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UTokyo Online Education 学術俯瞰講義 2018 Albert Charles Muller

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DIGITAL HUMANITIES AS FIELD

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WHAT IS DIGITAL HUMANITIES?

- Digital Humanities is an umbrella term for a wide array of practices for creating, applying, and interpreting new digital and information technologies. These practices are not limited to conventional humanities departments, but affect every humanistic field at the university, including history, anthropology, arts and architecture, information studies, film and media studies, archaeology, geography, and the social sciences.

WHAT IS IT CALLED?

- “Humanities Computing” was standard up to 2001
- “Digital Humanities”: coined by University of Virginia librarian John Unsworth in response to a rejection of “humanities computing” by publisher
- “Digital Scholarship”
- To be distinguished from “Digital Culture,” and “Media Studies.”

BUT DIGITAL CULTURE INFLUENCES DIGITAL HUMANITIES

- We rely on software of various kinds to live our lives, and the way that software is designed is based on certain types of philosophies and policies, most importantly, those of openness.
- The designing of such a thing as the Web, for example with its openness, could only happen due to a visionary type of thinking. This type of thinking has had profound impact on the way 21st century scholars do their research. (more on **openness** below)

TECHNICAL TRANSITIONS

- Scholars began using mainframe computers to analyze humanistic data as early as the 1950's and 60's
- Mid-80's – the birth of the PC; people begin to digitize texts on a large scale.
- 1994-95 the Web and new meaning of collaboration
- Present-day “digital humanities” is mainly characterized by trends that have appeared since the emergence of the PC, and even more, since the development of the WWWeb
- Late 90's-2000: Arrival of Unicode, enabling collaboration in East Asia.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Collaborative:**
- First, in the traditional sense of the example of the sciences, whose work has always been intrinsically *team-based*, often engaging humanists, technologists, social scientists, artists, architects, information scientists, and computer scientists in conceptualizing and solving problems. This is seen especially in the building of collaborative tools on data-building web projects.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Collaborative:**
- Second, in the newer sense of collaboration with one's audience and users, whose feedback gradual, improves—**curates**—imperfect sets of data that have been placed on the web for consumption.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Interdisciplinary:** Digital Humanities scholarship not only cuts across and unifies traditional fields in the humanities (literature, history, the arts) but also brings the tools—both technological and methodological—of other disciplines to bear on the analysis of culture and society.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Socially Engaged:** Digital Humanities scholarship opens and extends the reach of the university by bridging diverse communities. Building on the community engagement and activism of the professional schools, digital humanists often work with external cultural institutions (museums, archives, historical societies, and libraries) as well as with local communities, advocacy groups, non-profits, and schools.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Global:** The new audience for Digital Humanities scholarship and pedagogy is truly global. Because this scholarship is primarily web-based, the general public can not only access it but also engage critically with it.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Rapidly Changing in Character:** The fields, its tools, its aims, its evaluation are advancing so quickly that things that were written about DH ten years ago barely retain their relevance.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IS CHARACTERIZED AS:

- **Marked by the notion of "Openness"**: Open journals, open data, and so forth. This trend grows out of historical developments in software that go back to the 80's and 90's.

“OPENNESS”

- In the realm of “code” the 80's and 90's saw the beginning of territorial battles between those on the sides of “**proprietary**” (Microsoft, Apple) and “**open**” software (Richard Stallman [GNU], Linus Torvalds [Linux]—this latter group having far greater ideological influence)
- Open Source – computing model that gradually influenced thinking about culture. Eric Raymond, “The Cathedral and the Bazaar” (1997)

FREEDOM AND OPENNESS OF DATA

- Creative Commons (2001): Created by Larry Lessig (image, blog) (The Future of Ideas)
- Initiated to stop large corporations from making profit on the work of others (Disney).
- Open source software continues to hold a strong influence on the critical points of the web: Linux servers, Apache, Java, Perl, Android, XML, HTML...

TWO WAVES OF DH

- The first wave of digital humanities work was **quantitative**, mobilizing the search and retrieval powers of the database, automating corpus linguistics, stacking hypercards into critical arrays.
- **The process of digitization itself.** This was a huge task in the beginning, since no one had done it before. There is still much digitization remaining to be done of historical documents and so forth, but nowadays the techniques are well-established; OCR is always improving, resolution is always improving, computer memory is always increasing.

TWO WAVES OF DH

- The second wave is **qualitative, interpretive, experiential, emotive, generative** in character. Once data has been digitized, a wide variety of techniques, tools, and methodologies can be created for approaching . This, in the second stage, scholars pay attention to complexity, medium specificity, historical context, analytical depth, critique and interpretation. ...
- **Emergence of AI: a "Third Wave"?**

A NEW PARADIGM

- All of the above new dimensions, taken together, result in an entirely different **paradigm** of research for the humanities fields, which no humanist can properly ignore. Most importantly,
- **“Crowd-sourcing curation”** as a central feature of the future of the Humanities disciplines. ...But many "DH projects" only go to the rudimentary level of using the web as a place for team-based collaboration, without taking full advantage of the second level dimension.