CMPU 187 · Introduction to Digital Humanities

The Future(s) of Digital Humanities

21 May 2021
“The technology of a time is always going to inform the writing, talking, explaining, remembering.”

Our present success
“The field of digital humanities is growing and institutionalizing, and beginning to find a good number of adherents. DH gets occasional mainstream press coverage…”

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“We can build graphs and charts…”

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“...and we can do an okay job mining texts in search of patterns.”

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10 "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil—prophet still, if bird or devil! By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—Tell this soul with sorrow laden if within the distant Aidden It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore— Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore?"— Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."
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“All of this is fun and interesting, and personally, I get a lot of satisfaction out of doing this kind of thing and helping other people to do it. It is useful and absorbing, and in many cases, it really does help us do our work better. But DH has bigger challenges yet to face.”

Our present troubles
Representation
“...most of the data and data models we have inherited deal with structures of power, like gender and race, with a crudeness that would never pass muster in a peer-reviewed humanities publication.”

3.6.12 Sex *(required)*

3.6.12.1 Definition
An indication of the sex of the artist. This field is called "Gender" in the online publication.

3.6.12.2 Values
The flags are controlled by a pick list in VCS: M - Male, F - Female, U - Unknown, NA - Not Applicable

3.6.12.3 RULES

- Record the sex of the individual: *male, female, other, unknown*. For corporate bodies, record *not applicable*, except in cases where the body prefers to be identified by gender, such as the Guerrilla Girls (a group of female American artists for whom gender identification is important).

- For any anonymous artists or when you are otherwise uncertain of the sex, record *unknown*.

- For transgender people, record the sex/gender by which they self-identify (*male, female, or other*). In Nationality field (short for nationality / culture / race / ethnicity / religion / sexual orientation), record *transgender*.

https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/guidelines/ulan_3_6_biographical_info.html
3.6.12 Sex *(required)*

3.6.12.1 Definition
An indication of the sex of the artist. This field is called "Gender" in the online publication.

3.6.12.2 Values
The flags are controlled by a pick list in VCS: M - Male, F - Female, O - Other, U - Unknown, NA - Not Applicable

3.6.12.3 RULES

- Record the sex of the individual: *male, female, other, unknown*. For corporate bodies, record *not applicable*, except in cases where the body prefers to be identified by gender, such as the Guerrilla Girls (a group of female American artists for whom gender identification is important).

- For any anonymous artists or when you are otherwise uncertain of the sex, record *unknown*.

- For transgender or non-binary people, record *other* here, or when applicable the sex/gender by which they self-identify (*male, female*). In Nationality field (short for nationality / culture / race / ethnicity / religion / gender identity / sexual orientation), record transgender or nonbinary gender identity.
“...technically speaking, we frankly have not figured out how to deal with categories like gender that are not binary or one-dimensional or stable.”

“I would like us to start understanding markers like gender and race not as givens but as constructions that are actively created from time to time and place to place. In other words, I want us to stop acting as though the data models for identity are containers to be filled in order to produce meaning and recognize instead that these structures themselves constitute data. That is where the work of DH should begin.”

“What I am getting at here is a comment on our ambitions for digital humanities going forward. I want us to be more ambitious, to hold ourselves to much higher standards when we are claiming to develop data-based work that depicts people’s lives.”

Showing uncertainty
“Many tools that store temporal data demand times and dates nailed down to the minute, or at least the day, when of course many of us are dealing with things like ‘ca. 1500s.’ ”

“…the most common types of data visualization, which are great for quickly conveying known quantities but terrible at conveying uncertainty or conflicting opinions. You can assign a number to the degree of your uncertainty for data points, but how do you show the possible universe of missing data? How do we show the ways in which heterogeneous data has been flattened into a model to make it visually legible?”

Ways forward
“The great value of teaching DH to undergrads, I have come to believe, is not showing them how to use new technology, but showing them how provisional, relative, and profoundly ideological is the world being constructed all around us with data.”

“We can do what we know how to do: visualize datasets that we inherit from governments, corporations, and cultural institutions, using tools that we have borrowed from corporations. Or we can scrutinize data, rip it apart, rebuild it, reimagine it, and perhaps build something entirely different and weirder and more ambitious.”

Acknowledgments

This lecture incorporates material from:

Miriam Posner, UCLA