Approaching Digital Humanities

16 April 2021
Oh, the humanities
“…the disciplines that make up the modern humanities – including, but not limited to, literature, philosophy, classics, rhetoric, history, and studies of art, music, and design – have sought to define culture and help us gain a greater understanding of the human experience.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“The wellsprings of humanism were fed by many sources, but the meticulous (and, sometimes, not-so-meticulous) transcription, translation, editing, and annotation of texts were their legacy…

“…we suggest that the migration of cultural materials into digital media is a process analogous to the flowering of Renaissance and post-Renaissance print culture.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Significantly, text-based disciplines and studies (classics, literature, philosophy, the history of ideas), make up, from the very start, the core of both the humanities and of the Great Books curricula instituted in the 1920s and 1930s. (For all their importance to the history of civilization, ‘Great Dance Performances’ or ‘Great Architecture’ never formed the basis of liberal arts curricula.)”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“In a moment of crisis, the digital humanities contributes to the sustenance of academic life as we know it, even as (and perhaps because) it upends academic life as we know it.”


“We refuse to take the default position that the humanities are in ‘crisis,’ in part because this very rhetoric of crisis has persisted for well over a century…”

Burdick *et al.*, “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in *Digital_Humanities*, 2012
What distinguish the digital humanities?
“...a first wave of Digital Humanities developed, critiqued, and disseminated ways of structuring humanities data to dialogue effectively with computation.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“The fact of the matter is that Digital Humanities bears no privileged relation to modern or contemporary cultural corpora; on the contrary, it is indifferent as to whether its objects of study are performance videos from the 1960s or pottery shards from a Mycenaean archaeological site from the 2nd millennium BCE.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“...digital approaches are conspicuously collaborative and generative”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012

“Personally, I think Digital Humanities is about building things...If you are not making anything, you are not...a digital humanist”

How do you do digital humanities?
“We know DH in large part because it names itself, yet what it names seems increasingly malleable and at times difficult to grasp.”

“Digital Humanities infrastructures encourage *prototyping*, generating new projects, beta-testing them with audiences both sympathetic and skeptical, and then actually looking at the results.”

Burdick *et al.*, “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in *Digital_Humanities*, 2012
“Building on a key aspect of design innovation, Digital Humanities must have, and even encourages, failures…it is not an experiment if it cannot fail.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Curation, analysis, editing, and modeling comprise fundamental activities at the core of Digital Humanities.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Involving archives, collections, repositories, and other aggregations of materials, *curation* is the selection and organization of materials in an interpretive framework, argument, or exhibit.”

Burdick *et al.*, “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in *Digital_Humanities*, 2012
“Analysis refers to the processing of text or data: Statistical and quantitative methods of analysis have brought close reading of texts (stylometrics and genre analysis, collation, comparison of versions for author attribution or usage patterns) into dialogue with distant reading (the crunching of large quantities of information across a corpus of textual data or its metadata).”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Editing has been revived with the advent of digital media and the Web, and will continue to be an integral activity in textual as well as time-based formats. The parsing of the cultural record in terms of questions of authenticity, origin, transmission, or production is one of the foundation stones of humanistic scholarship upon which all other interpretive work depends.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Modeling highlights the notion of content models—shapes of argument expressed in information structures and their design…”

“a project dedicated to analyzing the correspondence of a famous artist might assume a chronological shape, which is one model of a human life.

“Or it might be organized around correspondents and relationships, another way of weighting the data.

“Or it could be structured by place of origin and receipt, as a geospatial network.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Digital Humanities projects can be described by sketching their structure at several levels. These begin with basic computation (programming, processing, protocols) and extend through the levels of organization and output that form the basis of most users’ experience (interface, devices, networks).”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“In the 21st century, we communicate in media significantly more varied, extensible, and multiplicative than linear text. From scalable databases to information visualizations, from video lectures to multiuser virtual platforms, serious content and rigorous argumentation take shape across multiple platforms and media. The best Digital Humanities pedagogy and research projects train students both in ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ these emergent rhetorics and in understanding how they reshape and remodel humanistic knowledge.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“…the visual becomes ever more fundamental to the Digital Humanities, in ways that complement, enhance, and sometimes are in tension with the textual.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“...graphical interfaces have been central to the humanities for centuries. What, after all, are indexes, tables of contents, and foot- and endnotes if not information storage and retrieval strategies?”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“Along with the digital archives, quantitative analyses, and tool-building projects that once characterized the field, DH now encompasses a wide range of methods and practices: visualizations of large image sets, 3D modeling of historical artifacts, ‘born digital’ dissertations, hashtag activism and the analysis thereof, alternate reality games, mobile makerspaces, and more.”

Why?
“More than ever, we need the critical insights, creative designs, speculative imagination, and methods of comparative, historically informed study that shape humanistic modes of inquiry.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“…fault lines have emerged within the DH community between those who use new digital tools to aid relatively traditional scholarly projects and those who believe that DH is most powerful as a disruptive political force…”

“…we are convinced that digital humanists can contribute significantly to a larger technically and historically informed resistance. By enabling communication across communities and networks, by creating platforms that amplify the voices of those most in need of being heard, by pursuing projects that perform the work of recovery and resistance, and by undertaking research that intervenes in the areas of data surveillance and privacy…”

Gold & Klein, “A DH That Matters”, in Debates in the Digital Humanities, 2019
“…the digital humanities has always seen itself as a field that engages the world beyond the academy…”

Gold & Klein, “A DH That Matters”, in Debates in the Digital Humanities, 2019
“We must…commit to making a digital humanities that matters beyond itself, one that probes the stakes and impacts of technology across a range of institutions and communities.”

“Digital, polyvocal expression can support a genuine multiverse in which no single point of view can claim the center.”

Burdick et al., “Humanities to Digital Humanities”, in Digital_Humanities, 2012
“...a central aim of this book is to describe a form of intersectional feminism that takes the inequities of the present moment as its starting point and begins its own work by asking: How can we use data to remake the world?”

D'Ignazio & Klein, “Introduction” in *Data Feminism*, 2020
Why not?
“Ultimately, we must each ask ourselves if our service and scholarship, and the field in which we place this work, are sufficiently committed to addressing the problems we face in the present moment…

“Our work within the digital humanities is enabled by larger social, political, and technological systems. In the present moment, we need work that exposes the impact of our embeddedness in those larger systems and that brings our technical expertise to bear on the societal problems that those systems sustain.”

Gold & Klein, “A DH That Matters”, in Debates in the Digital Humanities, 2019
“...the rapid ascent of the digital humanities in the public imagination...have masked, and at times threatened to overshadow, decades of foundational work by scholars and technologists who engaged in ‘digital humanities’ work before it was known by that name.”

“the challenges currently associated with the digital humanities involve a shift from congregating in the big tent to practicing DH at a field-specific level, where DH work confronts disciplinary habits of mind.”