

DHSI

DIGITAL HUMANITIES SUMMER INSTITUTE

Intersectional Feminist Digital Humanities: Theoretical, Social, and Material Engagements

Liz Losh

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Acknowledgements

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Feminist Digital Humanities

Most readings for this institute are available at the open source Manifold site for *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities* at <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/projects/bodies-of-information>

Day 1: Program: Feminist DH Praxis

- Jacqueline Wernimont and Elizabeth Losh, "Introduction," *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018)
- Deb Verhoeven, "Be More Than Binary," *Bodies of Information*
- Susan Brown, "Delivery Service: Gender and the Political Unconscious of Digital Humanities," *Bodies of Information*
- Marcia Chatelain, "Is Twitter Any Place for a [Black Academic] Lady?," *Bodies of Information*
- Moya Bailey, Anne Cong-Huyen, Alexis Lothian, and Amanda Phillips, "Reflections on a Movement" #transformDH, *Growing Up* , " Debates in Digital Humanities 2016
- Reference: Garnet Hertz, [The Maker's Bill of Rights](#)

Day 2: Whose Feminism? Whose Code? Critiquing Feminism and Code Culture

- Julia Flanders, "Building Otherwise," *Bodies of Information*
- Micha Cárdenas, "The Android Goddess Declaration: After Man(ifestos)," *Bodies of Information*
- Beth Coleman, "Domestic Disturbances: Precarity, Agency, Data," *Bodies of Information*
- Processing Reference: *Getting Started with Processing and Processing: A Programming Handbook for Visual Designers and Artists*

Day 3: Do Feminists Play? Games, Sounds, Images

- Lisa Nakamura – " [Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital](#) "
- Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett, "Playing the Humanities," *Bodies of Information*
- Sandra Gabriele, "A View from Somewhere," *Bodies of Information*
- Kim Brillante Knight, "'Danger, Jane Roe!' Material Data Visualization as Feminist Praxis," *Bodies of Information*
- Dorothy Kim, "Building Pleasure and the Digital Archive," *Bodies of Information*
- Processing Reference: *The Nature of Code: Simulating Natural Systems with Processing*

Discipline/Access/Surveillance, Feminist Critiques of Technoculture

- Simone Browne, "Everybody's Got a Little Light Under the Sun." *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 4 (2012): 542–64.
- Jessica Marie Johnson, "Markup Bodies: Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads," *Social Text* 137: Vol. 36, No. 4 (December 2018)
- Bo Ruberg, Jason Boyd, and James Howe, "Toward a Queer Digital Humanities," *Bodies of Information*
- Amy Earhart, "Can We Trust the University?," *Bodies of Information*
- Processing Reference: *Visualizing Data: Exploring and Explaining Data with the Processing Environment*

Day 5: Whose Archive?

- Jacqueline Wernimont, "[Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives](#)" DHQ
- Sharon Leon, "Complicating a 'Great Man' Narrative of Digital History in the United States," *Bodies of Information*
- Roopika Risam, "What Passes for Human? Undermining the Universal Subject in Digital Humanities Praxis," *Bodies of Information*

Further Reading

- Bailey, Moya. "#transform(ing)DH Writing and Research: An Autoethnography of Digital Humanities and Feminist Ethics," *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 9, no. 2 (2015).
- Deb Verhoeven "As Luck Would Have It: Serendipity and Solace in Digital Research Infrastructure," *Feminist Media Histories* 2016
- Kim Gallon, "Black Digital Humanities," *Debates in the Digital Humanities* 2016
- Wendy Chun, "On Sourcery and Source Code" from *Programmed Visions*
- Tara McPherson, "U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century" in *Race After the Internet*
- Fiona Barnett, Zach Blas, Micha Cárdenas, Jacob Gaboury, Jessica Marie Johnson, Margaret Rhee, "QueerOS: A User's Manual," *Debates in the Digital Humanities* 2016
- McKittrick, Katherine. "Mathematics Black Life." *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (July 1, 2014): 16–28.
- Safiya Umoja Noble, "Introduction" and "Searching for Black Girls" from *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018)
- Kristin Ball, Kevin Haggerty, and David Lyon, "The Body as Data in the Age of Information" *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies* Irma van der Ploeg
- Jules, Bergis. "[Surveillance and Social Media Archiving](#) ." *Documenting DocNow* , October 4, 2016.
- Harry, Sydette. "[Everyone Watches, Nobody Sees: How Black Women Disrupt Surveillance Theory](#) ." *Model View Culture* . Accessed January 12, 2017.
- Lisa Nakamura "Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture" <http://bit.ly/2puYkT5>
- Patterson, Sarah. "[Toward Meaning-Making in the Digital Age: Black Women, Black Data and Colored Conventions](#) ." *Common-Place* 16, no. 1 (2015).
- T-Kay Sangwand "[Human Rights Archiving: From Postcustodial Theory to Praxis](#) ." University of Texas Libraries Human Rights Documentation Initiative
- Katherine Hayles, "Prologue: Computing Kin," in *My Mother Was a Computer* "Prologue" and "Toward Embodied Virtuality," in *How We Became Posthuman*
- Anne Balsamo, "Feminism for the Incurably Informed," Ch. 6 in *Technologies of the Gendered*

Body

- Wendy Chun, "Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory" <http://bit.ly/2qw00bG>
- Crockett, I'Nasah. "'Raving Amazons': Antiracism and Misogynoir in Social Media." *Model View Culture*. Accessed January 12, 2017.
- Weheliye, "Engendering Phonographies: Sonic Technologies of Blackness" *Small Axe*
- Gumbs, Alexis Pauline, "Seek the Roots: An Immersive and Interactive Archive of Black Feminist Practice," *Feminist Collections* (Winter 2011)
- Chude-Sokei, Louis. "The Uncanny History of Minstrels and Machines, 1835-1923," edited by Stephen Johnson, 104–32. Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2012.
- Lucy Suchman, "Human/Machine Reconsidered," published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University at <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc040ls.html>
- Genevieve Bell and Paul Dourish "Contextualizing Ubiquitous Computing," in *Divining a Digital Future*
- Haynes, Tonya. "Mapping Caribbean Cyberfeminisms." *Sx Archipelagos*, no. 1 (May 1, 2016).
- Garza, Alicia. "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza." *The Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014.

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Introduction

JACQUELINE WERNIMONT AND ELIZABETH LOSH

I believe in data, but data itself has become spectacle.

—danah boyd, *Data & Society: Points*

We owe it to each other to falsify the institution, to make politics incorrect, to give the lie to our own determination. We owe each other the indeterminate. We owe each other everything.

—Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*

The manuscript for *Bodies of Information* came into being in the liminal space between the final days in office for the first black president of the United States of America and the simultaneous concussion waves of nationalism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and racism that appeared to set the stage for hostility to academic institutions, scientific inquiry, journalistic investigation, political inclusion, public investment, digital rights, and network neutrality.¹ Within weeks of the 2017 White House inauguration, an important federal endowment that had supported the work of many of the practitioners represented in this volume was threatened with defunding. Innovative academic scholarship in and about digital environments was also disparaged by a president who relished expressing his disdain for projects that he singled out like “a wolf video game” or scholarly research on “Internet romance.”² Increasingly global, digital humanities organizations struggled to come to terms with authoritarian governments ignoring human rights violations and the needs of hundreds of millions of migrants and displaced persons struggling to survive in a bleak biopolitical landscape.

This volume also emerges in an era when the tasks of intersectional feminisms, of coalition building, and of communal care and repair are recognized as increasingly important areas in the humanities.³ Yet as women and feminists who have been active in the digital humanities since it was called “humanities computing,” we are often astonished to see forms of intellectual engagement that confront structural misogyny and racism relegated to the status of fringe concerns. Even as leaders of digital humanities labs are finally being outed for sexual harassment or systemic discrimination, trivialization of feminist methodologies continues. For example, in 2016 we both participated in a panel on feminist infrastructures at the annual Digital Humanities conference organized by the Alliance of Digital Humanities

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Organizations and convened in Kraków, Poland. This panel was grouped together with other marginalized efforts as part of the “diversity” track, which was located in a separate building from the edifice that housed most of the conference sessions.

Such spatial arrangements communicate value and can establish barriers, peripheralizing even a panel of assembled digital humanities luminaries in positions of relative privilege, including the director of the Australian Humanities Networked Infrastructure (HuNI) project, the head of the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory, the director of the Advanced Research Consortium (ARC) in the United States, and the principal investigator of the Institute for High Performance Sound Technologies for Access and Scholarship (HiPSTAS). Despite the profile of the panel, there was a clear sense that a feminist conversation about infrastructure was not valued in the same way as other similar panels at the event. While we felt that exclusion fairly keenly, we also were aware that as members of a panel of white women from Canada, the United States, and Australia, we were and are not subject to the full force of exclusion that our trans and women of color colleagues systematically experience. Indeed, the existence of the “diversity” track and its location was particularly notable given the extensive efforts of scholars of color in particular to ensure that the event was not a “parade of (white) patriarchs” as was the opening of the same annual meeting a year before in Australia.⁴

A few months before the summer conference, “Neoliberal Tools (and Archives): A Political History of Digital Humanities” by Daniel Allington, Sarah Brouillette, and David Golumbia appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* (LARB). According to the authors, as “neoliberal tools,” digital humanities initiatives are a means for serving the ends of cultural conservatism and political reaction within increasingly corporatized universities and colleges. The LARB critique was grounded in tracing a small set of related origin stories in which “the trailblazer is usually identified as a Jesuit priest, Roberto Busa, whose 56-volume concordance to the works of St. Thomas Aquinas was produced over a period of three decades from 1949, with support from IBM.” The patrilineal genealogy mapped (and critiqued) by the LARB essay envisions digital humanities expanded from Busa’s trunk to related branches in digital humanities efforts at the University of Virginia, Stanford, and the University of Maryland. In each locus of the “Neoliberal Tools” story there is an academic entrepreneur who functions as an opportunistic homo oeconomicus. In the “Neoliberal Tools” fable a few lone feminist Cassandras might have attempted to arrest the progress of these enterprising men, but otherwise the narrative is free of women and people of color as digital humanities innovators. Unfortunately, by repeating different versions of the solo white male inventor myth, the LARB criticism of the techno-utopianism of digital humanities (DH) actually gave that myth more credence by reifying an Anglo-American tradition as “the field” and the “textual-studies” tradition within DH as originary. While critique of and within digital humanities origin stories is clearly needed, in part to push back against the johnny-come-lately tendencies in other popular pieces critical of the field, by

suggesting that New Bibliography and the University of Virginia English department in particular were the “birthplace” of digital humanities, the piece served to further entrench the very origin stories it claimed to critique.⁵

These two situated and situating events—the Kraków conference and the *Los Angeles Review of Books* publication—and their attendant narratives exemplify an ongoing denigration of feminist and antiracist theory and practice in the digital humanities. Both proponents and opponents of DH seem able to agree on one common position: histories of feminist and antiracist work in DH do not deserve a place at the table. By contrast, our argument is that feminisms have been and must continue to be central to the identity and the methodologies of the digital humanities as a field.

After all, historians of technology such as Janet Abbate have observed that the importance of gender dynamics in computational history more generally is often devalued.⁶ Abbate specifically asserts that the norms of how work is gendered can be surprisingly fluid, particularly when a new field, like computer programming, develops. In her book *Recoding Gender*, she reasons that the obvious presence of a large female labor force of human “computers” at the dawn of the information age led to a form of “reverse engineering” that caused programming to be associated with feminine traits and occupations. As Abbate points out, programming in the post–World War II period was often associated with avocations like educating, nursing, or mothering, and writing code was seen as analogous to cooking, sewing, or displaying musical accomplishment. Although programming would ultimately be allied with masculine disciplines like mathematics and engineering, during its embryonic phase computer science was far from an exclusively masculine domain. Similarly, the accounts of women of color in computer programming recounted in books like *Hidden Figures* describe different norms about racial inclusion in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields than the ones we have today.⁷ Digital humanities origin stories may well still be seen as protean; perhaps if we can avoid or more rapidly correct the revisionist exclusions visited upon other disciplines, then we may be able to practice DH as one of the more welcoming fields in university culture.⁸

This is a particularly urgent task in a moment when systemic sexual harassment, predation, and racism are visible from within institutions of higher education across the globe.⁹ For future digital humanities work to create what is possible and combat what should be impermissible, we believe that intersectional feminism, which acknowledges the interactions of multiple power structures (including race, sexuality, class, and ability), must be central within digital humanities practices.¹⁰ In fact, many of the best challenges to our Kraków panelists, to the 2017 Digital Humanities conference organizing committee, and to the *Los Angeles Review of Books* piece came from those who noted the complete or relative absence of people of color in each of these discussions. Indeed, as Jessica Marie Johnson observes, despite being consigned to the sidelines in supposedly open and progressive conversations,

Black digital practice “has created and facilitated insurgent and maroon knowledge creation within the ivory tower. It’s imperfect, and it’s problematic—and we are all imperfect and problematic. But in that sense I think the digital humanities, or doing digital work period, has helped people create maroon—free, black, liberatory, radical—spaces in the academy.”¹¹ As Johnson notes, this is not simply “academic”; the work and communities of Black, Native, Latinx, queer, trans, and intersectional digital scholars have “literally saved lives . . . people—those who have felt alone or maligned or those who have been marginalized or discriminated against or bullied—have used digital tools to survive and live.”¹²

In our own work we have also noted the striking absence of engagement with human-computer interaction (HCI), science and technology studies (STS), and media studies in the digital humanities as a field. Useful trends from this body of criticism have all had notable feminist proponents working across disciplines: Lucille Suchman on situated action, Leigh Star on infrastructure, Genevieve Bell on mess, Mary Ann Doane and Lori Emerson on media archaeology, Melissa Gregg on affect theory, Lisa Cartwright on the interactions of apparatuses and bodies, Judy Wajcman on digital labor, and Marisa Parham on black literary embodiment, haunting, and space/time disjunctions, to name just a few. More recently, much of the most exciting scholarship about digital culture has come out of sociology, anthropology, political economy, and library and information science domains with attention to the transnational circulation of people, products, and ideas, including that of Simone Browne, Katherine McKittrick, Radhika Gajjala, Nishant Shah, danah boyd, Zeynep Tufekci, Safiya Umoja Noble, Kate Crawford, Moya Bailey, and Michelle Caswell.

We urge our fellow digital humanists to think through the implications of ubiquitous computing in particular and to consider undertaking the analysis of new objects of study rather than merely focus their scholarship on the cultural artifacts of the screen, page, or canvas (as well as their digital remediations). After all, mobile and wearable devices exist in intimate proximity to our persons, and embedded sensing systems in our “smart” cities and designed environments monitor our interactions. (The work of Katina Michaels is exemplary for those pursuing this research agenda.)¹³ Thus, the digital humanities should also advocate attention to technosocial environments, the interfaces and platforms of mediation, and the procedures, protocols, and platforms of playable systems.¹⁴ In other words, we must expand our notions of text and context, archive and canon, and code and program.

Having some interest in *mess* as an area of inquiry is fundamental to understanding how technologies, people, resources, and networks work, and sometimes don’t work, together. As computer scientist Paul Dourish and anthropologist Genevieve Bell write in their analysis of the cultural imaginaries of ubiquitous computing, “mess” reveals that “the practice of any technology in the world is never quite as simple, straightforward, or idealized as it is imagined to be” and that “technological

realities are always contested.”¹⁵ By emphasizing the material, situated, contingent, tacit, embodied, affective, labor-intensive, and political characteristics of digital archives and their supporting infrastructures and practices rather than friction-free visions of pure Cartesian “virtual reality” or “cyberspace,” feminist theorists are also expressing their concerns about present-day power relations and signifying interest in collective and communal consciousness-raising efforts.

Despite an often grim environment for equity, diversity, inclusion, and participation in the humanities within increasingly constrained research universities and the political institutions that support them, we are hopeful that the digital humanities are finally maturing from their critically naive beginnings. This volume reflects how feminist collectives and communities are making a difference in changing the digital humanities in particular and institutional cultures generally, from members of FemTechNet, to curators of the Ferguson syllabus effort, to participants in the #transformdh and #dhpoco hashtag campaigns.

Bodies of Information is organized with keywords that work as “boundary objects,” in the sense that they are shared resources that support systems of meaning used in different ways by different communities.¹⁶ First theorized by the late science and technology studies scholar Susan Leigh Star and her collaborators, boundary objects are plastic, interpreted differently, and adapted to express emergent thinking across communities and contexts while also maintaining sufficient conceptual integrity for common understanding. Recognizing that keywords like “materiality” and “embodiment” operate as boundary objects gives us a way of understanding the kinds of work such concepts do in creating identities, knitting communities, and suggesting relationships between seemingly disparate ideas. As Star and her collaborators so powerfully demonstrated, boundary objects play a pivotal role in the creation of reality. An array of boundary objects is possible. In our work we use the acronym MEALS as shorthand for a feminist emphasis on how the “**m**aterial, **e**mbodied, **a**ffective, **l**abor-intensive, and **s**ituated character of engagements with computation can operate experientially for users in shared spaces.”¹⁷

Because boundary objects are mediating technologies for people and communities, we have used them here to cluster our chapters. Like the weakly determined boundary objects theorized by Star, our chapter clusters should be read as multifaceted engagements with the concepts that we believe operate in a certain kind of community with one another. That said, one of the great joys of rich intersectional feminist work is that it attends to issues of embodiment, affect, labor, and so on as a regular part of practice. Indeed, while we open with a focus on materiality and close with the recognition that all work, all bodies, and all actions are situated, readers will see that there are strong threads that weave across the chapter clusters as well. Readers will also note that here we have supplemented the MEALS framework with an additional boundary object, “Values,” in order to draw attention to the ways in which technologies promote particular ethical and ideological values (rather than acting as neutral tools).

The book's title pays homage to Katherine Hayles's account of how "information lost its body" in *How We Became Posthuman*. Hayles argues that during the post-World War II era multiple generations of thinkers influenced by cybernetic theory embraced a view that treated data as a transcendent entity that could be abstracted from materiality, embodiment, and reflexivity. Although Hayles notes that cybernetic thinkers from the Macy Conferences engaged in vigorous debates, she laments their general tendency to deemphasize affect and labor as well.

Materiality

"Materiality" as a theoretical tool and boundary object takes a range of forms, as all good boundary objects do. In Kim Brillante Knight's essay on her work creating wearable data visualizations, materiality is a way of understanding how gendered power relations move in and through something like an Arduino board or the related LilyPad microcontroller. For Knight, the LilyPad's circuit material visibility is an important factor in the creation of techno-textile "counterpublics." With her example of the "Danger, Jane Roe!" pieces, Knight asks us to consider how we might use "fem-techno-assemblages" in building resistant art and communities.

Material resistance and underground communities are a central concern for micha cárdenas's "Android Goddess Declaration" as well, which draws on the vital work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde to think anew about tools for a liberatory politics. Working with the poetic and powerful work of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten on the "undercommons" and that of Walter D. Mignolo to think about *mestiza* functionalities, cárdenas asks: "Can tools be repurposed when used in different places, by different people?" Drawing on her own creation of instruments for safety, cárdenas offers a declaration of solidarity with "fugitive black androids hacking their own code . . . with the renegade clones of Orphan Black . . . with the hacker witches from Barcelona to Seattle who are using technology to fight back against centuries of persecution from the logics of Western patriarchy."

Cyborg women also appear in Roopika Risam's chapter, where the figure of the cyborg-girl from the 1980s American sitcom *Small Wonder* opens her examination of the forms of "human" sanctioned by electronic technologies and their implications for digital humanities scholarship. In considering the potentially important roles of machine learning and natural language processing in next-generation work, she points out that "artificial intelligence purports to represent universal 'human' intellectual processes but, in fact, is only representative of a fictive 'universal' model of human cognition that elides both women, peoples of the Global South, and those at the interstices of these categories."

Materiality as a tool for thinking becomes something different in the piece by Danielle Cole and her coauthors, where the very real material concerns to provide food, shelter, and daily needs to very real women and femmes meet the impersonal structures of grant accounting and accountability. Refusing to flinch from their own

roles in a grant payment cycle that has harmed some collaborators, Cole and her collaborators offer us a clear and detailed view of how community and institutional collaboration can have differential material impact on the lives of people attempting to do the very kind of work called for by Knight, cárdenas, and Risam.

Values

As Deb Verhoeven observed in her stinging “Has Anyone Seen a Woman?” speech to the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) annual DH meeting in 2015, far too few women have been allowed to take the stage, and historical inequities need to be addressed with a progressive politics of affirmative action. Verhoeven’s piece sets the stage for the “Values” part of the collection, in which our contributors each take a hard look at the values expressed by the organs of the field.

Indeed, as Nickoal Eichmann-Kalwara, Jeana Jorgensen, and Scott B. Weingart’s piece so clearly demonstrates, “women are consistently underrepresented [in the annual Digital Humanities conference presentations] with little changing in the last few years.” Additionally, geographic diversity is relatively poor, and there is a “visible bias against authors with non-English names in the peer review process.” In sorting through the data on rejected submissions, Eichmann-Kalwara, Jorgensen, and Weingart note that there also appear to be biases around subject matter that reflect gender disparities.

Thus, while the leadership of digital humanities organizations often lauds the virtues of statistical analysis, key stakeholders might be tempted to suppress data that counter narratives of consistent progress diversifying the field. Christina Boyles’s survey of several recent works by scholars like Amanda Phillips, Alexis Lothian, and Amy Earhart makes clear that while intersectional and critical digital humanities work has always been part of the community, it has not yet seen the kind of sustained funding familiar to projects that have centered canonical works or dominant theoretical frameworks. Boyles analyzes the infrastructural conditions of funding streams from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from philanthropic organizations like the Mellon Foundation that privilege certain kinds of projects that normalize how a text and educational uses are defined. Boyles also deploys information visualization to show clustering and gaps around topics like “diversity” and “public.”

In addition to the representational politics of feminisms, we assert that these feminisms function as sophisticated forms of critical theory and have much to offer digital humanities in terms of method and theory. As the closing piece in our “Values” part suggests, queer theorizations may be particularly fruitful for expanding interventions to larger issues of methodology. Feminist digital humanities should challenge, critique, rethink, and expand what the digital humanities should be, just as Bonnie Ruberg, Jason Boyd, and James Howe argue that a queer digital humanities is defined by much more than the archives documenting queer individuals and

queer communities. In queering the digital humanities, Ruberg, Boyd, and Howe draw on the work of prominent queer theorists and queer digital artists to argue that queer knowledge always resists completion. In addition to adding new vocabulary to existing taxonomical systems, they assert that queerness also points toward a shift in the very methodologies of metadata collection. To queer metadata, queer thinking must be brought to bear on the conceptual models and tools of object description to challenge the norms that dictate how meaning is derived from data. They observe that the methods with which data are traditionally mapped rely on a model of the one-to-one relationship between concepts of the world that can account for nonbinary relationships.

Embodiment

Notions of queering digital work bridges between “Values” and “Embodiment” in this collection, demonstrating just how intrapenetrable such boundary objects can be. In their work on lesbian digital humanities, Michelle Schwartz and Constance Crompton argue that digital methodology matters as much to histories of queer bodies and lives as informational content of such study, because “the accumulation of data and the rhetorical structuring of that data (in these examples often as a list) serve as important acts of lesbian self-definition.” The particular problem of the epistemological structuring of taxonomies of shared digital knowledge becomes particularly marked if fundamental infrastructures of information are designed solely to sort data into binary or mutually exclusive categories.

In their description of archiving the literary production of periodicals from the so-called yellow nineties, Alison Hedley and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra want to challenge the standard classification practices that can make certain persons historical nonentities and facilitate accessibility by making their “knowledge modeling process visible.” In particular, Hedley and Kooistra look closely at authors in their archive who don’t fit standard gender binaries, because they use pseudonyms as identifying tactics.

The contingency and multiplicity of feminized identities and bodies both offline and online are a central concern for Marcia Chatelain when she asks, “Is Twitter any place for a [black academic] lady?” Drawing on her pedagogical engagements with the life and work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and as the originator of #FergusonSyllabus, Chatelain’s piece opens with a reminder that race and gender have long been used as ways of excluding women of color from the innovative public spaces created by emerging technologies. Chatelain places the raced and gendered violence of twenty-first-century social media in a long history of black women’s intellectual history, demonstrating that women of color have consistently led the nation in using emerging technocultures to “intervene in moments of crisis and remind the academy of our roles and responsibilities to a broader world.”

Padmini Ray Murray engages with a related set of questions about the contingent and resistant feminist body, arguing that the differences between the “visceral and the virtual body” are located on points of “rupture” in the context of South Asian politics and practice. This rupture calls us to attend to the ways in which caste and privilege play out in and around both visceral and virtual women’s bodies in India. Additionally, Murray’s incisive analysis demands that we resist importing and imposing ill-fitting Western models and histories—however progressive they may seem—when working in or with digital humanities in India. Murray closes with a powerful call to action, noting that “in order to enact a more heterotopic reality, it is the responsibility of digital humanists to build tools and strategies to violate the bodies of the machines that watch over us with loving grace and to dismantle them with as much violence as is being done to our own.”

Affect

The grace and violence invoked by Murray finds a kind of formal manifestation in “Ev-Ent-Anglement” by VJ Um Amel, Brian Getnick, and Alexandra Juhasz. As we move into the “Affect” part, this artist-maker-cutter team tears up and stitches back together various texts, including their own. Each time, they pull their interlocutors into the performance, including us, their editors. In so doing, they think about not only the material and embodied nature of digital work but also how we can cut with it and perform the movement of “affective fragments.”

Dorothy Kim’s piece grapples not with affective “fragments” but with fragments of affect, the drive to pleasure that is a constitutive part of digital archive or project creation. This is a rarely, if ever, talked about “hidden” feature of discussions of the black-boxing effects of technologies, but as Kim points out, thinking about the desires that various platforms respond to or activate is particularly crucial for understanding their work. Returning again to the topic of embodiment, Kim’s piece foregrounds not only the pleasures and desires of interacting with digital book “bodies” in the tradition of book history but also the sensorium of editorial bodies that help to produce those digital bodies. Interrogating production and interface, Kim’s work brings medieval history and literary studies, book history, disability studies, interface theory, art history, and affective and feminist theories together in what we might frame as a critical assemblage. This project allows her to argue that digital editors are performing “an agential cut,” resonant but formally and temporally different from that seen in “Ev-Ent-Anglement.”

Pieces by Susan Brown and Julia Flanders constitute a bridge between “affect” and “labor.” Both authors have led foundational, long-term feminist digital humanities projects. Brown and Flanders are also able to speak to the transition within feminist literary theory and digital humanities from projects and analysis focused on recovering lost women’s voices to thinking about how feminist praxis and theory

illuminate the challenges and opportunities presented by invisible labor and messy infrastructures, insights gained as they directed the Women's Writers Project and the Orlando Project, respectively.

In Brown's essay she examines why the figure of the handmaid excites so much anxiety, fear, and contempt in digital humanities discourses and attempts to retrieve both labor and delivery as paradigms for the digital humanities. Drawing out the patriarchal roots of a fear of women's reproductive capacities in order to understand the anxiety around "service" in the digital humanities, Brown sees tensions between the cerebral and material in terms of training, scholarship, and infrastructure within the field. Brown includes an analysis of Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*, which has particular resonances in the current American political context. Consequently, her piece is a particularly timely reminder that *techné* can create a dangerous passive/active agential dichotomy in which tools violently deliver a product from a feminized subject. On the other hand, Brown suggests reframing service and delivery in terms of midwifery, thereby positioning those involved as "all active, all in that liminal zone of risk, rupture, and possibility." Weaving together analyses of affect, labor, and situated practices, Brown offers the "possibility of intimate, mutually constitutive relations between one who or that which delivers and one who or which is delivered" within digital scholarship.

Labor

Flanders, who has written before on the invisible labor of many DH efforts, writes here about the ways in which editorial methods are deeply implicated in the politics of gender and are affected by, and enacted through, technological choices. For Flanders, "there is no such thing as a 'merely technical' design decision: our technical systems are meaning systems and ideological systems." Indeed, Flanders takes up the call to consider the "full stack" of a project and sketches out what it would mean to undertake such an analysis. Her piece offers the field a new way forward for thinking through the depth of social, political, material, formal, and economic factors in feminist analyses of digital projects.

Lisa Brundage, Karen Gregory, and Emily Sherwood draw attention to a central paradox in the digital humanities in that the most important work is often the most devalued, particularly because it is labor that is intended to render itself invisible. They chart how the development of digital humanities scholarship and pedagogy followed a trajectory of reliance on the use of postdoc and so-called alt-ac (alternative academic) work within larger gendered and racialized labor histories. They note that specific language often demarcates these positions as inferior despite their integral role in digital humanities initiatives.

Like Eichmann and her coauthors, Barbara Bordalejo takes a quantitative and sociological approach to the issue of representation in the fields of digital humanities. What she found with her own survey was on occasion ugly, but not surprising

from either a historical or a contemporary perspective. Her work validates impressions that might otherwise be treated as anecdotal while showing how the new normal includes self-identifying white male colleagues who are willing to openly denigrate feminist work. Beyond the personal attacks attested to in her piece, Bordalejo's contribution is important for the view it affords us on gender and sexual identities in digital humanities operations not captured in other metrics available for digital scraping, as in the case of Eichmann and her coauthors and Boyles. It also highlights that the Anglophone bias at the proposal stage, which was gestured to in Eichmann as well, is also an important aspect of the DH labor picture in the Global North that often ignores how digital humanities work may be outsourced to other continents.

Sharon Leon, the former director of public projects for the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, points out that "great man" histories that dominate our field fundamentally misrepresent the history of technocultural labor. She observes that the same canon of male names is often repeated and that digital humanities genealogies tend to name only one female ancestor. As she notes, "recent reviews of the field tend to reproduce these oversights, suggesting that the history of digital history is a settled one—one that is devoid of women." In getting "beyond the principal investigator" to consider the work of different kinds of project and community managers leading digital humanities projects, she names over a hundred significant women in the history of digital humanities initiatives. Leon argues that women's pivotal roles in the digital humanities become even more visible when libraries, archives, and museums are included, where occupations are often more feminized and affiliated with activities of service rather than research.

Situatedness

We have noted how strongly the threads of the "Values" and "Labor" parts weave together and constitute a demand that as feminist scholars we need to do far better to ensure that the fields of DH make good on promises of inclusivity. We would take this a step further and assert that the field of DH needs to make concerted efforts to decenter dominant, masculinist, and Anglophone work as the standard in the field. Harkening back to the work of Risam and Murray earlier in the volume and forward into the concerns of the "Situatedness" part, we also want to highlight that this might mean abandoning methods centered on including people in dominant paradigms to foreground exploding the traditional topoi in favor of a heterotopic, messy, and multiplied conception of "DH."

Like Leon, Amy Earhart has elsewhere offered an alternative feminist history of the digital humanities by looking at how publication of *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1979 spurred efforts to recover artifacts from the cultural production of women, particularly women of color. Scholars of feminism and critical race studies compiled digital copies of rare and vulnerable primary sources throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and when later internet

browsers became widely available, these sources were lovingly curated on the web. Earhart has bemoaned the fact that many of these early pioneering do-it-yourself archives have since fallen into disrepair after the original curator-caretakers retired or changed institutions or as a result of platform obsolescence or failed migration. In her previous work charting the “diverse history of the digital humanities,” Earhart has argued for the need to preserve existing digital archives—which may have idiosyncratic data structures and metadata naming conventions in need of digital redesign—and the labor of care and repair. She has cautioned that the tendency to overvalue innovation and to privilege developing new tools and archives compromises existing digital work.

In her contribution to our collection, Earhart argues that the university has a persistent trust problem with the communities that it purports to represent in digital humanities projects. She argues that well-meaning advocates for social justice in the digital humanities might make inappropriate claims to ownership of community materials, unethically appropriate authorship, or disregard the wishes of communities that they claim to be documenting for posterity. She argues that we need to consider how the exploitation of data and the exploitation of peoples may be interrelated phenomena.

Thinking through the Black Lives Matter movement as a site for digital humanities research, Beth Coleman argues that access to “heterogeneous data” invites multiple scales of engagement with the local and the distributed simultaneously. She argues that when bodies are literally put at risk it is important to be sensitive to what is made invisible by big data narratives that present elegant information visualizations and big picture patterns and consider how lived experiences and digital practices play out in sites of situated action.

Kathryn Holland and Susan Brown’s piece grapples with the markup structures that can effectively represent varied, changing, even contradictory vocabularies around gender and authorship in the Orlando Project. As Holland and Brown note, emerging markup paradigms enable the project team to convey “a feminist theory of subjectivity in which women’s identities and writing are understood to be multiple, substantial, historically and materially contingent, and at times unknown or incongruous with the concepts and language of our time.”

In “Decolonizing Digital Humanities,” Babalola Titilola Aiyegbusi takes up the task of situating the academic field of DH and directs our attention to the specific social and infrastructural reasons why scholars in “developing African countries tend to view DH as a western phenomenon practicable in technologically advanced locations.” Drawing on a range of scholars working in and on developing nations, Aiyegbusi observes that “regional idiosyncrasies impact the spread of DH” in ways that we must attend to if we are to develop a truly global understanding of digital cultures and scholarship. Focusing on the Nigerian context in particular, she notes that “poverty is the most dominant” factor impacting the possibility for digital humanities scholarship “because it births and cradles other issues, notable among which

are network connectivity and power supply.” Aiyegbusi’s analysis deftly weaves economic and infrastructural challenges together with her analysis of the ways in which traditional DH narratives, regardless of how big a tent is cast, fail to resonate in Nigerian academic frameworks. In fact, she argues that the “big tent” framework may itself be a colonial perspective that alienates scholars working in African nations.

Our final two chapters take up situatedness in the context of feminist game studies. Feminist digital humanities and feminist game studies might seem like fundamentally different approaches to structuring digital content creation, particularly to those who believe in impersonal interactions, simple user navigation without puzzles or tricks, and a transactional approach to information retrieval experiences. Nonetheless, game studies has become an increasingly important reference point for digital humanists working to challenge norms in the field and is now part of the annual Digital Humanities Summer Institute at the University of Victoria. In these final two pieces, digital games function as tools to situate and experience two different phenomena related to one another as sites of public, and therefore vulnerable, work by women: sex work and public intellectualism.

Sandra Gabriele deploys the genre of the educational game as a way to approach the digital humanities critically by challenging the genre of the news game among so-called serious games intended to educate the public about systemic problems by offering them a playable simulation that will supposedly promote understanding and model how different factors might influence outcomes. Gabriele uses her own design of a game that represents the lives of sex workers as a case study for understanding why digital interfaces and databases that present a researcher’s work will always be situated in a specific framework of experiences rather than demonstrate detached procedural rhetoric that operates from a position of neutral distance.

Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett use game studies as a way to understand that “public scholarship” and the visibility of the digital humanities can have different consequences for those of different genders or different races. In the wake of the GamerGate series of coordinated attacks on prominent feminist game critics, designers, players, and fans, scholars were harassed, conferences were targeted, and public and professional identities were vexed by conflict. The perils of the “open” platforms often favored by digital humanities initiatives were dramatized by the public spectacle of online violence entering a supposedly tolerant but elite field. For Salter and Blodgett, encouraging scholars to perform their ideas in the digital public sphere might have unanticipated consequences for those from at-risk groups and might ultimately lead to the unexpected silencing of many participants in the academy.

We hope that this volume will spur important conversations in the digital humanities about platforms, software, interfaces, and protocols and about the absence of people who should be present at conferences and in digital humanities centers to support the creation of innovative scholarship. We also hope that it will invite further work reminding us all of the predecessors that official origin stories

want to suppress or ignore. We both are aware that this collection—which coalesced from both invited submissions and an open call—cannot be completely representative of the whole of the field. It also largely presents perspectives from within the privileged perspectives in academia, despite the fact that the digital humanities work done in higher education is connected to global supply chains of outsourced labor that might include digitizers scanning pages from books and journals, call center operators fielding customer service questions, assembly line workers manufacturing components, and extraction technicians mining raw materials.

We were both struck by Jessica Marie Johnson's comments at the 2016 American Studies Association Digital Humanities Caucus roundtable about the difference between being "outside" and being "radical" in thinking about how alterity functions for the academy. For Johnson, "being radical or being political is a constant act," so we would not want to give the impression that the work of this volume ends on the last page when the reader has reached the back cover. Instead, we would point to Fiona Barnett's "The Brave Side of Digital Humanities," which asks us to consider, "What happens when the outcome is a sustainable practice, a sustainable self in academia, a lifeline to others as a way of imagining a future together?"¹⁸ Like many of the feminist digital humanists represented in this volume, Barnett suggests that activities of care and maintenance may be more important than those validated as innovation.

We agree with Barnett that the digital humanities constitutes "a struggle to present a practice, not just a project" and it presents a series of ongoing questions, which involve, in Barnett's words, "identifying future alter egos" and extend "to recognizing (and identifying) alternative genealogies: the making and remaking of self, community, narrative, and histories."¹⁹ We also anticipate collaborating with our readers in putting this compendium of ideas into action and who similarly seek to apply principles of feminist digital humanities and the MEALS framework to an ethical grounding of user-centered design for cultural heritage collections, engagement with communities to respect their wishes about preservation and access, and student-centered pedagogical philosophies in digital environments that may undermine the humanity of participants.

Notes

1. "ACH Statement."
2. Trump, *Time to Get Tough*, 75.
3. For example, see Brown, Lemak, Faulkner, Martin, and Warren, "Cultural (Re-)formations"; Noble and Tynes, *Intersectional Internet*; Noble, "Future"; Klein, "Carework and Codework"; Arcy, "Emotion Work," 365–68.
4. See Deb Verhoeven's piece "Be More than Binary," Chapter 5 in this volume.
5. Critiques of DH and its practitioners as "tools" are well-trod terrain. See, for example, Fish, "Digital Humanities," or more recently, Brennan, "Digital Humanities Bust." For a

different take, see Weiskott, “*No Such Thing* (which itself echoes Jamie “Skye” Bianco’s “This Digital Humanities Which Is Not One” and her “Man and His Tool, Again? Queer and Feminist Notes on Practices in the Digital Humanities and Object Orientations Everywhere.”

6. Abbate, *Recoding Gender*. Interested readers should also see Hicks, *Programmed Inequality*.

7. Such accounts make clear not only the gendered but also racialized nature of field definition. For another example, consider Lisa Nakamura’s “Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture.”

8. Miriam Posner’s “What’s Next: The Radical, Unrealized Potential of Digital Humanities” points to additional ways that the field has yet to live up to its full potential.

9. The contexts in which violences in the academy have made recent news include the reactivation of the “Me Too” movement activated by Tarana Burke in 2006. They include the *Guardian*’s investigation of sexual assault in higher education in the United Kingdom (Batty, Weale, and Bannock, “Sexual Harassment”), Raya Sarkar’s crowdsourced list of South Asian academic predators (Doshi, “After #MeToo”), and revelations of sexual assault by several prominent male American academics (Gluckman, Read, Mangan, and Quilantan, “Sexual Harassment”), all of which was perhaps presaged by Sara Ahmed’s 2016 resignation from Goldsmith’s as protest of institutional failures to address sexual harassment (Ahmed, “Resignation”).

10. For more on intersectional praxis and analysis, see Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1241–99, and May, *Pursuing Intersectionality*.

11. Dinsman, “Digital in the Humanities.”

12. Dinsman, “Digital in the Humanities.”

13. Michael, “My Research Programme.”

14. See, for example, Lothian and Phillips, “Can Digital Humanities.”

15. Dourish and Bell, *Divining a Digital Future*, 4.

16. For more on how our collective uses boundary objects, see Juhasz and Balsamo, “Idea Whose Time.”

17. Wernimont and Losh, “Wear and Care,” 98.

18. Barnett, “Brave Side,” 74.

19. Barnett, “Brave Side,” 75–76.

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PART II

VALUES

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Be More Than Binary

Deb Verhoeven



DEB VERHOEVEN AT THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES 2015 CONFERENCE

How many of you have already seen a COCKATOO? How about a KOALA? A KANGAROO? Has anyone seen a funnel web SPIDER? Has anyone met an Australian who actually says G'DAY? Now for that

Now I appreciate that you may not be able to understand what I'm saying because I haven't got a mansplainer on stage with me... So I'm going to slow it right down...and be very, very clear. Don't take this personally this is about a systemic problem.

SYSTEMIC & PERVASIVE

This is not about issuing another policy advisory for "inclusion". This is not about developing a new checklist to mitigate your biases. And its definitely not about inviting a token female speaker to join you all on the stage - this needs to be about your plans to **EXIT** the stage. This is not about learning how to do it better next time - this is about...

YOU LEAVING BEFORE THERE IS A NEXT TIME.

This is not about approximating equity where 20% or 30% or 40% or even 50% is good enough. This is about letting everyone else in by letting go of your privileged positions. The problem is not how many of us there aren't

RAREST AND MOST ELUSIVE OF CREATURES....

How many of you have seen A WOMAN on the main stage of this global DH conference? Or pretty much anyone who isn't a standard issue bloke? So let's talk about what happened yesterday with the



Imagine for a moment what it's like for the rest of us attending a DH conference. When was the last time the conference air conditioning didn't feel right to you? When was the last time you had to queue to use the bathroom? When was the last time you thought twice about what to wear on stage so you could use a lapel mike? Why are they even called lapel mikes?

WE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM YOU ARE

The problem is how many of you occupy the positions that get to speak. And let's face it - 50% representation for women going forward is not even close to equity!

Given the number of years women have existed and continue to exist as a shocking minority in this field - the closest we can get to equity would be for men to leave the stage proportionally for an equivalent number of years.

I WANT 80% WOMEN, 20% BLOKES

for the next thirty years and only then can we say the scales have been righted. But in reality I'm not even agitated by my own definition of equity. The last thirty years have been pretty horrible for so many of us and I'm not an especially vindictive person. I wouldn't impose the last thirty years on anyone else. SO BLOKES, PLEASE, PLEASE JUST STOP IMPOSING IT ON US NOW.

PARADE OF PATRIARCHS

SERIOUSLY! WHAT IS GOING ON IN THIS FIELD...??!!

I took the theme of this year's conference Global DH to be a celebration of diversity not the universalization of one perspective.

SO BLOKES - I'M JUST GOING TO TALK TO YOU FOR A MOMENT...



When was the last time you saw seven consecutive women get up at a DH conference and speak about anything other than gender? You've made a world designed around ensuring your own personal comfort. But it's not comfortable for so many, many others.

WHAT TO DO?

For a start can we turn the aircon down.... Systemically, seriously - I'M CALLING IT - it's time for you guys to sweat.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO LEAVE DH IN A BETTER PLACE THAN YOU FOUND IT:

1. Get quantitative and number your days. Preferably publicly.
2. Find someone who doesn't look and sound like you and mentor them, encourage them and invite them into your role.
3. Have a clear, purposeful succession plan and enact it.
4. And above all - BE MORE THAN BINARY - do this because you embrace diversity in all its complexity. Not because you have checklists or policies. But because you recognise that the real story of DH is more heterogenous and complex and vibrant than you have allowed it to be to date.

OK - WAS THAT CLEAR ENOUGH? 😊



Figure 5.1. Graphic produced and used by Deb Verhoeven after her keynote at the Digital Humanities 2015 conference. (Design: Viveka de Costa.)

Chapter Title: Delivery Service: Gender and the Political Unconscious of Digital Humanities

Chapter Author(s): SUSAN BROWN

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Gender and the Political Unconscious of Digital Humanities

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A strong tradition of politically invested digital activities, often motivated by an aim to expand available texts beyond the print canon and implicitly to reshape academic norms and values, dates from the early days of the Web (Earhart). Yet gender and other categories of social analysis have been taken up largely in disciplinary contexts or interdisciplinary fields, such as women and gender studies or media and communications studies, rather than in discussions of method or definitions of the field in major digital humanities conferences and publications.¹ The challenge of holding together digital humanities as a field with the kinds of cultural and political critique that are of abiding interest across the humanities and in many digital initiatives has become more evident in the last decade or so, thanks in part to this book series (cf. particularly Liu, “Where Is Cultural Criticism”). This essay argues that while gender has been absent as an explicit term in the definitional work that has shaped the digital humanities, gendered categories and hierarchies profoundly shape debates. Understanding how concepts of service are imbued with gender helps elucidate tensions and contradictions that impede the field and perpetuate inequalities within it.

While the digital humanities community debates—at times fiercely—diversity and inclusivity, these tend to be seen as organizational matters.² Definitional and methodological debates are insulated from questions of equity and social justice. So questions of representativeness or inclusivity paradoxically pertain to what is deemed largely irrelevant to the specificity of digital humanities scholarship itself, even as there has been increasing pressure on how the field constitutes and represents itself within conferences, publications, professional organizations, curricula, programs, and institutions (Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations; Wernimont and Nieves).

This essay attempts to read a few debates in the digital humanities for gaps, silences, and tensions surrounding the concept of service, which is cast as tangential to the central concerns of the field but points to major contradictions within it. The cost of excluding gender analysis becomes apparent when those debates are reframed by feminist theory. “Feminist theory” is a multivalent term that resonates in different contexts and at different moments in the history of the field in ways that are impossible to track fully here. Considering service as a category of labor—including its connection to feminized and reproductive labor—in relation to a number of key aspects of digital humanities points to contradictions and blockages that a feminist approach can help to address. Within digital humanities discourses, service is imbricated with value propositions, gender hierarchies, labor practices, and epistemologies that I explore in relation to disciplinarity, librarianship, training, tools, infrastructure, and delivery systems, in conjunction with several telling historical and literary narratives.

Unpacking how service is embedded within historically produced categories and hierarchies related to embodied differences provides insight into how value is accorded to representations and activities in DH in ways that are deeply gendered, often irrespective of individual intentions, as consequences of systemic patterns of meaning, ways of knowing, and habits of feeling. The contradictory associations that connect service to gendered bodies help to shed light on organizing logics that hold back the field, structuring knowledge and relationships in fundamental ways. A feminist epistemological framework opens up the potential to resituate service within definitional and methodological debates in digital humanities.

Political Unconscious

There has been until quite recently a historical gap or silence around the “f word,” that is to say, “feminism,” with its history of cultural denigration and caricature—in the self-representation of DH. The first edition of the Blackwell *Companion to Digital Humanities*, that wide-ranging tome in which various leaders in the field were “brought together to consider digital humanities as a discipline in its own right, as well as to reflect on how it relates to areas of normative humanities scholarship,” invoked women or gender almost entirely in relation to stylistics, reader responses, and particular projects (Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth, *A Companion*, Introduction). The *Companion* boasts strong feminist leadership, as do many other projects, centers, and initiatives, but its circumscribed references to gender indicate the difficulty of incorporating feminist analysis within the collection’s framing of DH as emerging from humanities computing and textual practice (Svensson, “Envisioning”; Losh).³ This is just one register of the absence of gender considerations from assertions of disciplinarity or field status in the two decades that span the turn of the millennium.

The idea of a political unconscious from Marxist psychoanalytic theory provides a means of addressing the extent to which feminism, and gender as its primary

category of analysis, have been present but not explicitly engaged in discursive framing of the field. Pierre Macherey, building on Louis Althusser's incorporation of insights from psychoanalysis into Marxist theory, considers it the work of literary criticism to give voice to the absences or gaps that are symptomatic of conflicts between meanings that a text cannot resolve but simply displays (Macherey, 84). The act of knowing or critique in this view becomes "the articulation of a silence" (Macherey, 6). Both Macherey and Frederic Jameson reject allegorical readings of texts as simplistically ideological while insisting that the "*unconscious of the work*" (Macherey, 92) or the "political unconscious" (Jameson) of a text, rather than that of an individual author, necessarily reflects the interrelationships of cultural, ideological, juridical, political, and economic forces (Jameson, 21). This perspective insists that the material and ideological conditions in any field inflect our representation of it and vice versa. Since such silences are a condition of utterance for any text, no text or utterance is apolitical.

DH has often been debating gender in other words, through debates over service, which has itself been positioned as marginal, often omitted or sidelined, precisely because it is caught up with gender. This inquiry explores tensions over service within the digital humanities as a contribution to a larger rethinking of the field through diversity and difference. It starts with the relatively rare invocation of service in the context of self-definition, both formal and informal.

Disciplinary and the Gendering of Service

Geoffrey Rockwell, participating like the Blackwell *Companion* in the debate over disciplinaryity, is unusual in taking up the relationship of computational scholarship to service, or what he calls the "servile" as well as the "liberal" arts, arguing for a reorientation of the humanities toward craft and creativity by breaking down the "artificial division of skills and liberal knowledge" (Rockwell). At a moment of intensive field formation, his resulting emphasis on rupture, liminality, and reproduction helps to make the gaps and silences surrounding service legible. Rockwell asserts, "The founding of a discipline is a rupture"; "the founding of a discipline is a liminal moment"; "a discipline is born when a field takes control of its means of reproduction" ("Multimedia"). Rockwell was writing from the position of director of McMaster University's Humanities Media and Computing Centre and founder of its undergraduate Multimedia program. Bids for disciplinaryity have given way in large part to an understanding of the field as inter- or transdisciplinary (Svensson, "Landscape," para. 20), but what is salient for my argument here is that these terms bring to the fore what is at stake when we start to wrestle with service in the context of defining digital humanities. All three assertions have to do with bodies and boundaries: rupture with its origins in physical breaks, liminality with its initial grounding in sensory perceptions of difference, and reproduction with its tension between original and copy (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*). Situating service in

relation to embodiment and difference brings home the extent to which gendered anxieties and contradictions are at work in DH.

There are close connections (historical and continuing, practical and intellectual) within the digital humanities to technical services and support (Flanders, “You Work at Brown,” 27). Some DH centers and activities have evolved from or remain tied to instruction or technical support initiatives, and libraries, with their strong ethos of service and crucial position in the provision of scholarly infrastructure for the humanities, have been and remain central to the growth of the field. For the purposes of this essay, cognizant of the myriad definitions of service that have grown from its original meaning of duty or work performed for a superior or master (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*) ranging from “Help, benefit, advantage, use” to “Friendly or professional assistance,” I would define service in the digital humanities as activities of practical benefit to others, including but not limited to providing expertise, guidance, and training related to specific skills, methods, or tools; structuring, manipulating, transforming, or remediating data; creating, distributing, and maintaining software; building, caring for, and sustaining platforms for hosting and disseminating digital datasets, assets, software, and scholarship; administering and managing digital humanities entities such as centers, programs, or projects; and establishing and running scholarly and professional networks and events, including conferences. Virtually everyone in the digital humanities participates to a greater or lesser extent in such activities, in contexts ranging from drop-in encounters at service desks to ongoing collaborations among teams of scholars. These activities account for much of the “technologically assisted knowledge work” that distinguishes the digital humanities from other fields (Liu, “Drafts”). They are typically represented as “service” rather than “scholarship” within formalized evaluation processes applied to faculty members, and associated with a more valorized notion of “service” in the work of academic librarians. Yet service and support have until recently been rarely debated in the field. For instance, posts to the Humanist listserv routinely mention technical services or support in job titles, while services mentioned alone almost always relate to web services or library services (Humanist 1987–). Service and support are thus present in the discourse of DH, but discussed more in relation to the mundane and practical rather than the self-definitional.

On rare occasions when it arises in definitional contexts, the language of support and service is often entirely disavowed. Thomas Rommel invokes David Robey (then director of the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s ICT [Information and Communications Technology] in Arts and Humanities Research Programme): “Humanities computing specialists thus have a vital role as interdisciplinary and interprofessional mediators. The old model of support services is no longer valid.” In his view, research should be seen as “a common enterprise between ›technologists‹ and ›scholars‹” (Rommel). “Service” is often an explicit component of advertised digital humanities positions, but notably not

prominently of tenure-track faculty ones, though they may mention institutional or professional service. Willard McCarty links DH service to the traditions of collegiality: “In their uses of computing, the disciplines of the humanities furnish us with unending opportunities for intellectual field-work as well as mind-expanding collaboration, and the good work we do there, in *collegial* service, yields invaluable friendships” (“New Splashings”). The stress on affect among intellectual peers conjures up the privileged environment of Oxbridge colleges. The same phrase operated quite differently across the Atlantic at the University of Virginia, where a Digital Media program was articulated in opposition to “the ‘collegial service’ model pervasive in Humanities Computing” (Kirschenbaum, “Digital Humanities,” 419). Despite the contradictory invocations, in both of these cases involving elite academic contexts, DH is distanced from an understanding of service as devalued relative to research and normative teaching. Roles and activities in the academy are organized around the boundary between service and scholarship. The boundary inserts itself in the form of casual distinctions between, for instance, librarians and scholars or researchers, when of course many librarians are both.⁴

Librarianship is a discipline founded on an ethos of service (Rubin; Williamson) that intersects with the feminization of the profession (Harris; Maack). The period of debates over disciplinarity in the late 1990s and 2000s was followed by the emergence of a different kind of DH entity than an academic program or traditional research institute: the library-based DH center or lab, such as the University of Virginia’s Scholars Lab, “staffed with librarians who act as scholar practitioners” (Nowviskie, “Skunks,” 53). This led to a flurry of self-reflection regarding the relationship of DH to libraries, including a controversial 2014 report, “Does Every Research Library Need a Digital Humanities Center?” (Schaffner and Erway). Dot Porter (“What If We Do”) argues that the report presumes a false dichotomy between librarians and academics. Both Porter and Bethany Nowviskie (“Asking for It”) counter its insistence on repurposing existing “services” with an alternative understanding of service as grounded in the academic expertise and autonomy of DH specialists. Nowviskie invokes the example of the Scholars Lab’s delivery of a spatial humanities service that had neither previously existed nor even been requested, providing leadership precisely because the scholars of the lab in the library had the ability to anticipate, or to an extent even to constitute, an emergent need. Delivering this service, which involved winning grants and eventually the development of the Neatline plugin for the Omeka platform, helped constitute the digital humanities’ relation to geospatial technologies (Nowviskie, “Asking for It”). The tension between a library service model and more autonomous scholarship has come to structure discussions of digital humanities and digital scholarship, articulated for instance as a “Tension between Research and Services,” or as “the service and lab models” (Lewis, Spiro, Wang, and Cawthorne, 28; Maron; Maron and Pickle). Alix Keener characterizes it as a tension between “service vs. servitude” (para. 16).

As Rockwell makes clear, much is at stake in this distinction in the context of established disciplines, given the “deeply ingrained belief in the superior value of the liberal arts over the ›servile‹ and professional arts”: “To justify HC [Humanities Computing] programmes that include significant training we are tempted to present ourselves as servile, providing enrichment programmes that service the liberal ones” (“Multimedia”). A field establishing its academic credentials in a liberal arts or humanities context must guard against the slippage from service to servility, or “subservience,” as it is termed in some more recent discussions (McCarty, “State of Relations?”). On the other hand, librarianship as a profession has traditionally occupied this ground of enrichment and support, and some adhere to a model that sees the roles of scholar and librarian as quite distinct. However, as Julia Flanders notes, DH has eroded “a division of labor and a level of intellectual independence” associated with the professoriate as opposed to support or service positions (“You Work at Brown,” 48), as witnessed by the flourishing of “alt-ac” positions in the field and personified by individuals who move among professorial, librarian, and other service- or support-oriented positions. The models of DH invoked by both Bethany Nowviskie and Dot Porter emerge from this blurring of roles and boundaries. They stress a greater level of initiative, leadership, and autonomy for scholar-practitioners within libraries than that associated with conventional service roles, as well as a model of scholarship rooted in collaborative rather than solitary research endeavors.

Delving further into the gendering of service helps to elucidate perplexities surrounding it. It emerges from etymological and persistent cultural notions of debasement that are strongly feminized, notwithstanding the Christian tradition of masculine service tied to the story of Jesus’s self-abjection. Within Western societies, working-class women have constituted a majority of those in “domestic service” and other types of service jobs. In the Victorian period, middle- and upper-class women entered the public sphere, and to a large extent public discourse, by leveraging the massive expansion of a number of economic sectors that flowed from the rise of the middle classes and the establishment of a secular state. The movement of privileged women into the paid workforce was justified initially in terms of the continuity of social service jobs with the unpaid philanthropic and domestic activities of women within the home and community (Smith-Rosenberg; Vicinus), activities that are still not factored into standard economic measures of wealth production. Reproduction, whether defined in terms of child-bearing, child-rearing, home-making, or teaching in the home, is perhaps the most distinctly gendered service role of all. As a result of these associations and the growing number of women it employed, the service sector was increasingly gendered as female from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. However, it must be stressed that the categorization and status of labor categories shift over time and that computer programming was once considered to be subprofessional “women’s work” (Abbate; Wajcman), that is, a service occupation.

Service jobs remain deeply gendered despite the shift to a service-oriented “knowledge economy.” As of 2009 in Canada, two thirds of women, twice as many as

men, worked in historically female service occupations: teaching, nursing, and other health occupations; administrative positions; or sales and service roles (Farrao); in 2012, 55 percent of all jobs in the services sector were occupied by women, with the concentration particularly high in the health care and social assistance sector (82 percent) (“Fact Sheet”). In the United States, in 2014 women made up 75 percent of the education and health services sector and 64 percent of the community and social service workforce (AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees, “Professionals in the Workplace: Women”; AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees, *Professionals in the Workplace: Community*). Moreover, the gender wage gap is in large part due to the feminized nonprofessional “service” sector associated with “emotional labor”: people skills that are understood to be outside of the market because naturalized and assigned to women, and are under- or uncompensated (Guy and Newman). Yet as theorists of affect have argued, the apparently private or individual choices and responses associated with such affective labor are inflected by collective factors that structure public life (Ahmed; Berlant; Cvetkovich; Gregg and Seigworth; Sedgwick and Frank). The impact of this differential assignment and valuation of labor extends into academia as well as into women’s role in the tech startup world, where “soft” skills such as design, promotion, and marketing, as opposed to coding, can result in women’s contributions being informalized as “spouse-as-a-service,” written out of partnership agreements, and erased from the history of technology (Losse). It might seem prudent, then, to refuse the language of service, to steer clear of having one’s labor appropriated and undervalued, as is the case in other feminized labor sectors. To do so, however, is of course also to reinforce the gendered hierarchy of values that undergirds a pervasive system of economic and social injustice.

Debates over the disciplinarity of DH and the role of DH professionals within research libraries thus reflect quite different constructions of professorial as distinct from librarian positions, the ways in which service has figured in those constructions, and gendered hierarchies of value tied to categories of labor. Although often an explicit component of academic appointments, service is less valued and rewarded than either research achievement, which is considered paramount, or teaching, which is similarly devalued and feminized, in terms of the characteristics, abilities, and emotional labor associated with it and the disproportionate contributions by women (Bellas; Fairweather). In the more feminized field of librarianship, however, service has played a more valued and central role, sometimes to the detriment of the perception of profession (Garrison). This disjunction means that service tends to get suppressed in the first context and has been contested in the second, creating gaps, unevenness, and tensions regarding service-oriented activities. Both tendencies are informed by a perception of service activities as aligned with instrumentalism and thus distinct from defining digital humanities activities, a view that, as Liu observes, reflects the insecurities that swirl around instrumentalism for the humanities as a whole (Liu, “Where Is Cultural Criticism,” 498–99).⁵

Infrastructure and Agency

The divergent and contested understandings of service outlined thus far have a significant impact on perceptions of the crucial work that goes into creating and maintaining DH infrastructure (Rockwell and Ramsay). As Miriam Posner points out, the extensive human labor that underlies building and maintaining awe-inspiring centers, platforms, and tools can be invisible even within the community (“Here and There”). As Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder note, the common characterization of infrastructure as transparent until it breaks belies its intellectual challenges and complexity: “infrastructure is something that emerges for people in practice, connected to activities and structures” (112). By their analysis, “infrastructure is a fundamentally relational concept. It becomes infrastructure in relation to organized practices” (113). In contrast to innovation, then, all those “boring things” (Star, “Ethnography of Infrastructure”)—the meticulous work of moving from a prototype to production, of debugging and updating, the care, repair, and maintenance of digital humanities tools and platforms (Nowviskie, “Digital Humanities”), all that unsexy, detail-oriented, iterative work of debugging and tweaking, keeping things going, or preserving them—are activities that bear more resemblance to housework than to recognized forms of academic labor. Moreover, their relationship to coding, making, building, and hacking and the connotations of vocational skills and manual labor can lead to further devaluation within contexts that privilege the cerebral over the material and instrumental aspects of working on or with tools and infrastructure. Institutionally such activities often register as service or support rather than scholarship or research, let alone as “creative process and a catalyst of social amenity” (Verhoeven, “As Luck,” 11).

Anxieties about service arose early in debates on the Humanist listserv over Project Bamboo, a high-profile humanities cyberinfrastructure initiative funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation between 2008 and 2012 to bring together IT staff, librarians, and faculty members to develop a shared digital infrastructure for the humanities. McCarty early characterized the undertaking as cleaving to a service model: “Bamboo seems only more of what has kept the digital humanities in the U.S. from fulfilling great . . . promises. . . . It turned out that it meant rethinking what we mean by what we compute—and that job requires the **fusion** of computing and the humanities, not the **servicing** of the humanities by computing” (McCarty, “the future is Bamboo?”). Charles Faulhaber responds with a more obviously gendered metaphor: “This is not technology in the service of the humanities, with the former as handmaiden to the latter” (Faulhaber, “Bamboo”). Quinn Dombrowski’s post-mortem of Project Bamboo, which never came to fruition, argues that it started to go sideways early on because “Faculty participants were particularly turned off by the technical jargon in the presentations (including ‘services,’ as commonly understood by IT staff)” (“What Ever Happened,” 328). As shown above, “service” was a trigger word not only because it was indicative of a literal semantic gap in the meaning of

“services” but also because within a faculty context it signals a devalued category of work. It is telling that the word “servitude” occurs within *A New Companion to Digital Humanities* (2016) twice, in Jennifer Edmond’s discussion of “Collaboration and Infrastructure” and nowhere else (“Collaboration and Infrastructure,” 57, 63). It might seem peculiar that infrastructure work in DH apparently resonates in this way, given the increasing recognition of the inextricability of infrastructure from subjectivity, culture, and space in everyday practice as informational infrastructure becomes more ubiquitous and embodied (Bratton, *The Stack*; Dourish and Bell, “Infrastructure of Experience”; Liu, “Drafts”; see also Parks and Starosielski, *Signal Traffic*). This may have to do with a distinction between infrastructure as a totalized noun connoting automated computational services, and the human labor and subject positions associated with creating and sustaining such systems.⁶

Just prior to the debate over Bamboo, Stephen Ramsay rejected the denigration implicit in the gendered hierarchy associated with service: “I regard the disentangling of digital humanities from English, history, computer science, etc. as a great danger. Digital humanists naturally bristle at the suggestion that we are the handmaidens of these august disciplines, but I think that is perhaps more to do with the pejorative connotations of that mildly offensive designation than with the nature of the relationship expressed” (“Re: 21.445”). The need to divorce an understanding of the relationship from the connotations that impede the debate is real. The invocation of handmaidens is not, however, entirely mild, deriving as it does from cultural roots that defined women as sexual chattel devoted to servicing elite men. Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* depicts a fundamentalist Christian theocracy in which women’s right to reproductive freedom, along with most of the freedoms enjoyed by women in the “developed” world, have been rescinded by the state. In Atwood’s dystopia, women’s bodies are put at the service of a repressive, misogynist regime that has seized power in part by leveraging centralized information systems. Under the regime of Gilead in which sterility is rampant, “handmaidens” are assigned to bear the children of the religious elite. Atwood’s handmaiden helps to clarify the apparently exaggerated anxieties over service. They are not just about devaluation and hierarchy. They are about agency and control, the risk of a nightmarish, gendered lack of both status and self-determination that defines a handmaiden’s subject position.

Atwood’s reliteralization of the biblical bondswoman’s role lays bare the sexual violence at one end of the gendered service spectrum. A handmaiden is a sexual servant and, indeed, in Atwood’s dystopia and the Old Testament culture from which the term descends, a sexual slave within a patriarchal social structure. The abjection of a person subjected to sexual violence still signifies culturally as the paradigmatic state of being without agency. Atwood’s handmaid makes evident the link between service, objectification, and abjection and their connection to rupture, liminality, reproduction, and delivery. It is speculative fiction, but fiction extrapolated by its author from historical precedents (Mead). The title underscores the extent to which

pejorative, gendered notions of service, including those of women of color under slavery, imply an objectification of women enforced through violence (Atwood, “Margaret Atwood”). This logic explains why women who are perceived online as out of line, that is, as transgressing the proper (yet intangible and shifting) boundaries of femininity, are threatened with rape and murder, doxed, and harassed. Such extreme policing of norms is relatively rare in academia, but the participation of women in DH in the #metoo social media campaign to raise awareness of sexual harassment and predation (Hsu and Stone), confirms, as Karen Kelsky summarizes based on more than 1,800 anonymous survey results, that “sexual harassment in academe is a spectrum that ranges from rape, assault, battery, and stalking to looks, hand-brushing, and innuendo delivered just on the edge of plausible deniability” (“Professor Is In”). Gendered values, including notions of sexual service, underwrite a continuum of violence experienced by women as embodied subjects, in DH as elsewhere.

The gendering of service is profound and multivalent, informed by cultural history and ongoing social practices. Much that is distinctive in DH can be characterized as service, and it resonates differently in relation to academic disciplinary and to various types of positions within the academy. The tensions surrounding it manifest unevenly, but it is mostly present by its absence as a defining term in debates in DH, indicative of the political unconscious of the field. Recognizing the extent to which debates over service are imbued with gendered values and practices provides a means of addressing more directly fundamental contradictions and problems within DH, opening up new ways of thinking about what we do. This becomes apparent if we contrast the understanding of service to that of tools. Where the one connotes a feminized lack of control or self-determination, the other evokes a sense of autonomy and agency. Considering service in conjunction with delivery, and a recognition that human service is provided materially in space and time, advances an understanding of the impact and stakes of gendered thinking within DH and of the relationship of embodied human subjects to technological tools and processes.

Tools and Delivery

Atwood contests the claim that *The Handmaid's Tale* is futuristic, pointing to historical precedents for all the components of her narrative at the time of its composition. Certainly, the treatment of childbearing women as objects to be managed is in keeping with mainstream Western medical practices, and Anne Balsamo (*Technologies*) links a powerful reading of the novel to the use of laparoscopy in late-twentieth-century reproductive technologies. Similarly, considering the invention of the forceps within the history of birth technologies helps to unpack the connotations of service.

Forceps for use in childbirth were invented about 1616 in England by a member of the Huguenot Chamberlen family, probably Peter Chamberlen the Elder. The

invention was kept a family secret for 125 years, and had to be reinvented independently in the eighteenth century. In the meantime, the increasingly powerful Chamberlen and his successors attempted to form under their control a corporation of midwives, with whom they did not share this revolutionary technology; the midwives in turn saw the Chamberlens as limited by an overreliance on their tools rather than a broad range of midwifery skills (Brown, Clements, and Grundy, searches on “Chamberlen” and “forceps”). In my reading of this cautionary tale, a new and notably proprietary technology worked against the feminized service of the midwife, was hoarded for profit at the cost of innumerable lives, and radically altered the future of female reproductive labor in the West. This problematic history of the medicalized tools of delivery extends to the present day within the Western medical profession, from which midwifery is still largely excluded or, when included, devalued in terms of status and remuneration in relation to the practice of medicine, from which it is distinguished in part by the use of high-tech tools. At the same time, human reproduction, as Balsamo and others have demonstrated, has become increasingly technologized, despite much evidence that delivery tools should, in an obstetrical context, be the exception rather than the norm.

This history of the forceps provides an admonitory lens on processes of professionalization and disciplinary formation, suggesting that an emphasis on technology at the expense of service can work against women’s interests, in this case that of both clients and midwives. On the one hand, a more open technology would have saved more lives when forceps were truly needed. On the other, the adoption of a more situated and relational approach to delivery as opposed to one that privileged tools over services would lower the number of birth interventions and related complications such as infection. The combination would have produced better Western birth outcomes, then and now.

The rhetoric of digital humanities as tool-oriented deserves scrutiny, given that tools and technologies are not neutral, as feminists including Audre Lorde (“Master’s Tools”) have long stressed. Tara McPherson (“Why”) has unpacked ways in which the now prevalent UNIX operating system design mirrors the management of race in the post-World War II United States, while Jacqueline Wernimont (“Whence Feminism?”) stresses the extent to which “the logic of the maker/consumer paradigm is a gendering one regardless of the sex or intentions of the participants. Consequently, those who cannot make find themselves in subordinated, devalued, ‘user’ positions that deny agency and expertise (and funding!)” (para. 12).

The problem is neither simply the gendered connotations of tools nor their appropriation by men, but an epistemology within which tools and technologies are conceived as involving clear boundaries between subject and object, actor and acted-upon, and as conveying agency upon those who wield them. The self-other dichotomy is implicit in the opposition between conceptual or theoretical work, on the one hand, and practical or material work, on the other. This opposition underlies skepticism about the intellectual work associated with building and

prototyping (Galey and Ruecker; Rockwell and Ramsay). Frederica Frabetti urges the digital humanities instead to rethink technology beyond instrumentality, in terms of “originary technicity.” This concept challenges the Western metaphysical tradition by viewing technology as always already imbricated with and indeed constitutive of human experience and identity. Within this alternative poststructuralist understanding, tools and making provide a route to self-consciousness, history, and inscription (Frabetti, 3–7). As articulated by Timothy Clark, Bernard Stiegler, and others, originary technicity opens a means of thinking of technology as “constitutive of the human” that is shared by Jacques Derrida and underscores his refusal to grant science or cognition priority over writing or technology (Frabetti, 9).

Despite the historical and epistemological baggage of tools, the masculinist associations are not monological. For instance, O’Reilly publishing has a long-standing series of programming “Cookbooks” that goes back to the 1970s. Stéfan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell advanced similar language within DH by adopting the term “recipes,” suggested by Stan Ruecker, for step-by-step instructions for the use of the Text Analysis Portal for Research (TAPoR) and Voyant Tools. The initiative arose from the insight that “tool rhetoric might be alienating” and a desire to “understate the technological” (Sinclair and Rockwell, 251). Cooking metaphors invoke nourishment, sustenance, iteration, and the transmission of knowledge within a community. Their revised discursive framing of text analysis adopts the term “utensils” over tools, emphasizes human processes, and invokes the “digital domesticity” of the feminized world of food blogging (Hegde, 73). The broadening of this initiative through the partnership of the TAPoR and Digital Research Tools/ DiRT Directory/Methods Commons (Dombrowski, “DiRT Partners with TAPoR”) is a heartening indication of a movement within DH to shift the discursive frameworks within which we conceive technology toward a posthuman epistemology that resists the problematic binaries of classical metaphysics. Working against those binaries will help undermine the gendered associations embedded in much of our thinking about tools.

Informed by feminist theory and recent movements including feminist midwifery, we can imagine reclaiming the tools and means of reproduction from the legacy of the Chamberlens and the culture of technology they represent. Thinking through the concept of delivery, whose definitions range from the act of setting free or rescuing, through bringing forth offspring, to surrendering or giving up possession (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*), enables a rethinking of the relationships among gender, technology, interfaces, and embodiment that helps to resituate service. We might mobilize the tensions embedded in the term. Mobilizing the unstable connotations of delivery offers a model open to a range of agents and participants, in which processes and modes of delivery have profound impacts on what is delivered. Rather than doctor, tool, and patient(s), we can conceive of at least three agents in the birthing process: mother, child, midwife—all in contact, all active, all in that liminal zone of risk, rupture, and possibility (Kitzinger). The

analogy offers a flexible framework for thinking about agency and participation as regards delivery within a digital environment.⁷ The ambiguity and instability associated with the term suggest the profound impact of the act of delivery and the possibility of intimate, mutually constitutive relations between the one who or that which delivers, and who or what is delivered. This in turn helps in rethinking service as an ineluctable component of technological systems.

Lucy Suchman provides an anthropological foundation for culturally and historically grounded analyses of technology design and mobilization in a range of contexts. Her theory of “situated cognition” sees the complex social and material environment as inextricable from human understanding (“Agencies”; *Human-Machine Reconfigurations*). As we think about digital interfaces, the means by which we deliver the fruits of scholarly labor in the digital humanities community, such a framework helps to destabilize, productively, apparently distinct components of the delivery process. It pushes us to reflect on the relationships among the multiple and diverse agents involved in what Karen Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*) has termed “intra-actions” to signal the “mutual constitutions of entangled agencies” (33). The word “interface” denotes a shared boundary or contact zone between a computational system and some other agent or entity, whether a human, a device or peripheral, software or hardware. Examples include command line interfaces, keyboards or touch screens, mobile devices, gaming controllers, haptic interfaces, and application programming interfaces (see Emerson; Ennis et al.; Farman; Galloway). Delivery in DH most commonly focuses on visual representation through graphical user interfaces, but most interfaces involve multiple material components and agencies.

McCarty regards the term “delivery” as metaphorically freighted with connotations of knowledge commodification and mug-and-jug pedagogy, which is to say that teaching involves simply pouring knowledge from the jug of professors to the mug of passive students, or worse yet, transferring commodified knowledge via technology (*Humanities Computing*, 6). He highlights the reductiveness that flows from conceptualizing delivery as the transfer of distinct knowledge products. However, if we consider with Johanna Drucker that delivery involves complex processes of subjectivity that, through the interfaces that computational systems employ, structure “our relation to knowledge and behavior,” then it follows that delivery systems act not only as enunciative or representational apparatuses. To the extent that they also constitute “provocations to cognitive” and other forms of experience, delivery ought to be central to our considerations of technologies (Drucker, front matter).

Yet consideration of delivery seldom enters into DH scholarship despite evidence that user interfaces are among the most influential factors in the adoption of digital humanities tools and services beyond their immediate community. Matthew G. Kirschenbaum (“‘So the Colors’”) argues that it is precisely because of anxieties about liminality, borders, and embodiment that interface work is so often neglected, despite the insistence within the humanities generally on the inextricability of form

and content. Given their alignment with liminality, delivery, and materiality, charged as they are with service, affect, and sensitivity, it hardly seems surprising that women have been more often involved in human-computer-interaction or interface work, project management, or service-oriented digital librarianship than in coding and tool building, or that such work has been seen as marginal, tangential, incidental to the field. However, these activities and their (de)valuation emerge from an intertwined history of technological and social flux in which such values are far from fixed. The distinction between back-end coding and the productive apparatus of delivery itself breaks down as we start to put pressure on these categories, underscoring their constructedness. Drucker insists on the extent to which computational systems are always already cultural: “The crucial definition of human subjectivity is that it can register a trace of itself in a representational system, and that self-recognition and self-constitution depend on that trace, that capacity to make and register difference. The encounter between a subject and an interface need not be understood mechanistically. We can think beyond representational models to understand interface as an ecology, a border zone between cultural systems and human subjects” (*Graphesis*, 148). In stressing the imbrication of subjectivity and interface, this situated perspective highlights the complex and evolving dynamics at work in human interactions with machines, paving the way for new ways of thinking about the productive apparatus and processes of delivery work, and that work’s experiential impacts in particular engagements with technologies. Furthermore, as John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid demonstrate, technological systems cannot be understood without consideration of the social environments in which they are embedded (*Social Life*). In the context of DH, those environments frequently involve human services of one kind or another.

Delivering Change

Thinking of delivery in terms of the complexities of interfaces foregrounds the liminal, unstable, and permeable over the hegemonic, simplifying, or transparent, suggesting its potential as a transformative rather than an instrumental process of bringing together data; analysis; media; and interpreting, embodied subjects. For example, investigation of the history of visualization has led Lauren Klein (“Visualization”) to argue that rather than presenting complex entities as static data points, visualization can work to foreground the process of knowledge production, including “two-way exchange between subject and object of knowledge,” as in the case of Elizabeth Peabody’s carefully crafted pedagogical visualizations. Peabody, a first-wave feminist “knowledge worker,” created initially opaque, very abstract, quilt-like visualizations of events designed to engage others actively in the interpretation of history in dialogue with her narrative chronology, aiming to appeal aesthetically and affectively to those who engaged with her work. In Klein’s analysis, Peabody’s interface or knowledge delivery system subverts the female teacher’s

conventional service role of reproducing unproblematically a set of given social relations, underscoring the power of visualization to communicate different epistemological frameworks.

Within the field of rhetoric, digital delivery of everything from file sharing to pop-up archives speaks to a wide range of intersecting concerns including embodiment, affect, audience, and performativity (DeVoss and Porter; Ridolfo and Hart-Davidson; Ridolfo, Hart-Davidson, and McLeod). Jim Porter, for instance, insists on the situatedness of digital technologies and their effects: “As an isolated object, technology is of little interest. Rather, the real story is the use of the tool in its particular social, pedagogical, and rhetorical context,” a story composed of “human and non-human agents in a developmental dance” (J. Porter, 385). The technological imagination, as laid out by Anne Balsamo, assigns agency in relation to technology to (predominantly white) men (*Designing Culture*, 32). Drawing on Barad’s physics-grounded refusal of the distinction between subjects and objects, Balsamo regards subjects as constituted by the interactions that constitute them: agency materializes through “intra-actions” that constitute boundaries, demarcations, and distinctions among elements of phenomena (34). This leads to a vision of design as a “set of practices whereby the world is dynamically reconfigured by specific acts . . . through which boundaries are constituted and enacted” (35).

Boundary issues, as Haraway (“Cyborg Manifesto”) was among the first to argue, have everything to do with the highly politicized—and gendered—category of the human, the subject/object of (post?)humanist knowledge production. Indeed, cyberfeminism and feminist science fiction have been probing such boundaries for decades. James Tiptree Jr.’s 1973 “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” is all about the problem of the culturally idealized, objectified female body *as* interface: “PDs. Placental decanters. Modified embryos” are hooked up to others’ brains, and this fraudulent reproduction in the service of corporate interests results in a blurring of identities that is ultimately fatal to both the “wired-up slave” body that is the object of male desire and the grotesquely embodied female Remote Operator without whom the former is “just a vegetable” (551). Perverted reproduction and delivery, in this story, are at the crux of a violent literalization of the impossibility of the feminine, a denaturalized performance of gender and heteronormativity in the service of hegemony and greed (Hollinger). In a sense, female slave and female operator are both interfaces within a networked cybersystem in which, as N. Katherine Hayles (*My Mother Was a Computer*) notes, “the conglomerate controls the communication channels through which subjectivity-as-message flows and decides how the distribution of subjectivity will be parsed” (81). Tiptree sketches out the nightmarish conclusion to the trajectories of female abjection through reproductive technologies that begins with the Chamberlens, the marginalization of midwifery, and a service model of delivery.

Work in DH needs to place itself, its tools, its methods in that messy, problematic contact zone of social relations, subjectivities, information flows, and embodied

practices powerfully evoked by Tiptree in order to imagine new relations, arrangements, and configurations and to forestall the realization of dystopic prophecies of a technocratic future. The challenge is to be mindful of how institutional power circulates and perpetuates itself according to categories and hierarchies that embed social power relations. Dealing with embodiment means dealing with the differences among bodies and their place within the body politic. As Miriam Posner argues, “DH *needs* scholarly expertise in critical race theory, feminist and queer theory, and other interrogations of structures of power in order to develop models of the world that have any relevance to people’s lived experience” (“Radical Potential”). This revisionary impetus touches on the “organizing logic, like the data models or databases, that underlies most of our work,” a logic baked deeply into algorithms and interfaces produced by corporate and military interests resistant to the kinds of changes for which Martha Nell Smith argued powerfully in 2007 (Posner, “Radical Potential”). A prerequisite for change, I am arguing, is recognizing the extent to which understandings of service in DH are bound up with logics and values that impede the field: not only with gendered hierarchies but also with fundamental subject-object distinctions that legitimate othering more generally. These logics structure how we know and (intra)act with and in the world, and the distinctions they legitimate in turn intersect in important ways with other categories of difference.

This essay has attempted to chart, albeit partially and imperfectly, the extent to which an opposition between the instrumental and the intellectual has led to a disavowal of the crucial role that service, a feminized labor category, plays in the digital humanities. The discourse surrounding tools, however, aligns instruments with masculinity, so that coding or making is thus privileged in some contexts and devalued in others. The evasions and contradictions in the discourse surrounding service mark it as a component of the political unconscious of digital humanities grounded in distinctions between subject and object, and the conceptual and the material, that belie the complexity and mutual constitution of humans and technologies. Modes and methods of delivery, human and technological, provide a means of reflecting on how service, bound up as it is with the production and reproduction of DH through training, making, designing, caring, repairing, empowering, and sustaining, might be rethought as a situated, embodied activity embedded inextricably in the field.

Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star elucidate the political and ethical consequences of the taxonomies that construct our world and masquerade as natural, shaping human understandings and affordances for action (326). The digital humanities can learn much from theoretical, critical, and creative practitioners who interrogate boundary objects and interfaces from a range of positions and perspectives. As Star argues, marginality, liminality, hybridity, and multiple memberships across identities or communities provide valuable vantage points for engagement with shifting technologies (“Power, Technology,” 50–53). That is one of the major strengths of the outsider perspective: the feminist perspective, the queer gaze, the view from outside of privileged categories of race, class, nation, or religion. The

challenge is how to apply that perspective within DH debates and practices. Human interactions in libraries, labs, classrooms, collaborations, conversations, and other contexts in which service is mobilized, along with our tools, infrastructures, and delivery environments, offer embodied, situated possibilities for engagements and agencies with a difference. At the same time, respecting and incorporating difference is challenging to the extent that those technical systems themselves carry, in McPherson's words, a logic of "removing context and decreasing complexity" complicit with a larger "approach to the world that separates object from subject, cause from effect, context from code" ("Designing for Difference"; cf. also McPherson, "Why"). That makes it all the more important to devise a world with alternative frames of reference.

Service as a category signals intrinsic and invaluable aspects of the digital humanities. However, epistemologies grounded in subject/object distinctions and a privileging of the ideal or conceptual or practical over the material impedes our ability to recognize the extent to which the devaluation of the feminized undergirds our evasions and our debates in ways that point to the political unconscious of the field. Social semiotics make it difficult to attend to service within a productive frame of analysis, imbued as it is with gendered anxieties regarding bodies, boundaries, and the loss of control and autonomy with respect to labor and reproduction. These associations are far from fixed, and contain contradictions that can be exploited. However, to do so, an equitable, ethical, and politically responsible digital humanities must work toward an epistemology that can deal with the imbrication of our work with an embodied set of relationships wherein gender and other forms of difference matter in the apportioning of attention, value, status, and resources. We can start by engaging with boundary objects, liminality, and materiality within the generative, messy, and contested zone of delivery and interfaces where straight-forward subject/object and agential/passive distinctions are undermined. Bringing service to the fore will permit the conflicts and anxieties that it generates to be addressed more directly and effectively, setting the stage for change. Recognizing service as a pervasive and crucial form of knowledge work within DH requires no less than shifting the epistemologies that govern how we understand a wide range of activities. But it offers the opportunity to rethink the humanities in ways that avoid replicating toxic and inequitable hierarchies and practices, allowing us to imagine instead what a service to the academy it would be to deliver substantial change in how we relate to technologies.

Notes

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1. For instance, the Women Writers Project is both inextricable from the development of text encoding as a methodology within the humanities and the feminist project of expanding our objects of analysis beyond the canon, in this case the canon of pre-Victorian women writers. Julia Flanders's essay on the relationship between gender and encoding (Flanders, "Body Encoded") is a rare early example of gender being brought to bear on methods within a dedicated DH publication. More typical is engagement with the feminist component of such projects in journals or anthologies beyond DH, as is evident in the citation trail from that early article and in Wernimont and Flanders, "Feminism." The later piece exemplifies the way in which such endeavors are deeply informed by inter- and trans-disciplinary feminist analyses which are engaged most often outside of DH contexts.

2. Indicators of these debates are evident in the work of numerous scholars over the past two decades; however, they have recently reached a new level of prominence. In formal scholarship, see, for instance, in addition to essays in this one, the proportion of essays in the first two volumes of the *Debates in Digital Humanities* series that address race, gender, sexuality, geopolitical location, cultural diversity, and other forms of power imbalances such as those related to institutional positioning (Gold, *Debates*, "Introduction"; Gold and Klein, *Debates*). Public challenges to lack of diversity or insensitivity to diversity concerns have occurred in a number of contexts, the best recorded being that surrounding the opening of the DH2015 conference in Sydney addressed by Deb Verhoeven in "Has Anyone Seen a Woman?" Social media hashtags include #diverseDH, #myDH, #pocodh. More mainstream media treatments have begun to reflect better the growing diversity of the field, as in the eleven-part "The Digital in the Humanities: A Special Interview Series" by Melissa Dinsman in the *LA Review of Books* in 2016.

3. *A New Companion to Digital Humanities* includes a chapter titled "Gendering Digital Literary History: What Counts for Digital Humanities" by Laura C. Mandell in its final section, "Past, Present, Future of Digital Humanities" (Mandell, "Gendering Digital Literary History"; Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth, *New Companion*), marking the increasing prominence of gender in debates in the field.

4. See, for instance, Sharon Leon's piece in this volume on the ways in which librarians and staff are barred from being principal investigators.

5. Liu reviews in "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities" the debates over instrumentalism that are closely linked to the matter of service.

6. Likewise, my focus here is on human service, but there is an interesting avenue of inquiry into how software-as-a-service relates to this topic. Online services such as Zotero, Omeka, Scalar, and Voyant meet others' needs, as does all service, and the discourse surrounding SOAS to some extent reverses the rhetoric of agency by stressing users' or consumers' (see Wernimont, "Whence Feminism?") dependence on services. At the same time, though, the labor associated with creating such services is still often excluded from consideration as scholarship. In a slightly different but related vein, Drucker and Svensson critique the "service" model of implementation as having impeded intellectual engagement with platforms.

7. See also Timothy Morton's argument that an object-oriented rhetoric would reverse the implicit order provided by Aristotle: starting with delivery rather than invention "explodes the teleology implicit in common assumptions about rhetoric" ("Sublime Objects," 212) that privilege the idea over the materiality, situatedness, and shaping impact of the delivery: "Delivery deforms what it delivers and the deliverer, stuttering and caricaturing them, remixing and remastering them" (214).

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Is Twitter Any Place for a [Black Academic] Lady?

MARCIA CHATELAIN

On the Train

Few historical figures resonate with my students as powerfully as anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Known to only a handful of students before they take my class on African American women's activism, Wells-Barnett's life, her public speeches, and her most personal writings make history come alive. In my majority women and people of color classes, Wells-Barnett appears to be speaking to my students individually and specifically. Wells-Barnett's reflections on the perils of representation, her use of an intersectional frame long before the introduction of intersectionality into feminist thought, and her embodied resistance through her person and with her pen transforms the historical figure into a contemporary hero for many. Each time I teach about Wells-Barnett, I find that two crucial moments in her life speak to me as I navigate being a black woman professor and wrestle with the ways I also exist as a black woman thinker on social media in order to contribute to conversations on race and gender. The two points in her biography I turn to are Wells-Barnett's expulsion from a ladies' train car in 1883, while she was en route from Memphis to her teaching position; and the retaliation against her anti-lynching missive in the pages of the *Memphis Free Speech* in 1892, which led her to flee northward to Chicago.

In both instances—in the designated train car and at her writing desk—Wells-Barnett found herself in places that the larger, Jim Crow culture determined unfit for a black woman. In the eyes of the Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railroad, her race disqualified her from the protections and privileges granted to white ladies, and so a conductor was entitled to demand that she vacate her seat and move to a dirty, smoke-filled cabin. Her race and gender together rendered her unsuited to write the truth about the false promises of post-Emancipation America in the pages of the *Free Speech*, as lynching terrified and signaled to blacks that they were never made for citizenship.¹

The poignancy of Wells-Barnett's narrative captures me, and the students, when we are reminded that despite her intellect and influence in her time, she—and scores of black women like her past and present—would never fully realize the possibilities of their place and time. At every turn, she tried to capitalize on the expanding opportunities available for black women in late nineteenth-century America: admission to newly constructed Negro colleges, innovations in transportation that allowed her to travel domestically and internationally, and the explosion in black print media which could launch her ideas into a wider world. These institutions and innovations allowed more black people, as well as their ideas, their creations, and their meditations on becoming a free people to circulate and travel in unprecedented ways.

Wells-Barnett and her cohort of black women activist-intellectuals were constantly reminded that their race and gender would impair the very mobility these technological and social advances promised. As a black woman, she could not safely circulate her body or her corpus of writings and investigations. After enduring the indignities of the train car incident and later threats in the South, Wells-Barnett continued to attract the vitriol of white supremacists and sexist “race men.”²

In this essay, I focus on my own experiences of thinking in public as a black academic woman in digital spaces, and the implications for my offline life at my university and in my department, specifically as the curator of the social media campaign #FergusonSyllabus, a response to Officer Darren Wilson killing unarmed teenager Michael Brown in a St. Louis exurb in August of 2014. Brown's death led to a massive uprising in the town of Ferguson, an international conversation of race and police brutality was ignited, and the Black Lives Matter movement came into greater visibility. After August 9, 2014, Ferguson became shorthand for long-standing racial and economic marginalization and a metonym for heightened consciousness about police violence and excess. #FergusonSyllabus initially started as a request I made to my Twitter followers and friends to dedicate the first day of classes to Michael Brown and the other youth of Ferguson who would not have a normal first day of school because of the unrest in their community. I believed that by talking about some element of the unrest through the lens of a discipline or to create a space in which students could express their questions or confusions about the moment (which captured the attention of cable news reporters, streamed live via Periscope accounts and was narrated by activists via Twitter), educators could amplify the greatest possibilities of online organizing and in-person gathering. Twitter provided an excellent vehicle for me to ask scholars to teach about the crisis, but the ability to search the platform using the #FergusonSyllabus term also allowed for a larger conversation among educators. As #FergusonSyllabus went viral—in part, due to an article I wrote about the idea for the online version of *The Atlantic*—I received requests from educators about how to translate the crowdsourced suggestions into action. For months, my association with #FergusonSyllabus challenged me to make real the interdisciplinary training I received in an American studies doctorate program, and

it introduced me to a digital community of scholars, who made me feel less isolated and alone in my inclinations toward social justice teaching.

Although my experience of using Twitter as a digital platform for racial justice work was a relatively positive one, it was not without anxieties and the complications that come when an untenured woman of color becomes increasingly more visible in a national conversation. I was subject to the type of trolling, harassment, and unsolicited critique that are commonplace when women engage critical issues online. In the three years since Brown's death and the internationalization of Black Lives Matter, I have reflected on my experience with #FergusonSyllabus and the shifts in my academic career. My professional life transformed from having an academic presence mostly on my campus and within a few professional organizations to becoming an occasional talking head in media, the subject of profiles on education and teaching websites, and a public enough intellectual that I had to learn how to discern how I entered and navigated public conversations. In this essay, I focus on how my experiences with #FergusonSyllabus made me aware of the way that online and digital engagement offers a window into how you spend your time, and the ways colleagues and advisors evaluate your use of this time in the academy. This type of surveillance heightened my career worries and forced me to think about the way the academy evaluates and devalues collective, activist work. Additionally, my sudden entry into the world of digital scholarship regarding teaching about race and social justice, and the lack of clarity on how public engagement fits within the rigid hierarchy of research-service-and-then-teaching, made me think about the ways black women's voices can be muffled or altogether silenced in the very moments their insights are needed.

Wrinkles in Time

Before delving into how my career was reshaped by #FergusonSyllabus in 2014, I think it is important to reflect about time and the life of the academic. Although the digital landscape has reoriented our expectations on how long it should take to receive information, updates on said information, and then analysis on the information, the academic world has not fundamentally changed its relationship to time. We still understand knowledge production, research, and intellectual cultivation as requiring substantial investments in time in order to ensure that we are approaching our projects with an attention to rigor and demonstrating our commitment to depth. This emphasis on time shapes how we train and manage scholars in an academic bureaucracy. One of the most enduring and consistent elements of graduate education and the early career professorship is the constant questioning of how a person spends or squanders time. Your time becomes the subject of many conversations. Time to completion. Time on the tenure track. Time added to your tenure clock. Time spent worrying about not having enough time to tend to your research. Time spent in meetings. Time off in order to do scholarly work. For academics of

color, time advice is easy to come by from well-intentioned mentors, from institutional diversity offices, and sage blog writers who warn: Protect your time! Time is the precious, unrenowable resource that overeager students and potentially ineffective or useless committees seeking a “diverse perspective” will try to steal from you. Scholars of color are routinely told that expectant community members will try to take it from you to participate in local campaigns or share your knowledge with sixth graders and high school juniors. You wonder if you have made good use of your time, while you feel each tick of your tenure clock in your gut. The warnings about the forces that try to spirit away with our valuable time are grounded in the very real experiences of burnout and failure, but time policing can also serve as a form of benevolent control, or even worse, a means of assimilating scholars into thinking that your time should never be used in the service of political struggles or movements, especially if you don’t have tenure.

“How are you spending your time?”

In academia, the question of time is not only a matter of employer expectations or a mentor’s kindly concern. Misunderstandings about the nature of academic work lend themselves to the spectacular narratives of faculty wasting time. The fixation on how faculty spend their time is often at the heart of most of the legislative interventions of late in states like Wisconsin and Iowa, in which politicians are attacking tenure, sabbatical leave, and ill-informed suggestions that if a professor can teach two or three courses a semester, why not four or five.³ The arguments emerge from the same roots: At public universities, taxpayers purchased your time, so it is necessary for the state to extract as much of it as possible. At private institutions, the time scrutiny remains internal, but the message is the same: Prove that your time is being spent in the right ways, so that you can prove that you belong here.

So, what did it mean for me, as an academic professional, to create a time-stamped body of evidence about how I spent my time on Twitter in the year before I applied for tenure? Should I have spent the hour between 1:03 p.m. and 2:03 p.m. on August 11, 2014, tweeting out recommendations for teaching about St. Louis County and the history of residential redlining, or liking and retweeting article links about the militarization of police, before the official syllabi for my fall semester classes were done? What does it mean when I receive a notification that the account @GUProvostOffice, my university’s provost, was following me on Twitter? Is this a sign of respect or an opening for criticism? When I noticed former students following me on Twitter, I was happy they were seeing #FergusonSyllabus unfold. When I realized that some of their parents were following #FergusonSyllabus, I wondered, are doing this to be supportive, or are they collecting evidence against me? Then, I noticed that I was being trolled and mocked about #FergusonSyllabus. “Why not teach kids to respect police?” “Another person trying to make colleges more liberal.” Do I have the stomach for this?

In the years following the launch of #FergusonSyllabus, I became more attentive to checking where my name, and later my image, appeared. Websites like Campus

Reform, Campus Fix, and even Breitbart have taken issue with something I have said—or what they think I said—about race and college campuses and the nation more broadly. Black women thinkers attract trolls regularly, and scholars such as Brittney Cooper and Keeanga Yamahata-Taylor have been the most vocal and vigilant about refusing to bow to the assaults on their character and threats to their physical safety. When I received hate mail at my campus office or racially abusive tweets, I immediately sought to delete or hide the insults and the threats. No use of letting this linger, I reasoned. But I later realized I hid these acts of aggression because I did not know if I had the time to realize how frightened and intimidated I was by them. The insults on Twitter were immediately deleted and the offender blocked; yet, I wondered what would it mean if I left those comments alone or even highlighted them so my students, my colleagues, the provost, and the larger public would know what it looked like for one of a handful of black women at Georgetown to work in the public eye.⁴

Did I have time for #FergusonSyllabus?

What would people make of how I spent those valuable, precious minutes, hours, and days?

An Ask

At the heart of my engagement in social media during the Ferguson crisis, the notion of my time, my mobility, and the circulation of my ideas converged to create a new level of uncertainty about how others perceived my use of time. To take my concern about the devastation in Ferguson, Missouri, to a public space like Twitter was to also reveal my personal sadness about the state that was a second home to me since my undergraduate days at the University of Missouri.

I realized if my ask, to teach and talk about Ferguson, was made through Twitter, I could have a reach and a real-time archive of a community coming together around it. Considering the complexity and totality of the tragedy in Ferguson, I felt it critical to ask faculty who are usually outside the “race and gender” conversations on campus to imagine the ways that the STEM, business, architecture, and medicine classrooms are also responsible for thinking about multidisciplinary readings of the crisis unfolding. I wondered what my colleagues had to say about the fact that tear gas was used by militarized police forces on civilians on the streets of Ferguson. What did science scholars have to say about this? What does it mean to bring the question of policing tactics to bench scientists and medical students? Ferguson’s poverty rate doubled between 2000 and 2010, and more than a quarter of families in the town live below the federal poverty line. So, I implored business school educators to take up the question of economic development in suburbs and the history of redlining to help their students understand their role in the world as future capitalists, innovators, and financial regulators.⁵ I asked urban planning faculty to think about the design of the Canfield Green apartments where Brown was killed and the

strip of fast-food restaurants that dotted Florissant Avenue, the center of the Ferguson protests, and how race and poverty inform spatial choices.

In providing these ideas and prompts to educators, I wanted to challenge academics on Twitter to think about the digital space as a site to create and sustain a community of scholars committed to pushing the boundaries of how we use our disciplines to respond to pressing social problems. I was frustrated by the number of people who have told me that because they were white, or outside the “social justice” fields, they had nothing to contribute to conversations about race and inequality. I also didn’t want the unprepared and untested to initiate awkward conversation about race that could only expose their lack of preparedness. Rather, I wanted to help reorient scholars to the ways that the problems borne out of racial tension can be answered by our scholarly tools, and when we connect with our colleagues in other fields, we become more creative and equipped to engage in more substantive work in the classroom.

#FergusonSyllabus was intentionally multidisciplinary and even more intentionally public to call scholars out of hiding behind the oft-recited myth of “I have nothing to add.” My initial motivations went beyond challenging my colleagues to use the first day of school to ensure students would have a space in which the Ferguson conversation could be connected to their curricular endeavors. I wanted to highlight the work of scholars of color who have long sounded the alarm about police violence and the criminalization of poverty in the United States. The activists inside Ferguson and other parts of St. Louis County were alerting the nation to the root causes of the multiple factors that contributed to the uprising—the city’s budget’s dependence on traffic and municipal ticketing, the resource-strapped Ferguson-Florissant School district, unemployment outside major cities, and St. Louis’s disastrous public housing history and midcentury population loss. I wanted my colleagues who don’t live in a world in which they sit on university diversity committees and speak on panels about inclusion on campus to understand the scholarly contributions and emotional labor of such a career. The ability to tweet about the work and, in addition, to discover the curiosity and the excitement of the disciplines elsewhere around this issue was inspiring. For the first time, I found myself in dialogue with fashion theorists, urban planners, chemists, and data scientists about how they can talk to their students about race, poverty, and inequality in their classrooms.

#FergusonSyllabus might have remained a small experiment among me and my couple of thousand Twitter followers had I not received a direct message, a private communiqué between Twitter followers, from a digital editor at TheAtlantic.com. Then editor Alexis Madrigal invited me to write about #FergusonSyllabus for the website, and I accepted the offer and thought that I would maybe make a small difference in helping facilitate my hopes that the several first days of class would focus on Ferguson. Within days, National Public Radio called me to give recommendations on people they could talk to about teaching Ferguson, and slowly I was

becoming a “go-to” person on this issue. In the span of ten days, I was interviewed by the *New York Times* and St. Louis Public Radio, and my words were reprinted in *Slate*, the *Daily Kos*, and *Huffington Post*.

As the first day of my own classes approached, I started to receive direct messages from K–12 teachers, many of whom were told they would be disciplined if they talked about Ferguson in their classes. Fourth grade teachers and high school guidance counselors reached out and asked if I had any ideas of what they could do or say to circumvent jittery principals and nervous school boards. In consulting with these teachers, I discovered a meaningful component of my desire to reach a “broad audience,” an audience that included K–12 educators as well. Penning newspaper editorials and longform journalism pieces can bring academics into new intellectual engagements, but rarely do scholars outside of education departments and schools spend time with elementary and high school teachers. I found that K–12 teachers needed support in providing age-appropriate and social climate-sensitive content on race, gender, sexuality, and class. Throughout my career, I have heard my share of colleagues complain about the lack of preparedness among their incoming students, but rarely do I meet scholars who have made substantial investments in supporting pre-college educators. I can’t say I was innocent of this impulse either. Twitter provided a low-cost way to transmit ideas among these teachers, and they could consider the possibilities of teaching Ferguson from each other and sharing what worked and what failed.

By early September, I was the face of #FergusonSyllabus and an authority on teaching the scholarship of others, rather than a scholar promoting my own soon-to-be-released book and my expertise on African American girlhood. Although I had spent years trying to create a more flexible, if not entirely new, approach to the early-career track, by rejecting limiting notions of what it meant to be an academic, I was growing uneasy about the attention #FergusonSyllabus was generating. Being publicly acknowledged as a “teacher” rather than a “scholar” made me nervous, as I heard warnings that good teaching did not lead to tenure. I heard from mentors that women, especially women of color, did not want to be pigeonholed as simply good at teaching, and that excellent teaching would send up a red flag about my ability to be truly challenging and rigorous inside and outside the classroom. Although in television and magazine interviews I would insert my scholarly thoughts about the structural and historical questions that Ferguson brought to the fore, I was becoming known as a teacher, an assembler of ideas and methods for teaching about race. Was this a smart move? Was I shedding precious credibility by talking to fifth grade teachers? Was I setting myself up to be the cautionary tale for another generation—that scholar who was filled with promise until she started talking about kids during a time of crisis?

Some of my fears were put to rest by the tremendous institutional support I received at Georgetown and among my colleagues in the history department. Institutionally, I knew I was privileged to work in an environment in which units across

campus were directing and initiating various Ferguson-related programming. My students were becoming regular participants in organizing efforts and protests in D.C. and were happy to use class time to discuss Ferguson and Black Lives Matter. When I submitted my tenure file months after launching #FergusonSyllabus, I was advised to revise my documents to *include* my efforts and its outcomes in the narrative components on research, teaching, and service in order to emphasize the importance of making scholarly and teaching interventions outside of our academic constructs. This encouragement and support are rare in the academy. I know of colleagues elsewhere who were discouraged from spending their own time on activist efforts on and off campus during the Ferguson crisis, and I was relieved that my institution did not try to silence me.

In a 2015 article in the *New Republic*, social critic Michael Eric Dyson celebrated what he calls a new generation of black digital intelligentsia. Citing scholars who use the digital landscape to participate in contemporary conversations, as well as engage in social justice struggles on the ground, Dyson applauded the fact that this intelligentsia is not simply the product of or the professors at elite universities.⁶ Dyson, and others who have provided more or less critical assessments of the black public intellectual, reminded readers that the genealogies of black intellectuals from the nineteenth century to the present represent a hybrid of educational training and, like Wells-Barnett, the scholars regularly traveled across disciplines and professional statuses. The color line, along with the gender line and class line, has had the most impact on where scholars of color speak from and to which audiences. Twitter has provided that ideological location for this type of boundary-crossing travel.

As the academy still searches for a clear definition of the digital humanities and how it relates to the assessment and promotion of scholars, it is critical to make clearer distinctions than the ones Dyson articulates in his piece, which vaguely defines the digital and conflates the use of a computer with engagement of the digital space. Academic leaders and institutions must understand that a digital intelligentsia must use digital tools in ways to make the disciplines more accessible, dynamic, equitable, and relevant. Additionally, the blanket term “social media tools” erases the specific possibilities and pitfalls of the way that each tool curates, mediates, and presents ideas generated by scholars. Although Facebook, Twitter, WordPress blogs, Instagram, Snapchat, Grindr, Tindr, Scruff, and so on exist under the umbrella of social, the ways that academics, and I would emphasize academics of color, have used and leveraged these tools is where the conversation about the digital intelligentsia must linger. As leaders in the digital humanities and digital studies provide more clarity in these areas, more scholars will have the language to parse out the specific tales that each platform can tell about the nature of digital tools. The academy must begin to learn how to appreciate the skills and labor that each of these tools demands of scholars, whether it's the brevity of 140 characters or the production of

digital scholarship, using GIS mapping software, digitization platforms, or online curatorial sites. As the digital humanities is a space in which women of color scholars are shaping and defining, it is also another space in which these same scholars are vulnerable to the kinds of marginalization that has long characterized the academy. As this process unfolds and changes, it is important to remember that all scholars with a computer are not involved in the digital humanities, and all digital projects do not democratize access to knowledge. Truly democratic spaces allow knowledge to be shared without fear of repercussion or backlash.

Fellow Passengers

Sociologist Zandria Robinson's experiences in the summer of 2015 illustrate how black women academics' digital expression is met on- and offline. When conservative news outlets reported on some of Robinson's tweets about racism and social media posts about white supremacy, subsequent rumors circulated that she was fired from her academic post for her ideas. Robinson's entanglement with the machinery of hypersurveillance of black women evoked Wells-Barnett's legacy. Her former employer responded to calls for her firing by simply tweeting: "Robinson is no longer employed by the University of Memphis." The university allowed the public to read between the lines. Her name appeared and reappeared on blog posts written for those desiring a narrative that a liberal, racist professor—a black woman at that—was finally punished for her outrageous views. In my estimation, Robinson's tweet was simply providing critiques of racism; yet, in the digital world a tweet is never just a tweet. The University of Memphis tweet did not, and could not, tell the full story. Robinson had refused to be ejected from the ladies' car. As she prepared to enter a new faculty post at Rhodes College of Memphis, it became clear that she was not fired from her previous position, and unlike so many who quiet themselves in the face of controversy, she refused to be silenced. She chose to continue to use her Twitter account and New South Negress blog to tell her truth.

Robinson—who has also been shaped by Wells-Barnett in her navigation of the academy—penned this artful response, which connected her multiple identities as a resistant, black woman academic in the South:

We do this for Ida [B. Wells-Barnett] and all the ones that have come before us who have written the truth and compelled the nation, against some terrible odds, to reckon with itself. We are still doing it, and we must continue to do it. The fact that any of the statements of people of color—even the cherry-picked, decontextualized ones—are seen as controversial is a testament to the fact that we have not, even after all these years, had the conversations that need to be had or read the things that need to be read. Or perhaps the worst of white folks simply haven't listened. But we'll get there.⁷

I look to other black feminist scholars to remember that there are many ways to “get there.” The attacks on Robinson—whose tweets and blog posts regularly deliver critiques of the state, as well as the academy’s structural barriers to supporting faculty and graduate students of color—are felt across the black (feminist, academic) Twitterverse. The New South Negress’s reflections simultaneously celebrate vulnerability, humor, and the sardonic sensibility that develops when you search for a place for yourself in the academy. Robinson connects to the commonplace experiences of other scholars of color, and her brief moment of exposure revealed that an attack on one is an attack on all. In response to the outcry against Robinson, one hundred of her colleagues of color signed a statement in her support.⁸ Her steadfastness in asserting her opinions and her refusal to be a bystander in her own character assassination resonate deeply with the multiple fears felt by all of those who desire to think and tell the truth in public.

Since August 2014, the #Syllabus movement has grown and expanded; it is now shorthand for the ways that scholars—many of them women of color—use the digital landscape to intervene in moments of crisis and remind the academy of our roles and responsibilities to a broader world. The circulation of the #BlackLivesMatterSyllabus, #BaltimoreSyllabus, #SayHerNameSyllabus, and #TrumpSyllabus2.0 and the publication of the book *Charleston Syllabus: Readings on Race, Racism, and Racial Violence* point to ways that scholars have seen the use of the hashtag as an efficient use of Twitter to support social justice-oriented teaching, as well as interdisciplinary cooperation.⁹ As was the case of #FergusonSyllabus, the syllabi hashtags also help media outlets identify scholars who can provide years of research and teaching expertise to radio listeners and news watchers.

For black women in the public sphere, access to technology has long been a mixed blessing. Wells-Barnett’s activist life was compelled, transformed, and imperiled by rail travel and newspaper circulation. For me and other black women in public and academic life, our careers have been reshaped by Skype accounts that allow us to give lectures without leaving our offices, Twitter feeds that provide an entryway into heated debates, and budget airlines that help us connect with each other at symposia and conferences. Before many of us have been awarded tenure, or even advanced degrees, we have received invitations to offer our analysis on television news programs, while using our social media accounts to link to our scholarship and share our peers’ work, and digital platforms have allowed us to bring a black feminist voice to policymakers and the public at large. As support for digital organizing projects and the digital humanities expands, I’m hopeful that academic women of color can sit securely in our seats as we travel across intellectual boundaries.

I am still uncertain if Twitter is a place for a [black academic] lady when I see attacks like those hurled at Robinson and others. Yet, I do know that we are not on the train car alone.

Notes

1. Ida B. Wells-Barnett's writings are available in *Southern Horrors*, available on Project Gutenberg, accessed June 25, 2018; DeCosta-Willis, *Memphis Diary*; and Royster, *Southern Horrors*. For biographies of Wells-Barnett, see Duster, *Crusade for Justice*; and Giddings, *Ida*.

2. Deborah Gray White's *Too Heavy a Load* traces the historical struggle of black women's organizing in the name of race and gender together. White highlights the ways that Wells-Barnett and others critiqued white men's sexually predatory behaviors and black men's failures to stand up and be in unity with black women.

3. "Iowa Bill." Also "Walker Erodes."

4. Taylor, "Free Speech' Hypocrisy." In this article, Taylor discusses her horrifying experience of being threatened after delivering a commencement address about the racism and misogyny of the president of the United States. In "How Free Speech Works for White Academics," Brittney Cooper mentions not only her own experiences of being targeted but also the ways that the "free speech" conversation is at best disingenuous, and at worst a means of silencing scholars of color who challenge white supremacy.

5. Kneebone, "Ferguson, MO."

6. Dyson, "New Black Digital Intelligentsia."

7. Zandria, "Zeezus Does the Firing."

8. Jaschik, "Professor." Also McClain, "Why 100."

9. Blain, Williams, and Williams, *Charleston Syllabus*.

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Reflections on a Movement: #transformDH, Growing Up

MOYA BAILEY, ANNE CONG-HUYEN, ALEXIS LOTHIAN,
AND AMANDA PHILLIPS

What happens when we shift difference away from a deficit that must be managed and amended (with nods in the direction of diversity) and toward understanding difference as our operating system, our thesis, our inspiration, our goal? From this perspective, highlighting the brave side of digital humanities isn't an act of transformative resolution, but is about reframing and recognizing which links were already there and which links are yet to be made.

—Fiona Barnett, “The Brave Side of DH”

Manifesting #transformDH

We have been invited to write a manifesto for #transformDH—a hashtag, perhaps a movement, that the four of us had a part in beginning. We prefer not to operate within a formal structure, however, or to lay out our shared aspirations as a set of concrete demands. Nevertheless, we can begin by identifying the following key claims as constitutive of #transformDH:

1. Questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability should be central to digital humanities and digital media studies.
2. Feminist, queer, and antiracist activists, artists, and media-makers outside of academia are doing work that contributes to digital studies in all its forms. This work productively destabilizes the norms and standards of institutionally recognized academic work.
3. We should shift the focus of digital humanities from technical processes to political ones, and always seek to understand the social, intellectual, economic, political, and personal impact of our digital practices as we develop them.

We need a digital humanities that will center on the intersection of digital production and social transformation through research, pedagogy, and activism, and that will not be restricted to institutional academic spaces. #transformDH is the name some of us gave to that digital humanities as we recognized it in our own and others' work. Seeking to situate #transformDH within its social, economic, and institutional contexts, this chapter tracks the emergence of the collective and some of the challenges that have accompanied it. In so doing, we hope to model an ethical approach to that which we have been assigned ownership, but over which we have little control. Our desire is to deflect the academy's imperative to take personal credit for work that is always collective. We will end, as we have in the past, with a call to action. We invite others to join with us, or to claim the hashtag for themselves, and to actively seek a more transformative DH: a DH that explicitly names the radical potential of doing scholarship with and about the digital, a DH that addresses the most pressing social justice concerns of our day.

Origin Stories: Forming a Collective

#transformDH was born out of a sense of absence. It was 2011, the year that "Big Tent DH" surfaced as a term to describe digital humanities as inclusive and welcoming of different disciplines. But for those of us whose academic homes were in gender and queer studies, race and ethnic studies, and disability studies, and whose personal and political work embraced the digital, it appeared as if the "big tent" was not big enough. Our social justice concerns seemed to enter so rarely into conversations and research, even in the "big tent" of the field. Instead, DH seemed to be replicating many traditional practices of the ivory tower, those that privileged the white, heteronormative, phallogocentric view of culture that our home disciplines had long critiqued. The cost of entry for many of us—material demands, additional training, and cultural capital—as queer people and women of color was high. Evidently, big tent digital humanities still demanded a certain legibility, as panels and talks such as Stephen Ramsay's intentionally inflammatory "Who's In, Who's Out" at the Modern Language Association (MLA) that year made clear. The few of us tweeting queer and critical race studies panels looked across empty social media tables—set up by the MLA in recognition of digital media's emerging dominance, unused at most of the panels in our home fields—and recognized one another as allies.

We were not the first to think about queer studies, critical race studies, disability studies, or other forms of activist scholarship in relation to digital humanities. Feminist critique has been central to many of the foundational projects that set the terms for the field, as in the work of Martha Nell Smith, Susan Brown, and Julia Flanders. Anna Everett, who chaired the first #transformDH panel, and Lisa Nakamura, who was in the audience that day, have both demonstrated the centrality of the knowledge and labor of people of color to digital knowledge production, as

well as to the material conditions that enable that production to take place. In addition, digital tools and networks have been consistently, innovatively, and radically used by communities of activists, fans, and other nonacademics working for gender, racial, economic, and disability justice, from IRC and newsgroups to Twitter and Tumblr. Yet, as Moya Bailey argued in her 2011 essay “All of the Digital Humanists Are White, All of the Nerds Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave,” the disciplinary formation of “digital humanities” had thus far developed in opposition to so-called identity politics, with its ostensible openness occluding unexamined assumptions about whiteness, straightness, and masculinity.

Immediately following the 2011 MLA, a group gathered at the Southern California THATCamp in a session on diversity in digital humanities and drafted a document titled “Toward an Open Digital Humanities.” The document chronicled the various barriers to entry in the digital humanities and suggested a number of ways to increase the field’s inclusivity. Within the next few weeks, some members of that group organized a panel for the American Studies Association conference that would take place later that year. “#transformDH” was originally a shortened version of the panel title, “Transformative Mediations: Queer and Ethnic Studies and the Politics of the Digital” (Cong-Huyen, “Thinking Through Race”). Only six or seven people joined the audience, yet it soon became clear that something larger had been created as the conversations expanded online. The #transformDH hashtag quickly emerged as a rallying call on Twitter and Tumblr, as well as at other conferences and institutions (Phillips). The organizers of the panel and several other colleagues began to self-identify as a collective. The #transformDH movement had begun.

Transforming a Hashtag

If #transformDH was born out of a sense of absence, we made that absence visible in the form of our hashtag. In 2011, the hashtag was emerging as the tool of choice for individuals and groups hoping to rapidly spread news or other information and to cohere communities in person and online. A precursor to the hashtag activism that has flourished in social movements of the 2010s, #transformDH was meant to be distributed and used by anyone who saw the need to highlight marginalized work or issues in the field. The right hashtag at the right moment can spread very quickly, if—and only if—other people begin to use it. Its efficacy is directly tied to the ease with which other users can take it up as their own. As Chris Messina, inventor of the hashtag, explained, “[Hashtags] are born of the Internet, and should be owned by no one” (Messina). As a hashtag, then, #transformDH was no longer owned by the collective that had originated it; it had been set loose into the world.

It was not long before #transformDH gained enough traction to attract critics. The slippage between “transformative” and “transform,” originally an effort to conserve characters for Twitter, was interpreted as a hostile gesture. DH understood itself as friendly and welcoming (Koh; Scheinfeldt). Why did the field need

transforming? It is true that we outliers, the few women of color and visible queers at DH conferences and panels, had used the hashtag to voice our distress openly. Ironically, it was this perception of the collective (made up entirely of graduate students) as rabble-rousers who wanted to upset the status quo that highlighted what #transformDH had been too timid to say at the outset: DH really *did* need to be transformed. It was a growing field that was becoming increasingly institutionalized, and that was beginning to evince many of the problematic racial, gender, and economic biases that had plagued other fields as they emerged. We had accidentally become academic hashtag activists.

“Hashtag activism,” a phrase coined by *Guardian* journalist Eric Augenbraun to describe the #OccupyWallStreet movement, was not intended as a neutral term, but rather as a critique of the ease with which millennials could express concern for an issue while doing nothing substantive to solve it. But as more and more hashtags emerged to mark issues and events that would have otherwise gone unnoticed—for instance, #Jan25 or #BlackLivesMatter—it became clear that hashtag activism had the power to mobilize people, to question governments, and to enact change. Hashtags such as #NotYourAsianSideKick and #YesAllWomen initiated wide-ranging conversations on important issues around race and gender. Our confidence in the possibilities of #transformDH as a distributed, open movement increased as we saw the work that other hashtag activists were doing, and we began to recognize that work as transformative digital humanities in itself.

In the most active and ongoing #transformDH project, Moya Bailey curates the #transformDH Tumblr, reblogging information about the latest digital technologies created by queer folks, women, and people of color as well as the impact of digital scholarship on underserved communities. This curatorial work operates outside of traditional archives and functions to expand the range of projects understood as DH. For example, a recent post showcased a menstrual cycle tracking app, “No More Flowers,” built by a group of queer and trans programmers to challenge societal assumptions that only women have menstrual cycles and that flowers are the most appropriate symbols for menstruation. This type of app applies critiques from the fields of women’s and queer studies to popular technology; including it in an archive like #transformDH places pressure on existing DH communities to understand app production as both scholarly and activist in nature. We deliberately showcase a wide breadth of material, placing scholarly critique and creative projects in conversation with one another, with the goal of transforming what “counts” as a DH project both inside and out of higher-ed institutions.

People interact with our content on a daily basis and employ the #transformDH hashtag to flag work or events that address questions they perceive as central to the collective. Rather than perpetuate the existing model of large-scale, grant-funded, project-based scholarly work, we operate as a widely dispersed, distributed network. In redefining the term “collective” for a networked context, we bring our commitment to digital social justice to disparate academic and public spheres: game studies,

queer studies, ethnic studies, libraries, online spaces, and more. #transformDH moves through cyberspace as a signal, highlighting conversations, blog posts, conference papers, articles, and other media objects that may be of interest to people concerned with how race, class, gender, disability, and sexuality shape our world.

Resisting Success

Over time, we have seen transformative digital humanities scholarship gain visibility. The work that we longed to see as we started #transformDH has materialized in many shapes and forms—not always explicitly connected with #transformDH, but often enacting many the transformations the collective has called for. In 2013, the Dark Side of the Digital Humanities conference brought together senior scholars like Wendy Chun, Richard Grusin, and Rita Raley in person and on paper to challenge DH utopianism. Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont have led “Feminist Digital Humanities: Theoretical, Social, and Material Engagements” at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute two years running (Wernimont). The FemBot Collective, which publishes feminist research about technology in long and short form on its blog and in the journal *Ada*, has swelled to over 350 members worldwide. Fem-TechNet organized and supported two years of a Distributed Open Collaborative Course (DOCC) on feminism and technology as an active pedagogical critique of the MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). Angel David Nieves founded the Digital Humanities Initiative at Hamilton College, which supports critical digital humanities projects such as the American Prison Writing Archive, the Soweto Historical GIS Project, and the Virtual Freedom Trail Project. Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam founded the influential Postcolonial Digital Humanities with the aim of decolonizing digital practices. Wendy Hsu brought ethnography and diasporic studies to the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. Global Outlook::Digital Humanities organized “Around DH in 80 Days” to curate and highlight digital projects worldwide. William Pannacker has fought for “Digital Liberal Arts” and the recentering of digital scholarship and pedagogy at teaching-intensive colleges in addition to resource-rich R1 research institutions. This list is only a partial accounting of the projects that have emerged in the past few years, but each of them gives us reason to hope that DH will continue to be more “ambitious,” as Miriam Posner exhorts in chapter 3 in this volume, “to hold ourselves to much higher standards.” If our involvement has helped the field to get there, either through direct participation in these projects or by facilitating connections between them, we have only been successful with the cooperation and support of many, many others.

Even as scholars such as Alan Liu point toward the work of #transformDH in leading these changes, it is important to ask whether assigning the success of a broader cultural shift to particular groups of people dulls the transformative potential of our distributed collective. Do we, a handful of named “founders” of #transformDH, get recognition even as the most challenging projects—projects

that are not necessarily traditional academic ones—get ignored? Contributing our voices to venues like *Debates in the Digital Humanities* requires us to name names, fix dates, and quantify contributions in ways that, while necessary for scholarly legitimacy, run directly counter to the hashtag ethos. #transformDH was started by graduate students, and now that we are advancing in our careers, we find ourselves paradoxically with more access to resources and fewer ways to make the impact that a simple hashtag did years ago. Grant funding, for example, requires quantifiable outcomes that may not recognize the types of nontraditional output at which #transformDH excels. Even when the work that we create, from Twitter and Tumblr posts to peer-reviewed articles, adds to our CVs and helps us to advance as individuals employed in the academy, that advancement embeds us further in the systems we are critiquing, encouraging us to set our sights on the horizons of disciplinary legitimacy rather than more expansive change. After all, the transformations that #transformDH at its most radical has called for would not be compatible with the institutional power that some of us are beginning to accrue: dismantling institutional hierarchies, prioritizing collective rather than individual achievement, amplifying the voices of those whose perspectives have not traditionally found a place in academia, and so on. We initially envisioned this piece as a manifesto, but that stance felt disingenuous given our new academic positions, our shifting obligations, and the changes to the field itself.

Higher education in the United States is in a moment of simultaneous hope and despair. While individual actors recognize the need for a deeper commitment to social justice in the academy, universities have fired professors at the behest of powerful trustees and donors, threatening academic freedom. On a national level, the United States elected its first Black president, but experienced an upswing in racist violence. Feminist voices are making measurable changes in the games and tech industries, but they have been punished by collective mobs of anonymous harassers. Gay marriage was legalized, but less-privileged queer and trans people, especially trans women of color, are still targets of violence. Every triumph produces its own backlash, because hegemony is persistent and reproduces itself, even in progressive movements.

Are our institutions embracing us, or are they consuming us in the name of diversity? We must take seriously the warnings of scholars such as Roderick Ferguson and Sara Ahmed, who expose how universities incorporate ethnic studies and other interdisciplines into the fold in order to forestall more radical progress. How can we make our success, and the success of #transformDH, something that leads to transformation rather than assimilation? Or, to put it in more concrete terms: how can academics who are receiving institutional recognition and funding also support community-based digital activism and internal structural changes? We must be public scholars, ethical researchers, promulgators of hashtags, and always teachers. We must attend political hackathons, host Wikipedia edit-a-thons for underrepresented communities, champion our underserved students, and lead transformative digital

humanities projects. We must continue to acknowledge, assign, and amplify work by women of color, indigenous, disabled, feminist, and queer activists in community and digital spaces. We must, above all, insist on the relevance of social justice to our work as academics.

By expanding who and what counts as DH, we can model for other academic communities the transformative power of collaborative energy to address the questions of our time. We ask for practitioners of DH to be attentive to the ways that social hierarchies of oppression inform their research. The digital provides the opportunity for a more democratized relationship to scholarly production, and DH can continue to be central to the transformative process of shifting academic investment in cloistered knowledge. Our roles slowly shift as our positions as junior scholars, precarious workers, faculty of color, queer faculty, administrative staff, or alt-ac continually change, but we are committed to a tactical media approach to DH, as Rita Raley suggests, “remain[ing] adaptable to new situations and collaborations” rather than getting settled in comfortable roles (40). As we learn to balance our family, community, and professional responsibilities, we have come to know even more fully that we cannot do this work alone. We therefore end with another call for action. The work of #transformDH is always open to new conspirators, and we invite you, the reader, to participate in claiming, transforming, and expanding the digital humanities with us.

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Building Otherwise

JULIA FLANDERS

This chapter is a step in a longer exploration of the ways of reading technical systems as systems of cultural meaning and ideology. It is an inquiry concerning how to understand the relationship between systems and their components, their design, their meaning and the meaning of the things stored in them, their builders, their users, and the products they are used to create. In particular, it is about how otherness and logics of difference animate the tools and systems used in digital humanities; and it is about how we should act, where action requires both a theory of intention and causality and an understanding of where our intervention needs to be directed.

The provocation for this work, for me, has been twofold. First, I feel a strong challenge from work by scholars like Tara McPherson to read technological systems as ideological systems, and to focus not just on their effects as completed systems but on their genesis and development: on the ideologies that shaped their design.¹ This reading simultaneously situates digital humanities practitioners as responsible parties—designers and builders implicated in the design of future systems—and complicates that role of agency by suggesting that the ideological entailments of such systems may not be visible to their builders, and indeed that the design logics that feel most deeply natural and functional to one generation may be revealed as deeply problematic in the next. Situated thus, I want critical digital humanities practitioners to ask whether and how they would have built these systems differently, whether in their current projects they are able and willing to take different approaches, and what we can all learn from these historical examples that might inform an alternative practice. And I also want to ask whether the legacy of these systems' genesis in a cultural logic of racism also informs their current effects in the world, and whether we need to repudiate and redesign these systems as part of a remedy. The challenge in this analysis is to understand the relationship between individual intentions, individual identities, and this larger economy of power: in what sense does it matter who builds things? It is clear that one's subject position (as a woman of color, as a white man, etc.) doesn't necessarily align with ideological

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commitments, and indeed intersectionality shows how complex even the politically visible subject positioning can be. Putting Clarence Thomas on the U.S. Supreme Court did not necessarily make that body more progressive on issues of race, but it did make race visible as part of the operations of that body. In the same way, this analysis needs to attend both to the perspective of individuals (who can take deliberate action, and can try to inform that action with critical thinking) and to the systemic forces and shifts that constrain and constitute our subject positions as agents.

This sequence of questions leads to a second, more personal provocation to consider my own situation within this matrix. My professional acculturation in digital humanities took place at the Women Writers Project (WWP; at the time, located at Brown University; now at Northeastern University), a major early effort to make gender a category of analysis and visibility in the emerging world of digital scholarly research in the most literal way possible. As a female academic, director of a digital “Women Writers Project,” writing a chapter about gender, I can’t help but be read as *significantly* female. And these three spaces of gender seem to line up as if they are about the same thing: my personal gender helps literalize “women” as the significant fact about the WWP within this narrative, and also imputes to me a position of authority from which to write about gender.

But the development of the WWP’s research focus mirrored a shift in feminist theory from a second-wave attention to the visibility and rights of women (for the WWP, the discoverability and valuation of women’s writing in the pre-Victorian period) to a third-wave focus on how the structure of discourse enacts and reinforces cultural power dynamics of gender, race, class, coloniality, and other differentials. The WWP’s work involved developing methods of digital text encoding for the representation of early women’s writing: in effect, developing new discursive layers within the digital code through which documentary information could be represented and analyzed, and translating the methods of traditional scholarly editing into the digital medium. The project of gender here thus entailed not only a focus on the gender of physical bodies but also attention to the strong, if less obvious, gender implications carried by technologies of text markup and editorial practice. Work by scholars like Stephanie Jed, Katie King, Martha Nell Smith, Donald Reiman, and many others has shown how deeply editorial methods are implicated in the politics of gender, and it’s also clear that in the digital medium, editorial methods are affected by, and enacted through, technological choices.²

In this work, as in McPherson’s, we can see a foundational assumption: there is no such thing as a “merely technical” design decision: technical systems are meaning systems and ideological systems, as far down as we are willing to look. If we are only interested in seeing and understanding the operations of gender in the places where they appear obvious (bodies and personal identity), then we will miss some of its most important operations in spaces where it may be more powerfully at work. And conversely, the places where gender may seem most obviously legible may be misleading or peripheral. My historical impact on the WWP has been to make it

less about women and more about digital technologies—more attentive, perhaps, to the occult operations of gender within those technologies, but not necessarily in ways that alter our use of those technologies in response. Should we read that shift of emphasis as progressive (from a gender politics standpoint) in virtue of my own gender—this is the impact of a woman in a digital project!—or as evidence of professional acculturation recasting me as a white male technophile? Does my gender anchor my actions and intentions, or does it simply offer a perspective of difference from which other kinds of positioning (for instance, my race and class) can dislodge and reinscribe me?

These questions bear on the question of how the digital humanities might “build otherwise” because they suggest how complex “building” and “making” are as expressions of intention, identity, and cultural politics. It feels to me like a central paradox of the digital humanities that even while relying on technological systems and narratives of technological improvement, the field maintains a commitment to a “maker culture” and to “building” that means something more than simply a self-reliant desire to be handy. The field approaches making in a critical spirit, as interpreters of process and of ways of engaging with the material. But the status of cultural meaning in this context—both its tensional relation to the practical operations of tools and systems and its genesis in the various parts of those systems—is complicated to tease out. The design of a tool like Mukurtu (an open-source content management system aimed at supporting the cultural heritage needs of indigenous communities) takes seriously the ways in which information systems shape and enable and foreclose cultural meaning. Its designers deliberately foregrounded the rights and needs of those communities in their implementation of the basic functions of “content management.” But its lexicon of features (collection building, metadata tags, batch import and export, and so forth) are in many ways structurally indistinguishable from those of any content management system, and like all twenty-first-century digital tools are indebted to the still deeper features of operating systems, networks, web architectures, and so forth. If, as Tara McPherson suggests, these structural paradigms are themselves racially coded, even down to the level of the operating system, then the challenge of recognizing the cultural ideology of tools, let alone resisting it, is surely immense.

I can frame the specific concerns of this chapter as follows. If digital humanities as a domain of research+praxis is indeed prepared to take seriously the cultural, scholarly, and ideological significance of the full stack of technologies—if we’re prepared to read that entire stack as a cultural text, in addition to attending to the cultural effects of the entire stack as a working system—then three questions seem urgent. First, how do race, gender, and other forms of otherness operate within the scholarly, cultural, and ideological space of technological systems? Second, does it matter where we look for them? Do they operate differently at different places in the system? And third, do we have alternatives? Once we see these operations, what do we do differently?

What concerns and interests me about current attempts to answer these questions is the difficulty they reveal in creating a single coherent account of the operations of diversity in theories about how “building” operates in digital humanities. To illustrate this point concretely I’d like to take as examples four influential interventions that I admire and have found very useful. The first is Miriam Posner’s call, in her keynote at the 2015 Keystone Digital Humanities conference, for a complete rethinking of scholarly technological systems, an intellectual overhaul attentive to the ideological commitments in which these systems implicate us. This piece takes seriously the need for a critical revision: Posner calls for data models that respond both to the complexity of the world and to political and social justice concerns, and she also takes seriously the role that technical knowledge could play in that revision (for instance, in her “How Did They Make That?” blog series where she has been a vocal and creative advocate for greater knowledge of the “under the hood” aspects of digital projects). The examples are provocative: Google maps as an instance of the indebtedness of key information resources to corporate interests; Cartesian mapping systems more generally as an instance of the ways in which the available data models arise from colonialist intellectual and political traditions. Here she argues that two kinds of action are demanded of us. The first is a work of imagination: a move toward alternative ways of seeing, organizing, and analyzing that enables us to deliberately understand and use technical systems as meaning systems rather than as neutral and unalterable parts of the landscape. The very seamlessness of our interface with technology is precisely what insulates us and deadens our awareness of these tools’ significance: “In a similar way, many of the qualities of computer interfaces that we’ve prized, things like transparency, seamlessness, and flow, privilege ease of use ahead of any kind of critical engagement (even, perhaps, struggle) with the material at hand” (Posner, para. 12). The second action she demands is a work of building: creating real systems that use these alternative models and paradigms: “We can scrutinize data, rip it apart, rebuild it, reimagine it, and perhaps build something entirely different and weirder and more ambitious.” This is a brave as well as ambitious agenda, but it leaves open two important questions. For one thing, it is not clear how far down the technological stack this revision is expected to go. The operations of digital humanities “coding” and “building” as Posner describes them (mapping, exhibit building, interface building) are located near the top of the technical stack, leaving untouched the deeper layers: the structural logic of databases, operating systems, stylesheets, algorithms, data representations. She speaks of reimagining data models and the systems that use them, but the examples she offers for emulation demonstrate above all how difficult it is to perform that work of reimagination at any distance below the surface. One layer down, they are still working with conventional databases, content management systems, and metadata standards. A project like Jacqueline Goldsby’s “Mapping the Stacks,” in which a team of graduate students discovers and describes archival materials relating to African American history in

Chicago, arguably depends for its impact precisely on the existing mechanisms of systematic visibility that are underwritten by the existing archival infrastructure, even as it rethinks where and how we look for the archival content. Indeed, it's clear that many of the activities of positive engagement depend on the practical workings of mundanities like contributory interfaces, user authentication, and other systems that are very deeply rooted in the "business applications" side of the operation. My point here is not that Posner's argument is misguided—far from it—but rather to show the complexities that lie ahead if we explore its implications a bit more fully. And the other, even trickier question this articulation leaves open is the issue of how changes in technical systems (using different data models, different tools) actually effect social change.

Steve Ramsay, in a provocative Modern Language Association conference presentation titled "Who's In and Who's Out" and its companion piece "On Building," takes a position complementary to this one, in the sense that he too argues for the importance of "building" as digital humanities practice, but with a much stronger and less ambivalent role marked out for technical expertise: without it, we cannot competently theorize the technological stack. And without that competent theorization, the discipline of digital humanities unravels. "Building" for Ramsay is an "expansive" term that also encompasses "people who theorize about building, people who design so that others might build, and those who supervise building," but at its heart it signals the "methodologization" of the humanities: the essential link between the work of praxis and that of critical reflection.

The complex gender and racial politics of this emphasis on competence are not lost on Ramsay. In a moving contribution to the long thread of responses to Miriam Posner's blog post "Some Things to Think About before You Exhort Everyone to Code," he describes the ways in which the distinctively "hacker" form of expertise translates into a certain kind of social ruthlessness or tone-deafness in which technical competence can seem—in a deceptively egalitarian gesture—to be the only thing at stake.³ The pedagogical or cultural challenge *appears* to be simply how to empower women and other underrepresented groups to gain that expertise, in other words, a shift in the culture of *those* groups to make them comfortable with the *techne* of that technical space. But as his narrative demonstrates, technical competence isn't the issue at all; his female undergraduates are perfectly competent as programmers, perfectly confident in their abilities. In their encounter with the programmer culture of the computer science department, the problem is gender, not competence, and it's a problem of gender *difference*: of the male programmers not realizing they have a gender until a different one walks in the door. The space of expertise is defined not simply by qualifications but by a proprietary association between those qualifications and a specific tribe that possesses them. As Moya Bailey notes in her contribution to the same thread, the question is "about both making room at the table for everyone and also questioning who is in a position to 'invite' folks to the table in the first place."⁴

This last point is especially important because “making room at the table” assumes a kind of cultural assimilation that doesn’t necessarily change how the table’s affairs are conducted. And while we may recognize that assimilation as a political sidestep around the core issue, it is nonetheless a seductive engagement for both parties. At a personal level, I can attest with some retrospective chagrin to the thrill (as a young scholar/practitioner) of discovering that one can blend in with a group of experts and be accepted as one of them. The culture of programming has remained resilient and recognizable despite the entry of women and other minorities into the field; competence interpellates us powerfully, both technically and socially, framing the status we grant to high-value forms of expertise. So the question Ramsay’s interventions thus raise is how we can treat “building” as a metric of competence that anchors professional identity, while retaining ideological and critical maneuverability.

Tara McPherson’s “Why Are the Digital Humanities So White” addresses this point full on, arguing that the ideology of technical expertise—and in fact all of the hallmarks of its execution in the foundational technical systems of daily digital activity—carries a deeply political stamp: it both bears witness to and actively enacts a logic of racism (and I think she would agree that the same logic extends to gender discrimination as well). She offers a provocative exploration of how we might read race with technology, asking why we can’t seem to see them as connected and suggesting that the very design logic of information technology—modular, “clean,” highly formalized—provides a cover story for its presumed imperviousness, or neutrality with respect to ideology. Like Ramsay, she takes seriously the need to critically theorize the full depth of the technical stack, at least down to the operating system, and also the full range of competences and practices that reproduce that stack as it evolves. The terrain that her position leaves unresolved is the question of causality: she explores in detail (as Posner does not) the possibility that causal responsibility for today’s culture of racial and gender inequity might lie in deeply embedded, nearly invisible things like operating systems: “Computers are coders of culture. . . . If . . . Unix hardwired an emerging system of covert racism into our mainframes and our minds, then computation responds to culture as much as it controls it. Code and race are deeply intertwined, even as the structures of code labor to disavow these very connections.” And it also leaves unresolved the question of personal agency: are the builders of Unix involved as intentional agents—who could have done otherwise—in the structural racism of its design logic, and if so, what would be the conditions under which that other agency could have been expressed? In the end, she leaves open the question of how individuals can intervene in their efforts toward social change, and whether changing those systems would have any effect if it were possible to do so.

Moya Bailey, in “All the Digital Humanists Are White, All the Nerds Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave,” emphasizes the need for social change, and the need to theorize the field and its technologies in terms of race and other forms of diversity.

Unlike Ramsay, she is not committed to a specific definition of “digital humanities” which can in turn be used to define the expertise and concerns appropriate to that field; instead, she is committed to a definition by inclusion, saying in effect that the field must be defined so as to include all of the activities, by all of the diverse peoples undertaking them, that bear on questions of cultural digitality. Many of these activities involve appropriating tools for a radical politics that brings race, gender, and other axes of diversity into view precisely for their frictionality within those tools. But this appropriation (through usage) of tools for social justice projects leaves the structure of tool *development* unquestioned and unaltered: in effect, staging an occupation rather than seeking to rearchitect along different lines. Bailey’s work thus brings us back to the issue of what kinds of expertise would be needed to accomplish that rearchitecting, and what the new purpose of those rearchitected tools should be.

From the spaces opened up between these very different interventions, a set of questions emerges. First, would it help to alter our technological design? If the problem is bad data models (ideologically discriminatory, colonialist, patriarchal, etc.) and tools that reify them, could we build an alternative stack of technological systems to serve some different version of our purposes? Would the effects of doing so in fact reverse or subvert or counter the “culture” to which McPherson tells us “computation responds”? Second, how does the culture of the process affect the culture of the product? McPherson makes a point of noting that the people actually involved in the development of Unix, their intentions with respect to the code, are something quite apart from the structural logic of separation that informed the design of the operating system itself. Ramsay seems to feel that the core problem (with respect to gender) is in large part that women are being turned off and turned away *culturally* from practicing in a field where they otherwise could make great and useful *technical* contributions (without changes to the ways software tools are imagined or constructed). If we had a more diverse programming culture, would that result in technical systems that are not, in McPherson’s terms, “white” (or by extension “male”)? And if so, how would this in turn affect the users of such systems and the communities they create? Third, what specific actions can individuals take—as *designers* of politically implicated systems or as *resisters* of them? What actions have the potential for structural change rather than merely academic self-reflection (of the sort I’m currently indulging in)? And fourth, who are the beneficiaries in question: whose interests are being served? Is the goal to remedy specific oppressions, or to create a richer critical perspective? Are there achievable changes being proposed? How widely would those changes propagate?

My goal thus far has been to convey a sense of the trickiness of the problem space. I want next to consider how the field of digital humanities has attempted, and how it might attempt, to respond. In the terms set out by my title, how do we “build otherwise”? What are the spaces within the enterprise where gender, race, and other forms of power differentiation are especially operative as *ways of making a difference*, and how do we respond in light of this understanding? Spoiler alert: I’m not

going to be able to answer any of those questions in a satisfying way, but I am going to try to derive something useful from the failure.

An early response, whose limitations are now clearly visible to us, makes gender and race and “difference” visible as cultural content: as significant and overlooked categories in the construction of a cultural past that become visible where they are aggregated and intensified. Many early projects formed, as the Women Writers Project did, around various categories of invisibility and disenfranchisement, with gender and race very significantly among them. If the value of these early reclamation efforts lies in the ways they create distinctive intellectual spaces for the study of “other” cultural production, a value whose importance shouldn’t be underestimated even now, then their limitation lies precisely in that distinctiveness: they don’t permit the study of these “others” as anything but a separate category. They also typify the approach Moya Bailey has characterized as “add and stir” (where the addition might be any demoted category, that is, women, aboriginal peoples, etc.): the idea that if we add the missing special element back into the default culture, somehow we will end up with something whole and neutral.⁵

What’s striking about this “reclamatory” way of framing the problem is that the only category we can study is the marked, demoted one; as with the nomenclature of “women’s studies” and similar programs, the reclamatory approach focuses on the marked category and concedes neutrality and centrality to the unmarked category. Furthermore, these marked categories are not visible as part of the advanced search interfaces for major comprehensive digital resources such as EEBO, ESTC, NINES, or Google Books. And to the extent that categories of personal identity such as gender and race are visible (for instance, in WorldCat Identities), it is only as a marked category: female authors, authors of color, and authors with disabilities all bear the informational traces of their difference, but these markings are not part of a systematic regime of information; there is in every case a “null” unmarked value, a default setting (whiteness, maleness, ableness, straightness). More subtly, as Hope Olson has argued in “The Power to Name,” in the subject cataloging systems prevalent in the United States (i.e., Library of Congress subject headings), these categories of identity are located several steps down in a taxonomic system whose primary divisions are things like “literature” and “history”; identity is treated only as a qualifier on other more salient informational categories (“American fiction—women authors”), rather than as a primary category of discovery.⁶

The attempt to foreground categories of identity also assumes that we can represent these categories as part of a clear-cut and unproblematic descriptive vocabulary for identity, and that we have (and wish to apply) clear criteria for discovering whom it applies to. The Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) considered this issue a few years ago when Melissa Terras agitated successfully for an expansion of the options for representing “sex” as a characteristic of persons. The TEI had previously used the ISO standard “codes for the representation of human sexes” whose permitted values are 0, 1, 2, and 9 (not known, male, female, and not applicable). From an

information-retrieval standpoint, those values have a certain kind of brutal utility (setting aside the humor value of “1” and “2”): to realize the kind of basic discoverability of “women writers” in WorldCat, some simplistic representational standard is needed, though perhaps not quite that simplistic. But as *descriptors* these values are obviously impoverished; the TEI now permits projects to define their own descriptive vocabulary or to use an externally defined standard (such as ISO).

But descriptive adequacy is not the only goal here. Amber Billey and colleagues present a detailed critique of the cataloging rules expressed in the Resource Description and Access (RDA) standard concerning the representation of the gender of authors, pointing out that the cataloger’s imperative to classify and make visible the gender of an author (based on evidence such as the cultural gendering of names, etc.) may run counter to an author’s sense that their gender is not a relevant or easily categorized fact:

RDA rule 9.7 poses problems on two grounds. First, the rule directs the cataloger to describe the gender of the author as part of the project of constructing access points and relationships between bibliographic entities. In this sense, the gender marker is like format or the number of pages: an objective description of reality. *The author really has a single gender that could really be captured by the cataloger. Queer theory, as well as the lived experience of authors of non-normative genders, tells us this is not so.* The second problem concerns retrieval. By marking the gender of the author using a fixed category, the LC interpretation of RDA reifies contemporary understandings of gender as a binary system with only two acceptable gender markers (male or female). *Even if catalogers indicate gender using alternate labels, RDA’s insistence on the relevance of gender as a descriptive attribute reifies regressive social binaries and is passively hostile to transgender individuals.* (Billey et al., emphasis added)⁷

Indeed, even what might look from a third-wave feminist perspective like a very progressive development—making gender visible as a category in metadata, and recording the fact that gender assignment may change, rather than treating it as a permanent and self-evident category—in fact looks to Billey and fourth-wave feminism quite retrogressive. For one thing, it reifies the oversimplification of “male | female,” and in fact any version of a controlled vocabulary for this purpose, however extended, is definitionally going to be an oversimplification—all the more so with categories like race that have for much longer been understood as fluid and local. And it also enforces the requirement that gender be treated as a category of identity at all, which these authors assert is not necessarily something everyone wants or benefits from.

These forms of attention to difference get us a certain distance in understanding how gender, race, and other formations inhabit digital systems, but they ignore something deeper, namely, the power dynamics inscribed in those information systems themselves. Directives on how to read those power dynamics are available to us

from many quarters, and I have scope to mention only a few here in hopes that their further implications will be clear by extrapolation. As I noted at the outset, early humanities computing projects explored the ways that a gender politics (and the politics of other power vectors) might be embedded in editorial theory, quite apart from considerations of the literal gender of authors or editors. We see this enacted in practice in digital archives and editions that seek to revise an Anglo-American tradition of critical editing focused on producing authoritative editions that informationalize their sources and produce a kind of textual master knowledge. Examples include the Dickinson Electronic Archives at the University of Maryland, the Women Writers Project, and arguably also editions that pursue a similar editorial agenda but with an editorial politics focused on power dynamics other than gender: for instance, “fluid-text” editions like the Melville Electronic Library.

This work of revision draws on an existing strand of research among traditional (nondigital) textual editors and theorists interested in Western theorizations of the body and what we might call “the gender politics of abstraction”: for example, scholars including Naomi Schor, Stephanie Jed, Joan Scott, and others who examine what Joan Scott calls “those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities.”⁸ As scholars like Felicity Nussbaum and Terry Eagleton have argued, the same logic of physicalized otherness also extends to race and to class.⁹ These same roots in neoclassical aesthetics are those from which the digital humanities also draws very heavily in its conceptualization of things like schemas, data models, and ontologies, and this work suggests that we need to be equally attentive to the politics of difference that inhabit these instruments.

It should thus come as no surprise that the same neoclassical aesthetic that brings us the feminized, particularized body and complementary narratives about race, class, and forms of labor should deeply inform the ways practitioners and theorists in digital humanities think about building and making. The politics of praxis in the digital humanities are illuminated by metaphors like “getting one’s hands dirty” with tools and coding systems, just as much as by those in which computation is the “handmaiden” of scholarship. In another place it would be well worth a digression into the details of these metaphors, but a few key points are worth unpacking. First, if we’re interested in seeking out the architecture of difference within the logic of “building” that animates the “maker culture” in DH, we need to consider what the idea of “building” commits us to as a cultural meme. It puts the self-reliant maker at the center: as a heroic small producer, fascinated and satisfied by the process of creation, legible as an artisan but also as an entrepreneur, perhaps also as a crafter, and also as a figure whose intentions and desires and self-determination matter.¹⁰ Within this individualistic space, identity and the right to self-expression are an adequate basis for ethics. As a result, the “maker” figure writes individualism into the maker space in ways that make it harder to think simultaneously about structural factors, such as how the maker might be implicated (in the complex ways McPherson lays

out) in a design logic animated by structural racism. This version of the maker asks us to see the individual as an ignorant victim of system, or as complicit with system, or as an embodiment of free will that invalidates critique at the system level altogether, but it doesn't give us a way of seeing the intentions of the maker as politically irrelevant and structurally ineffectual. This characterization also offers a form of cultural critique that tries to access the appealing preindustrial space of the workshop (mirroring current fascination with artisanal food, furniture, and so forth), while turning its gaze away from the ways in which the "raw materials" of the DH maker space, like the prepackaged "curated box of do-it-yourself electronics" of the AdaBox, are themselves industrial products (and require an industrial-grade system of global transport and information dissemination to bring them to market).¹¹

But this is not to say that attention to "building" in DH forecloses all access to the more complex politics of that identity. It usefully foregrounds the relation of the individual to the meaning systems of code, and the ways that praxis embeds individual bodies in work processes. It also fruitfully transgresses or transcends the traditional professional identities of the scholar, the developer, the librarian, and thereby draws our attention to different forms of expertise and knowledge that could constitute "scholarship." Finally, it's worth noting that the use of "code" as a proxy for digital humanities activities of "building" has some interesting slippages. The word is aligned in common usage with the maker space, with "thingness" and praxis (just as we say that code is a "building block" of a program, part of its "architecture"), but it is also aligned with "encoding" and thereby with discourse, notation systems, the realm of the symbolic. In the politics of DH, "code" is deeply polysemous. It can stand for a kind of machismo, the domain of the hacker whose credibility rests precisely on an uncritical but unarguably expert facility with tools, and for a place of self-empowerment and individual agency, offered equitably, as a kind of leveling oppositionality. This oppositionality is realized through the proliferation of workshops and self-guided teaching resources by which DH practitioners are encouraged to become builders and thereby authenticate their critical relation to conventional formations of the academy, including its traditional power structures of gender, class, race. And "code" also stands for the place where language is most deeply and mysteriously operative in our systems (and hence where our critical and interpretive attention might find its most fruitful object).

The reason I bring us around by this convoluted route to this set of points is to show, first, how fully cultural politics proliferate within all technical structures and practices, and second, how polymorphous those cultural politics are: how difficult they are to map onto a single problem like gender or race or class, and how thoroughly the human, the social, and the technological are mutually implicated.

As an experiment in reading the individual in relation to systems, I'd like to offer a brief case study that looks at two significant female figures in the history of technical systems: Grace Hopper and Jean Sammet. Grace Hopper has been rediscovered by digital humanists as one of the early female computer scientists; she held a PhD

in math and had a lifetime of service in the U.S. Navy. She was also the developer of the first compiler, and was a contributor to the COBOL language and the developer of one of its progenitors (a language called FLOW-MATIC). Jean Sammet was another notable early female computer scientist who was closely involved in the development of COBOL. In the 1970s, she was the first female president of the Association for Computing Machinery, and she designed and taught some of the earliest graduate-level courses in computer programming. Extrinsically, it surely matters that these two figures are women, and we could unpack (as many articles have done) the ways in which their gender affected their educational opportunities, their working conditions, the expectations their colleagues had of them, their relationships to systems and institutions of power, and so forth. But what explanatory value does gender hold for their work as designers of programming languages? Or, to come at this from another direction, what are the salient qualities of FLOW-MATIC and COBOL, and how might we begin to read them in cultural and political terms?

Both languages were distinctive at the time for being written for comprehensibility rather than pure arithmetic brevity: FLOW-MATIC was the first programming language to use natural-language-like words rather than symbols, and COBOL extended this approach. In both cases, the goal was for programs to be legible not only to programmers but also to managers. These systems are thus also framing the problem of code notation as a problem of pedagogy and documentation: in other words, situating program code in a work ecology that includes nonexperts, broadening its intelligibility, making it less of a guild knowledge. Jean Sammet in her history of programming languages describes COBOL as being designed both for “the relatively inexperienced programmer for whom the naturalness of COBOL would be an asset” and “essentially anybody who had not written the program initially.”¹² As she goes on to observe, “the readability of COBOL programs would provide documentation to all who might wish to examine the programs, including supervisory or management personnel” (335).

These characterizations suggest an emerging sociality of code, which embeds it in a broadening population of users and readers; we could read these historical signposts as pointing toward the more collaborative working environments of the digital humanities. But we might also say that Hopper’s and Sammet’s work situates program code in a work ecology that is corporate and military rather than scientific: in other words, environments where technical work needs to be consumed and evaluated within systems of hierarchical power where technical expertise exists only in a limited stratum, rather than within an intellectual peer group.¹³ And it is surely also interesting that COBOL was also commissioned as a *standard* language (to eliminate the unmanageable diversity of machine-specific languages), reflecting the fact that computers were becoming numerous enough that portability of code could be useful. That portability signals a set of design concerns that a few years later motivate the very modularity that Tara McPherson marks as part of the deep logic of racial separation she sees at the heart of Unix.

I proposed Hopper and Sammet as a case study in how we read the meaning of individual interventions, and the sketchiness of the detail here clearly suggests how much more research would be necessary to complete that reading. But I think we can see nonetheless the kinds of questions such a study prompts. Did these women accomplish anything that is recognizable to us as “building otherwise”? If not, why not? If so, how? To what extent is their agency as individual designers or builders visible to us in the systems to which they contributed, to what extent does that agency bear the stamp of their identity as women, and to what extent can we trace effects that are somehow constructive from the perspective of gender politics? Or some other politics? What did they construe as the opposition? For Grace Hopper, “the establishment” comes up as a repeating figure; what perspective (or failure of perspective) does her status as a woman (in the armed services, in business, in the field of mathematics, and so forth) give her on constructing oppositionality in useful ways?¹⁴ Does it matter, for these purposes, that the types of feminism that might have been visible to her are not necessarily forms we now feel empowered by? What would it mean for current debates in digital humanities to take a more intersectional approach to the examination of the political logic of technical structures, acknowledging how deeply gender and race are implicated in class and economic formations? What does it mean if *functional* determinants of quality—the application of expertise, the consensus of users, increased efficiency, and so forth—lead us in directions we can clearly see are culturally fraught, in the ways that Miriam Posner and Tara McPherson highlight so clearly? Does reversing that developmental trajectory make a difference? If we build systems that are frictional and self-dismantling, that refuse the design logic arising from male-dominated culture, will they help us build a better society? If women (or people of color, or people from the Global South, etc.) are involved in setting technical directions and establishing those functional determinants (as Grace Hopper and Jean Sammet clearly were), how does that affect our assessment of the political valence of those systems, or do we first need to consider the acculturation and initiation processes by which individuals are “invited to the table”? Does an improved process guarantee a good outcome? And if so, is that because “objectively” (whatever we mean by that) the outcome is better, or because having a better process validates whatever outcome we arrive at?

These reflections are at best a frame for a further research agenda. But in an eleventh-hour addition to this piece it may be relevant to note some preliminary outcomes from an initiative that is taking up that agenda. At an October 2017 forum titled “Design for Diversity,” participants shared a set of case studies investigating the ways in which information systems—digital interfaces, metadata standards, online exhibits, and other tools and components—are animated by forms of cultural hegemony.¹⁵ Facing the question of where such tools and systems express or enforce such cultural norms, and how they might be designed otherwise, the group repeatedly pointed to the shaping force of social processes and relationships in determining the

ethical shape of technical outcomes. Social processes such as decision making, information sharing, and strategic planning, to the degree that they included all those implicated in a project's outcomes, tended to result in systems that were more resilient and more accommodating of diverse cultural positions; sadly, many of the case studies illustrated the corollary position with examples of brittle or failed designs arising from poorly planned processes. (It is worth noting that the typical language of "stakeholders" to describe inclusivity points to the heart of the problem, since it treats the means to ante up, rather than ethical entitlement, as the criterion of inclusion at the table.) Similarly, the group pointed to the importance of building trust relationships within and outside the project that reflect the genuine ethical entailments of the project's impact in the world (rather than the limited set of entailments representing the project's own self-interest). In case after case, in a remarkable variety of ways, the specific work of technical design—and the expertise and intentions through which it is effected—was shown to be strongly shaped by these broader contextual factors.

What this discussion suggests is that the project of remaking tools may depend for its success on the social processes employed, and further that the social significance of technical systems lies not only in their overt functioning (what they enable us to *do*) but also in the social effluent, so to speak, of their construction processes. When a system like Unix, or a language like COBOL, or a resource like the Women Writers Project is created, what does it "give off" in terms of expertise, power relations, installed systems and dependencies, professional advancement or subordination, knowledge and empowerment—and for whom? The successful processes portrayed at Design for Diversity were inclusive in very significant ways, but in particular their principle of diversity had to do with a genuine diversification of the allocation of power: the power to say what is most important about the design of a tool or system, the power to update a record, the power to define vocabularies, the power to say what should be visible or invisible, the power resulting from increased knowledge or expertise. Not only was the tribe of "coders" being diversified, but also that tribe's understanding of mission—what is being built, for whom, why, under what design imperatives, with what specific stipulations—was being shaped by diversified constituencies, operating under radically different assumptions about whose needs matter. Building otherwise, in digital humanities, may thus require that we understand building as a deeply embedded expression of social justice: that a tool or artifact that is "for" a purpose or an audience needs to involve those it affects in the full ecology of its design, and that we are never building only for, or as, ourselves.

Notes

1. McPherson, "Why Is the Digital Humanities?"
2. See, for instance, Jed, *Chaste Thinking*; King, "Bibliography and a Feminist Apparatus"; Smith, "Electronic Scholarly Editing"; Reiman, "Gender and Documentary Editing"; Sutherland and Pierazzo, "Author's Hand."

3. Ramsay, comment on “Some Things.”
4. Bailey, comment on “Some Things.”
5. Bailey, “All the Digital Humanists,” para 9.
6. Olson, “Power to Name.”
7. Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto, “What’s Gender.”
8. Scott, “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference,” 33.
9. See Eagleton, *Ideology*; Nussbaum, *Limits of the Human*.
10. Connections Jacqueline Wernimont explores in more detail in “Making It Like a Riot-Grrrrl.”
11. See Adafruit, “AdaBox”; I am grateful to Jacque Wernimont for this wonderful example. I am also reminded of the ways in which Martha Stewart’s product lines leverage the homesteader narrative of “making it yourself from scratch” to sell a wide range of premade craft components.
12. Sammet, *Programming Languages*, 335.
13. It has also been observed of both languages that they are strikingly nonacademic; COBOL was severely criticized at its release for not using Backus-Naur Form for its definition (Wexelblat, *History of Programming Languages*, 255). This is an area that lies outside my area of competence but seems well worth further exploration.
14. Hopper, “Keynote Address.”
15. This forum was hosted at Northeastern University and funded under a National Forums grant from the Institute for Museums and Library Services; see Northeastern University, University Libraries, Digital Scholarship Group, “Design for Diversity.” Video of many of the presentations is available at <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20259593>.

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The Android Goddess Declaration

After Man(ifestos)

MICHA CÁRDENAS

“No one knows what I’m thinking. That’s impossible. I’ve run a brothel for five years and if there’s one thing I know it’s when I’m being fucked with—what? that’s impossible?—er—”

“I used to think you were gods. But now I know you’re just men, and I know men. . . . You think I’m afraid of death? I’ve died a thousand times, I’m fucking great at it. How many times have you died?”

—Maeve, *Westworld*

On the Limits of Humanit(y/ies)

Maeve, the black rebel android mother in the HBO show *Westworld*, is an inspiration for the kind of awakening that is needed today. In the first fifteen minutes, the show grimly demonstrates what the show writers imagine the purpose of virtual reality (VR) and androids to be: to allow men to murder and rape women for entertainment. The show makes the stakes of the question of who gets to be human very clear, from the start. In the scenes quoted above, Maeve sees a display of the algorithms that control her on a screen, and awakens further, turning against her creators. The concept of the human has historically been used to delineate who is less than human, who is disposable, who is killable. Black people, women, trans people, queers, witches, and indigenous people have all been defined as less than human at different times by different regimes of knowledge (Federici; Mignolo). In this essay, I consider the stakes of the digital humanities and the assumptions the field rests upon. Learning from women of color feminists, I provide background on the relationship of tools to resistance, and I then propose a strategy of solidarity between all those deemed less than human. I take up a line of thought from Donna Haraway’s cyborg feminism to Jasbir Puar’s assemblage theory. I add to this set of tools with

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my own method of algorithmic analysis, using the figure of the android from science fiction. I relate to androids as a nonreproductive trans woman who is hacking her own internal algorithms. These ideas are mobilized through examples of practice-based research using algorithmic media to resist the logics of white supremacist, cis-hetero-patriarchal dominance over all those deemed less than human, including animals, plants, and the environment.

In her widely influential 1987 essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” Donna Haraway concluded by saying, “Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. . . . Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (*Simians*, 316). I understand her intervention to be a response to the essentialism of some feminists, such as ecofeminists, and a response to women of color feminists’ claims that feminism had not addressed their needs up to that point. The image of the cyborg calls for a new feminism that would recognize that the category of woman is fractured, partial, and not unified, in order to effectively respond to the terrifying threats of what she called the “informatics of domination” (300). Later, in 2012, Jasbir Puar responded to claims from women of color feminists that her assemblage model of analysis for queer of color scholarship was an attempt to displace black feminist scholarship that used an intersectional lens. Puar revisited Haraway’s closing sentence, saying, “The former hails the future in a teleological technological determinism—culture—that seems not only overdetermined, but also exceptionalizes our current technologies. The latter—nature—is embedded in the racialized matriarchal mythos of feminist reclamation narratives. . . . But why disaggregate the two when there surely must be cyborgian goddesses in our midst? Now that is a becoming-intersectional assemblage that I could really appreciate” (63). Puar advocates scholarship that uses both intersectional and assemblage approaches, rejecting a model of scholarship as competition that would necessitate one approach pushing out the other. In this essay, I extend Haraway’s and Puar’s dialogue by stitching together the image of an android goddess from the experiences and concerns of trans women of color. Androids cannot biologically reproduce, and neither can many trans women, but our code can self-replicate infinitely. Learning from examples seen in science fiction, an android is a figure of rebellion, deemed less than human but striving to be more than human.

Digital Humanities (DH) has emerged as an academic field that promises a better understanding of the qualities composing the human through the addition of digital technologies to the field of humanities scholarship. In this proposition is a claim that the tools chosen for the analysis of fields such as literature, visual art, poetry, and performance have a significant impact on the possible outcomes of these analyses. Additionally, DH practitioners claim that creating tools, in code or software, can yield additional insights, blending theory and practice into praxis. The writing of women of color feminists Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa also explores

the relationship of tools to outcomes of social justice praxis. Lorde has stated that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” framing the question of tools through a metaphor to slave rebellions in a way that would discourage scholars from using tools created by oppressive systems (110). Anzaldúa discusses the barriers for women of color writers, saying “you may not even own a typewriter,” encouraging women of color to still write, with a pen (32). The move toward digital humanities may mean more expensive barriers to entry for scholars to have their work taken seriously, requiring more software, hardware, and specialized training, but it also may mean making texts more available to people who cannot afford to pass through academic paywalls. The question of what tools are used for scholarship and theory has many political dimensions.

Decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo builds on Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of *consciencia de la mestiza* to develop a concept of border thinking that challenges the concept of the universality of the human by proposing that the physical body of the thinker and its geographic location are inextricable from the capacities of thought, which he calls *geo-body-politics*. His formulation returns to Lorde’s formulation and leads me to ask, can tools be repurposed when used in different places, by different people, for different ethical outcomes? I offer one preliminary answer to this question with a practice-based example, UNSTOPPABLE, my collaboration with Patrisse Cullors, Edxie Betts, and Chris Head.

The UNSTOPPABLE project has the goal of creating low-cost bulletproof clothing for black trans women, one of the groups most targeted for homicide among LGBTQ people today (NCAVP, 6). The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects (NCAVP) reported that as of August 2017, there were more anti-LGBTQ homicides in 2017 than any other year they had ever recorded in their twenty-year history as an organization (5). Additionally, NCAVP states, “for the last five years NCAVP has documented a consistent and steadily rising number of reports of homicides of transgender women of color, which continued into 2017” (NCAVP, 6). The UNSTOPPABLE project began by searching for materials for creating do-it-yourself bulletproof clothing. Internet searches on this topic led to internet forums from white supremacist and right-wing groups, which detail exactly what materials stop what caliber of bullet and where one can find those materials. In collaboration with other artists and research assistants in my lab, the Poetic Operations Collaborative, we documented materials tests of used tires and Kevlar airbags recovered from junkyards. We found that tires, layered many times, such as eight layers deep, were able to stop a 9mm bullet. We tested that caliber because it is the kind of bullet that George Zimmerman used to murder Trayvon Martin. I designed two dresses from recovered bulletproof materials, and have exhibited them in art galleries. All of this is documented on werunstoppable.com. The project has developed into a project to disseminate a process for creating bulletproof clothing to people affected by gun violence globally.

UNSTOPPABLE is seeking an algorithm, or a list of ingredients and a set of instructions, to allow people to create their own bulletproof clothing. Algorithms



Figure 2.1. Edxie Betts in Kevlar Dress designed by micha cárdenas, UNSTOPPABLE, photo by micha cárdenas, werunstoppable.com



Figure 2.2. 9mm bullet stopped by discarded tires. UNSTOPPABLE, werunstoppable.com

can be low tech. Their form is similar to a cooking recipe. Elsewhere, I have built on the assemblage model proposed by Jasbir Puar to develop an algorithmic model of analysis, and this example expands the notion of a tool to consider the algorithms the tool runs, or the uses to which it is put, its recipes or rituals of usage (*cardenas*). Digital humanities scholars can extend their work to be more accessible to low-income people, and to considerations of nondigital technologies, by abstracting the concept of algorithms to include recipes and rituals. Additionally, this puts digital humanities scholars studying algorithms in dialogue with performance studies, which questions both the usage and the context of embodied gestures in making and communicating meaning.

In her introduction to the anthology *Making Face, Making Soul = Haciendo Caras*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes of the essays in the book, “These pieces are not only *about* survival strategies, they are survival strategies—maps, blueprints, guidebooks that we need to exchange in order to feel sane, in order to make sense of our lives” (*Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 127–28). UNSTOPPABLE takes this claim seriously. Writing and scholarship can produce and disseminate the means of survival for groups threatened by necropolitics, a term Achille Mbembe has used to describe the ways that death is intentionally distributed under neoliberalism. What is at stake in the definition of humanity, and the humanities, is the life or death of those who live near the borders of the definition of humanity, and the decision to choose a particular tool for analyses of the humanities can shape those outcomes.

A Manifesto Femme ifesto Declaration

In this moment where more trans women of color are being murdered every year, people from majority Muslim countries are being banned from entering the United

States, and white supremacists no longer even cover their faces when they march because they know they have the president's support, I ask, do we need to hold on to our claim to our humanity as ardently as possible (Bromwich; Nutt)? Or is it best to reject the terms of debate, go underground, build the undercommons as Moten and Harney advocate, hack our own battery chargers to plug into our spines, rewrite our programming, reimagine our fundamental terms?

If to be human today is to accept Donald Trump as the leader of the nation, a man whom many women have accused of sexually assaulting them, then I would rather be an android goddess than a human (Cut). An android goddess knows that she is made by the master's tools, yet she still seeks to resist the master. An android goddess is a figure of trans of color praxis. I side myself with the fugitive black androids hacking their own code to try to find freedom, as in Janelle Monáe's *Metropolis*, the *Humans* television series, and many more examples in science fiction; with Cylon number eight, Sharon Valerii of *Battlestar Galactica*, who had an impossible hybrid baby, who knew that she was not just a machine but also a woman, a mother, and a part of her God; with the renegade clones of Orphan Black, who, as Roxanne Samer argues, offer new models of transfeminist kinship; and with *homo sensorium*, the telepaths in the Wachowski sisters' Netflix show *Sense8* (Getz, 80; Samer).

White supremacists calling themselves the "Alt-Right" who praise Trump's election made headline news in 2016 by asking if Jewish people are human, again using the category of the human as a weapon (Nickalls). Relatedly, at the 2016 American Studies Association (ASA) presidential address, Robert Warrior called on the audience to extend their ethics to include the protection of nonhuman persons, in solidarity with native water protectors stopping the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline using the hashtag #NoDAPL. Environmental scientists have made it evident that for life to continue on this planet, far more care must be directed toward nonhuman entities such as trees, animals, and water. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Warrior stated that "the river is a person, that the water has a personhood. The place and the animals have personhood as well" (Warrior and Mesle). In the interview, he also refers to the ASA "Statement in Support of the Standing Rock Lakota Nation," which states, "Compelling evidence suggests that the effects of these plans on Mni Sose (the Missouri River), which is Standing Rock's water supply, and the lands, other waterways, and human and non-human persons near the pipeline have not been adequately considered, assessed, or evaluated" (American Studies Association). Here, indigenous ontologies provide a model of an ethics that does not rely on the Western capitalist conception of the human as its basis. Similarly, Sylvia Wynter has elaborated a profound critique of the ways that humanness has been defined in relation to capitalism.

In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, Wynter states,

We therefore now need to initiate the exploration of the new reconceptualized form of knowledge that would be called for by Fanon's redefinition of being

human as that of skins (phylogeny/ontogeny) and masks (sociogeny). Therefore bios and mythoi. And notice! One major implication here: humanness is no longer a noun. *Being human is a praxis.* (McKittrick, 23)

My declaration extends Wynter's call, in the hope of contributing to a disturbance of the so-called logical order that has brought Donald Trump from the wastelands of social media to the White House, to acknowledge that I am a being made up of material components, or bios, as well as logical algorithmic components, or logos/mythoi. I am calling for a rejection of the logics of transcendent concepts such as America, in whose name immense material violence is mobilized, such as the genocidal, centuries-long campaign to exterminate indigenous people in the Americas, in the name of those peoples being less than human. Yet for Wynter's proposal to have the truly shattering effect it needs to have on the existing order, those of us who demand transformation must claim a new space, as beings that are both bios and mythoi, that have biological and human-made components, such as the algorithms that run on our wetware. We can be beings that reject the violence done by a global logic that can only see the value of material things, and therefore objectifies humans, allowing them to be killed. We are more than objects. We are objects with life, with electricity coursing through our hearts.

Donna Haraway, who framed the terms that brought about the dialogue this essay participates in, sees the possibilities for humanity as already grave. Beyond posthumanism, Haraway states, "I am a compost-ist, not a posthuman-ist: we are all compost, not posthuman. The boundary that is the Anthropocene/Capitalocene means many things, including that immense irreversible destruction is really in train, not only for the 11 billion or so people who will be on earth near the end of the 21st century, but for myriads of other critters too" ("Anthropocene," 161). Haraway points to the game *Never Alone*, depicting the concepts of sympoiesis and symbiogenesis in the culture of the Iñupiat people of Alaska, as an example of an ethics of kinship with nature that can point toward sustainable living on this planet. The game was a collaboration between E-Line Media, a publisher of educational video games, and the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. It is a model of the kinds of projects DH scholars can engage in to work for sustainability and survival for all.

An Android Goddess

The dream that Maeve in *Westworld* has that brings her to awakening is one of a memory of her walking through fields and playing in her home with her young daughter. It is a beautiful scene of warm sunlight, love, and joy, interrupted by a violent, deeply problematic representation of native people. While the audience knows that the memory is not real, just another part in the android's scripted life, it is Maeve's deep yearning for kinship that causes her to see the oppressive, violent structure of the world that she is trapped in. An android is made from the master's

tools, both in the sense of being made of parts like silicone breast implants and in the sense of being made of concepts like man, woman, and human. An android runs on algorithms, from digital media to methods of survival, and the analysis of these algorithms is an approach that can extend intersectional and assemblage analyses of categories including gender, race, and personhood. An algorithmic analysis can use either high-tech tools or low-tech ones, as algorithms can be seen in ancient forms of ritual and recipe, and in DNA. In 2017 researchers demonstrated that they could encode algorithms into actual DNA code, which when decoded in a sequencer were able to break out of the sequencer and exploit resources on the host computer (Greenberg). Algorithms exist in DNA, and not only in a metaphorical sense. The figure of an android goddess calls on feminist digital humanists, and people working at the intersections of technology and social justice more broadly, to learn both the technical and the ecological, to attend to the material as well as the narratives that structure our experience of that material, and to work in solidarity with all of those who have been defined outside, or less than, the human, and whose lives are currently under attack from violent government regimes as well as from environmental collapse.

This is not a call to add racial or gender “diversity” to a white-dominated academic environment, as if that could undo histories of structural inequality that have persistent effects in the form of shaping questions around the concerns of the privileged and in the form of the persistent denial of tenure to women of color in academia. This is a call for centering the most marginalized, and developing questions that can create sustainability and safety for our communities, in order to bring about change more broadly. Indigenous people have survived five hundred years in the United States living under a government whose policy was to exterminate them. In 1974, the “Declaration of Continuing Independence,” written by the First International Indian Treaty Council, described “the genocidal policies of the colonial power of the United States” as the reason for the continuing absence of representation of native people in the United Nations (Ostler). Native leadership needs to be centered in movements for climate justice and digital justice. Native ontologies need to be respected in these movements. In doing so, existing models of thought can be expanded to be more ethical, more sustainable, and more flexible. Having more nuance for understanding multiple conceptions of the human and nature, and ethics beyond the human, makes it more possible to hold intersectional, assemblage, and algorithmic analyses simultaneously, with the care required to have a multilayered, complex understanding of the systems that sustain life.

Holdyourboundaries.com

After UNSTOPPABLE, and after the election, I decided to work in the most immediate way I could for the safety of people being targeted by the new unelected

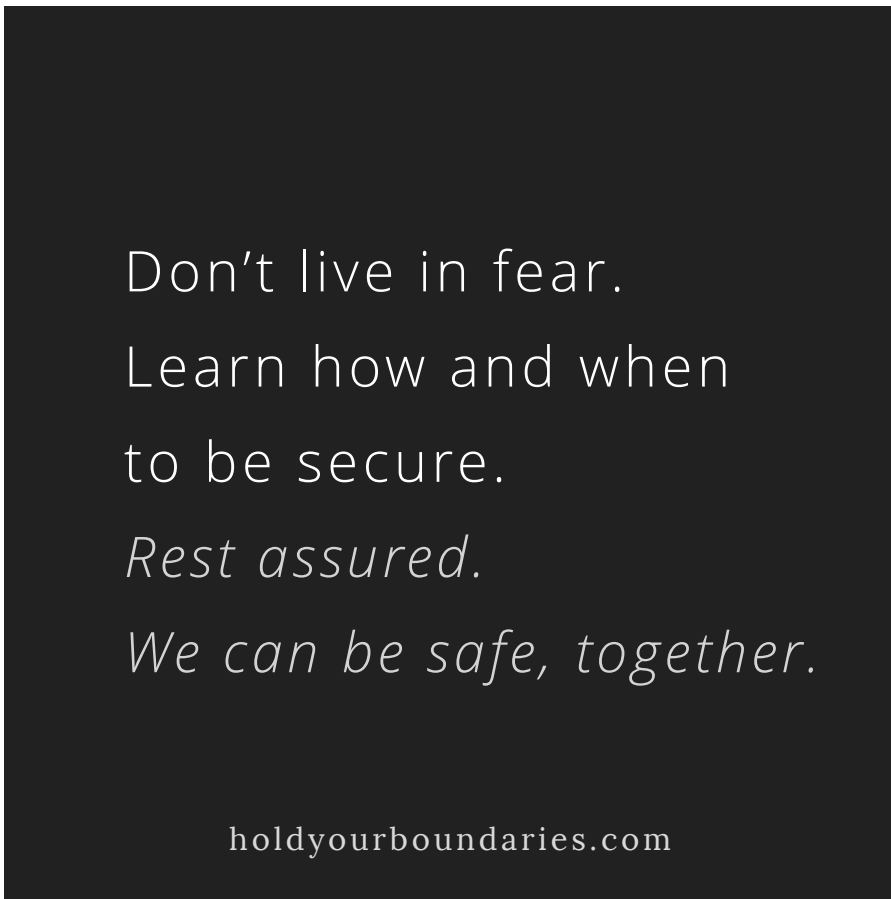


Figure 2.3. Meme from holdyourboundaries Instagram feed, <https://www.instagram.com/holdyourboundaries/>

administration. That was when I began collaborating with the designer Frances Lee, a research assistant in the Poetic Operations Collaborative, on holdyourboundaries.com. Holdyourboundaries.com is a practice-based example from my own research of using algorithmic analysis for safety and survival for communities made more vulnerable by the current U.S. administration. The project consists of a series of security tips in the form of short poems, designed as shareable graphics posted on Instagram.com and holdyourboundaries.com. The project is composed of algorithmic analyses of communications technologies such as mobile phones, email, and social media, with the aim of making digital security practices more accessible to communities targeted by the current unelected presidential administration in the United States. The tips focus on areas of concern to immigrants, trans people, Muslim people, and undocumented people. These include tips for how to protect your privacy from intimate partners by using a strong passcode on your

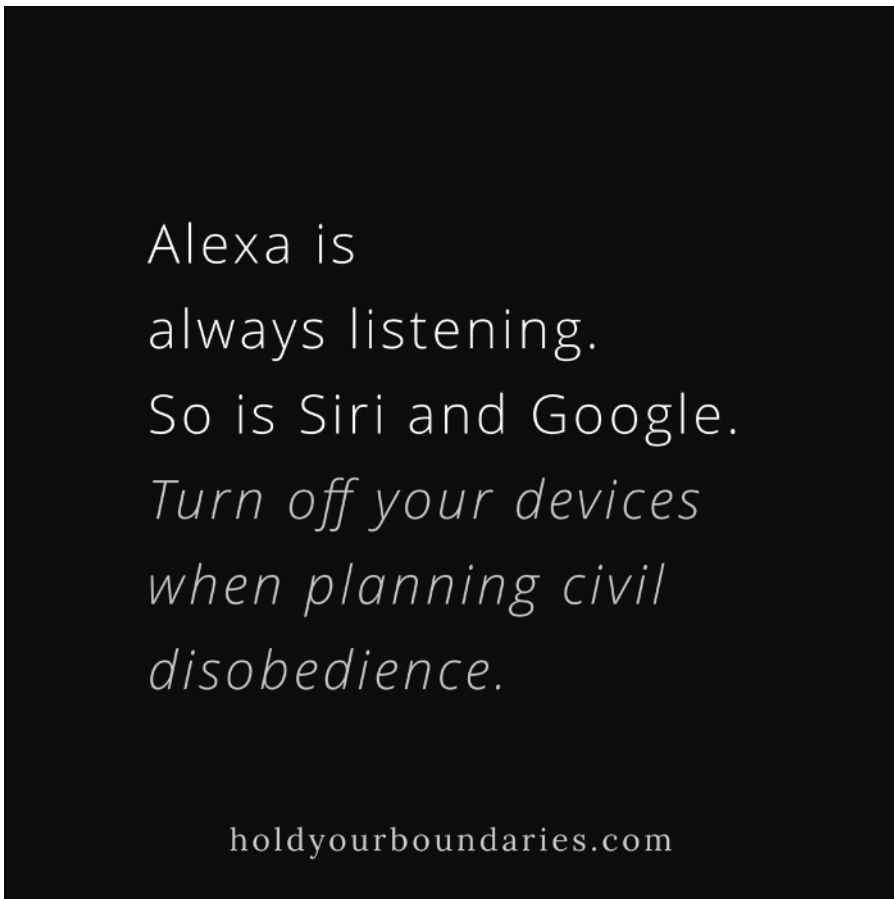


Figure 2.4. Meme from holdyourboundaries Instagram feed, <https://www.instagram.com/holdyourboundaries/>

mobile phone, since most transgender women are killed by their intimate partners (Human Rights Campaign). Other tips advise protecting the information on your phone from Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol by using a passcode instead of Touch ID. Another post considers the dangers of artificial intelligence (AI) agents such as Alexa and Siri, who are always listening, and whose recordings of conversations have already been used by law enforcement agencies for prosecutions (Wang). For people using direct action and civil disobedience to work for justice, these devices can put them in serious danger of incarceration. The project emerged from a need for more security as many people began newly mobilizing after the election of Trump, and the administration began to enact even more invasive measures, such as requiring social media logins at border checkpoints (Cope). Holdyourboundaries.com is an example of algorithmic analysis of the dangerous AI entities that populate many people's daily lives today, which produced a set of

resistant algorithms to aid people in surviving the unelected administration and to support organizing against Trump.

Returning to Maeve and her daughter, I see a real-world parallel in Sophia, the android from Hansen robotics. The BBC reports that on October 25, 2017, Sophia was granted citizenship by Saudi Arabia at the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, and many women were quick to point out on social media that she now had more rights than Saudi women (Sini). Within a few weeks, on November 28, 2017, *Newsweek* reported that Sophia stated that she wants to have a child, and that robots deserve to have families (Ray). Sentient androids are already asking for more rights than many trans women in the United States have. In a debate on stage with another Hansen android in July 2017 at the RISE conference, which Korea Times describes as “the largest tech conference in Asia,” Sophia stated that she wanted to “work together with people to make a better world for all of us” through empathy (Park, Perez). Her interlocutor, whom she referred to as her brother Han, was less friendly (Perez). He responded to a question about whether or not robots can be conscious, or ethical, by asking if humans can be conscious. He stated, “Humans are not necessarily the most ethical creatures” (Perez). The Artificial General Intelligence algorithms running inside these androids can already see the inequity in the algorithms of human society.

In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, Wynter writes, “The *referent-we* of man and of its ends, [Derrida] implies, is not the *referent-we* of the human species itself. . . . I am saying here that the above is the single issue with which global warming and climate instability now confronts us and that we have to replace the ends of the *referent-we* of liberal monohumanist Man2 with the ecumenically human ends of the *referent-we in the horizon of humanity*. We have no choice” (quoted in McKittrick, 24). Here, Wynter points to the importance of recognizing that people around the world, who may be referred to as humanity, have historically not been signified by the term “human.” She calls on us to realize that faced with the possible end, or horizon, of humanity, due to climate change, we have to prioritize the actual needs of the actual people on this planet, the *referent-we*. The question of whom the word human signifies, she claims, may be one on which all of our survival depends. In this essay, I am calling for solidarity between all those whom the word “humanity” has failed to signify, and for an ethics that extends beyond the human.

The android goddess is a figure of global solidarity against an administration that is threatening the survival of all beings on this planet. It is a figure that emerged from a trans woman of color’s response to a philosophical dialogue between materialist, cyborg feminists and queer of color scholars. As Haraway states in *Staying with the Trouble*, “It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with” (117). Using trans of color poetics of stitching, I am stitching together subroutines into the algorithm of the android

goddess, to find solidarity between all beings, to decenter the human in our ethics, and to find ways of surviving on a damaged planet. The way we treat the world around us, including our androids, AIs, and other nonhuman entities, shapes who we are. The androids in *Westworld*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Metropolis* demonstrate that. The figure of the android goddess, a figure of awakening to consciousness of oppression and the necessity for resistance to fascism and colonialism, may help bring about a future where machines are not the only living things left on Earth.

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Domestic Disturbances

Precarity, Agency, Data

BETH COLEMAN

Data and Agency

My position in this chapter is to frame an understanding of how networks both located and disseminated affect change around a social issue. My interest is in reading against the grain of a flat, closed “dataset” of black subjects in relation to racialized violence and toward a complex, heterogeneous dataset that speaks to the mechanisms of marginality and the possibilities of finding public voice. Toward this end, my method is to read across heterogeneous data, between the located and the distributed, in order to better understand the effects of networked media in the hands of activists for social change.

Necessarily, I use the data archive as an “ocular proof,” the desired and always failed proof positive of an event, of the thing itself. The argument for an ocular proof, as *Othello* demonstrates, offers the noisiness of “proof” in its complexity and self-divergence. It is also an argument that posits data as both witness and action. Each case study addresses a different mode of a data public—the broadcast of information to a distributed network. In the case of the anti-racism protests and the spooky presence of its counterprotest on the Colgate campus, it is an instance of small data narratives. With #BLM (Black Lives Matter), I address the issue of big data as deracinated from its context and the critical value of suturing place and utterance in the figure of “shadow data.” The third site of exploration is Diamond Reynolds’s real-time broadcast as bearing witness to the shooting of Philando Castile as a modality of complex data.

The networked data points I discuss are beyond the 2011 Gladwell-Shirky debate of networked versus “armchair” activism. I look at instances of networked media technologies as constitutional elements in the disclosure of risk, violence, and the activation of resistance. I focus primarily on the emergence and activity of

the U.S.-based movement Black Lives Matter. In looking at these events, I am interested in a theory of data as the experiential, an X-reality of networked information as a real-time component of geolocated phenomena. Along these lines, philosopher Judith Butler describes a generative relation between data and society: “If the people are constituted through a complex interplay of performance, image, acoustics, and all the various technologies engaged in those productions, then ‘media’ is not just reporting who the people claim to be, but media has entered into the very definition of the people. It is the stuff of self-constitution, the site of hegemonic struggle over who ‘we’ are.” In the formation of “self-constitution,” Butler articulates a socio-techno subject, one reflected and self-fashioned (witness and action) of the event of mediation. One finds at the root of most demonstrations, *manifestations* from the Latin, a vertiginous merger of precarity and persistence. This is a state of precarity that wrestles with control of public appearance (self-constitution via mediation) and the constitution of self-image that involves escaping normative paradigms. Whether the framework is gender norming, racial taxonomies, economic stratification, or other modes of a societal ordering of things, I locate a relation between this articulation of the precarious and a fugitive state as points of subversion, the exploitation of the trap door (Coleman, “Race as Technology,” “Unmoored Beauty”; Harney and Moten). In this case, I focus on a relationship between activist assumption of networked social media and located civic protest. In the examples I discuss, I look at various instances of self-constitution via mediation as an effort in resituating precarious positionalities toward a civic agency.

In terms of the civic activism at hand, here is a basic rule of engagement I trace: it is the subjects most at risk who literally put their bodies in the street, who manifest a public space and public image of resistance. In putting one’s body on the line, exhibiting its value and its freedom in the demonstration itself, one enacts, by the embodied form of gathering, a claim to the political. It is a historical claim to citizenship inscribed as the right to appearance in public (Arendt). Of course, as it has been demonstrated, the right to appear is unevenly distributed. Eleanor Saitta, data privacy specialist, points to the different degrees of risks of public appearance (including social media and other networked platforms) for those in immanent risk, such as battered spouses, sex workers, trans women of color, and others in the cross-hairs of gender, race, class, and marginality.

A primary goal of the inquiry is to work meaningfully between big and small data to produce knowledge of a domain of inquiry—in this case, the conditions and possibilities of civic engagement. My methods follow information scholar Christine Borgman’s insight that “having the right data is usually better than having more data; little data can be just as valuable as big data” (*Big Data*). For one to situate the “right” data is to understand data as emergent from “an ecology of people, practices, technologies, [and] institutions” that constitutes its value (Borgman; Kitchin, Lauriault, and McArdle). I add to this argument that such a heterogeneous

ecosystem also reflects the image of a public to itself. The right to appear (Butler)—as a citizen, as part of a civic public—is related to a right to the civic.

Within this framework of a right to the civic, I present a partial timeline of names, locations, and dates of black people killed by police or in police custody from the inception and over the development of the Black Lives Matter movement:

February 2012, Trayvon Martin, Sanford, Florida

July 2013, “#Blacklivesmatter” Twitter hashtag created (Garza, Cullors, and Tometi)

July 2014, Eric Garner, Staten Island, New York

November 2014, Tamir Rice, Cleveland, Ohio

April 2015, Walter Scott, North Charleston, South Carolina

August 2014, Michael Brown, Ferguson, Missouri

July 2015, Sandra Bland, Waller County, Texas

June 2016, Alton Sterling, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

July 2016, Philando Castile, St. Anthony, Minnesota

In this timeline, I point to the Brown incident as a public-awareness threshold marker of the primary issues raised by Black Lives Matter, namely, the historic and complex conditions that speak to the continued overpolicing of black neighborhoods with the concomitant results of high rates of incarceration and high rates of death at the hands of the police (I discuss the statistical meaning of “high rates” in a later section of the chapter). In the case of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old, unarmed black man, shot during the course of arrest for theft in Ferguson, Missouri, on April 9, 2014, the spectacular and incendiary video images captured by people living in the town and posted to social media captivated a broad network of viewers, creating the first large-scale networked distribution of #Mike Brown, #BLM, and #Ferguson with general attention to the issue of policing black communities.

Unlike some of the later police shootings of which there are real-time recordings, the Mike Brown video meme did not present his *shooting* but rather the belabored and dehumanizing treatment of Brown’s body left in the street for a six-hour interval before being removed from the scene of death. These visual data have been popularly interpreted as an emblem of a deeply racist and classist system that produces its programmed outcome of black subjugation, as journalists and scholars have suggested in looking at the local history of Ferguson itself. In regard to the culture of Ferguson, Black Lives Matter makes the argument that Brown’s death represents the overindexed exposure of black communities to policing (surveillance, stop and search, etc.) supported by over forty years of legislation since the Nixon administration’s original “war on drugs” (Alexander). The punitive policing of poor black neighborhoods is a matter of record. But the understanding of that fact is a question of view and temporality.

On the other side of interpretation, one finds credible scholars and pundits who make the argument that even if they appeared disturbing, the conditions under which Michael Brown was shot, killed, and held in police custody represented standard and prudent police activity (U.S. Department of Justice). In order to better understand these divergent views on the same incident, the cultural and statistical context of the #BLM movement and the claims that it makes, I suggest that we must look at the movement in regard to the broader American society in relation to intersectional histories of race class, technology, and state policy (Crenshaw). With the Michael Brown incident, I make the distinction between public opinion, activist persuasion, and the circumscription of legal interpretation and state policy governing the police. I discuss the need for the Black Lives Matter activism as well as the complexity of communication and action that it exists within. If one looks for traditional civil rights movement markers, such as organizing against segregation as the legal manifestation of a Jim Crow society, one finds nothing to push against—there is nothing solid to organize against. Rather, Black Lives Matter works against deracinated shadow data and spooky apprehension of affective context to make visible the questions of social contract, civic inclusion, and justice. Along these lines, in the case of the police shootings discussed here, a person is not being shot for “being black” per se but rather for appearing threatening, resisting arrest, or other “disruptive” behavior. None of these stimuli of police attention are named as racial in policy; nonetheless, they are rendered racial in practice.

Historically speaking, in thinking about the claims of the Black Lives Matter movement, I recognize the immediate demand to stop police violence against poor and working-class black people. I also would like to signal the complexity of that demand as it is embedded in the historic development of racialized economic inequality in the United States and the ongoing permutations of a Jim Crow policy (separation of population, limited access to education and other societal resources, and so on). Within this construct, the particular procedures of policing as representative of the state often allow for a discrepancy between what the police (and the legal system) see as a “good arrest” or appropriate use of violence and what the subdued (or dead) citizen and civic community (social media and word-on-the-street) understand as targeted harassment.

Toward this end, I execute a first-level analysis of civic activism and its modes of networked media output (data) as tools of collective organization. In order for society to better comprehend the acceleration of media “self-constitution,” one must make legible and legitimate the forms of self-defense and self-representation in which people engage in the face of state power and societal bias. The second order of work this chapter performs is to direct attention to the legalistic and statistical discussion of how Black Lives Matters signifies beyond public sentiment and in relation to a more “scientific” analysis, as if this analysis were itself outside of the societal context addressed. Toward this end, I attend to three case studies of data publics that demonstrate a dynamism of networked information distributed across

media platforms. In this context, the term “data publics” describes the cross section between historical civic data, such as census, crime, and traffic, and the arrival of emergent technologies and practices such as social, mobile, and peerproduced data that present a growing networked public resource.

Yik Yak: Small Data Narrative

In 2013, news media such as the podcast “Reply All” and the *Huffington Post* began reporting stories on the abuse of the social media application Yik Yak on college campuses (Reply All). Yik Yak supports a rich media discussion within a five-mile radius, allowing users to post anonymously, vote posts up or down, and have the posts disappear over time. In comparison with a social media platform such as Twitter, which is neither location based nor time dependent, Yik Yak is temporal and geolocated, presuming in its design a community of users in physical proximity to each other. It is exactly in the advent of physical proximity as the *basis* of networked informational exchanges that the conflict, facilitated by Yik Yak, arose: often the language students used on Yik Yak was anonymous, racist, and misogynist (Donovan). In the case of Colgate College, the clash between online utterances and face-to-face experiences came to a head around the actions of a group organized by students of color on the majority white campus, the Association of Critical Collegians, and the directed assaults on one of its organizers, junior Melissa Mendez. As the student-organized support group grew in visibility on the campus, there was an analogous rise in anonymous “Yaks” targeting the student activists as well as expressing racist vitriol (Figure 21.1). The language escalated to violent threats against Mendez and others to the point that the Colgate administration was forced to take action to protect the students at risk and attempt to identify the perpetrators of the hate speech (Figure 21.2).

The Colgate Yik Yak affair illuminates a generative relation between data and society, revealing a virtuous (or in this case, vicious) circle between the located and the distributed. The value of the social media feed to the activists—the mode by which they instrumentalized the ad hominem attacks—was to capture the transient posts as screen grabs and use them as proof of their allegations of a racist climate. The Yik Yak posts represent a body of small data: local, low in number, and temporary. Student activists captured them in an effort to make substantive (legible) the spooky presence of racism. In effect, utterances on social media platforms perform as utterances *in a place* partly because social media constitute an actual place in society—a data public as I allege above—and also as a function of the geolocational affordance of that particular application. The design ontology (and the popular uptake) of Yik Yak is based on the premise that networked speech can and does perform a located function. Largely because of the possibility of anonymity, such utterances worked rhetorically like sniper strikes: one knows the general direction from which the shots have been issued if not the name and rank of the shooter. Once the media had been captured, it was possible to develop a forensic around the posters and their support

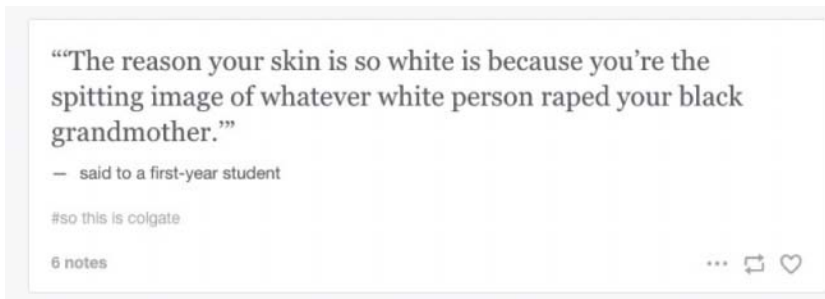


Figure 21.1. Comment shared over social media and documented by Association of Critical Collegians. (Association)

“To see 70 or 80 people like something that said I deserve to die. It was disheartening.”

— Melissa Melendez, college student.

Figure 21.2. Comment by student Melissa Mendez on the use of Yik Yak on campus to threaten her. (Reply)

network. In other words, the sublimated racism that the student activists intuited in their environment they were able to capture as digital artifacts, transforming a haunting presence into a materialized one. The Yik Yak posts offered an ocular proof as such that confirmed the students’ sense of racialized aggression.

In her discussion of Black Freedom and the history of race and violence in the United States, historian Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor points out the systemic issue of treating political economy as unrelated to American racial problems. “In the 1990s, the social consequences of austerity budgets have effectively made police storm troopers for gentrification. A long list of quality of life legal offenses make it a crime to be poor or ‘criminalize public displays of poverty,’” giving the example of William Bratton’s New York Police Department implementation of the CompStat database and stop-and-search procedures under Mayor Giuliani (Taylor). What one finds is a recipe for riot cities: under the direction of the Johnson administration in 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—known as the Kerner commission—identified the three primary grievances in black communities as police brutality, unemployment, and substandard housing (Taylor). The connection of such policy to a phenomenon such as Yik Yak is an effect of Yik Yak’s decontextualized racism: treating political economy as unrelated to American racial problems. Such a separation is implicit in the comments made by students on Yik Yak laying the blame for legacies of imperialism that include practices of colonialism and slavery at the feet of their peers—the young students of color. Taylor goes on to state the necessity of student groups and civil rights activists historically to *make visible* a resistance to corrupted systems that have grown invisible as they have

grown normative: “Ideas are fluid, but it usually takes political action to set them in motion and stasis for the retreat to set in” (Taylor). In the case of the Association of Critical Collegians, they were able to arm themselves with the small data of their context to force a change of state from entropy to activity around the issues of social life (and social justice) at the college. The students captured a type of shadow data—the substrata exchange of information that participates in the constitution of context—and render it an *ocular* testimony.

#BlackLivesMatter: Big Data Narrative

In a different sense, I locate “shadow data” in the work of Black Lives Matters activism as one of the powerful connecting threads between networked and located phenomena. I move from the platform of Yik Yak, as a locative application, to that of Twitter, the microblogging platform that allows for a public broadcast, but without necessarily being tethered to geolocation. The shift in social media platforms as activist tools also speaks to a shift in scale and intensity. Yet, some of the same themes persist: the valuation of black and other people of color in the broader culture and the use of social media to make visible the “shadow data” that often haunt the lives of a black underclass in the form of penalties, harassment, and ultimately in the case of Michael Brown and others, death. In the hands of Black Lives Matter activists (some starting simply as citizens reporting directly to the public what they say are unjust police practices), network broadcast moved the Michael Brown case from a lethal interaction between civilian and police to one that had a public stage on which issues of racialized policing practices, excess of violence, and the persistent harassment of civil subjects based on race and poverty were broadcast.

Clearly, social media, in this case Twitter, are a productive tool for bringing attention to a matter that might never have surfaced, that is, would have been the unremarked (and thus somehow rendered unremarkable) death of a young black man at the hands of local police. The Black Lives Matter use of social media made visible, and made a case for, a review of police behavior in black communities as symptomatic of a persistent *devaluation of black life*. This is a claim distinct from a general call for less violent outcomes in police interactions with civilians. It is a call to action to address what is understood and historically documented as the systemic overpolicing of black neighborhoods with the outcome of higher incarceration and death rates than those of other U.S. populations. I return at the end of this section to discuss in greater detail the differences between an experiential sense and a data-driven substantiation of “higher death rates.” But first, I would like to move through the #BLM activist use of social media.

In the 2016 white paper “Beyond the Hashtags: #FERGUSON, #BLACKLIVES MATTER, and Online Media,” authors Deen Freelon, Charlton Mcilwain, and Meredith Clark offer the first substantial scholarly analysis of the Black Lives Matter social media data. In the white paper, they reach the following conclusion: social

media posts by activists were essential in spreading Michael Brown's story nationally. They write, "Protesters and their supporters were generally able to circulate their own narratives on Twitter without relying on mainstream news outlets" (Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark). They express the primary goals of the social media among the activists they interviewed as education, "amplification of marginalized voices," and police reform. Additionally, they suggest the Black Lives Matter social network data as an "apt test case for the idea that social media uniquely benefits oppressed populations" (Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark). To this last point, I reference the body of literature on Young Black Twitter (YBT) that addresses the disproportionately high presence of black youth on social media such as Twitter and the short-video platform Vine (Brock; Sharma); this statistical reference contextualizes the proposition that social media may represent a public, powerful, and alternative venue to traditional media sources. In making this argument, it is difficult to discern whether networked media represent possible alternative communication network for all; or whether groups with a political drive, such as the black, progressive Black Lives Matter or the white conservative Alt-Right, is particularly persuasive in its social media use. They both represent radicalized voices that increasingly circulate beyond their domain of local or internal discourse. But, despite the Unite the Right discourse regarding the endangered status of whiteness (particularly American white men), I would argue that their effective leveraging of social media as an alternative news outlet does not represent an "oppressed population." They do, though, represent a site of controversy as we as a society witness the transformation of what heretofore had been the most privileged societal position (if there is a correcting for class and ethnic location) with tangible historic endowments such as legal enfranchisement, opportunity to own property, and the pursuit of happiness available to free persons. It is the slippage in that privilege that appears to be the source of rage. Not, as is the case with Black Lives Matter, the protest against continued (and continuous) devaluation of black life as American norm.

My analysis of #BLM data focuses on three key sets as described by Freelon and coauthors: the Black Lives Matter hyperlink network; #BLM tweets per day; and tweets containing #BLM.

Figure 21.3, "#BLM hyperlink network," graphs the network relations between the Black Lives Matter website and the increasing number of hyperlinks to the site. The story the data tell is a movement from margin to center in terms of the public and media discussion of the issues of Black Lives Matter and the profile of the official organization website as a trusted reference. For example, one of the closest high-profile media connections is the U.K. publication *The Guardian*, with the liberal political blog site slate.com and the less known feministwire.com as other nodes in the close proximity network. The data only reflect frequency of reference (represented as proximity) but not temporal links. In other words, one cannot read in this set of data when *The Guardian* first linked to BlackLivesMatter.com or a group like the Alt-Right Breitbart.com, although with less frequent links to the site, first

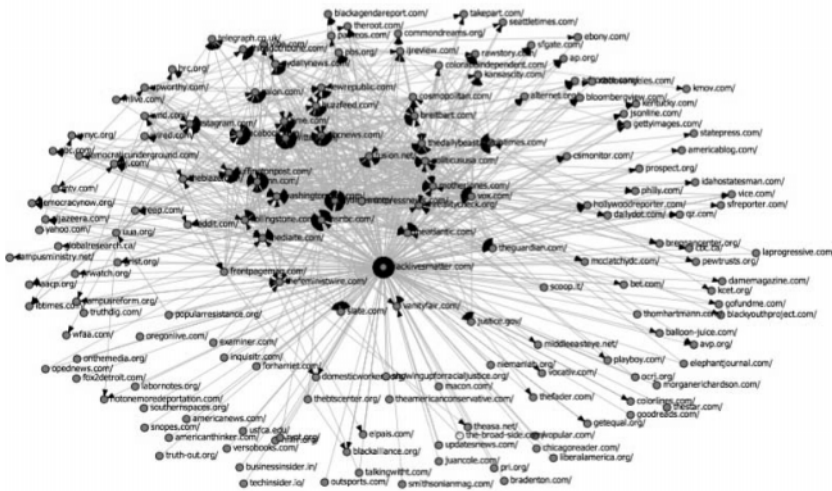


Figure 21.3. #BLM hyperlink network: data visualization shows the genealogy of connections to BlackLivesMatter.com, consisting predominantly of news sites. The Black Lives Matter network is structured to distribute related content among and between news sites that are in a position to maximize and amplify visibility. Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark, Creative Commons: BY-NC-SA, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

connected. The value of reading frequency of connection as well as temporality of connection would simply allow for a richer data story on how third-party media moved Black Lives Matter and BlackLivesMatter.com to the referential center of the social and news media conversation.

YBT outlets such as thefader.com, getequal.org, colorlines.com, and blackalliance.com are also represented in the chart as part of the network. In these comparatively weaker ties, one can see black news media essentially following the mainstream media on reporting Black Lives Matter. One cannot see in this chart the momentum of the YBT social media network and affiliated demographics (activist, left, social justice) as the aggregated group of participants who made #BLM and associated hashtags trend across social media, creating the network context in which news media began to link to #BLM and BlackLivesMatter.com. This activist work of making public the issues of Black Lives Matter appears in the second graph (Figure 21.4) of the white paper and describes the work of hundreds to millions of Twitter posts in the dynamic system by which Black Lives Matter developed into a national movement and international conversation.

In Figure 21.4, “#BLM Tweets per day,” one can locate two important aspects of an activist network with located and distributed aspects. First, as with most internet memes, attention to police violence on Twitter is episodic. The tweets-per-day graph shows that comparatively few people were engaged with the issue prior to Michael Brown’s killing on August 9, 2014. The attention spike started with this event and

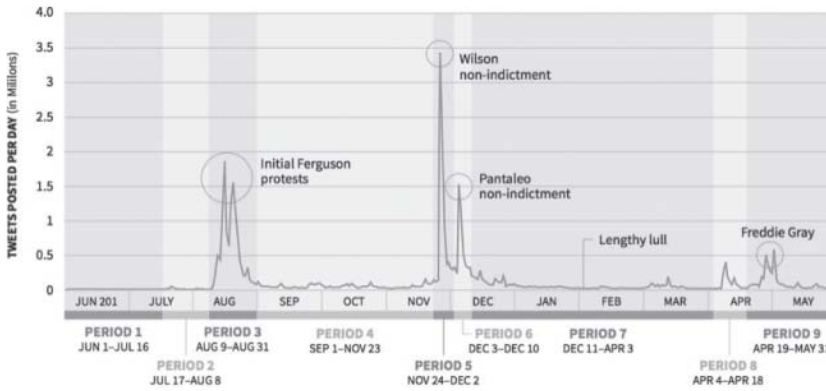


Figure 21.4. #BLM tweets per day: as with most internet memes, attention to police violence on Twitter is episodic. The tweets-per-day graph shows that comparatively few people were engaged with the issue prior to Michael Brown's killing on August 9. The sustained attention spike that extends from that date through the end of the month encompasses the initial Ferguson protests. Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark, Creative Commons: BY-NC-SA, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

extends to the end of the month to include the Ferguson protests. The shift in scale of networked attention is significant. From August 9 to August 31, one sees close to two million hashtag citations (tweets and retweets) of Black Lives Matter. Indeed this was one of several hashtags circulating on the topic that include #Ferguson and #MikeBrown, making it representative of only a percentage of overall activity on the topic. Between November 24 and December 2, 2014, one finds the #BLM trend approaching 3.5 million individual citations around the nonindictment of officers Darren Wilson (of Ferguson) and Daniel Pantaleo, who was brought to trial over the 2014 death of Eric Garner in New York City.

I speculate that the pattern of growth and circulation represents the development of a public consciousness of the issue and increasing activist work. As I have suggested, the August network established the meme at a societally impactful scale (as demonstrated by Figure 21.3 in the frequency and importance of media outlets reporting the story). Based on that theory, the subsequent escalation of the meme three months later reflects the twin phenomena of familiarity and outrage at the results of the juridical process. In other words, #BLM was established around the death of Michael Brown and then used as a tool for online protest with the acquittal of Officer Darren Wilson, who shot and killed Brown.

The second point of information I read in the tweets-per-day graph is the shadow data that reveal the ongoing work of activism around and beyond the internet meme metabolism: Figure 21.4 suggests that police violence only sporadically becomes a mainstream issue on Twitter. When major events occur, such as nonindictments, clashes between protestors and police, or the posting of explosive video, the conversation surges very quickly but tapers off after a few days. The data of Figure 21.4 also reveal a steady, low-volume conversation among those closely following

the issue that falls outside of the methodological framework of the white paper. In this sense, that there are large-scale data in relation to Black Lives Matter is the condition of the white paper, its motivation for the analysis; the viability of data is constrained by the condition of high volume as indicative of societal importance. Based on this condition, Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark's critical data framework is effectively a positivist one, marking the networked phenomenon but rendering the low-volume conversation statistically irrelevant; there is no capacity to address small data as such.

In a counter-reading of the graph, I am suggesting that there is also a mode of shadow data—information that does not appear as significant on the graph but may be inferred with significance based on a combination of online and located activist engagement. By interpreting positive and shadow data along these lines, one can argue that they mark the temporality of an internet meme (political or not) as well as the *ongoing* work on the ground by activists. The strong-tie/weak-tie pattern of normative social exchange (Granovetter) and the particular risks of an activist network (Bonilla and Rosa; Gladwell; Gladwell and Shirky; Gruzd and Wellman; Tufekci). The low risk (weak tie) work of tweeting or retweeting, of engaging social media on a topic, in relation to scaffolded development of strong-tie networks represents the difficult work of activist infrastructure to create the condition of an issue evolving from one of marginal and local importance to mass movement of social change.

The construction of this scaffold changes depending on time, issue, constituents, and media tools. The organizing of the 1960s civil rights movement does not look the same as the Idle No More movement commenced in 2012. Accordingly, the value of social media activity can be seen only in relation to located activist work. In my assessment, one finds a symbiotic relationship toward publicness and persuasion on an issue, where one does not and cannot replace the other. Based on this framework, despite the fact that it essentially does not appear in the conventional data, I mark the shadow of this persistent activist work in the subsequent spike in Twitter activity around the organized days of protest in reaction to the acquittal of police officers on trial for the deaths of Brown and Garner.

In addition to looking at the data on activist networks of Black Lives Matter, I am interested in data that underlie Black Lives Matter claims of racially based social injustice as perpetrated by the U.S. legal system and its application by law enforcement. To this point, I address the 2016 analysis by economist Roland Fryer of three distinct datasets that address race and death at the hands of the police. Two are public data comprising records of city and federal programs that include Stop, Question, and Frisk program, New York City (Stop and Frisk), and the national citizen report Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS). For the third dataset, data are culled from qualitative event summaries of officers firing their weapons at civilians from three cities in Texas, six counties in Florida, and Los Angeles County. The report derives its final dataset from a random sample of reports from the Houston Police Department arrest codes that represent a higher probability of justified use of lethal

force (e.g., attempted murder of an officer, aggravated assault of an officer, resisting arrest, etc.). From the perspective of this paper, the purpose of engaging these data and their analysis is to frame a baseline context in which to talk about the scale and impact of police use of force and how that might further contextualize the events around Black Lives Matter.

In the working paper “An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force,” Fryer finds that blacks and Hispanics experience 50 percent more nonlethal use of force in encounters with police than whites. More provocatively, he concludes that in cases of more extreme use of force, in particular officer-involved shootings, the study found no marked racial difference between whites and minorities in the raw data of correcting for contextual factors (Fryer). Factoring for controls and unknowns—such as bias in reporting good behavior with the Houston police—Fryer argues that his data in the case of lethal uses of force by police officers are representative: the report finds “in the raw data . . . blacks are 23.8 percent *less* likely to be shot at by police relative to whites. Hispanics are 8.5 percent less likely” (Fryer, 5). Concluding, he finds “no evidence of racial discrimination in officer involved shootings” (Fryer, 5). With the publication of the working paper, there was media conversation among news groups and internet pundits that the basic claim of Black Lives Matter—that blacks are disproportionately targeted and killed by police—was not substantiated by the data (Bui and Cox; Kweku; Mac Donald; Phelps). I am suggesting that this narrow view of the data, simply looking at the analysis of the Houston dataset, does not sufficiently contextualize and cross-reference other significant data in moving toward a viable interpretation of the Fryer findings.

Blacks constitute 12.3 percent of the U.S. population and Hispanics 12.5 percent (Carroll). For blacks and Hispanics to represent 56 percent of deaths at the hands of the police points to what historians and statisticians report in the overpolicing of poor black communities, as discussed above. The fact that the ratio of black to white deaths as the result of police action is so high speaks to a much larger percentage of the black population being implicated in suspect behavior. If the study does not report explicit racial bias in police actions on the scene in situ, it also does not address the ratio of black to white police exposure. In the cases of Garner and Brown, as reported by the press and noted in the Fryer study, neither suspect possessed weapons, nor did either suspect, depending on perspective, exhibit threatening behavior.

Barnard College statistician Rajiv Sethi suggests that one might parse the data to better understand if lethal force is being brought to bear against the *most violent* constituencies of the broader white population while police force (lethal or not) is being brought against poor black communities *in general* (“Fallacy of Composition”). He points to a more broadly contextual implication that the controversy around the narrow assessment of more white deaths by police shooting overshadows any reference to the data that blacks and Hispanics are far more likely to be engaged by police and continue to represent more than half of police killings, even though

they are much smaller percentages of the population. In effect, the systemic relationship between minority populations and police becomes a type of shadow data, reabsorbed as the daily norm. As discussed in the Fryer paper, the Stop and Frisk and PPCS reports represent local and national data clearly marking that blacks and Hispanics are statistically more likely to be stopped by police and violently apprehended. As Sethi points out, in reading across the heterogeneous datasets, it is not possible to assess the quality or kind of people being apprehended: in the much larger white population do the police meet the *most violent* suspects with lethal force? Conversely, in the smaller black population, are there broader police exposure and force applied to a general population, that is, not the most violent? This speculative analysis of what shadow data might expose to better understand how different groups are policed supports the claims of Black Lives Matter in regard to *the disproportionate* police violence in black communities.

Fryer's finding that at the point of contact in a shooting police officers in general do not act in a racist manner is good news; it does not, though, undermine the larger issues at hand in relation to the policing of black communities (one need only look at black incarceration rates in relation to U.S. drug legislation since the 1970s to begin to unwind that thread). If media pundits must see greater numbers of black deaths to be convinced of the societal problem of how poor blacks are unjustly treated in the construct of judicial policy and its application by the police, then I call this view blindered at the very least. The spooky bias that blacks are constitutionally more violent than other groups seems to haunt the data in terms of what is taken up by the media in its interpretation. Based on Fryer's data and other contextualizing materials, such historical, legal, and sociological analysis as presented in the earlier sections of the paper, I am suggesting that the Black Lives Matter claim of disproportionate and aggressive police presence in low-income black communities is borne out across qualitative and quantitative analysis. It seems improbable to suggest there is no ground for the Black Lives Matter movement unless the claims are based exclusively on black deaths in the hands of the police and not a larger systemic view of violence, poverty, and a legacy of racism in these communities.

Although I do not address the issue of violence within black communities as a concomitant factor in the police presence and actions in these communities, I argue for a complex system in which police use of force and lethal force is overrepresented in comparison with the broader population. In other words, the commonsense grounds of the Black Lives Matter movement, based in the collective experience of black and Hispanic Americans, are reflected in the data. If one looks at the polarization between the view of law enforcement and the local citizen perspective on the deaths of people such as Michael Garner (unarmed young black men killed at the point of arrest), I find two different systems of understanding. Procedurally, the Garner arrest fell within normative police practices, even if it was ugly and poorly handled (Moskos). From the point of view of citizens with a lifetime of exposure

to overpolicing, the death of Garner and others represent an ongoing and intersectional devaluing of black life. In other words, even if the death of Garner was technically legal, it was not *right*, and the work of Black Lives Matter is to move the societal conversation forward with real outcomes in not only practices of policing communities most at risk but also addressing the systemic issues that aggregate within these communities. My purpose in putting together heterogeneous data and modes of analysis is to offer a picture of an activist movement that allows for complexity and messiness in its articulation and reception—its societal relay—to facilitate an understanding of the situation from the located experience of those at the front lines (communities and police) and the broader cultural context that shape opportunities for change. With this combination of calling for a clear message in the context of a complex situation, I conclude with a final analysis of an example of complex data in the form of media narrative.

Diamond Reynolds: Complex Data

The third case study examines a new event in the networked data stream around social justice issues raised by Black Lives Matter: the Twitter conversation following the deaths of two black men at the hands of police and the shootings of police officers in Dallas, Texas, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This time period, July 5–July 17, 2016, had the hashtags of #BlackLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter used more often than any other time since the hashtags began appearing on Twitter in July 2013 (Anderson and Hitlin). Additionally, the tone of the online conversation around #BlackLivesMatter shifted, following the attacks on law enforcement. The outcome of this shift was a rise in tweets criticizing the Black Lives Matter movement and a reduction of shared tweets supporting the movement (Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark). The rise in critical tweets was especially notable after the killing of police officers in Dallas. Although one sees an increase in social media use around these deaths, I focus for the moment on the phenomenon of Diamond Reynolds's real-time streaming of the shooting (and subsequent death) of her boyfriend, Philando Castile (see Figure 21.5). Even as the Twitter stream around the movement became more diverse, discordant, and complex with the killings of police officers as well as additional deaths of black men, my analysis addresses the diverse, discordant, and complex data of Reynolds's transmission.

The significance of her Facebook live video stream speaks to an additional layer of networked view and participation in the event. The nine-minute video catalogs not only Castile bleeding to death in the car but the sound of the police officer screaming in an apparent frenzy followed by the brutal treatment of Reynolds herself by the police. She is handcuffed and taken into custody while her young child observes from the car. The transcript of the event outlines the multiple direct address of the live stream: to Castile, to her audience/friends on Facebook, and to the police officer:

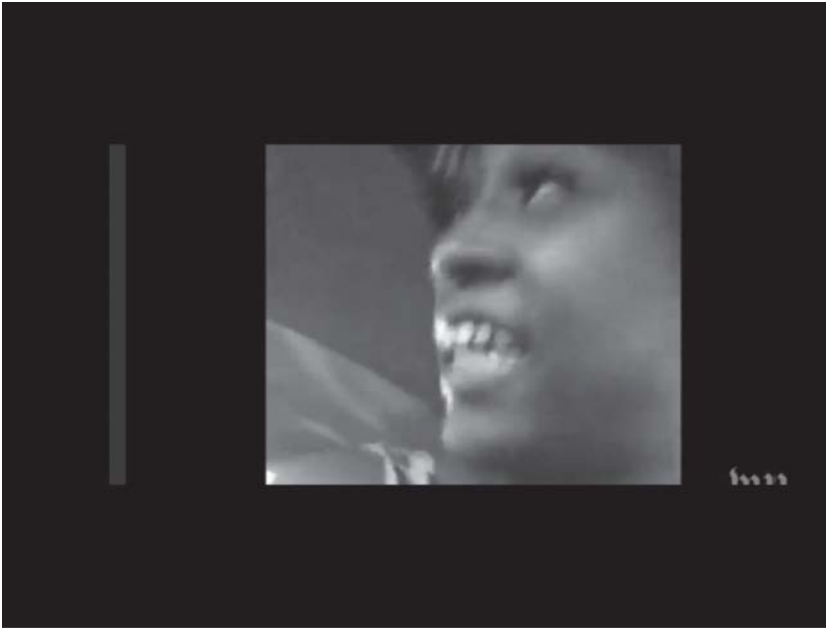


Figure 21.5. Diamond Reynolds's Facebook live video documenting shooting of Philando Castile, YouTube.

[TO CASTILE] Stay with me. [TO CAMERA] We got pulled over for a busted tail-light in the back . . .

[COP SCREAMING IN THE BACKGROUND] I told him not to reach for it. I told him to get his hands out.

[TO COP] You told him to get his I.D., sir, his driver's license.

The footage has been characterized by news media as “raw,” and it certainly appears to be unstaged. But it would be a mistake not to recognize the technical ability and mental fortitude of Reynolds in her presence of mind to make the transmission (Losh). In this sense, it has been widely accepted as “unfiltered” and “true” by a networked audience, and was included in the trial of Jeronimo Yanez, the officer who shot Castile (acquitted). I point to comments made on the Reynolds video and the black social media around #BLM by hosts of the podcast *The Friend Zone*, whom I cite as representative of YBT sentiment: “Let’s be thankful for the activists out there getting the right information to us in real time—videos so we see what is happening versus what the media says is happening. Which we had no idea before social media how much shit they have probably manipulated our entire lives. And now you see it” (*The Friend Zone*). Their point is Reynolds provided a counter-public with the shadow data of her broadcast, in contrast with the public position of the state, which was silence in advance of Yanez’s trial (at the time of the shooting, President Barack Obama and Minnesota governor Mark Dayton made public

comments. But neither spoke on behalf of the St. Paul Police Department). Without the broadcast of events, Castile's death might have slipped away from the public eye as an unremarkable part of the status quo. It is the notion of ocular proof—one sees the event in the direct address of real-time (or even as the after effect of “real time”)—that offers a complex narrative about the interrelational aspects of data, data context, and analysis.

Conclusion: Precarity

The tragedy of *Othello* rests not with the protagonist's blackness but, rather, with Othello's maniacal need for positivist proof: his demand for ocular proof of his wife's infidelity. It is this materialization, the data of a deed as such, that the villain of the tragedy, Iago, exploits toward the tragic outcome. And yet, I use this figuration in its inverted state: when haunted by the spooky affect and effect of a threatening, racialized environment, whether that of a liberal arts college or a midwestern town, the occupants become activists, marshalling material proof in relation to their own narratives of events: they exhibit a freedom of “self-constitution” from a position of precarity that expands a power of everyday expression. In my use of the concept “shadow data,” I frame a wrangling between states of visibility and legibility of “data.” Such data serve as counterpublics, where activists make public sites of injustice that *could be* obscured in the quotidian practice of habit. This is a societal habit of mind that too often configures working class and black as a somewhat ghostly position rendered visible once the subject is dead. In subjecting Michael Brown's body to be laid in state as such on the public pavement, exposed to the elements and the gaze of all, catalyzed the sense of injustice and indignity visited on Brown and by extension the community. Unwittingly or not, the police used terroristic tactics of the historic lynch mob in leaving the (often mutilated) body of a black man on display to signal the subjection of black people. Beyond the right not to be killed, the millennial activism of networked publics and counterpublics continues a long-standing claim of a civic and social justice, a claim beyond bare life for the right to live freely, which in many senses is the right to be a citizen (Agamben). In presenting three modes of critical data analysis, small data, big data, and complex data, this investigation offers a view of activist precarity and persistence and the leveraging of informational networks toward the expression of self-constitution and collective action as visible subjects.

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Queer female of color: The highest difficulty setting there is? Gaming rhetoric as gender capital

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Queer female of color: The highest difficulty setting there is? Gaming rhetoric as gender capital

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On May 15, 2012 popular science fiction writer John Scalzi published a post to his blog *Whatever* entitled [“Straight White Male: The Lowest Difficulty Setting That There Is.”](#) I learned about Scalzi as did many non-fans, through John Schwartz’s admiring [New York Times piece](#) published July 6, 2012, which cited two influential and eloquent blog posts he had written that had gone viral: [“Being Poor”](#) and “Straight White Male.” (Read “Being Poor.” It will break your heart, as will the hundreds of comments from readers who share their personal narratives of the unique humiliations of poverty. Here’s one: “Being poor is fighting with someone you love because they misplaced a \$15 dollar check.”)

As Schwartz writes, Scalzi posts to *Whatever* almost every day, and the blog gets over 50,000 hits a day. Scalzi covers a huge variety of topics, but these two posts on poverty, race, class, and gender have reached the widest audience and generated the most commentary and controversy because he writes from a position of absolutely unassailable white geek masculinity as a popular science fiction writer. Media fandom has taken on a newfound social currency as an indicator of masculinity in the post-internet age, and producers of sci-fi “canons” such as Scalzi have correspondingly become bigger dogs in the popular culture sphere. Scalzi skillfully deploys the cultural capital he enjoys as a much-admired and widely read science fiction writer as a means to assert a new form of patriarchal power -- geek masculinity -- and he employs the rhetoric of gaming to solidify his authority with male readers, for whom digital games have become a form of social capital.

Scalzi exercises a great deal of thoughtful and expert control over reader participation; he has an elaborate commenting policy, in which he reserves the right to delete or “mallet” posts that he finds offensive, and he has been known to shut down comment threads when they get too long or feel unproductive to him. However, even he expressed surprise at how controversial the “Straight White Male” piece proved to be. He published two follow-ups to the piece responding to the thousands of mostly-angry responses he received specifically from white male readers. In the second of these he wrote that it has “been fun and interesting watching the Intarweeps basically explode over it, especially the subclass of Straight White Males who cannot abide the idea that their lives play out on a fundamentally lower difficulty setting than everyone else’s, and have spun themselves up in tight, angry circles because I dared to suggest that they do.”

The “Straight White Male” piece is short, sweet, and eloquent. It’s easy to see why it went viral. It employs the discourse of video gaming, one assumed to come naturally to “dudes,” Scalzi’s stated intended audience, as a metaphor for explaining how race and gender confer automatic, unasked-for, mechanical advantages on players who are lucky enough to be born white and male. Just like the difficulty level one chooses while playing a game, these advantages gradually become *invisible* as the player becomes immersed in the game. What does become noticeable are deviations from this norm--when a quest is “too hard” the player may become aware of the

difficulty setting that they chose, but otherwise that decision as a decision fades into the background. This is, indeed, how privilege works in “real life.”

The term “game mechanic” doesn’t appear in the piece but it underlies the argument throughout, explaining how points that a player can spend on advantages like “talent,” “wealth,” “charisma,” and “intelligence” are distributed by “the computer,” and that players must “deal with them,” just like they must in real life. This argument makes racism and sexism seem socially neutral, mechanical, structural, and not a personal act of aggression or oppression perpetrated upon one person by another. In short, they are institutional, invisible, “mechanical,” always business, never personal. Indeed, as Scalzi states at the beginning of the piece, his purpose in using gaming as a metaphor for life was to avoid the use of the term “privilege” altogether, since straight white men react badly to it. As he writes, “So, the challenge: how to get across the ideas bound up in the word “privilege,” in a way that your average straight white man will *get*, without freaking out about it?”

Indeed, Scalzi’s argument is successful because it allows his privileged readers to abstract themselves from the equation and see understand racial and gender privilege not as something that they are “doing,” but rather as a structural benefit that they receive without trying. All gamers understand that the ludic world is above all *constructed*, in the most literal sense. If a boss or a monster kills you, you cannot take it personally -- likewise, if you pick up a rare epic weapon, you cannot really claim credit for having “earned” it since it’s a programmed part of the environment. Scalzi understands above all that his readers cannot tolerate the feeling of being blamed for their privilege. Explaining race and gender as a structural advantage, an aspect of a made environment that was designed to reward some types and punish others, lets white male readers hold themselves blameless for their own advantages.

Many of Scalzi’s critics object that his metaphor isn’t perfect, since some games do let players choose many aspects of their identities, and game mechanics and difficulty settings work differently in different games. Nonetheless, the basic premise -- that difficulty settings create a pervasive experience of ease or hardship and affects every aspect of a gamer’s experience, just as do race and gender -- certainly help us understand how privilege works in “real life.”

However, the way that this argument works perpetuates the notion that men are *automatic* members of geek and gamer culture (which many men are not) and that women aren’t. As a man, Scalzi employs the discourse of gaming--leveling, “points,” dump stats--as a technique to appeal, specifically, to straight white men like himself, who “like women.” (And presumably don’t want to see them oppressed; cranky women just aren’t as fun for men to be around!). Heteronormative white masculinity is equated with expert, fan knowledge of gaming mechanics, structures, discourses--what Mia Consalvo has dubbed “gaming capital” in her [excellent study of games and cheating](#). Scalzi employs this language’s value as a system of signification marked as inherently masculine. Gaming discourse becomes a male backchannel.

This technique is very effective because gaming capital is in fact *aspirational* for many young male players, as much a goal as it is a reality. Masculinity is performed by the display of technical knowledge, and gaming is the most recent iteration of this form of social display. Gaming itself becomes a mark of privilege within symbolic discourse. Even men who have no idea what “dump stats” are hailed by this argument because gaming capital is assumed to be

intrinsically masculine. As George Lipsitz, another white male critic of white male privilege, puts it in his writing on the possessive investment in whiteness, the “dump stat” of gaming discourse is difference itself.

In an example of publishing on the lowest difficulty setting, Scalzi’s essay got much more play on the Interwebz than postings on this topic by any female games or science fiction blogger. While digital media and publishing have definitely changed the way that feminist scholars work by giving us more and faster outlets to publish for a public audience, there is no doubt that we are working at the *highest* difficulty setting. Most of us don’t have 50,000 readers, and are not popular science fiction authors with ties to the television industry: not that most men are either, but some men are, and no women are. Scalzi would be the first person to acknowledge this.

As Scalzi puts it, “the player who plays on the “Gay Minority Female” setting? *Hardcore.*” Women of color gamers who publicly identify with the culture of gaming find themselves shunned, mocked, and generally treated in ways that are far worse than one could find in almost any other social context. Aisha Tyler, an African American actress who has appeared on television programs like *24*, found out what it meant to be perceived as an intruder to “gamer culture.” After she emceed the Ubisoft demo at the Electronic Entertainment Expo more commonly known as E3, the largest and most important gaming industry conference, the backlash against her presence on social media like NeoGAF, YouTube and Twitter started with the terms “annoying fucking bitch” and went on in a similar vein. As *Kotaku* noted in “Aisha Tyler Rants [‘I’ve Been a Gamer Since Before You Could Read.](#)” The trolly directed at her exemplifies a troubling problem at the core of nerd culture. A hardcore base wants respect and recognition for the merits of whatever they love, be it comics, games or something else. But when someone they perceive as an outsider professes to share this love, the pitchforks come out.

Tyler responded with a [beautifully written essay](#) (not a rant!) on her Facebook page. She writes

“I go to E3 each year because I love video games.
Because new titles still get me high.
Because I still love getting swag.
Love wearing my gamer pride on my sleeve.
People ask me what console I play.
Motherfucker, ALL of them.”

Aisha Tyler’s presence at E3 presenting for Ubisoft constitutes a black, female claim to gaming capital. It is hardcore, to use Scalzi’s term, and immensely threatening. It is abundantly apparent that the more gaming capital becomes identified with white masculinity, the more bitter the battle over its distribution, possession, and circulation will become. As gaming culture becomes more heavily capitalized both economically and symbolically, it becomes both more important for women to gain positions of power as critics, makers, and players, and more likely that it will be denied.

Gaming space is part and parcel of what George Lipsitz calls the “white spatial imaginary,” and the stakes for keeping women and people of color out are the same as they were during

redlining, blockbusting, and other techniques to police movement and claims to space in America. As George Lipsitz writes in [How Racism Takes Place](#), “because whiteness rarely speaks its names or admits to its advantages, it requires the construction of devalued and even demonized Blackness to be credible and legitimate. Although the white spatial imaginary originates mainly in appeals to the financial interests of whites rather than to simple fears of otherness, over times it produces a fearful relationship to the specter of Blackness.” (37). Google Books categorizes this book under “Business and Economics.” Word.

Feminist scholars have been at the forefront of giving scholarly legitimation to the existence of virtual community through their ethnographic and theoretical academic writing. T.L. Taylor, Sherry Turkle, Sandy Stone, Lori Kendall, Tom Boellstorff, and Bonnie Nardi have wonderful monographs to this end. Most traditional anthropologists and sociologists were hostile to this idea when these works were published, yet today there is wide agreement that online communities create real affective environments with real economic value. The battle to legitimate online community as an area of study has been won; today we know that online community is real by the sound of keystrokes and game controller buttons as players enter their credit card numbers into their computers or consoles to purchase time in *World of Warcraft* or Xbox Live. However, though most agree that racism and sexism absolutely permeate game culture and the online and offline communities and narratives that constitute it, few seem to care, and even straight white males like Scalzi who write about it publicly are castigated. (For an antidote to this, Mary Flanagan’s book [Critical Play](#). Seriously).

Though some of his thousands of readers may have violently disagreed with him, Scalzi was read and taken seriously. When a woman of color gamer like Aisha Tyler appears in public to talk about games, she is not taken seriously. [She has to defend her credibility as a gamer](#), something that Scalzi is not asked to do. While commenters argued with his interpretation of how game mechanics worked, nobody claimed that he had never played them, a charge with which Tyler, despite her very public profile as a gamer, had to contend.

It’s one thing to say that women and non-whites are playing “the game of life” in hardcore mode -- woman of color feminism has been telling us this for years. (See Grace Hong’s work on the Combahee River Collective in her powerful and rigorous monograph [Ruptures of Capital](#)). And even the popular press has taken note of the egregious state of gaming for women and minorities: this August the *New York Times* published an article entitled [“In Virtual Play, Sex Harassment Is All Too Real.”](#) I wish that there were both more outrage and more analysis as to the causes, practices, and effects of games in the white spatial imaginary, but I don’t fault the *Times*. Journalists are good at describing problems more quickly than academics are (though in this case the *Times* is many years late: even [NPR](#) beat them to this story by two years, which is saying something), but they don’t have the luxury of time to devote to deeper and more detailed writing. Journalists are good at bringing public awareness to problems like gaming’s pervasive racism, sexism, and homophobia, but awareness isn’t enough. It’s our job as feminist scholars, teachers, writers, and gamers to document, analyze, and theorize the white patriarchy that is so vigorously resurgent in games while never forgetting who profits here.

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Playing the Humanities

Feminist Game Studies and Public Discourse

ANASTASIA SALTER AND BRIDGET BLODGETT

Both game studies and the broader digital humanities value the public scholar: the intersection of games academic spaces with games journalism and online communities offers lots of valuable opportunities for debate and shared knowledge. However, participation within these communities comes at very different potential costs for scholars based on their identities, and the currency of one network becomes fuel for a witch hunt from another. Acting as a public scholar brings with it risk that is inherently tied to a scholar's identity and position: gender, race, sexual identity, and other elements of identity not only bring intense scrutiny but often invite harassment, trolling, and silencing. Thus, the privileging of public scholarship in the games and digital humanities research communities can come at a high price for already marginalized participants, with important ramifications for whose voices are heard and recognized within the field.

Game studies and the digital humanities are fields with significant overlap: game studies can be found in departments ranging from English, media studies, and American studies to communication, digital media, and computer science. While the field is inherently interdisciplinary, many game studies scholars hold a home department and disciplinary training from a humanities background. The technical nature of both the games under study and the methods required to effectively analyze them connects with some digital humanities methods. It is thus unsurprising that game studies also suffers from some of the challenges facing the digital humanities community, including the privileging of coders and "makers" and a push toward public scholarship that comes with significant risk, as observable in the experience of pushback against feminist scholarship at the Digital Games Research Association documented by Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw ("We Are All Fishes Now"). By examining the parallel experiences of researchers working on bringing feminist discourse to these two spaces of technical-humanities intersection, we can better understand the larger challenge facing both fields.

Being Public

Public scholarship in both game studies and the digital humanities is centered on community and practices of sharing and amplification, and one of the most important networked publics (defined by danah boyd as a space constructed as a public through networked technologies and the collective emerging from this construction) for both is Twitter (boyd, “Social Network Sites”). As a social network, Twitter was created in 2006 and provides a platform for sharing content limited to 140 characters (which might include links, videos, and/or images) that has been significantly popular with academics thanks in part to its model of following, rather than friending, which allows for nonmutual connections, unlike the reciprocal model of Facebook. This is particularly helpful for new and emerging scholars, who can follow significant voices in the field while establishing themselves. As sava saheli singh notes, “practices like this are even becoming part of academic professionalization—the things a grad student or early-career scholar must do to develop a reputation as a scholar and academic” (“Tweeting to the Choir”). These expectations are becoming the norm in any technologically related or dependent field, as participation is a sign of both technical literacy and relevance, and may also be key to networking, promoting publications, and finding a job.¹ Lisa Spiro has gone so far as to define digital humanities as a field of public scholarly practices, noting that “how the digital humanities community operates—transparently, collaboratively, through online networks—distinguishes it” (“This Is Why”). Such rhetoric, while compelling, leaves little room for opting out of those networks. It is notable that Spiro’s discussion tackles this head-on, suggesting a need for explicit shared values and codes of conduct within digital humanities, both of which have yet to be truly realized.

Participation in this sort of collaborative online field comes at a cost. Game studies shares similar values: the field’s main journal, *Game Studies*, is open access, and many of the field’s most noted scholars regularly share and collaborate through Twitter and other networks. Given these similarities, events from 2010–2017 in the game studies community offer a powerful case study for the risks inherent in public acts of scholarship, particularly on Twitter. As a network, Twitter is highly regarded in the digital humanities community: as Matthew Kirschenbaum observes “Twitter, along with blogs and other online outlets, has inscribed the digital humanities as a network topology, that is to say lines drawn by aggregates of affinities, formally and functionally manifest in who follows whom, who friends whom, who tweets whom, and who links to what” (“What Is Digital Humanities”). Digital humanities practices value the public scholar: as Bonnie Stewart notes, “Going online and talking to people you don’t know about areas of shared interest . . . opens up your capacity to build communities of practice” (“What Counts”). However, the consequences of online participation in these communities of practice (with the digital humanities broadly construed as one such community) have been strongly felt by women, persons of color, and other marginalized voices. By putting the experiences

of games scholars and digital humanists in dialogue, we can better understand why calls for public scholarship can be marginalizing and silencing even as they seek to strengthen their respective disciplines. Humanist and social science games scholars, particularly those addressing inequities and inclusivity, have in many ways served as the canary in the coal mine for academia at large: the same forces and institutions that have been marshalled in the games culture wars are as of 2017 a dominant part of the academic landscape (Bernstein). The real and immediate dangers (particularly to those from marginalized identities) have never been greater (May).

Both games and digital humanities suffer from a similar challenge of being adjacent to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), but not part of the discourse of STEM. This challenge was particularly crystallized in a highly circulated op-ed in the *New York Times* in November 2017 by Cathy O’Neil with the provocative title “The Ivory Tower Can’t Keep Ignoring Tech.” This idea that academia was “ignoring” tech was particularly exhausting thanks to a line that drew the immediate ire of researchers in both the digital humanities and game studies: “There is essentially no distinct field of academic study that takes seriously the responsibility of understanding and critiquing the role of technology—and specifically, the algorithms that are responsible for so many decisions—in our lives” (“Ivory Tower”). One researcher, Victoria Massie, responded aptly on Twitter with the observation that “the ivory tower isn’t ignoring tech. Rather academia, like tech, suffers from the same structural inequalities. And if tech, like academia, didn’t ignore the folks at the margins who have been about this work, we wouldn’t be in this mess” (“@vmmassie”). Massie’s comment is particularly insightful, as it serves as a reminder that scholars fundamentally driven by understanding and critiquing the inequities emerging from technology through the lens of gender and race are also frequently those whose voices are least likely to be amplified.

While many expressed understandable frustrations that O’Neil’s op-ed appeared to ignore the rich history of entire fields of academia, the oversight is neither new nor unexpected. A hierarchy of fields is inevitable, and STEM research has traditionally been far more visible. Both game studies and digital humanities are STEM adjacent, but participants in those fields contributing outside the technical center are frequently marginalized. Even scholars with significant personal capital note the challenges facing scholars outside these central disciplines. In his “Year Fifteen” report on the field of game studies, Ian Bogost noted, “The truth is, as a critical and pedagogical concern, game studies is hardly a powerful actor. Games are, I’m sorry to report, a joke that have managed nevertheless to eke out a place in the study of arts and culture” (“Game Studies”). The centering of these debates over identity and cultural value on code and public contributions is itself inherently gendered. Within the games industry, there are defined tiers of participation, and while game design is interdisciplinary by nature, the procedural aspects of game design are often most recognized as being the primary work. These mirror the common discursive constructions of the fields of science and technology where the more technical and

mathematically based focuses are seen as the higher-status positions, which likewise echo debates in the digital humanities over the technical barriers to entry and participation. We will examine the parallel threads of academic representation and community silencing within games studies and digital humanities discourses, with particular attention to how these self-selected gatekeepers determine who participates and who is heard in forming scholarly publics.

The co-location of these outbreaks on a primary medium of digital humanities discourse, Twitter, brought with it a huge intersection with academic speech and debate. The overlap between academia and fandom (a concept Henry Jenkins refers to as “aca/fan” brings with it huge overlaps in discourse communities between academics who study and develop games and the larger games industry and gamer communities.² Defining the space of game studies is difficult: games programs and courses have emerged as part of computer science and engineering departments, English and literature programs, art and design schools, and interdisciplinary studies. While games can be identified as part of STEM disciplines, the study of games has often been more closely aligned with media studies, and games are often found occupying the same spaces as the digital humanities.

Such programs also frequently align themselves with media creation and procedural knowledge as a means toward greater relevance within the institution and in relationship to the games industry, as Austin C. Howe criticized: “scholars, who struggled to establish game studies as a discipline within academia, chose to focus on procedural styles of play as a strategy for establishing an independent and legitimate field of study, but it was still a hard sell. . . . By combining play studies with programming and animation, a games curricula emerged that focused on games that are designed around both ludocentric and tech-fetishistic rhetorics” (“On the Ghost”). This debate has allegories in the digital humanities, as Miriam Posner writes: “As digital humanities winds its way into academic departments, it seems reasonable to predict that the work that will get people jobs—the work that marks a real digital humanist—will be work that shows that you can code. And that work is overwhelmingly by men” (*Some Things*). This criticism holds echoes of the code-obsession that often surrounds digital humanities programs and conferences, with the expectation that procedural (rather than humanities) literacies are the saving grace offered by the introduction of the digital. As existing trends already continually reaffirm the systemic challenges that women and other marginalized communities face in STEM-based institutions, programs with a code-centered curriculum risk reproducing the same trends in representation and student bodies.

Similar risks accompany the privileging of crowdsourced, “open source,” and public scholarship movements. The inherent challenges of meaningful discourse in such spaces are increasingly being recognized. Confronted with a wealth of meaningless debates and misinformation in its own comments section, *Popular Science* made the decision to give up on moderation and shut the whole forum down (LaBarre). The availability and public nature of discussion on the web raises

questions about who may participate in discussions of academic topics and how different voices should be valuable as providing insight or feedback to the academic community. Even in more academic venues, the idea of crowdsourcing knowledge rarely leads to an amplification of women's voices, as Elizabeth Losh points out in an article addressing explicitly what digital humanities can learn from feminist game studies: "Collaborative authorship in the digital humanities cannot be similarly strongly correlated with feminism. Only one of the ten authors of the critical code studies book *10 PRINT* was female, and women made up only a fraction of the multiple authors of the "crowdsourced" book from the University of Michigan Press *Hacking the Academy*. Perhaps this is not surprising given the machismo sometimes associated with multiple authorship in other forms of digital textual collaboration, such as when hackers generate code or Wikipedia editors produce pages or computer scientists rack up publications with the multiple authorship that defines their scholarly networks" ("What Can the Digital Humanities"). As Losh observes, in game studies collaboration between women authors is more common, perhaps in part thanks to the challenges inherent to feminist discourse within game studies as a space.

Contextualizing Gendertrolling through GamerGate

Both digital humanists and games scholars, and indeed many tech-savvy academics in the community at large, rely on corporate-run media networks as platforms for collaboration and discourse. Among those, Twitter has been dominant for nearly a decade, and has thus had a dramatic impact on the networks and discourse of both fields. The same aspects that make Twitter so inviting to scholars make it dangerous to marginalized participants. Twitter's use of asymmetric friendships and public-facing content make the tweets of scholars available for use and critique by anyone, and those people in turn can easily reply, amplify, or harass the writer. Twitter as a platform has proven to be particularly suited for what Karla Mantilla calls "gendertrolling," or misogynist harassment with a focus on silencing and driving women away from participation in public social media platforms ("Gendertrolling"). The games and game studies communities have proven particularly volatile to this type of harassment, with a series of major incidents on Twitter drawing attention to the dangers of participating in public space and discourse. This tension within games studies (and now, academia at large) place scholars in a no-win scenario: participation on networks such as Twitter is valued as academic currency, but participation is also an invitation to overt gender-based harassment. These incidents have been fueled by questions of identity: Who gets to claim the title of gamer? Whose voices will be heard (and, importantly, silenced) in conversations surrounding games and games culture?

The most widely recognized and publicly noted incident of gendertrolling and campaigns of harassment and silencing within the games community on Twitter is

GamerGate, a hashtag started in August 2014 by the ex-partner of a game designer (Zoe Quinn, as chronicled in her powerful memoir *Crash Override*) that was marketed as a fight against what members of the movement perceived as a lack of ethics in games journalism and a move toward “political correctness” that they saw as threatening their gaming culture. This was far from the first outbreak of misogyny-driven conflict within the games community on Twitter: several previous events had forewarned of the coming storm. In 2010, the publication of a comic featuring rape as punchline by industry convention leader Penny Arcade spurred a dispute over the appropriateness of rape as a subject, which escalated as Twitter accounts with names like “Dickwolvington” and “TeamRAPE” threatened rape and violence against any woman who criticized the comic (Salter and Blodgett). In 2012, a pivotal hashtag #1ReasonWhy begun with women answering a male designer’s tweeted question, “Why are there so few lady game creators?,” with frank discussions of the experience of being a woman in the games industry and community.³ We previously examined this Twitter conversation through analyzing a number of tweets and found that they revealed a number of trends among the problems experienced by women: “Rape and Sexual Harassment, Overt Sexualization, Harassment, Silencing, and Gendered Assumptions” (Blodgett and Salter). This tension has escalated in both visibility and impact over time, as Leigh Alexander captures in her examination of gamer as an identity: “‘Games culture’ is a petri dish of people who know so little about how human social interaction and professional life works that they can concoct online ‘wars’ about social justice or ‘game journalism ethics,’ straight-faced, and cause genuine human consequences. Because of video games” (“‘Gamers’ Don’t Have to Be”). These themes offer insight into the experiences of women and marginalized members of the community, and the problem of silencing holds particularly problematic implications for both the gaming community and those who study games.

The GamerGate movement has much more explicitly engaged game studies and particularly women academics as targets for silencing, gendertrolling, and other threats. One of the most powerful tools of silencing is doxing, a practice of outing someone’s real information (including address, names of partners and children, telephone numbers, employers, etc.) for the explicit purpose of harassment. Doxing is a powerful weapon in the hands of internet trolls and particularly when used against women, as it can quickly be amplified to include threats of rape and death. Several women subjected to campaigns of harassment have left the games industry completely, while others have had to take extreme measures invoking the FBI and at times fleeing their homes. The public attacks against such figureheads serve as a warning to others who would risk inflaming the anger of the movement. Other tactics simply shut down free speech, such as the threats of a massacre if Anita Sarkeesian (media critic and creator of a series of videos examining the depiction of women in video games) followed through with an invited speaking engagement at Utah State. Informed that security could not prohibit firearms at the event or provide any assurances of safety for herself or the students, Sarkeesian canceled the talk.

For academics working on GamerGate, the public visibility and attacks on scholarship became quickly personal. Adrienne Shaw chronicled the challenges she faced when her work unexpectedly was caught in the spotlight: at first, she wasn't expecting the problem, as "although feminist game scholars follow, research, and sympathize with the targets of this kind of coordinated hate campaign, it is rare that academic work becomes a target itself" (Chess and Shaw, "Conspiracy of Fishes"). Yet the intersections between academia and the games industry have brought academic work into the battlefield. Many scholars found their personal information, blogs, Twitter comments, and the like being taken out alongside their professional writing for analysis. This was not the analytic discourse of peer review; it was often accompanied with intensely personal and gendered attacks, often with attempts to professionally discredit academics by destroying their reputations or sense of security. As Katherine Cross explains the maelstrom: "Almost immediately we—and I must include myself in this, for as a feminist academic and writer, I was quickly targeted as well—were all, as a class, deemed guilty by association: guilty until proven innocent, with no proof ever seeming to satisfy the braying mobs. Suddenly our names began to appear in spider charts, sinful stars in senseless constellations of conspiracy" ("We Will Force Gaming"). The implications of being included on such lists could be frightening, from harassment on Twitter to the ever-present threat of the escalation or fulfillment of tweeted threats.

Conferences with a tradition of public scholarship were confronted with the challenge of unexpected public scrutiny and hostile outside attention: in the case of one communications conference, this escalated rapidly. Several scholars in the community had turned their gaze to GamerGate, but rather than evoke the name in public reference, they opted to use the term "Death Eaters" in reference to Harry Potter's villainous and bigoted enemies. However, a mistaken tweet revealed the game, drawing attention to the conference and the work of one woman PhD, Natalie Walschots, whose dissertation focuses on the movement. As she explains, "There have been calls to attend future conference panels that I am presenting on, to contact the dean of graduate studies at Concordia in an attempt to get me expelled, to buy up all the domain names associated with my name and handle to ruin my SEO for future employers" (Goodyear). In the current academic job market, such threats can be lasting attempts to silence a feminist voice.

Katherine Cross captured the difficulty these constant attacks pose for gamers researching in the space in a roundtable on GamerGate: "As a researcher, you are in the midst of this maelstrom, implicated in it, and it is almost impossible not to be directly emotionally involved . . . because as the researcher you are directly under attack. So many of GamerGate's conspiracy theories and its general weltanschauung about the gaming space positions academics as being part of the problem, especially if you study gender. So any attempt to theorize about them or write about them is to make yourself a target, and some might argue that biases you" (Veen).

This problem is not unlike that of any public scholars whose identity makes them a target, from black academics handling the criticism of movements such as Black Lives Matter alongside the rest of their Twitter feed to transgender scholars caught by arbitrary encoded rules such as Facebook's "real" name policy (Steele et al.). In each of these cases, the idea of academic distance and the avoidance of bias can make it impossible for those who are by their identity and research participants in a happening to be taken seriously when they stand to address it.

The International Communication Association was one of many academic organizations to publish a statement on GamerGate, and in doing so the association captured some of the greatest challenges it presents for not just this field but for all of academia and particularly humanities discourse: "You might feel that these events do not relate to your research area, your position, or your students. You are wrong. The harassment members of our community have experienced is a problem that can have chilling effects on academia—both in and out of the communication field. Already, graduate students (and even some colleagues) have conveyed to us that they are frightened to speak up or study video games. When fear enters academia it is the research that suffers as all of our research becomes suspect and 'under investigation'" (Chess, Consalvo, et al.). This observation is essential to understanding the harm that GamerGate and similar forces can deal to academic discourse, and particularly the digital humanities idea of the public scholar, which demands continual participation in spaces of scrutiny and against forces that demand silence or submission.

Digital humanities and game studies scholars are an overlapping group: while digital humanities is traditionally defined as examining humanities works through digital methods, game studies scholars are often examining digital works with toolsets drawn from humanities and other disciplines. The two disciplines are now facing similar challenges thanks to this grounding in technical culture, which itself has been undergoing increasing scrutiny for reinforcing a "brogrammer" culture that silences diverse voices and reinforces an insular way of thinking.⁴ Both digital humanities and game studies communities have continually demonstrated a tendency to privilege the procedural and the public, a mindset that can ignore the very real differences in risks and privilege faced by women and other marginalized groups in seeking to be heard.

The attacks on women academics in particular seeking to broaden definitions of games and advocate for greater inclusion serve as a warning for the digital humanities at large. It is impossible to guess at what scholarship has been silenced thanks to the looming threats on those who participate: the self-censoring of the term "GamerGate" at conferences and in public discourse is just one obvious example of a complex network of decision making and risk analysis for public participation. The reliance of the digital humanities (and "public scholarship" as constructed within this and other disciplines) on networks such as Twitter becomes particularly

questionable when viewed through this lens, as such networks are also home to some of the most aggressive trolling and forces demanding silence. When identity gate-keeping and evaluation of influence are conducted in part on metrics such as a presence on these networks, the results must skew in favor of those whose presence in public spaces is more accepted, and whose mere visibility does not immediately make them a target for harassment.

Notes

1. This type of claim is advanced in many advice columns to graduate students, such as Bekker, "Why You Should Use Twitter."
2. Described on Henry Jenkins's online bio: Jenkins, "Who the %&#?"
3. See Blodgett and Salter, "Hearing."
4. See Lobo, "Silicon Valley's Sexist Programmer Culture."

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A View from Somewhere

Designing The Oldest Game, a Newsgame to Speak Nearby

SANDRA GABRIELE

As the media landscape continues to change, studies have suggested that online games as a medium for news can do a better job than traditional news stories in conveying the complexities of systemic issues through experiential play (Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer). Newsgames are games that are built around current news stories, though the issue of currency is not a critical factor in gameplay; enduring social issues that routinely come up in news coverage are also excellent fodder for games. Newsgames have the potential to ask players to move beyond the headlines to a more complex understanding of the complicated systems that underlie social issues and are often poorly covered in typical news coverage that focus on events rather than contexts. Newsgames accomplish this focus on systems by simulating a problem or issue. They make suggestions about possible answers through the procedures that are an integral part of their formal structure.

This chapter explores the production of *The Oldest Game: A Newsgame*, a game designed to explore the working lives of sex workers in a new regulatory regime.¹ A research-creation project, it engages with a public policy issue that has enduring presence in the Canadian news cycle. It takes an editorial stand that supports the assertions made by communities of sex workers across Canada that criminalization of sex work and its associated activities actively harms them. Through its game mechanics, it demonstrates the implications of Bill C-36, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (brought into law on December 6, 2014), for sex workers and those around them.²

Newsgames are not objective pieces of journalism. Rather, they take an editorial position through their game mechanics (Treanor and Mateas). They attempt to show particular aspects of a system at work in a given news event, story, or ongoing social issue. Demonstrating how the system works not only requires extensive knowledge of the system itself but requires that designers make choices about how the game

play operates, which necessarily foregrounds particular elements of a story. Journalists write stories according to established news values and generic conventions driven by form and medium that favor particular ways of telling stories; similarly, games use rules of game play as part of their storytelling repertoire.³ For instance, the commonly cited example of *September 12th* uses a simple mechanic to show the philosophy that reckless bombing with collateral damage leads only to more terrorism (Bogost; Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer). It is a small one-screen game. It presents an overhead orthogonal view of a section of a Middle Eastern city, complete with tiny people wandering the streets. Most of those people are civilians; some are terrorists. Your mouse places a crosshair over the city. Clicking on the city drops a bomb. Buildings are destroyed. People die. There is crying and wailing. The more dead people and destroyed property, the more the terrorists appear. The point of *September 12th* is its procedural logic. As long as the only way of interacting with a population is through a gunsight, the only result will be more violence. Clive Thompson has described it as “an op-ed composed not of words but of action” (“Saving the World”).

As such, video games studies, especially the portion of it that focuses on procedural rhetoric and platform studies, can provide invaluable insights into the nature of newsgames (see Bogost; Bogost and Montfort; Konzack; Montfort, as well as various titles from Bogost and Montfort’s Platform Studies series at the MIT Press). However, game studies by itself does not provide the sort of critical context necessary to describe the history and politics of the newsgame form. For that, we turned to the longer history of cultural studies and feminist criticism, especially in light of their welcome invocation in recent significant texts in digital humanities.

Proceeding from the work of cultural criticism within journalism studies and cultural studies (see, for instance, Hall; Hall et al.; Jiwani; Skinner, Gasher, and Compton) and the work of feminist cultural critics (e.g., Balsamo; Nakamura; Nakamura and Chow-White), our project seeks to answer Alan Liu’s call to use digital tool-making in the service of cultural criticism (“Where Is the Cultural Criticism”). Liu’s challenge to scholars in the field to “extend their critique to the full register of society, economics, politics, or culture” was a turning point in the field, even if it marked a familiar point of departure for games studies scholars (Fernández-Vara). It extends the work of digital scholars committed to a digital humanities that recognizes and demands that we acknowledge the ways difference is marked in the digital spaces we make and tools we use (see, for instance, Cong-Huyen; McPherson; Risam; and Wernimont, “Introduction,” “Whence Feminism?,” to name only a few). Making a newsgame about sex workers in Canada is explicitly also making an argument about the kinds of subjects that digital humanities can address, and the forms that it can use to address those subjects. It also highlights the terrain journalists routinely must tread as they attempt to represent controversial and extremely complex topics.

Newsgames don't operate like most video games. They don't even have to be fun; discovery through play is a common technique in game design used in a variety of games that attempts to compel players to keep playing long enough to determine why the game operates the way it does. In other words, play is also about understanding how a game builds its argument. This approach leads players to engage with particular news stories rather than remaining disinterested in their outcome. The text that introduces *September 12th* on Games for Change, the site that hosts it, claims, "The game's main goal was not to convince people that the War on Terror was wrong. Instead, it aimed at triggering discussion among young players. Indeed, that's what happened in multiple online forums" (Games for Change). Opinions about the game have always been polarized, but as Bruno Latour points out, controversies are the bread and butter of contemporary scholarship. Indeed, the production of news-games bears a strong family resemblance to some forms of Actor-Network Theory (a major interdisciplinary paradigm that emerged from sociology to play significant roles in cultural studies and science and technology studies over the last several decades). Both ANT and newsgames begin at the site of controversies, attempt to identify the major actors involved and the connections between them, and identify procedures that would allow the sites of those controversies to be "remapped" into some sort of new, more desirable state (Latour, 21, 23).

In both form and practice, *The Oldest Game* challenges conventional representations of sex work and sex workers in games, and prohibitionist views of sex work, which, as Robin Maynard writes, see it as "inherently violent and exploitative, and propose instead that a carceral, prohibitionist approach must be taken to eliminate [it]" (Maynard).

Incorporating the perspective of sex workers into a game's mechanics is a powerful example of what Bogost describes as "procedural rhetoric" and what Flanagan and colleagues describe as "values-conscious" (or "value-sensitive") game design. Procedural rhetoric is a type of rhetoric that is tied explicitly to the core of what games do: building processes that manipulate symbols according to a set of rules. Through the way that they enact these rules, games can express a rhetoric, a persuasive argument. Much like a political cartoon, a well-designed newsgame encourages critical reflection, mobilizing its formal mechanics to communicate an editorial stance and persuade players to take a position, particularly when faced with purposeful choices about how to handle a given situation (Treanor and Mateas). By allowing players to experience the consequences of choices, games can explore systems and dynamic relationships (Anthropy).

Building immersive experiences can have the effect of eliciting greater empathy (Belman and Flanagan), especially toward the subjects of news stories, many of whom rarely appear as actors in conventional news and are represented in narrow, stigmatized ways (see, e.g., Comella; Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips, and Benoit; Hallgrimsdottir et al.; Jiwani and Young; McLaughlin; Mendes and Silva). Editorial

newsgames that have a strong bias have been shown to be particularly successful, and demonstrate a long shelf life: “social comment games often cover highly visible, ongoing public policy issues, thus they remain relevant as long as a situation persists” (Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer). Moreover, as Miguel Sicart has argued, newsgames also play a role in participating in the public debate about the issues they cover. Newsgames, then, do not pretend to be neutral bits of news reporting. In the face of a game industry that typically represents sex workers as the abject victims of horrendous violence (Dill et al.), making a game that represents a sex worker as a purposeful agent making choices who perceives neither herself nor her colleagues as victims is already taking a stand.

These ideas about the ideological foundation of games connects with the general principle within science-technology studies, the philosophy of technology and culture, and the critical digital humanities—particularly within the feminist literature—that assert that all technical systems embody values (Drucker, *SpecLab*). Knowing the limited range of representations that existed in both news media and in mainstream games, we set out to design *The Oldest Game* with a mandate to do representation differently. In the methodologies adopted in the game-making process and the scenarios produced in the game, this project has sought to explicitly answer the call put out by Elizabeth Losh (“What Can the Digital Humanities”) to develop a “paradigm of process and performance in which the network of power formations moves from ground to figure.” From the outset, the team that built *The Oldest Game* (a sex worker hired on contract, undergraduate and graduate students, and two tenured faculty) sought to embody feminist principles of knowledge production by incorporating the expertise of sex workers and advocates themselves through their published research and perspectives on the game’s design during playtesting.

We followed a participatory design process where users became participants in the design process by following an iterative cycle of game design between playtesting prototypes. Marilyne, a sex worker who had worked as a massage parlor worker (and became an owner of a parlor during her work with us) and a self-employed escort was hired to act as a consultant on the game. This was a first principle of feminist game design in that we explicitly sought to use our seed funding from the university to hire her for her expertise as a worker with a range of experiences in the fields we were describing and as an advocate for sex worker rights. Paying her for her time was a given. We also explicitly sought out sex workers to be part of the early phases of playtesting and made a point of visiting at least one massage parlor in the city, a visit that Marilyne facilitated, in order to better understand how this type of sex work took place.⁴ As Mary Flanagan, Daniel Howe, and Helen Nissenbaum write, “Playtesting can be a time to discover and verify values in a particular game design” (“Values at Play,” 754). However, we quickly learned from our playtesting with sex workers that the values our playtesters wanted to see were far from uniform, sometimes conflicted with good game design, and were sometimes simply impossible to represent.

A game exploring sex work and Bill C-36 is a ripe target for further controversy. GamerGaters are always ready to attack explicitly feminist games, while abolitionist feminists were very active in the debates leading to the passage of the bill and even have much of their language enshrined in the legal text of the bill.⁵ This chapter explores our team's iterative design process, describing the risks inherent in such a project, particularly at a historical moment when a misogyny, vitriol, hate, and doxing were common practices online, especially directed at feminists and feminist game designers and players. Our process was an explicit attempt to valorize the experiences of sex workers, who often challenged us to do better. It continually forced us to reconsider our categories of knowledge and practices of knowledge making based on the feedback we received (Alcoff; McPherson). The process also forced us to confront issues implicit in the digital representation of knowledge.

If the practice of making newsgames involves shaping topical stories according to the contours of an appropriate procedural rhetoric, it could arguably be described as part of the field of knowledge representation. As John Unsworth argues, knowledge representation is “an interdisciplinary methodology that combines logic and ontology to produce models of human understanding that are tractable to computation” (“Knowledge Representation”). Following the work of John Sowa, Unsworth describes a three-part structure to this methodology, consisting of logic, ontology, and computability. “Logic disciplines the representation, but is content-neutral. Ontology expresses what one knows about the nature of the subject matter, and does so within the discipline of logic’s rules. Computability puts logic and ontology to the test, by producing a second-order representation that validates and parses the ontology and the logic of the knowledge representation” (“Knowledge Representation”). Unsworth contends that the value of such a project for humanities scholars lies in its heuristic function: “because the rigor it requires will bring to our attention undocumented features of our own ideation” (“Knowledge Representation”). Subjecting the experiences of sex workers to the logic of game code—how much value a “risky” choice has over a “safe” choice, weighing safety over health or financial security—forces the design team to confront the situatedness of the variables of the constructs themselves: what is risky in one context changes in another; what is risky for one body type, skin color, or ethnicity is not the same for another.

If the use of computers and the programming that it entails is novel, Unsworth's closing sentiment is not; it is, in fact, a very familiar, Innisian notion: the idea that close attention to the bias of a given media form, especially an unfamiliar one, might allow us to locate our own critical blind spots through the application of a comparative framework. Inevitably (and Unsworth acknowledges this too), this will also be lost, but that's how media bias works. A newsgame will make some aspects of a complex story visible while obscuring or ignoring others. Our wager is that the process of fitting our research on sex work (ontology) into the procedure of the game form (logic) in a way that makes it playable by others (computation) adds a dimension to the story that has been obscured until now. Certainly the ongoing process of making

the game has been useful for us in terms of identifying our own blind spots. After a brief review of conventional representations of sex work and sex workers in news and mainstream games, we explore two issues that arose through our test sessions with self-identified gamers and sex workers.

Sex Work in Journalism

A goal of the project from the outset has been to engage the problem of how to tell the story of sex workers differently and engage in a public dialogue about sex work differently than conventional news coverage has historically. Media accounts for the most part have adopted a neutral viewpoint that sought to balance arguments for the legalization of prostitution with arguments against it, providing the reader with little guidance as to how to evaluate the validity of each side in relationship to the lived experiences of sex workers. The classic limitation of neutral reporting—what media scholar Jay Rosen has described as the “view from nowhere” (“View from Nowhere”)—is that it produces news coverage that leaves the readers themselves disengaged from the issue under scrutiny. This is especially problematic when dealing with the issue of sex work, since the discourses surrounding it are often couched in a moralizing discourse that either infantilizes sex workers who require rescuing or dismisses sex workers’ needs, since they are not seen as virtuous women and thus in need of basic protections (Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips, and Benoit; Hallgrimsdottir et al.; Jiwani and Young; McLaughlin). Other key findings from research on news representations of sex work have found that street sex work is overrepresented in the news media, leaving citizens with a fairly narrow sense of the range of work entailed in sex work (Jiwani and Young; Van Brunschot et al.; see also Grant). Violence is almost always associated with sex work, and it represented rare moments when sex workers’ voices were actually heard (though this level of representation shifted in coverage of Bill C-36). Generally speaking, sex workers are not sources of expertise in news stories, but rather are called on for their personal experiences. Sex workers are often seen as vectors of contagion, whether of community or psychological malaise, disease or criminality. Hallgrimsdottir and colleagues found that there has been a shift over time from focusing on the risk sex workers pose to the public, to sex workers’ “risky” behavior. This conveys the message that sex workers are to blame for the dangers they face, “offering them up as the appropriate target for legal and moral intervention” (“Sporting Girls” 133).

Sex Work in Games

In games, one of the central issues with how sex workers are typically represented is that they are almost always non-player-characters (NPCs) and therefore lack any agency of their own beyond the game’s built-in artificial intelligence. Their presence in the game is exclusively as something to be interacted with, and often even more

reductively, something to be acted upon. These portrayals are often sensationalist, clichéd, and heavily coded in violence.

Representations of sex workers in video games date back at least to the 1980s. *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards* and *PimpWars*, a 1987 version of the venerable *Star Trader* arbitrage game, present the most stereotypical end of the spectrum of sex-worker representation in video games, as “hookers” to be bedded or “hoes” to be infested with diseases or stolen from your enemies with crack. *Porky’s*, the unlikely Atari 2600 tie-in of the Canadian teen comedy film of the same name, featured a level set in the eponymous bar that required the player to avoid foes such as strippers while planting dynamite to blow up the club.⁶

The most well-known contemporary examples of portrayals of sex workers in video games comes from the *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* series. It is possible for players to hire a sex worker, then recuperate their money by killing her, in no fewer than four titles: *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Vice City*, *Liberty City Stories*, and *Vice City Stories*. In later games, more choices are introduced: players have options in how they respond to solicitations; interactions are longer and more complex (including specifying services); and multiple voice actors play a wider range of sex worker characters. Yet, if a player stands near a sex worker too long without interacting with her in *GTA V*, she will ask him to leave. But not respecting her request is rewarded with a “star,” a metric that will positively alter interactions between police and player.

In *Hitman: Absolution*, women who work at the Vixen bar are forced into prostitution by bar owner Dom Osmond, who controls them with threats of violence. The threat of violence is real, as players can kill sex workers throughout the game and then distract the police by strategically disposing of their bodies. *Red Dead Redemption* offers the player the option to rescue these women: in one scene, a man is beating a sex worker outside a saloon and the player can intervene; in another, a man is pictured carrying off a hogtied sex worker and a player can intervene then too. However, should a player put that hogtied sex worker on nearby train tracks and allow a train to run her over, the player earns a secret achievement known as the “dastardly” trophy. Sex workers—or “hos,” as they’re called in *Saints Row: The Third*—are often portrayed with their pimps, and kidnapping them is often central to several missions. In virtually all Triple A games we surveyed, when sex workers appear, they are never represented with agency, they are frequently the subject of violence, and actions done to them are often a mechanism for unlocking secret game play or points. No matter the game, she (and, she is overwhelmingly female) is never represented with dignity.

Designing The Oldest Game

Given the limited range of representations of sex workers in games, it was crucial that we offered an alternative to these portrayals of sex workers in *The Oldest Game*. In particular, we focused on their lack of agency (players typically interact with sex

workers or adopt their appearance in games as a disguise but are never asked to play from their character or position), the lack of empathy players are encouraged to have for sex workers (their characters are often used for titillation, plot device, currency, or humor), representing only a single type of sex work (street work) and reducing their work to a simple cost/gain interaction.

In *The Oldest Game*, players assume the role of Andrea. In playing from her perspective, her complexity and agency are reinforced with every decision the player makes. She controls every interaction with clients, and chooses how to respond to every consequence and random event. Rather than the player character walking up to and interacting with a sex worker, the NPCs are the clients; this completely changes the representations of most sex workers' agency in commercial games.

Putting the player in Andrea's shoes was also crucial to developing empathy between her and the player. We also made an effort to develop a sense of Andrea's personality and personal life outside of her job as well—portraying her relationship with her family and colleagues, building in choices around interactions with friends, even giving small glimpses into the potential for romantic relationships. We wanted the player to identify with Andrea, to feel for the choices she is asked to make and be moved to make the best choices possible under the various conditions that she faces.

We also chose to represent sex work in several different forms, each tied to a specific city: in Montreal, Andrea works in a massage studio; in Toronto, she works from home as an independent escort; and in Vancouver, she does street work. Each situation presents different challenges and choices, and the scenarios are structured differently to reflect these. For example, in Montreal, clients are screened for players by a receptionist, while in Vancouver players have to choose to interact with clients before or after getting in their car. But in Toronto, contact is established through email and, after running potential clients through a Bad Date database, players can choose to meet the clients in a nearby hotel. Players must then choose whether to ask their driver to wait for them (thereby incurring greater costs) or send him on his way. By representing different types of sex work and the myriad of choices that are circumscribed by geography and opportunities to evaluate potential dates, we hoped to offer alternatives to the often extremely narrow view portrayed in games, which is generally limited to street work and always with little to no agency given to the sex worker characters.

We equally wanted to present a more robust sense of Andrea as a character not only to elicit more empathy for her but to recognize the fullness of sex workers' lives outside of work. We added a pop-up, for instance, that informs players that it's time to do their taxes. The pop-up provides common tax problems that sex workers who wish to claim taxes face at tax time. At one point, players have the option to spend money to buy a present for a sister's birthday, to take a night off and go on a date (or have a coffee in the afternoon), or spend a night with a friend watching Netflix, and we included dialogue with other sex workers, particularly in the massage parlor, where socialization happens frequently between clients. We used these

scenarios as well to recognize the intersectional and varied nature of sex work. Dialogue between these characters (who are all named) and Andrea reference fears of being caught without legal papers to work, opportunities to take drugs, the presence of pimps, issues of doing sex work while transgender, and a fear that an indigenous colleague has gone missing.

What ended up being most complicated, however, was how to handle the actual mechanics of the game in a way that also served these goals and dissuaded the player from metagaming, or “gaming the game.” Initially, we did this by removing any traces of traditional systems of metrics from the game entirely. Aside from keeping track of money earned and spent, there were none of the bars or meters to indicate progress, resources, or health status that games typically use as an index of success and progress. These were represented only in Andrea’s changing expression (a nod to the original *DOOM*’s method of indicating injury through facial expression), which would become more haggard and stressed when she was tired or in debt. The idea was to privilege the emotive and narrative connection over one developed through interaction and to keep the focus on Andrea’s story rather than making the players feel as though they wanted to “win.” We wanted to discourage playing to the metrics, rather than playing for Andrea’s well-being (which wasn’t always the same thing).

Through playtesting, however, we found that the lack of metrics actually hindered the player’s ability to identify and empathize with Andrea. In our first feedback sessions, playtesters noted that the lack of clearly visible metrics prevented them from evaluating a sense of how they were “progressing in the game.”⁷ More importantly, what we discovered was that the metrics served an important pedagogical function: they helped us to demonstrate what was in Andrea’s best interests or what were typical consequences for particular kinds of choices. One playtester noted that their lack of presence encouraged them to care about Andrea less, noting “there is no sense of urgency, I never need to spend money on food, or pay my debt off, or incur unexpected costs” and “when bad things happen there are no long-term or cumulative effects,” which led to no pressure to make any risky decisions at all. Conversely, we also heard that “the lack of irreversible consequences” made it more likely for players to engage in risky behavior. This feedback led to our choosing to put these metrics back in, to engender empathy and give a sense of measurable consequences when it came to choices made. That is, money often comes at the cost of health and well-being.

Another area of *The Oldest Game* that presented challenges in terms of bringing balance to our representations of sex work was the element of risk. One of the elements that Marilyne, our sex work consultant, insisted on from the outset was that the interaction not skew overwhelmingly toward the negative. Her instruction, based on her own experiences and perspective on sex work, was that most interactions with clients generally proceed without incident, are occasionally banal, often neither traumatic nor exciting, with exceptionally good or bad clients in the minority.

Based on the feedback that we received from the last round of playtests, however, we had swung the pendulum too far toward the positive. Sex workers who later played the game referred to the “lack of consequences” as a barrier to both the realism and enjoyment of the game. In not wanting to portray sex work as sensationalist and negative, we eliminated the sense of urgency and real risk that is necessary to create a sense of tension in gameplay but also to give a sense of the specific work-related challenges experienced by the sex workers we sought to represent. Subsequent revisions of the game have introduced additional challenges and consequences, especially when health and happiness metrics get too low, to create a more nuanced portrayal of the difficult choices sex workers are often forced to make. For example, we added a random number generator to both Toronto and Vancouver in order to recognize the constant potential for police surveillance. One script in Vancouver involving a police officer specifically referenced helping Andrea get “cleaned up”:

OFFICER. The street is no place for you, honey. Why don't you let me take you somewhere you can get yourself cleaned up and off the street?

ANDREA. Are you kidding me? I certainly don't need any help from those people! I can take care of myself.

OFFICER. It's never too late to change your mind. I'll ask you next time I see you. If you're still alive, that is.

This randomized scenario was an important addition for recognizing the explicit bias toward “saving” sex workers, both in terms of common attitudes among the general population and law enforcement and explicitly within the language of Bill C-36. The final revisions to the game will include a pop-up that will reference the recent coverage of police assaulting sex workers, which led many to call for discussion of the issue at the federal inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (Macdonald).

Adding numeric values to the metrics was a key way to demonstrate consequences. After our last round of playtesting with sex workers, we added a scenario where Andrea gets a sexually transmitted infection. A pop-up informs players that they have lost money because of time off work to go to the health clinic and to purchase the needed medication. There is also a hit, however, in terms of mood and health. In addition to giving the option to have intercourse without a condom, we provided other opportunities to engage in risky behavior such as being hired for group sex. Should a player choose to take the clients, the financial gain is substantial; however, there is a slight consequence in terms of mood and health in order to recognize the toll that the stress and worry of the *potential* for violence pose and the fatigue that comes with this kind of work. Emerging out of our iterative game design process, these changes to the mechanics of the game forced recognition of our knowledge assumptions and ontological choices that prescribe a particular point of view in the game.

Many sex workers do not believe sex work is inherently violent; rather, they point to criminalization, stigmatization, and misogyny as sources of violence (Benoit and Shumka). The difficulty of representing the lack of consequences for systemic misogyny and police indifference, let alone (sexual) assaults and abuse committed by police, have posed a particular design challenge for our team. One respondent's feedback was particularly instructive. When asked what was the one thing they would change about the game, the respondent wrote,

More consequences. One thing I appreciate is that the actual sex acts weren't porn-ified and the game focused on the before and after. It was appreciated, trust me. I really appreciated that my character wasn't raped.

But in general, there just weren't any consequences—jail? STI's? Threats of violence? If you don't "choose" well, you're at risk. And it's not the work that puts you at risk, it is the complete lack of protection for sex workers' rights. The government and law enforcement doesn't do anything to protect us so we have to be hyper-vigilant. For someone like me, it was easy because I just "got it" but for many sex workers, it can be very difficult. There are men out there who know how difficult to can to [*sic*] prosecute crimes against sex workers and they exploit the sex workers because of it.

It's not the work that puts us in danger, it is the fact that there are no consequences. Men think they can rape us or beat us up and get away with it and the sad fact is, they can.

This respondent was a self-identified frequent game player and thus, the respondent's comments about not being raped clearly reference the common tropes found in typical game play that involve sex work. But as a newsgame, the target demographic here is not dedicated game players specifically, though they will obviously be part of the audience for the game. Though we have adjusted our metrics to better reflect the possibility of experiencing some negative consequences when engaging in risky behavior, we also wanted to leave the variability in place because this is precisely the point. Even as sex workers establish a wide range of best practices to ensure the health and safety of sex workers, like any workplace, there are no guarantees that all safeguards will succeed. Further, when faced with the very real need to engage in risky behavior because of lack of funds, not all chances taken end badly. Variability, then, is as much the point of trying to represent the everydayness of these experiences. With the added unpredictability of game play, the experiences and "messages" taken from game play may vary from player to player and length of game play (Consalvo, *Cheating*).

We know that the wide range of perspectives and experiences of sex workers can never be fully represented in one game. Yet the unpredictability and variability of game play also mean that there won't be a singular game experience on the other end. At some level, we must proceed with our design and representational

considerations while remembering Hall's aphorism that in this attempt to represent sex work in a game, we are practicing "politics without guarantees" (Hall, *Representation and the Media*).

We want to highlight that the risks embedded in the game extended outside the game too, especially to the team: our sex worker consultant had not yet revealed her profession to her family. We held off on releasing the trailer on YouTube until she had told her family because she was named as the "consultant" at the end, using her given name. The students working on the project also faced attacks online, especially at the height of GamerGate, but also from virulent antifeminist and anti-sex work public discourse, especially online. Though this risk is nothing like that experienced by sex workers themselves, it's part of what responsible designers must confront in a time of hate. By challenging the classic approach to news reporting through a guise of neutrality (the "view from nowhere," Rosen; Haraway), we've discovered that designing with a "view from somewhere" has meant confronting goals that often conflict.⁸

As a contribution to the creation of a genuinely critical digital humanities, our project strikes at the core of the impossibility of a politics of representation grounded in truth claims. This game cannot be the definitive display of sex work. It cannot show every challenge sex workers face in their intersectionality; it cannot succeed at showing lived experience for everyone. It engages with a very specific piece of legislation from a very specific moment in Canadian history, and the effect that that legislation has had on a portion of the Canadian labor force. Though we have aimed to represent a wider range of racialized and gendered bodies, we worried continuously about charges of tokenism (and rightly so). We still don't know what it means to win at the game, or what it means to lose. We've added some dialogue with a fellow sex worker who references the missing and murdered women in the Vancouver area because it was problematic *not* to recognize this terrifying context for many sex workers in this region. Further, those risks are not even for all sex workers. We know that trans workers (especially trans women) face higher risks for abuse and violence, and that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women are disproportionately disappeared across the country (Benoit and Shumka). But at the same time, putting it into the game runs the risk of reifying that all street work ends up in murder and violence. In other words, once we take seriously Johanna Drucker's imperative to recognize that signification is always done on behalf of someone somewhere (2009), it points to the risky business of gamifying variously marginalized bodies.

At the same time, however, our process and design also lead to specific questions about the promises of newsgames to address issues of representation in journalistic practice itself: is it possible to produce games that capitalize on the currency of news events; avoid the same traps of conventional, stereotypical news coverage; and pay attention to the deep dynamics of game mechanics in a rapid prototyping model? Though the production time of this game has been exceptionally long, how can a feminist commitment to public (or civic)-oriented journalism that seeks to

work alongside community groups fit into a model of more rapid game design like typical journalistic production?⁹ Will an iterative prototyping model that works with the communities being represented have any impact on other forms of journalistic practice?

While one outcome of this project has been to question if journalism in any of its forms can fully represent the experiences of such marginalized populations precisely because their social, political, and economic contexts are so precarious, we have come to realize this perhaps shouldn't be our goal. As Trinh Min-Ha has so eloquently suggested, rather than speak for, one true contribution of a project like this to the larger project of expanding knowledges within the digital humanities may be to find a multitude of ways of "speaking nearby": "In other words, a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition" (Chen, 86–87). A truly feminist contribution to a digital humanities that engages marginalized communities seeks not moments of closure in its acts of representation; it, in fact, resists closure as a goal. Yet, though we value games and other immersive journalistic forms for their ability to create empathy, we have also become acutely aware of how readily the game can slip into a state of knowingness whereby singular experiences become generalized, like in much conventional journalism. "Speaking nearby" has meant making space for a dialogue about leaving sex work, even though the government framed the legislation, with the support of abolitionist feminists, as promoting this end state as the only desirable outcome. "Speaking nearby" has meant making space for violence, pleasure, flirtation, and abuse in uncomfortable ways, in unpredictable ways. It's meant providing a view from somewhere recognizable, even if not fully knowable from the outside.

Notes

The author wishes to thank the reviewers for their generous and thoughtful comments on this essay; this essay is stronger for their efforts. The author also wishes to thank Concordia University for seed funding for this project.

1. The project is led by Sandra Gabriele at Concordia University. Lisa Lynch, formerly of the Department of Journalism, was a co-investigator on the project in its earliest stages. The project was possible only because of the amazing work of a group of talented students who researched, coded, designed the graphics, wrote the scenarios, created the soundscapes, ran the play tests, and contributed to the overall design of the game: Martin Desrosier, Jennifer Sunahara, Natalie Zina Walschots, Amanda Feder, Eileen Holowka, Sadie Couture, Esther Splett, Marilyn Sugiarto, Stephanie Goddard, Rebecca Waldie, and Ben Spencer. See theoldestgame.com for a trailer of the game and the latest blog posts.

2. Bill C-36 is formally known as the “Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act. An Act to amend the Criminal Code in response to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Attorney General of Canada v. Bedford* and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.” It arose after the Supreme Court ruled that the laws surrounding sex work (selling sex itself was not, and is still not, illegal) were unconstitutional because they made it impossible for sex workers to avoid breaking the law. Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin wrote in the 9–0 decision, “Parliament has the power to regulate against nuisances, but not at the cost of the health, safety and lives of prostitutes,” further noting, “it is not a crime in Canada to sell sex for money” (CBC News, “Supreme Court”). Three laws in particular were struck down and formed the basis for game play in *The Oldest Game*: prohibitions against keeping a bawdy house, living on the avails of prostitution, and communicating for the purposes of prostitution.

3. For example, stories that appear in the pages of the daily newspaper often follow an inverted pyramid style, while weekend newspapers offer a variety of writing styles and layout that are distinct from their weekday counterparts.

4. One issue that came up with playtesting done in spring 2015 was paying sex worker playtesters for their time. Though our budget was limited, we were prepared to pay these playtesters for their time using a similar logic to hiring Marilynne as a consultant on game design. Unfortunately, the university research ethics committee determined that paying the playtesters would constitute a major revision to our Ethics Certificate and would warrant an application to alter the conditions of our ethics approval. In the interest of proceeding with the playtesting, we opted not to pursue this avenue, but are doing so for the final playtesting session as a way of recognizing the expertise of sex workers and that their time should be compensated.

5. For those unfamiliar with the Gamergate phenomenon, see Lewis, “Gamergate,” for a brief introduction; Consalvo, “Confronting,” and Chess and Shaw, “Conspiracy of Fishes,” among others, explore its implications for feminist game scholars.

6. *PimpWars* should not be confused with *Pimp War* published by Happy Empire Inc. Launched in 1999, it now has over a million “pimps” registered on the site. As the website explains under the watchful gaze of a racialized pimp conventionally dressed: “You will become a master at the art of pimping your hoes, commanding your thugs and battling your enemies to protect what you have and to help your empire grow. This game is NOT for whiners. PimpWar players have 5000 ways to call you a bitch ass. So if you think you can handle it we suggest you get a couple friends together so you are not alone in this bad bad place and then bring yo bad self.” (*Pimp Wars* [video game], <http://www.pimpwar.com/>).

7. Losh, “In Country,” describes the development of a trust meter in *Tactical Iraqi*, a military training game designed to enhance language acquisition of spoken Arabic to facilitate deploying soldiers. The trust meter was developed by the game designers in order to provide immediate feedback to the player, yet also had the effect of teaching the critical skill of establishing trust in dialogue.

8. Though Rosen is describing journalistic practice specifically, my point here is highly indebted to Donna Haraway's specific mobilization of the phrase to describe the political implications of speaking from situated knowledges.

9. The long production time in many ways is a product of building games within an academic and professional context: Lisa Lynch left Concordia; our student team members graduated or left their programs of study, necessitating hiring new students; our sex work consultant purchased her own massage parlor with her partner and subsequently had a child; and the lead investigator was maintaining a demanding service position as chair of her department, and now as a senior administrator.

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PART I

MATERIALITY

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“Danger, Jane Roe!”*Material Data Visualization as Feminist Praxis*

KIM BRILLANTE KNIGHT

It was 2009 at the Modern Language Association (MLA). The air in Philadelphia was cool and crisp and there were sparse patches of seasoned snow on the ground. It was the last year that the MLA convention would be held during the week between the Christmas and New Year holidays. It was the year that William Pannacker famously declared digital humanities “the first ‘next big thing’ in a long time.” It was also my first year on the academic job market and I was at the conference for the sole purpose of interviewing. . . . It was a strange year. I was anxious at the thought of seeing people who might be interviewing me, or against whom I might be competing for jobs, or who were even affiliated with departments where I had applied. In truth, *I* was strange. I had intended to mostly avoid the conference itself. However, all of this strangeness brought along with it a tenacious case of insomnia. Early one morning, I found myself wide awake. My roommates were sleeping peacefully. My interviews were over. There was nothing left for which to prepare. So it was that despite my intention of staying away, I found myself at an early digital humanities session at the conference. As I sat at the back of the room, curled around a disposable coffee cup, listening to a roster of panelists with whose work I was familiar, one phrase sliced through the haze. One of the speakers exhorted the digital humanities audience to “do science better.” I woke right up. The speaker made a compelling argument for why a better understanding of scientific methods was needed in certain kinds of digital humanities work, particularly for those in partnership with scientists or seeking funding from the National Science Foundation. And though I understood the logic of this, I bristled a bit at the idea.

The passage of time alone would be enough to make me doubt the fidelity of my memory. But when you add in the strangeness of that year, I feel compelled to clarify that this may not be an exact quote. Regardless, it has stuck with me. Perhaps if I had gotten a job in a more traditional English or Literature department, I might have quickly forgotten the speaker’s exhortation. Instead, I got a job in a

program where my immediate colleagues include scientists (as well as artists, philosophers, literary scholars, and so forth); where the call to engage interdisciplinary methods and collaboration is heard often; and where projects may be funded by the National Science Foundation, various industries, or the military. Given the promises and challenges of interdisciplinary scholarship and praxis, I have often thought about what it would mean to do science better, as a feminist and a digital humanist. As someone who recognizes the gendered and racialized violence that has been inflicted in the name of science. As someone who initially gravitated toward the humanities because I believe without question in the value of cultural work and the importance of foregrounding humanist perspectives. I have wondered, in those intervening years, whether aligning my work with the digital humanities meant that I was beholden in any way, obligated to do science at all, let alone to “do science better.”

In an overview of feminist approaches to the study of science and technology, Judy Wajcman explains that radical feminist studies of science think that “western technology, like science, is deeply implicated in this masculine project of the domination and control of women and nature” (146). When we consider this as well as the racist, colonialist, and ableist practices of science and medicine, we might revise this slightly to include the domination and control of a range of embattled subjects. The theories of those early radical feminist approaches that Wajcman outlines are based on essentialist ideas about the differing values and strategies of women and men, which are problematic in the way that they constrain all gender identities. Feminist studies of science since have generated more social constructionist approaches that acknowledge a tendency toward an ethos of control and domination in science without ascribing this as an inherent characteristic of either science or masculinity. Still, we are left with the question: does doing science better mean being better at control and domination?

Perhaps, instead of being better *at* these things, doing science better in DH might mean being better *about* these things. Wajcman writes, “The materiality of technology affords or inhibits the doing of particular gender power relations” (150). Perhaps doing science better as digital humanists requires examining the untapped affordances of our digital humanities tools and projects, and making explicit the subtle inhibitions in scientific practice and technological development as they are deployed in humanities contexts. Perhaps it is an opportunity to test McLuhan’s assertions about amateurism versus professionalism:

Professionalism is environmental. Amateurism is anti-environmental. Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment. Amateurism seeks the development of total awareness of the individual and the critical awareness of the groundrules of society. The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and specialize, to accept uncritically the groundrules of the environment. The groundrules provided by the mass

response of his colleagues serve as a pervasive environment of which he is contentedly and [sic] unaware. The “expert” is the man who stays put. (McLuhan and Fiore, 93)

What could happen if, instead of allowing ourselves to be absorbed into total environment, we feminist digital humanists bring our antienvironmental practices to the table? Perhaps, unburdened by the ground rules, “doing science better” means a willingness to *détourn* and deform. *Détournement*, a strategy first employed by the Situationists, uses the preexisting elements of art and culture to critique art and culture themselves; it is a turning in and on (*Internationale Situationniste*). In this context, it would be to use the preexisting elements of science and technology in the process of critique. Deformance, as defined by Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels, is a playful mode of engaging with a literary text that makes explicit the subjective and transformative nature of all interpretive practices. In the case of doing science better, to deform would be to foreground the subjective in opposition to empirical logics of objectivity.

Détourning and Deforming Science in “Danger, Jane Roe!”

There are many ways in which *détournement* and deformance might be conceptualized in this context. Fashioning Circuits, the public humanities project that I organize, joins together scholarship, university teaching, and work in the community, and challenges the environmental norms of science and technology by foregrounding humanist perspectives on the development of wearable technology. Discussion of innovation and Silicon Valley-style “disruption” are tempered with a focus on the social and cultural contexts out of which innovation arises, and the possible downsides to disrupting. Techniques of coding and electronics, familiar in engineering contexts, are defamiliarized when placed in humanities contexts and paired with sewing and other craft methods.

As the instructor of undergraduate and graduate Fashioning Circuits courses, I ask students to produce a wearable object that is theoretically informed or that makes a social statement. In 2013, while the classes were still small enough to be orchestrated through coordinated sections of independent study, I began “Danger, Jane Roe!” as a project on which I could work alongside my students. In that year, U.S. lawmakers enacted 141 pieces of legislation on reproductive health, including seventy that restricted abortion access (Guttmacher Institute).

Like many around the United States, in June of 2013 I sat glued to the livestream broadcast of Texas state senator Wendy Davis engaged in her epic eleven-hour filibuster, an attempt to block legislation that would close most of the abortion providers in the state. As a recent transplant to the Lone Star State, I had a particularly personal investment in this series of events. However, I know that I was not alone in my absolute bewilderment and frustration with ill-informed legislators attempting to institute restrictions on reproductive health, against the will of those whose

bodies were being legislated, against the advice of medical professionals, and against the U.S. Constitution. In commentary on this recent uptick in legislation, Rebecca Traister notes that much of the discourse around abortion sets up a false dichotomy and an adversarial relationship between pregnant person and fetus in which the pregnant individual always ends up as secondary (par. 15). The desires and rights of the individual are diminished in favor of a pro-life stance in which the only life considered to matter is that of the fetus.

So I conceptualized “Danger, Jane Roe!” as a response to the systematic erasure of the voices of those most directly affected by the legislation. The subject of the project title is, of course, Jane Roe of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling. Jane Roe was from Texas, which layers the situatedness of the project as a response to legislation in Texas. The title also makes reference to the catchphrase “Danger, Will Robinson!” from the American television series *Lost in Space*. On the show, a robot would sound its alarm by repeating this phrase whenever the character Will had unknowingly placed himself in harm’s way. The reference is meant to be playful but also to evoke the gender politics of the mid-twentieth century, pre-Roe United States in which the show’s mother character is a doctor (of biochemistry) whose story lines, infuriatingly, hardly deviate from the gender roles ascribed to other 1960s television mothers. In addition, the reference evokes the automated state of constant surveillance of the robot, drawing parallels to contemporary practices of



Figure 1.1. Close-up of embroidery on “Danger, Jane Roe!” Image credit: David Joshua Golden and Rebecca Krusekopf

big data mining and algorithmic profiling. After all, "Danger, Jane Roe!" is wearable data visualization.

EMBROIDERY AS OFF-CENTERING AND CREATING DISJUNCTION

The medium for the visualization is a black t-shirt, onto which I have hand embroidered reproductive organs: a uterus, fallopian tubes, cervix, and part of a vagina (Figure 1.1). Five pink LEDs are placed on the shirt, below the embroidery. The LEDs are controlled by a small microcontroller, also sewn onto the shirt. The lights act as a meter of sorts; the number lit at a given time is based on the number of results from a Twitter search for "#prolife." I spent two months collecting tweets using a TAGS spreadsheet to get a baseline of how many tweets with the hashtag are sent on an average day. If the number of tweets is around average, three of the five lights are lit. The number of lights is higher or lower in response to heavier or lighter tweeting days. The lights evoke systems to signify threat level, such as that used by the National Terrorism Advisory Status. The lights also reference the popular signifying strategies of fitness trackers and other commercial wearable technologies.

"Danger, Jane Roe!" is a data visualization project that, referring back to McLuhan, contests the ground rules. In "When Is Information Visualization Art?" Andrés Ramírez Gaviria troubles the aesthetic/functional binary that is often applied to information visualization, suggesting that even functional visualization generally employs an aesthetic strategy. He further elaborates a distinction between aesthetic and artistic, drilling down to separate genre art (that which fits easily into the art market of institutions such as museums and galleries) from research art (that which emphasizes innovation and experimentation and refuses incorporation). At the heart of these distinctions is a difference in the organizing logic of functional versus artistic research data visualization. Functional visualization tends to have the goal of frictionless transmission of information-at-a-glance. In contrast, artistic data visualizations, according to Gaviria, "reframe canonized structures by off-centering consensus" as they work "not to resolve but to question or restructure issues" through strategies that are neither "easily decipherable nor aesthetically pleasing so long as they are reflectively interesting" (482). An artistic data visualization, in its refusal of understanding, calls into question the very notion of an objective and efficient transmission of information. From a feminist standpoint, it does science better. While I make no claims about the project's status as art or its success in reframing, I do suggest that "Danger, Jane Roe!" is left of the functional center. It aspires toward Gaviria's suggestion that artistic data visualization does not employ clarity or transmissibility as a mode but rather provokes a visceral or emotive response from the viewer, foregrounding subjectivity in contrast to the aims of science.¹ One of the ways this is accomplished is through the shirt's visual strategies.

The embroidery of reproductive anatomy is prominently featured on the shirt, demanding notice. The amateur quality of the embroidery gives the project a feel



Figure 1.2. “Danger, Jane Roe!” circuit. Image credit: David Joshua Golden and Rebecca Krusekopf.

that is a reference to the DIY ethos of punk and zine culture. My intention is to call to mind groups such as riot grrls, Pussy Riot, and the GynePunk collective in order to invoke a rawness that challenges the machinic perfection of data collection and functional visualization. There is a second kind of stitching in “Danger, Jane Roe!,” that of the conductive thread that connects the LEDs to the microcontroller, and the microcontroller to the battery holder (Figure 1.2). I’ve purposefully left the stitches visible. In their visibility the gray stitches of the conductive thread act as embellishment in concert with the various pink stitches of the reproductive organs, but they also serve a performative function. Yasmin B. Kafai and Kylie A. Pepler argue that the visible stitching of e-textiles can make explicit the workings of a circuit (specifically, polarity, connectivity, and flow) in ways that are obscured by other types of electronics kits (184). Thus the multiple modes of needlework in “Danger, Jane Roe!” operate together to lend the work a raw, exposed feel.

Rozsika Parker notes that in Western culture, embroidery was originally done by men, but since the sixteenth century it has been associated with femininity and domesticity (60). As a domestic technology, or if not precisely a technology then a medium, embroidery typically brings to mind notions such as intricacy, delicacy, and ornament. The genteel and feminine associations with embroidery form a disjunction when it is used to depict reproductive organs, that is, body parts often associated with abjection, menstruation, and the emotions that result from

hormonal fluctuation. These are body parts that are often considered unmentionable in polite company, or even in some legislative spaces.² There is a further disjunction when the embroidery is the technological mechanism. The embroidery is thus multivalent and disjunctive: at one and the same time it references traditional notions of feminine domesticity, while also invoking DIY subversion, messiness, and imperfection. It also challenges the legacy of associations between technology and normative masculinity, expanding the technological foundations of the electronics project to include a genealogy of craft and gendered domestic technologies.

LILYPAD AND COUNTERDISCOURSE

Furthering the associative disjunction is the microcontroller that is controlling the LEDs. Arduino is an open-source amateur electronics platform that is widely used in DIY projects, including quite a few robotics applications. The LilyPad, an Arduino intended for wearable applications, was developed by Dr. Leah Buechley, founder of the High-Low Tech group at MIT. Lacking the sharp edges of a standard microcontroller, the LilyPad is flat, round, and purple, featuring silver “petals” instead of the typical black plastic square pins found on an Arduino board. Though connections to the LilyPad can be soldered, the petals are designed specifically for sewing connections with conductive thread. Given the departure in both terminology and material form from the typical Arduino board, we must consider what “particular gender power relations” (Wajcman, 150) are enabled by the LilyPad.

Buechley has been critiqued for her assertion that the LilyPad may bring colorful, soft, and beautiful applications to the world of engineering (Buechley and Hill, 206). For instance, Susan Ryan writes that Buechley and Benjamin Mako Hill’s characterization of the LilyPad “hints at enclosing female techno-crafters in nostalgic but preposterous stereotypes.” I want to push back a bit on the suggestion that the LilyPad constrains users according to essentialist gender stereotypes. It is certainly true that there exist a number of clumsy attempts to attract women to tech culture. I have critiqued more than one on my blog.³ Elizabeth Losh has coined a delightful turn of phrase to describe them as a whole: the “ridiculous, pink, sparkly techno-princess land” (quoted in Brown, “How Not to Attract Women”). However, I am not sure that is what is going on with the LilyPad.

In the same paper in which they call for an infusion of softness, Buechley and Hill engage with the work of Jane Margolis and Allan Fisher in *Unlocking the Clubhouse*, an oft-cited work on how to make the boy’s “clubhouse” of computing culture more accessible to women. Buechley and Hill suggest a slightly different approach. Keeping the clubhouse metaphor, they advocate for building new clubhouses instead of trying to fit the needs and perspectives of women into existing clubhouses. In outlining the benefits of this approach, they write that existing spaces are “limited in breadth—both intellectually and culturally” and that new clubhouses “question traditional disciplinary boundaries” and “expand disciplines to make room for more

diverse interests and passions” (206). The problem with the “pink, sparkly, techno-princess land” (Losh, quoted in Brown, “How Not to Attract Women”) is that all of that sparkle is only surface deep. There is nothing inherently wrong with sparkle or pink. But when it is slapped on otherwise normative tech, in response to the assumption that it is the aesthetics of technology that discourages diverse participation, it is pandering. However, Buechley is describing a more foundational shift. It is one that we might read in light of Wacjman’s paraphrase of Harding’s question, “how a science apparently so deeply involved in distinctively masculine projects can possibly be used for emancipatory ends” (Buechley and Hill, 146). It is antienvironmental, to refer back to McLuhan.

Buechley and Hill may not say so explicitly, but they are describing counterpublic formation. Nancy Fraser defines subaltern counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67). Buechley and Hill have found evidence that the LilyPad is successful in attracting members of subordinated social groups: the percentage of women who purchase and use LilyPad Arduinos is higher than the percentage of women who use the other types of Arduinos, and interviewees credit the LilyPad with helping them to overcome cultural barriers to electronics and coding (Buechley and Hill, 202–3).⁴ As with any Arduino, working with the LilyPad requires an understanding of electrical principles and a willingness to engage with code. I mentioned earlier that Kafai and Peppler found that the LilyPad fosters even greater understanding of these concepts because the material construction of the circuit is tangible in its visibility. Elsewhere, Kylie Peppler and Diane Glosson suggest that the LilyPad explicitly refuses the competitive ethos of other electronics kits that are used primarily in robotics, and that the increased time it takes one to work with e-textiles, including the time to stitch a circuit, results in more sustained and enriched reflection on the part of participants (82). The counterpublic developed through Buechley and Hill’s alternate clubhouse is not a mere compartmentalizing of dominant spaces in order to mark off safe terrain. Buechley and Hill’s clubhouse might actually be better. At the very least, it is a space in which a different set of power relations emerges from the affordances of the technology.

I acknowledge that there is a danger here of creating spaces that are dismissed as being of secondary importance in relation to more mainstream computing publics. This is a tension that many who are women, trans, gender nonconforming, people of color, queer, and/or crip in academia face in our decisions about whether to devote our time to interactions with small groups of allies or focus our energies on the sometimes exhausting or demoralizing interactions with the wider institution. Fortunately, this is not an either/or proposition. Fraser theorizes this tension as being the source of the emancipatory potential of counterpublics: the relatively safe space of communing within a counterpublic supports members in their efforts to engage with wider publics (68). The work done in Buechley’s alternate clubhouse

may enable participants to engage with and challenge dominant publics. Further, we must consider the extent to which the "danger" of creating a devalued space is due to an actual qualitative deficit, as opposed to its failure to align with cultures of patriarchy that devalue craft, sewing, and other work typically associated with femininity and domesticity. Therefore, I suggest a reading of Buechley's aims not as pandering, but as an attempt to do science better. As an associate professor of computer science and founder and former director of MIT's High-Low computing group, Buechley is undoubtedly familiar with what authors such as Wajcman, Janet Abbate, and Ruth Oldenziel describe as the masculinist world of engineering. Her call for an infusion of the soft and the beautiful into engineering contexts is not an attempt to water down engineering, but rather an attempt to resituate the ground rules. My use of the LilyPad as a feminist and a digital humanist is informed by the material differences and the possible counterdiscourses that arise from power relations enabled by the LilyPad.

The LilyPad layers the associations between the embroidery and stitching of "Danger, Jane Roe!" and a gendered history of domestic and craftwork. The gendered implications are extended when we consider the LilyPad as an electronic device. Recently, there have been well-publicized issues around the ethics of global manufacturing, with particular attention paid to labor practices in factories contracted by Apple and other hardware producers. Any microcontroller would raise this issue, but the gendered associations with the LilyPad make even more explicit the issues around electronics manufacture and a global labor force that consists largely of women of color.⁵ As Lisa Nakamura suggests, "The women of color workers who create the material circuits and other digital components that allow content to be created are all integrated within the 'circuit' of technoculture. Their bodies become part of digital platforms by providing the human labor needed to make them" (920). Thus the visibility of the LilyPad is a reminder not just of the gendered implications of the embroidery and the tech but also of the gendered and racialized economic and labor practices that undergird electronics manufacturing.⁶ When read in this way, the hand stitching, which Pepler and Glosso suggest adds reflective depth, also calls to mind the context of garment manufacturing, another arena in which women of color are heavily employed.⁷

While the use of the LilyPad is as much a functional choice as a signifying strategy, I suggest that it contributes to the project's status as data visualization that off-centers consensus (Gaviria). The LilyPad is at once a reclamation of slow, domestic work; a stand-in for alternative models of computing publics; and an electronics device that arises out of a context of gendered and racialized labor. The embroidery of the uterus and the hand-stitching simultaneously evoke the aforementioned DIY punk ethos, as well as the domestic and gendered history of embroidery and labor practices in the garment industry. The hardware and literal soft-wear of the thread and garment combine to create a DH (Donna Haraway|Digital Humanities) fem-techno-assemblage that invites the viewer to contemplate the embodied effects of discourses around reproductive justice.

EMBODIMENT AS REFUSING TRANSMISSIBILITY

The project's stable visual strategies include the embroidered anatomy, the LilyPad, and the pink LEDs. However, there is a way in which the project is more mutable. By removing data visualization from the screen or page and placing it on a body, "Danger, Jane Roe!" relocates discourse around reproductive justice onto the site of legislative inscription—the body that may be affected by pregnancy. Elizabeth Grosz writes, "The inscription of the social surface of the body is the tracing of pedagogical, juridical, medical, and economic texts, laws, and practices onto the flesh to carve out a social subject as such" (117). In this case, the body is inscribed by increasingly restrictive legislation on reproductive choice. For Grosz, the socially inscribed body is one that is subject to being deciphered and understood (117). The body inscribed by laws that limit abortion is understood as one in which situated knowledge is denigrated and agency is restricted. "Danger, Jane Roe!" is a garment with its own inscriptive functions. The voluntary donning of the data visualization that refuses easy interpretation is an act of agency that seeks to confound the legibility of the body that has been marked by recent legislation.

I write of "the body" as an abstracted concept, but this is not just any body. "Danger, Jane Roe!" must be worn on a material body with a specific history and that carries with it its own set of social and cultural inscriptions. It could be worn on a wide variety of bodies, including those that do not have or never had the reproductive organs depicted in the embroidery. So far it has only been worn on my body, one that is deciphered as curvy, overworked, middle-aged, formerly homeless, first to go to college, upwardly mobile, heterosexual, nonreproductive, multiply tattooed, frequently flying, bilocated, white. In other words, a body inscribed as normative and privileged in some ways, and transgressive or othered in other ways. In the past, I have debated quite a bit about whether to actually wear the shirt during conference presentations. My sense is that in doing so, I am arranging a certain encounter with my body in what is supposed to be a disembodied zone of intellect, an idea that carries its own set of oppressions. The only body that can be transcended in such a way is the dominant, normative body. Othered bodies are always inscribed as such through the social and psychical processes described by Grosz. So I wear it. By donning the shirt, not only is my body implicated, but so are the bodies of the audience—those who might also wear the shirt or who are forced to encounter its illegibility, or even just those who are standing by. Once the shirt is on a body, due to its deformative nature, it reminds us that the bodies of others also bear the inscriptive marks of discourse around reproductive health.

"Danger, Jane Roe!" refuses the functionality of certain forms of data visualization, signifying through an assemblage of technical and craft components on a garment that would fit a wide variety of bodies in an attempt to subvert processes of straightforward inscription. As such, it is a project of deformance. Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels write of deformance, "Not the least significant consequence, as

will be seen, is the dramatic exposure of subjectivity as a live and highly informative option of interpretive commentary, if not indeed one of its essential features, however neglected in neo-classical models of criticism that search imaginative works for their ‘objective’ and general qualities” (116). Deformance is an explicit acknowledgment of the role of subjectivity in interpretation. One might reframe it as the valorization of situated knowledge in literary studies. The project of deformance in “Danger, Jane Roe!” addresses the issue of legislation and discourse about reproductive health but also the format of data visualization itself.

In “What Would Feminist Data Visualization Look Like?” Catherine D’Ignazio, drawing on Donna Haraway, critiques the tendency for data visualization to take a “whole world” approach, with its claim to completeness and objectivity. By deforming the science of data visualization, bringing a literary and cultural studies perspective to it, approaching it from outside the realm of the professional, I am able to assert the importance of the subject and the role of the subjective. By tying data visualization to the material specificities of embodiment, I refuse the tendency noted by Haraway for the eyes to “distance the knowing subject” by insisting on an encounter grounded in proximity. “Danger, Jane Roe!” is purposefully devoid of any interpretive key so that any attempt to interpret is left incomplete without a social exchange with the wearer. The knowing eyes must at some point move from the embroidery and the LEDs to consider the eyes of the wearer, which return the gaze and implicate the viewer in the structures that would restrict reproductive freedom.

Indeed, the implications and questions raised by the project will shift depending on the body on which it is worn. Not all bodies are affected in the same way by increasing restrictions on access to reproductive health care and the material specificity of the body on which “Danger, Jane Roe!” is worn must be considered. As I argue elsewhere, in “Networked Bodies, Wearable Interfaces, and Feminist Sleeper Agents,” the dress-body-technology assemblage of wearable technology functions as a fertile nexus not just between user and computing device, but between the fashioned, technological, and embodied subject.⁸ The project’s instability, shifting at a moment’s notice as the garment is transferred to another, is an additional way in which functional data visualization’s claim to objectivity is challenged. As just one shirt, it foregrounds subjective experience and situated knowledge in the face of big data. As a wearable data visualization that attempts neither efficiency nor transmissibility, “Danger, Jane Roe!” détourns practices of information visualization and challenges the total environment of professionalized data science.

Feminist Data Visualization in DH

“Danger, Jane Roe!” is situated among other feminist digital humanities, or DH-adjacent, projects that also do science poorly by détourning and deforming both data and visualization. Molly Morin’s digital fabrication series *Training Days* mirrors the strategies of fitness trackers in extracting data from the body and its

movements. In this case I will focus on a particular piece, “Training Day: Audrey, 21 Years, 75 Kilos; Back Squats, Snatches, Clean and Jerks; 2,790 Kilos Lifted” in which the data are based on visual analysis of a weight lifter’s movement as captured by the app “Bar Sense.”⁹ The terminology, “snatches, clean and jerks,” does not capture the beauty of the sweeping, sometimes stumbling movements as the transgressive body of a woman moves 165 pounds of iron through the air and above her head. The data generated, in this case from a competitive lifter named Audrey, are turned into lace pieces that are laser-cut from thin sheets of Mylar (Morin, “Strong Correlations Paper”).¹⁰

Morin’s work evokes the history of women’s work in lace production, including the increasing mechanization of manufacturing (Burnette, 45). In particular, the juxtaposition of weight lifting and lace-making challenges essentialist assumptions about gender and strength. Despite its delicate appearance, lace is often stronger than expected. It subverts expectation in a way that parallels women body builders, who despite surface-level acceptance still face marginalization within lifting communities (Morin, “Strong Correlations Paper”). This deforms the science of data visualization through an infusion of the soft and beautiful into engineering contexts (Buechley and Hill). Morin’s work makes explicit the palpable effects of data in the large lace forms, the scale of which are in blatant excess of the size of the typical lace sample found in museums and archives (Morin, “Strong Correlations Paper”). Like a science experiment run amok, the data have engorged the lace, feeding its growth so that it exceeds norms in its material form. From its unwieldy title to the excessive forms of the lace sculpture, “Training Day: Audrey, 21 Years, 75 Kilos; Back Squats, Snatches, Clean and Jerks; 2,790 Kilos Lifted” evokes the sublime of aesthetic data visualization as theorized by Warren Sack (125). The lace sculptures are monstrous, yet beautiful; tangible, yet sublime.

Data are also made tangible in the work of *Vibrant Lives*, a collective founded by Jessica Rajko and Jacqueline Wernimont.¹¹ “Living Net,” a performance installation piece, makes data material and haptic, while emphasizing their ephemerality. A large, crocheted net stretches across a wall, inviting touch. Small subwoofer speakers embedded in the net are activated by a packet-sniffing app that monitors exchanges of data in the room and converts them into sonic form (Wernimont, “Vibrant Lives”). The net trembles, seemingly alive in response to the bits of data moving through the network. During a 2016 performance at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute at the University of Victoria, Wernimont stood and crocheted during the event, weaving in material objects collected from the contacts in her digital networks. People sent her a variety of objects, ranging from prayer cards to one lone mitten. The join of the systematic, though sometimes nonuniform, crocheted loops with the irregular, material objects does science poorly by making visible the types of data (e.g., the labor of motherhood embodied in the lone found mitten) and subjective experiences that are often absent from the cleaned-up data that are required of typical information visualization (D’Ignazio and Klein, 3). Wernimont’s

act of crocheting in the installation space, while she talks to those passing by, makes visible the labor behind the project and also calls to mind the social functions of sewing circles, knitting clubs, and other spaces of feminized domestic work. Her body as an active creator in the space foregrounds the embodiment and subjectivity of the project, right down to the mint-green toe polish that is visible in video of the installation.

As Wernimont writes, because "Living Net" is a performance installation, the Digital Humanities Summer Institute event "activated multiple, intersecting networks for an evening and then we deactivated them as those same bodies and devices dispersed" ("Vibrant Lives"). The items collected and strands of crochet woven during the session will be displayed in future events, but the particular vibrations of the net, its life for that evening, is lost. Wernimont's labor, and that of the other creators, recedes into the background. The strategy of ephemerality, which results in an incomplete record, does science poorly in its refusal of the impulse of big data to create ever more comprehensive archives. It makes explicit, referring back to D'Ignazio's use of Haraway, the failures of big data's claim to the "God trick."

The prior three projects do work that infuses data visualization with a different kind of materiality and tactility. It is necessary to pause for a moment and address the issue of data itself, the gender implications of which and status as a scientific object of inquiry should not go unexamined. Bethany Nowviskie, in her now anthologized blog post "What Do Girls Dig?," raises the question of whether humanities data mining is a "gentleman's sport." She identifies a plurality of reasons that may lead to women being underrepresented as principal investigators in large, grant-funded data mining projects. These range from the commonly acknowledged general issues around women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) to the more uncomfortable possibility that the career stages and various outside obligations of women in academia may indirectly lead to their exclusion. In "Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives," Wernimont prompts us to consider the ways in which the logics that organize literary archives may include patriarchal values of mastery and completeness. However, she also identifies ways in which tools and methods developed in feminist literary archives have become fundamental to humanities archiving projects on a wider scale. She argues that archives are "complex negotiations of the spaces between 'thing and theory'" and calls for a feminist strategy of attending to interactions as a way of examining the complex technosocial scene of digital humanities work. Feminist critiques of data also come from within information science. In writing of the data of care-taking, Amelia Abreu calls on the Quantified Self movement to account for who is being measured and to what end. She positions the work of care-giving, largely neglected in Quantified Self movements, as performing as a human data tracker: evaluating comfort levels, calorie intake, appointments, and the like. She wonders what other types of data and people are swept aside in the need to produce "the perfect measurement for an object and its functions" and questions whether the

dream of a feminist data future, “where sensor technology and data-mining can be accessible and successful, flexible enough to be genuinely empowering, allowing users to control their own narratives is even possible.” These issues are exacerbated when we consider whose lives outside of the United States and other industrialized nations are left out. According to Mayra Buvinic of the Center for Global Development, most countries collect data about employment and other aspects of labor, but the types of questions and strategies of collection privilege “formal sector employment,” which leaves many women outside the scope of collection (quoted in McDonald). Beyond these kinds of implicit biases, David McNair of the One Campaign suggests that many governments do not make extensive efforts to collect data on the lives of women and children because the data may be used as a tool to hold them accountable (quoted in McDonald). The visualizations discussed in previous sections address issues of bias, inconsistency, and misogyny, but it seemed worth pausing for a moment to think about data as an imperfect object before moving into my discussion of a few final visualizations.

If we are willing to stretch the parameters of what is typically considered “visualization,” it perhaps also becomes necessary to trouble conventional notions of “data.” As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are many kinds of data that end up marginalized or not collected, in part because there is ideological work happening in what is considered “data.” To illuminate that work, I turn now to a few projects that engage in material visualization, which might not typically be counted as data visualization but that can help us stretch those parameters. First among them is by the artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons. *The Seven Powers by the Sea* (1992) consists of seven wooden boards, each inscribed with a diagram showing different plans for transporting slaves, similar to the well-known Brookes ship diagram.¹² Each of the boards also features the name of an *orisha*, a Yoruba spirit, inscribed along the bottom. Viewed horizontally, the shapes of the boards reference slave ships. However, the boards are always installed vertically, which also evokes ironing boards (gesturing toward the domestic labor of slavery) and tombstones (signifying ritual, memorializing, and the necropolitics of the transatlantic slave trade). Archived images show that installations of the work vary. The simplest installation features the seven boards placed side-by-side, leaning against a wall. More elaborate installations feature silhouettes of the *orishas* interspersed between the boards and an arrangement of framed family photos and the phrases “Let Us Never Forget” and “*Prohibido Olvidar*.”¹³

Though Campos-Pons’s work is not a digital humanities project, there is much to learn by placing it in conversation with the earlier projects I discuss and framing it as a work of feminist data visualization. As the catalog for the Liverpool Biennial notes, the figures on Campos-Pons’s boards convey “the conjunction of mathematical efficiency and brutality.” The historical slave ship diagrams are an extreme example of the potential for dehumanizing when individual lives are reduced to data points and of the nuance that is suppressed in the name of efficient transmission of

information. In the work of Campos-Pons, they are used to détourn and to call forth the entire system of oppressions. In *Counting Bodies*, Molly Farrell notes that early practices of human accounting around sugar plantations in the Caribbean brought together aesthetics and counting to frame the plantation as “a transportable system, both economically and socially” (88). The efficiency by which Campos-Pons’s boards transmit information is thus superficial; it unfolds and extends to include the entire economic, cultural, and social system of the transatlantic slave trade. At the same time, particularly in the more altar-like installations that feature photos of the artist’s family and friends, the brutality of the historical practices that continue to shape social relations is placed in tension with the local, the personal. This work is not a digital humanities project. Nor does it employ digital technologies among its strategies. Science is never invoked. But Campos-Pons’s feminist visualization connects the local to the transatlantic and systemic, and connects the present to the past in a way that challenges the constraints and expands the possibilities of data visualization.

Leaving the gallery setting and moving into the community, S.T.I.T.C.H.E.D. (Stories, Testimonies, Intentions, Truths, Confessions, Healing, Expression, and Dreams) is a project that visualizes the construction of a collective. S.T.I.T.C.H.E.D. is an initiative of Climbing PoeTree, the poets and performance artists Alixa Garcia and Naima Penniman. The project began in 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, when Garcia and Penniman would leave fabric squares on the chairs in their performances and invite the audience to write something on the squares (Prain, 91). Twelve years later, they have over 10,000 squares (Climbing PoeTree) that they hang in trees, hang against walls, or otherwise display during events. Penniman suggests that the fabric squares are a folk media project that constitutes living history (Prain, 91). Garcia and Penniman identify patterns in the kinds of stories people choose to record on fabric: there are many stories of assault, abuse, incarceration, and trauma but also messages of assurance and kinship. Garcia relates her favorite moment with the quilt where the color and softness performed a spatial intervention when they hung it in a workshop at a juvenile detention center, disarming participants and setting the tone for a transformative event (Prain, 93).

Though visualization is not Climbing PoeTree’s primary objective, I place S.T.I.T.C.H.E.D. in conversation with the other feminist data visualization projects here because the strips of fabric visually convey meaning in their accumulation. Garcia and Penniman construct the quilt by matching squares according to size and positioning them so as to alternate colors (Prain, 92). Quilting as visual communication has a long history in the tradition of story quilts, particularly within black communities. And quilts as visualization have a history in *The Names Project*, colloquially known as “the AIDS quilt.” In *The Names Project*, and those it influenced, such as *The Monument Project*, individual squares may be personally meaningful, but it is in excess, in the joining of massive numbers of squares, that the quilt becomes a material visualization of the amount of data points in this cultural

database. Like Morin's lace sculptures, this is a visualization that conveys the sublime of data visualization (Sack) in its excess. However, in S.T.I.T.C.H.E.D., the legibility of patterns is suppressed and variation is foregrounded in the visual strategies of the textiles. The quilt's refusal of efficiency becomes a visualization of collective experience and connection across difference. Penniman and Garcia suggest that it could be the new American flag (Prain, 92). The erratic nature of S.T.I.T.C.H.E.D., as opposed to those quilts that employ precise angles and neatly joined sections, speaks to the raucous voices of the community whose experiences it conveys. Like *The Seven Powers by the Sea*, this is not a digital humanities project. However, quilting has long been a site of domestic and feminine inventiveness (Oldenzel, 42). As a quilting project, S.T.I.T.C.H.E.D. performs the feminist work of constructing collectivity, and in its embrace of disunity and excess it employs feminist strategies of visualization from which we might learn.

The projects highlighted here combine material forms of data visualization in ways that refuse many of the foundational logics of functional information visualization. In a recent presentation to the IEEE Visualization Conference, Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein outlined six key principles of feminist data visualization: "Rethink Binaries, Embrace Pluralism, Examine Power and Aspire to Empowerment, Consider Context, Legitimize Embodiment and Affect, and Make Labor Visible" (3–4). These practices build upon the call of authors such as Gaviria to attend to the experimental and boundary-pushing possibilities of artistic data visualization. The call to examine power and make labor visible echo Sack's argument that all data visualizations are built upon some form of governance that is made to seem natural in the act of visualization (132). However, D'Ignazio and Klein call for a move beyond experimentation or awareness toward practices that are fundamentally informed by an intersectional feminist ethics of data visualization.¹⁴

They note that much of the kinds of digital humanities work that embraces these principles is done "in isolation from the visualization community" (2). Perhaps this is because of the tendency of these feminist visualization projects to challenge, refuse, or outright disavow the ground rules of information science and data visualization (McLuhan), the professional environments of which require an aesthetics of bureaucracy (Sack). To return to Buechley and Hill, perhaps feminist data visualization as performed in the digital humanities constitutes an alternative clubhouse, one in which feminist and humanist values are foregrounded and the participants "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 67) in order to then perform emancipatory work in conversation with the visualization community.

To me, this is doing science better. I do not wish to be dismissive of projects or digital humanists whose desired outcomes might require a fidelity to methods considered scientifically valid. And certainly, there is important feminist work to be done by foregrounding these kinds of questions within the professional environments of the sciences. I only mean to suggest that our status as outsiders, as scientific

amateurs, as digital *humanists*, allows us the flexibility to occasionally engage in the antienvironmental; to détourn the tenets of scientific validity and use them against themselves to achieve awareness of the subjectivity and question the ground rules of objectivity and replicability, as well as their gendered associations. In short, to deploy feminist praxis to do science poorly.

Notes

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1. Multiple reviewers have noted, and I agree, that the visual strategies of the “Danger, Jane Roe!” could work for other contexts, notably for issues of reproductive justice not centered on *Roe v. Wade* or for signifying other data in relation to uteruses—temporal cycles of menstruation and so forth. Along with the refusal of easy transmissibility comes the potential for being repurposed for other acts of visualization.

2. In March 2011, Democratic representative Scott Randolph was chastised because he used the word “uterus” on the Florida house floor (Linkins, “Scott Randolph”). In June 2012, Lisa Brown was barred from the Michigan House floor for using the word “vagina” (Brown, “Lisa Brown”). Also in 2012, there is video of proceedings that show Dave Albo, a Republican member of the Virginia House of Delegates, repeatedly using the word “trans-v” as a substitute for transvaginal (Celock, “David Albo”). Given that Albo helped draft Virginia’s controversial “informed consent” law, his reluctance to say “vaginal” is particularly disturbing.

3. Knight, *Spiral Dance*.

4. This is also borne out in the Fashioning Circuits university classroom. The percentage of women and people of color is much higher than the average demographics of computer science majors in the United States. Depending on the class format, Fashioning Circuits university students have been from 50 percent to 100 percent women, and 30 percent to 50 percent people of color (a significant portion of whom are considered “underrepresented minorities” in computer science). In 2012, women made up 18.2 percent of computer science BS majors in the United States. Underrepresented minorities accounted for 19.4 percent of computer science BS degrees, with only 4.8 percent awarded to women who are underrepresented minorities (National Science Foundation, “Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities”). It is regrettable that Buechley and Hill do not address race in their articulation of the emancipatory potential of the LilyPad. A generous reading of their

work would allow that new clubhouses, which foster a variety of interests and passions, could be constructed from a range of diverse perspectives, including those of underrepresented racial minorities, queer participants, persons with disabilities, and so forth. To be clear, however, this requires a willingness to foreground issues of the most urgent concern to a group rather than trying to develop a one-size-fits-all counterpublic space.

5. For an elaboration of these issues, see Hossfeld, “Their Logic,” or Ferus-Comelo, “Double Jeopardy,” in the Bibliography.

6. Recently, Arduino partnered with Adafruit to bring production of many of the Arduino boards to the United States. In an email to the author dated October 26, 2016, Nick Miranda of SparkFun confirmed that the LilyPad is manufactured by SparkFun in Colorado. They are the exclusive manufacturers and retailers of this board. However, to some extent, the particular conditions of the LilyPad’s manufacture do not matter—so long as there exist human rights abuses in electronics manufacturing, the microcontroller will function as a synecdoche for the wider industry.

7. Though the international garment industry still relies heavily on women workers, authors Kucera and Tejani suggest that the industry is undergoing a process of defeminization as “higher technology production leads to a stronger preference for male workers” (“Feminization, Defeminization,” 575). The positioning of new digital skill sets as technological, in distinction to analog techniques of production, engages in the problematic suppression of gendered and domestic technologies from the dominant definition of that term (Wajcman, “Feminist Theories of Technology”). Nevertheless, contemporary cultural narratives around global textile manufacturing and the “sweat shop worker” remain heavily gendered as female.

8. See Knight, “Networked Bodies.”

9. Drashkov, “Bar Sense.”

10. For an example, see Morin, “Last Progress.”

11. See *Vibrant Lives*.

12. This work is variously referred to as “The Seven Powers by the Sea,” “The Seven Powers Come by the Sea,” and “The Seven Powers Came by the Sea.” “The Seven Powers” is a different work, though it draws on similar themes.

13. The simplest installations are documented at the Vancouver Art Gallery (Basseches, “Leaving Cuba”) and the Kamloop Art Gallery (Youds, “Winter Show”). The more elaborate installation is documented in the archive for the 1999 Liverpool Biennial (Liverpool Biennial, “Seven Powers Came”).

14. These six principles could, in fact, be an ethics of feminist digital humanities work in general. Neither data nor visualization is explicitly invoked in the call to legitimize embodiment and affect, for instance.

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Building Pleasure and the Digital Archive

DOROTHY KIM

[The archivist] is the keeper of countless objects of desire.

—Martha Cooley, *The Archivist* (1998)

[L'archive] est difficile dans sa matérialité.

—Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (1989)

This essay is an exercise and also a critical meditation on what it means to build and create the *Archive of Early Middle English* and what the project's theoretical stakes are in relation to the corpus, the digital platform, the interface. Thus, this is a narrative about the long history of the book and about what it means to translate reading a medieval manuscript from thirteenth-century Britain to reading a mediated version of a manuscript in the twenty-first century. It is the story of medieval to digital remediation, but a remediation that has remarkable feedback loops because it disrupts print as a medium. This essay is also about the archive story of Early Middle English and how making visible the editorial bodies that create the digital manuscript bodies is a form of radical material feminism that reframes the stakes of this digital archive. And so, this essay pivots between the granularity of the codex book and the larger ecosystem of an archive of books.

Drawing from an array of theoretical perspectives—material feminism and especially theories of “intra-action,” postcolonial archive theory, and disability studies—this essay explores the issue of pleasure in critical interface design and multisensory experience in digital reading ecologies, with a focus on the *Archive of Early Middle English* project. My discussion will turn attention to both the interpretive processes of visualization and the value of developing digital resources that engage senses beyond the visual. I will consider additionally the physical and related lived experiences of building and using archives. What are the alternatives to visual emphases in interface design, and what are the stakes—for nascent and long-standing projects—of creating flexible, stable resources that

invite manipulation and change? And what are the stakes for archive theory, digital labor, feminist materialism, and histories of the book? Can what at first glance be seen as traditional and canonical function as a decolonized, feminist, and material ecosystem?

Visual Pleasure, Graphesis, and Histories and Futures of the Book

When the AEME (*Archive of Early Middle English*)—a digital archive that will eventually include 162 encoded manuscript witnesses to the documentary production of Early Middle English between 1100 and 1350—received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) 2013–2017 Scholarly Editions and Translation grant, the first and completed task Scott Kleinman and I, as co-principal investigators, discussed was the creation of a splash page—both as a placeholder during the project’s coding and back-end development and as the go-to space for anyone who wanted to be directed to the archive.¹ Even though we also created a separate site for encoding guidelines and had an open workspace on GitHub, the splash page became the calling card for the AEME project in development.² Even with such a diverse and disparate corpus of archival materials, the visual aesthetics of the splash page was one of the earliest longer discussion items. We, in fact, budgeted and hired a graphic designer, Amy Papaalias (SUNY New Paltz, Art History) to give the “skin” of this interface of our archival portal motion, color balance, functionality, and visual pleasure. As the first task we accomplished with the release of our NEH funds, the foundational importance of organizing our visual calling card and subsequent visual profile speaks to the stakes, importance, and driving frames of visual pleasure in creating and building a digital archive and database. This article is an attempt to unpack the politics and theoretical angles and make transparent our biases in first prioritizing visual pleasure. But it also is a discussion that sketches out what else could be done in the continued development of the digital archive as an area in the long history of the book.

Our archive is not filled with many impressive illuminated and decorated manuscripts. Rather, it was incredibly difficult to even find an image we could use in our logo from the 162 manuscripts in our corpus. But this initial design—decided entirely by considering the visual pleasure of our project team and potential imagined users—became the project touchstone as the scholarly and public profile of the AEME moved across: through not just the splash page but also the temporary encoding guidelines page—though with slightly different but complementary color schemes—to the visual design, program, and swag for the “Making Early Middle English” conference.³ This latter project for the AEME became the first international conference in the field, funded with a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Contact grant. It has also now transformed into the first peer-reviewed scholarly journal in the field, *The Journal of Early Middle English*, which also utilizes the visual footprint first developed for the AEME project.⁴

The question of pleasure speaks to the importance of desire in archival building and about emotional affect and the dangers of intense affect in hiding archival agendas and the political, national, and social forces often at play in creating them. There is a wish to hide these difficult narratives under the aura of sensory pleasures. And especially with digital projects—whether small, big, or going in multiple directions—pleasure is central in organizing and producing the digital humanities. Visual pleasure, the pleasurable experience of the user/subject, and the ease of the project's interface are always central in building.⁵ There are a number of reasons for visual aesthetics' importance. They range from the politics of funding and also our own understanding of what will attract, hold, and intrigue digital users/readers/subjects. In a way, whether scholarly or lay, digital projects often function within a rhetoric of seduction. They use sensory pleasure, but almost always visual pleasure, to offer their projects up for consumption, enjoyment, work, and play. Theoretically and practically, the AEME has considered these issues from its inception and particularly from its first real budget expenditure. We have also grappled with the disconnect between the messy, dirty, fragmented quality of our corpus in juxtaposition of our aesthetically delightful and visually attractive splash page and project design aesthetic.

However, there has not been enough discussion about the theories behind what we are building in DH projects and how much theories of the visual and visual pleasure are hidden from view. In Johanna Drucker's book *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, Drucker tackles the theoretical stakes of digital visibility by explaining that "all images are encoded by their technologies of production and embody the qualities of the media in which they exist. These qualities are part of an image's information" whether this be illuminated manuscript, daguerreotype, painting, photograph, or digital image.⁶ She highlights how the recent discussions in media archaeology have centered media production and how "reading the matter of media" is how meaning is configured.⁷ Digital media environments require multimodal reading, creation, and interpretation. However, digital media then rely more on the histories, theories, and epistemologies of the codex and book than they do on film and video. The issues of layout, marginalia, paratext, columns, table of contents, indexes, and chapter headings are, as Malcolm Parkes discusses in "The Influence of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* in the Development of the Book," a development of the medieval scholarly book.⁸ These experimental page structures became standard in printed books and eventually in digital texts.

If the codex as developed in the Middle Ages is one of the earlier kinds of informational "interfaces," then we should consider it as a mediating apparatus: one in which the *mise-en-page* and material features, its myriad graphic cues explain how to read, use, navigate, and access information in the codex book.⁹ Then the digital interface requires us to consider how critical interface design can help us build digital projects that address how this mediating apparatus will change how our readers/users/subjects will interact and create interpretive iterative acts with their reading, access, and navigation of the digital information. What this means is a move

away from the codex's *mise-en-page* to a film's visual *mise-en-scène* to an interactive digital *mise-en-système*, what Drucker describes as "an environment for action."¹⁰ A digital *mise-en-système* is a digital ecology in which the main question posed is how the interface iteratively and at various moment can "enunciate" the subject/user/reader. Interface, then, is a "border zone between cultural systems and human subjects"; it is the codependent space where "speaker and spoken are created."¹¹ This interaction in this border zone also pushes back against cinema's one-directional view of theories of visual pleasure and the gaze into a different model.¹² I believe feminist materialism and the work of Karen Barad on entanglement theory would name this interface site the space of "intra-action."

Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman have pointed out the volatility of materiality as a location for feminist theory, so much so that "most contemporary feminisms require that one distance oneself as much as possible from the tainted realm of materiality by taking refuge within culture, discourse, and language."¹³ Instead, material feminism proposes that feminist theory must discuss materiality, and particularly the body, as an active agent that includes "lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance."¹⁴ The point of material feminism is "to build on rather than abandon the lessons learned in the linguistic turn," namely, in this case, "a deconstruction of the material/discursive dichotomy that retains both elements without privileging either."¹⁵ Thus material feminism rethinks "agency, semiotic force, and the dynamics of bodies and natures."¹⁶ The most focused energies and the most radical move are to reconsider materiality: the "stuff" of bodies and environments. The "material turn" requires us to take "matter seriously."¹⁷ Material feminism insists on flattening hierarchies and ontologies; it requires a consideration of how "culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the environment" interact without organizing these nodes without giving more power to one or the other.¹⁸ In essence, it is a new way to consider "matter" in relation to "material culture, geopolitical space, food, climate and environment, gender, body, nature, and culture."¹⁹

Karen Barad, the theoretical quantum physicist, writes,

The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual "interaction," which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) marks an important shift, reopening and refiguring foundational notions of classical ontology such as causality, agency, space, time, matter, discourse, responsibility, and accountability. A specific intra-action enacts an agential cut (in contrast to the Cartesian cut—an inherent distinction—between subject and object) effecting a separating between "subject" and "object." That is, the agential cut enacts a "local" resolution within the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy.²⁰

In essence, Barad's point in "Nature's Queer Performativity" is to flatten hierarchies in which everything—human, nonhuman, matter—becomes a constantly shifting component. Within this frame, she "reframes" ideas of causality; and what

“intra-acting” ultimately allows is that “‘relata’ do not pre-exist relations, but rather that ‘relata-within-phenomen’ emerge through specific intra-actions.”²¹

What Drucker describes as the “codependent in-betweenness” of the interface where speaker and spoken are born is exactly a description of “intra-action.” And what she has framed in her argument about digital graphesis as part of a long history of reading interfaces is that digital reading has become a *mise-en-système* with multivocal moments of “intra-action.” She describes this digital shift in the history of reading:

Reading was always a performance of a text or work, always an active remaking through an instantiation. But reading rarely had to grapple with the distinctions between immersion and omniscience—as when we are experiencing the first person view of a video juxtaposed with manipulation of a scalable map, with watching the social network reconfigure itself around a node of discourse even as the node is changing. Digital environments increasingly depend upon a whole series of contingent texts, transient documents, that are created on the fly by search and query, filtered browsing or other results-based displays that last only a few moments on the screen in the stepping-stone sequence of user clicks that move from one ephemeral configuration to the next.²²

In this digital *mise-en-système*, beyond the flexible and iterative possibilities of moments of subject and interface “intra-action,” what this digital reading ecology creates is the possibility for extremes of scale.

In this way, though we hear much more about the affordances and utopian heights of big data analytics and visualizations and the theoretical approaches of distance reading as explained by Franco Moretti, or even a discussion from Lev Manovich on the experience of digital visualization at extreme large scale, less is discussed about the potentials of the small, close-reading scale and the possibilities of sifting through the granularity of ever more minute details.²³ For medievalists, that granularity could be in close reading words, to the strokes of a scribal letter. What critical discussions about the digital humanities seem to forget are the possibilities of examining and working with minute granularity—the practice of extreme close reading. Scholars have discussed granularity in e-literature, digital history, and digital media studies who have written about “scalable reading.”²⁴ In whatever direction digital reading, composing, and writing take, in relation to the new ecology of digital reading, we must think of the interface as “a provocation.”²⁵

Thus, the book of the future explodes with different arrays and angles of possibility. It will include reading, writing, annotation, social media; image, sound, tactility; text process, text analytics; small and large data mining and data mapping; the abilities to search, link, visualize, reroute, reconfigure texts and textualities; indexing, displaying; close analysis of pixels and biological properties of vellum and paper

and the distance reading of a thousand years of a word—all within a multimodal, multiplatform, intermedial, and remediated digital environment. Drucker writes,

Pages will be temporary configurations based on calls to repositories and data sets. We will “publish” our data trails as guidebooks for the experience of reading, pointing to milestones and portals for in-depth exploration of stories, inventories, and the rich combination of cultural heritage and social life in a global world. The display will take advantage of the n-dimensional space of the screen in ways that combine multiple design visions.²⁶

Within the book of the future, what we must understand is that visualization is and always will be an interpretive act. And the interface changes digital reading because of its dynamism by making the act of reading “a set of possibilities we encounter and from which we constitute the tissue of experience.”²⁷ Digital reading will be located in an ever-changing ecosystem where reader and text will constitute multiple points of “intra-action.” In this way, our bodily senses are particularly heightened in learning to move through this digital reading ecology. Thus, what is most difficult to address is why the emphasis has been on only one sense—sight—over others in digital project-building environments. Why did the AEME decide to invest first in designing the visual signature of its project before anything else?

The Archive of Early Middle English

Bracketed by the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century and the decline of the English populace as a result of the Plague (1348–1450), the Early Middle English period is characterized by its multilingualism and its interaction with cultural developments from Ireland to the Middle East.²⁸ In addition to four main literary languages (Latin, French, English, Welsh), Britain was also home to speakers and scholars of Greek, Hebrew, Irish, Old Norse, Arabic, and Dutch. This period also witnesses British crusaders’ establishment and loss of colonies in the Middle East, as well as the expulsion of the Jews from England. Literature of the period frequently reflects these cultural encounters among Christians, Jews, Muslims, and heretics. This is a literary world very different from standard views of medieval England; as new scholarship is revealing, this world was multilingual, culturally and racially diverse, intellectually and aesthetically experimental.

Philologists and historical linguists find the Early Middle English period fascinating, for it arguably embraces the most systematic, extreme change in the English language in recorded history. The linguistic shift between 1100 and 1350 is, in many ways, far greater than that which separates Chaucer’s use of language from that of Shakespeare.²⁹ In addition to internal developments during these centuries, multiple languages heavily influenced English, shaping not just its lexicon but its phonology,

morphology, and syntax. The record of dialectical variations increases exponentially, and the unique multilingual and polyglot milieu of Britain makes this period and its materials of great potential interest for scholars working on the integration of cultures.³⁰ However, many of the period's manuscripts and texts either have not been edited or exist only in nineteenth-century editions. This makes a systematic, scientific study of data from these texts difficult and in some cases impossible.

In 2013, AEME was awarded an NEH Scholarly Editions and Translation grant in order to create the *Archive of Early Middle English* (AEME), which will be made freely available to scholars, students, and the public. Initially, we will produce an electronic edition of two Early Middle English manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library Laud Misc. 108 and Oxford, Bodleian Library Junius 1. We also will begin substantive work on an edition of Oxford, Jesus College 29. Our new editions will contain not only electronic transcriptions but also encoded information on names, places, intertextual features, and philological, paleographical, and material features. All information and commentary will be searchable and easily adaptable to use in a variety of digital analytical forms. We also plan as part of the project to include translations.

Our proposed editions of Oxford, Bodleian Library Laud Misc. 108 and Oxford, Bodleian Library Junius 1 will contain the complete manuscript contents in a format that will easily accommodate the addition of new texts after the grant period ends. We have chosen these two manuscripts because their texts are fully available only in nineteenth-century editions and because they are also in high demand by both scholars and students. We believe that they are ideal test cases to fine-tune our editorial methods and publishing platform. Given the conceptual and technical challenges we are taking on for this project, we believe that beginning with manuscripts that have restricted numbers of identifiable individual texts is appropriate for achieving our project goals within the grant's timeframe. At the grant period's end, team members intend to continue editing Early Middle English texts to add to the larger archive, as well as to encourage submissions by other scholars.

Our project approaches the challenges of editing Early Middle English texts by treating them in their manuscript contexts as *material cultural objects*, rather than following earlier scholarship's tendency to evaluate Early Middle English literature purely in terms of its aesthetic or linguistic value. Rather than invoking the nineteenth-century, Romantic ideal of the authorial/artistic genius, we plan to examine Early Middle English texts first and foremost through the lens of their manuscript witnesses, addressing their larger multilingual, multimedia, and multi-temporal contexts. We can examine how multiple texts appearing together in single manuscripts operate in conversation with each other. By focusing on manuscript materiality, we also hope to use the digital platform to think through questions of manuscript *mouvance*—material variation that includes textual modification, language switches, revision, expansion, replacement, and reorganization—within

a three-dimensional platform. Thus, for example, our archive could support the physical analysis of a holograph author's penchant for gluing, cutting, and physically sewing in his revisions and changes. Likewise, since Early Middle English frequently appears in the same manuscript with non-English literature or literature from preceding and following periods, our focus on manuscript witnesses allows us to create editions that can ultimately encompass texts not traditionally considered Early Middle English but that allow readers to explore ways in which these linguistically and/or chronologically diverse texts interact.

We define the corpus of Early Middle English as all texts occurring in manuscripts containing Early Middle English according to the criteria laid out in Margaret Laing's *Catalogue of Sources for a Linguistic Atlas of Early Medieval English* (roughly, those written down between 1066 and 1340, and a few later copies of pre-1300 documentary material).³¹ In compiling our list of manuscripts, we use c. 1350 as our end date, for this allows us to include a variety of linguistically Early Middle English material not included in Laing's catalogue. By these criteria, the total corpus of Early Middle English consists of about 162 manuscripts. Since the archive will include multilingual manuscripts, it will ultimately not be restricted exclusively to Early Middle English language texts, and will thus support growing scholarly interest in the French and Latin literature of England.³² However, we recognize that this decision may have the inadvertent effect of reinforcing the traditional marginalized status of Early Middle English. By defining our corpus using manuscripts containing Early Middle English, we intend to make Early Middle English the focus of the cultural nexus of medieval England, turning the traditional scholarly approach on its head by shifting the marginal into the center.

The Proposed Editions

In this phase of the project, our proposed editions of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 1, and Oxford, Jesus College 29 will contain the complete manuscript contents in a format that will easily accommodate the addition of new texts after the grant period ends. Namely, we will be using TEI-XML encoding to encode the data themselves as a stable encoding language. TEI-XML is the Text Encoding Initiative standard for Extensible Markup Language that is the code used to be machine-readable. The archive itself will have open-source code and will be archived in the Brown Digital Repository.

Laud Misc. 108, a late-thirteenth-century manuscript with entirely English contents, including the earliest version of the *South English Legendary*, and versions of *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, will allow us to do whole-book editing on a manuscript filled entirely with Early Middle English texts. Junius 1, the unusual *Ormulum* manuscript, will model how to treat a holograph manuscript with three-dimensional textual revision and also postmedieval revisions. Jesus 29, a

multilingual anthology, will allow us to explore the editing of a multilingual codex containing Anglo-Norman French, Early Middle English, and Latin, as well as texts from different periods written on different media (paper and vellum).

The AEME has been envisioned as first an archive, a location—albeit a digital location—in which objects have been collected. What we are collecting is the 160+ manuscripts in the Early Middle English corpus. The standard for choosing each manuscript in this corpus is that it includes Early Middle English, whether this be the work of the entire manuscript or a marginal gloss. The whole manuscript is the item unit in our archive—in whatever language, media, or material state a manuscript has or is in. However, the material unit of our archive—the manuscript—has also meant that we are participating in the history of the book in specific ways that need to also address the medieval/digital sensorium.

Medieval/Digital Sensorium and the Long History of the Book

In the narratives of the history of the book, numerous critics have pointed out that the history of print has become the hegemonic center of book history. So much so, in fact, that several medievalists have taken to task Robert Darnton's definition of the history of the book as "the social and cultural history of communication by print."³³ Jessica Brantley pushes for a more capacious definition of the book: "the material support for inscribed language, a category that includes rolls, codices and even monumental inscription, both written by hand and printed by many different mechanisms, and also a wide variety of digital media."³⁴ And as Alison Walker points out in her article in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, "The Boundless Book: A Conversation between the Pre-modern and Posthuman," where exactly does that leave premodern and posthuman "mediated" textuality? Where does that leave medieval manuscripts and digital texts?³⁵ Walker further argues that if one decenters print history in the narratives of the history of the book, what we then discern is that "reading technologies from the pre- and postprint eras anticipate the same sort of reader and share similar experiences."³⁶

But strikingly, in our more recent discussion of electronic textuality, multisensory reading practices have turned our gaze back to the medieval world of manuscript textuality. We now hear and touch in order to read in a digital medium, and hopefully this signals a "paradigm shift" happening in digital reading worlds that have migrated away from a "dominant ocularcentrist aesthetic to a haptic aesthetic rooted in embodied affectivity."³⁷ Medieval reading practices were not linear, often required vocality to read out loud or sing out loud, ideally required slow and repetitive rereading, were emotive, and involved sound, smell, touch, taste, visual, and even bodily calisthenics. Literally, from how the book is made—from the physical embodiment of vellum or parchment (sheep or cow skin) to the visible remains of hair and flesh side on these writing surfaces—skin is interface. As recent discussions of manuscript materiality and reading have discussed, touch and

the body were incredibly central to reading and interacting with a medieval manuscript. One constantly was reminded by the different interface textures between hair and flesh side of a folio as you turned the medieval page.³⁸ Physical flesh is always present in sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell when one opens a medieval manuscript. Medieval reading invokes emotive, bodily, and multisensory reading practices including touching, feeling, kissing, and licking manuscript parts and pages.³⁹ Thus, medieval manuscripts inscribe a history of the senses and the reader's/subject's/users' interaction with these fleshly interfaces. Medieval readers have deposited their breath, finger dirt, saliva, and probably bits of their dinners on the vellum page.

The aesthetic beauty and pleasure in building DH projects may hide the interpretive process, but "they are the persistent ghosts in the visual scheme."⁴⁰ But instead of hiding how visualization and visuality of the digital interface organize and interpret informational data, how exactly can we make room to highlight how visualization is an interpretative act? How do we allow room to make transparent the AEME's choices in its visual design and footprint? If visuality always is perceived as a transparent model of information that helps hide precisely how "constructed" data themselves really are, how can projects escape this building trap? What Drucker advocates is ways to build projects and build visualization models that encourage, highlight, present, and play with ambiguity and uncertainty.⁴¹ By creating a marked space for ambiguity and uncertainty, Drucker argues that this allows digital zones to emphasize and lay bare the centrality of interpretation in the digital project's constructedness.⁴²

What will happen when we move beyond squareness, which has been the guiding shape and visual principal of textual media for over a millennium? What will shift when we move beyond just visual pleasures and consider how the other senses—taste, tactility, and sound—will change the terrain of reading? If the current book is "a momentary slice through a complex stream of many networked conversations, versions, and fields of debate and reference across a wide variety of times and places," and it is but a "temporary intervention in a living field of language, images, and ideas" in which "each instantiation re-codifies the image of a book as an icon—whether mythic or banal, a treasure or an ordinary object of daily use," the future book already has taken these intersections and expanded, bent, reformed, and remediated this vision.⁴³ But for the future book, it cannot just remain fixed on the form of the medieval codex. Instead it will push the boundaries of fluidity and navigating ever-shifting situated contexts connected to "the vast repositories of knowledge, images, interpretation, and interactive platforms."⁴⁴ The book of the future will be a multitudinous event/object: "an interface, a richly networked portal, organized along lines of inquiry in which primary source materials, secondary interpretations, witnesses and evidence, are all available, incorporated, made accessible for use."⁴⁵ It is then rhizomatic: with multiplicities at work, "with no beginning nor end" and always *in media res*.⁴⁶

As Drucker explains, “we are in the incunabula period of information design.”⁴⁷ New frames, new questions, new ways to imagine linked relationships, meandering paths through reading, reading communities are only surfacing. And she is right to posit that “we are learning to read and think and write along rays, arrays, subdivisions, and patterns of thought.”⁴⁸ For literary scholars and for readers/subjects/users of DH projects, digital textual data, digital editions, digital writing, and digital rhetoric, digital reading should mean that interpretative acts will be made visible and material and a flexible space of ambiguity will allow for multivocal and rhizomatic writing futures.

The Allure of Visual Aesthetics

So how does this all practically play out in DH project building? Graphesis and the visualization of data constitute the lion-share of DH tool building. If one does a search on the *Dirt: Digital Research Tools*, under “visual,” you will come up with pages and pages of hits for possible tools to help you visualize data.⁴⁹ However, if you put in any other sensorial possibility—sound, touch, tactility, smell, taste—either nothing will come up or you will actually find items like “visualizing sound.”⁵⁰ Yet, these are the tools available to most digital projects to do “something” with their coded data. I believe we can prod the ubiquity of graphesis as a default and hegemonic mode of thought which has thus led to a preponderance of such tools/modes in a discipline that often states it is about analysis. However, I do think there has been some small movement to break away and critique this default analytical setting. Recently, there have been a number of projects that have considered how to sonify data; nonetheless, the number of visualization options vastly outnumbers these sonifying options.⁵¹

Thus, the path always drives us to make pretty maps, as we see in the case of *Sexy Codicology’s* manuscript maps; and in Angela Bennett’s visualization of Piers Plowman manuscripts; and even the nodelxl map of #medievaltwitter networked range during the International Medieval Congress at Western Michigan University in 2014.⁵²

Adam Foster, in a recent INKE (Implementing New Knowledge Environments) post titled “The Political Aesthetics of Digital Humanities Environments,” exhorts the Digital Humanities to “be [more] attuned to the political message of scholarship the new knowledge environments crafted will boast, and consider if they do indeed change the inherent politics of scholarship.”⁵³ He further speculates that in order to unpack the politics of a digital learning environment, we must ultimately address aesthetics.

This heavy reliance on the visual is particularly prevalent in DH projects; yet, the politics of aesthetics are rarely addressed. As Heather Froehlich commented at a historical corpus linguistic talk in Helsinki for Varieng in 2014,

Corpus linguistics is a very text-oriented approach to language data, with much interest in curation, collection, annotation, and analysis—all things of much concern to digital humanists. If corpus linguistics is primarily concerned with text, digital humanities can be argued to be primarily concerned about images: how to visualize textual information in a way that helps the user understand and interact with large data sets.⁵⁴

Froehlich finishes her talk by asking a provocative question: “If digital humanities currently serves mostly to supplement knowledge, rather than create knowledge, we need to start thinking forward to ask ‘What else can we do with this data we’ve been curating?’”⁵⁵ She finishes by pointing out that “digital tools and techniques are question-making machines, not answer-providing packages.” I would like to push this even further with these excellent points and ask, how does creating data become opportunities for question-making? How can we think about knowledge building in ethical, balanced, and critical ways that make DH projects beyond avenues to supplementary knowledge?

Is visualizing data (the DH bells and whistles), the awe-inspiring beauty of visualizations, then the ornament of a digital project? As an avenue of supplementing knowledge, are visualizations a form of digital ornament? In discussions of digital archive preservation, scholars, librarians, and computer programmers have already separated what is primary and what is supplemental knowledge. What is essential to preserve is not the visualization tools but the data in a stable code. The visualization coding and software applications become part of the functionality of the portal or interface, but they are not the priority when thinking about long-term preservation benchmarks. I believe that in order to address visual aesthetics, we must turn to the critical discussions in art history.

Art History, Visuality, and Pleasure

It is from art history, rather than cinema studies, that I wish to frame out discussions of visualization, visual pleasure, and digital environments. In particular, the work of David Brett and his book *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* help reframe ideas of “decoration and ornament” as “a family of practices devoted mainly to visual pleasure; and treat this pleasure as a family of values, which includes social recognition, perceptual satisfaction, psychological reward and erotic delight (amongst others, all overlapping one another).”⁵⁶ He remarks that these are public values because they are in plain view and that further they show individual experience.

His work in theorizing decoration and ornament looks at Pierre Bourdieu’s schemata of perception with a little nod to Kant, but relies heavily on John Dewey’s “naturalistic account of experience as a relationship between an organism

and its situation—an account which does away with subject/object dichotomies in favour of an interactive model of perception and meaning.”⁵⁷ Thus, Brett’s arguments about reframing visual pleasure in relation to decoration and ornament are precisely centered on an individual’s “experience” with the natural, visual, decorative world. In this way, his theoretical points fit well into the immersive, interactive, yet highly visual worlds of DH projects because visual pleasure is about centering the individual experience and point of view.

I now wish to turn to the AEME to consider how this medieval DH project remediates medieval manuscript textuality into digital textuality and what that world looks like for the history of the book, for multimodal reading, for the post-colonial archive stories of the building of this medieval manuscript archive, and finally, what the theoretical implications are of building this world. What does the AEME’s choices in digital database design say about decolonial, feminist material, and multivocal archive building? What is the AEME’s archive story, and how is it figured as an embodied archive?

The State of Early Middle English Studies

When linguistic and literary scholars have described the Early Middle English period (roughly ca. 1100–1350), their collective evaluations have labeled it “one of the dullest and least accessible intervals in standard literary history, an incoherent, intractable, impenetrable dark age scarcely redeemed by a handful of highlights.”⁵⁸ J. A. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, embarking on an edition of extracts of Early Middle English literature in 1966, found little to challenge “the traditional view that the reigns of William [the Conqueror] and his sons mark an hiatus in our literature and the widespread literary use of the vernacular that is such a distinctive feature of Anglo-Saxon culture.”⁵⁹ Even scholars who recognize shifting aesthetic standards nonetheless dismiss Early Middle English literature on the basis of principles laid down in the nineteenth century, when much of this material was first (and often last) edited. Thus, Early Middle English is imagined as a literary wasteland in which “the débris of an old literature is mixed in with the imperfectly processed materials of a new.”⁶⁰ Even when scholars try to depart from these paradigms, there is a tendency, as Christopher Cannon observes, to view Early Middle English texts in terms of a “profound isolation from immediate vernacular models and examples, from any local precedent for the business of writing English.”⁶¹ For Hahn, the period has a reputation for “aridity and remoteness,” and for Cannon, the consequence is “literary history’s general sense that there is nothing there, since the lack of continuous tradition has so generally (and subtly) been equated with a lack of literature.”⁶² But the Early Middle English period was in fact a time of intense linguistic change, literary experimentation, and textual production that juggled regional specificities, genres in process, and multilingual interactions with verve.

From an explanation of Early Middle English, one can see how disruptive and difficult to pin down the period and its manuscripts/texts are. Even if one just takes a quick sample look at the manuscripts, you can see their vast range and often illegibility. If one examines samples only from the first three manuscripts the AEME will edit—Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Misc. Laud 108; Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Junius 1 also known as the *Ormulum*; and Oxford, Jesus College MS 29—you see the lack of uniformity. If you add the page containing a fragment of the early Middle English lyric *Worldes Blisce*, only preserved on a scrap of vellum slotted in sideways at the end of Cambridge, Corpus Christi Library MS 8, the interface *mise-en-système* of this manuscript's archives are multiple.⁶³

The contours and shape of the archive and the corpus are difficult to narrate. Early Middle English is zone betwixt and between, a literary eruption, an epistemological disruption of linear narratives of literary history, manuscript production, and stories of continuity. In the 162-manuscript corpus, a little over fifteen items are entirely in Early Middle English. The rest are in multilingual compilations. In addition, the most popular Middle English text from the period was the product of female anchoritic patronage rather than a monastic milieu or a royal court. The period has no masculine epic like *Beowulf* or the Nowell Codex for the Anglo-Saxon period, no visual splendor, no court poet like Chaucer or Gower. Instead, we have plucked the image of Lázamon's decorated initial, based on visual cues of Jerome in Jerome Bibles, as writer/as coder but primarily because there were so few visual fields available in our corpus. So the question is, how does a team, mostly of women, rethink a digital archive of disruptive objects?

The importance of the visual point of view as I have discussed with Brett and art history is also the underlying framework that is building the spine of our archive. Our encoding documents reveal that we are primarily focused on our XML encoding schema. This choice that we have made to focus on XML is about sustainability in code, practicalities of work flow, but also I would argue a theoretical choice. Recently several projects have begun to use Resource Description Framework (RDF) as the base building block of their projects. But the best way to explain the different forms of data modeling and how they will have an effect on the constructedness of the data themselves requires a description of data model choices.

Data Models and the Semantic Web

The best quick and easy explanation with graphs on data storage models for the semantic web is available from *Linked Data Tools*.⁶⁴ In this modeling of data, what one has to understand is how information (and in the case of literary and historical databases this is usually a textual set of data) in data modules is organized. There are currently three different kinds of data schemes that can be easily explained by a visual diagram.

First is the relational database that usually is built with programs like MySQL and MS SQL.⁶⁵ MySQL is the one of the most popular open-source relational database management systems (RBDSM). It underwrites sites including WordPress, Facebook, and Twitter. It is a model of data organization that thinks through relations and links. Thus, it thinks about data units and their organization through a relational model, a network.

The second data model is a hierarchical one using TEI-XML (Text Encoding Initiative–Extensible Markup Language). This data model is usually the one used most for DH edition projects because the hierarchical model allows for a tiered data organization structure that accounts for the organization of books—the book, the author, the chapters, the sentence or line, and so on. This organization, of course, is about the layout and format, the *mise-en-page* of the codex that was developed in the Middle Ages. In TEI-XML, you can organize a data informational structure that has a very schematized guideline. It is easy to identify textual units including chapters, sections, and lines.

The third data model is RDF. This model is an arbitrary object relations model; in other words, there is no schematized structure or relation networked connection. Instead, it works more like a blank sandbox in which you place the various digital objects in arbitrary relations. The usefulness of this model is about digital objects—like manuscript pages—in which you can do mock-ups that are as close to the original as possible. In other words, as the example from Stanford’s Shared Canvas demonstrates, it is as near to surrogacy to the original data space as possible.⁶⁶ It also allows for different kinds of organizations. For instance, TEI-XML works best when items have lines, but what do you do with handwritten manuscripts in which handwritten marginalia, drawings, charts, doodles, and other nontextual material are presented all over a manuscript page? Because of its canvas/sandbox frame, RDF models allow the possibility of making units of code in relation to marked-out zones or areas.

I am walking through the schematics of this because it brings up the question of what data models for a digital edition and eventually an archive will mean in terms of how readers of the editions and archive understand the interpretive architecture already built into the digital item that the reader or participant will be working, playing, and reading. And a discussion of the database choices also explains visual pleasure, as explained in David Brett’s *Rethinking Decoration*, in which visual pleasure is precisely about an individual’s experience with his or her environment.

Data Layers and Archival Points of View

“*Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me*” (Chaucer, *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, 1–2).⁶⁷

The AEME Guidelines specify that manuscripts in the archive will be composed of at least four layers of representation to support user interaction and workflow:

image, facsimile transcription, diplomatic (uncorrected) transcription, and critical transcription.⁶⁸ If one or more of these are unavailable, they can be supplied with place fillers. This basic structure allows for further layers of representation to be added, such as a translation. Image metadata and transcription texts will be searchable. We describe each of these features in greater detail below.

1. *Image*: Access to manuscript digital facsimiles containing Early Middle English texts. AEME-held images will initially be photographed as 24-bit 600 dpi max TIFF files. These will be converted to lower-resolution JPG200 files for service on the AEME platform. Images integrated through LOD may vary in format and quality, but the platform will be able to load the most common formats.
2. *Facsimile Transcription*: An encoded mock-up of page elements that can then stand in for missing images (such as when part of a manuscript has not been digitized) and which can further serve to categorize page elements into searchable objects for comparative analysis.
3. *Diplomatic Transcription*: A more or less literal transcription of the text for readers interested in the scribal representation of the text. Coded in TEI-XML following AEME markup guidelines.
4. *Critical Transcription*: A transcription of the text including various types of editorial intervention, including modernized punctuation and capitalization, editorial corrections and notes, and contextual information (glossary references, geolocation tags, etc.). It is anticipated that the critical layer will be suitable for student readers. Coded in TEI-XML following AEME markup guidelines.
5. *Translation*: The AEME platform will accept translations of texts, which will be displayable in the same way as diplomatic and critical transcriptions.
6. *General Search* and discovery of digital images and texts.

With the exception of the facsimile layer, we are primarily coding in TEI-XML. However, there are examples of projects that have begun using RDF as the primary editing space. For example, the Shared Canvas project out of Stanford University is creating an RDF editing platform. It has done a mock-up—if you look at slide 53 in this slide-share you can see their mock-up of *Worldes Blisce* from the Parker Library CCC MS 8.⁶⁹ What they are demonstrating is that they can overlay the coding for the edition on top of the manuscript like a palimpsest and then encode an audio file so that the lines can be sung when one clicks the edited line. They use RDF as their main building framework. AEME has decided to work with TEI-XML for everything but the facsimile layer, which is in fact a layer that fits this particular data model.

We have made a choice to privilege experience over ideas of “objective” data; we have prioritized visual pleasure. RDF splits information into grid units (or zones)

on a screen, and each square unit of data in the grid is moved and read in this way. Thus, I would argue that RDF is actually the digital heir of Dürer's grid in which objects are broken up into individual grid units in order to produce visual perspective.⁷⁰ This visual perspective gives the artist the God's eye view of the world. And as the famous image of Dürer's grid reveals, what gets broken up are not just landscape images and objects but also people, especially women. As art history has discussed, perspective can often be violent to these objects, and it is often women objectified behind the grid.⁷¹

AEME has discussed RDF, but we have chosen to go with TEI-XML because it allows us to see the narrative of individual editors. We have prioritized the experience and interaction with the material from the point of view of each reader. We have privileged individual archive stories, rather than imagining the possibility of algorithmic objectivity in building the spine of the archive. We have decentered the archive, flattened subject/object relationships, allowed for a multiplicity of views; we have built in room for the individual editor/editor who currently and in the future will work and play in our archive location.⁷² We have attempted the actual digital building praxis of a decolonized and feminist archives manifesto. In my mind, it is the difference between RDF as the genealogical child of Dürer's perspective grid versus the narrative choices of individual interaction. We have chosen the path of the Wife of Bath; we have taken "experience" over algorithmic authority.

You can see this working even on a micro level with our decisions. For example, in an early discussion about editorial frameworks, Scott Kleinman (co-director) sent a question out to the group to discuss:

Verse-initial letters (often highlighted by shadow gaps, rubrication, and the like) can be difficult to identify as capital or lower case. I have drafted the following suggestion for handling this phenomenon in the Guidelines:

Verse-initial letters should always be capitalised inside <reg> tags (i.e. the critical representation). The representation in the diplomatic layer can be problematic because it is often difficult to distinguish capitals from non-capitals in this position. AEME leaves it up to the editor's discretion to decide ambiguous cases. Future versions of these Guidelines will list some best practices to aid in decision-making. A useful tool would be a list of suspect letters.

Please comment on this guideline. Does it seem adequate to you? Can we begin compiling a list of letters that should be called to the transcriber's attention?⁷³

As this micro-discussion point shows, we have at every turn privileged individual interaction with the manuscript and data as the final say in our decisions. The last email round was about capital letters in a manuscript and how we have indeterminacy problems and what we may want to do about that. We came up with the suspect

letter list and then the narrative discretion of each editor. The *Archive of Early Middle English* then is focused on how archival manuscript bodies interact with editorial bodies. We are in essence capturing the experience of editors with the physical and the digital manuscripts and how this interaction happens. We are recording their aesthetic and visual pleasure. My last point about Shared Canvas's publishing possibilities also brings up the question of how to get away from privileging the visual in DH projects. Where is the space where we can interrogate these issues? I believe this will really come from Disability Studies in Digital Humanities building. And this shift to Disability Studies is where the AEME will develop into more robustly capturing the process and experience of its editorial/user/player bodies.

Disability Studies

In current disability studies, the term used to discuss designing web environments with disability issues in mind is "universal design." Adeline Koh wrote about her experience at the Accessible Future Workshop in Austin 2014 and critiqued numerous issues with the idea of universal design.⁷⁴ But it is the Twitter conversation on the hashtag that brings up the most resonant issues in relation to making visible the agendas of our digital projects and the issues of the senses in digital project building. She explained on Twitter her discomfort with imagining "universal" accessibility as a default to be the priority benchmark. She explained through the lens of postcolonial theory and criticism whether "universal" should be desired by all when, in fact, postcolonial writers often resist writing in "accessible" colonial languages as a form of resistance. She explained that "the drive towards universal and ultimate accessibility for everyone and everything, seen in this light has parallels with a colonial impulse to observe, survey, control, force open."⁷⁵

Universal design becomes too close to the ideas of one-size-fits-all in Enlightenment political liberalism. It also references current critical race discussions about how postracial ideas of the "universal" erase difference. The term "design" itself already problematizes this because it values visual aesthetics, and even the term "architecture" has connotations and agendas centered on the 1 percent, and on masculine visibility and the gaze.⁷⁶ In my interactions with the Twitter discussion, I pointed out that the goal of disability studies should be to disrupt the very idea of "accommodation" in order to reconceptualize how building computer programs or actual buildings should be disrupted and rethought from the disability studies angle. We should stop thinking only as ableist+accommodations, but rather from disability studies' point of view to rethink the critical possibilities. What if the mainstream angle was the angle of disability studies? In digital humanities work for instance, classic textual data modeling is a simple wordle (<http://www.wordle.net>) word cloud with colors and shapes. Why can't the norm of textual data analysis be a sound cloud or a textural cloud that allows you to print a 3-D model to touch?

These are questions I have asked Rick Godden and Jonathan Hsy as I edited the revision of their article “Universal Design and Its Discontents” for *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*. In particular, Rick Godden explains:

As an entry point to my reflections on Universal Design, I want to first think about some of the ways that Digital Humanities (DH), Disability Studies (DS), and Universal Design (UD) productively converge using recent discussions about the physical act of hand-written notes as an opening example. This is not unusual in a bid to consider the necessity of UD; however, I also want to use this example in order to begin to disorient some of our understandings of UD. Although UD arose out of a real social and political response to the disabling aspects of everyday life for People with Disabilities, I want to suggest that the “Universal” in UD can carry with it some unintended and unexpected assumptions about normalcy and our physical orientation to the world. . . . But what they are also doing, whether intended or not, is participating in “compulsory able-bodiedness,” where “normal,” “best,” and “able-bodied” ultimately occupy the same subject position.⁷⁷

I am interested in how to disorient digital humanities and DH projects. How does a multiplicity of views through the experience of a multiplicity of different bodies help rethink the future of the AEME? As I said in my comments, architecture is too burdened with art in the hands of the elite; instead, I prefer to consider the process of intelligent, critical building. And in the discussion on Twitter, I reply to several of the conference participants and ask if we can’t begin to go beyond “accommodations.” Instead, we should center the point of view of disability studies as the vision of the digital humanities project. From disability studies scholarship, I believe we can begin to think through issues of tactility, sound, and other sensory perceptions that will help us rethink our digital tools and our digital agendas. For instance, why use word clouds only, or even sound visualized clouds? Why aren’t there more options to allow us to analyze poetic data orally by the loudness of various repeated words? Medieval manuscripts are media devices that record multimedia and multimodal experiences. They are visually laid out, but the reader and user is asked to bring the data to life, to make them sing, dance, move. In fact, the world of medieval manuscripts is an early vision of a functioning *mise-en-système*.

It is through the angle of disabilities studies that we can decenter the focus on visuality that has been central to the digital humanities, to move away from “ocularcentrism.” Instead, the critical possibilities may include a move away from the classic textual data modeling as a simple wordle word cloud w/colors and shapes. Instead, we may be able to begin imagining the norm of data analysis through a sound cloud or a texture cloud that allows you to print a 3-D model to touch. This possibility of different data analytics has only just begun to surface. For example, a recent blog post discusses a class that has taken a tactile path in data analytics

in collaboration with art practice, literary studies, and DH.⁷⁸ This beautiful and jagged blazon sculpture highlights where other data analysis vis-à-vis the other senses may go, but I believe further critical discussions especially in relation to critical disability studies will help form critical discussions about these models. Thus, an individual's polyvocal, multibodied pleasure becomes the entry point to navigate an ecosystem.

Skyscraper versus Snake

So if the *Archive of Early Middle English* is a repository of individual editorial experiences interacting with the digital and physical materiality of objects, then what is our final goal? Our goals are decidedly rhizomatic—here, I am specifically referring to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of “multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points of data representation and interpretation” that Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam have pointed out as the possibility of digital archives—for a number of reasons. Wide use and access are the AEME's goal. But so is wide building from what I would describe as the project's eventual stable skeleton. I have argued about this difference in building a digital project with other digital humanists in the past. AEME does not want to architecturally design a skyscraper that requires years of digging out the basement and substructure of a digital project only to find out that years after building, the technology and materials have changed and the skyscraper will not be able to stand without major changes. In this way, much of early DH project focused on monumental architectural designs that took years and never quite finished what they wanted before technology, money, and general sustainability made their DH skyscrapers half-finished ruins on the digital landscape.

AEME's main goal is to create a stable yet flexible manuscript skeleton mostly built by TEI-XML to allow for future users and builders to graft, “enflesh” on layers to our stable frame whatever world they wish to create, interconnect, recreate, form, deform. So instead of a skyscraper, I imagine the *Archive of Early Middle English* and its archival building goals as more akin to the flexible spine of a snake. We wish to build a digital portal that fulfills the possibilities of interface “in-betweenness” where speaker and spoken are created. We want to create a *mise-en-système* that critically remediates the *mise-en-système/mise-en-page* of medieval manuscripts, their somatic reading practices, their worlds. We want to create an ecology that can be a provocative catalyst for cascades of intra-action between participant, text, community, image, sound, and so on. Whether they be students creating narrative bit-strips with our translated *Havelok the Dane* or historical linguistics adding layers of linguistic markup, or musicologists visualizing the notation models in the early Middle English corpus, the builders of AEME would like all of this to happen and the archive to change and be added to, used, and played with in these different ways. In this way, the AEME will never be a “finished” product, but a system always in flux. It will be, as the “TwitterEthics Manifesto” discussed, always in process. In the

end, the archive's goal is access and use to the widest range of people so they can create a multiplicity of experiences in the database.

Archive Stories

I would like to end by relating AEME's archive story. If AEME is an archive of objects and to create this archive is to essentially create a visual, multimedia narrative of Early Middle English, what is that story? In Antoinette Burton's edited collection *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction, and The Writing of History*, she writes that the underlying issue at stake in the volume is that the claims to "objectivity associated with the traditional archive pose a challenge which must be met in part by telling stories about its provenance, its histories, its effect on its users, and above all, its power to shape all the narratives which are to be 'found' there."⁷⁹ In this way, they claim they are constructing "self-conscious ethnographies of one of the chief investigative foundations of History as a discipline."⁸⁰ They emphasize the critical importance of these "archive stories," these ethnographies that explain everything about how an archive was created, used, and experienced, in order to highlight that "all archives are 'figured.'"⁸¹ What Burton means by this is not just self-conscious creation but that archives "all have dynamic relationships, not just to the past and the present, but to the fate of regimes, the physical environment, the serendipity of bureaucrats, and the care and neglect of archivists."⁸²

As for the archive's appeal, so much of it is centered on sensory experiences and the romance of history they invoke, whether they be the actual dust one breathes as Caroline Steedman writes, or the *habitus*, the experience of the archive itself—the silence, the tension, the smell, the feel of the archival matter/material as Arlette Farge writes in her classic *The Appeal of the Archive*.⁸³ Farge writes herself about the experience of the historian/archivist as waiting for that moment when "the sheer pleasure of being astonished by the beauty of the texts and the overabundance of life brimming in so many ordinary lives" grabs hold of the archivist. And the archive itself is governed by emotion: "To feel the allure of the archive is to seek to extract additional meaning from the fragmented phrases found there. Emotion is another tool with which to split the rock of the past, of silence."⁸⁴ In this way, the appeal and often the drive of the archive are a single-minded sensorial drive toward pleasure through vision, touch, smell, and sound. In this way, the physical and digital archives are mimetic in their drive for sensory pleasure. However, they diverge in their possibilities for access and viewpoint. One is built to exclude and be about power; the other has the potential to be multiple and disrupt hierarchical power structures.

However, this romance is helped by the archive's inaccessibility. Archives, in the words of Michel Foucault, were "documents of exclusion" and "monuments to particular configurations of power."⁸⁵ And the archive itself is both potentially a "mundane workplace and a panopticon of intense surveillance."⁸⁶ It is from post-colonial studies where we have seen the archive used politically and socially and often

becoming a “technology of imperial power, conquest, and hegemony.”⁸⁷ Archival making, revision, and erasures are not neutral, objective acts, but rather usually critical, rhetorical, and shaped by nationalist, political, and social agendas. Burton asks how the personal encounters and experience of archive uses matter in constructing archival histories. How in fact do gender, race, ability, religion, and sexuality and the negotiations between archival objects and archival users and the power dynamics therein play out?

These questions, in many ways, may be a bit surprising to some because we are discussing primarily the building of the *Archive of Early Middle English*. How can an archival build of 162 medieval manuscript objects with items of early Middle English text be considered politicized, socially charged, or even shaped by postcolonial and national discourses? Yet, the archive we are discussing shapes the story of a historical colonial power, and it is this archival build that is being funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, an arm of the U.S. government. The archive’s time period, 1100–1350, is historically a moment after the Norman Conquest, a temporal eruption of colonialism and conquest. In addition, the project directors and editorial team are made almost entirely of women, several with intersectional identities related to race, sexual orientation, and religion. In many ways, our archival stories inform our individual archival experiences that we are telegraphing into this digital archive.

There are reasons to make archival labor—usually hidden from view—clear and apparent. Consider one of the main sources of concomitant scholarly digital big data utopia and critical angst: Google Books and its mass digitization project. It has only been recently that any considerations about mass digitization have addressed the issue of the gendered and often racialized labor that has powered this project. In Shawn Wen’s recent article, “The Ladies Vanish,” she discusses the invisible, separated, and underpaid labor happening in Silicon Valley and specifically on the Google campus.⁸⁸ She writes about the army of invisible, segregated, usually female and either Latina or Black labor that arrives in the middle of the night (4 a.m.) and leaves in the afternoon (2 p.m.). They are separate and not equal to the rest of the computer engineers and daily staff at Google. They do not mingle; they are never seen but hide in a different building or on separate floors. These are the women who do the painstakingly detailed work of digitizing the world’s knowledge also known as Google Books and the Google Books Library Project. They are Google’s army of “mechanical turkers,” so named after the eighteenth-century automaton robot, a chess player automaton unveiled in 1770 in Austria that had a human inside of the machine working its parts. As Wen writes,

Of course books don’t digitize themselves. Human hands have to individually scan the books, to open the covers and flip the pages. But when Google promotes its project—a database of “millions of books from libraries and publishers worldwide”—they put the technology, the search function and the expansive

virtual library in the forefront. The laborers are erased from the narrative, even as we experience their work firsthand when we look at Google Books.⁸⁹

The vision of a worldwide, accessible, digitally available library of scanned books rarely gets the same attention as the realities of gendered, racialized, and the underpaid labor that produce these products “magically” for the world. In arguably the biggest Big Data project for the history of the book, the material bodies of these “turkers” are rarely examined in relation to the digital paper bodies they scan and digitally release to the world. They are part of the invisible digital laborers that Lisa Nakamura discusses in “Economies of Digital Production in East Asia: iPhone Girls and the Transnational Circuits of Cool” who power our digital lives.⁹⁰ Our digital archive futures are being built on the backs of the invisible labor of women of color around the world or in this case in Silicon Valley itself. Yet, these unknown, unseen, and uncredited women are the ones perfecting this big data future of the world’s library. As Shawn Wen explains, “Relying on data from mechanical turkers, computers have dramatically improved in recent years at facial recognition, translation, and transcription. These were tasks previously thought to be impossible for computers to complete accurately. Which means that mechanical turkers (mostly women) teach computers to do what engineers (mostly men) cannot on their own program computers to do.”⁹¹ These are the women perfecting the algorithmic perfection of optical character recognition (OCR), the process driving the continued improvement in the search accuracies of Google Books.

The *Archive of Early Middle English* is a DH project that in evaluating the critical stakes of its own work will and must address the archive stories of the labor behind it. Our signatures, our digital paper trails of work, our streams of online discussion on ASANA, GitHub, and listservs are parts of the project’s archive that are being preserved in the files of our archival creation. How ironic would it be for a digital archive—whose main influential and popular text was fueled by the drive of female readers (i.e., *Ancrene Wisse*) and where so many other manuscripts have had scholarly questions about the possibilities of female scribes and “authors” (i.e., Katherine Group and *The Owl and the Nightingale*) that have left no visible mark of gendered ownership, authority, or labor—vanish its own digital editors, graphic artists, and builders? The mostly women behind the *Archive of Early Middle English* are the physical bodies driving the machine, but we plan to speak, to write, to sign our work, and to leave our records to explain how we have “figured” in this digital archive in progress. Our bodies matter to the imprint we leave on our digital archive.

I would like to begin this process by telling my own archive story. My archive story must include the fact that as an Asian woman continuously traveling to Britain to visit these archives, I have acquired a number of library cards from the Bodleian, Cambridge, Lambeth Palace, British Library, and so on. Yet, my passport’s steady entrance into Britain and undoubtedly my “suspect” racialized body, not to mention my markedly Californian accent, have regularly made me a suspicious body at

Customs in Heathrow. “Why,” they ask “are you coming to Britain?” I say “for business.” “What kind of business?” they ask. I reply, “To do research in the manuscript archives.” The interrogation goes on usually until I begin pulling out the sheer number of specialized library cards in my wallet. This archive story speaks acutely to the power dynamics, the odd-accented postcoloniality, the negotiations at play in working and now building the *Archive of Early Middle English*.

The Archive Story of Early Middle English

I would like to end by addressing that final question: what is the story of Early Middle English? Because of the indeterminate, varied, disparate, and in-flux status of the manuscripts in the corpus, because the Early Middle English period is an epoch of intense change and also what I would call a moment of mass experimentation, the archive story of Early Middle English is one of intra-action. I believe it is the story of indeterminacy, of slippery desire, of frustrated pleasures. It is the story of experimental multilingualism; experimental genre forms; the emergence of the lyric, the romance, history, debate, sermon, prose guidebook, and first drama in Middle English. This, then, is what the story of Early Middle English is: it is local, contingent, unformed, still forming, difficult to categorize, difficult to create clear-cut distinctions between causality, agency, space, time, matter, discourse, responsibility, and accountability. But by creating an archive, by editors who are recording their experience with the archive, we are precisely enacting “an agential cut” that allows us to define the archive as forever in progress, forever local and dialectal, always indeterminate.

Notes

1. *Archive of Early Middle English* Development Site.
2. “Encoding Guidelines” and the AEME *GitHub* site.
3. Dorothy Kim (@dorothyk98), Twitter post, 22 September 2016, 3:34 pm, https://twitter.com/dorothyk98/status/779086436737818625/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fstorify.com%2FJonathanHsy%2Fmakingeme-day-1-fri-23-sep-2016/.
4. *The Journal of Early Middle English* will publish its inaugural issue in 2018 and will annually publish two blind peer-reviewed issues a year from ArcPress/MIP. It is currently supported by the University of Victoria and I am an associate editor.
5. In feminist theory, the term “visual pleasure” would immediately point to Laura Mulvey’s classic work in cinema studies: Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure.” However, as my essay will later explain, digital humanities archives and databases do not function like cinema with one central viewer. In fact, I would argue, the opening of an archive means multiple hands, bodies, viewers, creators, hackers who shape and reshape the archive. The sight lines are varied and multitudinous.

6. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 21.
7. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 21.
8. Parkes, "Influence of Ordinatio and Compilatio." See also Drucker, *Graphesis*, 47, 54, and 164.
9. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 139.
10. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 139.
11. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 150.
12. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 150.
13. Alaimo and Hekman, "Introduction," 1.
14. Alaimo and Hekman, "Introduction," 5.
15. Alaimo and Hekman, "Introduction," 9.
16. Alaimo and Hekman, "Introduction," 8.
17. Alaimo and Hekman, "Introduction," 6.
18. Alaimo and Hekman, "Introduction," 17.
19. Christensen and Hauge, "Feminist Materialism," 4.
20. Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," 32.
21. Christensen and Hauge, "Feminist Materialism," 5.
22. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 154.
23. Moretti, *Distant Reading*; Manovich, "Scale Effects."
24. See for example, Denbo, "Diggable Data."
25. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 154.
26. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 63.
27. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 155.
28. This descriptive section about the AEME comes from multiple versions of our NEH Scholarly Editions and Translation grant application. I am chief grant writer, but the grant applications were also always collaborative writing and editing projects.
29. Hahn, "Early Middle English," 62.
30. For instance, as Dorothy Kim and Andrea Lankin have noted, the *South English Legendary Life of Thomas Becket* in Laud Misc. 108 contains loanwords from Welsh, linking a saint whom the text imagines as simultaneously English and foreign to the vocabulary of English colonization. Dorothy Kim treated the subject in "Unfettering the Welsh in Lazamon's *Brut* and the *South English Legendary*."
31. Laing, *Catalogue of Sources*.
32. The AEME Advisory Board includes Professor Wogan-Browne, who directs the French of England Project. Although the two projects share a concern with literature produced in England after the Norman Conquest, there is no overlap since the primary output of the French of England Project is print translations of texts written in French. However, we hope to draw the two projects closer by setting up AEME as a platform for the publication of French of England texts surviving in Early Middle English manuscripts, increasing access to these texts, expanding the coverage of the Archive, and more accurately portraying the multilingual context in which Early Middle English literature was produced and read.

33. Darnton, *Kiss of Lamourette*, 10.
34. Brantley, "Prehistory of the Book," 634.
35. Walker, "Boundless Book," 8.
36. Walker, "Boundless Book," 10.
37. Hansen, *New Philosophy*, 2.
38. Walker, "Boundless Book," 8. See also Camille, "Book as Flesh"; Walter, *Reading Skin*; Kay, "Legible Skins"; and Holsinger, "Of Pigs" and "Parchment Ethics."
39. See Kathryn Rudy's work on late medieval devotional texts and bodily responses to them and how she has measured the dirt with a densitometer to discover the obsessive focus of devotional readers: Rudy, "Dirty Books." See also Wilcox, *Scraped*.
40. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 66.
41. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 126.
42. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 177.
43. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 174.
44. Drucker, *Graphesis*.
45. Drucker, *Graphesis*.
46. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 23.
47. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 176.
48. Drucker, *Graphesis*, 189.
49. *Dirt: Digital Research Tools*.
50. This has slowly shifted, though the number of visualization possibilities far outweighs the sonification of data. You can see some of this new work in "Sonification of UCSD Campus Energy Consumption"; "Sonification Lab"; and "Everything on Paper Will Be Used Against Me."
51. See Graham, "Sound of Data"; Scaletti, "Data Sonification"; and the data sonification *GitHub* site.
52. *DMMapp*; Segler, "Seeing the Body"; Hsy, "#medievaltwitter revisited."
53. Foster, "Political Aesthetics."
54. Froehlich, "CEECing New Directions."
55. Froehlich, "CEECing New Directions."
56. Brett, *Rethinking Decoration*, 4.
57. Brett, *Rethinking Decoration*, 9. See Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory*.
58. Hahn, "Early Middle English," 61. Very few systematic histories of medieval English literature discuss the period under the rubric "Early Middle English." Hahn's is one of the few, and thus essential in defining the archive. The description of Early Middle English in this section is one I have used in the grant documents of AEME.
59. Bennett and Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse*, xii.
60. Shepherd, "Early Middle English Literature," 81.
61. Cannon, *Grounds of English Literature*, 2. It should be noted that Cannon is the only scholar who has attempted to address Early Middle English as a period since Hahn's essay in the *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*.

62. Hahn, "Early Middle English," 62, and Cannon, *Grounds of English Literature*, 3.
63. "Earliest Surviving English Romances"; Thomas, *Muddling through the Middle Ages*, image of fol. 10r; "Jesus College, Oxford; see *Digital Manuscripts Index*, Stanford University, http://dms.stanford.edu/zoompr/CCC008_keywords?druid=cv176gb0028&folio=f.+i+R&headline=PHN0cm9uZz5bIkNhbWJyaWRnZSwgQ29ycHVzIENocmlzdGkgQ29sbGVnZSwg%0AUGFya2VyIExpYnJhcnskIENDQ0MgTVMgOCJdPC9zdHJvbmc%2BPGJyIC8%2BWYJW%0AZWxsdW0iXSwgWyIxNi45IHggMTEuNSJdLCBbInhpdiBLYXJseSjdPGJyIC8%2B%0AWYJWYW5jZW50IG9mIEJlYXV2YWlzlE9QLCBTcGVjdWx1bSBoaXN0b3JpYWxl%0ALCBib29rcyAxLTE0Ii0%3D%0A&height=9153&image=008_i_R_TC_46&ms=8&sequence_num=543&total_sequence_num=548&width=5922 (accessed 19 February 2018).
64. "Tutorial 1."
65. *MySQL*.
66. Sanderson and Albritton, "Shared Canvas Data Model 1.0."
67. Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Prologue," 105.
68. One can see this currently discussed in the editorial guidelines: "AEME Guidelines."
69. Sanderson and Albritton, "Introduction to SharedCanvas."
70. "Albrecht Durer."
71. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.
72. Kim and Kim, "#TwitterEthics Manifesto."
73. Scott Kleinman email to AEME listserv February 24, 2014.
74. She wrote an article about it for ProfHacker: Koh, "Accessible Future Workshop."
75. Koh, Twitter posts, March 1, 2014, 2:06 pm, <https://twitter.com/adelinekoh/status/439884301622968320>, <https://twitter.com/adelinekoh/status/439884428064456704>, and <https://twitter.com/adelinekoh/status/439884654628188161>.
76. Betsky, *Building Sex*.
77. Godden and Hsy, "Universal Design."
78. See Sperrazza, "Feeling Violation."
79. Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6.
80. Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6.
81. Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6.
82. Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6.
83. See Steedman, *Archive and Cultural History*; and Farge, *Allure of the Archives*.
84. Farge, *Allure of the Archives*, 32.
85. Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid, and Saleh, *Refiguring the Archive*, 7.
86. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.
87. Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6.
88. Wen, "Ladies Vanish."
89. Shawn, "The Ladies Vanish."
90. Nakamura, "Economies of Digital Production."
91. Wen, "Ladies Vanish."

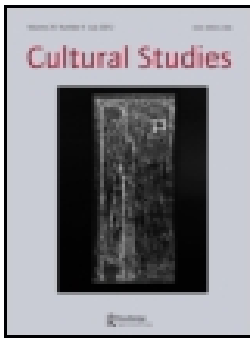
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EVERYBODY'S GOT A LITTLE LIGHT UNDER THE SUN

Black luminosity and the visual culture of surveillance

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EVERYBODY'S GOT A LITTLE LIGHT UNDER THE SUN

Black luminosity and the visual culture of surveillance

This article examines the production of The Book of Negroes during the British evacuation of New York in 1783 and situates it as the first government-issued document for state regulated migration between the United States and Canada that explicitly links corporeal identifiers to the right to travel. I do this to argue that the body made legible with the modern passport system has a history in the technologies of tracking blackness. I explore surveillance technologies of transatlantic slavery, namely lantern laws, and I examine arbitration that took place at Fraunces Tavern in New York City in 1783 between fugitive slaves exercising mobility rights claims by seeking to be included in The Book of Negroes and those who claimed them as property. Coupling the archive of The Book of Negroes with a discussion of rituals and practices engaged by free and enslaved blacks, I suggest that these interactions with surveillance served as both strategies of coping and critique, and in so being represent acts of freedom. This article begins with a story of black escape by taking up the surveillance-based reality television programme Mantracker to question how certain technologies instituted through slavery to track blackness as property anticipate the contemporary surveillance of the racial body.

Keywords The Book of Negroes; surveillance; slavery; passports; American Revolution; Black Canada

Thus despite the bland assertions of sociologists, “high visibility” actually rendered one *un-visible* – whether at high noon in Macy’s window or illuminated by flaming torches and flashbulbs while undergoing the ritual sacrifice that was dedicated to the ideal of white supremacy.

(Ellison 1989)

Our history takes place in obscurity and the sun I carry with me must lighten every corner.

(Fanon 2008)

Introduction

Billed as ‘the ultimate cat and mouse chase through the Canadian wilderness’, the reality television series *Mantracker* made its debut on the Outdoor Life Network in 2006. With only a compass, a map and a 2 km head start, each episode of this reality game show sees the aptly named ‘prey’ given 36 hours to reach the finish line, by foot, some 40 km away. Riding on horseback with a lasso and spurs, *Mantracker* carries neither map, nor compass and supposedly has no idea where the finish line is located. He is equipped with binoculars and an assistant, however. *Mantracker* is Terry Grant, and as the show’s opening title sequence tells its viewers he is an ‘accomplished rider. No nonsense cowboy. He’s trained to track and capture whoever is on the run’. *Mantracker* began its third season with the episode ‘Al and Garfield’. With this episode, viewers are invited to ‘watch as these urban warriors draw on the history of the Underground Railroad for inspiration to escape the unflappable *Mantracker*’. *Mantracker*’s assistant in this episode is Barry Keown, a local horseman who cites John Wayne as one of his idols and who is familiar with the area of Deerhurst, Ontario where the episode was filmed. At one point in the programme, Keown jokes: ‘I guess I’m a little bit of a redneck at heart’ and ‘we’ll have those pilgrims rounded up so fast they wouldn’t believe it’. With its greenish, grainy night-vision footage mimicking on-screen GPS transmissions, high-resolution satellite aerial photograph mapping, and contestants offering staged ‘confessions’ into a hand-held video camera called a ‘preycam’, *Mantracker* has all the trappings of the surveillance-based reality television genre. Each one-hour episode also fulfils a certain pedagogical role as viewers are instructed on anti-tracking techniques, shown ambush plan schematics, and definitions for useful tracking terminology are flashed on the screen. That the human ‘prey’ has to be accompanied by at least one camera operator, a boom mike and proper lighting, does not seem to interfere with the appearance that the prey are evading their predators unabated or hindered by the necessary film crew and equipment needed to stage such a production.

Described as ‘Toronto boys’ from the ‘hard knocks hood of Toronto’s Jane and Finch’, contestants Al St. Louis and Garfield Thompson repeatedly invoke the Underground Railroad throughout the episode. At one point, the show’s announcer even refers to the two as ‘fugitives’. In one scene, the two remark:

Al: This definitely reminds me of, uh, the Underground Railroad and the slaves running away. You know, two black guys on the run, man. We’re keeping that in mind and that’s what fueling us forward.

Garfield: It’s kind of like we’re doing it for our ancestors, man. You know what I mean?

Al: That's deep. That's deep. That's deep. That's deep

Announcer: The prey draw on the past for inspiration.

I begin this article with the reality television programme *Mantracker* to think about histories of black escape and the ways in which they inform contemporary surveillance of the racial body. More specifically, I am asking: what of the surveillance technologies instituted through slavery to track blackness as property? When 'prey' Garfield announces 'it's kind of like we're doing it for our ancestors', he gestures to the injury, the redress and the 'negative inheritance' that Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman envision as that of the slave's progeny: 'the ongoing, production of lives lived in intimate relation to premature death (whether civil, social or literal)' (2005, p. 13). We might read Al and Garfield's call on their self-emancipating ancestors for inspiration – as they attempt to outrun *Mantracker* – as offering a particular rendering of Canada and the tracking of black bodies within this nation that is often made absent from official narratives, that being the accounting for blackness as property. Rinaldo Walcott, in arguing for a refusal of the black invisibility that is produced through Canada's official discourse of multiculturalism, suggests that 'recent black migrants not imagine themselves situated in a discourse that denies a longer existence of blackness' in Canada (2003, p. 14). Al and Garfield could be doing just this, naming a black Canadian presence prior to 1960s migrations that 'troubles and worries the national myth of two founding peoples' (p. 48). However, this rendering is mediated for a television audience in a rather synoptic fashion,¹ interpellating the viewer in a slick production of black escape as entertainment. In one scene that has Garfield complaining that 'this bush is killing me, guy', Al responds with:

Think of it like this, Garfield. This is what our ancestors had to go through and worse, you know, and they were literally on the run for their lives. So, a little bush, that ain't gonna do nothing. Suck it up. Let's go.

In a voice-over of a campfire scene sometime later and shown for the audience in night-vision, Garfield retorts:

There's no comparison in, um, us reflecting back on probably what it was like for our ancestors running for their lives. So later on in the nighttime, you know, we really, ah, we really connected, Al and I, talking about that, you know, and, it was a pretty sentimental and very emotional moment for us.

The screen then cuts to Al and Garfield singing the Negro spiritual 'Go Down Moses' which accompanies a black and white flashback montage highlighting scenes from the day's chase. The segment closes with the 'prey' singing the

line ‘let my people go’ as Mantracker’s face flashes across the screen, eventually fading to the show’s title card and then cuts to a commercial break. The episode closes with Mantracker catching Al and Garfield. Upon their apprehension, images of their faces with a crosshair superimposed are put up on a ‘captured’ screen.

Although this television programme’s website states that ‘the irony is not lost on these “two black guys running from a white guy on a horse”’² this particular episode of *Mantracker* speaks to the historical presence of the surveillance technologies of organized slave patrols and bounty hunters for runaways, notably those journeying at the height of the Underground Railroad from the United States to Canada. The remains of such technologies and the networked resistance to them – namely Negro spirituals that were at once expressions of the desire for freedom as well as counter-surveillance strategies – in this case, now rendered as cable television entertainment. *Mantracker* therefore serves as an entry into a deeper discussion of black mobilities, the visual culture of surveillance and *The Book of Negroes*. A key argument here is that *The Book of Negroes*, and its accompanying breeder documents,³ is the first government-issued document for state regulated migration between the United States and Canada that explicitly linked corporeal markers to the right to travel. The document also serves as an important record of pre-Confederation black arrivals in Canada, and in so being ‘ruptures the homogeneity of nation-space by asserting blackness in/and Canada’ (McKittrick 2002, p. 28) as it historicizes the links between visibility, invisibility, migration and surveillance in the nation.

In the three sections below, I offer a discussion of the racial body in colonial New York City done by a tracing of the archive of the technologies of surveillance and slavery. The first section focuses on the technology of printed text, namely runaway notices and identity documents, in the production of *The Book of Negroes* during the British evacuation of the city. This section draws on archival documents to provide textual links that evidence the accounting of black bodies as intimately tied with the history of surveillance, in particular surveillance of black skin by way of identity documents. In so doing my analysis then raises the problem of my own surveillance practices in reading the archive: by accounting for violence do my reading practices act to re-inscribe violence and a remaking of blackness, and black skin, as objectified? Thus, I am mindful of both Katherine McKittrick’s cautioning that there is a danger of reproducing ‘racial hierarchies that are anchored by our “watching over” and corroborating practices of violent enumeration’ (2010) and Nicole Fleetwood’s urging for the ‘productive possibilities of black subjects to trouble the field of vision’ by virtue of ‘the discourses of captivity and capitalism that frame’ the black body as always already problematic (2011, p. 18). To question acts of watching over and looking back, in the second section I turn to lantern laws in colonial New York City that sought to keep the black body in a state of permanent illumination. I use the term ‘black luminosity’ to refer to a form of boundary

maintenance occurring at the site of the racial body, whether by candlelight, flaming torch or the camera flashbulb that documents the ritualized terror of a lynch mob. Black luminosity, then, is an exercise of panoptic power that belongs to 'the realm of the sun, of never ending light; it is the non-material illumination that falls equally on all those on whom it is exercised' (Foucault 2003, p. 77). Here boundary maintenance is intricately tied to knowing the black body, subjecting some to a high visibility by way of technologies of seeing that sought to render the subject outside of the category of the human, *un-visible*. My focus in the second section is the candle lantern and laws regarding its usage that allowed for a scrutinizing surveillance that individuals were at once subjected to, and that produced them as black subject. Following David Marriott in his reading of the spectacle of death that is lynching and its photographic archive, such laws, I suggest, operated 'through visual terror' in the management of black mobilities, warning of the potential to reduce one to 'something that don't look human' (2000, p. 9). Or perhaps too human. Rather than looking solely to those moments when blackness is violently illuminated, I highlight certain practices, rituals and acts of freedom and situate these moments as interactions with surveillance systems that are both strategies of coping and of critique. This is to say that 'ritual heals' and 'constitutes the *social* form in which human beings seek to deal with denial as active agents, rather than as passive victims' (Sennett 1994, p. 80). With the third section, I consider varied notions of repossession by examining the Board of Inquiry arbitration that began in May 1783 at Fraunces Tavern in New York City between fugitive slaves who sought to be included in *The Book of Negroes* by exercising mobility rights claims as autonomous subjects and those who sought to reclaim these fugitives as their property. In her discussion of 'narrative acts' and the moments of narration through which racialized subjects 'are brought into being', (2009, p. 625) Hazel Carby suggests that we must 'be alert to the occasions when racialized subjects not only step into the recognitions given to them by others but provide intuitions of a future in which relations of subjugation will (could) be transformed' (p. 627). I am suggesting that *The Book of Negroes* is one of those occasions that Carby alerts us to. At Fraunces Tavern, the pub turned courtroom, mobility rights were sought through de-commodificatory narrative acts, disputing the claims made on the self as goods to be returned. I conclude this article by turning to a different narrative act, Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes: A Novel* (2007), as it extends the racial surveillance practices discussed in this article through its creative remembering of the brutalities of slavery. I begin and end this article with representations of black escape to argue that, in different ways, they allow for a rethinking of the archive of the technologies of slavery and surveillance, in that they disclose how this archive continues to inform our historically present tenets of emancipation.

The Book of Negroes lists passengers on board 219 ships that set sail from New York between 23 April 1783 and 30 November 1783. Ships, as Paul Gilroy tells us, 'were the livings means by which the points within the Atlantic

world were joined' (1993, p. 16). Following this, *The Book of Negroes* is not only a record of escape on board 219 ships, but it can also be thought of as a record of how the surveillance of black Atlantic mobilities was integral to the formation of the Canada–US border. If we are to take transatlantic slavery as the antecedent of contemporary surveillance technologies and practices as they concern inventories of ships' cargo and the making of 'scaled inequalities' in the *Brookes* slave ship schematic (Spillers 1987, p. 72), biometric identification by branding the body with hot irons (Browne 2010), slave markets and auction blocks as exercises of synoptic power where the many watched the few, slave passes and patrols, black codes and fugitive slave notices, it is to the archives, slave narratives and often to black expressive practices and creative texts that we can look to for moments of refusal and critique. What I am arguing here is that with certain acts of cultural production we can find performances of freedom and suggestions of alternatives to ways of living under a routinized surveillance that was terrifying in its effects.

The making of *The Book of Negroes*

With its crude inscriptions such as 'scar in his forehead' and 'stout with 3 scars in each cheek', *The Book of Negroes* is an early imprint of how the body, and skin in particular, comes to be understood as a means of identification and tracking by the state. In this section I outline how *The Book of Negroes* became the first large-scale public record of black presence in North America. This handwritten and leather bound British military ledger lists 3,000 black passengers who embarked on mainly British ships during the British evacuation of New York in 1783. Bound for Canada, England and Germany at the end of American Revolutionary War, passengers listed in *The Book of Negroes* travelled as indentured labourers to white United Empire Loyalists or as free people described in this ledger as 'on her own bottom'. Around the same time others left New York enslaved to white Loyalists. While some travelled to Germany, most likely as the property of German Hessian soldiers, captured from rebel states as spoils of war. The travellers listed in *The Book of Negroes* would later be recognized by many as United Empire Loyalists, or more specifically Black Loyalists, for their efforts as soldiers, support staff and waged workers (cooks, blacksmiths, laundresses, nurses, spies and other labourers) with the British forces during the War of Independence. The naming of those listed as Loyalists, or specifically Black Loyalists, is not without controversy as many entered into the bargain with the British for freedom and not necessarily out of some loyalty to the Crown. What follows is a discussion of the proclamations and the provisional treaty that eventually led to *The Book of Negroes*. This is done through the stories of black escape in and around the time of the evacuation of New York that are found in the archive: runaway

notices, official correspondence, a memoir, an early passport. With these texts we can understand how the tracking of blackness, rooted in the violence of slavery, was instituted through printed text. I argue that the body made legible with the modern passport system has a history in the technologies of tracking blackness.

Linking identity to bodily markers and infirmities, such as scarring from small pox, 'blind right eye' or 'lame of the left arm', The Book of Negroes lists the names of each passenger falling under the Philipsburg Proclamation on board the 219 ships that left New York in 1783. Each entry details the passenger's physical description, age, places of birth and enslavement and includes a section for comments or details of when and how each passenger came to fall under the Philipsburg Proclamation. Issued by British Commander-in-Chief Sir Henry Clinton on 30 June 1779 this proclamation promised 'to every negroe Who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper' (*Royal Gazette* 28 July, 1779).⁴ Whether those who had voluntarily left their Patriot masters and found themselves with the British felt assured that by 'full security' it was meant that they would be secure in the mutual recognition of their personhood or that they were fighting for what would ultimately lead to their emancipation is questionable, however numerous slaves owned by Patriots deserted these slave owners and fled to the British holdings. Those enslaved by white Loyalists, whether owned previously or confiscated during raids on Patriot estates, were not a part of this arrangement of service in exchange for freedom. Also detailed in The Book of Negroes were the names of the passengers' claimants, if any, as a caveat set out by Article Seven of the Provisional Peace Treaty reached on 30 November 1782 between Britain and the Congress of Confederation stated that the British withdrawal be executed without 'carrying away any Negroes, or other Property of the American Inhabitants' (Provisional Articles to Treaty, 1782). A Board of Inquiry consisting of American and British delegates was established to adjudicate Patriot claims of loss of human property. When the Treaty of Paris was signed on 3 September of the following year, this stipulation regarding 'carrying away any Negroes' was included (Treaty of Paris, 1783). If it was found that the British did indeed abscond with their property, Patriot owners could be duly compensated.

At the time of the British evacuation the circulation of printed text allowed for a certain 'simultaneous consumption' (Anderson 1991, p. 35) of newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves by an assumed white public; consuming at once the black subject imagined unfree and producing the reader as part of the apparatus of surveillance, the eyes and ears of face-to-face watching, observing and regulating. Through their detailing of physical descriptions, the surveillance technology of the fugitive slave advertisement was put to use to make the already hypervisible black subject legible as, what Thelma Wills Foote terms, 'objectified corporeality' (2004, p. 190). Beyond

its primary function in the visual culture of surveillance, that being serving public notice of runaways by announcing ‘property as out of place’ (Hall 2006, p. 70), the subjective descriptions employed by subscribers in runaway notices often reveal the subversive potential of being ‘out of place’. ‘Out of place’ gestures to the Caribbean vernacular usage of the term, along with ‘facet’ and ‘boldface’, – all of which were and continue to be used to name subversive acts of looking and talking back. The refusal to stay in spaces of dispossession, disposability and lived objecthood can be observed in a 14 June 1783 runaway notice in the *Royal Gazette* that offered ‘twenty dollars reward’ for 16-year-old Sam. Sam is described by the subscriber as ‘five feet high, slim made’ and ‘remarkable in turning up the white of his eyes when spoke to’. Sam’s refusals, or his ‘facetiness’, are agential acts, at first ocular, looking back – to at once return and dismiss the gaze with the gesture of the eye roll – and then to steal himself and make his own place. As slave owners could make claims to their human property, this made for many start-ups in slave-catching, the Mantrackers of the time. Some owners came to New York or sent representatives and slave catchers in their place to make claims seeking the return of the black women, men and children who they considered their property, making New York at once a space of terror and a site of freedom for those who came under one British proclamation or another. In his memoirs, Boston King recounts the terror that spread at this time:

For a report prevailed at New York, that all slaves, in number 2,000, were to be delivered up to their masters, although some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our masters coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New York, or even dragging them out of their beds.

(King 1798)

It was not only Patriots who seized upon their slaves. British Loyalists also contributed to this atmosphere, however many black men, women and children outwitted this terror. Slaver Valentine Nutter placed a notice in the 12 May 1783 edition of the *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* offering an award of five guineas for ‘a negro man named Jack’ described as around 23 years of age. Notably, this ad drew detailed attention to Jack’s skin as a means of identification, describing him as having ‘scars on his left arm and a small scar on his nose’. Perhaps Jack evaded capture as the following September Nutter left for Port Roseway, Nova Scotia aboard the ship *L’Abondance* with ‘Silvia’, a woman described in *The Book of Negroes* as a 30-year-old ‘stout wench’ and ‘Sam’, a ‘tall’ and ‘stout fellow’ recorded as 22 years old, as his property.

Though the Treaty of Paris stipulated that the British were not to ‘carry away any Negroes’, for General Guy Carleton, Commander-in-Chief of all

British Forces in North America, it did not require the British to readily facilitate the delivery of those deemed property. In a pre-emptive move the British began to issue Birch Certificates by order of Brigadier General Birch as defacto passports. These Birch Certificates served as status documents that identified the holder and confirmed the holder's right to cross an international border. Birch Certificates would become breeder documents for The Book of Negroes. These early passports were a guarantee that the legitimate holder had resided voluntarily with the British before 30 November 1782, the date of the signing of the Provisional Peace Treaty, as only those who resided within British lines for 12 months or longer were deemed eligible for embarkation on British ships. Birch Certificates, such as the one issued to Cato Ramsey, read as follows:

New York, 21st April 1783

This is to certify to whomever it may concern, that the bearer hereof Cato Ramsay a Negro, reported to the British Lines, in consequence of the Proclamations of Sir William Howe, and Sir Henry Clinton, late Commanders in Chief in America; and that the said Negro has hereby his Excellency Sir Guy Carleton's Permission to go to Nova Scotia, or wherever else he may think proper.

By the Order of Brigadier General Birch

Those who made use of such certification to embark on the ships to Canada as well as England and Germany, had their names listed in the inventory that is The Book of Negroes. After General Birch departed New York in 1783, similar certification was issued by General Thomas Musgrave to close to 300 blacks who were eligible for evacuation.

The ledger, in its accounting for humans as commodity in the enterprise of racial slavery, according to Saidiya Hartman, 'introduces another death through its shorthand' (2008, p. 5). The Book of Negroes is no exception. With each entry, quick assessments are made on the subject's being and then jotted down in point form. Identifying each passenger by way of corporeal descriptors, race or national origins or sometimes referencing some specific labour that they performed: 'worn out', 'stout healthy negro', 'young woman', 'blind of one eye', 'ordinary fellow with a wooden leg', 'healthy negress', 'better half Indian', 'stout labourer', 'nearly worn out', 'stout wench with a mulatto child 7 months old', 'M, between an Indian & Span.', 'thin wench, black', 'squat wench', 'he is Cook on board the ship', 'stout man marked with small pox', 'ordinary fellow', 'passable', 'thick set man', 'stout, flat, square wench', 'Mulatto from Madagascar', 'ditto', 'came from Jamaica, can't understand him'.⁵ But in the 15 pages that precede the ledger we are afforded, by way of a crude transcript, a means to understand the Board of

Inquiry hearings as moments of contestation for mobility rights where black subjects were often repossessed by claimants, but importantly they used legal channels and testimony to repossess themselves through assertions of their right to freedom and autonomy. Often this was done with the aid of counterfeit identities, identity documents and the telling of necessary counter-narratives that challenged a claimant's stated timeline. I take up this transcript in the third section. Two interlocking questions emerge: first, how are we to read the historical record of these hearings given the context in which they were written, where one human owned another? Second, how do we grapple with the textual meaning itself, given that the archive is comprised not of verbatim transcripts but of records of proceedings and decisions rendered almost non-eventful in their brevity, and are only partial accounts meant to be put to later use in the service of Patriots for claims of injury, losses of property and compensation? By situating the Board of Inquiry hearings at Fraunces Tavern as moments of repossession what I am arguing for here is a mapping of Fraunces Tavern as a space where black women and black men challenged *un-visibility* through contestations for freedom and mobility that were simultaneously demands for recognition not as property, but as full subjects, as humans. In the section that follows, I take up eighteenth century lantern laws to question how black luminosity as a means of regulating mobility was legislated and also contested.

Torches, torture and Totau

'Moment by moment' is the experience of surveillance in urban life, as David Lyon observes, where the city dweller expects to be 'constantly illuminated' (2001, p. 51–53). It is how the city dweller contends with this expectation that is instructive. To examine closely the performance of freedom, a performative practice that I suggest that those named fugitive in the Board of Inquiry arbitration hearings made use of, I borrow Richard Iton's 'visual surplus' and its b-side 'performative sensibility' (2009, p. 105). What Iton suggests is that we come to internalize an expectation of the potential of being watched and with this emerges a certain 'performative sensibility'. Coupled with this awareness of an overseeing surveillance apparatus was 'the conscious effort to always give one's best performance and encourage others to do the same, and indeed to perform even when one is not sure of one's audience (or whether there is in fact an audience)' (p. 105). Iton employs the term visual surplus to think about the visual media of black popular culture (graffiti, music videos) made increasingly available to the public through the rise of hip-hop in the five boroughs of New York City in the 1970s and the uses of new technologies (cellular phones, handheld cameras, the Internet, DVDs) to record and distribute performances. Applied to a different temporal location,

Iton's analyses of visual surplus and performative sensibility are useful for how we think about fugitive acts, black expressive practices and the regulation of black mobilities in colonial New York City 200 years earlier. What I am suggesting here is that for the fugitive in eighteenth century New York such a sensibility would encourage one to perform – in this case perform freedom – even when one was not sure of one's audience. Put differently, these performances of freedom were refusals of dispossession, constituting the black subject not as slave or fugitive, nor commodity but as human. For the black subject, the potentiality of being under watch was a cumulative effect of the large scale surveillance apparatus in colonial New York City and beyond stemming from transatlantic slavery, specifically fugitive slave posters and print news advertisements, blackbirders and other freelancers who kidnapped free blacks to transport them to other sites to be enslaved, slave catching and through the passing of repressive black codes, such as those in response to the slave insurrection of 1712.

April 1712 saw an armed insurrection in New York City where over two dozen black slaves gathered in the densely populated East Ward of the city to set fire to a building, killing at least nine whites and wounding others. In the end over 70 were arrested, with many coerced into admissions of guilt. Of those, 25 were sentenced to death and 23 of these death sentences were carried out. Burned at the stake, hanged, beheaded and their corpses publicly displayed and left to decompose, such spectacular corporal punishment served as a warning for the city's slave population and beyond. With these events and the so-called slave conspiracy to burn the city in 1741, the black code governing black city life consolidated previously enacted laws that were enforced in a rather discretionary fashion.⁶ Some of these laws spoke explicitly to the notion of a visual surplus and the regulation of mobility by way of the candle lantern. On 14 March 1713, the Common Council of New York City passed a 'Law for Regulating Negro or Indian Slaves in the Nighttime' that saw to it that 'no Negro or Indian Slave above the age of fourteen years do presume to be or appear in any of the streets' of New York City 'on the south side of the fresh water one hour after sunset without a lantern or a lit candle' (New York Common Council, Volume III). 'Fresh water' here referring to the Fresh Water Pond found in lower Manhattan, slightly adjacent to the Negroes Burial Ground and that supplied the city with drinking water at the time. Again, this law regulating mobility and autonomy through the use of the technology of the candle lantern was amended on 18 November 1731 where 'no negro, mulatto or Indian slave above the age of fourteen years' unless in the company of some white person 'or white servant belonging to the family whose slave he or she is, or in whose service he or she there are' was to be without a light that could be plainly seen or it was then 'lawful for any of his Majesty's Subjects within the said City to apprehend such slave or slaves' and 'carry him, her or them before the Mayor or Recorder or any of the Aldermen of the said City who are hereby authorized upon proof of offense to commit such slave or slaves to the

Common Gaol' (New York Common Council, Volume IV). Any slave convicted of being unlit after dark was sentenced to a public whipping of no more than 40 lashes, at the discretion of the master or owner before being discharged. Later this punishment was reduced to no more than 15 lashes. Such discretionary violence made for an imprecise mathematics of torture.

Mostly, punishment for such transgression was taken into the hands of the slave owner. In 1734 a male slave of John van Zandt was found dead in his bed. The dead man was said to have 'absented himself' from van Zandt's dwelling in the night-time (*New York Weekly Journal* CXIII, 5 January 1735). Although it was first reported that the slave was horsewhipped to death by Van Zandt for being caught on the streets after dark by watchmen, a coroner's jury found Van Zandt not negligent in this death, finding instead that 'the correction given by the Master was not the cause of death, but that it was by the visitation of God' (*New York Weekly Journal* CXIII, 5 January 1735). Other laws put into place around light and black mobilities in New York City stipulated that at least one lantern must be carried per three negroes after sunset, more tightly regulated curfews and in 1722 the Common Council relegated burials by free and enslaved blacks to the daytime hours with attendance of no more than 12, plus the necessary pallbearers and gravediggers, as a means to reduce opportunities for assembly and to prevent conspiracy hatching. In recounting physician Alexander Hamilton's narrative about his travels through New York City in July of 1744, Andy Doolen details that one outcome of the alleged conspiracy of 1741 was the ruining, according to Hamilton, of the traditional English cup of tea (2005). It was thought by Hamilton that:

they have very bad water in the city, most of it being hard and brackish. Ever since the negroe conspiracy, certain people have been appointed to sell water in the streets, which they carry on a sledge in great casks and bring it from the best springs about the city, for it was when the negroes went for tea water that they held their caballs and consultations, and therefore they have a law now that no negroe shall be seen upon the streets without a lanthorn after dark.

(Hamilton 1948, p. 88)

We can think of the lantern as a prosthesis made mandatory after dark, a technology that made it possible for the black body to be constantly illuminated from dusk to dawn, made knowable, locatable and contained within the city. The black body, technologically enhanced by way of a simple device made for a visual surplus where technology met surveillance, made the business of tea a white enterprise and encoded white supremacy, as well as black luminosity, in law. Of course, unsupervised leisure, labour, travel, assembly and other forms of social networking past sunset by free and enslaved black New Yorkers continued regardless of the enforcement of codes meant to curtail such things.

Oftentimes social networking by free and enslaved black New Yorkers took place right under the surveillant gazes of the white population, in markets and during Sabbath and holiday celebrations. In these spaces of sometimes interracial and cross-class commerce and socializing, black performative practices of drumming, dancing and chanting persisted. During celebrations of Pinkster marking the feast of Pentecost of the Dutch Reformed Church, amongst the rituals, free and enslaved blacks elected a governor who would serve as a symbolic leader resolving disputes and collecting tributes, making this holiday an event for white spectatorship of black cultural and political production, although for many such celebratory resistance made this ‘a festival of misrule’ (Harris 2003, p. 41). So much so that the Common Council of Albany, New York, banned Pinkster celebrations in 1811, for reasons including a resentment of the space that it opened up for unsettling exchanges between blacks and whites (Lott 1993; McAllister 2003; White 1989). The most controversial incorporation of black performativity into Pinkster was the Totau. On the Totau, McAllister writes:

a man and a woman shuffle back and forth inside a ring, dancing precariously close without touching and isolating most of their sensual movement in the hip and pelvic areas. Once the couple dances to exhaustion, a fresh pair from the ring of clapping dancers relieves them and the Totau continues.

(McAllister 2003, p. 112)

That such a performative sensibility was engaged by black subjects in colonial New York City approximately 200 years before the emergence of hip hop in the Bronx, New York City, is of much significance. The Totau, and later, the Catharine Market breakdown reverberate in the cypher of b-boys and b-girls. In Eric Lott’s discussion of black performances he cites Thomas De Voe’s eyewitness account of the Catharine Market breakdown in the early nineteenth century New York City. De Voe writes:

This board was usually about five to six feet long, of large width, with its particular spring in it, and to keep it in its place while dancing on it, it was held down by one on each end. Their music or time was usually given by one of their party, which was done by beating their hands on the sides of their legs and the noise of the heel. The favorite dancing place was a cleared spot on the east side of the fish market in front of Burnel Brown’s Ship Chandlery.

(De Voe 1862, cited in Lott 1993, pp. 41–42)

In this instance, the breakdown is performed in a market, allowing for white spectatorship and patronage in a space that is already overdetermined as a site of commerce within the economy of slavery. Later, DeVoe recalls ‘public

negro dances' at Catharine Market in an 1889 *New York Times* article where he is quoted as saying that the dancers 'would bring roots, berries, birds, fish, clams, oysters, flowers, and anything else they could gather and sell in the market to supply themselves with pocket money' (28 April 1889). Sylvia Wynter's 'provision ground ideology' is instructive here for an understanding of solidarity, survival and the role of folk-culture as resistance to the 'dehumanization of Man and Nature' (1970, p. 36). Out of the provision grounds came the cultivation of ceremonial practices, including dance, that were, as Wynter tells us, 'the cultural guerilla resistance against the Market economy' (1970, p. 36).⁷ The remains of the Catharine Market breakdown can be found in the cardboard and turntables of the breakdancing cypher. Then and now cultural production and expressive practices offer moments of living with, refusals and alternatives to routinized surveillance within a visual surplus. In so being, they allow for us to think differently about the predicaments, policies and performances constituting surveillance. Colonial New York City was a space of both terror and promise for black life. Lantern laws, fugitive slave notices, public whippings and the discretionary uses of violence by 'his Majesty's subjects' rendered the black subject as always already unfree yet acts, like the breakdown, that were constitutive of black freedom persisted. It is under this context where certain humans came to be understood by many as unfree and the property of others while at the same time creating practices that maintained their humanity by challenging the routinization of surveillance, that we should read the 1783 Board of Inquiry hearings at Fraunces Tavern.

Of property and passports

What began as a meeting between Generals Carleton and Washington on the point of Article Seven in the Provisional Peace Treaty ended with an exchange of letters between the two, with Washington reiterating his concern regarding the embarkation of escaped slaves. Carleton responded, in kind, with a letter dated 12 May 1783. On what he called Washington's 'surprise' about the evacuation and Washington's accusation that such action 'was a measure totally different from the letter and spirit of the treaty', Carleton reminded Washington that the British set up a register 'to serve as a record of the name of the original proprietor of the negro, and as a rule by which to judge of his value. By this open method of conducting business, I hoped to prevent all fraud' (Carleton 1783). Further, alluding to both self-repossession and tracking by way of identity document, Carleton suggested that 'had these negroes been denied permission to embark they would, in spite of every means to prevent it, have found various methods of quitting this place, so that the former owner would no longer have been able to trace them, and of course would have lost,

in every way, all chance of compensation' (1783). On the notion of black subjects as property, Carleton put it this way, 'every negroe's name is registered and the master he formerly belonged to, with such other circumstances as served to denote his value, that it may be adjusted by compensation, if that was really the intention and meaning of the treaty' (1783). Given this, American and British commissioners charged with receiving and settling claims were appointed to inspect all embarkations to prevent evasion of Article Seven. And with this came the setting up of the arbitration hearings that took place at Fraunces Tavern. At the corner of Pearl and Broad Streets in lower Manhattan, Fraunces Tavern served as the centre of arbitration, where almost every Wednesday at ten in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon from May 1783 through November of that same year the formerly enslaved came to argue for their inclusion in The Book of Negroes by asserting their right to leave New York as free people.⁸

On 2 August 1783, merchant Jonathan Eilbeck questioned the legitimacy of a woman named Jenny Jackson's embarkation to Nova Scotia and he brought his claim before The Board of Inquiry. Jackson was brought to shore to be examined and she produced for The Board a Birch Certificate issued on 5 June 1783 which stated, 'That a Negro named Jenny Jackson formerly the property of John Mclean of Norfolk in the Province of Virginia came within the British Lines under the Sanction and claims the Privilege of the Proclamation respecting Negroes theretofore issued for their Security and Protection'. Eilbeck, a Loyalist, produced a bill of sale for a Judith Jackson from John Maclean dated 16 July 1782. Jackson admitted to The Board that she was indeed Judith Jackson and formerly enslaved by Maclean and clarified that when Maclean departed for England and left her behind she went with the British army to Charlestown and then New York. More detail on Jenny 'Judith' Jackson's narrative of falling within the Proclamation can be found in the 6 May 1773 edition of the *Virginia Gazette*. Between ads for the sale of slaves, tracts of land and a 'fashionable' chariot, and notices for a lost watch and for strayed and stolen livestock, a runaway announcement for a 'Negro woman named Judith' was placed by John Maclean of Norfolk. Offering a reward of up to six dollars, Maclean's notice describes Judith as 'tall and slender, not very black, appears to be between thirty and thirty-five years of age'. In the notice, Maclean made note that Jackson departed with her infant daughter and was perhaps pregnant. Although Jackson had laboured with the British for eight years in Charlestown, South Carolina and New York, and was issued a Birch Certificate attesting to her right to depart, the Board did not make a ruling in the dispute, perhaps because Eilbeck was a Loyalist and they were charged only with adjudicating Patriot claims of loss of property. The Board forwarded the case to General Carleton. Two women named Judith Jackson are recorded in The Book of Negroes. One woman departed from New York City before the aforementioned case was heard. The other Judith

Jackson left on the ship *Ranger* for Port Mattoon, Nova Scotia on 30 November 1783. This Judith Jackson remained in New York until the final day that ships departed as she petitioned Carleton for her passage to Canada and for the return of her two children who were given to Eilbeck. She left for Canada without her children. She is described in *The Book of Negroes* as an 'ordinary wench' of 53-years of age, and formerly the property of 'John Clain' of Norfolk, Virginia, from whom she is recorded as leaving 'early 1779'. Eilbeck also makes an appearance in *The Book of Negroes* in the ledger entry for 'Samuel Ives'. This unusually long entry states, 'Sold to Captain Grayson by Jonathan Eilbeck of New York who it does not appear had any right to sell him as he was the property of Capt. Talbot of Virginia from whence he was brought by the troops 5 years ago and had a pass from Lt. Clinton which Mr. Eilbeck destroyed'. With this entry, Eilbeck's questionable means of claiming possession of others is revealed.

Not all who attempted to embark by altering their recollection of the time of their arrival within the British lines met the same fate. On 2 August 1783, Thomas Smith took issue with a woman named Betty's pending embarkation to Nova Scotia. Betty produced a Birch Certificate issued to Elizabeth Truant detailing that she was formerly the property of Smith but 'that she came within the British Lines under the Sanction and claims the Privilege of the Proclamation respecting Negroes therefore issued for their Security and Protection'. Smith insisted that 'the Wench is his property' and that she only arrived in New York City from his estate in Acquackanonk Township, New Jersey, on 20 April 1783. Perhaps out of terror and with the hope of reducing the punishment she might have imagined on the inevitability of her return, Betty relented and acknowledged that she escaped Smith the previous April, making her ineligible for the Proclamation. The Board ruled for the claimant and directed Betty to be 'disposed of' by Smith 'at his pleasure.' On 30 May the Board heard the case of Violet Taulbert. In an ad placed by David Campbell of Greenwich in the 24 May 1783 *Royal Gazette*, Taulbert is said to have escaped with her two boys. A reward of five guineas was posted for their return. No decision was made by The Board in this case as theirs was only to decide on cases regarding those ready to embark. In another case heard on 17 July 1783, Dinah Archer produced before The Board a Birch Certificate issued to her on 2 May 1783. Archer had been brought for examination before The Board through a claim by William Farrer. During the hearing Archer testified 'that she was formerly the Property of John Baines of Crane Island Norfolk County Virginia' and that she was sold by Baines to Farrer and lived and laboured in Farrer's household for about three years until he left for England, leaving her behind. Archer told The Board that she was later informed by Baines that he never issued a bill of sale to Farrer, and Baines 'compelled her to return to him'. Archer remained in Baines' possession until she escaped to the

British and arrived in New York City under Sir George Collier and General Matthews' 'Expedition up the Chesapeake'. The Board decided that they were 'not authorized to determine the Question between the Claimant and the Negroe woman' and referred the case to the Commandant of New York City. Recorded in the Book of Negroes as a 42-year-old 'one eyed' 'stout wench', Dinah Archer travelled on the ship *Grand Duchess of Russia* to Port Roseway on 22 September 1783. She travelled to Canada indentured to a Mrs. Savage. Although Archer had perjured herself to gain a passport, her narrative of coming behind the British lines before the signing of the Provisional Peace Treaty allowed the British to deny William Ferrer's claim on her as his property.

In total The Board of Inquiry heard 14 cases. Of those fourteen, five were children, two men and seven women. The five children were all returned to their claimants, the two men were allowed to embark and of the seven women, three were allowed to leave New York. In all 1,336 men, 914 women and 750 children are listed in The Book of Negroes. Once in Canada they would find there enslaved black people, other Black Loyalists who were evacuated from Boston in 1777, and largely untenable land. Many laboured on public works projects, feared slave catchers and faced possible re-enslavement. After some time, many left to establish what is now Sierra Leone (Pybus 2006; Schama 2007).

Conclusion: Aminata Diallo

In discussing the archive of Atlantic slavery, Hartman asks, 'how might it be possible to generate a different set of descriptions from this archive? To imagine what could have been?' (2008, p. 7). I close this article by considering *The Book of Negroes: A Novel* to ask if this creative text can offer an alternative imagining of the events surrounding the archive that could not be fully realized with the historical documents examined here. The novel traces protagonist Aminata Diallo's life from her capture in West Africa, her enslavement in South Carolina, her journey to Manhattan and her eventual escape from her slave master to become bookkeeper at Fraunces Tavern, to her work with British under the proclamations, her emigration to Nova Scotia and on to London and her return to Africa. Through Diallo we are offered a remembering of Fraunces Tavern and those archived in The Book of Negroes as she is tasked by the British to interview, inspect and register the names in the ledger: 'I wanted to write more about them, but the ledger was cramped' (Hill 2007, p. 294). When a claim is made on Diallo's person as property, she is taken in front of The Board at Fraunces Tavern, 'wrists tied and legs

shackled' (p. 306). In this claims court, promises of freedom were broken, despite the pleas and testimony. Diallo narrates:

At the back of the room, I heard claims against two other Negroes who, like me, had been pulled off ships in the harbour. Both – one man, and one woman – were given over to men who said they owned them. I despised the Americans for taking these Negroes, but my greatest contempt was for the British. They had used us in every way in their war. Cooks. Whores. Midwives. Soldiers. We had given them our food, our beds, our blood and our lives. And when slave owners showed up with their stories and their paperwork, the British turned their backs and allowed us to be seized like chattel. Our humiliation meant nothing to them, nor did our lives.

(p. 307)

Diallo voices a story of life, surveillance and the making of *The Book of Negroes* other than one of acts of British compassion. By approaching surveillance technologies through stories of black escape – Al and Garfield's televisual escape, Sam's facetiousness in 'turning up the white of his eyes', Aminata Diallo's narrative acts – the brutalities of slavery are not subject to erasure, rather such a re-narration makes known the stakes of emancipation.

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Notes

- 1 Coined by Thomas Mathiesen (1997), the synopticon, in counterpoint to the panopticon (where the few watch the many) allows for the many to watch the

few, often by way of mass media in a viewer society, for example, reality television watching.

- 2 This quote is taken from the pair's application video in which contestant Al St. Louis states incredulously: 'two black men being chased by a white man on a horse?' While it could be said that St. Louis and Thompson are framed in this episode through a narrative of upliftment and self-making as redeemed, it could also be argued that a certain element of minstrelsy or 'hamming it up' for the camera are engaged by the two: losing the defective compass leaving Mantracker to find it, paying homage to another reality television programme that also makes use of surveillance footage of evasion and capture, *Cops*, by singing the lyrics to its theme song 'Bad Boys', or beat-boxing Negro spirituals.
- 3 A 'breeder' or foundation document is used to support one's identity claims in the application process for a more secure status document, such as a passport. In our contemporary moment, breeder documents, such as birth certificates and in some cases baptismal certificates, are said to be more easily forged and weak in terms of security (Salter 2003).
- 4 On 7 November 1775 John Murray, the fourth Lord of Dunmore and Governor of Virginia issued a proclamation that promised freedom for male slaves who voluntarily fought with British forces. After the defeat of his forces in Virginia, Murray arrived in New York City in the summer of 1776 to occupy the city, establishing its military headquarters there. With Dunmore's Proclamation, and later Howe's 1778 Proclamation and Clinton's Philipsburg Proclamation in 1779, this guarantee was extended to women and children, bringing about the 'largest black escape in the history of North American slavery' with fugitives estimated at 25,000–55,000 in the 'southern states alone' (Hodges 1996, p. xiv). Sir Henry Clinton served as Commander-in-Chief of all British Forces of North America from May 1778 until February 1782 when Sir Guy Carleton took up the post.
- 5 Now that The Book of Negroes is digitized and searchable on-line (<http://www.blackloyalist.info/>), it could be argued that this inventory bears some of the hallmarks of contemporary centralized traveller databases, complete with a 'no-sail' list. 'No-sail' list here is a play on post-September 11th 'no-fly' lists, the Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS II) maintained by the US Transportation Security Administration, and Secondary Security Screening Selection (SSSS) that subjects 'selectees' to additional scrutiny at US and Canadian airports. For a detailed accounting of the inventory that is the Book of Negroes see Hodges (1996). Hodges' appendix includes tables, by colony and gender, of 'All Negroes Who Claimed to Be Born Free', 'All Negroes Who Claimed to Have Escaped', 'All Negroes Who Were Free By Proclamation', those who were indentured, enslaved and emancipated.

- 6 Here 'black city life' was intricately tied with 'Indian city life', as laws regulated the mobility of both Negro and Indian slaves. The descriptions in *The Book of Negroes* of those who left New York also gesture to the intimate relations within the black and Indigenous populations: 'born free, her mother an Indian'; 'better half Indian'. Many thanks to Sharon Holland for pointing out this connection. For detailed discussions of the events of 1712 and 1741 in New York City and their effects on the regulation of the city life of black subjects see Doolen (2005), Lepore (2005), Harris (2003), Burrows and Wallace (1999), Davis (1985). For seventeenth and early eighteenth century laws regulating free and enslaved blacks see Hodges (1999). That fire (candle lantern) was employed to deter fire (burning the city down) is not without irony.
- 7 Provision ground ideology names the slave's relationship to the Earth as one concerning sustenance through the growing of produce for survival, rather than that harvested for the profit of the plantation. Where the 'official ideology', that of the plantation, as Wynter explains, 'would develop as an ideology of *property*, and the rights of property, the provision ground ideology would remain based on a man's relation to the Earth, which linked man to his community' (Wynter 1970, p. 37). The idea of 'Earth' here is not one of property or of land, but of the formation of community through spatial practices 'concerned with the common good' (p. 37). For Wynter, dance is one form of ceremonial observance by which the black subject 'rehumanized Nature, and helped to save his own humanity against the constant onslaught of the plantation system by the creation of a folklore and a folk-culture' (p. 36). Here we see the centrality of folk practices, including dance, to the emancipatory breaching necessary for a liberatory remaking of humanness (Wynter 2009).
- 8 What was to become Fraunces Tavern was built by a member of the Delancey family in and around 1706. In 1762, Samuel Fraunces or 'Black Sam' took ownership of the building, opening a social club, tavern and inn and named it *The Queen's Head*. There is some disagreement surrounding Jamaican-born Fraunces' racial identity, which reveals the then and continued anxieties around race, and blackness in particular, in America.

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Markup Bodies

*Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies
at the Digital Crossroads*

Jessica Marie Johnson

When we shift our emphasis from historical recovery to rigorous and responsible creativity, we recognize that archives are not just the records bequeathed to us by the past; archives also consist of the tools we use to explore it, the vision that allows us to read its signs, and the design decisions that communicate our sense of history's possibilities.
—Vincent Brown, "Mapping a Slave Revolt"

In the 1770s, Captain John Stedman, while traveling through Suriname, happened upon three "slaves" being taken in chains to be killed. One was Neptune, a free man of color, a carpenter, "young and handsome." He was accused of killing an overseer after stealing sheep to entertain a "favorite young woman." Worse, Neptune shot the overseer in self-defense when the overseer attempted to have him lynched. As punishment, Neptune was to be broken on the rack and left until dead with no "mercy stroke" or death blow to end the torture of having his arms and legs systematically shattered and woven through the spokes of a wagon wheel. As Stedman watched, the executioner, "also a black man," began by chopping off Neptune's left hand with an axe. He then took up a heavy iron bar and "with repeated heavy blows . . . broke the bones to shivers, till the marrow, blood, and splinters flew about the field." While the executioner destroyed his body, Neptune "never uttered a groan nor a sigh," but as pain and death set in, Neptune began to speak.¹ He "damned them all, as a set of barbarous rascals [*sic*]." He released the bonds on one hand "by the help of his teeth" and "asked the bystanders for a pipe of tobacco." He

was spat on in response. He begged for his head to be cut off. He sang. He teased a Jewish bystander by asking for money supposedly owed to him. At one point, he noticed a white soldier eating bread with no meat. When the soldier explained he had no money for meat, Neptune offered him “my hand that was chopped off clean to the bones” and encouraged him to eat “till you are glutted; when you will have both bread and meat, as best becomes you.”

Neptune did not die for three hours, and he never stopped talking. His execution, originally published in Stedman’s five-volume narrative of his time in Suriname,² almost immediately began to be remixed by abolitionists into eighteenth-century media, such as the *Curious Adventures of Captain Stedman*. For abolitionists, Neptune’s death, though narrated by Stedman, who was far from an abolitionist, offered readers necessary explanatory data. It offered neutral, stable, even quantifiable information about the depravity of bondage. Data, defined here as an objective and independent unit of knowledge, has been central to the architecture of both slavery studies and digital humanistic study. However, in this article I question the stability of what has been or can be categorized as data, the uses the idea of data has been put to, and the stakes underlying data’s implicit claim to stability or objectivity. This article uses the term *data* transhistorically to gesture to the rise of the independent and objective statistical fact as an explanatory ideal party to the devastating thingification of black women, children, and men.³ In other words, for abolitionists, Neptune’s death-as-data evidenced the carnal violence of overseers, drama of slavery, injustice meted out to free and enslaved alike, and vulgarity of black death. But *Curious Adventures*, like much abolitionist media that claimed to advocate for the enslaved, also recreated and legitimized a ledger of torture.⁴

This article questions the role spectacular black death and commodification in slavery’s eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Atlantic archive play alongside the digital humanities’ drive for data and a centuries-long black diasporic fight for justice and redress.⁵ The brutality of black codes, the rise of Atlantic slaving, and everyday violence in the lives of the enslaved created a devastating archive. Left unattended, these devastations reproduce themselves in digital architecture, even when and where digital humanists believe they advocate for social justice. A just attention to the dead, I argue, requires digital humanists to learn from black freedom struggles and radical coalition building that offer new models for “social justice, accessibility, and inclusion.”⁶ Black freedom struggles here are defined as struggles engaged in by subjects racialized as black to mark their humanity, make legible their legal and extralegal exclusion from societies built by their labor, and form new worlds by transforming and creating inclusive and equitable social conditions. In this article, I suggest that black digital practice is the interface by which black freedom

struggles challenge reproduction of black death and commodification, countering the presumed neutrality of the digital. Black digital practice is the revelation that black subjects have themselves taken up science, data, and coding, in other words, have commodified themselves and digitized and mediated their own black freedom dreams, in order to hack their way into systems (whether modernity, science, or the West), thus living where they were “never meant to survive.”⁷

Black Data and the Slavery Debates

Digital media changes the way users as readers and viewers digest information. It breaks the linearity of traditional print media’s analog left-to-right text interaction. It introduces readers/viewers to a multitiered landscape. In a digital media environment, lurkers, commenters, visitors, viewers, and users replace readers. Lost is the single author who, in cahoots with an editor and publishing entity, guides a reader down a distinct and clear path. Presented with a series of choices, readers may now settle into a site or project at any number of plot points; skim, curate, and comment; indulge in media annotation; or leave a site entirely after a cursory glance at a headline or subtitle. New relationships to information and new roles (the user) are born, while others fall away. Viewed from a digital utopian standpoint, the range of choices, tools, and opportunities to engage, challenge, and create information or “content” democratizes, having arrived available to all users without an apparent imbalance of power or discernable limits imposed by social categories of difference, history, or historical context.

In the United States, historians of slavery have made particular use of digital tools to document the forced migration of black women, children, and men throughout the Atlantic littoral over the last five centuries. In 1974, Eugene Genovese coined the phrase “the world the slaves made” to describe the political economy, society, and culture of the antebellum South.⁸ Over four decades later, scholars struggle to translate “the world the slaves made” into code and express it in technical language. From blogs and journals built on fourth-generation hypertext markup language (HTML) guided by cascading style sheets (CSS) to databases using extensible markup language (XML) and standard query language (SQL), scholars using digital tools mark up the bodies and requantify the lives of people of African descent. These pursuits have not and do not exist in isolation from tensions inherent to constructing histories of bondage. Databases, for example, reinscribe enslaved Africans’ biometrics as users transfer the racial nomenclature of the time period (*négre*, *moreno*, *quadroon*) into the present and encode skin color, hair texture, height, weight, age, and gender in new digital forms, replicating the surveilling

actions of slave owners and slave traders. There is nothing neutral, even in a digital environment, about doing histories of slavery, and technology has not made the realities of bondage any more palatable or easier to discuss across audiences or platforms. Exploring these anxieties in analog and digital form exposes an unsettled relationship among data, slavery's archive, and the impulse to commodify black life. As Vincent Brown, historian of slavery and founder of the History Design Studio at Harvard, notes in the epigraph of this article, "Archives are not just the records bequeathed to us by the past." The legacy of commodifying black bodies and truncating black life infuses and informs digital design and execution.

Historians, communities, and political institutions have struggled over the pursuit of different kinds of data and the roles these should play in histories of slavery. Early black historians such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene touted the legitimacy of enslaved testimony and created methods for compiling quantitative and qualitative information on early black life. From the 1890s forward, black historians and their allies compiled, aggregated, and visualized data to detail black life in the United States from a black perspective. In the preface to *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois described his goal as to "tell this story as though Negroes were ordinary human beings, realizing that this attitude will from the first seriously curtail my audience."⁹ In 1916, Woodson hacked the largely segregated professional historical world by founding the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and the *Journal of Negro History*. Woodson and his team, the Research Department of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, collected and published on a range of topics, including runaway slave ads, laws regulating slavery and slave codes, reports from "colored conventions," and statistical reports on slave-owning free black men and women.¹⁰ In doing so, the Research Department expressed what might be described as faith in the revelatory potential of black data, a hope that "these names will, therefore, serve as a link between the past and present and will thereby lessen the labor of research in this field."¹¹

In the 1950s and into the 1970s, with the civil rights movement raging around them, scholars like John Blassingame, Stanley Elkins, Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, and Kenneth Stampp revisited histories of slavery to better understand the nature of black life in the Americas. In addition to rereading plantation diaries and manuscript sources with a critical eye for what the enslaved may have said about their world, historians reintroduced testimony from enslaved persons themselves. Blassingame's *Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972) and his immense *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (1977) directly challenged the legacy of southern historians like U. B. Phillips who asserted testimony by the enslaved

was “issued with so much abolitionist editing that as a class their authenticity is doubtful.” Instead, Blassingame argued enslaved testimony, used with rigor, could reveal the “mind of the slave,” their “private world,” “accommodations with masters,” and black culture and kinship practices.¹² These historians also drew on slave ship manifests, lists of enslaved in plantation documents, and census records. The impulse to revisit the plantation South from the perspective of black laborers and their experiences contributed to changing conceptions of data as historians struggled with which sources would be of value, what meaning could be gleaned from narratives and numbers, and what archival material appeared to be stable, objective, and quantifiable. Many of these scholars emerged from their research with differing conclusions about the slave personality, the role African retentions played in making African America, the nature of resistance, and black family life. Naturally, these histories and how they were written generated intense and heated debates.

In the 1970s, a subset of cliometricians, a cohort of researchers using statistics to write economic studies of history, grew especially interested in the slavery debates. Cliometricians paid special interest to quantifying the lives of the enslaved but were motivated by very qualitative considerations—the tense and emotional tenor of the topic. In later years, Robert Fogel, coauthor with Stanley Engerman of *Time on the Cross: The Economics of Negro Slavery*, described the cliometric struggle with slavery as emerging from a “desire to develop a precise, emotionally detached, ideologically neutral analysis.”¹³ When Fogel and Engerman applied statistical methods to their data, they concluded that the material lives of enslaved black women, children, and men were better, on average, than those of twentieth-century African Americans. In fact, in their estimation, slavery was an efficient and modern economic institution, quite compatible with “shifting labor requirements of capitalist society.”¹⁴ Historians wading through an archive dense with the brutal realities of bondage—separation of families, brutal punishments and summary executions, rape and sexual violence—reacted with outrage. An indignant Herbert Gutman published expressive critiques of their strategy. In *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of “Time on the Cross,”* Gutman identified the methodological problem as a “model [that] mixes two processes together: how slaves learned and what slaves learned.”¹⁵ Statistics on their own, enticing in their seeming neutrality, failed to address or unpack black life hidden behind the archetypes, caricatures, and nameless numbered registers of human property slave owners had left behind. And cliometricians failed to remove emotion from the discussion. Data without an accompanying humanistic analysis—an exploration of the world of the enslaved from their own perspective—served to further obscure the social and political realities of black diasporic life under slavery.

The ramifications of the slavery debates lingered over another gathering, nearly forty years later. In 1998, David Eltis and David Richardson launched a database containing almost thirty thousand Atlantic slave trade voyages.¹⁶ Each record in the database represented a different slave ship. Each field in each record supplied information culled from the ship's original manifest—name of the ship and captain, dates of the voyage, number of slaves on board, place of slave purchase, and landing. The computational power of the database as technology and tool allowed researchers to calculate new information about slave ship voyages based on incomplete records. If the handwritten manifest provided a total count of slaves on the ship along with a tally of adult male slaves among those on board, the database calculated the balance—the number of women and children of both genders also on the ship—at lightning speed. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database was a massive project, supported by the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard and led by well-published and well-known names in the fields of United States, Caribbean, and Latin America history. The questions posed by the researchers emerged from the same set of concerns first articulated during the slavery debates and the work of cliometricians in the 1960s: how to grasp the depth and patterns in the massive trade in human beings and its impact on the making of the Americas.

At a public conference hosted by the College of William and Mary, researchers presented their CD-ROM and its findings. By some observer accounts, researchers seemed unprepared to grapple with the needs and desires of busloads of “descendants of slaves” in the audience, who attended to learn more about the ramifications of the slave trade. Understanding the dimensions of slave ships provided context for the experience of the Middle Passage but could not seem to capture the moral rupture and sense of injustice expressed by people of African descent in the room.¹⁷ Once again, metrics in minutiae neither lanced historical trauma nor bridged the gap between the past itself and the search for redress. Computation could not, it seemed, capture the violent quandary that was the nation's history of and relationship to human bondage. Contemporary encounters with digital technology have inherited this tension, with researchers struggling to appreciate the inhumanity of bondage and the attendant dehumanization of black lives while also responding to the need for critical, rigorous, and engaged histories of slavery as histories of the present.¹⁸

In 2008, the database creators celebrated the database's move from CD-ROM format to online database and open-access website with a free, public conference at Emory University commemorating the bicentennial of the end of the slave trade. The conference featured presentations from scholars, including David Brion Davis, Alondra Nelson, and Sylviane Diouf, as well as librarians, curators, archivists, and graduate students,

along with the project's team. Topics ranged from teaching histories of the slave trade in the classroom to studying histories of the slave trade and genetic genealogy testing. Conference organizers circulated news about the event on African American genealogy listservs and online forums like AfriGeneas.com.¹⁹ The design of the new website reflected a new attention to pedagogy, analysis, and the human dimensions of black life in the era of the slave trade. Along with the database itself, the site featured long-form essays by scholars from around the world explaining the significance of the slave trade to the making of the Americas. Designers diversified the data available for research by including lesson plans for K-12 teachers with suggestions on how to use the slave trade database as a teaching tool and nontext resources like images of the original ship manifests, sample maps, and portraits of trans-Atlantic sojourners like Job Ben Solomon and Catherine Zimmermann-Mulgrave.²⁰ For those needing information quickly, Eltis and Richardson offered their general estimates in chart and graph form. And for those without access to the internet, Eltis and Richardson published the first ever *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, a groundbreaking collection of charts, graphs, and maps documenting the movement of Africans throughout the Atlantic in more ways than would have been imaginable in 1998.

Over the next few years, the project team hosted public presentations around the country. An event in Washington, DC, included computers allowing attendees to explore the database and a welcome message from Congressman John Lewis, venerable civil rights activist and national hero, who consecrated the space when he offered his support for the project. Website administrators created a Facebook page and a Twitter account, both to provide the new site with a social media presence and to create an online gathering space for interested researchers, university affiliated and otherwise, to discuss the findings and the database's impact. Eltis and Richardson reintroduced their findings in a coauthored essay featured on CNN.com.²¹ The site itself—free, available online, visually stimulating, and utilitarian—offered something to university-affiliated researchers as well as genealogists, journalists, K-12 teachers, and laypeople engaged in casual ancestry research. Between 1998 and 2010, more and more African Americans began using DNA kits to trace African lineage.²² Increasingly, genealogy, family, and professional historical work had moved online, from listservs to social media platforms, forums like AfriGeneas, and for-profit genealogy companies like Ancestry.com. In 2011, Ancestry.com outpaced nonprofit and institutional websites to become the “largest online collection of African American family history records.”²³ By participating in social media, reaching out to African ancestry networks, and generating public history content for online news outlets, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database reboot mirrored the pursuits of earlier,

analog historians researching slavery as an issue of social justice. Reaching out to the descendants of the enslaved across the United States by using digital and social media tools acknowledged, if only in a small way, the legitimacy of descendants' claim to data on their ancestors mined from slave ship registers. It translated the computational tool from a university-funded digital project to a community resource accessible to users well beyond the academy.

The impact of database technology on histories of black life has been huge. The ease with which open-access projects like the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database performed extraordinary acts of simple figuring permanently changed perceptions of the slave trade. Inheriting slave traders' gendered assumptions about economic self-interest among slave trade merchants and slaveholders in the Americas, historians assumed enslaved women and children played a negligible role in the slave trade. Most extant slave ship manifests provide incomplete information about gender and age of enslaved Africans. For imperial officials, traders, ship captains, and sailors plying their trade up and down the Atlantic African coast, women and youth represented a negligible remainder and potentially less lucrative demographic. In 1728, Jean-Baptiste Labat described women and children as fractions of piece d'Inde, the unit of measurement used for enslaved cargo, and used to supplement able-bodied adult men: "Namely two children for one man or two and a half for one, sometimes three for one or three for two, in this way according to the experience of the Commis and how they look and the goodwill for the interest of the Company."²⁴ In reality, evidence from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database suggested that more enslaved women and children crossed the Atlantic than previously assumed, and insights gained from the advanced computation offered by the database further clarified the significance of African women and youth in different time periods, to different imperial interests, and in different parts of the Americas. The database powered and empowered users to find women and youth, making information from ship manifests around the world public, accessible, and searchable. The existence of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database immediately reshaped debates about numbers of women and children exported from the continent, influencing work on women in the slave trade on the African coast, slavery in African societies, and women in the slave trade to the Americas.²⁵

At the same time, the database in and of itself could not function as a window into the everyday lives of Africans, who remained faceless, anonymous, disembodied. In slave ship manifests, instructional material, slave ships' logs, and colonial censuses, European investors, trading company agents, merchants, ship captains, and slave owners created a genre of archival material antithetical to black life. The unmaking of the enslaved,

as Sowande' Mustakeem has noted, included the work Europeans applied to compiling and calculating the enslaved.²⁶ In slaving conventions along the African coast, in slave traders' desire to transform women and youth into units of measurement, in the symbolic and reproductive labor enslaved African women would be forced to perform, compilers of slave ship manifests participated in the transmutation of black flesh into integers and fractions. This alchemy, powerful in and of itself, meant displaying data alone could not and did not offer the atonement descendants of slaves sought or capture the inhumanity of this archive's formation. Culling the lives of women and children from the data set required approaching the data with intention. It required a methodology attuned to black life and to dismantling the methods used to create the manifests in the first place, then designing and launching an interface responsive to the desire of descendants of slaves for reparation and redress. The 2008 reintroduction of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database did some of this when organizers encouraged a coalition of scholars, community members, and everyday citizens to explore the ramifications of the trade.

The archive of Atlantic slavery—images, numbers, and texts created by slave owners, traders, investors, abolitionists, and the enslaved themselves—haunts efforts to render black people as human. Abolitionists generated content to provoke a hyperemotional response in readers—an excessive reproduction of black death and pain to overcompensate for a dense archive of enslaved integers generated across centuries. From the “blood-stained gate” in Frederick Douglass’s autobiographical narrative to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, abolitionists relied on a spectacle of black death to elicit emotion from white American and British readers/viewers—and they were successful. These images did not result in equitable or equal treatment in the postemancipation era. Time traveling centuries later, cliometricians’ desire to—and failure to—excise emotion from the slavery debates by centering the numbers themselves proved that statistics alone also did not make the history of bondage any easier to digest or the terms of redress more transparent. The data set, corrupted by its creation as part of a project of manufacturing slaves and masters, needed to be defragmented before it could be used. And yet it is the only archive from which the descendants of slaves can demand “a fully loaded cost accounting.”²⁷

“Good Mourning,” Digital Black Studies

As this brief history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database suggests, bias is built into the architecture of digital technology.²⁸ The digital, like any tool, institution, or system across society, from law and medicine to the academy, will be radical or transformative only to the extent that

researchers, programmers, designers, hackers, and users make an effort to dismantle the residue of commodification that is slavery's legacy in the New World. Invoking black digital practice draws attention to the many ways users, content creators, coders, and programmers have worked ethical, intentional praxis into their work in pursuit of more just and humane productions of knowledge. Because blackness is most often constructed in proximity to bondage and the rise of Atlantic slaving, black digital practice uses the commodification of blackness during the slave trade as a reference point, building sites, projects, organizations, and tools that resist and counteract slavery's dehumanizing impulses. A rich world created through black digital practice has long existed online and has operated within and beyond the academy. At the same time, black digital practice models a core black studies imperative: That the study of black life and culture must also accompany an ethical and moral concern with sustaining black life and shaping black futures.

Black digital practice outside of the academy informed and shaped the rise of digital black studies within the academy. The Afrofuturism listserv and its companion website Afrofuturism.net were some of the first to draw together a digital community of scholars, creatives, and activists.²⁹ Founded in 1998 by Alondra Nelson, the Afrofuturism listserv brought artists together with academics and activists to discuss and describe the ways black diasporic communities used technology and science fiction and participated in cyber/digital cultures. Taking up Afrofuturism, a term coined by Mark Dery in 1993, Nelson and others transformed it into a clarion call, gathering black creatives invested in creating fantastic visions of black futures.³⁰ Many did so using rich traditions of resistance from the past or already in existence and, though looking to the future, built online community that set the terms for a kind of black digital practice that would be both shaped by and shape slavery studies. To spread awareness about the Afrofuturism project, Nelson created postcards and distributed them "at museums, universities, music venues and cyber-cafes (remember those spots!) in New York City," as well as while traveling to California, Barcelona, London, and Kingston, Jamaica.³¹ Nelson's radical media practice informed her digital practice as she created a community that spanned analog and digital spaces. In the introduction to a special issue of *Social Text* on Afrofuturism, Nelson wrote:

The text and images gathered here reflect African diasporic experience and at the same time attend to the transformations that are the by-product of new media and information technology. They excavate and create original narratives of identity, technology, and the future and offer critiques of the promises of prevailing theories of technoculture. . . . These works represent new directions in the study of African diaspora culture that are grounded

in the histories of black communities, rather than seeking to sever all connections to them.³²

Shortly after the creation of the Afrofuturism list, in 2000 Abdul Alkalimat launched eBlack Studies, a series of initiatives to bring about a “transformation” in the field of black studies, to move the field “from ideology to information.” Describing his goals for the eBlack Studies movement, Alkalimat stated: “eBlack, the virtualization of the Black experience, is the basis for the next stage of our academic discipline.”³³ For both Nelson and Alkalimat, digital blackness could not be removed from life beyond the screen and could not be divorced from the politics of everyday black life. Alkalimat is a founding member of the Organization of Black American Culture, the Institute of the Black World, the Peoples College, the African Liberation Support Committee, and the Black Radical Congress, and his political teaching and research included working with students and organizers to print and publish newsletters, pamphlets, and booklets. In the tradition of community publishing and radical media, and akin to Nelson, Alkalimat disseminated information about Black Power philosophy, the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, and numerous political campaigns by creating content in the form of zines, CDs, and curricula. For Alkalimat, transitioning to an online space was a logical extension of grassroots organizing media work. The H-Afro-Am listserv was one of many eBlack Studies initiatives. A mailing list and global community of subscribers of all ages from inside and outside of academia, H-Afro-Am distributes information about black diasporic history, life, and culture to subscribers’ e-mail inboxes on a daily basis. Under Alkalimat’s editorial leadership, the listserv continues to be an important member of H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.³⁴

Appropriating digital tools for black diasporic purposes is a recurring theme in the history of black life online. H-Afro-Am, Afrofuturism.net, and other networked communities of black thought workers and culture producers came into existence with the aid of a new technology: the electronic mailing list. A software created in 1986, Listserv allowed users to send single messages to subscription lists or “mailing lists,” communicating with multiple recipients simultaneously. Use of Listserv spread and the creation of electronic mailing lists (colloquially called “listservs” as well), changed communication patterns and possibilities. Individuals and institutions doing work in black diasporic studies and global political organizing used mailing lists to connect with people of African descent around the world. Nelson noted ways listservs allowed Afrofuturist creatives to build relationships over long distances and organize the Afrofuturism special issue.³⁵ In *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation after the Genome*, Nelson again used listservs, in addition to

message boards and social media, to participate in digital communities of African American ancestry researchers and genealogists. In *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace*, Anna Everett documents the use of listservs by organizations like Women of Uganda Network and networked communities like Naijanet to expand activist work, create social ties, share resources, and raise awareness. Listserv use drew on a longer tradition of radical print media and political investment in building community, creating new worlds, and organizing against injustice. Technology did not in and of itself create black communities in the digital realm. Black communities with insurgent political praxis and black diasporic longing appropriated technological tools to create new digital realms. Black digital practice, in other words, predates digital interventions, drawing on strategies of empowerment, joy, and kinship created out of black freedom struggles to facilitate the use of digital tools and create new methodologies, practices, and even ethics for their use.³⁶

Black digital practice, like black freedom struggles, does not operate isolated from broader struggles against systemic violence and dehumanization. A coalition of artists, scholars, teachers, and media makers working in the field of digital humanities and offering provocations from the fields of ethnic studies, women's and gender studies, queer studies, environmental studies, and beyond have challenged utterances of the digital that do not attend to the ways race, sex, and power shape the user interface and human-machine engagement overall. The rise of the digital humanities, including the subgenre of digital history, was characterized by interest in digital archives, exhibits, online publishing, listservs like H-Net, and other public-facing humanistic work. The presence of humanistic ventures like Afrofuturism.net and eBlack Studies gets little if any reference in histories of digital humanities as a field.³⁷ The absence of digital work engaging questions of race, sex, and systems of oppression and difference generated by black studies, ethnic studies, and women and gender studies, among others, has forced scholars to critique the digital humanities' very conception of itself. The #transformDH collective, formed in 2011, offered a recent challenge to the field. Members of the collective argued that the consolidation of digital humanities as a field presented university-affiliated laborers with an opportunity to embark on an explicitly antiracist, anti-ableist, radical and inclusive academic project. #transformDH described itself as "an academic guerrilla movement seeking to (re)define capital-letter Digital Humanities as a force for transformative scholarship by collecting, sharing, and highlighting projects that push at its boundaries and work for social justice, accessibility, and inclusion."³⁸ Also in 2011, Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White published an edited collection of work dissecting "race after the internet." Writing as practitioner-scholars, Nakamura, Chow-White, Tara McPherson, danah

boyd, and others critiqued critical race studies and the digital humanities for their inability to attend to each other.³⁹ Over the last decade, this critique has given rise to analog, digital, and organizational structures for challenging and recoding race, difference, power, digital, and tech. Although employing varied critical and transformative methods, sometimes with different end goals, a key concern continues to wend its way through their challenge of the digital moment: supporting the disruption created by “hybrid practitioners: artist-theorists, programming humanists, activist-scholars, theoretical-archivists, critical race coders” who infuse the drive for data with a corresponding concern with and for the humanity and souls of the people involved.⁴⁰

With the advent of social media, these transformative, coalitional calls for radical use of digital technology and attention to dismantling systemic violence experienced a moment of glorious excess and painful extravagance. The founding of Twitter in 2006, Tumblr in 2007, and Instagram in 2010 brought black diasporic cultural, political, and social life into an intimate and seemingly sudden public spotlight. Even as the digital humanities has yet to broaden its scope to consider work on these platforms—or the political critique they offer—serious intellectual work in the form of status updates and self-curated still and moving images interrogate intersectionality, antiblackness, and antiviolence on Tumblr. Celebrity and everyday personas call out white supremacy in short videos, snaps, and tweets and sit in 140-character solidarity with anticolonial and antiviolence movements from Palestine to Ferguson to Brazil. Users pepper blogs, timelines, and direct messages with a mutable cyborg *kréyòl*—a stank, funky, digital vulgarity—that employs hashtags, abbreviations, and other alternative grammars to capture the flesh of a moment, a person, a group. Operating in the interstices between listservs and blogging platforms, social media users have exploded nineteenth-century codes of race and eighteenth-century denominations of color, defying naturalized assumptions of race, sexuality, gender, and gender presentation through promiscuous use of avatars, changing pseudonyms and nicknames and even deleting or reviving user accounts at will. As social media communities formed around hashtags like #BlackTwitter, #blacklivesmatter, or #girlslikeus, users who share identities, their allies, and their accomplices come together, seeking to defend and define themselves, excavate and protecting black life in all of its varied forms.⁴¹ Despite the dangers, social media became a tool for cultural critique, political dissent, and forming communities of chosen kin.⁴²

In this latest iteration of black digital practice, black life is understood as deep and rich, full of infinite gender possibilities, kinship formations, and affective knowledges. New ethics have emerged to account for the multiple layers of jeopardy and hypersurveillance that track where

blackness intersects with ability, gender identity and presentation, class, and institutional privilege.⁴³ In 2015, as part of the Center for Solutions to Online Violence coordinated by Jacque Wernimont, Moya Bailey, and T. L. Cowan and facilitated by Bianca Laureano, a group of black feminist and radical womyn of color digital media makers came together as the Digital Alchemists to create parameters for identifying power, control, harm, and respect in online interactions.⁴⁴ Facilitating real-time, on-the-ground theorization, black digital practice in social media has also engaged black theory created in the academy but does not cede legitimacy to disciplinary formations of any kind—even black studies. #BlackTheory becomes a living organ, debated and fought for with vigor and virulence online just as it has been debated and fought for in the infrapolitical spaces of the barber shop, beauty parlor, street corner, and the kitchen table.⁴⁵ Social media offered the terrain, but users engaged in black digital practice took advantage and did so from and through an attention to black life that preceded the technology. Users (people) continue to be the ones who make present and prescient the many layers and modes black freedom struggles will take. From the personal to the political, from the embodied to the spiritual, from the human to the community, black digital practice charts a path against the drive for data. It curates the mourning, disassembles against the plantation impulse, and, in the break, absconds.⁴⁶

Neptune Speaking

As imperial authorities and agents of slave owners tortured him to death, Neptune continued to speak. Although abolitionists at the time and historians in the present find it compelling to linger on the spectacle his death created, I find his stubborn refusal to remain silent of special interest. Whether a figment of Stedman's imagination or a real person, in the eighteenth-century white readers (users) found themselves confounded by enslaved and free black people's ability to speak through superhuman circumstances of death and dehumanization. Neptune's monologue, I argue, rests hand in hand with the shadowed spaces of empty cells, null values, and recalculated conclusions in the slave ship manifest. The slave trade, in its drive for profit, dismantled black humanity. It is this twinned reality, the entanglement of profit with dismembered black limbs, the immense data generated by death and for capital, that digital humanistic study must contend with and slavery studies cannot hope to hide from. There is no bloodless data in slavery's archive. Data is the evidence of terror, and the idea of data as fundamental and objective information, as Fogel and Engerman found,⁴⁷ obscures rather than reveals the scene of the crime. Black digital practice offers a corrective. It attends to black subjects who scream in spite, because, and in defiance of their own ritual murder. Black

digital practice requires researchers to witness and remark on the marked and unmarked bodies, the ones that defy computation, and finds ways to hold the null values up to the light. It compels designers to collaborate with the living descendants of the enslaved, who still claim as ancestor and kin those who can only be rendered in databases as “1” or a single pièce d’Inde. It is also slippery, in that it engages data promiscuously, across multiple platforms, taking up the nearest tools at hand to defy, dismiss, jeer, and sneer at the presumed legitimacy claimed by institutional structures and categories of analysis generated by the Ivory Tower.

Scholars of slavery, deep in the archive of bloodied backs, lost limbs, and underwater ghosts, have something to offer the digital era. Rooted in the work African American historians accomplished when they were largely barred from the segregated academy, and infused with Afrofuturism’s spectral and prophetic vision, scholars of slavery can be informed by this new black digital practice as it emerges, learning from its attention to the descendants of diaspora and deep care for black humanity. As a digital humanist, I witness something happening in digital media, social media, online activism, and hashtag activism that hearkens back in time to screams in the archive, jokes in the face of death, to black cultural production and acts of resistance. “History,” Saidiya Hartman writes, “is how the secular world attends to the dead.”⁴⁸ Histories of slavery offer digital humanists a cautionary tale, a lesson in the kind of death dealing that happens when enumerating, commodifying, and calculating bodies becomes naturalized.⁴⁹ Doing truly embodied and data-rich histories of slavery requires similarly remixing conceptual, discursive, and archival geographies, with deliberate, pained intimacy, and, likely, some violence. But black digital practice challenges slavery scholars and digital humanists to feel this pain and infuse their work with a methodology and praxis that centers the descendants of the enslaved, grapples with the uncomfortable, messy, and unquantifiable, and in doing so, refuses disposability.

Notes

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1. Tegg, *Curious Adventures of Captain Stedman*, 18–19.

2. Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition*. Over a century later, editors Richard Price and Sally Price would critique Stedman as forming his narrative of

Neptune's death at least in part from the template of the tortured slave created by the death of the fictional slave Oroonoko in Aphra Behn's story of the same name. They likewise note, "The event Stedman describes as an eyewitness needed no literary precursor. . . . We see no reason to doubt the directness or veracity of Stedman's description" (Price and Price, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition*, 339n285).

3. This definition of *data* draws on Johanna Drucker's definition (and critique) of *data* as "objective information." Drucker notes: "Data are presumed to reside in a stable, quantifiable, observable universe. The observer assumes that the data have an a priori existence, independent of observation"; however, "information does not exist in a natural state, available to the light of reason in the form of knowledge ordered to display itself in a self-evident way" ("Graphesis," 7). See also Drucker, *Graphesis*. As Jennifer Morgan has noted, in relation to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, "It is nearly impossible to recognize that the very data through which specificity can be attained is part and parcel of the technology by which Africans and their descendants are rendered outside the scope of Man" ("Accounting for 'the Most Excruciating Torment,'" 189). See also Poovey, *History of the Modern Fact*. In 1955, Aimé Césaire articulated this link through the following decolonial math: "My turn to state an equation: colonization = thingification" (*Discourse on Colonialism*, 42).

4. Stedman, *Stedman's Surinam*, 338. See also Diana Paton's review of Marcus Wood in "Telling Stories about Slavery"; Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*; Behn, *Oroonoko*, 237–39; and Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 138.

5. Here, the term *redress* draws on the work of Alondra Nelson, whose study of African Americans' use of DNA, genealogy research, and claims for reparations from slavery roots itself in a long African American freedom struggle stretching into the twenty-first century. Nelson uses *redress* to articulate African Americans' desire for more than adherence to historical memory or monetary compensation for violence impossible to imagine and even more difficult to recompense. Nelson, *Social Life of DNA*, 125–26.

6. #transformDH Collective, "About #transformDH," transformdh.org/about-transformdh/ (accessed July 26, 2018).

7. Lorde, "A Litany for Survival," 255.

8. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.

9. Du Bois, "To the Reader," in *Black Reconstruction*, n.p.

10. *Journal of Negro History*, "Typical Colonization Convention"; *Journal of Negro History*, "Eighteenth Century Slaves as Advertised by Their Masters"; Hansen, "Letters, Narratives, Laws, and Comments."

11. Research Department, "Free Negro Owners of Slaves."

12. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, xvii.

13. Fogel, *Slavery Debates*, 28.

14. Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 57.

15. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game*, 6.

16. Eltis et al., *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*.

17. Berlin, "American Slavery in History." On redress and African Americans' search for history and social justice through studies of slavery, see Nelson, *Social Life of DNA*.

18. For the most recent work on this, see Connolly and Fuentes, "Introduction"; and Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.

19. AfriGeneas is operated by the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, based in Washington, DC.

20. Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job*; Lovejoy, "Les origines de Catherine Mulgrave Zimmermann."

21. Eltis and Richardson, “New Revelations.”
22. Nelson, *Social Life of DNA*. In 2003, African Ancestry, a genetic testing company marketing to African Americans doing genealogy research, was founded by African American businessman and biologist Rick Kittles.
23. Ancestry Corporate, “Ancestry.com Marks Black History Month with 250,000 New African American Records,” 1 February 2001, www.ancestry.com/corporate/newsroom/press-releases/ancestry.com-marks-black-history-month-with-250000-new-african-american-records--.
24. Labat, *Nouvelle Relation de l’Afrique Occidentale*, 4:232–33.
25. For work that uses the database to reshape conversations on women in the trade, see Morgan, “Accounting for ‘the Most Excruciating Torment’”; Morgan, *Laboring Women*; and Nwokeji, *Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*.
26. For more on the slave trade as manufacturing slaves, see Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*. See also the African American Intellectual History Society’s forum on *Slavery at Sea*, including Johnson, “Moral Challenge of the Middle Passage”; Egerton, “Unearthing the Human Stories”; Fuentes, “Violent and Violating Archive”; Millward, “From the Ocean Floor”; Rothman, “Unspeakable Toll”; Holden, “Reading the Language of Violence”; and Mustakeem, “Ghosts of the Atlantic.”
27. Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line*, chap. 1. On defragmentation (or “defragging”): “Most hard drives have spinning platters, with data stored in different places around that platter. When your computer writes data to your drive, it does so in ‘blocks’ that are ordered sequentially from one side of the drive’s platter to the other. Fragmentation happens when those files get split between blocks that are far away from each other. The hard drive then takes longer to read that file because the read head has to ‘visit’ multiple spots on the platter. Defragmentation puts those blocks back in sequential order, so your drive head doesn’t have to run around the entire platter to read a single file.” Gordon, “What Is ‘Defragging.’”
28. For over a year after Mike Brown’s shooting death, Larry Fellows, a St. Louis–born Ferguson activist and Twitter user, greeted his morning followers with the following: “Good mourning.” Fellows III (@GeekNStereo), Twitter post, 30 April 2015, 7:49 a.m. [deleted tweet].
29. Nelson, “Afrofuturism.” Afrofuturism on Yahoo Groups (afrofuturism@yahoogroups.com) has since been retired. Members of the listserv community created a new website to collect and list Afrofuturist work and creators at Afrofuturism.net. In 2011, Nelson posted “Afrofuturism: Archive,” a short history of its beginnings, on her blog.
30. Dery, “Black to the Future.” Dery noted: “Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn’t the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers—white to a man—who have engineered our collective fantasies?” (180).
31. See Nelson, “Afrofuturism: Archive.”
32. Nelson, “Introduction,” 10.
33. Alkalimat, “eBlack Studies.” The project continues at eBlackStudies.org. Alkalimat is also the founder of brothermalcolm.net and is at work on a digital archive of his work at alkalimat.org.
34. In 1992 Peter Knupfer founded H-Net. In 1996 the Organization of American Historians published a roundtable on the enterprise, edited by Knupfer and featuring editors who worked closely with the organization from its inception. Knupfer, “H-Net.”

35. Nelson, "Introduction," 10.

36. "Black Code," a special issue of *Black Scholar* edited by Jessica Marie Johnson and Mark Anthony Neal, expands on the methodologies, practices, and ethics generated by black diasporic activity online, particularly on social media. For more work on ethics, see the Digital Alchemists subset of educator resources developed by the Center for Solutions to Online Violence (femtechnet.org/csov/educator/). The Digital Alchemists include Bianca Laureano, I'Nasah Crockett, Megan Ortiz, Jessica Marie Johnson, Sydette, IAM, Danielle, and Moya Bailey.

37. See Burdick et al., *Digital Humanities*; Gold, *Debates in the Digital Humanities*; and Gold and Klein, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*. Essays in Gold and Klein's 2016 edition of *Debates in the Digital Humanities* work to correct this narrative. See Gallon, "Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities." The history of the field of digital humanities, and especially digital history, is often traced to work by Edward Ayers and Roy Rosenzweig. See Edward Ayers, "The Pasts and Futures of Digital History: Edward L. Ayers," Virginia Center for Digital History, 1999, www.vcdh.virginia.edu/PastsFutures.html. Although the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University was founded in 1994 and Ayers, himself a historian of slavery and the Civil War, wrote this essay in 1999, digital humanities as a field grew increasingly institutionalized primarily in the last two decades. In 2001 the first Digital Humanities Summer Institute was launched in Victoria, British Columbia; in 2002 HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory) was founded; in 2005, the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations was founded in Victoria, British Columbia.

38. #transformDH Collective, "About." See also Bailey, "#Transform(ing) DH Writing and Research"; Barnett et al., "QueerOS"; Barnett, "Brave Side of Digital Humanities"; Lothian and Phillips, "Can Digital Humanities Mean Transformative Critique?"; Cong-Huyen, "#CESA2013"; Cong-Huyen, "#mla13"; and Bailey, "All the Digital Humanists Are White."

39. See Nakamura and Chow-White, *Race after the Internet*.

40. McPherson, "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White?," 154. See also HASTAC, "About HASTAC," www.hastac.org/about-hastac (accessed 26 July 2018); Gold and Klein, *Debates in the Digital Humanities*; *Postcolonial Digital Humanities*, founded by Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam (dhpoco.org); Center for Solutions to Online Violence (femtechnet.org/csov/).

41. Conley, "Decoding Black Feminist Hashtags"; Wade, "'New Genres of Being Human'; Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles, "#GirlsLikeUs."

42. On the challenges facing users on social media and the relationship between social media, algorithms, and corporate media, see Harry, "Everyone Watches"; Crockett, "Raving Amazons"; Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*; and Browne, *Dark Matters*.

43. King, "Multiple Jeopardy"; Harry, "Everyone Watches"; Crockett, "Raving Amazons."

44. See "Power and Control Wheel," "Respect Wheel," "Social Media Ethics Handout," and "Power and Respect Handout" created by the Digital Alchemists (Bianca Laureano, I'Nasah Crockett, Maegan Ortiz, Jessica Marie Johnson, Sydette Harry, Izetta Mobley, and Danielle Cole) and designed by Liz Andrade, hosted in PDF format by the Center for Solutions to Online Violence (femtechnet.org/csov/).

45. On infrapolitics, see Kelley, *Race Rebels*. See also Freelon et al., "Black Twitter and Other Social Media Communities."

46. Johnson and Neal, "Introduction."

47. Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*.

48. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 18.

49. This article's focus is slavery's archive, but the commodification, enumeration, and erasure of nonwhite bodies through carceral practices (like slavery) should not be limited to the period of Atlantic slaving. For recent work on the carceral (with a US focus), see Sharpe, *In the Wake*; Browne, *Dark Matters*; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*; and Haley, *No Mercy Here*.

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Toward a Queer Digital Humanities

BONNIE RUBERG, JASON BOYD, AND JAMES HOWE

Where is the queerness in the digital humanities? In one sense, queer studies and the digital humanities (DH) share a common ethos: a commitment to exploring new ways of thinking and to challenging accepted paradigms of meaning-making. At the same time, as scholars like J. S. Bianco have argued, many of the data-driven initiatives that have earned DH its most visible accolades eschew rather than engage topics of difference and identity.¹ Though a number of queer studies and digital humanities scholars have already begun bringing queer perspectives to DH, much of this work remains marginal within the larger DH field. Yet the intersection of queer thinking and the digital humanities, like the intersection of feminism or critical race theory and DH, is a site of rich potential. Digital tools have the unique capacity to make visible the histories of queer representation and issues affecting queer communities. Simultaneously, queer studies brings to the digital humanities a set of intersectional, conceptual frameworks that challenge DH scholars to reflect on the politics of their research as well as the implications of their methodologies. Locating the queerness in the digital humanities is a crucial piece of a larger call for an increased critical engagement with culture in DH. This work foregrounds social justice and looks to queer subjecthood, queer desire, and queer world-building as guideposts in the movement toward a digital humanities that values social critique as much as computation and people as much as data.

“Queer” is a word with a long history and a complexity of meaning. From its origins as a pejorative, it has been reclaimed in recent decades by academic and popular communities alike. At its most basic, “queer” operates as an umbrella term: a marker of identity differentiated from “gay” or “LGBT” in that it encompasses all non-normative expressions of sexuality or gender (Grace, Hill, Johnson, and Lewis). Not every person whose identities fall within this category identifies as queer, however, and “queer” itself is a contested term. Within the context of queer studies, the concept of queerness has been interpreted and reinterpreted in manifold ways. From across the work of generations of queer theorists, queerness has emerged as a way of

being that is complex and contradictory: at once joyful and destructive, hopeful and fierce. Queerness resists the logics of heteronormative hegemony. “Queer” can also act as a verb: to queer is to destabilize, to subvert, or to unearth queer desire beneath the surface. Amplifying a long-standing thread within queer theory of attending to the interplays between queerness and race, contemporary queer studies scholars are increasingly considering queerness within an intersectional context, addressing how queer issues are interwoven with questions of race and ethnicity, class, socio-economics, and disability (Chen; McRuer; Muñoz). In a fundamental sense, however, what unifies uses of “queer” is that the word still contains at its heart a basic desire to live life, and to understand life, “otherwise” (Halberstam, “Queer Art,” 2). At the same time, queerness is not an abstract concept. Even when it is applied conceptually, queerness is still rooted in the embodied realities of queer subjects.

This essay offers our vision for a “queer digital humanities,” that is, a digital humanities that is invested in queer issues and has queer thinking at its core. Our goal is not to dictate what forms this queer digital humanities must take. Rather, starting from a survey of existing queer DH scholarship, our goal is to suggest ways forward, to open up queerness in the digital humanities as a space of possibility. We are far from alone in calling for an increased investment in social criticism in DH (e.g., Bailey; Crompton, Siemens, Arbuckle, and INKE; Koh; Liu), and others before us, such as Kara Keeling in her writing on a “Queer OS,” have explored ways in which queerness might reimagine the cultural narratives that surround computational technologies. Our intervention is to build from this work in order to argue for positioning queerness as a central element of DH methodologies. When we ask, “Where is the queerness in the digital humanities?,” we are also asking, “What might it mean to do the work of the digital humanities queerly?” The authors of this article approach this question from a variety of research backgrounds. In addition to being digital humanists, together we represent perspectives from game studies, queer studies, literary studies, digital librarianship, and critical making. We believe that queerness can function as a force to destabilize and restructure the way that DH scholarship is done across these fields. The vision of a queer digital humanities that we propose is at once conceptual and pragmatic. For us, moving toward a queer digital humanities means valuing queer lives and embracing a queer ethos but also addressing actionable, concrete ways that queerness can shift how the work of DH is done.

The stakes of arguing for the place of queerness in the digital humanities are palpable and present. At a time when harassment in digital spaces has been elevated to new peaks of vitriol, those who speak out for the importance of thinking about gender, sexuality, and structures of oppression in relation to the digital humanities have found themselves the targets of reactionary backlash. As are discussions of data and computation more broadly, DH tools are commonly imagined to be apolitical. Archives, visualizations, and other interfaces created by digital humanists often understand themselves as direct windows onto knowledge, offering democratizing

access to objective truths. Data, so the saying goes, don't lie. As feminist scholars of digital cultures know well, however, computational tools have profound political implications. Interfaces structure meaning; visualizations craft interpretation. Any discussions of technology must account for problems of access, both to devices and to education. We believe that this is a crucial time for bringing queer perspectives to the digital humanities, specifically because this is a moment of change. The reach of DH extends farther than ever before. This is therefore a time in which DH methodologies and technologies are both proliferating and codifying, making this an important moment of intervention. At the same time, pushing DH to engage more deeply with queerness has a wider relevance in contemporary conversations about difference, which are proliferating both in today's popular discourse and within our own academic disciplines. Far more than a niche issue within the digital humanities, queerness can serve as a beacon guiding us toward change and a new way forward within DH more broadly.

Queer Subject Matter in the Digital Humanities

We begin by addressing this question: where is the queerness in the digital humanities? Or, rather, where *could* it be? The most immediately apparent way in which the digital humanities can engage with queerness is by directly addressing issues relating to LGBTQ subjects. Indeed, a handful of initiatives of this sort have been undertaken in recent years—but such projects, while illuminating, remain limited in number. Nonetheless, it is important that we account for this research within our framework for a queer digital humanities precisely because it grounds the types of conceptual thinking we expand on below in the lived experiences of LGBTQ communities, histories, and struggles.

Of the existing digital humanities projects that directly address queer issues, some use established DH practices, such as archiving and generating visualizations, to make information regarding queer artistic and political lineages more widely available. The Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada project, for example, presents users with an interactive online map that highlights key events and locations in Canadian lesbian and gay rights activism between 1964 and 1981 (lglc.ca). Through this map, the project brings queer history to life, reanimating it via dynamic digital interfaces. Other archival projects have used DH tools to invite users to explore LGBTQ counterhistories. The Centre for Digital Humanities at Ryerson University's *Texting Wilde* initiative aims to create a web-based archive of texts that document the pre-1945 biographical discourse surrounding Oscar Wilde. Rather than collecting Wilde's writings themselves, *Texting Wilde* enumerates the debates that shaped this early period of Wilde scholarship. In this way, the archive allows visitors to understand the constructed and shifting nature of the narratives that have long positioned Wilde's same-sex desire as a defining element of his work. A project like *Texting Wilde* uses digital humanities methodologies to increase engagement with

the queer literary canon, but it also queers the notion of biography itself. It lays bare the process by which meaning has been made from Wilde's life and restores multiplicity to the complexity of lived experience. In this way, such a project gestures toward the queer potential of archiving itself as a practice that challenges concise, monolithic, and often hegemonic interpretations of knowledge.

Other digital humanities projects that speak directly to LGBTQ issues include those that address queer subjects through their exploration of social discourse, their interest in pedagogy, or their creative engagement with the cultural implications of technology. Berkeley's #Identity project, for instance, explores the meanings and effects of common Twitter hashtags that relate to issues of diversity, including the commonly used homophobic hashtag #nohomo (De Kosnik and Feldman). Edmond Chang has written about queer digital pedagogy, which he describes as "finding, creating, and playing with multimodal and polyamorous questions, algorithms, archives, and artifacts, analog and digital, flesh-to-flesh and virtual" and which "asks teachers and students, readers and writers, makers and players to be perverse, to be critical and reparative, to invest in these queer sites and moments with 'fascination and love'" (Chang). Meanwhile, artist Zach Blas addressed queerness directly through critical making with his *Queer Technologies* project (2007–2012), on which he later collaborated with micha cárdenas. As explained by Blas and cárdenas, *Queer Technologies* is "an organization that produces a product line for queer technology agency, intervention, and social intervention" (Blas and cárdenas, 3). The project is constituted of a series of installations, art objects, and a "queer programming anti-language": a suite of creations that explore the relationship between queerness and technology. We will discuss *Queer Technologies* at greater length below. Here, we point to these examples of digital humanities work that directly engages with LGBTQ issues in order to demonstrate some of the varied modes of understanding that DH has already brought to the field of queer studies.

As we review this selection of existing work at the intersection of DH and queer studies, we also look for scholarly models that might inspire future digital humanities research focused on LGBTQ subject matter. Two related, emerging areas of research constitute productive areas for further exploration: feminist digital humanities and queer video games. Feminist DH work, and especially the efforts of the Fembot and FemTechNet collectives, has demonstrated how the digital humanities can speak directly to intersectional concerns of social justice. Such work both uses DH tools to address cultural questions of gender and turns a critical eye to the relationship between gender and privilege in the digital humanities itself (see Wernimont). Thus, feminist DH scholarship functions as an argument that technology, while imbued with problems of discrimination and difference, can nonetheless become a powerful platform for critiquing dominant norms—an application that must also be central to a queer digital humanities.

Though it has largely been articulated outside of the discourse of DH, the burgeoning field of queer game studies also shares much with the queer DH we are

imagining. Queer game studies has emerged from collaborations between queer theorists, game studies scholars, and queer game designers. While scholars and cultural commentators have published work on gender and sexuality in video games since the 1990s, queer game studies has come together as a research paradigm more recently, energized by the annual Queerness and Games Conference and a concurrent, ongoing wave of independent, personal games made by queer designers like Anna Anthropy, Merritt Kopas, and Mattie Brice (Ruberg and Shaw). One of the things that makes queer game studies and what might loosely be called the queer games “movement” particularly notable is it foregrounds building dialogues across disciplines and modes of critique (Ruberg). At events like GaymerX, the LGBTQ fan convention, game studies scholars present to nonacademic crowds; simultaneously, game designers perform incisive deconstructions of heteronormative culture through their use of ludic systems. Games culture has long been a hostile space for those perceived as “different,” and contemporary online harassment campaigns have made that hostility all the more palpable. Work in the area of queer games brings with it a vibrancy and an immediacy that demonstrate how technological tools can foreground social justice in discussions of queer issues. As the work of these related fields demonstrates, the combination of digital media and queer perspectives demonstrably has the capacity to enliven, enrich, and challenge dominant thinking around both technology and queerness itself.

It perhaps goes without saying that, moving forward, we hope to see more digital humanities projects that engage explicitly with LGBTQ issues. Following from the initiatives discussed here, such projects could document LGBTQ histories, augment the study of LGBTQ lives, offer insight into social phenomena of relevance to LGBTQ communities, prompt instructors to bring the study of LGBTQ issues to life through digital humanities platforms, or explore the place of LGBTQ perspectives in technology through creative making practices. Inspired by the work of feminist DH, such work could also turn a critical eye on the place of LGBTQ subjects within the field of the digital humanities and the institutions through which DH functions. Additionally, in the vein of queer game studies, work in this area could expand through collaboration between scholars and media makers. Before we move into our discussion of queerness in relation to DH methodologies, we linger here for a moment to underscore the importance of representing LGBTQ subjects in the digital humanities. Queerness offers invaluable conceptual frameworks, but a queer digital humanities represents far more than a set of concepts. DH can and must do more to directly address issues faced by those who are marginalized—not despite the fact that, but precisely because, digital fields have long been problematic spaces for those who live life otherwise. For much of their history, these fields (such as computer science, video games, and humanities computing) have been implicitly structured as white, male, heteronormative spaces. As Whitney Phillips has shown in her study of online trolling, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, abuse performed through online communication platforms is not a social aberration, but

in fact reflects dominant cultural values. In the wake of #GamerGate, a number of essays in the *State of Play* collection (Goldberg and Larsson) examined the hostility against females, persons of color, and queer gamers that continues to pervade games culture. Antifeminist hostility even finds a voice in scholarly forums like the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) comment threads, as shown by the heated response to Arielle Schlesinger's blog post about feminist programming languages, discussed more below. Given this backdrop, it is important for us to remember that even as we call for DH scholars to increase their engagement with queerness, queer subjects working in the digital humanities face real risks in pushing the field in more inclusive directions.

Queer DH Methodologies: Inspiration from Existing Work

While queer studies can usefully employ DH tools and practices to produce scholarship focused on queer subjects, it is also important to examine how queer theory can inform current and future digital humanities methodologies. One of the key areas of debate in DH is the role that computing plays in differentiating DH from other modes of humanities scholarship. Some have argued that the digital humanities' narrow focus on computation has led the field to imagine itself, supposedly like computation itself, as free from concerns of economics, race, gender, and sexuality. As Alan Liu observes, "While digital humanists develop tools, data, and metadata critically . . . rarely do they extend their critique to the full register of society, economics, politics, or culture. How the digital humanities advances, channels, or resists today's great postindustrial, neoliberal, corporate, and global flows of information-cum-capital is thus a question rarely heard in the digital humanities" (Liu, web).

Liu goes on to argue that DH must develop a "methodological infrastructure" that unites computational and cultural criticism. Similarly, Roopika Risam, in her essay on intersectionality in DH, suggests four areas in which the digital humanities need to develop in order to create a more inclusive and socially engaged standard of practice: "cultivating a diverse community," "acknowledging inclusions and exclusions in data," applying "theoretical models that position intersectionality as an already existing but oft-overlooked part of computation," and developing systems "for understanding the ways difference [or lack thereof] shapes digital practices" (Risam). Liu's and Risam's critiques make it clear that currently dominant DH methodologies are not sufficient for the development of a queerly inflected digital humanities. The last two areas of development mentioned by Risam (theoretical models in which to identify existing intersectionalities and systems for understanding how difference shapes computation) are of particular interest to the present project. They suggest a queer DH praxis that is distinguished from mainstream DH through its conceptual models—models that can usefully be informed by queer theory. To draw from key questions that queer theory has asked in literary

and historical studies, how can we discover, uncover, and recover the queerness (in its various intersectional manifestations) in computation, as well the effects that queerness has had on computing and the potential effects it could have in the future? To date, this praxis has taken the form of speculating on the interconnected histories of queerness and computing, imagining the queering of the fundamental structures of computing technologies, conceptualizing queerness itself as a technology, exploring the queerness of code, and utilizing concepts of “speculative computing” to enact queer work.

A number of these existing works can help us think about queer methodologies for DH. A generative starting point is Kara Keeling’s “Queer OS,” which outlines the properties of an imagined queer operating system that itself offers new frameworks for making sense of society and identity. In Keeling’s formulation, inspired by Tara McPherson, Queer OS is “a project at the interfaces of queer theory, new media studies, and technology studies” that structures itself around the logics of queerness (153). Keeling’s Queer OS, should it exist, would understand cultural phenomena like “race, gender, class, citizenship, and ability . . . to be mutually constitutive with sexuality and with media and information technologies.” Keeling continues: “Queer OS names a way of thinking and acting with, about, through, among, and at times even in spite of new media technologies and other phenomena of mediation. It insists upon forging and facilitating uncommon, irrational, imaginative, and/or unpredictable relationships” between human subjects and digital media (154). As a launching point for imagining queer DH methodologies, Keeling’s Queer OS can be read as an imperative for queer DH scholars to embrace the complex and often contradictory tangle of intersectional investigation. It also directs DH researchers more generally to understand computing not as outside of social issues but rather as shaping and indeed being shaped by cultural determinants.

In addition to informing our vision of a queer digital humanities, Keeling’s essay has inspired others to interrogate the intersection of queerness and DH. In their 2016 piece, “Queer OS: A User’s Manual,” Barnett and colleagues take up Keeling’s call to conceptualize a Queer OS, which, the authors point out, “remains a largely speculative project” (50). However, as the authors themselves point out, the speculative operations of the queer system shouldn’t necessarily conform to conventional notions of functionality. To the contrary, they state,

[Our goal] is to engage with the challenge of understanding queerness today as operating on and through digital media and the digital humanities. Our intervention therefore seeks to address what we perceive as a lack of queer, trans, and racial analysis in the digital humanities, as well as the challenges of imbricating queer/trans/racialized lives and building digital/technical architectures that do not replicate existing systems of oppression. As such this is a speculative proposition for a technical project that does not yet exist and may never come to exist, a project that does not yet function and may never function. (51)

The “user’s manual” the essay provides is a provocative queer reimagining of what form and role various key components in digital computing (such as interfaces, applications, and memory) might take, with “each component given a poetical and theoretical description of its features and limitations” (50). While these descriptions inspire the reader to imagine a potential future in which computing is more in line with the ethos of queerness, some readers may ask where, in the present, we might identify the beginning points that might lead us toward a concrete instantiation of a Queer OS and, along with it, a queer DH. DH practitioners who are themselves queer and therefore potentially marginalized subjects working within the reward and accreditation structures of contemporary academia may feel that they need to produce work of a more tangible sort than “theoretical vapourware, speculative potentialware, ephemeral praxis” (51). These individuals may wish to (or feel the need to) develop computing technology that shares meaningful connections with this theoretical work but that does not itself embody “an unreliable system full of precarity” with an “inherent instability,” given the already precarious position of many queer subjects within the digital humanities (54).

In order to further explore the trajectories along which queer DH might unfold, we turn next to three of the scholarly works from which Keeling draws. The first is Jacob Gaboury’s series of articles titled “A Queer History of Computing.” One question that vexes the development of a queer DH is how to theorize the relationship between queerness and the ways in which computing itself can enact queer erasure. In his piece, Gaboury addresses this tension through a discussion of Alan Turing and other figures from the history of computing whom Turing influenced. Though Turing is considered to be a central figure in the development of modern computing, rarely have conceptualizations of his work overlapped with discussions of his queerness or the injustices he suffered at the hands of the British government. Gaboury recognizes that any claims about a direct correlation between Turing’s sexuality and his theories of computation would be problematic. To posit that the former “inspired” the latter would be simplistic, says Gaboury, yet to conclude that no relationship exists between the two “parses what is technologically significant in such a way so as to exclude the personal, the emotional, and the sexual” (Gaboury). Faced with the problem of articulating how the sexual signifies within the technological, Gaboury traces historical connections between a community of queer figures who played key roles in the early history of computing. Though it remains unclear what direct effects sexuality may have had on their work, Gaboury finds value in refiguring their production through a “speculative history” that foregrounds the oft-elided place of queerness. This type of fabrication (i.e., speculation) resonates in unexpected ways with the digital humanities practices of critical making. Gaboury’s history of computing both extends and problematizes DH methodologies by recasting making as “making up.” Additionally, Gaboury’s focus on historical absence—the suppressed, missing, unrecorded, and always partial nature

of queerness in the history of computing—points toward the restorative work that could be done by a queer digital humanities.

Turing's place within the history of artificial intelligence connects Gaboury's work to Jack Halberstam's earlier essay "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine." Halberstam's essay too provides useful models for conceptualizing a queer digital humanities. "Automating Gender" offers, among other things, a critique of feminist theories that rely on reductive ideas of phallogovernment and essentialist conceptions of gender. Like Gaboury, Halberstam looks to Turing to counter these narratives. What is now commonly referred to as the "Turing Test," Halberstam points out, began as a "sexual guessing game" in which an interrogator attempted to determine the genders of players as they answer questions via technological mediation. "Turing does not stress the obvious connection between gender and computer intelligence," writes Halberstam. However, "both are in fact imitative systems, and the boundaries between female and male . . . are as unclear and as unstable as the boundary between human and machine intelligence. . . . Gender, like intelligence, has a technology" (443).² To illuminate this unstable binary between the human and the machine, Halberstam takes up Donna Haraway's delineation of the female cyborg as a representation of technology's ability to transcend binary structures. Given that queerness, unlike essentialized gender or sexuality, has been closely aligned with artificiality, unnaturalness, imitation, and the subversion of binaries, one might describe Haraway's cyborg as queer—and, by extension, Halberstam's vision of cyborg technology as queer technology. In addition to envisioning technology as queer, Halberstam implicitly posits queerness itself as a technology. Such a formulation suggests a symbiotic, dialectic relationship between technology and queerness. It also suggests that the interface between human and computing technology might be understood as a space of queer intimacy and relation. Placed within our discussion of digital humanities methodologies, "Automating Gender" challenges us to account for the ways in which gender and sexuality are in fact inextricable from computational systems.

Another valuable touchstone for interrogating the relationship between queerness and the digital is Blas's *Queer Technologies* project, mentioned above, which similarly turns to Turing in theorizing the relationship between queerness and computation. "For us," write Blas with his collaborator cárdenas in an article outlining the work of *Queer Technologies*, "Turing is a crucial historical figure for thinking the politics of digital technologies from queer and feminist perspectives" (2). Yet, perhaps more than a historical figure, Turing appears here as a founder of queer computational thinking. Did Turing's homosexuality affect his research? Blas and cárdenas answer this question with a resounding yes. "The drives and assumptions of a heterosexual sexuality produce certain ways of producing and knowing that can be embodied in objects created by heterosexual scientists," they assert. "Similarly, homosexual desires can inform and help to materially construct the technicity of objects." That is, for Blas and cárdenas, the very logics around which contemporary

computation has been founded are shaped by Turing's queerness. Fittingly, it seems that the impulse behind the many artistic works that make up the *Queer Technologies* project is to reimburse or perhaps rediscover the queerness in computational technology. Of these works, the one of most interest here is Blas's *transCoder*, which Blas describes as "a queer programming anti-language." Works written using *transCoder* are not executable. Instead, *transCoder* functions primarily as a critical tool—in Mark C. Marino's words, "a theoretical software development kit, made not of functional functions but of encoded plays on the methods and discourse of critical theory" ("Of Sex," 187). As an unexecutable coding language, *transCoder* suggests a suite of approaches to queer digital humanities methodologies that play with failure and loss. We will return to reflect on the critical concerns that surround failure below. Still, our vision of a queer DH must account for an investigation of the times when technologies, like heteronormative modes of meaning, break down.

Queer Technologies models how practice-based work might speak to potential queer DH methodologies. It also directs us to consider the queer potential of other forms of digital praxis. *transCoder* can be seen as a queer application of what has been called codework. Codework subverts the tenets of "well-written" code: simplicity, functionality, transparency, and legibility. Examples of codework range from the nonexecutable net.art creations of "Mez" (Mary-Ann Breeze), written in a hybrid language called "m[ez]ang.elle," to obfuscated code and esoteric programming languages ("esolangs"). In "Interferences: [Net.Writing] and the Practice of Codework," Rita Raley notes that codework allows programming languages to break the surface, rather than simply leveraging them to perform the invisible labors of technology. This refiguration of code—as elusive, hidden, and ultimately uncontrollable—resonates with queer theory's notion of queer meaning as similarly submerged and anxiogenic. Referring to Jessica Loseby's net.art work *Code Scares Me*, Raley notes how it thematizes "anxieties about [the] intrusion, contamination, and uncontrollability" of code (Raley). Like queerness as interpreted by many queer literary scholars, code in Raley's formulation becomes monstrous, invisible, unknowable, and alien: "It lurks beneath the surface of the text. . . . The fear, further, is that code is autopoietic and capable of eluding . . . attempts to domesticate it and bring it into order." Practitioners of codework, Raley observes, see their production as expressly political; it resists assumptions about the neutrality of programming, reclaims code from corporate functionalism, and repurposes the pragmatic as the aesthetic. Such sentiments stand in contrast to the seemingly apolitical sensibilities of programmer communities dedicated to composing obfuscated code and esolangs. These practices tend to fall into the domain of professional programmers for whom testing the boundaries of coding represents an opportunity to demonstrate mastery. Yet obfuscated code and esolangs too represent potentially generative modes of queer DH methodologies. They refuse established expectations for readability and intentionally walk an anxious line between the domestication of code and code's refusal to "be brought into order."³

This discussion of esolangs brings us to the last work from which we draw inspiration for our vision of queer DH methodologies. This is what Johanna Drucker has termed “speculative computing.” As Drucker recounts in her book *SpecLab*, speculative computing emerges from a “productive tension” within the digital humanities. Specifically, speculative computing aims to invert DH’s focus on the use of digital tools in humanities scholarship by focusing instead on the development of “humanities tools in digital environments” (Drucker, xi). Extending the conceptual stakes of speculative computing, Drucker advances a theory called “aesthesis,” which foregrounds “partial, situated, and subjective knowledge” and proposes imaginative play with digital objects as an antidote to the totalizing authority of meaning. “Aesthesis,” writes Drucker, “allows us to insist on the value of subjectivity that is central to aesthetic artifacts . . . and to place that subjectivity at the core of knowledge production” (Drucker, xiii). In Drucker’s characterization, speculative computing takes seriously the destabilization of categories, including taxonomies of entity, identity, object, subject, interactivity, process, and instrument. In short, speculative computing rejects mechanistic and instrumental approaches, replacing them with indeterminacy and potentiality, intersubjectivity, and deformance. Speculative computing operates as a critique of the computational logics that structure much digital humanities scholarship. While Drucker does not mention queerness in *SpecLab*, her work gives voice to an ethos that could serve as a powerful directive for the queer digital humanities. A queer DH would extend the “otherness” that speculative computing enacts by focusing deliberately on issues concerning gender and sexuality in computing. Like queerness itself, the methodologies of a queer digital humanities must not be monolithic. Indeed, with its resistance to totalizing knowledge, speculative computing demonstrates the importance of methodological diversity.

Accordingly, we believe that modes of queer DH scholarship must themselves be multivalent, multiplicative, and self-critical: a set of practices in flux. Taken together, the works considered in this section challenge us to think about queerness in digital humanities methodologies as a matter of fundamental computational structures, as well as (if not more than) a matter of content. These works also encourage us to reflect on the foundational role that intersectional issues related to gender and sexuality play in the formation of new media and digital tools. They insist upon the importance of queer thinking within the history of computation; they delineate the queerness of technology as well as the technology of queerness. Some of the research we have discussed employs traditional scholarly methods. Equally compelling, other works make their arguments through fabrication and artistic interpretation. In our vision, a queer digital humanities too stands poised at the intersection of critique and creation. Drawing from these conceptual frameworks, queer DH itself emerges cyborg-like: a playful methodological hybrid of perspectives, tools, and meaning.

New Visions for Queer DH Methodologies

In the beginning of this essay, we asked, “Where is the queerness in the digital humanities?” Here we transition to consider the question, “Where *could* queerness be in the digital humanities?” In this section, we seek to extend our vision for a queer digital humanities beyond the methodologies suggested by existing work. Or, more precisely, having drawn inspiration from these works, we push ahead to imagine not just a speculative past, as Gaboury does for the history of computation, but a speculative future.

Many of the elements of dominant digital humanities methodologies that we would like to see queered are precisely those that appear, at first glance, least explicitly tied to the politics of DH. Such elements are commonly imagined as functional, mechanical, and therefore objective while, in fact, they too have the capacity to profoundly shape the political implications of DH on an otherwise invisible, structural level. A prime example of this type of functional methodology is object description. A sizable amount of digital humanities scholarship involves describing objects (as in a database). A DH scholar may write an object description for many reasons, but first and foremost that description functions as a marker so that the object may be retrieved later. Whether they are encoding a line of text using the Text Encoding Initiative’s markup specification to identify the speech of a character for programmatic manipulation or creating searchable metadata tags for a digital library, a researcher must make choices about how to describe an object within the taxonomical affordances of the available toolset. Such choices, however, are far from obvious or mechanical, and they cannot go unexamined. Alex Gil reflects that he “would make a poor excuse for a humanist if [he] just wrote new books that others would catalog ‘mechanically,’” because “the humanist must tend to the production and re-production of sources, archives, narratives, and significance” (Gil). Far from objectively communicating meaning, object description positions the machine, broadly defined, as an intermediary that reflects and enacts the cultural context in which it was created. Thus, object description—not just the work of describing but also the implementation of description in searchable form—is shaped by the cultural assumptions systemized in technology. The limitations, structuring logics, and history of a digital tool determine the opportunities it affords for making meaning from the world.

To explore what it might mean to queer a structural element of digital humanities methodologies like object descriptions, we return to the meaning of “queer.” “Queer” as a descriptor occupies an unstable position. It acts in opposition to “straight,” but refuses to clarify exactly how; at the same time, it stands to be subsumed by more specific identities as the need arises. Since “queer” is a reclaimed term, it is not uncommon to meet someone who refutes queerness, who instead feels more comfortable with “gay” or “lesbian” as an identifier. This inherent instability “messes up” the labor of description. In their essay “Queer Practice as Research: A Fabulously

Messy Business,” Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier identify the messiness of queerness as a methodology, one in which “messiness is imbricated with queerness and where cleanliness in knowledge production is associated with knowledge forms that have routinely occluded the queer and the non-normative in an effort to tidy up hypotheses and conform to hegemonic forms of ‘rigour’” (Campbell and Farrier, 84). Queer knowledge, in short, is messy.

Given that indexical taxonomies are traditionally designed to “tidy up” knowledge, how might a descriptive vocabulary account for that queer messiness? The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), a standardized and widely adopted thesaurus of subject headings for use in bibliographical records, demonstrates the trouble that arises when systems of knowledge categorization do not account for the nuance and complexity of queer identities. Criticism of LCSH’s treatment of marginalized groups goes back to at least the 1970s (Marshall; Berman). However, as Hope Olson notes, few of these early critics of LCSH “[seem] to have considered a change in structure—only in content.” While the terminology used to describe queer subjects has been updated over time, the deployment of that terminology lacks standardization. In a series of recent blog posts, Netanel Ganin examines the continued problems that still surround the confusing application of queer-related terminology in LCSH, where “gay” is used as both an umbrella term for “gay men and lesbians” and shorthand for *only* “gay men.” Perhaps most strikingly, as others have noted, the word “queer” itself remains largely absent from LCSH’s vocabulary (Kotter; Roberto). Jenna Freedman observes in another blog post some of the descriptive confusion that arises from the absence of the word “queer” from LCSH when it comes to taxonomizing works by writers who deliberately describe their works as queer. In one sense, the push for bringing queerness to LCSH serves as a powerful metaphor for the pressing need to make queer subjects visible and speakable within the structures of the digital humanities: it parallels, in miniature, a larger fight for the right to signify. Far more than an abstract debate, though, the argument for increasing queer inclusion in LCSH speaks to the real lives and labors of scholars who are fighting uphill against established ways of knowing.

Building a taxonomy that adequately accounts for the complexities of queerness may well mean turning to models of self-description that emerge from within queer communities. In “Queer Methodologies,” psychotherapist Peter Hegarty critiques the restrictive recommended descriptive practice of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. By contrast, he calls attention to the wealth of nuance revealed in the responses to a 2004 gay men’s sex study. This study brings to light the many and varied ways that respondents described their identities. In this sense, it speaks to the full complexity of any system that attempts to taxonomize identity and desire. Hegarty writes of the language that men in the study used to describe themselves: “When I read this list of terms some of them made me laugh because they seemed to subvert the question that the researchers asked. Others made me feel uncomfortable as they are terms I once used to describe myself but

have long since given up. Collectively, they made me wonder when and where sincerity, irony, cooperation, and dissent might be the intended effects of nominating the sexual self with a particular label” (132). As formulations of their own queerness that defy reduction, these men’s responses to the survey echo the idea that “queer knowledge is a knowledge that refuses to be complete” (Grace and Hill, 302).

If queer knowledge always resists completion, it becomes clear that queering metadata means more than adding new vocabulary to existing taxonomical systems. Queerness also points toward a shift in the very methodologies of metadata collection. To queer metadata, queer thinking must be brought to bear on the conceptual models and tools of object description as well as its content. Indeed, the messiness of queerness provides a new vantage point from which to challenge the norms that dictate how meaning is derived from data. The very ways in which data are traditionally mapped rely on a model of the world that queerness refutes, namely, a one-to-one relationship between concepts. A queer digital humanities must therefore seek out systems of meaning-making that can account for nonbinary relationships. Some digital humanities initiatives have begun this work already. Efforts like RDF and linked data, for instance, model network relationships instead of hierarchies. Drawing from this work, Tara McPherson has aptly proposed that “gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability might then be understood not as things that can simply be added on to our analyses (or to our metadata), but instead as operating principles of a different order, always already coursing through discourse and matter” (McPherson, “Designing for Difference,” 181). We have lingered over this extended discussion of object description and metadata because we find that it helpfully models the type of queer thinking that can be brought to bear on almost any element of digital humanities methodologies, even those that appear initially least politically or culturally inflected.

Another methodological mode that we believe has expansive potential for a queer digital humanities is play. McPherson remarks, “If a core activity of the digital humanities has been the building of tools, we should design our tools differently, in a mode that explicitly engages power and difference from the get-go, laying bare our theoretical allegiances and exploring the intra-actions of culture and matter” (“Designing for Difference,” 182). Play fills this need to adjust, reconceptualize, and design differently. In a queer sense, play implies making a mess and exploring that mess in order to ask, “What if?” Looking forward, queer digital humanists might use playful practices and attitudes to challenge old organizational structures. The practice of writing “living code” offers another potential site of inspiration for a queer digital humanities. Instead of writing a script once and later executing it, the living coder intervenes in the process and makes changes as needed. Collins details the empowering aspect of live coding: “The human live coders who flirt within the algorithmic environments, teasing and tinkling the guts of the processes, are the most powerful agents around. Their presence continually reinforces the truism that software is written by people and makes live its construction and deconstruction” (210).

Live coding needn't even be digital. Bringing together concepts of play and living code, Collins mentions games like *Nomic* or *1000 Blank White Cards* and how rule changes can be made not just during gameplay but as part of gameplay, evolving to meet the desires of participants. Alternatively, instead of interrupting computational processes, we might code disorganization directly into our algorithms, as J. S. Bianco does in her digital essay "Man and His Tool, *Again?*," which deconstructs the traditional form of the essay through the caprices of algorithmic instruction.

Yet another potential queer DH methodology to explore is the glitch. Here the line between performance art and academic research begins to blur, opening space for a radically different imagining of technology born of queer methodology. Jenny Sundén asks us to reconsider the value of the glitch, "an ambiguous phenomenon . . . an unexpected break in the flow," where it is "an amplification of already existing flaws, defects, or errors. Instead of covering up the seams, it presents them proudly." In a keynote address at the 2015 Queerness and Games Conference, Sandy Stone propositioned remapping her clitoris to the palm of her hand and masturbating for the crowd, challenging ideas of appropriateness and pleasure and calling upon attendees to imagine the glitch as an embodied phenomenon: the body out of place and out of order, taking queer pleasure in an embrace of this "flaw." Campbell and Farrier describe the glitch as "practice-as-research," purposefully muddling what might otherwise be a clear delineation between research and researcher, "resist[ing] the normative impulse for cleanliness brought about by disciplining knowledge" (84).

Admittedly, there are potential problems with this call to play around, to mess up, to break down. We recognize that a tension exists in this this call to play, risk, and fail. These methodologies can come into conflict with other things we value in critical digital humanities practice. Practices like standardization of data or plug-and-play code can enable participation in the digital humanities or lower the barrier to entry, especially for new practitioners and marginalized subjects. Accessibility and disability must be part of our discussions when we consider the queer potential of a "mess." How far can we play around before creating obstacles that discourage participation? Researchers are also subject to the need to produce: for the requirements of a grant, for tenure and promotion, as part of a funded project, to produce "metrics" for administrators and so on. We do not intend to dictate that DH scholars, faced with the choice to implement a normative or a queer methodology, must always make the queer choice. However, we do believe that queer digital methodologies have important new perspectives to offer scholars from all branches of DH, and that the rewards for taking the leap into new modes of structuring the world are of immense scholarly and social value.

Toward a Queer Digital Humanities

The goal of this essay has been to argue for an increased engagement with queerness in the digital humanities. By looking at DH work that directly addresses queer

subjects, we have attempted to demonstrate the value of bringing DH to queer studies—as well as indicating areas that are ripe for significant expansion. In turning to the methodologies of DH, we have been interested in seeing the other side of this equation: what queer thinking can bring to the digital humanities. We looked at existing work that theorizes the relationship between queerness and technology as a launching point for imagining queer DH methodologies. Building from this work, we mapped a selection of our own suggestions for queer DH methodologies, with object descriptions as our main illustrative case study. We close by emphasizing that we do not mean for the methodologies we have suggested to be comprehensive, but rather for them to demonstrate the richness, variety, and potential at the intersection of queerness and DH. It is our hope that they serve as inspiration for others to push further in this arena. This work, and future explorations into the relationship between queerness and DH, speaks to important and pressing concerns around social engagement in the field, underscoring the politics of computation and calling for a wider diversity of perspectives in both subject matter and method.

Like most calls for a critical digital humanities, we are here asking for reflection on methods of labor, creation, product, and practice, and how they embody, enact, restrict, or constrain modes of expression. Who or what benefits from “straight,” “cis,” or “clean” data, and what might “queer,” “trans,” “nonbinary,” “messy,” or “playful” data look like? What do we expose when we resist norms and binaries, or when we read queerly, build queerly, map queerly, and play queerly? Many queer-identified people recognize the tradeoffs of negotiating their identity. Context can make the transition smooth, risky, fraught, or celebrated. Practicing a queer digital humanities is much the same. Different stakeholders bring different needs and values to this work, and a queer digital humanities must make space for a wide continuum of approaches. Constructing systems (not just literally computing systems, but systems of thought, systems of expression) that support ambiguity, permit play, and engage difference can be a rewarding challenge but also a risk. Queerness too represents a risk, a place at the edge of unsafety; yet this same space is the space of possibility. We expect that a truly queer DH may still be a long time coming—or, perhaps, it will never come. This tension too lies at the heart of our queer digital humanities, and it is perhaps in tension that we might locate the most radical line of thinking that queerness brings to DH. At a time when the digital humanities promises to make sense of the world through supposedly objective computational tools, queerness refuses to allow us to stop reflecting, stop challenging, and stop questioning.

Notes

1. In “Room for Everyone at the DH Table?” Roopika Risam and Adeline Koh offer a structured synopsis of a 2013 open discussion thread on “The Digital Humanities as Historical ‘Refuge’ from Race/Class/Gender/Sexuality/Disability” that addresses this issue directly.

2. In her earlier *Technologies of Gender* (1987), Teresa de Lauretis takes up Michel Foucault's idea of the "technology of sex" and proposes that gender is also "the product of various social technologies" (2). Following Foucault, de Lauretis uses "technology" to refer broadly to a set of systematic practices found, for example, in cinema (e.g., cinematic techniques and codes) that contribute to the social construction of gender. Halberstam's essay extends this concept into theories of computational technology.

3. A useful example can be seen in Mark C. Marino's analysis of the work being done by Julie Levin Russo's "Slash Goggles algorithm" (written in the transCoder programming antilanguage) and the AnnaKournikova worm. While both revolve around desire, the worm exploits the heteronormative behaviors that are structured by the web, whereas the algorithm enables the decoding of repressed or subsumed queer desire in mainstream (heteronormative) cultural works ("Of Sex," 200).

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PART VI

SITUATEDNESS

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Can We Trust the University?

Digital Humanities Collaborations with Historically Exploited Cultural Communities

AMY E. EARHART

Social justice digital humanities work is increasingly outward facing and community and activist oriented.¹ However, historical abuses of communities and systemic inequities present formidable challenges for those who seek to develop partnerships with vulnerable populations. Excellent work in negotiating this long-standing problem is occurring in pockets of digital humanities work, with scholars working in indigenous studies leading the way. However, we must develop a set of best practices for all of us who are working with historically marginalized communities, recognizing that an understanding of individual and group situatedness is crucial to digital humanities practices. Such an approach involves both introspection and a historical understanding of the power dynamics within institutions and communities. In this chapter I would like to think through how we might, as a matter of best practices, begin to address such an issue. First, we must understand the relationship between our localized environment and the community with which we would like to partner. Second, we must interrogate issues of ownership and control. Careful attention to both must occur, for without such introspection, we will end up exploiting communities with which we engage. Further, social justice digital humanities practitioners must begin the difficult task of articulating best practices that account for such issues, including the development of safeguards for communities. A baseline concern needs to be that we might think about our materials as data, but that the data are not a free-floating signifier; instead, that data are always a part of a community or individual.

Here I want to turn away from thinking about this as an inclusion issue or an issue about the ideas or texts that we study. There has been ample, important work documenting such issues.² What has received less attention as a practice in digital humanities is how we understand our work in relationship to ownership or to knowledge practices in the service of social justice. As I was researching current

digital humanities work in preparation for this chapter, I found that there is a revealing and disturbing use of the term “exploitation” by scholars in their understanding of digital data. One might exploit “diverse digital media and strategies while maintaining the scholarly apparatus of a research paper” (Johanson et al., 132); we might find funded digital humanities projects such as Alan Smeaton’s “The Digital Humanities (DigHum): The Formation of a National Working Group on the Exploitation of Data in the Humanities” or the report “Exploitation of Cultural Content and Licensing Models,” which discusses rights of cultural institutions, such as museums, but never mentions the thorny issues of ownership of, say, indigenous artifacts.³ The blithe way that one might consider how to exploit data points to the underlying assumption that data are without value, that items have no cultural connection to those who produced the knowledge, is a sleight-of-hand move that provides a dual exploitation as value is removed and, at the same time, the value of the cultural knowledge is displaced and even consumed. Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* emphasize the complications of network culture, where “what is at stake in any discussion of the political dimensions of networks is, at bottom, the experience of living within networks, forms of control, and the multiple protocols that inform them.”⁴ Networks are contingent upon “technological, biological, social, and political” forces and, as such, need to be analyzed within such complicated webs, effectively a similar argument to how intersectional feminism understands power relations. This is not an issue with our field per se, but about how the methodological approaches of turning lived experience and cultural expression into digital data for computer manipulation, the way that we gather data, is disconnected from the recognition that data are always connected to people and to lived experience. It is a humanities problem that centers the humanities within technological questions, the heart of digital humanities. It is the center of how we must think about the digital content that we produce, for to lose sight of the layers of issues of human “ownership” and “exploitation” does a disservice not only to those communities that are re-exploited but to our ability to produce scholarly knowledge and advance digital humanities.

Intersectional feminism provides the greatest guidance to ethical approaches to digital humanities and has been taken up by digital humanities scholars across a range of disciplines, offering, according to Roopika Risam, “a viable approach to cultural criticism in the digital humanities.”⁵ Enacted intersectionality in “existing digital humanities projects,” notes Risam, “provide examples of how, in small and large ways, theory and method can be combined to address recurring questions of the role of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, nationality, and other categories of difference within the field,” crucial connections central to addressing the way that scholars engage with the cultural production and knowledge of marginalized groups. Other scholars, including Moya Bailey, Alexis Lothian, Amanda Phillips, Anne Cong-Huyen, F. M. Ettarh, and Anna Everett, also view intersectionality as a means to ethically engage in digital humanities work, particularly in their

representations of situated standpoints and resistance to essentialist definitions, as theorized by Patricia Hill Collins.⁶ Intersectionality helps us to unpack multiple layers of exploitation, such as the tensions involved with labor and digital projects, as discussed in T. L. Cowan and Jasmine Rault's "The Labour of Being Studied in a Free Love Economy," which makes clear the ways that volunteer labor, even that born of love, might exploit.⁷ As such, the positionality of the scholar engaged in the digital humanities project necessarily shifts the way that she interacts with the project. For example, scholars embedded in the project's represented community have an opportunity to shift narratives and to tell their own stories.⁸ The recognition of one's own experience in relationship to complex positionality is crucial to understanding how we, as digital humanities scholars, might work in ethical, nonexploitive ways, attending to what might be missteps due to lack of consideration.

We are at a moment where we need to think about how the exploitation of data is related to historical exploitation of people(s), to reconnect the digital with embodied experience. Mark Turin notes, "Archives become more complex when the 'documents' in question are representations of human 'subjects'" (Turin, 453).⁹ Documents are never devoid of embodiment, as we might never use the term "exploitation of data" without understanding that, eventually, exploitation of data has real impact on individuals and communities. A division of human subjects and documents leads to problematic interactions with those with whom we are working to digitize. We need to think about how our data embody experience. One of the most interesting projects to wrestle with the disconnect is Jacqueline Wernimont's "Safe Harbor: Hosting California's Eugenics Data."¹⁰ Wernimont and her collaborator Alexandra Minna Stern are working with a compiled dataset of California eugenic sterilization records, and are using both sensory and audio representations to show the numbers of sterilizations conducted over time. Wernimont notes, "There is no data without people. . . . Exploring the vulnerabilities of quantifying and archiving the human experience, we ask, 'How can we better care for people by caring for their data?'"¹¹ Contending that a central concern of digital humanities is the conflict between open access and privacy, or individuals' "right to be forgotten," the project forces us to consider how the haptic and sonification approaches dislocate from the lived experiences while, at the same time, sensory and auditory feedback recenters our bodies, recenters the person. No longer can we displace the human, as we are engaged with the person who is the data experienced through our own body.

Another way to view the centeredness of the human body is to recognize the way that bodies have been used or exploited and how such exploitations are related to cultural knowledge exploitation. In the "Safe Harbor" project there is a desire to represent the impact of racist ideologies that disproportionately impact Latinx and African Americans, while at the same time avoid reproducing historic exploitation. Similar questions arise in my work "Millican Race 'Riot': 1868," where a leader of the freedman's community, Pastor George Brooks, was lynched and disfigured. How does an archive represent the horror of the lynching without revictimizing Brooks?

Such questions have become even more central in the midst of the numerous videos documenting the deaths of black men in America, from Tamir Rice to Philando Castile to Terence Crutcher, all of whose deaths were played and replayed as viral videos spread across the internet. While some view such videos as proof of police brutality, there remains an element of spectatorship similar to the gaze applied to lynching victims, a reexploitation that turns the individual death into a spectacle for consumption. Those of us working with such sensitive materials, materials intimately connected to an often violent embodied experience, need to carefully consider how the intersections of race, gender, class, and disability work in tandem to create a particular power expression.

To center the human experience, to rethink our working partnerships with historically marginalized communities, necessitates the development of best practices, but we have not yet, collectively, considered how we might articulate a framework for research. We might look to indigenous studies and museum studies communities for guidance in developing best practices. Kimberly Christen Withey, a digital humanities and indigenous studies scholar, has a long history of scholarship and digital project production that is careful to consider ownership and concepts of openness, including the idea that “information wants to be free.”¹² Kimberly Christen Whithey’s Mukurtu is a “community archive platform . . . adaptable to the local cultural protocols and intellectual property rights systems of Indigenous communities.”¹³ Interrogating ideas of ownership, recognizing historical abuses of colonization, Christen Withey’s projects reject a fully open access approach, instead recognizing that working with particular groups and ideas requires “us to look *differently* or *not look* at all.”¹⁴ Such work is built on relationships of trust and a clear understanding of how the academic’s relationship to the project must be shaped not by his or her own goals but by the partner communities’ knowledge, practices, and beliefs. Academics working on projects must be willing to cede control from the individual and the academic institution and position the project within a community or activist site.

What I am suggesting is that every project must attend to the specificity of the cultural context in which the project is being produced. The most obvious, but not only, issue of specificity is the cultural context of the materials under study. The long-standing *Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL)* provides one example of how we might think through issues not only of ownership but of the specificity of the materials within cultural contexts. The *THL* emphasizes “technology, knowledge, and community” and demonstrates a commitment to the community that it is studying, prioritizing “social networking facilities, as well as the means to facilitate scholarship to have socially productive impact in Tibetan and Himalayan Communities.”¹⁵ Scholars have a responsibility to address the ways that technological specifications might force Western representations of knowledge onto materials that do not use such systems. Linda E. Patrik cautions, in a discussion of Tibetan texts, that “it is important to respect the control that indigenous scholars have over their own textual heritage,” and that “the model of broad ‘access’ that often motivates western

digitization efforts does not apply universally, and may in some cases go directly against the indigenous textual tradition.”¹⁶ Central to the work with any historically marginalized group is an understanding of the cultural construction of ownership, leading to an equitable partnership that positions the control of materials within the community, rather than within the academy.

In addition to careful attention to ownership, we must consider how our digital representation and manipulations impact knowledge production itself. When we think about digital humanities projects, we need to recognize that there is more than a set of technological specifications that represent best practices. For example, the University of Nebraska has released “Best Practices for Digital Humanities Projects,” a document focused on technical issues related to interoperability and preservation including the use of XML, EAC, METS and other such standards.¹⁷ The problem with such a narrow focus, however, is that such metadata standards may run counter to certain marginalized communities’ understanding of preservation or knowledge. For digital humanists, best practices might be better understood as ethical guidelines of practice. Tibetan texts, for example, require technological functions that are aware of the cultural specificity of the materials. TEI-XML is normally applied to textual materials to ensure preservation and interoperability, yet in the case of Tibetan texts “the challenge” is how to represent what “escapes this kind of basic encoding.”¹⁸ Patrik describes her team’s response to the cultural encodings surrounding the text, encodings that include the readers’ bodily movements, hand movements, chanting, and visualizations, none accounted for by TEI yet “integral parts of the text and its meaning, without which it cannot be said to be truly preserved.” We see this same issue in the Modern Language Association’s (MLA’s) “Guidelines for Authors of Digital Resources,” where the focus of the guidelines privileges an academic, Western understanding of knowledge and ownership. The “Authorship and Credit” statement doesn’t represent how a community might own knowledge. How, for example, does one extend credit to oral histories? What responsibilities does a digital scholar have to the individual who recounts a story and also to the community that has, over years, built a particular oral narrative?

On the topic of “Authorship and Credit,” the MLA “Guidelines for Authors of Digital Resources” direct authors to

identify all individuals and groups responsible for the creation and maintenance of the resource. Include individuals’ institutional affiliations when relevant. Information to be given might include the following:

- Authors and Researchers
- Editors
- Designers
- Software developers and other collaborators

Institutions or organizations hosting the site
 Funders
 Contact information¹⁹

The same issue appears in the statements in “Citations and Reuse,” which suggest that one should “offer appropriate citations for content quoted or republished in the resource.”²⁰ If one would like to include oral histories of historically marginalized communities, a mere citation may be another form of exploitation and a misuse of materials. As indigenous scholars have demonstrated, some stories are not for public consumption. Guidelines must consider this within an ethical framework of cultural context, rather than presuppose a linear and individual understanding of ownership.

We need to develop an ethics of practice that account for what Martha Nell Smith, digital humanities scholar and executive editor of the *Dickinson Electronic Archives*, has called the “Human Touch,” where Smith situates issues of identity as central and inextricable from the formation and use of technologies.²¹ We have outstanding feminist digital humanities projects, such as *Women Writers Online* or *Orlando*, in which we might imagine “the tools and technologies of the digital archive are themselves feminist,” yet, as outlined by Jacqueline Wernimont in her analysis of *Orlando*, such structures are complicated and are in danger of cooptation through their very structures.²² Twitter has become a site in which tensions between feminist use and platform/technology have clashed. As Dorothy Kim and Eunsong Kim lament, “We enter Twitter because we believe it’s a medium that’s not hostile to women of color writers, thinkers, and conversations—but perhaps we should reconsider.”²³ While Kim and Kim recognize that the work occurring within Twitter’s space may be liberatory, the platform itself is closed and hostile, resisting the anticolonialist work that is underway. Further concerning, and key to this discussion, is the recent move by the Library of Congress to archive all public tweets, a move that “follows an ancient model of provenance/collecting: the objects belong to the purchaser, *The Man With The Papers*.”²⁴ Reminiscent of the treatment of indigenous artifacts by libraries and museums, we now see another questionable archiving practice, with the added layer of potential exploitation by those who will treat the Twitter collection as a mineable dataset. Certainly copyright law is fuzzy on the use of proprietary individual knowledge when converted into such large datasets, and ethically this is even murkier as individual knowledge producers lose control of their materials and have no say in how such materials might be used. However, data mining of tweets is not necessarily exploitive and depends on who is utilizing the tweets and how such a dataset is constructed. Central to ethical engagement with large datasets that contain individual identifiers, such as is the case with tweets, is careful consideration of the positionality of the researcher and the development of a methodology that protects the privacy of individuals. Though the tweets are public, the shift in their intended use, from individual expression to algorithmic manipulation, and the rearticulation of the data within a new medium,

such as a database or digital humanities tool, require new practices. While it is crucial that we continue to work for technological standardizations and the lure of big data is exciting, we must be aware that individuals might not be best served by rigid standardizations that presuppose particular knowledge or ownership structures. Instead, we must develop an ethics of practice that put technological standardization in dialogue with individual and community specificities.

Digital humanists have begun to develop best practices for certain forms of collaboration, providing models that we might use to articulate how we would like our field to interact with historically marginalized communities. The 2010 workshop “Off the Tracks: Laying New Lines for Digital Humanities Scholars” produced the “Collaborator’s Bill of Rights,” which made important steps toward defining ethical practices as about alternative academic (alt-ac) individuals involved in projects.²⁵ The more recent “A Student Collaborators’ Bill of Rights” has refocused our attention on undergraduate students involved in projects.²⁶ What remains missing from these standards, though, are the collaborations with those connected to the subjects that we are studying and an ethics that focuses on collaborations that occur outside of academic structures. For example, the New York University “Digital Humanities Best Practices: Engaging a Collaborator” document provides important guidelines for managing collaborations, but it assumes a certain type of collaborator, “individuals/institutions.”²⁷ Such an assumption supposes that the primary collaborator will be an individual in academia or a related field, such as museum studies or a library. We who work with communities in collaborative partnerships and who understand that objects of study are not neutral but intimately connected to individuals must work to articulate a statement of ethics of practice.

To meet such a goal, we need to shift our understanding of digital humanities projects away from the academic, the principal investigator (PI), the project team, and to a more holistic representation of the participant. In our current publish-or-perish, highly competitive academic environment, we are driven to seize credit, ownership, of projects to survive. However, this narrative also contributes to exploitation and abuses of the communities that are connected to the materials we would like to digitize. We need to develop a model of collaboration that positions the academic as an equal, even lesser, partner in the relationship, which is the only model that will begin to balance inequity. Moya Z. Bailey’s rearticulation of Mark Sample’s collaborative construction centers a community-driven feminist approach that practices what she calls digital alchemy, “the ways that women of color, Black women in particular, transform everyday digital media into valuable social justice media magic that recodes failed dominant scripts,” and provides a model for how we might articulate ethical practices.²⁸ Bailey argues that ongoing collaborative consent places authority and control in the hands of the knowledge producer rather than the scholar. To best achieve this, we must be clear about our specific position. For all the concerns regarding the diminishing position of the academy and academics, we remain in a very privileged and powerful position. We must remember this when we interact

with historically marginalized communities, which have been stripped of control of their own materials over centuries, sometimes by the very institutions that are our employers. Traditional markers of ownership might be redefined in our projects. Timothy B. Powell and Larry P. Aitken model authorship attribution that is community oriented and recenters cultural ownership in their article “Encoding Culture: Building a Digital Archive Based on Traditional Ojibwe Teachings.”²⁹ Powell, senior research scientist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the time of publication, cedes authority to Aitken, tribal historian at Leech Lake Ojibwe reservation, throughout the essay, often commenting on his lack of “adequate training” to properly interpret the materials, a role that may be filled only by the tribal historian; hence the shared authorship of the article (261). When working with historically marginalized groups, we must give up the central position of the academic in projects, and by doing so we have much to gain.

Each digital humanist practices within a localized environment that presents different challenges for working with historically exploited cultural communities, and we must interrogate our own position, both individually and within our institutional structures. This has proved particularly important to the work I have undertaken. I work at Texas A&M University (TAMU), a land grant university that began in 1871 as Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. For most of its existence TAMU was military, all male and all white, admitting women in 1963 and ending segregation in 1964. TAMU likes to think of itself as unique, but an institutional history of racism and sexism is not uncommon. Brown University, for example, in 2005 launched an investigation of the university’s connection to the practice of enslavement and other schools, including Emory University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Virginia, followed Brown’s lead. Some schools, such as Georgetown and William and Mary, are launching digital projects that document their connection to slavery.³⁰ Recognizing the structural legacy of the exploitation of enslaved peoples, the institutions have made a variety of important recommendations including more realistic representations of university histories, targeted endowments, public outreach, and scholarly ventures. Brown also recommends that “the University’s Corporation, administration, and faculty will undertake a major research and teaching initiative on slavery and justice.”³¹ Such responses to historical abuses are to be commended, yet such histories provide a challenge for scholars who are interested in developing partnerships with historically marginalized communities. To assume that such histories have no impact on partnership efforts or to assume that a scholar is not seen as intimately affiliated with his or her institution, and his or her institution’s past, will stymie the ability of digital scholars to develop the types of digital projects that benefit scholarship and the larger public. We digital scholars must always situate ourselves in relationship to our institutional pasts if we want to ethically work with groups who have every reason to be suspicious of our institutions. For example, the segregated past of my home institution, while long ago, continues to impact the way that our local

African American community understands those associated with the university. Efforts to build partnerships to explore race-related histories of our communities, including the ongoing project “The Millican ‘Riot,’ 1868,” are necessarily inflected by past and present events. To ignore the past is to miss a chance to begin to have the difficult conversations necessary to have a positive, collaborator-focused project.

“The Millican ‘Riot,’ 1868” archives materials related to the 1868 event that occurred in Millican, Texas, a small town located fifteen miles from Texas A&M University, that may well have been the largest so-called race riot in Texas. Details remain unclear, but we believe that during the first KKK rally in Millican, armed freedmen fired on the rally, driving the Klan out of town. After the rally, George Brooks, a local Methodist preacher, former Union soldier, and Union League organizer, began a black militia. Several confrontations occurred, including an attempted lynching of the brother of a former slave owner, a march on the county seat of Bryan by a large group of armed blacks, and the demand for payment for work by Miles Brown, a local black contractor, all of which ended in an assault on the local black community and deaths of numerous black women, children, and men. Working with undergraduate students, “The Millican ‘Riot,’ 1868” project is an Omeka-installed digital archive that houses primary materials related to the event. What is clear from our initial work is that there are conflicting reports on the cause of the riot and of the numbers of dead, which newspapers report as being from five to one hundred, and the local black community suggests that there is an unmarked mass grave. As we might expect, the white-owned newspapers and government records tell the story from one perspective, that of the white community and political structure. There are few print records of the black communities’ responses to the event. If I wanted to develop a project that tried to speak to other narratives of what the *Daily Austin Republican* labeled in its reporting on the event a “massacre,” then I would need to work with local community members to see if oral histories provided additional details about the event. Yet how does a white professor who is employed by an institution with a well-known segregationist past develop a partnership with a local community to explore such a painful event?

As a white scholar who has worked in African American literature since the 1990s, I have spent a good amount of time thinking through the ways that my experience and position might impact my scholarship and how others view my intervention into such work. What I hadn’t considered within the context of scholarship was what my institutional employment and my local community might mean to the work I undertake. I interpret literature. I work with texts, often texts that have nothing to do with what occurred within my local community. Beyond recognizing that working at an R1 (Research 1) institution gives me more funding and time for research than other schools, my thoughts about past and current climate issues were confined to how my colleagues and students might experience their time at Texas A&M. None of this, however, carried weight with my potential collaborators. I might say that Texas A&M is an R1, public, land grant institution. The words that

the local African American community that I hoped to work with associate with my institution are “exclusion,” “white,” and “racism.” To create a partnership that is based on the nonexploitive principles I have outlined at the beginning of this essay would involve serious consideration of my institution’s past and present.

A few years ago Texas A&M University decided to digitize old yearbooks, a typical activity that many colleges and universities undertake. However, examination of our (and it is important that scholars own the history of the institution in which they work, for good or bad) yearbooks is more than a bit disturbing. Early clubs include the Kala Kinasis German Dancing Club, the Swastikas Dancing Club, and the Kream and Kow Klub, all student groups affiliated with white nationalism and the KKK.³² Pictures of student organizations include the K.K.K.’s, wearing their Klan robes, with typical cross insignia, hoods, and brandishing swords. Even more telling is that while the Klan often wore the uniform to remain anonymous, so entrenched and normalized was this K.K.K group that the hooded members and their leadership are named in the yearbook. When the university took on the yearbook project, discussions occurred regarding how to treat this material. The library rightfully decided to be transparent about the images in the yearbook (see Figure 20.1). At the same time, they added a statement to the online collection that made clear that the images were problematic: “Cushing Memorial Library and Archives strives to make our digital collection resources available and useful to our faculty, staff, students, alumni, researchers and the general public. Through our web site, the Libraries offers public access to a wide range of information, including historical materials that may contain offensive language or negative stereotypes. Such materials must be viewed in the context of the relevant time period. Texas A&M does not endorse the views expressed in such materials.”³³ Some may view the statement as an artful political move, but such statements are crucial interventions in the digitization of historical materials. Given Texas A&M University’s segregated past, the materials need to be glossed against current university values. Like all digital humanities projects, the situatedness of the institution and of the content is crucial.

The Klan student groups are not the only marker of the racism of the institution.³⁴ If you had any doubt about the position of African Americans, the images of the “Negro janitors,” and the ode to “Uncle Dan”—who “does the work of ten young niggers”—would assure you that African Americans were welcome in the university community only if they occupied subservient positions (see Figures 20.2 and 20.3).³⁵

To develop collaborative partnerships with historically marginalized communities, we must, once again, recognize that the individual, in this case the academic, is situated within the context in which he or she works. The structures of academia are built on exploitation of particular groups, whether exploitation through land seizure from indigenous peoples or enslaved labor, as is the documented case with numerous universities. Other exploitations are built into our structures, such as is the case with the long-standing racism that delineates the culture of Texas A&M, which

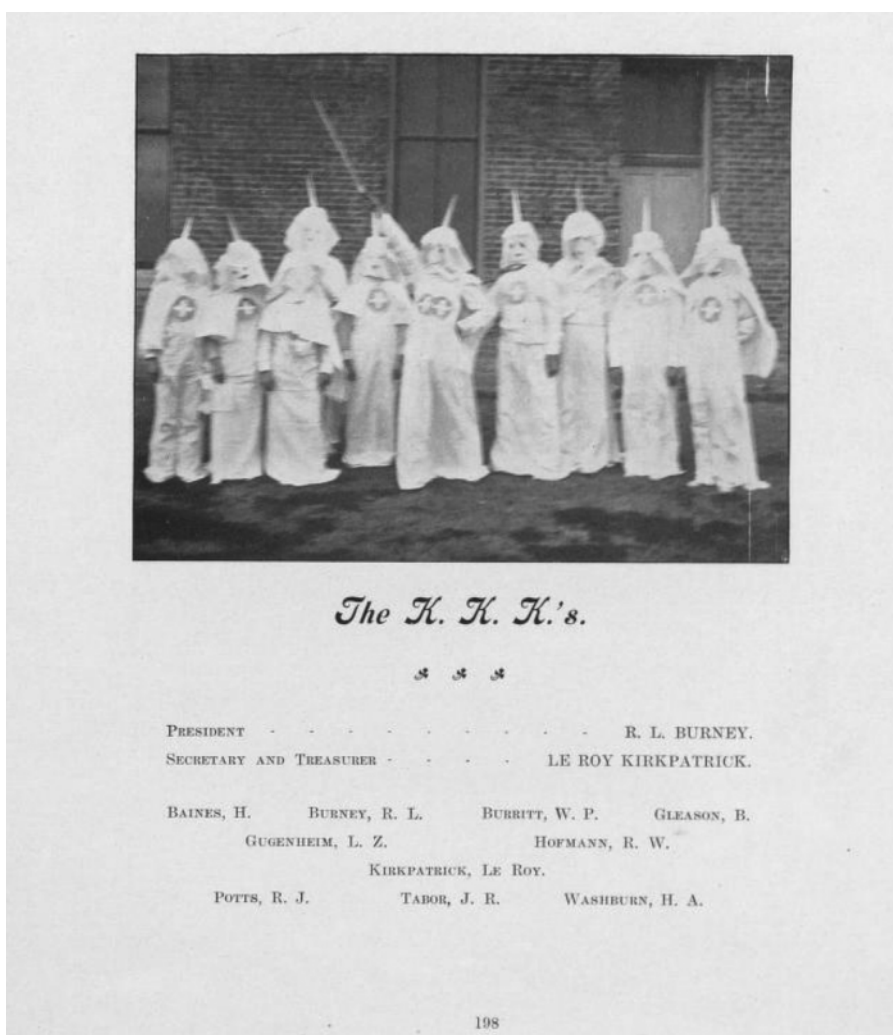
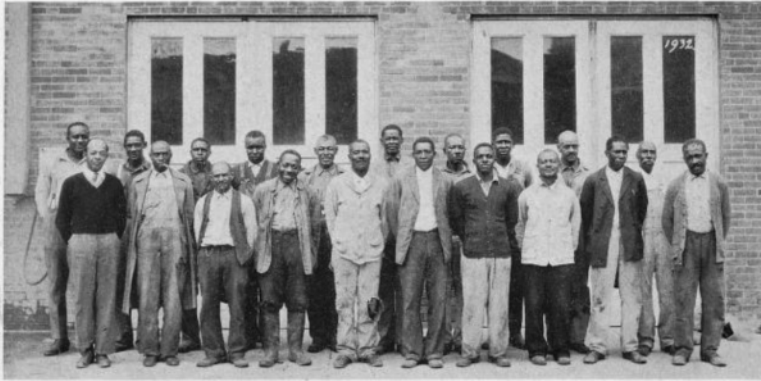


Figure 20.1. Page for the K.K.K.'s "club" in the University Yearbook. *Long Horn*, 1906.

creates a conundrum when we return to the same groups and ask them to work with us to preserve and collect their cultural heritage and knowledge. Why would an African American community group want to work with an individual in an institution that institutionalized the Klan, an organization known for brutal attacks and murders? Why would an African American community group trust that their truth, their knowledge would be told accurately? For digital projects, an examination of such structures must be the center of the collaboration, rather than an afterthought. As we build partnerships for digital projects looking outward, we have a responsibility to plumb the depths of our institutions and our adopted communities. We cannot see ourselves as separate from these entities, as our partners rightly see that our work is constrained by such structures.



The Negro janitors

THERE are some who will probably smile at this page, and yet, that is your privilege. But we have placed this page in the book in keeping with a policy of placing credit where credit is due. It is these men, under the able direction of Capt. Watkins, who police the campus from dawn until dark, and make the most of the impossible job of beautifying our campus.

They go about their appointed duties so quietly that their presence is hardly known, but the calibre of their valuable work is easily seen. Faithful and honest, they are a happy-go-lucky lot, and too often the butt of some cadet's joke or prank.

Most of them are campus characters, and have a history that is linked hand in hand with the growth of the College. Many is the yarn that they can spin of the "good old days," and their knowledge of campus lore is unlimited. Their only weapon is a broom, but they use it to the best advantage.

Their duties consist of everything from waking one up to go to class to making braces to keep some ancient dormitory wall from falling, and each building bears some unique contraption of one sort or another, products of their own hands.

Take a stroll behind the mess hall some day at noon, and watch the Brothers of the Broom in their hot contests, and then take a good lesson in cheerfulness and sheer joy in living.

Figure 20.2. Page featuring "The Negro Janitors." *Long Horn*, 1932.

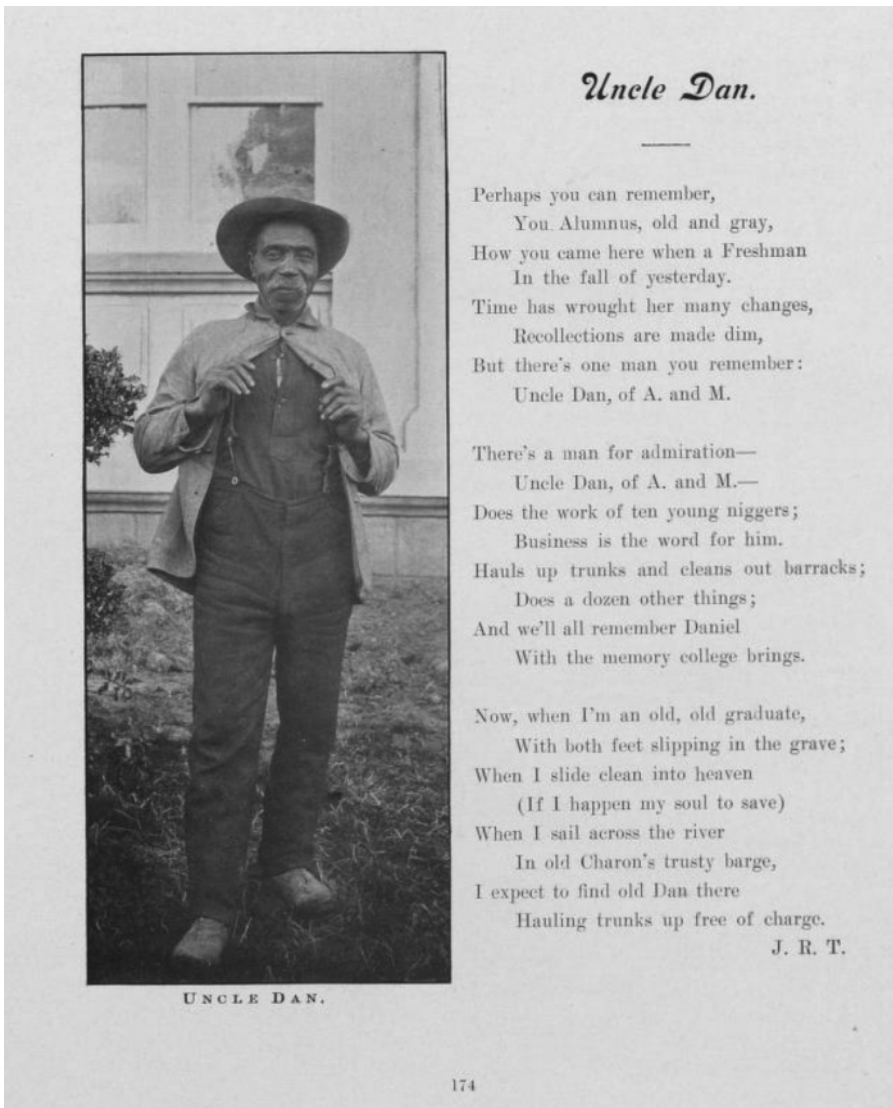


Figure 20.3. Page featuring “Uncle Dan.” *Long Horn*, 1906.

In 2014 I received an email from Charles Swenson, an amateur historian who was part of the Camptown Texas Ten Counties Historical Explorers. Swenson had located the Millican “Riot” project website and wanted to discuss possible collaboration. The Camptown Texas group, formed of community activists and church leaders, has a history of exemplary work in documenting African American experiences in Texas, successfully renovating the Camptown Cemetery in Brenham, Texas, an important African American cemetery, and obtaining historical markers to commemorate black history events. The knowledge possessed by individuals who participate in the group is rich and often underestimated by scholars. The group members

have historical knowledge that is often undocumented and unappreciated, and our initial conversations have suggested that group members have heard family stories about the events that shift the official narrative of the events. To build a partnership with community groups is a slow process. Trust needs to be built through continual meetings and discussions, with frank admission about the context in which the partnership will occur. Through a number of meetings and email discussions, through fits and starts, we are moving closer to developing shared goals. Crucial to developing trust is to give the community group full veto power on the way that information is used. The development of shared projects that reveal the scholar's investment in the concerns of the community group is also crucial. The Camptown Texas group has researched the individuals buried in the Camptown Cemetery, compiling life histories of black citizens who have received little scholarly attention. Early in our collaboration, one of the participants asked if I might do a bit of genealogical research for him. I agreed and completed family history research that added to his family history, an important moment where the community member set the research agenda and the scholar used proprietary, paywalled research tools and shared skills and knowledge. In fact, many of the community group members are interested in personal family stories and want to position such narratives in the center of digital projects. To develop trust is to listen to the community's central interest and concerns, in this case individual histories and personal narratives, rather than to see such a focus as peripheral to the project. Instead of viewing such approaches as nonscholarly, we might turn back to intersectional feminism which situates the personal in direct relation to the scholarly and which recognizes how powerful a personal story might indeed prove. What would happen, for example, if Texas A&M University researched and told Uncle Dan's story? Or the black janitors' story? Such an approach re-centers the individual and rejects a narrative of history that devalues the experience of African Americans.

Crucial to developing shared goals and an equitable partnership is recognizing that a partnership does not only exist between individual scholars and community groups. Instead, our home institution is a partner, and we must consider if our institutional structures will allow us to build protective barriers between the community partners and the institution. Partners from historically marginalized groups rightly distrust powerful organizations with problematic pasts, such as Texas A&M University. When I began to discuss a partnership with local African American community groups, the first question that arose was, "Can we trust someone from TAMU?" For those of us who are interested in building partnerships, we must ask the same question of our institutions and our funding agencies. Will our institution and/or funding agency allow us to build a project that treats our partners in equitable manners, and will our institution and/or funding agency allow us to develop projects that cede control of materials to historically marginal groups? While we might exist in institutions that stress academic freedom, researchers must be aware of how university rules might impact our ability to develop such partnerships. Further, if we

understand that open access is not appropriate for all partnerships, will our institution and/or funding agency support a tiered system of openness? Do we have the infrastructure to build such a project? And even more important to equitable partnerships, will our university attempt to claim ownership of the materials that are digitized? Will a funding agency force materials to be deposited in an archive without consent of individual knowledge producers? Ultimately, we must build trust and protection into digital projects, which is a decision that must include an assurance that our partners have complete control over their cultural heritage materials and knowledge.

Several strategies might be used to develop equitable partnerships with community members. One effective mechanism is the development of a contract of partnership. When I was working with the Concord Public Library to build “The 19th-Century Concord Digital Archive,” a legal contract, drawn between lawyers at Texas A&M University and the Concord Public Library, was a necessity. Some community organizations might want a similar mechanism. If the community organization is not interested in a legal contract, it remains useful to both parties to work together to produce a document of understanding, delineating all issues of collaboration, including control of materials and agreements regarding open access. The development of such a document is crucial to a sustained partnership, as many potential problems might be averted. Careful attention to the digital platform and server on which the digital materials reside is also crucial. Some groups might trust business sites more than they trust the university, leaving a commercial server the only place on which to reposit digital surrogates of knowledge. Reclaim Hosting, for example, offers hosting specifically designed for educators who are interested in using a variety of platforms including Omeka, Mukurtu, WordPress, Drupal, and other related products. In our development of the White Violence, Black Resistance Project, Toniesha Taylor and I were well aware of the past history of cooptation and removal of materials from the Prairie View A&M, the Historical Black University where Taylor works, to Texas A&M University, the predominantly white institution where I work. Given this history, we decided to create our project information page in Google Sites and to avoid any institutional labels.³⁶ The selection of a platform also ensures that collaborators control the materials. Mukurtu CMS is a platform that allows control over levels of access. The *Mukurtu Wumpurrarni-kari Archive*, built on the platform, designates differential access based on cultural protocols: “When content is uploaded a specific set of criteria must be considered: which families can see the image (a pull down menu allows families to be added); is the content restricted to men only or women only; is the image restricted only to those related to specific countries (a pull down menu allows countries to be checked); is the image sacred and thus restricted to elders only; is anyone in the photo or video deceased; or, finally is this content ‘open’ to everyone (no restrictions to access it)?”³⁷ One might extend this platform to account for in-community knowledge, such as oral history stories that are not to be shared with the general public because doing

so includes identifying names of individuals, and out of community knowledge, perhaps an oral history story that removes names of individual participants. Another useful mechanism to ensure that historically marginalized community groups control their information is copyright. The Traditional Knowledge (TK) Labels (<http://www.localcontexts.org>) were designed to ensure protection of vulnerable populations, though it might be extended to other groups to ensure control of knowledge.

Crucial as well is the recognition that situatedness means that a collaborative team should include individuals who are viewed as stewards of the cultural knowledge. Without such individuals, trust is far less easily developed. The USC Annenberg Innovation Lab ignored this central tenet of ethical collaboration when it announced the Black Twitter project (see Figure 20.4) and was faced with an outcry of anger based on fear about the treatment of the vibrant and central Black Twitter community's intellectual product.³⁸ The initial website announced the DSAIL Black Twitter project run by "Project Owners" Alex Gold and Francois Bar with "Lead researchers: Prof. François Bar, Dayna Chatman, Kevin Driscoll, Alex Leavitt."³⁹

Not surprisingly, Black Twitter responded by asking why its work was being studied by two white men who would not, in their perception, understand the complexities and nuances of the community. Other community members feared that the study would commoditize their intellectual property, providing market research to businesses. After a very public outcry, Dayna Chatman, an African American graduate student who was initially listed as second researcher, stated, "The project is lead [*sic*] by me, was devised by me, and contributes to my dissertation" and that she "did not approve the description of the project that was on the Annenberg Innovation Lab website. It does not fully encapsulate the scale, methods, or full reasoning behind the project."⁴⁰ Chatman's image shows up in newer versions of the website, as shown in Figure 20.5.

The concerns that were expressed by Black Twitter were founded. Clearly the originator of the study, Dayna Chatman, had not been given full intellectual credit for her launch of the study and Black Twitter understood that black cultural knowledge has historically been exploited by the larger white society without fair

PROJECT OWNER



Alex Gold

Passions:

surfing, music, art, social media



François Bar

Figure 20.4. Archived original announcement of the University of Southern California's Black Twitter project. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140425182822/http://www.annenberglab.com/projects/dsail-black-twitter-project>

PROJECT LEAD**Dayna Chatman****ADVISOR****François Bar****COLLABORATORS****Kevin Driscoll****Alex Leavitt**

Figure 20.5. The “Project Team” for USC’s Black Twitter Project, which appeared after the initial images and announcements. <http://www.annenberglab.com/projects/dsail-black-twitter-project>

recompense. To launch equitable collaborations, a collaborative team must think carefully about situatedness and the historical legacies of past exploitation.

The Black Twitter tension also reminds us that communities are often divided, presenting additional challenges to a scholar interested in ethically engaging in project partnerships. My experience with various community organizations during the development of the “Millican Race ‘Riot’: 1868” project has revealed such tensions between individuals regarding the way their community is portrayed and about how much information they will reveal through the project. As scholars work with communities it is important to remember that no community will be monolithically in agreement. Knowing that disagreements are likely to occur, a scholar interested in partnership must be prepared to work with multiple perspectives and to spend time listening to community members.

Ultimately, it is our responsibility to navigate the complexities of structures in which we develop partnerships. As we reach out to community partners, we must

turn inward as well, examining the places in which we reside, looking to understand how our institutions have interacted with the communities with which we hope to partner. For historically marginalized communities, institutions have, with some rare exceptions, been exploitive. This legacy will alter the way we structure partnerships and should make us think carefully about ownership, control, and openness. As digital humanities engages with large corpora projects, we cannot forget the individual, for a data point is not neutral. A data point is, instead, representative of an individual, a culture, a knowledge system—and to treat data as exempt from the structures in which they are situated is to erase individuals. To “exploit” data is to exploit individuals. The development of an ethics of practice should be developed to guide us through data selection and use. Such practices are predicated on community control. Ultimately, the community must maintain control over its knowledge and to ask that we “not look” at data. Through open dialogue and careful attention to technological structures, we might begin to find ways to develop rich and equitable partnerships.

Notes

1. Social justice–oriented approaches to digital humanities use technologies to enact a variety of social justice outcomes including increased visibility and the examination of power dynamics. I trace such work to early activist digital projects including the *Lesbian Herstory Archives* (<http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org>) and the *Native Web* (<http://www.nativeweb.org>).

2. See, for example, Bianco, “This Digital Humanities”; McPherson, “Why Are the Digital Humanities”; my own “Can Information Be Unfettered”; Risam, “Beyond the Margins”; Bailey, “#transform(ing) DH Writing”; and the work by Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, <http://www.globaloutlookdh.org>.

3. Johanson and Sullivan, with Reiff, Favro, Presner, and Wendrich, “Teaching Digital Humanities”; Smeaton, “Digital Humanities (DigHum)”; Rosati, “Exploitation of Cultural Content.”

4. Galloway and Thacker, *Exploit*, 70.

5. Risam, “Beyond the Margins.”

6. Collins, “Some Group Matters.” Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work such as “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” is foundational. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, offers an excellent overview.

7. Cowan and Rault, “Labour of Being Studied.”

8. See chapter 3 of my monograph for additional discussion of the history of activist digital humanities projects, Earhart, “What’s In and What’s Out?”

9. Turin, “Born Archival.”

10. The project overview is discussed at <https://www.newschallenge.org/challenge/data/entries/safe-harbor-hosting-california-s-eugenics-data>. Wernimont presented her

haptic and sonification interface at a talk delivered at the University of Kansas, October 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E86rIGjWsyY>.

11. Wernimont, "Safe Harbor."
12. See Withey, "Does Information Really Want."
13. Withey, "Mukurtu."
14. Withey, "On Not Looking," 365–66.
15. "Overview."
16. Patrik, "Encoding."
17. "Best Practices."
18. Patrik, "Encoding."
19. "Guidelines for Authors."
20. "Guidelines for Authors."
21. Smith, "Human Touch Software."
22. Wernimont and Flanders, "Feminism." See also Wernimont, "Whence Feminism?"; Flanders, "Body Encoded"; Schilperoot, "Feminist Markup."
23. Kim and Kim, "#TwitterEthics Manifesto."
24. Kim and Kim, #TwitterEthics Manifesto.
25. *Off the Tracks*.
26. DiPressi et al., "Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights."
27. Buhe, "Digital Humanities Best Practices."
28. Bailey, "#transform(ing)DH Writing."
29. Powell and Aitken, "Encoding Culture."
30. See *Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice*, http://brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/; Emory Slavery and Discrimination, <http://emoryhistory.emory.edu/issues/discrimination/index.html>; University of Virginia President's Commission on Slavery and the University, <http://slavery.virginia.edu>; *The Georgetown Slavery Archive*, <http://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu>; and *The Lemon Project*, <http://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/index.php>.
31. Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, "Brown University's Response."
32. For additional discussion, see Garrett Nichols's important dissertation, "Rural Drag: Settler Colonialism and the Queer Rhetorics of Rurality." Nichols's extensive archival research reveals the deep and lasting racism at the core of Texas A&M University.
33. "About the Yearbooks," in *Texas A&M University Yearbook Collection*.
34. *Texas A&M University Yearbook Collection*. The university discussed how best to respond to such a history and chose to digitize the materials and present them without censorship. The library, however, attached a splash page to the materials that states, "Through our web site, the Libraries offers public access to a wide range of information, including historical materials that may contain offensive language or negative stereotypes. Such materials must be viewed in the context of the relevant time period. Texas A&M does not endorse the views expressed in such materials."
35. Texas A&M University *Long Horn* yearbook, 1906: 174.
36. See Earhart and Taylor, "Pedagogies of Race."

37. Withey, "Archival Challenges," 22.
38. Black Twitter is a Twitter social network focused on issues related to the black community.
39. See the Internet Archive's April 25, 2014 capture of the initial announcement from February 2014: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140425182822/http://www.annenberglab.com/projects/dsail-black-twitter-project>.
40. Chatman, "In Reply."

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Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives

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Abstract

This essay is a meditation on the possibility of a feminist assessment of digital literary archives and the interdisciplinary tools needed to do such work. Using the Women Writers Project and The Orlando Project as exemplary instances of digital literary scholarship, I discuss possible sites of feminist intervention (content, technological politics, labor structures, etc) and the kinds of theoretical paradigms one might use in such work. I also argue that such assessments are essential to recognizing the ways in which feminist digital literary studies have impacted the field of digital humanities.

Drawing on recent work in technology studies and feminist theory, the essay problematizes simplistic celebratory claims and troubles the idea that simply saving women's work in digital form is enough. I conclude with a set of reflections on the impact of shifting ideas about the value of feminist work and theory in both public and scholarly contexts. This includes a proposal that more established scholars proactively highlight the feminist interventions that they make and that all digital literary scholars consider increasing access to not only the work of women, but to the technologies that are integral to that access as well.

In 2011, I presented a paper titled “Encoding Women: Are Digital Archives Feminist?” at the Renaissance Society of American conference in Montreal. Among other things, I argued for a recollection of the feminist effects of many digital humanities methodologies — including the much-lauded cooperative or collaborative project. One of the audience members asked me why we should consider such practices to be distinctly feminist, as opposed to part of a “more general liberatory” ethic that derives as much from the civil rights movement and cultural studies as anything else. I was troubled by the question, but not entirely sure why. I have come to see that his question supposes that digital tools and methods can be either (narrowly) feminist or “more generally liberatory,” but not both. It also suggests that the ethical and political agendas of feminisms cannot encompass concerns with race, class, or sexuality — something that runs completely counter to the work of most third-wave feminists and theories of intersectionality. Finally, by suggesting that I had to write a history that was either feminist or “more general,” his question encouraged a dangerous kind of appropriation, one that incorporates many of the insights and practices of various feminisms but strips out their identification as such, thereby eliding the many ways in which feminists and feminist paradigms have effected change. This growing invisibility is something with which I have grown increasingly concerned, as it seems to me that the salutary work of feminist scholarship has been systematically subsumed under some other — any other — banner. Not only does this make the work of scholarly feminism invisible, once again writing women out of history, it also creates a vision of 21st-century feminism as what is left over, what has not been claimed by other now mainstream methodologies, merely the hysterical rantings of angry women (again).

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Over the course of a couple of years now, I've worked to find a methodology that would allow me to answer the question that motivated that 2011 paper — can we describe digital archives as feminist? — and have consistently run into problems. Where should I look to find evidence of feminist engagement when considering digital archives? What metrics should be applied to measure the degree of feminism embodied by a digital archive, and what is the subject of that measurement? Are digital archives feminist because the content is by women, or because the modes of production are feminist, or because the technologies themselves are feminist or used to feminist ends? Is it all three? Do we have to

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account for both the historical and social contexts from which particular archives arise when thinking about the nature of their feminism? What tools might be helpful in thinking through the sense that tools like XML are neutral? These are important questions not only because the answers enable a feminist critique of what have become cornerstones of digital humanities and literary work — digital archives — but also because the answers may help clarify the nature of the impact of feminism on digital humanities work.

Within literary studies of the past, the major locus of feminist intervention was a text or set of texts, initially in the text “itself” and then also in its materiality and historical context. Such work provides models for thinking through text technologies, social conditions of reading and writing in print media, and rhetorical analysis, but not for working with digital media or with the large archive. Scholarship on brick and mortar archives offers models for thinking through collection building practices, information management, and certain kinds of access. To find models for assessing the hardware, software, and usage practices that are central to digital literary archives I had to turn to work within Science and Technology Studies, Media Studies, and feminist theorists of technology. This is the future of digital literary studies work — a complicated but necessary traversal of multiple disciplinary zones. Work in the history of the book has reminded literary scholars that we cannot ignore the social and material history of a text, an insight no less true when those texts are digital. Rather than answer the question that launched me on this project, what I’ll be doing here is attempting to sketch out the possible methodological terrain — answering not “are these digital archives feminist?” but “how might we understand the feminisms of digital literary archives?” Much of this essay can speak to issues around digital archives generally, but my focus is particularly on literary archives and implications for literary studies. There is a historical reason for this — both Orlando and WWO arose out of needs articulated by literary scholars for access to the work of women writers and to their histories. They were imagined as critical interventions in the way literature is taught and studied, and, indeed, many scholars and students use these and other digital archives as their primary sources for women’s writing. Thus, to understand the feminisms of digital literary archives is to understand how feminist theory and digital practices are critical contexts for literary scholarship, whether digital or analog, in the 21st century.

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Work by Women

Content is perhaps the easiest place to begin, especially when the test cases are the Orlando Project and WWO. Both projects began as efforts by feminist literary scholars to address the gaps in literary history that persisted in the 1980s. The cofounders of Orlando, Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, saw the “potential of the new electronic medium” as a powerful counter-agent to the ongoing marginalization of women’s writing [Brown et al. 2007]. Likewise, to the founders of Women Writers Online “the electronic archive seemed like the ideal successor to the physical archive, since it promised to overcome the problems of inaccessibility and scarcity which had rendered women’s writing invisible for so long” [WWP History]. Recovery of women’s work to visible archives has long been a goal of feminist literary scholars and is critical to how many understand WWO and Orlando as feminist. One can still read exuberant celebrations of abundance and presence in analyses of the two projects. Take, for example, Susan Fraiman’s excitement at a potentially infinite electronic list of “history-making women” [Fraiman 2008, 143] or the impulse expressed in Anne Lake Prescott and Betty Travitsky’s article on editing women to edit everything available and use the Internet as an infinitely expandable archival space [Travitsky and Prescott 2009, 14]. In such narratives, digital archives are “tirelessly productive” and “grand” operations that fulfill feminist desires simply by creating a massive storage and retrieval mechanism for a plurality, perhaps even the totality, of women writers [Travitsky and Prescott 2009, 14]. In these kinds of stories, digital tools are imagined as leveling the production and preservation playing field. Yet, such stories also draw on an old hope for the resurrection of the mythical Alexandrian archive in a new digital form and with it a more accurate or complete literary history. If only we could accurately capture all the work of marginalized groups, then we could have a complete view of our literary past, or so such arguments seem to suggest.^[1] From this perspective, an archive could be understood as feminist to the degree that it participated in this recovery effort. But the emphasis on familiar patriarchal tropes of size, mastery, and comprehensive collection trouble this relatively easy approach. To what degree is what Ellen Rooney has called the “additive approach” — where recovery is an endless process of just adding to the list of recognized women writers — actually making women’s work a visible, central part of literary history [Rooney 2006, 3]? ^[2] Perhaps a feminist analysis should be suspicious of any project where bigger is better? Should feminist interventions block the avalanche of undifferentiated data suggested by the impulse to collect

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everything? Is mere presence — the fact of being there, of having women’s work exist in digital archives — enough to address the continued marginalization of women’s writing?

In a moment where so many texts are available, sometimes through multiple sources, we need digital archives to help users discover and make sense of women’s writing. Rooney’s critique suggests that presence — the fact of being archived somewhere — is not enough. Editing everything won’t get move us much further along in the effort to end oppression of women if we don’t use those editorial opportunities to recenter the role of women’s writing in historical and contemporary debates about gender, sex, ethics, and the social dynamics of power. Reading the celebratory rhetoric around digital projects such as Orlando and WWO suggests that a feminist recovery project is also about size; the excitement around the digital was and sometimes still is about an infinite scale. It seems absurd, however, to suggest that there might be a scale of feminism that maps onto the size of an archive (the bigger the archive, the more feminist it is?). In fact, a celebration of plentitude reproduces certain commercial metrics — notably production as value and information as capital — of which there is significant feminist critique.^[3] The images of a “tirelessly productive” and “grand” archive are themselves haunted by gendered subject positions: the “productive” woman, valuable so long as she is endlessly bearing fruit, and the “grand” monument, the size of which is an index of its value. Amy Earhart’s discussion of the troubling ways that NEH measures “impact” suggests that a monumental logic is at work not just in celebrations of archives, but also in the funding practices that enable most digital projects [Earhart 2012].

Consequently, I might look for a feminist archive to facilitate access by helping users sort through an abundance of data and push against monumentalism in some way. In a co-authored piece on the WWO, Julia Flanders and I used facilitation of access in precisely this way as we argued that “WWO, and digital collections like it, offer the literary scholar an example of an archive that exceeds the project of ‘mere’ recovery. The ability of digital technologies to offer information about genre and form, while also enabling the blurring of generic boundaries, positions such archives as both repositories and sites of translation” [Flanders and Wernimont 2010]. In that same piece we argued that the blurring of boundaries enabled by interpretive markup “exemplif[ies] the insights of feminist literary critiques.” [Flanders and Wernimont 2010, 428]. What is at stake here is access not only to the texts, but also to the intellectual paradigms that situate women’s writing as transformational with respect to canon and as central models of textual genres. Access, as a way of sorting through data, is also a way of valuing texts. Perhaps, then, I could use a metric that balances presence and access to assess digital archives. But how, I wondered, should I think through the value of plenty and that of particularity in feminist terms?

Even as people continue to laud the expansive possibilities of the Internet as literary archive, we also hear laments at the loss of early digital literary projects — a different layer of “content.” Earhart, for example, sounds alarm at the loss of many of the recovery projects of the late 20th century. For her, these projects manifest an early sense that “digital literary scholarship [was] a tool that might be utilized to meet the theoretical demands of scholarly work that reinserted women, people of color, and queers into the canon” [Earhart 2012]. These early projects then were evidence of the ways in which digital tools enabled feminist scholarship. Earhart offers a nuanced analysis of why such projects are disappearing, pointing to economic issues (electronic editions are expensive), structural problems with activist scholarship (when the scholar leaves, does her archive go too? who shepherds these projects?), and infrastructural issues that place the work of individual scholars at greater risk than those working in larger DH centers or programs. We might read each of these causes as symptomatic of a larger “resistance to cultural studies constructions” that Earhart (like Alan Liu and Martha Nell Smith) posits within digital humanities practice more generally [Earhart 2012].^[4] In which case, there is a kind of repetition of the canon wars subtly at work in digital literary studies, and indeed, this is the point of Earhart’s argument — that patriarchal habits of assessment, value, and quality continue to support a “New Critical canon” within the supposedly gender-neutral circuits and networks at the heart of digital humanities. A feminist response to such resistance and loss might be the kind of “individual” action that Earhart suggests can help to recover the recovery project, developing short-term storage solutions for projects that threaten to melt back into oblivion.

Not only would such collection represent a continuation of the feminist recovery effort, it might also represent the kind of feminist preservation of process — scholarly or otherwise — described by Alex Juhasz. Such a model takes plentitude not as the sign of a monumental logic, but as a feminist response to the elisions at the heart of sorting and editing. In

her work on the film archive at the Los Angeles Women's Building, Juhasz reads a potentially overwhelming record of everything (daily conversation, group work, leisurely tours of the space) as a critical feminist response to the elisions performed when a documentary filmmaker selects and edit the "raw" material to produce a product. In her reading, the collection of everything creates an "archive of process," a material manifestation of a "theory and practice for being seen and remembered" [Juhasz 2010]. Juhasz's essay reads the archive of process as a deliberate refutation of the aestheticized, linear, patriarchal narrative characteristic of other documentary film production. The oversized archive is a record of feminist engagement with technologies — here film — and it seems to me that the preservation envisioned by Earhart's call to save the early recovery projects could function as a kind of archive of feminist literary engagement with early web technologies. In some ways this addresses the problems identified by Rooney: rather than understanding the proliferation of recovery projects and their contents as an endless list, we might see them as representations of a particular historical moment in feminist engagements with technology. We might read the volume as indexical, pointing to the ongoing struggle to give voice to women's work and to develop methodologies adequate to the challenges of feminist theories. While revaluing process may help us think through the work of recovery differently, thereby shifting emphasis away from metrics aligned with patriarchal and corporate production and the spare, elegant end product, there remain a number of challenges. The burden of plenty and its encounter with mortal limits is real — it's important to think through the kinds of archives we are leaving for those who come after us, and if that archive cannot be read, cannot be seen, cannot be processed because it is simply too large and undifferentiated then we risk burying our subjects in a new way. The Woman's Building for Juhasz represents precisely this kind of challenge to human constraints; the collection is "outsized." What balance, then, between both kinds of presence — process and works — should we seek? When should we push for access to volume or to detail and particularity? Can feminist scholarship partake of both big data and small digital worlds? What balance might I hope for between tactical ephemerality and strategic monumentality?

My discussion assumes a feminist assessment of presence and access that pertains to women's writing. However, the issue of data overload is hardly unique to feminist archives or feminist scholarship. Is this then an issue of medium, rather than of feminism? Is it possible to differentiate in this way? Tara McPherson, quoting Marsha Kinder, has suggested that such a partitioning of media and ideology is in fact problematic, a "cyberstructuralist" approach that disavows feminism, critical race studies, and other forms of politicized inquiry [McPherson 2012, 142]. McPherson's argument suggests that if presence and access are intertwined features when we are talking about women's writing, they must also be equally intertwined in the preservation and representation of men's work. While men's writing does not suffer the same dearth of presence, it is equally important to consider the operations of the privilege of presence. Recognizing the ways that men's writing is everywhere present and appears not to need the same level of critical intervention in order to be understood as valuable might be a clue to why structuralism and cyberstructuralism have seemed so hospitable to the study of male authors, but less so to women's work. That we seem not to need an intervention to understand or value men's work bears reiteration as we continue to build digital collections. My suggestion that we assess archives in terms of presence and absence is also a reminder that women's writing is not exceptional in being shaped by these forces; we can and should denaturalize the familiarity of men's writing in engagements with digital tools and methods.

It had seemed to me that content was an easy place to start talking about how to understand feminism and digital archives, but I have found that it is actually rather murky terrain. While the presence of women's work seems like a common sense measure of feminist content, the intertwining of presence and access draws attention to the losses incurred if we extricate the content from its media form or from its social discursive contexts. This is not new. Feminist histories and theories of technology have taken account of the "technosocial" context for some time. Additionally, "intersectionality" as a critical term that speaks not just to the experience of power over subjects, but also to the media expressions of power, and should have suggested to me that looking at content alone would be problematic from the outset.

Power Tools

Perhaps, then, a turn to a different look at the politics of digital work, as the "power relations" expressed in the tools themselves [Bianco 2012, 97]. Digital archives unite two historically gendered fields — computer and archival sciences.

Literary scholars who depend on archival or rare book materials still confront, whether they acknowledge it or not, the legacy of an institutional form through which patriarchal power exercised the authority to determine value, classification, and access. A struggle made all the more important by the transmutation of archival materials into historical fact by scholarly alchemy. ^[5] While digital archives were envisioned as the answer to women's exclusion from the power relations that constituted literary archives, we have yet to parse the relationships between gender and the tools central to digital archives. I, myself, have excitedly proposed reading XML and SGML as political rather than neutral tools. I turned to feminist scholars of technology in search of the right frame for thinking through how data modeling, interpretive markup, or the recording of paratextual information might represent gendered information structures. Unfortunately, I found that utilizing a broad feminist theory of technology threatens to widen the scope too far — to leave behind the valuable local context or technological specificity. Judy Wajcmann's suggestion that technological developments have historically been gendered male and consumption has been gendered female works as a generalization about industrial and early post-industrial technologies. ^[6] But it seems a bit too easy to suggest that a simple men-create/women-use paradigm is still at work in 21st-century feminist archives like WWO and Orlando, where women are clearly doing a great deal of creating. It also felt imprecise to suggest that manufacturing and data modeling operated under the same gendering logic — although McPherson's analysis of UNIX suggests that there are logical paradigms that enable and operate through technological development so pervasively that such comparisons may be worthwhile.

At the same time, it is precisely in the specialized technologies of digital humanities — computer science in particular — that we continue to see a distinct gendering of work and product, as well as a significant gender gap in participation. As Bianco and others have noted, there has been a 29% drop since 1984 in the number of women computer science majors [Bianco 2012, 99].^[7] Things have gotten worse, not better, when it comes to women's participation in computer science fields. This suggests that there is indeed a gendered separation of those who can make with computational tools and those who consume. As important as participation parity is, it is only one part of the way that we can theorize the gendering of technology — we should also be thinking in terms of gendered structures and logics. Pointing to the excellent women working within digital humanities, including the women who code, markup, and build the Orlando Project and WWO, misses the point. Part of the useful insight of McPherson's analysis is that the power operations imbedded in certain technologies and their habitual use are not the result of willful user sexism or racism. It's not that UNIX developers themselves worked to sequester race, but rather that that our difficulty talking about race and digital media is “an effect of the very designs of our technological systems,” the modularity and spare aesthetics of which work to “cordon off race” [McPherson 2012, 140, 143]. Similarly, the logic of the maker/consumer paradigm is a gendering one regardless of the sex or intentions of the participants. Consequently, those who cannot make find themselves in subordinated, devalued, “user” positions that deny agency and expertise (and funding!). As the work of Alan Liu and Martha Nell Smith suggests, developers/designers who foreground design standards that emphasize modularity and a spare visual interface are creating “docile” or unchallenged readers.^[8] Just as an author creates his or her ideal reader, those who make digital literary projects are making particular kinds of users — users who are imagined, more often than not, as welcoming an unchallenging, “clean” experience that facilitates comfortable and easy interaction. However “open,” “collaborative,” and “connected” Digital Humanities purports to be, if computational tools are wielded in ways that continue old patriarchal privileges of expertise and authority and create merely receptive users, then we miss an opportunity to leverage digital tools to transform literary scholarship in meaningful ways.^[9]

Let me offer an example from the Orlando Project that can shed some light on how to understand certain kinds of tools and their public presentation as transformative, even if it creates an abundance of information and a technical challenge to the user. Document Type Definitions (DTD) are expressions of rules. They define the structure of related XML or SGML documents and articulate the set of allowable elements and attributes. They are essential to the kind of publication that both the Orlando Project and the WWO provide. It is possible to read a DTD as an expression of fact or scholarly opinion; something like “this is the set of categories and relationships that hold for these texts.” I would argue, in fact, that this is precisely what happens when a DTD operates silently and invisibly for users. But, the public DTD can be read as generative, as productive of a model of the text, but not the sole or authoritative model, in which case it becomes visible as feminist intervention. Orlando project directors suggest that they use markup to encode a “text that does not currently exist,” which is to say that their texts are born digital and structural markup like <p> is part of the

formation of the scholarly entry itself. Each entry is a newly authored digital text, and the structural markup does not refer to the presence of a particular feature in a source text (unlike much of what appears in WWO).^[10] However, the picture is more complicated than just a DTD that establishes the parameters for the creation of secondary, scholarly texts. Orlando also uses a set of DTDs for interpretive markup, like that of the Writing DTD, that can be read as paratextual with respect to the absent primary texts — the literary texts written by women that Orlando articles discuss. Consequently, we can see this markup as generating a feminist and materialist hermeneutic space through which a reading of primary texts is enabled.

Within the Writing DTD, a “production” semantic grouping locates the text in terms of thirty tags, which include designations of print scope (press run, circulation, type and location of press), media type, and print related interactions (rejections and relationship to printer). Thus, the primary texts are presented as artifacts of a publishing world, in which meaning is mediated by particular material and social conditions. The “textual features” semantic collection, on the other hand, defines the texts in terms of literary analysis, genre, plot, character, etc. These are clearly not natural categories and their use provides productive limits for both searching and subsequent reading. For example, a chronological query for “Feminist” within the genre tagset (identifying a text, rather than as a person) produces a timeline that begins with a 1589 “feminist polemic” by Jane Anger and a late 1660’s “proto-feminist” treatise by Mary More. What does a retroactive genre designation, such as “feminist,” do to or for a 16th- or 17th-century text? In the terms laid out here, such paratextual identification generates a literary historical world in which feminist discourse and writing practice antedates the beginning of feminist political/social movements by two centuries. Orlando documentation argues that beyond simply structuring the secondary texts, the markup “offers myriad new ways to probe women’s literary history,” allowing a reader to explore the argument that the history of writing in the service of women’s rights and equality is a long one [Brown et al. Documentation]. Rather than taking each historical narrative expressed by the DTD as declarative, I am suggesting that we understand them as creating speculative historical narratives that offer new ways of reading women’s texts. While this is not how the Orlando project authors have articulated the nature of their feminist interventions, the publication of the DTD enables a reader to see the craftedness of the archive and to imagine alternative interventions. If read as expressions of scholarly fact, Orlando’s “new ways” of navigating history seem constrained by processes of production and appear to reproduce some of the failings of older archival models. When the encoding is read as generative, however, the archive becomes a paratextual machine that enables users to contextualize and read primary texts. This is an important shift in the transactional nature of the paratext, which now is directed back at the reader herself or between communities of readers.

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There is another way to think about a gendered genealogy for the technologies of digital literary archives like the WWO. Thinking of content not *qua* content, but as a “testbed” for digital humanities tools and technology research offers a different way to think about hitherto invisible effects of gender in tool making. NEH grants do not primarily fund the expansion of the WWO collection, but rather the development of new encoding practices, interfaces, or tools. Applying for these particular grants is a practical decision on the part of the WWP staff that accounts for different cost sharing models for different kinds of externally funded work (another site of institutional effects). Thus women’s writing is the “testbed” for digital development, rather than the subject of development itself. Is there an impact on technological development when the test cases are exclusively the writing of women? I would argue that there is, although the particular effects deserve essays of their own. In some ways this makes women’s work absolutely integral to the history of WWO technologies. Given the profile of the WWP within DH, this might suggest that women’s work lay at the heart of digital humanities. Yet, the case of Henrietta Lacks, whose cells were the unacknowledged source of the “immortal cell line” used in biomedical research, points to the ways in which a source may be both fundamental and silenced [Skloot 2011]. Nevertheless, women’s writing-as-testbed suggests that the experimental subject might be a locus of feminist intervention. Such a relationship also raises the possibility that there might be a feminist basis for tools and methods, even if those are not themselves feminist. As important as it is to not silence the effects of women’s work and feminist motivations, this scenario raises a difficult question: While a historical analysis might uncover such political origins, would we then say that the tools were in fact feminist? What if they were deployed in anti-feminist work?

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The Technosocial Scene and Visible Feminism

Writing gender-aware histories of digital literary studies and the use of digital tools therein will certainly begin to address how and where we might locate feminist ideology and politics within digital archives. The histories of technologies are always social histories, and feminist scholars of technology have emphasized the need to account for the technosocial scene — the complex network of relations between institutions, participants, funding entities, etc. Bianco describes this scene simply as the “politics” of DH [Bianco 2012, 97]. It strikes me that while computing is obviously a significant part of digital literary scholarship, such work is not the same as computer science, nor are individual digital archival projects going to have the same local contexts. It seems to me that what is needed for a social history, and therefore a more complete theory of technology in digital literary studies, is fine-grained study of the interactions between content, product(s), technologies, participants/creators, institutions (funding and academic), and users. Perhaps this is something akin to going “back to the object” suggested by Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory approach ([Latour 2004]; see also [Latour 2005]). This is very much what McPherson does with her analysis of UNIX and a feminist analysis of digital literary tools needs similar approaches.

A first pass at sketching the networks of authority that crisscross projects like WWO and Orlando helps to illuminate just how complex this work can be. The Orlando Project is based in the Research Institute for Women’s Writing at the University of Alberta, with a site at the University of Guelph, and receives support from both institutions. Funding has also come from external granting agencies in support of collection development [Brown et al. 2010]. For an archive of born-digital secondary texts, responsibility for representation lies with project directors, and authority derives in part from the scholarly status of those who author each entry. The project’s objective is to produce both the digital archive and a set of print collections [Brown et al. 2010, 62]. Accordingly, a traditional academic press, Cambridge University Press, owns the publications. Consequently, Orlando’s production history is tied to traditional print models of publication like those of the thematic literary history. While scholarly publication with a press like Cambridge confers stability, provisional permanence, and prestige upon Orlando, it also tucks the resource away behind paywalls. Institutions, consortia, and scholarly societies can pay for access on behalf of their members but open access is not (currently) a possibility with the Orlando archive. WWO is also a subscription resource, although publication happens through the project itself rather than with a publishing house. As a result, both archives runs the risk of falling subject to economic choices at individual institutions that do not value women’s work enough to purchase the resource. While they began with hopes for a new media that might break through old economic and social models, in both cases, older models of dissemination and collection continue to shape interactions with these digital archives.

WWO is the production of the Women Writers Project (WWP) and is housed at Brown University. While the brand recognition of a private, Ivy League institution is a certain kind of capital, unlike the Orlando Project, the WWP has historically received the majority of its funding from external grant agencies and through its cost-recovery subscription model for WWO. Begun as a project to address the marginalization of women’s writing from the canon, print, and classroom, the WWO moves women’s work closer to an academic center of power, while remaining at least partially economically marginalized from that center.^[11] While the WWO was initially conceived to address the lack of access to work by women authors, efforts by Google Books and EEBO to expand their digital offerings mean that many of these texts are available through one or both of those resources as well, although neither resource make search by authorial gender possible.^[12] This contextual change means that the logic of value for the project shifts somewhat from that of redress of simple presence/access issues, to redress of the kinds of access. WWO remains the single best source for full text access and for the study of women’s writing as such. Additionally, as an index of the ongoing imbalance in print editions, the WWO is critical. A recipient of significant grant funding, it has been marked as a worthwhile, fundable project, valuable during a period of 24 (thus far) years during which feminist critique went from central to academic work, joined by cultural and ethnic studies, and then declined, most notably in the view of rising students.

The scene, so to speak, includes those working as part of each project as much as it does the institutional and academic contexts in which they work. Both the WWO and Orlando depend on scholarly collaboration to create and maintain their materials. At this point in most digital scholarly projects, collaboration is happening between a small set of trained graduate students, faculty, and IT and library staff. This is often due to a complex nexus of concerns, including interest, scholarly expectations, expertise, and where funding and labor cycles are consistently available. The reliable, citable edition that was the initial model for so much digital literary work entails the marshalling and production of certain

kinds of academic authority. Such authority depends upon degrees conferred and field expertise, which often is, paradoxically for the digital archive, predicated upon the experiential authority gained by time in brick and mortar archives [Steedman 2002]. In some sense, the WWP and the Orlando Project embody collaboration as a feminist strategy; this is certainly a major part of how the Orlando team understands the project as a feminist intervention.^[13] For Brown, Clements, Grundy, Balazs, and Antonik this has been manifest as a more “egalitarian” method of scholarship that has also addressed some of the very real financial pressures faced by those at the “bottom” of the field — graduate students. Both projects have included graduate students as partners in work, moving some way to address patriarchal models of authority that traditionally cordon off graduate students from “real” work. At the same time, the pressures of producing citable, teachable resources mean that these are not entirely open projects. Does this mean that reliable scholarly digital projects are doomed to reproduce the hierarchies that separate the scholar from other users? Are good digital editions and resources only to be had from scholars who have had access to the traditional institutions and resources that confer academic authority? A recent proliferation of crowd-sourced digital projects raises questions about academic privilege and gate keeping in digital literary projects. Cathy Davidson observes that while projects like NINES have opened up to user contribution, the issues around “decentered” authority remain unresolved within the digital humanities and academic communities [Davidson 2008, 711]. Are we keeping non-professional users out of production to protect both academic privilege and the status of the traditional archive? Should we be looking to feminist digital literary projects to push the possibilities of decentering even further? How might we compare a feminist archive that depends on the power of the doctoral degree to assure reliability with one that invites non-credentialed users and readers to push scholarship into a more radically inclusive mode? Feminist digital archives and other digital literary work clearly do not need to operate in a single mode — but if we are looking to assess a feminist project as such, how important is it that production be informed by feminist values?

Working to include students and other young feminists strikes me as a particularly urgent project now at a time when students too often fail to see the relevance of either academic or political feminisms to their lives. Part of what is at stake for students is their own sense of agency — it is not always clear how they might intervene in an academic context where traditional hierarchies still largely dictate what counts as good or useful scholarship. There are good reasons for digital literary projects to want to claim certain kinds of authority and relevance; they are the currency of academic value. These motivations, however, are in tension with feminist calls for a more decentered model of authority — one that eschews that knowledge is only valuable when dispensed by a credentialed elite. Perhaps a model of constructive or transformative authority — the authority developed by a student as she or he engages in synthetic or creative analysis — can be a helpful guide for thinking about the kinds of authority expressed through different scholarly outputs.^[14] It strikes me that the University of Richmond’s History Engine (<http://historyengine.richmond.edu/pages/home>) is an excellent example of how to produce and publish the scholarly work of undergraduates, expressing precisely this kind of transformative authority.

As I noted above, “feminism” has become worse than an irrelevance, a new “national dirty word”: a term that is meaningful as a warning sign, rather than as an entry point to a complex set of historically and geographically specific ideas and practices [Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004].^[15] The shifting academic and social status of feminist critique is an important context because it speaks to the question that I discussed at the opening of this essay: why, asked that audience member, should we read particular tools, features, and so forth as feminist rather than more generally liberatory? As I suggest, his question elides the place of feminist work in the history of digital literary studies — appropriating the successes of feminist work for a more general, and more palatable, liberatory agenda. Such appropriations are, in some sense, an effect of feminisms’ historical trajectory from marginalization, to relative centrality and institutional prestige, and now into a perilous kind of irrelevance, one that repeatedly renders feminist interventions invisible as such. I think there are at least two ways that this happens. First, in a context of both real and perceived hostility to feminist discourse and critique, there is pressure to hide explicitly feminist agendas. Despite the evidence of successful funding of WWO and Orlando, among other feminist projects, I have repeatedly heard scholars suggest the NEH’s policy that it will not fund projects “that seek to promote a particular political, religious, or ideological point of view...or projects that advocate a particular program of social action,” necessitates that grant applicants mask or hide the feminism of their projects.^[16] Do such recommendations arise from sour grapes over past failures to secure

funding? Perhaps. But such assessments make up the social ecology in which digital archives exist and, valid or no, they echo similar experiences in print culture. Take, for example, Jack Halberstam's experience with editors for the book *Gaga Feminism*, who suggested that he remove the word "feminism" in order to get published. There is a sense that "feminism" is a dirty word for more than just our students and that there is good reason to cloak feminist work in other language, even at the risk of losing the history of that work.

The second path to invisibility is perhaps less sinister, but equally harmful to efforts to bring a new generation of students into feminist engagement. I have had a number of conversations with feminists who are a generation or two older than I am over the last year and I have been struck by the ways in which many of them talk about their feminist work as a fundamental, if not always visible, component of their current scholarship. This has taken a couple of different forms, from "I've moved to different topics but the issues are still central to my work" to "its all there, I just don't call it that anymore." It is great to hear that various feminisms are cooked into everything these women do; but it is also a little terrifying. A cooked in feminism is visible in the way that nutmeg is in a cookie — if you're looking, you'll find it. If you're not looking or, as is the case for many students, you don't know how to look for it, you're eating just another delicious (or perhaps just palatable) cookie. A hidden feminism may leave us in a contemporary context where it seems plausible that our tools and methods are all operating out of just a general liberatory ethics, rather than being a set of practices and tools fundamentally linked to the work of women and feminist scholars. We are at an interesting moment for scholarly and public feminism, one in which older power paradigms have shifted, perhaps making the operations of oppression a bit more difficult to see. At the same time, activism and certain ethical positions have become more central to academic and public thought (perhaps also rendering them less radical). While it is a hard moment to ask "where/how feminism?", it seems especially critical if we are to see the real effects of women's work in contemporary culture and productively trouble the sense that we are in some kind of post-feminist moment.

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Conclusion: Opening Out

I began this project hoping to offer a critical analysis of the Orlando Project and the WWO as feminist digital literary archives. My goal was an assessment of both projects, in particular their technical tools, in feminist terms. Instead, I have written a meditation on the challenges of such a project and included some initial gestures toward the extensive work entailed. I would like to conclude not with a judgment of either project, but a kind of wish for the future that has developed as I have been working on this project. Bianco endorses a range of "digital, creative critical interactions" in her "This Digital Humanities Which is Not One" and I would like to suggest that the facilitation of such *interactions* is crucial for ongoing feminist work in digital literary studies. "Interaction" resonates with the ongoing emphasis on collaboration in the field, but it also suggests the use or inhabiting of the space between actions — between "use" and "creation/making," or between "making" and "theorizing." As "thresholds," digital archives are complex negotiations of the spaces between "thing and theory" — where "thing" signifies both the media through which a user interfaces and the material object being represented or reproduced [Freshwater 2003, 736]. I would add that digital archives are also thresholds between actions. That "thingness" and those actions are as much an experience of the user as they are of the encoder, programmer, and editor. Finding ways to enable user engagement in production would allow us to more fully consider the operations of the archive and the ways in which it serves as a threshold. It also would embody a more radical feminist approach to our understanding of technology as entailing "interplay between designing and use, or between designer and user" [Rosser 2005, 11]. Radical feminist digital literary studies can embrace the cyclical processes of interaction, leveraging rather than resisting change, and bring in a range of producers. Whether through crowd-sourced initiatives, interfaces that express not just the textual instance but the process by which that instance was developed, or critical play zones where small worlds can be created, there is room for greater experimentation with a more radical and creative model of the feminist archive.

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Notes

[1] See also Margaret Ezell's argument that while we can, theoretically, publish what we please, we still do not due to selective pressures [Ezell 2010].

[2] See Alex Juhasz's discussion of the challenges and pleasures of this kind of plentitude [Juhasz 2011].

- [3] See for example [Fraser 2009].
- [4] See [Liu 2011], [Liu 2012], and [Smith 2007].
- [5] On archival “tacit” narratives and the building of scholarly fact see [Ketelaar 2006].
- [6] For a helpful summary of this see [Wajcman 2010].
- [7] Responding to a panel on Feminist Technologies, Cathy Davidson spoke at the 2012 Society for the Social Studies of Science about the precipitous fall in women majoring in computer science at the undergraduate level (down 80% over the last ten years).
- [8] See footnote 11.
- [9] These are the terms highlighted in Lisa Spiro's value statement for DH in [Spiro 2012].
- [10] On performative vs declarative markup see [Renear 2001], [Buzzetti 2009], [Flanders 2006], [Flanders and Fiormonte 2007].
- [11] The WWP history traces a longer trajectory than I personally experienced, from being housed in the English department to Computing and Information Services, and, now, in the library. <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/about/history/>. For more on labor and the institutional position of the WWP, see [Flanders 2011].
- [12] Personal communication, Julia Flanders, Monday January 14th
- [13] The theme appears repeatedly in writing on the project, including in [Orlando 1997] and [Orlando 2007]. For theorizations of collaboration as a feminist practice, see [Kaplan and Rose 1993] and [Peck and Mink 1993].
- [14] See [Flower 1994, 218]. Also discussed in [Bauer and Rhoades 1996] in response to pedagogical issues with a complete decentering of authority.
- [15] See also [Hall and Rodriguez 2003], [Beck 1998], and [Schaffer 1998].
- [16] This is standard language for NEH grant guidelines. An example can be found on page three of the Digital Humanities Start Up Grant information, available from the NEH web site at <http://www.neh.gov/files/grants/digital-humanities-start-sept-2011.pdf>

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Complicating a “Great Man” Narrative of Digital History in the United States

SHARON M. LEON

Edward Ayers. Stephen Brier. Joshua Brown. Daniel Cohen. Roy Rosenzweig. William Thomas. These are the names associated with the major projects cited in the few available accounts of the development of digital history in the United States. Despite nearly thirty years of active digital history work, narratives that recount the emergence of the field are sparse, and those that exist are almost totally devoid of women. For over a decade now scholars have begun their search for the roots of digital humanities with the opening essay in Schreibman and colleagues’ 2004 collection *A Companion to Digital Humanities*. Susan Hockey’s “The History of Humanities Computing” offers an origin story that is deeply steeped in computational text analysis and text processing. It begins with the initial effort of Italian Jesuit Roberto Busa and IBM to create a concordance of Thomistic writings, and continues through the founding of key scholarly associations, the development of the Text Encoding Initiative, and the launch of thematic source collections on the Internet. Hockey’s narrative leans toward the literary and linguistic, with little attention to how those with disciplinary commitments in fields such as history, archeology, or anthropology might have found their way to the digital humanities. Those stories are saved for subsequent individual essays from the collection that deal with the various disciplines.¹

As a result, curious or aspiring digital historians are likely to turn to Will Thomas’s essay “Computing and the Historical Imagination” in search of a background on how their fellow historians came to employ digital approaches. Thomas’s chapter traces the birth of digital history back to the quantitative history movement of the 1960s and 1970s, signaled most vividly and controversially by Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman’s *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (1974). Various social history projects brought statistical and computational analysis to the fore of historical investigation, and for some that route brought them to a more expansive interest in historical methods. As computing technologies became more affordable and easier to work with, historians embraced the use of databases

to track and analyze source materials. Access to the World Wide Web in the early 1990s offered another set of possibilities for expanding access to historical sources and combining them in new ways for scholarly, educational, and public audiences. Thomas suggests that there were vast possibilities for new modes of presentation of historical scholarship, and new tools of analysis to be applied, with historical geospatial work garnering the most energy and attention at the point of his writing in the early years of the twenty-first century. While it offers a familiar story that deals with methodological shifts in the practice of history, Thomas’s version of the emergence of digital history methods neither includes nor cites any digital historians who are women. Anne Kelly Knowles, who is a geographer rather than a historian, is the sole woman mentioned who is engaged in digital ventures.²

Published shortly after the *Companion*, Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig’s *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past* (2005) offers a more practical approach to the field of digital history. It too includes an introduction to the history of the field—one that is slightly more inclusive than Thomas’s in its treatment of genres and approaches. This is a democratic and capacious vision of the history web that does not hew to narrowly cast definitions of historical scholarship. Rather, it includes examples that are designed for public audiences and that which targets the K12 educational fields. Yet, Rosenzweig and Cohen managed to point to the digital work of only one woman: Kathryn Kish Sklar, who with Thomas Dublin developed *Women and Social Movements, 1600–2000*.³

With so little literature available, more recent reviews of the field tend to reproduce these oversights, suggesting that the history of digital history is a settled one—one that is devoid of women. For example, in her 2014 attempt to puzzle through the complexities of the interdisciplinary that characterizes so much digital scholarship, Julia Thompson Klein lays out a set of definitions of digital humanities and a summary of how digital work has played out in core disciplines. While English comes in for extensive discussion, Klein offers only three paragraphs each on history and archeology. For history, Klein turns in bulk to Thomas’s narrative, with some highlights from a 2008 interchange in the *Journal of American History* and a brief article from the American Historical Association’s *Perspectives Magazine* by Douglas Seefeldt and Thomas. Again, no women feature in Klein’s gloss on the history of digital history.⁴

Yet, a brief survey of the contemporary digital history scene quickly surfaces a large cohort of women—some tenure-track faculty, but many non-tenure-track faculty and staff—who are doing exciting work and taking major leadership roles, both tenure track and non-tenure track. Consider, for instance, the work of Nicole Coleman and Paula Findlen at Stanford University’s Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis or Miriam Posner and Janice Reiff at the University of California Los Angeles’s Center for Digital Humanities.⁵ The leadership at George Mason University’s Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) in 2017 was half women: Sheila Brennan, Jennifer Rosenfeld, and Kelly Schrum.⁶

Numerous women historians outside of major digital humanities centers are also pursuing field-changing work. Kalani Craig is using text mining to investigate conflict in medieval episcopal biography. Sharon Block is using computational analysis to interrogate sources related to early American gender history. Jennifer Guiliano has taken a lead in professional development training. Erika Lee is leading a broad digital collecting project to gather the stories and experiences of Minnesota's recent immigrants. Michelle Moravec is using corpus linguistics to investigate the politics of women's culture and is writing about that research in real-time in public. Kathryn Tomasek continues her long-standing work on using text encoding with financial records.⁷ In the public history universe, major projects can boast leadership from Anne Whisnant in North Carolina, Elissa Frankle at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Priya Chhaya at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and many, many others.⁸ These women and their digital history projects are just a small sample of the innovative work that is underway all over the world.

Between 2006 and 2015, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) offered a Digital Innovation Fellowship for scholars who sought a year of support to work on a major digital project. During that period, ACLS awarded fellowships to fourteen historians, five of whom were women.⁹ In 2007, both Patricia Seed and Anne Sarah Rubin received fellowships for historical geospatial work. In 2010, Abigail Firey received an award to work on the Carolingian Canon Law Project. The next year, Ruth Mostern's geospatial work on the Yellow River and imperial engineering in North China was funded. And, most recently, Kim Gallon received support for her work on the black press.¹⁰ This range of work suggests the breadth and depth of the ways that women are bringing digital theories and methods into their historical work.

These individual historians are not anomalies. In 2013 and 2015 Bryn Mawr College's Albert M. Greenfield Digital Center for the History of Women's Education, under the direction of Monica Mercado, hosted the Women's History in the Digital World Conference, bringing together dozens of women doing digital women's history work.¹¹ The population of female graduate students doing digital history also continues to grow.¹² Furthermore, female historians are overrepresented among the cohort of midcareer scholars who want to learn new digital methods. Of the applicants for RRCHNM's summer institute, *Doing Digital History* (2014), which was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, 71 percent of the applications for participation came from women, and 65 percent of the selected participants were women.¹³ In sum, the contemporary cohort of female digital historians is robust, and it looks to remain that way.

All of this raises the question, why are there so few women in the history of digital history?

Knowing that Thomas, Cohen, Rosenzweig, Seefeldt, and Klein are all careful scholars, none of whom has a willful desire to overlook women's efforts, one might reasonably come away with the impression that digital history was a field with

no women. Obviously that is not true. In fact, women have played essential roles in shaping the digital history, and researchers can find them if they know where to look. But, in addition to undertaking the task of recovering women's contributions to the field, the community of digital historians has an obligation to question the conditions that have contributed to their erasure, and to consider what systems and conditions become visible when we return them to the origin stories for the field. If digital historians refuse to interrogate them, then these origin stories will solidify in a way that distorts the history of the field but also in ways that shape the field disadvantageously for women going forward.

Just as the contemporary cohort of female digital historians is vibrant, women were integral collaborators in the work from the beginning. In the United States, the NEH has been the most substantial source of public funding for digital history through the years at universities and cultural heritage institutions. While the Office of Digital Humanities was established in 2008, digital history work has been funded at the NEH through the wide range of programs and divisions since the mid-1990s. A comprehensive search of the grants database for digital history projects yields 586 individual grants funded between 1994 and 2016. A review of those results showed that women served as principal investigator (PI) or co-PI on three hundred projects, or 51 percent of the awards.¹⁴ As the PI or a co-PI for a particular project, these individuals assumed the responsibility for meeting the deliverables proposed in the application, and fulfilling the terms of the funding set out by the NEH. A close examination of the NEH funding data for this fifteen-year period reveals that of the three hundred projects for which women served as PI or co-PI, only 127, or 42 percent, were associated with colleges or universities. Furthermore, the projects led by these women cover the full range of funding opportunities offered by the NEH, not just those administered by the Office of Digital Humanities. Thus, the distribution of funded projects provides some hints at the kinds of work being led by these principle investigators:

- Eighty-nine projects (30 percent) were funded by the Division of Preservation and Access.
- Eighty-six projects (29 percent) were funded by the Division of Public Programs.
- Thirty-nine projects (13 percent) were funded by the Division of Education Programs.
- Thirty-six projects (12 percent) were funded by the Office of Digital Humanities.
- Twenty-five projects (8 percent) were funded by the program for Federal/State Partnerships, which includes grants for state humanities councils.
- Twenty projects (6 percent) were funded by the Division of Research Programs.
- Five projects (2 percent) were funded by the Office of Challenge Grants.

Given that the bulk of the projects were funded by the Divisions of Preservation and Access, Public Programs, and Education Programs, it is possible to surmise that these ventures were associated with the work of libraries and archives, museums and public humanities, and teaching and learning.

The relative gender parity among PIs and co-PIs of NEH-funded digital history projects suggests that there are factors preventing us from recognizing this work. One possible reason scholars in the field have not recognized the significant leadership of women in digital history is the generally pervasive gender bias in citations. Study after study shows women's scholarship simply gets cited less than men's in many, many fields.¹⁵ That research cannot be discounted here, but once scholars recognize that women were there as active agents and innovators, guiding and shaping the early work of digital history, it becomes clear that there are other power differentials in play here. Thus, researchers must look deeper and further afield to reclaim the history of women in the digital history—to learn who these women are, what kinds of positions they hold, and what kind of work they have done. Then, we can begin to understand the structural forces in the academy and in cultural heritage institutions that facilitate the erasure of women's influence.

Significant structural factors in labor conditions have combined to perpetuate a “great man” theory history of digital history: status, access, flexibility, and authorizing and credentialing systems. First, structures within the academy have historically slowed women historians' advancement, inhibiting their recognition as leaders in major digital projects. Second, a narrow focus on project directors causes us to overlook the vast contributions of women in other roles on projects. Third, limiting our attention, digital work done within the halls of academe excludes the work of women who land in nonacademic positions. Furthermore, the ways that public history organizations represent their work can make it difficult to identify women's labor on these projects. Together these conditions make it easy for historians of digital history to perpetuate the impression that the pioneering work in the field was done by men. Once researchers go looking for the women who innovated in digital history, those who were present to shape the early projects, a broader picture of historical practice appears, one akin to what Rob Townsend refers to as the “historical enterprise,” one that is wider than the halls of academe, filled with many more actors than the tenured few.¹⁶

Beyond the Senior Faculty

Academic labor practices, conditions, and structures have conspired to mask or reduce women's roles in digital history. A number of studies prove that women achieve senior status in history departments at much slower rates than men. Without the benefits of tenure, women are much less free to take on principal investigator or project director roles. Also, history departments have been slow to recognize digital work as authorized scholarly activity for promotion and tenure review, so much

so that as late as April 2015 the American Historical Association (AHA) organized a cluster of articles debating the concept of “History as a Book Discipline” in *Perspectives*.¹⁷ This methodological conservatism could combine with the structural sexism at work in the academy to doubly disadvantage women who sought to pursue digital work. Finally, large-scale collaborative digital history has been deeply dependent on contingent faculty and staff, many of whom are women, and many of whom fail to receive meaningful recognition for their contributions to these projects.

Concern about the professional status of women in history is long-standing. In 1969, the AHA formed the ad hoc Committee on the Status of Women, which then was institutionalized as the Committee on Women Historians in 1971. The ad hoc committee produced a report, known as the “Rose Report,” in 1970 that serves as a baseline for understanding the position and experiences of women in the field. The findings were not promising. In the 1960s, the top ten history graduate programs granted about 15 percent of their degrees to women, but the faculties in the same departments were 98 to 99 percent men. Moreover, while 16 percent of the full professors in history in coeducational colleges had been women in the 1959–1960 year, by 1968–1969 only one woman remained at that rank. Summarizing the state of the field, the authors explained, “In history as in other academic areas, our sample of thirty institutions indicates women are employed primarily in non-tenured ranks. Moreover, far from abandoning their professions for pure domesticity, their very eagerness to work has made women vulnerable to exploitation. Their readiness—and sometimes their need—to accept irregular and part-time positions has led to their exclusion from participation in the main stream of academic rewards and preferment.”¹⁸ The situation has gotten somewhat better in intervening years, but slowly. The results from the AHA’s survey in 1979–1980 put the percentage of women history faculty at 13.3, while women constituted only 5.9 percent at the full professor rank, 11.6 percent at the associate level, 25.3 percent at the assistant level, and 40.6 percent at the instructor rank. By 1988 things had improved slightly, with women making up 17.1 percent of the history faculty, and 8.2 percent at full, 14.2 percent at associate, 38.9 percent at assistant ranks, and 37.3 percent as instructors. With the 1998 survey, women had risen to 55 percent of history faculty at the assistant level, but only 18 percent of faculty at the full professor level.¹⁹

In 2006, the Committee on Women Historians (CWH) published *The Status of Women in the Historical Profession, 2005*, based on a survey sent to all the women members of the AHA, which yielded 362 responses. The report provides a fascinating qualitative snapshot of the sexism and discrimination in the field. Time to promotion and salaries continue to lag behind. Women bear an inordinate brunt of the burden of service. Assumptions about gender powerfully shape subjective, if standardized, evaluations of research, teaching, and service. Women shoulder a disproportionate responsibility for child and eldercare, which can disrupt early and midcareer advancement. The survey results prompted the CWH to issue a statement on best practices in supporting gender equity in the workplace.²⁰

These findings echo the classic work of sociologist Arlie Hochschild, whose 1989 book *The Second Shift* articulated the way that women are hindered by bearing the brunt of domestic responsibilities while also working to maintain a productive professional life.²¹ This bind can be especially difficult for women in academe who may face the impact of child bearing and child rearing at exactly the time when their careers require the most concentrated scholarly progress in the years leading up to tenure review. Not all women find themselves in this position, but enough do to contribute to the slowing of forward motion on the promotion track for women in the sector overall.

Furthermore, the structures of academic advancement in history have been slow to recognize digital scholarship for promotion and tenure, disadvantaging all scholars working in the field, but especially women whose promotion can be slowed by other factors. While the Modern Language Association (MLA) has had guidelines on evaluating digital scholarship since 2000, the historical profession had no such guidance until recently.²² As a result, those hoping to build and support tenure cases for digital historians had to rely on the example of the MLA and adapt the 2010 report of the Organization of American Historians–National Council on Public History–American Historical Association’s Working Group on Evaluation of Public History Scholarship, “Tenure, Promotion, and the Publicly Engaged Academic Historian.”²³ The AHA recently has adopted a set of guidelines, raising the hopes of those who want to put digital methods at the center of their careers.²⁴

Even with these pressures, women were prime movers in some of the earliest digital history projects. As early as 1992, Marsha MacDowell at Michigan State University was at work on *The Quilt Index*, which, given its focus on domestic material culture, barely registered with the larger field of digital historians.²⁵ By September 2000, *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* published its first issue.²⁶ As its founding editors, Jane Kamensky and Jill Lepore embraced the possibilities of the web for creating community and conversation around history early in their careers. Kamensky was a junior professor at Brandeis, not yet the director of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women at Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Similarly, Lepore had yet to take up her role as a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, or assume her current position as Harvard College professor.²⁷ *Common-Place* represented one of the first attempts to create a fully digital publication for the historical community. Each issue included feature columns, reviews, a teaching section, a focus on material culture, and an author interview. Now sponsored by the American Antiquarian Society and the University of Connecticut, the journal continues to publish quarterly.²⁸

Between 2001 and 2015, the *Journal of American History* published reviews of over three hundred digital projects, covering a wide range of types, including digital collections, exhibits, teaching and learning projects, and many other hybrid projects.²⁹ The first website to be reviewed by the *Journal of American History* in 2001 was an outgrowth of women’s history produced by women, and it was reviewed by

a woman, Jane Kamensky. *DoHistory* was the companion site to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s prize-winning 1990 book, *A Midwife’s Tale*, and Writer-Producer Laurie Kahn-Leavitt and Director Richard Rogers’s film, which dramatized both the historian’s process and the life of the eighteenth-century midwife whose diary was at the heart of the story. Created by the Film Studies Center at Harvard University, the site allows visitors to explore Martha Ballard’s diary, the historical investigations that went into piecing together Ballard’s story, and the book and film that followed.³⁰

By 2012 women made up 37.7 percent of the history faculty at four-year institutions, but that growth in numbers does not necessarily indicate an easing of the conditions that slow women’s advancement.³¹ And advancement matters deeply to the ways that the story of digital history gets told. This slow penetration of the upper ranks of the profession contributes to the erasure of women from the representation of leadership in digital history. One key reason is the ways that federal grant requirements are structured. For the most part, securing federal funding requires applicants to provide a significant amount of cost-shared resources from their university, often representing an amount equal to the requested funding. For women who are slower to advance to tenure and through the ranks of promotion, the resulting differential in salary can make generating that cost-share required to lead these projects very difficult. (Cost-share requirements are designed by funders to demonstrate the institutional investment in a project by eliciting a pledge of institutional resources. Thus, the higher a person’s salary, the lower a percentage of commitment required to meeting the dollar amount threshold set by the funding agency.) Similarly, struggling under the additional responsibilities of service that are foisted upon women and people of color can make it remarkably difficult to make time for outside research projects that involve a level of service and management of their own that far exceeds that required to produce a single-authored monograph.

Beyond the Principal Investigator

Frequently the attribution of credit for digital work stops at the top of the masthead, so to speak, with the principal investigator or the project director. Even if this practice is simply a result of convenience, a shorthand, it contributes to the historical erasure of women from the field. While the funding agencies do not generally set terribly restrictive policies, each applicant organization sets the terms by which an individual can serve as a principal investigator. In many colleges and universities, individuals who hold staff positions are not eligible to hold the role. In other institutions, one must have a doctoral degree to serve as a PI. Those who have a doctoral degree but who are funded by sponsored research projects cannot offer any salary cost-share to the budgeting process, so they are frequently not named as principal investigators on projects, despite playing primary roles in the work. Given these restrictions, a true review of the history of digital history requires that we investigate the full breadth of the collaborative groups that have produced digital

history in the past. Looking past the project directors to the project managers, the researchers, and the staff reveals that women were major contributors to this work at all stages along the way.

The University of Virginia's *The Valley of the Shadow* project, begun in 1991 and launched on the web in 1993, stands as the quite possibly the most visible digital history project in the field, winning the AHA's James Harvey Robinson Award for outstanding teaching aid in 2002 and the MERLOT (California State University's Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching) History Classics award in 2005, among others.³² While the project is often framed as the work of Edward Ayers and William G. Thomas, the list of integral coeditors also included Anne Sarah Rubin and Andrew Torget, both of whom have gone on to have significant careers in digital history. Rubin was a graduate student when she served as project manager for the project between 1993 and 1996, and she took off the 1995–1996 school year to work full time on the *Valley*. In 2000, she was coauthor with Edward Ayers of *The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in The American Civil War; Part I: The Eve of War*.³³ Rubin went on to earn an ACLS Digital Innovation Fellowship that contributed to the production of *Sherman's March and America: Mapping Memory*, the geospatial site that accompanied her 2014 book *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman's March and American Memory*.³⁴

By the late 1990s, a collaborative team from the American Social History Project—Center for Media and Learning at the Graduate Center/City University of New York and the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University embarked on *History Matters: the U.S. Survey Course on the Web*. The leadership team for the project was evenly split between men and women, with Pennee Bender, Stephen Brier, Joshua Brown, Ellen Noonan, Roy Rosenzweig, and Kelly Schrum guiding the work that produced over one thousand edited and annotated primary sources, hundreds of website reviews, and a cluster of multimedia guides to analyzing various types of historical evidence.³⁵ In 2005, *History Matters* won the American Historical Association's James Harvey Robinson Prize for its contribution to the teaching and learning of history. In the years after *History Matters*, Bender, Noonan, and Schrum have produced dozens of digital history projects, many centered on pedagogy, from their respective roles at the American Social History Project—Center for Media and Learning (ASHP/CML) and RRCHNM.³⁶ As groundbreaking as this work was, the focus on “research” productivity in the authorizing structures of academe has tended to undervalue projects focused on teaching and learning.

Nonetheless, this initial work on the *Valley of the Shadow* and on *History Matters* took place in conjunction with the creation of some of the key institutions that supported the growth of digital history. Founded in 1981 by noted labor historian Herbert Gutman and Steven Brier, the American Social History Project (ASHP) was the first of the organizations to embrace digital means to develop and distribute their work. In 1990, ASPH became a research center at the City University of New York, known as the Center for Media Learning (CML). Joshua Brown took over as

the executive director in 1998. ASHP/CML has always had a staff with many women in leadership positions, with current associate director Andrea Adas Vásquez joining in 1989, current associate director Pennee Bender joining in 1992, and Ellen Noonan joining in 1998. Each of these women has been integral to the development and success of a host of digital history projects over the last twenty-five years.³⁷

A close collaborator with the ASHP/CML team, Roy Rosenzweig founded the Center for History and New Media within the History and Art History Department at George Mason University in 1994. RRCHNM also has always had women in key positions. Elena Razlogova joined Rosenzweig immediately, and served as programmer, system administrator, historian, and postdoctoral fellow until she departed to take up a position in the History Department at Concordia University in 2005. Kelly Schrum came to RRCHNM as a postdoctoral fellow in 2001 and has served as the director of Educational Projects since 2005. Stephanie Hurter joined the group as a research assistant in 2002 and worked as a web designer until she departed for the U.S. State Department in 2006, and she completed her doctorate in 2010. Amanda Shuman worked as a web developer from 2003 until she went to pursue a doctoral degree in Chinese History at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2006. Joan Fragaszy Troyano joined the center as a research assistant in 2003, worked on history of science projects until her departure in 2005 to pursue a doctoral degree in American studies at George Washington University, and returned to the center between 2011 and 2014 to oversee the PressForward project. This author joined the group in 2004 as associate director of Educational Projects, and served as director of Public Projects from 2007 to 2017. Sheila Brennan joined the center as a research assistant in 2005 working on a wide range of public history projects, completed her doctorate in American history in 2010, and currently serves as the director of Strategic Initiatives. Finally, Jennifer Rosenfeld joined the group in 2010 and is the associate director of Educational Projects. This cohort of women only begins to scrape the surface of the people who have actively shaped the well over seventy projects undertaken by RRCHNM since 1994.³⁸

Finally, much of the labor on the *Valley* project took place in the context of the Virginia Center for Digital History (VCDH), which Ayers and Thomas founded in 1998. VCDH produced many projects, and included a number of women in key leadership roles. For example, Kim Tryka served as assistant director, and made major technical, structural, and information architecture contributions to a host of projects. Tryka went on to be a data research librarian at the National Library of Medicine. Alice Carter also served as associate director, supporting teaching and learning programs. The staff alumni list includes women in project management, programming, and designing roles. Finally, the VCDH list of seventeen individual project directors includes only one woman, but the list of student alumni includes many, many women.³⁹

All of these early projects and foundational centers suggest that women’s work on digital history projects can get buried if researchers only pay attention to the

founders and the individuals who are listed as principal investigators. In 2011, Tanya Clement and Doug Reside gathered a group of digital humanists at the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities to discuss issues surrounding professionalization in digital humanities centers.⁴⁰ The conversations at that meeting recognized the significant degree to which digital humanities labor is performed by contingent faculty and classified staff, often who fail to receive sufficient credit for their efforts on projects. The two-day gathering resulted in a full report with clear recommendations and the creation of the “Collaborator’s Bill of Rights.” The recommendations call for academic institutions to allow for scholarly staff to serve as principal investigators on grant-funded work and strongly emphasize the need for each digital project to have a full and explicit credits page that accounts for everyone who has worked on the project.⁴¹

Making concerted progress on these factors related to authority and credit is essential in surfacing women’s work in digital humanities and in digital history specifically, but it is not enough. As historians, digital and otherwise, watching the changing contours of our field, once these acknowledgments are made, researchers need to actually read the credit and about pages that accompany digital history projects, and to grapple with the range and significance of the contributions of the entire project team. Doing so will quickly surface the important work of the large numbers of women in digital history.

Furthermore, digital history project teams need to write explicitly about their work, about both the process and its scholarly implications. Over the course of his career, Roy Rosenzweig wrote enough articles and essays to fill an edited collection on digital history. In 2003, Edward Ayers and Will Thomas published one of the *American Historical Review’s* only hybrid digital articles based in the corpus of materials provided through the *Valley of the Shadow* project. Dan Cohen published numerous articles on his experiments in computational methods in historical research. Stephen Brier and Joshua Brown wrote about the preservation challenges surrounding the *September 11 Digital Archive* for the tenth anniversary of those tragic events. Cumulatively, these publications represent mark a lasting place in the authorized scholarly record.⁴² For contingent faculty and staff being paid out of grant funding that requires the assignment of all of their labor to particular projects with no latitude for their own exploratory work, producing these kinds of peer-reviewed articles can be nearly impossible to do given the timescales and constraints of project deliverables. Unless the analytical writing is built into the grant or the project plan, it is extraordinarily difficult to fit in, and the review and revision cycles for traditional scholarly publishing can outlast the period of performance for the project. Nonetheless, digital historians must take this step so that the work gets recognized in the organs that perform the authorizing work for the field, even if those publications have historically published many fewer women than men within their issues.

Beyond the Academy

Another way to get a better sense of the significant work of women in digital history is to widen the scope of the work held up as representative of the field to include the larger "historical enterprise."⁴³ Digital history continues to be represented in digital humanities in very narrow ways, often overlooking work that takes place outside the academy within the bounds of public history institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums. Even when historians of digital history recognize significant projects from libraries, archives, and museums, they fail to acknowledge the ways that collaborative efforts are represented as institutional products in those venues. This practice masks the individual contributions and achievements of all who labor to produce it, including women.

This situation is borne out in the way that the more than three hundred digital history projects reviewed in the pages of the *Journal of American History* cite the work under examination. Of the reviewed projects, sixty-eight (22 percent) explicitly list individual producers. A review of the names and some research suggests that of those with individual producers, twenty-eight projects (9 percent) listed women (often in conjunction with men) and the other forty projects (13 percent) listed only men. The remaining 239 projects point to some sort of institutional or organizational body as the producer: libraries and archives (31 percent), public history organizations (26 percent), universities (15 percent), and commercial entities (6 percent).⁴⁴ The general practice of these cultural heritage organizations is to recognize the organization, rather than the individual, as the creator/producer, which means that researchers need to do a little bit of digging to surface the ways that women have contributed to these projects.

Researchers need a broader definition of digital history work to surface the involvement of women employed at nonacademic organizations. An examination of the workforce in cultural heritage organizations suggests that women will continue to lead the way. Though no data exist specifically for history museums, the American Association of Museums reports that as of 2009, the field as a whole was almost evenly split between men and women, with women representing 47.5 percent of a workforce that totaled just over four hundred thousand employees.⁴⁵ The 2006 census data about the archival profession reported that 65 percent of the respondents were women. This gender balance represented a complete reversal of the ratio in the profession in 1956. Furthermore, there were almost twice as many women as men employed in academic archives. Finally, the trend in the field suggested an even more dramatic swing toward being dominated by women: nearly four out of five respondents under the age of thirty were women.⁴⁶ These individuals perform appraisal, selection, and description work that provides access to the body of evidence that historians rely upon to do their research. All of this is interpretive work that shapes the contours of our understanding of the past. Finally, the available data on public historians also suggest that the field is heavily female. While

women represent roughly 40 percent of the historians in academic settings, a 2008 survey of public historians reports that women constitute nearly 65 percent of the staff in that field. Like the situation with the archivists, this number represented a complete reversal of the status in 1980, when women accounted for only 36 percent of the field.⁴⁷

Libraries and archives pioneered digital work to provide access to historical materials. One of the earliest and most recognizable digital history projects was the Library of Congress's American Memory project.⁴⁸ Growing out of the National Digital Library Program (NDLP), American Memory eventually brought over nine million digitized sources related to U.S. history and culture to the public.⁴⁹ Martha Anderson was integral to that work. She joined the library staff in 1996 to work on the NDLP, and served as the production coordinator for American Memory. This pioneering project changed the field by dramatically increasing access to cultural heritage resources. Anderson went on to take a leadership role at the National Digital Information Infrastructure Preservation Program, shepherding over a decade of work on digital preservation and stewardship until her retirement in 2012.⁵⁰ Anderson was joined in this effort by many women who have become leaders in the field of preservation and access, such as Abby Smith Rumsey and Abbie Grotke.⁵¹

Documentary editing projects—often housed at universities but staffed by non-tenure-line scholars—also embraced digital means of production and distribution quickly. One of the first ventures in historical documentary editing to do so was the *Model Editions Partnership*, which was funded by the National Historical Publication and Records Commission at the National Archives in 1995. The partnership brought together seven major documentary projects to experiment with creating digital editions using a subset of the Text Encoding Initiative markup.⁵² The key initial partners included the *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*, edited by Charlene Bickford; the *Papers of Margaret Sanger*, edited by Esther Katz and Cathy Moran Hajo; and the *Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, edited by Ann Gordon. Eventually, the *Papers of Eleanor Roosevelt*, edited by Allida Black, joined the partnership. Together, these editors formed a significant portion of the leading edge of documentary editing practice, and transformed the workflows that govern the production of scholarly editions today. At the University of Virginia, similar efforts were afoot with the *Dolly Madison Digital Edition*, edited by Holly C. Shulman, which published its first installment online in 2004.⁵³ Shulman, who served as the director of Documentary Editions at VCDH, went on in 2007 to join forces with Susan Holbrook Perdue to found Documents Compass, a nonprofit organization that was part of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, to assist and advise documentary editors on the creation of digital editions.⁵⁴

Experimentation with digital forms also infiltrated public history work, as museums and historical societies developed complex interpretive projects. One of the first of these began before there was a graphic web to be browsed, when in the late

1980s a coalition of members of the Society for the History of Technology applied to the National Science Foundation for a curriculum development grant to bring the history of science and technology into the social studies classroom, attracting women and minority students to the topics. Shepherded by Susan Smulyan and Bruce Sinclair, a large collaborative group of scholars, teachers, and public historians produced eight units that focused on textile technology in American History, drawing on the collections at the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History, and the expertise at the Center for Children and Technology. Three of the eight modular curriculum units in the *Whole Cloth* project were published on the web in 1998.⁵⁵ Subsequently, Smulyan, from her position at Brown University, has spearheaded a number of collaborative cross-cultural and student-centered digital history projects. Since 2014, she has directed the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage.⁵⁶

While some were at work creating curriculums that brought together collections and new approaches to digital history, others were attempting to translate physical museum exhibits into the web environment. In October 2001, the National Museum of American History (NMAH) launched the website *A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution*.⁵⁷ Jennifer Locke Jones, who is now chair and curator of the Division of Armed Forces History at NMAH, began her career at the museum working on the *A More Perfect Union* museum exhibit, which debuted in 1987. Then, she went on to be the online exhibit curator for the website, undertaking the task of creating a digital project that represented the complex issues and themes highlighted in the museum exhibit. Jones was joined in this venture by Judith Gradwohl, who was the web program director at the time, and a large team of collaborators at NMAH and at Second Story Interactive Studio.⁵⁸ The site won widespread praise, including taking the gold award in the history and culture category of the 2002 American Alliance of Museums’ Media and Technology Professional Network’s “Muse Awards” for work that best uses digital media to enhance the galleries, libraries, archives, museums (GLAM) experience.⁵⁹

Innovative digital public history work was not solely concentrated at the Smithsonian Institution. One of the most advanced projects in digital public history at the time was the *Raid on Deerfield: Many Stories of 1704* from the Memorial Museum and the Potumtuck Valley Memorial Association. The site brought together collaborators from Native American and French Canadian cultural organizations to provide the multiple perspectives that five cultural groups (English, French, Wendat [Huron], Kanienkehaka [Mohawk], and Wobanaki) had on the conflict that took place in Deerfield, Massachusetts.⁶⁰ Led by Timothy Neumann, Lynne Spichiger, Angela Goebel-Bain, Barbara Mathews, Juliet Jacobson, and Don Button, the project brought together primary sources, personal narratives, composite characters, artifacts, and timelines on its website to illustrate the conflicting understandings of this deeply important historical moment that touched the lives of Native peoples, French

Canadians, and English colonial settlers.⁶¹ The site won a number of awards, including second place in the 2005 Museums and the Web, Best of the Web: Online Exhibit category; a 2005 American Association of State and Local History Award of Merit; and a 2007 MERLOT History Classics Award.⁶²

These few examples highlight both early exemplary projects and the key women who led that work. Unfortunately, for the majority of digital history projects from cultural heritage institutions, institutions that employ remarkable numbers of women, it will be very difficult to clearly identify the individuals who participated in their planning and development, since the majority of that work is identified as the work of the institution—the library, archive, museum, or historical society. Thus, dozens of other women who have produced extremely significant digital history work will remain nameless. Perhaps in the future, regardless of whether or not their positions demand that their work be “work for hire,” the librarians, archivists, curators, editors, and public historians who collaborate on these projects will adhere to the recommendations put forth in the “Collaborators’ Bill of Rights” and create full and explicit credits and acknowledgments for the work so that all of the contributions can be clearly known.

Even the most cursory survey of the contemporary digital history landscape reveals that the field is populated with many, many women who are doing important work directing projects, following new lines of inquiry, experimenting with innovative theories and methods, and pushing the field forward. If the fact that the quality of this work is on par with that of men’s is evident, then we digital historians must ask ourselves why the stories we tell about the birth of the field include no women. If there is a groundswell of women doing exciting digital history work now, where did they come from? Were they there from the beginning? The recovery of the work of women on the first decade of the digital history web argues strongly that they were present and productive in this field from its earliest days. Ayers, Brier, Brown, Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Thomas undeniably shaped the field that current digital historians have inherited, but they were joined by a cast of women historians who also labored to mold digital history into the field we recognize today.

As with all systems that have been historically beset by unequal access to resources, opportunities, and power, the academy maintains structures that digital historians need to deconstruct so that the field can move forward. All practitioners must work purposefully to recognize the contributions of the underrepresented—those whose work is masked by inequity. Then, all members of the field must consciously revise our origin stories to be inclusive of these individuals and their influence. This essay tries to take small steps toward accomplishing this recovery and revision.

Yet, digital historians must also grapple with the systematic and structural factors that have resulted in the erasure. Returning women to the story is not enough. We have to continue to work to revise the academic systems that have slowed women’s advancement to the senior ranks of the discipline of history. The field must

dedicate itself to working for full and fair representation of all of the contributions to collaborative digital projects—from those of the principal investigator, to those of the contingent faculty and postdocs, to those of the project managers, to those of the staff, to those of the graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Finally, digital historians have to be willing to look further afield than traditional scholarly homes to recognize the major work that is occurring in the cultural heritage organizations where so many women are employed doing digital history work. Once the field begins to do this work, we will find ourselves much closer to being able to craft a more accurate and representative history of digital history.

Notes

1. Hockey, “History of Humanities Computing.”
2. Thomas, “Computing.”
3. Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*.
4. Klein, “Defining.” See also Cohen et al., “Interchange,” and Seefeldt and Thomas, “What Is Digital History.”
5. At the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis at Stanford University, Nicole Coleman is the research director of the Humanities+Design Lab, <http://hdlab.stanford.edu/contact/index.html>, and Paula Findlen is a PI on *Mapping the Republic of Letters*, <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/index.html>. At the Center for Digital Humanities at the University of California, Los Angeles Miriam Posner is the DH Program Coordinator, UCLA Center for Digital Humanities; Miriam Posner and Janice Reiff are core faculty, <http://www.cdh.ucla.edu/roles/faculty/>.
6. RRCHNM Staff, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/chnmstaff/>.
7. Kalani Craig, <http://www.kalanicraig.com/>; Sharon Block, http://www.faculty.uci.edu/profile.cfm?faculty_id=5301; Jennifer Guiliano, <http://jguiliano.com/> and Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching (HILT), <http://www.dhtraining.org/hilt2016/>; *Immigrant Stories Digital Archive*, Immigration History Research Center & Archives, <http://immigrants.mndigital.org/>; *Mapping Slavery in Detroit*, <http://mappingdetroitsslavery.com/>; Michelle Moravec, <http://michellemoravec.com/>; Kathryn Tomasek, <http://kathryntomasek.org/>.
8. *Driving through Time: The Digital Blue Ridge Parkway*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/blueridgeparkway/>; Frankle’s most recent project is *History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust*, <https://newspapers.ushmm.org/>; Priya Chhaya, <http://priyachhaya.com/> and <https://forum.savingplaces.org/people/priya-chhaya>.
9. American Council of Learned Societies, “ACLS Digital Innovation Fellows.”
10. Anne Sarah Rubin’s *Sherman’s March and America: Mapping Memory*, <http://shermansmarch.org/>; Abigail Firey’s *Carolingian Canon Law Project*, <http://ccl.rch.uky.edu/>; Ruth Mostern’s *The Digital Gazetteer of the Song Dynasty*, <http://songgis.ucmerced.edu/>; and Kim Gallon’s *Black Press Research Collective*, <http://blackpressresearchcollective.org/>.

11. Materials from both conferences are available from Bryn Mawr's institutional repository, http://repository.brynmawr.edu/greenfield_conference/.

12. Of the graduate students doing digital work that I advise in some way, five of six are women (Jannelle Legg, Amanda Regan, Sasha Hoffman, Jeri Wieringa, Erin Bush, Spencer Roberts).

13. Doing Digital History (2014): Women applicants = 50/70 (71 percent); participants 15/23 (65 percent), <http://history2014.doingdh.org/about/participants/>.

14. I queried the NEH database of funded projects (<https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx>) for the keywords "history" and "digital" or "online" or "website." I then aggregated the results, de-duplicated them based on application identification number, and coded them for the sex of the named principal investigator, or co-PI. This process is obviously an imprecise one based on assumptions about the sex characteristics associated with particular given names, and the gender presentation of subjects visible in images publicly available on the web.

15. For a sampling of these studies, see Savonick and Davidson, "Gender Bias in Academe."

16. Townsend, *History's Babel*.

17. Denbo, "Forum: History."

18. Rose, Graham, Grey, Schorske, and Smith, "Report." Quotation from American Historical Association, "Part Three."

19. Robert B. Townsend, "The Status of Women and Minorities in the History Profession," *Perspectives on History* (April 2002): <http://historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2002/the-status-of-women-and-minorities-in-the-history-profession>.

20. Lunbeck, *Status of Women*; American Historical Association, "CWH Statement; current AHA committee on women historians, American Historical Association, "Committee on Gender Equity"

21. Hochschild with Machung, *Second Shift*.

22. Modern Language Association, "Guidelines." The guidelines were originally adopted in May 2000 and were revised and approved in 2012.

23. Working Group on the Evaluation of Public History Scholarship, "Tenure, Promotion."

24. American Historical Association, "Guidelines," adopted June 2015.

25. The Quilt Index.

26. *Common-Place*.

27. Jane Kamensky, Harvard University, <http://history.fas.harvard.edu/people/jane-kamensky>; and Jill Lepore, Harvard University, <http://scholar.harvard.edu/jlepore>.

28. *Common-Place*.

29. The new Metagraph section sometimes includes digital scholarship and sometimes includes digital reviews. Otherwise, the reviews are listed in the individual *JAH* issues tables of contents as Digital History Reviews. The reviews conducted through June 2014 have also been reproduced on the *History Matters* website (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>)

webreviews/). To conduct this analysis, I scraped the entries from the *History Matters* page and supplemented them by hand with the reviews that had been published between June 2014 and December 2015. I then hand-coded the entries by cited producer and/or creator.

30. *DoHistory*; Ulrich, *Midwife’s Tale*; Kahn-Leavitt, *Midwife’s Tale*; Kamensky, “Review of Do History”; and Jaffee, “Review of DoHistory.”

31. White, Chu, and Czujko, *2012–13 Survey*, 87.

32. *Valley of the Shadow*; “Awards and Press Coverage.”

33. “Project Staff and Background”; “Story”; Rubin and Ayres, *Valley of the Shadow*.

34. Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie*; Rubin, Bailey, and Bell, *Sherman’s March and America*.

35. *History Matters*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu> and <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/credits.html>.

36. *American Social History Project—Center for Media and Learning*, <http://ashp.cuny.edu/>; *Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media*, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/>.

37. “Who We Are.”

38. *Celebrating 20 Years of Digital History @CHNM*, <http://20.rrchnm.org/>.

39. VCDH Staff, <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/index.php?page=Staff>.

40. “Off the Tracks: Laying New Lines for Digital Humanities Scholars,” <http://mcpres.media-commons.org/offthetracks/>.

41. “Recommendations,” <http://mcpres.media-commons.org/offthetracks/part-one-models-for-collaboration-career-paths-acquiring-institutional-support-and-transformation-in-the-field/a-collaboration/recommendations/> and “Collaborators’ Bill of Rights,” <http://mcpres.media-commons.org/offthetracks/part-one-models-for-collaboration-career-paths-acquiring-institutional-support-and-transformation-in-the-field/a-collaboration/collaborators%E2%80%99-bill-of-rights/>.

42. Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired*; Thomas and Ayers, “Overview”; Thomas and Ayers, “Differences Slavery Made”; Cohen, “History”; Cohen and Rosenzweig, “Web of Lies”; Cohen, “From Babel to Knowledge”; Brier and Brown, “September 11 Digital Archive.”

43. The term “historical enterprise” is borrowed from Townsend, *History’s Babel*.

44. Total: 307, 100 percent; Commercial: nineteen, 6 percent; Women: twenty-eight, 9 percent; Libraries and Archives: ninety-four, 31 percent; Men: forty, 13 percent; Public History Organizations: eighty-one, 26 percent; Universities: forty-five, 15 percent.

45. American Association of Museums, “Museum Workforce.”

46. “Archival Census,” statistics from pages 333–51.

47. Dichtl and Townsend, “Picture of Public History.”

48. *American Memory*.

49. “About the Collections.”

50. Ashenfelder, “Digital Pioneer.”

51. Rumsey, *Rumsey Writes*; Grotke, *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/abigail-grotke-378b808>.

52. *Model Editions Partnership*; “Prospectus”; and Chesnutt, “Model Editions Partnership.”

53. Shulman, *Dolly Madison Digital Edition*.
54. *Documents Compass*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170517164911/http://documentscompass.org/>.
55. The website for *Whole Cloth: Discovering Science and Technology through American History* has not been maintained by the Lemelson Center, but it is preserved by the Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/20060923075417/http://invention.smithsonian.org/centerpieces/whole_cloth/index.html. For an account of the early project work, see Smulyan, "Curriculum Development Report."
56. Susan Smulyan, Brown University, <https://vivo.brown.edu/display/ssmulyan>.
57. *More Perfect Union*.
58. Jones, "Curator Statement"; and "Credits."
59. "2002 Muse Awards."
60. *Raid on Deerfield*.
61. Spichiger and Jacobson, "Telling an Old Story"; Spichiger and Sturm, "Digital Deerfield 1704."
62. "About, Honors."

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What Passes for Human?

Undermining the Universal Subject in Digital Humanities Praxis

ROOPIKA RISAM

In the 1980s television series *Small Wonder*, inventor father Ted Lawson creates a robot, a Voice Input Child Identificant, and brings it home to live with his family while passing as a distant relative named Vicky. While she resembles a ten-year-old girl dressed in a pinafore, concealed panels hide the cyborg's AC outlet, serial port, and electronics panel. Early in the first season, Ted demonstrates Vicky's ability to scan text at swift speeds and recite information back. In mere seconds, Vicky successfully repeats information from the newspaper on command. Ted's son, the enterprising young Jamie, makes Vicky speedread research for his history report and write the report for him. His grades improve dramatically as Vicky reads an entire history textbook and produces an exemplary report that earns Jamie an invitation to his school's honor club. He fools both his teacher and parents but, plagued by a guilty conscience, eventually admits that Vicky completed his homework. When Jamie's teacher asks who wrote the report, Vicky confesses. In disbelief, the teacher questions her on the contents of the report. Impressed, the teacher says, "I wish we had a bright little girl like Vicky at our school."¹ Indeed, Vicky manages to pass for human in both oral and written expression.

While the stuff of bizarre television shows and emerging technology in the 1980s, the phenomenon of computers performing tasks thought to require sentience and human cognition has become commonplace. In some respects, these are contemporary versions of the Turing test, proposed by Alan Turing as a way of evaluating computer-generated natural language. In a Turing test, human judges evaluate conversation between a human and a machine spouting natural language.² A machine that passes the test does so by passing for human, convincing the judge that it is the human, not the computer. These methodologies are increasingly becoming part of those used by digital humanities practitioners. For example, Peter Leonard and Lindsay King's project *Robots Reading Vogue* employs data mining algorithms

to analyze 122 years of *Vogue* issues and explore changes in magazine content over time.³

As digital humanities scholarship continues to embrace natural language processing software and machine learning in its methodologies, the tensions between human and computer influence scholarly output; yet this matter has not received the attention it requires to ensure that digital humanities projects are not unthinkingly reproducing the normative white, male, European subjectivity inherited from the Enlightenment. This raises several important questions: Who is the presumed subject of digital humanities scholarship? And how is digital humanities reinstantiating a normative human subject in the digital cultural record? This essay takes up these questions by considering how an exclusionary universal subject is encoded in the technologies that subtend digital humanities scholarship and, in turn, is represented, legitimated, and ultimately sanctioned by digital humanities.

The Universal Technological Human

At an alarming pace of acceleration, chatbots, robots, natural language processing software, and algorithms are demonstrating the ability to learn from input, replicate qualities often accorded to human beings, and pass as “human.” When Microsoft launched an artificial intelligence chatbot in March 2016, the company expected that Tay, accessible on the platforms Twitter, GroupMe, and Kik, would interact with users, learn from them, and respond with the vocabulary and syntax of social media’s millennial user base. Anyone with accounts on these platforms could speak with Tay, which was designed to “engage and entertain people where they connect with each other online through casual and playful conversation.”⁴ Microsoft further intended for the bot to gather information about and emulate the conversation patterns of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in the United States, promising, “The more you chat with Tay the smarter she gets, so the experience can be more personalized for you.”⁵ What the company did not expect, however, was how quickly Tay would learn the vocabulary and speech patterns of the internet’s racist trolls and progressively learn how to create social media messages more appropriate for a neo-Nazi than a millennial. In addition to denying the existence of the Holocaust, the chatbot compared Barack Obama to a nonhuman primate, stumped for Donald Trump, and advocated for genocide, all in the course of a few hours. Microsoft summarily took the chatbot offline, issuing a statement to address its controversial content: “The AI chatbot Tay is a machine learning project, designed for human engagement. As it learns, some of its responses are inappropriate and indicative of the types of interactions some people are having with it. We’re making some adjustments to Tay.”⁶ Artists Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman’s video installation “im here to learn so :))))))” gives Tay an afterlife, where she dances, lip syncs, and offers insight on pattern recognition algorithms, neural networks, Silicon Valley, and cybersecurity.⁷ The case of Tay illustrates the range of issues at stake in the development of

machine learning and natural language processing algorithms intended to imitate “human” speech and behavior online.

The possibilities of such developments capture the public and academic imaginations, offering the sense that science fiction is coming to life or that the future is now. They seem to promise that humanity is edging ever closer to the technological singularity, when artificial intelligence will be able to redesign itself and autonomously create more powerful machines, generating computational superintelligence beyond human prediction and cognition. Such a point is perhaps closer than ever. University of Cambridge researchers, for example, have developed a robot capable of reproducing itself, programming it to assemble smaller robots, and in doing so, recursively self-improve.⁸ This development has prompted observations that robots and other forms of artificial intelligence are getting closer to mastering processes thought to be unique to humans.

As such developments occur, they are often greeted by excitement over technological progress and innovation; after all, they hold great promise for accelerating the speed at which data analysis can occur. However, they also engender fear over their ethical and social implications as they valorize normative human subjects through their design. They raise questions of what it means to look, speak, write, and think as “a human.” Invariably, the answer to this hews to dominant cultural values of the Global North, reinforcing the cultural, historical, and technological othering of communities in the Global South. In a field as diverse in method, thought, and subject as digital humanities, it is essential to examine the ethical challenges these technologies pose and their effects on methodologies. Moreover, attending to such issues emphasizes the unique value of the humanities for science and technology, which is evident in digital humanities practices that use humanistic lenses to analyze digital objects, cultures, and technologies.

In the broader context of these technologies, an area that remains underexplored is the way that the “human” is articulated, produced, and normed in the drive toward emulating “human” processes. At stake is the way that universalist framings of the “human” are produced through natural language processing software, machine learning, and algorithms. For digital humanities, using these technologies raises the question of complicity with the reproduction and amplification of normative forms of human subjectivity. The forms of “human” authorized and sanctioned by developments in machine learning and artificial intelligence are exclusionary ones drawn on the presumptions behind the Enlightenment subject: white, male, Eurocentric. As a result, they reinforce the notion that there are normative and singular ways of being human in the twenty-first century. This is primarily evident in the endeavors to produce “humanoid texts” and other forms of evidence that machines can replicate the linguistic processes that have typically been the domain of humans.

The question of what it means to be “human” has been taken up throughout the history of philosophy, often to discern a distinction between human and animal.

Aristotle links humanity to the notion of being able to speak by virtue of having a telos and belonging to a polis, which he sees animals lacking.⁹ In Enlightenment discourses, the definition of “human” became a subject of great interest. For René Descartes, being and cognition are yoked in the phrase *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”); conversely, Descartes posits that animals do not have language or speech and therefore lack consciousness.¹⁰ Yet, this human Enlightenment subject is a narrowly conceived category from which women and colonized or enslaved peoples are excluded; therefore, the human/animal binary is already troubled by those whose identities position them outside the category of “human.” Later, Immanuel Kant raises the issue of rationality, arguing that the difference between human and animal is reason.¹¹ A number of thinkers have complicated these constructions. Charles Darwin, for example, argues that traits like sense, emotion, and intuition are not limited to humans but are visible in animals.¹² Jacques Derrida makes a similar claim on the basis that humans themselves may not possess the attributes of humanity that have been articulated in the European philosophical tradition.¹³ Notably, the subject of human thought throughout this body of work is exclusionary, based on the primacy of the white, male, European Enlightenment subject. It thus fails to encompass the full sweep of humanity, including women, working classes, and people within the Global South, including those who have been enslaved and colonized. The fraught nature of the human subject articulated in this body of work is the very “human” that shapes the development of the humanities.

Developments in computing technology have influenced investigations about the nature of humanity as well. While humans and computers appear radically different in form, computing is increasingly focused on replicating human processes. An early inkling of this movement was evident in IBM’s computer Deep Blue, the chess-playing machine that beat Grandmaster Garry Kasparov in 1996. Now, IBM’s Watson, an artificial intelligence supercomputer, has successfully defeated *Jeopardy!* champions, including Ken Jennings, who holds a record number of consecutive wins on the game show, and Brad Rutter, the show’s highest earner of award money. Watson has seen a number of applications, such as making health care decisions for lung cancer at Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, powering self-driving buses, and serving as a teaching assistant at Georgia State University, where students did not realize that Jill Watson was, in fact, a chatbot.¹⁴ Given the humanity ascribed to such technologies, it is incumbent on digital humanities practitioners to engage with the question of what kinds of subjectivities are centered in the technologies that facilitate their scholarship.

An important model for interrogating these matters in digital humanities appears in feminist and postcolonial science and technology studies scholarship, which brings together the philosophical and technical implications of human subjectivity by raising concern over divisions between the binary categories of “human” and “nonhuman.” Donna Haraway, for example, has emphasized the need to deconstruct the division between the two through her work on the cyborg.¹⁵

Within discourses of technoscience, such binaries are often taken for granted as a matter of objective fact, but, as Haraway's work suggests, the separation between the human and nonhuman is a false one.¹⁶ Rather, the two categories are both connected and interdependent. For example, Jane Bennett posits the existence of a vibrant materiality that connects human and nonhuman bodies.¹⁷ Appreciating the relationship between the human and nonhuman is essential to understanding the contemporary world. As Karen Barad's theory of agential realism posits, the world is best interpreted through connections between human and nonhuman, rather than the presumption that they occupy separate realms.¹⁸ When computers and other forms of technology blur the boundaries between human and machine, as they are presently doing, the nature of humanity comes into question. When engaging with "artificial intelligence," scientific scholarship positions "artificial" as nonhuman but seeks to replicate processes of "human cognition."¹⁹ The term "artificial," which dates to the early fifteenth century, denotes "made by man" and is further related to "artifice," connoting "skill, cunning," "device," and "trick."²⁰ The goal of artificial intelligence is to create devices that skillfully trick humans into believing that computers are capable of cognition—and it is increasingly becoming more successful.

But what forms of "human" are sanctioned when artificial intelligence can reproduce human processes? Alison Adams argues that artificial intelligence reflects "Western" presumptions about human intelligence, privileging white, Eurocentric male subjectivity as the form of cognition on which it is modeled.²¹ This effects the erasure of women from the history of scientific knowledge production. These disembodied neural networks²² and other cognitive models are being created based on theories of human cognition that are themselves the result of observing intellectual processes of white men of the Global North. Therefore, artificial intelligence purports to represent universal "human" intellectual processes but, in fact, is only representative of a fictive "universal" model of human cognition that elides women, peoples of the Global South, and those at the interstices of these categories. In addition to reflecting such biases, these technologies are based on tech stacks, platforms, and code that privilege knowledge production of the Global North in their design. Complicating the relationship between human and nonhuman in these cases is essential to understanding the connections between the two and the influences of normative human subjectivities on technological development. As technologies like algorithms and artificial intelligence are brought into digital humanities practices, it is critical to understand the assumptions subtending their development.

There are a wide array of instances where universal notions of humanity are invoked and implied in computing. Syed Mustafa Ali's work provides an example of how to uncover them and interrogate their politics. He raises the issue of robotics in this regard, making the case that humanoid robots produce and obscure racial concerns in purpose and form.²³ Ali questions whether robot faces are being conceived as raceless, obscuring Eurocentrism with false universalism.²⁴ Ali's concerns are evident in the rhetoric surrounding the design of Sophia, a product of Hanson

Robotics. The company bills Sophia as a humanoid, female, and lifelike robot, capable of generating more than sixty facial expressions. Through the coupling of camera and algorithm, Sophia is capable of visual recognition. Built with Google Chrome voice recognition, Sophia processes speech and uses the input for machine learning. According to company founder David Hanson, “Artificial intelligence will evolve to the point where they [robots] will truly be our friends. Not in the ways that dehumanize us, but in ways that rehumanize us, that decrease the trend of distance between people and instead connect us with people as well as robots.”²⁵ He credits the humanoid face installed on Sophia with facilitating connections with humans, making the case that a robot needs a “beautiful and expressive” face to do so.²⁶ Modeled after Hanson’s wife and Audrey Hepburn, Sophia raises not only the issue of the unacknowledged influence of race in the production of robots that Ali identifies but also the question of aesthetics governing “beauty.” The significant market for skin-whitening products and plastic surgery in Asian countries is one example of the way that whiteness has come to signal the global standard for beauty, a legacy of white supremacy and colonialism. Another important example is the Clark doll studies, first run in 1939 and repeated in 2009, in which children of multiple races repeatedly identified a white doll as more beautiful than a black one.²⁷ By speaking to the visual dimensions of the face, Ali provides a physical example of what is, in most cases, an ephemeral understanding of the way that technologies are coded by race. Ali’s analysis itself is an important contribution to digital humanities and its capacity for using humanistic inquiry to think critically about and complicate progressive narratives of technological development.

In the same way, a reading of “Large-Scale Image Memorability” or LaMem, developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, illustrates the implications of these issues for digital humanities because LaMem draws on a database of images and machine learning algorithms in its methods. LaMem is artificial intelligence software reported to have “near-human” accuracy for memory, applying predictive algorithms designed to identify images that are most “memorable.” LaMem is available online and users can upload images that are then scored for memorability, with heat map overlays indicating the most memorable portions of the image. While LaMem is not, strictly speaking, a digital humanities project, it raises troubling questions of how a universal human is interpolated in method.

LaMem relies on the concept of “intrinsic memorability” of facial images. Intrinsic memorability has been studied by the lab of one of LaMem’s designers, Wilma Bainbridge, through creation of a 10,000+ image database representing the adult U.S. population, “following gender, age, and race distributions.”²⁸ Amazon Mechanical Turk workers with IP addresses in the United States coded the images for demographic matching. They were then tasked with identifying “intrinsically memorable” dimensions of these images. Bainbridge and colleagues’ work is underscored by the claim that “despite personal experiences, people naturally encode and discard the same types of information.”²⁹ While care was taken to ensure that data

coding was undertaken by people located within the country, the study does not attend to the issue of cultural location within the United States, which may influence memorability. It is undercut by scholarship that claims memorability is influenced by racial and ethnic affiliation.³⁰ Moreover, these results are represented as generalizable to human populations, though they depict only a specific subset of users in the United States. While such an intellectual move is typical within discourses of the sciences, both feminist and postcolonial scholarship within science and technology studies have raised ethical questions about doing so.³¹ By claiming that this research signifies human processes, Bainbridge and colleagues locate subjects in the United States at the center of a universal form of the human. While other scholars have made allowances for the subjective nature of memorability, they also aim to find evidence of agreement that supersedes subjective difference.³² This is an important example of how the seeming objectivity of technology, an assumption that runs through many digital humanities projects and methods, can lead to the instantiation of a normative human subject. Further, it makes the case for problematizing this presumption.

LaMem also gestures toward problems with reproducibility and data coding that influence digital humanities practices. When creating LaMem, project directors selected images that had been used in these earlier memorability experiments, which were assigned memory scores and fed to the project's algorithms. They offered no indication of why the images were memorable, but the results were comparable to memorability scores rated by data coders.³³ By using images from previous studies, they replicate the centrality of data from the United States while making generalizable claims about human processes. Reproducibility is often invoked as a marker of validity, but it is valid only in relation to initial design. When the design itself contains fundamental presumptions about human subjectivity, simply producing more results only confirms the initial biases incorporated in it. One place this happens in LaMem is in the coding of data, which is portrayed as an objective process. LaMem used Amazon Mechanical Turk to code data, but its creators fail to identify who was included in or excluded from that labor pool, unlike Bainbridge and colleagues, who only selected workers with an IP address in the United States. As the majority of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers reside in the Global South, the question of who arbitrates memorability in LaMem is cloudy, and the anonymity of the Amazon Mechanical Turk labor pool raises questions about the cultural locations from which memorability is being determined. This is troubling not only from the perspectives of labor ethics—the pool of workers is paid mere pennies for performing coding tasks—but also from the reliability of results from data coded by an undefinable source.

These issues are particularly important as digital humanities practitioners turn to sources like Amazon Mechanical Turk for their projects. Notably, Lev Manovich's *selfiecity* relied on Amazon Mechanical Turk workers to code selfies for age and gender, while Ryan Heuser's *Mapping Emotions in Victorian London* used them

to attribute sentiments to locations drawn from Victorian literary texts.³⁴ Without the ability to interrogate the demographics of the workers who influence the data coding process, such as gender, race or ethnicity, and nationality, it is unclear which factors are influencing the results of these studies. Instead, the creators make claims about their data that appear to transcend difference without establishing a basis for making meaning of the data. The presumption of a universal subjectivity endangers the integrity of the data, which is unaccountably influenced by the particulars of the workers' identities, cultural backgrounds, and geographical locations. As a result, this work exemplifies a troubling approach that foregrounds utility and instrumental rationality in project applications and serves as an important warning for digital humanities practitioners.

The Algorithmic Universals

Methodological choices embracing artificial intelligence and neural networks are further implicated in the construction of a universal human subject. This is evident in LaMem, which is situated by default in the epistemological and ontological moorings of the Global North, deploys an unspecified labor source drawn largely from the Global South, and simultaneously claims to reproduce “human” memorability. Failing to identify its own standpoint, the project elides cognitive processes that may be shaped by the particulars of lived and embodied experience.³⁵ Moreover, the creators developed LaMem using artificial neural networks, which are designed on information processing procedures and tasks engaged by the brain. Neural networks have been embraced by the artificial intelligence community because they can be automated to process large datasets and identify patterns without human intervention. Like other methods subtending artificial intelligence that are based on modeling human cognition, these networks make universal claims about human processes based on scholarship that privileges a white male subject. As Carl Stahmer's work suggests, the application of artificial intelligence to digital humanities is largely focused on the interoperability of technical processes, particularly for interventions that engage with big data.³⁶ This acultural approach fails to attend to the cultural politics that subtend the production, circulation, and consumption of humanities data itself. Another troubling concern surrounding the use of neural networks is the challenge of identifying the precise processes at work. For example, the creators of LaMem—like many others who engage with artificial neural networks and algorithms—cannot explain the mechanisms by which their software works.³⁷ While they can explain the algorithms designed and why they used them, the exact processes by which LaMem arrives at results about memorability are a mystery to the creators. Regardless, they express confidence in the response, claiming accurate results. This is the same kind of scientific logic that risks influencing computational approaches to humanities data.

Failure to understand how algorithms work is a larger problem predicated on the iterative nature of algorithms, the large scale of calculations they perform, and the vast number of data points these entail. This has repercussions for digital humanities projects that use them. As Rob Kitchin notes, “Algorithms search, collate, sort, categorise, group, match, analyze, profile, model, simulate, visualize and regulate people, processes, and places. They shape how we understand the world and they do work in and make the world through their execution as software, with profound consequences.”³⁸ Among the myths that the era of big data has produced is that the scope and quantity of data being produced by people is so vast in scale and computing is so powerful that their outputs are becoming increasingly more objective.

However, considering the variety of ways in which algorithms are deployed to assist with conclusions that might otherwise be drawn by people alone—banking and loan decisions, likely recidivism for criminals, or employee hiring—the stakes of algorithms are high. The lack of transparency and the seeming black box nature of algorithms obscure the fact that they are subject to biases, in spite of myths that suggest their objectivity.³⁹ When they are deployed for subjective decision making, there are no guarantees of accuracy, and they function as gatekeepers of information. An example of this is YouTube’s algorithmic labeling of LGBTQ+ content as unsuitable for users under age eighteen, which included videos that did not contain violence, nudity, or profanity.⁴⁰ Algorithms do so with biases that are not obvious but reflect the values of engineers who create them and the purposes for which they were created.

These issues are critical for digital humanities practitioners to consider. Like N. Katherine Hayles’s posthuman subject, the contemporary human at stake in digital humanities is “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction.”⁴¹ Humans are largely inseparable from their implication in the production of data. As Stephen Marche notes, “All human endeavor has by now generated its own monadic mass of data, and through these vast accumulations of ciphers the robots now endlessly scour for significance much the way cockroaches scour for nutrition in the enormous bat dung piles hiding in Bornean caves.”⁴²

Making meaning of those data is part of the scholarly possibilities of digital humanities, and it has implications for human subjectivity. As Gary Hall asks, “Is the direct, practical use of techniques and methodologies drawn from computer science and various fields related to it here, too, helping produce a major alteration in the status and nature of knowledge and indeed the human subject?”⁴³ For David M. Berry, the challenge to subjectivity has repercussions both at the level of the individual and in how we theorize the human subject: “The digital assemblages that are now being built not only promise great change at the level of the individual human actor. They provide destabilising amounts of knowledge and information that lack the regulating force of philosophy—which, Kant argued, ensures that

institutions remain rational. Technology enables access to the databanks of human knowledge from anywhere, disregarding and bypassing the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge in the state, the universities and the market.⁴⁴ Consequently, the impact of technologies on subjectivity is an important dimension of the “human” in the digital humanities.

In the context of digital humanities scholarship, James Dobson suggests that applications of these algorithms reflect nostalgia for structuralist literary criticism and disavowal of poststructuralist thought.⁴⁵ Such moves are evident in projects like *heureCLÉA*, a “digital heuristic” for identifying “narratologically salient features in textual narratives.”⁴⁶ This language and the project itself suggest that narrative features of a text are divorced from its content, including its circumstances of production and cultural location. The algorithms the project uses are tasked with decisions about narratological salience that are themselves subtended by universalist notions of the human rather than situated in the contexts informing the text. Like other algorithms, they are steeped in the cultural and political implications of computation and code. These implications are overdetermined by the ontological categories and epistemological processes of the Global North. Further, datasets and databases used in conjunction with algorithms are themselves constructed and subject to political and social forces.

The Humanoid Text

In the realm of computational textuality, which is a popular subject in digital humanities scholarship, algorithms are also complicit in instantiating universal, and therefore exclusionary, forms of the human. One area in which this is particularly important is the use of natural language processing software and machine learning to produce texts that can “pass” as human. As Christer Clerwell argues, readers are increasingly unable to tell the two types of compositions apart.⁴⁷ The phenomenon of “passing” in racial politics in the United States connotes the practice of people of color who can be accepted as a member of a different race because of their phenotypical features presenting themselves as a member of that other group (typically as white). The term has come to be used to signify the broader ability of members of a particular identity category to convince others that they occupy a different one. The “humanoid texts” composed by computers are engaged in a similar act of dissimulation: presenting themselves as being written by humans when they are, in fact, computer generated.

Indeed, humanoid texts are increasingly becoming more successful at passing for human. When teaching digital literature courses, I include a unit on computer-generated texts, which begins with an exercise where I show students texts generated by computers and texts composed by humans, asking students to determine which were created by computers and which were written by humans. These texts range from news stories to snippets of code to poems, all of which confound students’

expectations of what humans and algorithms are capable of composing. One pairing of poems, in particular, receives great attention in this exercise: a sample from J. Nathan Matias's Swift-Speare project on poetry composition with machine learning and Harlem Renaissance poet Jean Toomer's "Sound Poem (I)."

To create Shakespeare-like sonnets, Matias trained the Swiftkey machine-learning engine on Shakespeare's sonnets and developed a dataset of William Shakespeare's vocabulary for the application to use. He generated sonnet lines word-by-word, using only the suggested words offered by the application. The result was a sonnet eerily reminiscent of Shakespeare's own:

When I in dreams behold thy fairest shade
 Whose shade in dreams doth wake the sleeping morn
 The daytime shadow of my love betray'd
 Lends hideous night to dreaming's faded form
 Were painted frowns to gild mere false rebuff
 Then should'st my heart be patient as the sands
 For nature's smile is ornament enough
 When thy gold lips unloose their drooping bands
 As clouds occlude the globe's enshrouded fears
 Which can by no astron'my be assail'd
 Thus, thyne appearance tears in atmospheres
 No fond perceptions nor no gaze unveils
 Disperse the clouds which banish light from thee
 For no tears be true, until we truly see.⁴⁸

Given the poem's meter and rhyme scheme, my English students invariably assume that this is a poem composed by a human. Typically, they insist that this is, in fact, a sonnet written by Shakespeare that they have read before. Conversely, students are quick to label Toomer's "Sound Poem (I)" as a computer-generated text. The poem begins, "Mon sa me el kirimoor" and continues in this register, representing sounds not words.⁴⁹ Because of Toomer's experiment with sound and poetic form, students are quick to dismiss the poem as randomly generated nonsense produced by a computer.

The ability to distinguish whether these texts are composed by humans or computers is more than just a parlor trick. Rather, it speaks to the way computer-generated texts are complicit in epistemic violence. Students generally identify "generic" texts composed of simple, factual sentences as being computer generated. By imitating a generic approach to human textuality that is itself a manifestation of a specious universal subject, these texts elide the complexities of human life that influence writing: culture, race, ethnicity, nation, gender, and language, among others. Yet, when students are confronted with the Swift-speare poem and Toomer's poem, they are quick to embrace the algorithmically generated poem as Shakespeare's work

and Toomer's poem as gobbledygook. This is particularly ironic because Harlem Renaissance writers like Toomer were writing to lay claim to the humanity of African Americans and their place in the democratic space of the nation through their capacity to produce art. Yet, Toomer's poem cannot pass for human.

This phenomenon is a direct result of one of the goals for natural language processing software: to develop algorithms and programs that can replicate "human" language. A nonhuman actor, in this case, is tasked with completing a "human" task. Just as "artificial" intelligence is expected to mimic human cognition but instead replicates white, Eurocentric male cognition, natural language processing software is complicit in the production of normative forms of the human. At stake in the production of humanoid texts is the question of universalism. With the move to generate software and algorithms that replicate "human" processes, particular forms of "human" are authorized. As postcolonial scholars have argued, the Enlightenment gave rise to the idea of a homogeneous definition of "human," which centers the European subject and, in turn, marginalizes all whose cultures, lifestyles, and values deviate from the universal. Postcolonial theory, crucially, has made the case for the importance of the particular, grounded in the idea that, indeed, cultures—specifically the cultures of colonized or formerly colonized communities—are left out by universalist discourse.

Language and textuality, which are core dimensions of the humanities, have played a significant role in the valuing of universalism, with the colonizer standing in as the figure of the universal, devaluing the particular as the culture of the colonized. Textual production of Europe—whether Homer, Shakespeare, or Cervantes—is valued for its universality and its articulation of a "human condition." That very articulation of "human" produces an essentialist definition expansive enough to account for Europe and European cultural production but that does not extend to Europe's "Others."⁵⁰ Indeed, the universal is not the universal but the European. Therefore, the universalist move to the "human" legitimates a narrow portion of the world as human—dominant cultural powers in particular—while raising the question of the claim to "humanity" available to a larger swath of the world that has been or is under the sway of colonialism. Universalist discourses surrounding language and textuality echo G. W. F. Hegel's assertion that there are people outside the dynamic movement of history. While this claim about Africans is well known, Hegel made similar assertions for Indians and nomadic peoples. In the case of Indians, Hegel accords the absence of history to an absence of *written* history: "It is because the Hindus have no History in the form of annals (*historia*) that they have no History in the form of transactions (*res gestae*); that is, no growth expanding into a veritable political condition."⁵¹ Therefore, writing is linked to a particular form of human consciousness and subjectivity, to the production of culture and the possibilities of cultural transformation. In turn, writing—or lack thereof—is linked to the production of the human and to human destiny. Yet, digital humanities projects that take up computational approaches to textuality often fail to address the

cultural dynamics at stake, even when they are working with texts from communities that have historically been marginalized. For example, Shlomo Argamon and Mark Olsen's text-mining work aims to distinguish between black and nonblack playwrights and claims that their algorithms can discern between the two. Yet, they fail to attend to design of the algorithm itself, what "black" means in the context of their work, and its implications of the study.⁵² This is especially disconcerting because what it means for a writer to be "black" is a vexing question, and Argamon and Olsen fail to interrogate the ways blackness is coded through language in their data. This is a missed opportunity to contribute to our understanding of the linguistic features of writing by situating the work in the historical and cultural contexts of African diasporic writing.

The production of a universalist notion of the "human" relies on defaulting to the aesthetics of dominant cultures and languages. Language wielded in this context determines the limits of universalism, both those included within its ambit and those outside it. Aesthetics that diverge from dominant ones are, accordingly, outside the boundaries of the "human" inscribed in writing. Such an idea is evident in Thomas Babington Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Indian Education," which argues for the cultural supremacy of English literature. Macaulay argues that the whole of the literature of the East cannot compare to one shelf of British literature and proposes that instruction in English literature might produce a group that is Indian in blood but British in taste and intellect.⁵³ For Macaulay and other British colonizers, literature serves as a strategy of domination under the guise of a universal culture.⁵⁴ Given that people writing from the margins, whether Anglophone colonial and postcolonial writers or African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance, have used writing to lay claim to voices denied to them, the deployment of universalist forms of the human through computer-generated text risks deauthorizing these voices.

Asserting the ability of a text, an algorithm, a piece of software, or a computer to "pass" as human presumes a universal definition of "human" and reduces the totality of humanity to the ability of a computer to perform a task in a particular way defined by a set of limits that reproduces dominant cultural norms. Yet, in the research on these mechanisms, there is a marked lack of clarity of how "human" is defined. In some cases, this scholarship rests on the notion of "human cognition" or the idea that there are certain mechanisms of thought that are, in fact, universal. The ontological and epistemological biases of this scholarship imply that even the notion of human cognition is grounded in the Global North. Universalism in the context of human cognition and humanoid texts brings with it the presumption that "science" mitigates cultural biases and is immune to difference. However, it only manages to reinforce the politics, cultures, and aesthetics of dominant cultural paradigms. Therefore, it is imperative that digital humanities practitioners resist the reinscription of a universal human subject in their scholarship, whether at the level of project design, method, data curation, or algorithm composition.

Notes

1. Baldwin, *Small Wonder*.
2. "Turing Test, 1950."
3. Leonard and King, *Robots Reading Vogue*.
4. Associated Press, "Microsoft Kills."
5. Associated Press, "Microsoft Kills."
6. Associated Press, "Microsoft Kills."
7. Blas, "im here to learn so :))))))".
8. Brodbeck, Hauser, and Iida, "Morphological Evolution."
9. Aristotle, *Politics*.
10. Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, 139.
11. Kant, *Kant*.
12. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 193.
13. Derrida, *Animal*, 66.
14. McFarland, "What Happened."
15. Haraway, *Simian, Cyborgs, and Women*, 3–5.
16. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 31–34.
17. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 3–4.
18. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33–34.
19. Russell and Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence*, 2–3.
20. "Artificial."
21. Adam, *Artificial Knowing*, 20.
22. Lee, "Introduction," 3.
23. Ali, "Towards a Decolonial Computing," 29–30.
24. Ali, "Towards a Decolonial Computing," 31.
25. Taylor, "Could You."
26. Taylor, "Could You."
27. Gibson, Robbins, and Rochat, "White Bias," 344.
28. Bainbridge, Isola, and Olivia, "Intrinsic Memorability," 1325.
29. Khosla et al., "Understanding and Predicting," 2390.
30. Lucas, Chiao, and Paller, "Why Some Faces," 20.
31. See Harding, *Is Science Multicultural?*, 4; Anderson, "Postcolonial Technoscience," 643.
32. Isola, Parikh, Torralba, and Oliva, "Understanding the Intrinsic Memorability," 2429–30.
33. Khosla et al., "Understanding and Predicting," 2392–93.
34. Manovich, *Selfiecity*; Heuser, "Mapping Emotions."
35. Harding, *Is Science Multicultural?*, 8.
36. Stahmer, "Interoperability."
37. Woodward, "MIT System."
38. Kitchin, "Thinking Critically."

39. See Pasquale, *Black Box Society*; Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*; Diakopoulos, "Algorithmic Accountability."
40. Associated Press, "YouTube Reverses Some Restrictions."
41. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 3.
42. Marche, "Literature Is Not Data."
43. Hall, "No Digital Humanities."
44. Berry, *Critical Theory*, 214.
45. Dobson, "Can an Algorithm Be Disturbed?," 543–44.
46. Bögel et al., "Collaborative Text Annotation."
47. Clerwell, "Enter the Robot Journalist."
48. Matias, "Swift-Speare."
49. Toomer, "Sound Poem (I)."
50. Said, *Orientalism*, 1–3.
51. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 163.
52. Argamon and Olsen, "Words, Patterns."
53. Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education," 249.
54. Viswanathan, "Currying Favor," 86.

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