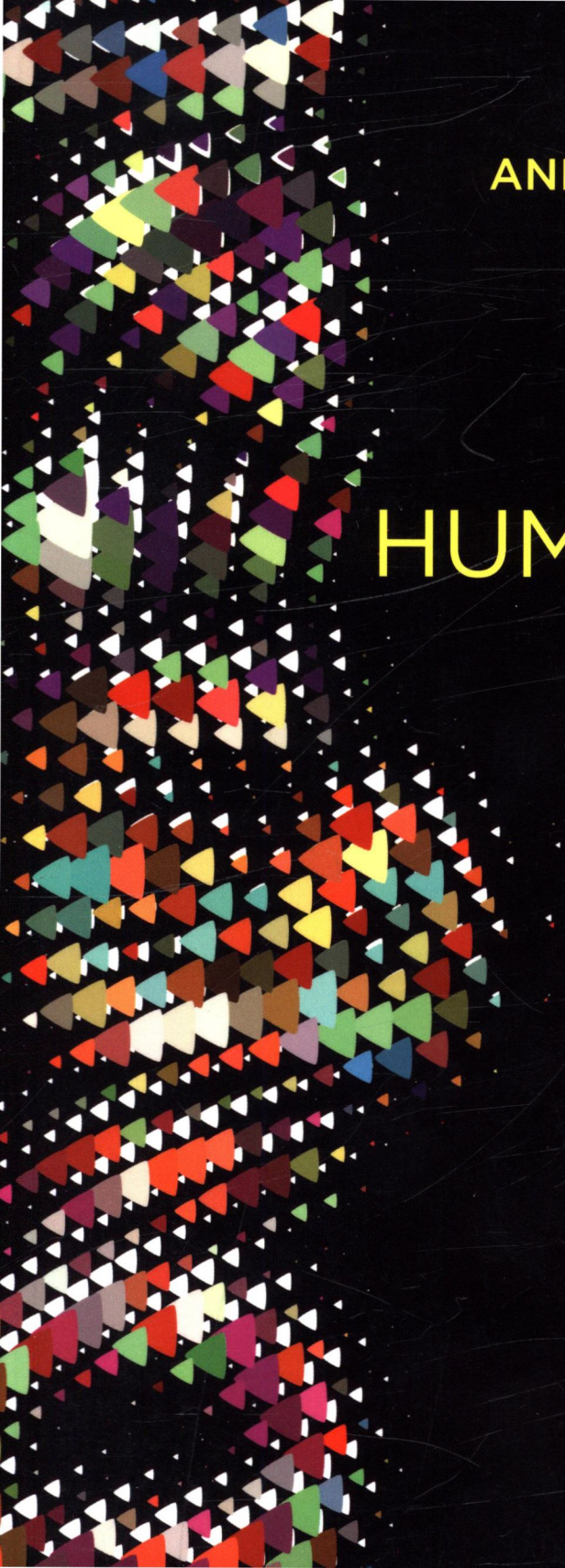

DAVID M. BERRY
ANDERS FAGERJORD

DIGITAL HUMANITIES

'This is a compelling and exciting analysis of the ways in which the encounter between the humanities and computers is reshaping and remediating our shared cultural and intellectual world. David Berry and Anders Fagerjord present an inspiring manifesto for a pluralistic and critical digital humanities and provide an essential roadmap for anyone seeking to understand our emerging digital cultures.'
Andrew Prescott, University of Glasgow

As the twenty-first century unfolds, computers challenge the way in which we think about culture, society and what it is to be human: areas traditionally explored by the humanities.

In a world of automation, Big Data, algorithms, Google searches, digital archives, real-time streams and social networks, our use of culture has been changing dramatically. The digital humanities give us powerful theories, methods and tools for exploring new ways of being in a digital age. Berry and Fagerjord provide a compelling guide, exploring the history, intellectual work, key arguments and ideas of this emerging discipline. They also offer an important critique, suggesting ways in which the humanities can be enriched through computing, but also how cultural critique can transform the digital humanities.

Digital Humanities will be an essential book for students and researchers in this new field but also related areas, such as media and communications, digital media, sociology, informatics, and the humanities more broadly.

David M. Berry is Professor of Digital Humanities at the University of Sussex.

Anders Fagerjord is Associate Professor of Media and Communication at the University of Oslo.

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DIGITAL HUMANITIES

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Digital Humanities

Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age

DAVID M. BERRY AND ANDERS FAGERJORD

polity

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Digital Humanities

For Lorna M. Hughes and Andrew Prescott

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Contents

1 Introduction

This book is about the digital humanities, an exciting new field of research that emerged at the beginning of the 2000s.[1] As digital technology has swept over the world, the humanities too have undergone a rapid change in relation to the use and application of digital technologies in scholarship, although the perceived effects of this are sometimes not always completely visible on the surface of the constituent disciplines. The internet, hand-held network computing devices such as smartphones and tablets, and even 'smart watches' have become so ingrained in our lives that it is difficult to remember how we managed without them. Similarly, databases and image archives, applications and digital tools have begun to make a large impact on both the kinds of resources that are available to humanities scholars and the methods we use. Humanities research has been irrevocably transformed, as indeed have everyday life, our societies, economies, cultures and politics. These changes are echoed in new ways of thinking about culture and knowledge, and, in light of this, the humanities are actively augmenting and rethinking their existing methods and practices. 'Digital humanities' as a term and a movement has, since its first use in 2001, been taken up by many scholars and universities, and, perhaps more strikingly, by most major funding bodies, but remains contentious and contested.[2] Nonetheless, as a term, it helpfully situates humanities research that is self-consciously digital in its orientation, and assists in giving a sense of the kinds of research practice that are increasingly being shared and incorporated into humanities scholarship.

One need not talk to many humanists, however, before one learns that this label is an umbrella term for a variety of diverse practices, which often have a history that is older than that of the digital computer. Some voices also echo the opinion that digital humanities is somehow alien to the tradition of humanities, and may even be a threat to its values. In this book, we touch on some of these controversies and debates and seek to contribute to understanding of them and the ways in which they offer helpful critique, and, sometimes, anti-technology polemic.

This book builds on the theoretical and empirical work already done by fields such as media and communications, and connects them further to the field of digital humanities, particularly to develop and deepen the notion of a 'critical digital humanities'. In our increasingly postdigital age, whether

something is 'digital' or not is no longer seen as the essential question (see Berry and Dieter 2015). There are fewer 'humanities issues' and distinct 'technical issues' that can be neatly bifurcated. The question of whether something is or is not 'digital' will be increasingly secondary as many forms of culture become mediated, produced, accessed, distributed or consumed through digital devices and technologies. Thus, the argument of this book is that the digital humanities must be able to offer theoretical interventions and digital methods for a historical moment when the computational has become both hegemonic and post-screenic. With 'post-screenic', we gesture to a move away from the computer screen or visual interface as the key site of interaction. We think of the 'digital' as a previous historic moment when computation as digitality was understood in opposition to the analogue, rather than complementary, as we argue in this book. Instead of thinking in terms of digital vs analogue, the specific affordances of each form should be understood and used together – for example, paper archives combined with faceted search, or photographs analysed with statistical thematic analysis, etc. Thus, under our contemporary conditions, the modulations of the digital or different intensities of the computational are manifested as a postdigital moment. This includes thinking about the politics of disconnection and how the idea of slowing-down digital projects to 'disrupt digital networks [might] be akin to what the slow food movement is to fast food: an opportunity to stop and question the meaning of progress' (Mejias 2013: 159). The digital humanities, as a field, is unique in being positioned between technology and culture and can therefore think critically about how these cadences of the computational are made and materialized. But, perhaps more to the point, digital humanists as builders of these kinds of systems often have a sophisticated understanding of technologies, algorithms, software processes and their implementation, and consequently can contribute important insights into how humanistic technologies can be developed.

Technology is often identified as something *done* to the humanities (and the university more broadly) – that is, from outside the institution. Whether through economic pressures (cuts in funding, new teaching pressures, marketization, 'do more with less') or technical pressures (digital transformations in publishing industries, new technologies of management and control, Bibliometrics, Google Scholar, etc.), the result is that the humanities have sometimes felt under siege or have been called into question, and been questioned about their viability, relevance or purpose in the twenty-first century.

Our book is positioned in the middle of this debate. We aim to trace some of the genealogies from 'computing in the humanities' into digital humanities (trace, as a full history would require a whole other, much longer

book). We seek to show the wide variety of practices, methods and inquiries that identify with digital humanities, and even some that, although may not identify as digital humanities, can offer useful contributions to the field. We then discuss the possible impact, as well as the limitations, of computational tools and methods for humanistic research. Finally, we argue that the humanities must also build theoretical understandings of computation in culture, just as much as humanists and media scholars have explored the role of writing, of image, and of the printing press. Otherwise, the humanities will make themselves increasingly distant from a society so reliant on ubiquitous digital technology, which might be better called a postdigital society (see Berry and Dieter 2015).

In recent years, there has been a steady flow of research publication within the various disciplines where digital humanities work is being carried out. Many important texts discussing and debating the contours of digital humanities have been published, which have been of great impact (e.g., Schreibman et al. 2004; Berry 2012a; Gold 2012; Svennson and Goldberg 2015). Digital humanities is, broadly speaking, the application of computation to the disciplines of the humanities. But, as these authors have reiterated, digital humanities is, and remains, a discipline very much under construction. Indeed, Pannapacker has been asked whether the term 'digital liberal arts' might be more useful (Pannapacker 2013), and Bernard Stiegler (2012) prefers the term 'digital studies', to widen the range of its research focus. Franco Moretti has also argued that 'the term "digital humanities" means nothing', explaining that 'computational criticism has more meaning, but now we all use the term "digital humanities"' (Moretti 2016). In any case, digital humanities is now very much identified with a certain digital 'way' of doing humanities research, which has been described as a computational turn in the humanities (see Berry 2011).

This ongoing contestation and debate means that 'the territory of the digital humanities is currently under negotiation' (Svennson 2010). This book therefore seeks to contribute to a wider mapping of these contours and possible futures, but argues for an additional *critical turn* in the digital humanities that would serve further to strengthen and embed its position in the academy.[3] We believe there is a need to offer a tentative map of this growing field and a guide to the future trajectories of the discipline, and this book is an attempt to contribute to developing this important cognitive resource. By drawing such a map of the digital humanities, we also discuss and critique its strengths and weaknesses, through a critical digital humanities, where the use of computers and computer culture within the field, and more broadly within society and culture, is itself under scrutiny.

There is no single understanding of digital humanities as such, and we

can find a lot of different definitions from practitioners who use the term in multiple ways depending on their fields. Indeed, digital humanists are 'already united in their dislike of their own label, their dogged insistence that everything that's being done has been going on since 1982 (or 1949 or 1736)' (Meeks 2012). There is also the suspicion that the digital humanities represents a 'management-friendly' means of disciplining faculty or that digital humanists are selling out the very principles of the humanities in their use of new-fangled technology. Changing to the term 'digital humanities', as Hayles argues, was meant to signal that the field had emerged from the low-prestige status of 'a support service into a genuinely intellectual endeavour with its own professional practices, rigorous standards, and exciting theoretical explorations' (Hayles 2012). However, this has not quietened the sense that digital humanities has controversial implications for the humanities and the university. Indeed, we agree, but we will argue throughout the book that digital humanities is an important contributor to the humanities and to developing 'computational' thinking more generally. Whether this will strengthen the existing contours of the humanities or result in a radical reconfiguration remains to be seen.

The 'digital humanities' can be usefully contrasted with what Sterne (2015: 18) has called the 'analogue humanities', a term he uses as a heuristic for thinking about what the humanities are and how they contrast and intersect with the digital humanities. He argues: 'the analog humanities refers to a nexus of methodological, technological, and institutional conditions across the humanities that have only come into clear focus in retrospect. They refer to the cultural and material infrastructures on which humanists depended and still depend. They were (and are) not uniform across fields. Just as "there is no single vision of the digital humanities, nor can a single vision be possible" . . . we could say the same for the analog formations of humanistic scholarship' (2015: 19).[4] This definition is useful in that it points to the importance of materiality and cultural techniques in relation to the epistemology and practices specific to a field of inquiry. Whilst it might overstate the disjuncture between 'analogue' and 'digital', it draws attention to the way in which epistemology and practice change in relation to changes in media of storage, processing and transmission.[5]

We argue that even the non-digital will become bound up in the preservation possibilities offered by the digital. So the newly digital archive as documentation of the passing of time becomes increasingly critical, both as a source of historical understanding and as a site of identity and culture. It also becomes increasingly encoded in a form of digital knowledge representation (see Folsom 2007). Indeed, we now live within a time of computational abundance which we might think of in relation to the ques-