

Without losing sight of the theoretical sophistication, attention to history, and concern for the practices of actual people that has characterized the most productive turns in media studies, I am hopeful that the digital humanities moment might allow the field of media studies to fully embrace its charter and more rigorously interrogate the role of computation and computational thinking in everyday life. This means teaching computational processes as part of media studies, embracing the notions of tinkering, coding, and critical making that are at the heart of digital humanities work, and expecting our students and ourselves to produce rich, open, and multimodal arguments, artifacts, and interventions. In other words, borrowing the best of digital humanities practice and applying it in a media studies context, which is especially important for those strands of the discipline that consider emergent media.

So what is the best of the digital humanities? Simultaneously method, ethic, and attitude, there are as many versions of the digital humanities as there are practitioners. The term “digital humanities” has been applied to the critique of electronic literature, digital history projects, text encoding, archeological simulations, bibliographic showcases, network mapping, distant reading, geospatial visualizations, tool building, and projects designed to preserve and share cultural heritage. These efforts might be too diverse to comfortably wear a single disciplinary label, but over the years DH practitioners have developed a shared and recognizable set of operating principles. Each of these realms offers the possibility of interplay and exchange with media studies, and much overlap is already happening.

The DH method is at its core one of praxis, if we take that notion to refer an iterative cycle of theory and practice designed to stimulate engagement and action. It is, occasionally contentiously, about making things, “screwing around,” and then reflecting on and refining the method until the next set of questions can be asked. Recognizably

humanities-inflected hermeneutics are, in the best cases, a crucial part of the development phase (in the selection of tools; in the assumptions guiding representation) and enabled by the projects themselves. Such a method is not wholly foreign to the field of media studies. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick has pointed out, media studies departments and scholars have long confronted a tension between theory and practice, and have often resolved that the best work is done across this tension. Beyond such an engagement with praxis, we might also acknowledge burgeoning media studies movements such as cultural analytics and certain variants of platform or software studies where praxis-based methods are regularly applied, and where computational fluency is demanded.

An ethic is trickier to attribute, but perhaps the most salient characteristics of the community of digital humanities practitioners are commitments to collaboration, open forms of scholarly communication, and efforts challenging the norms of scholarly practice. Here, then, is a locus of real affinity with media studies. Much digital humanities work is about making public something currently hidden, and the field has collectively built on this desire for openness in the organization of its scholarly communications apparatus. Media studies has felt the same imperative, as evidenced by the open and experimental nature of Flow, Antennae, Media Fields, Mediascape, an active Ttwitterati, Media Commons, in Media Res, and others. These disruptive publishing efforts have an analogue in conferences such as Flow, with its effort on replacing paper reading with conversation, and in an increased emphasis on workshops at larger conferences. In these situations, as at the many THATCamps that largely serve DH constituencies, the process itself is an interrogation of established scholarly practices. Aside from the collaboration required to design, build, edit, and maintain these publishing platforms and conferences, media studies tends to not emphasize collaborative large-scale research projects in the way common to DH. This will likely change as media studies embraces

praxis as a method for new media work, as compelling projects of this sort often demand a range of skill sets difficult to find in a single scholar.

The commonalities between these two fields have a great deal to do with their shared engagement of computational processes and with the changes in communications and networking that computation has enabled. Practitioners of the digital humanities think through and about digital media, out of interest, of course, but also because mastery of the method demands this sort of engagement. It is at this point - in the critical interrogation of emergent media systems and the social and cultural spheres in which they are situated - that media studies scholars might well drive the conversation. Our own emphasis on theory and cultural studies should ideally have prepared those of us interested in digital media as an object of study with a method and ethic of our own. As we extend and apply the tools of the digital humanities to our studies of emergent media, we should remember to ask questions of power, taste, narrative, and resistance, both so that our work will continue to be thoughtful and so that these questions might be asked at other moments when the digital humanities are invoked.