



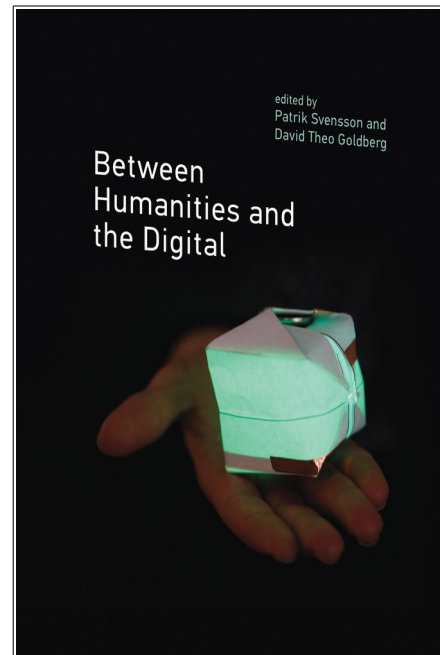
Reviews

Between Humanities and the Digital, edited by Patrik Svensson and David Theo Goldberg. The MIT Press, 2015, xiv + 574 pp, £31.95, ISBN: 978-0-262-02868-4. Language: English

In recent years there have been a slew of publications that have sought to reflect critically on the rapidly-developing field of digital humanities, from *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (2012) and *Understanding Digital Humanities* (2012), to *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader* (2013), *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities* (2014) and the *New Companion to Digital Humanities* (2016). The current volume presents a further contribution in this vein.

What *Between Humanities and the Digital* proposes to add is a ‘field-defining’, ‘inspirational and bridge-building’ (p. 1) work that embraces the more ‘traditional’, instrumentalist approaches that seek to enhance humanities research via the application of digital tools, as much as it does critical, cultural-studies-inflected readings of the digital, and everything else ‘in between’. Calls to establish this kind of balanced approach are made in most of the recent work listed above such that, in and of itself, this will not render the volume ‘field-defining’. However, it is still heartening to see such an extensive embrace of more marginalised voices in DH in respect of their approach to the digital – those of people who do not normally, or have only just started to, consider themselves ‘digital humanists’ – alongside those that can be heard in virtually all the recent anthologies on the topic. In this respect, I particularly enjoyed reading the chapters by Nick Montfort on computational literature, Jennifer González on the representation of race in online art projects, and Chandra Mukerji on the power play in evidence at different junctures in the history of technology, from the Renaissance to the present day, to name just a few.

The result of this ‘comprehensive’ approach is a compendious work that runs to nearly 600 pages, including thirty-five individual chapters, plus a final ‘provocation’ by N. Katherine Hayles regarding the ‘revisionist rather than revolutionary’ (p. 503) approach to the field taken by most of the contributors. After a brief introduction by its editors, the volume is divided into three sections, each preceded by an outline of its intended focus. These sections



are dedicated to: I, scoping the field of DH in the broadest sense; II, a more detailed look at the way that DH ‘inflects’ a range of humanities fields and disciplines; and III, reflections on ‘knowledge production, learning and infrastructure’. As the section descriptors indicate, *Between Humanities and the Digital*, like many other recent volumes, aims to address institutional and infrastructural aspects of the emergence of DH, as well as the academic debates at its core.

But, despite the promise of an ‘expansive and large-scale vision of the field’ (p. 1), and the genuine balance achieved with respect to the ‘instrumental digital humanities’ versus ‘humanities-based studies of the digital’ divide, my own reading of the volume as a humanities scholar whose disciplinary base is in modern foreign languages was somewhat frustrated. Although in the introduction, the volume’s editors claim that it will include ‘a span of disciplines and areas including cinema studies, humanities computing, English, archeology, media studies, science and technology studies, history, art theory, library science, religious studies, media history, gender studies, computer science, ethnic studies, and comparative literature’ (p. 4), some of which, like religious studies/theology and archaeology, are often overlooked in DH scholarship, it makes no mention whatsoever of ‘modern languages’ qua discipline.

It is true that there are a good range of chapters in the volume that detail interesting DH projects taking place in, or focusing on, countries other than the US/UK: Nishant Shah’s chapter deals with educational projects in India; Cecilia Lindhé’s focuses on a project to study the representation of the Virgin Mary in Sweden during the Middle Ages by modeling medieval churches as ‘multimodal spaces’ (p. 195); Larissa Hjorth’s chapter concerns the use of camera phones and locative media in East Asia; Lisa Parks’s deals with media infrastructures in Iran and elsewhere; and Todd Presner’s looks at the use of social media in recent uprisings across the Middle East/North Africa. There are also a handful of other chapters that advance arguments about extending the scope of DH research so that it becomes ‘less white’ (to quote Tara McPherson, in Gold, ed, pp. 139-60) and less Anglo/Euro-centric. For example, Geraldine Heng and Michael Widner discuss a project to envision what a ‘global Middle Ages’ might be; and most importantly, Anne Cong-Huyen makes the case for a ‘transnational Asian/American’ DH. But there is no direct engagement in any of this with the (trans-)discipline that is modern languages – despite the great irony of so much of DH’s development having taken place under the auspices of the Modern Language Association.

Modern languages is not without guilt in terms of its absence from such debates as have been had thus far regarding the scope of digital humanities. Modern languages is ‘difficult to read’ as a discipline, and the close relationship of corpus linguistics to humanities computing has probably entailed a desire in self-proclaimed DH to consign its relationship to modern languages to its (pre)history. Modern linguists have also not been quick to embrace DH. But linguistically (as well as culturally) ‘sensitive’ readings of the digital can help us move beyond Anglophone (and Anglocentric) modes of thinking that, unless contested, cast themselves as universal truths. And this opening up to the contributions that modern languages might make to digital humanities would perhaps have contributed to an even more thorough attempt to ‘deprovincialize’ the field than that offered here.

References

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