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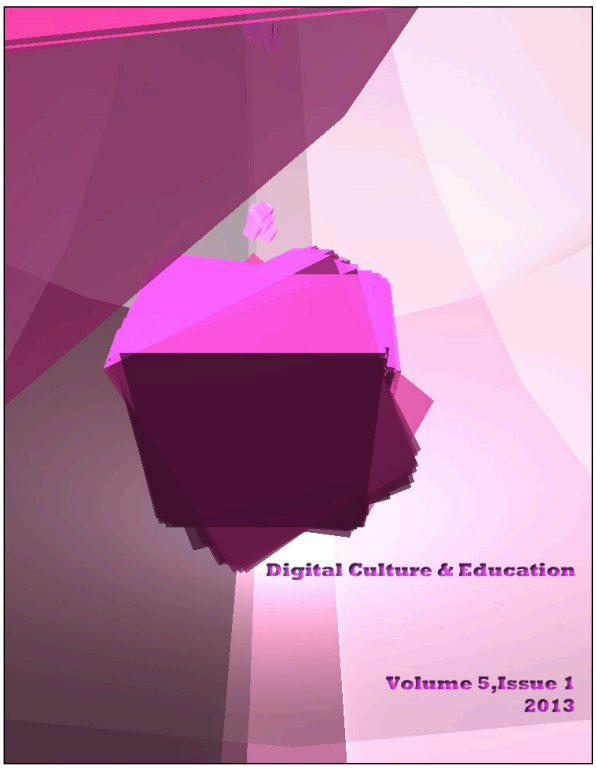

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Matthew K. Gold (ed.). (2012). *Debates in the digital humanities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN 9780816677955.516 pages. USD 34.95.

Matthew K Gold has brought together a number of leading figures in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* in a broad-ranging collection of articles that attempt to outline the contested, eclectic, and progressing landscape of computing in the humanities. At first glance the premise of the book may seem odd to those new to the field; the very idea that there are high-level academic debates about the construction and application of computing technology within humanities research. However, apart from the distinctive culture of building and coding digital tools, these often heated debates largely constitute the field of the digital humanities and reveal its growing maturity. Gold's book is a commendable attempt to delineate the discursive nature of computational tools within the humanities, rather than reconstitute a formulaic, passive and instrumental understanding of computing.

In Gold's introduction and framing of the book, largely focusing upon North American issues, he does perhaps overstate the so-called rise of the digital humanities. The field is perhaps not advancing any more quickly than any other field in the humanities and often the 'determinist' and overly optimistic lens in which computing is viewed clouds other realities. A sophisticated, contextual and applied understanding of computing is far from the norm in humanities education and the field is not so much 'rising' but merely broadening to encompass all sorts of computing in education, and unfortunately, much of this is not really research nor humanities focused. Patrik Svensson discusses this in his article 'Beyond the Big Tent' where he reflects upon the boundary-making in the community and the highly contested and different modes of engagement with computing in the humanities.

Gold has divided the book into six sections which serve to introduce some of the more established understandings of the landscape of the field. The sections are; defining, theorising, critiquing, practising, teaching, and envisioning a future for the digital humanities.

Contributions in defining the digital humanities section discuss the values of the field, its boundaries, its institutionalisation, and the tensions between 'making and interpreting digital' objects. The 'defining the digital humanities' debates is perhaps as old as the field itself, and as it is one if the boundary-making debates of the community,

it is not going to be settled quickly. Still, the contributors in this section do take the worn-out 'defining' debate forward somewhat.

The contributors in the theorising the digital humanities section concentrate on the debates surrounding theory and practice; again an important discussion within a field that has software development at its core. Joanna Drucker warns of some of the dangers of software tool use in humanities research if humanistic contexts are not well understood. As many software tools used in the humanities are developed for scientific enquiry, there are dangers that the knowledge they represent may be understood empirically and through 'fixed frames of reference' and 'standard metrics'. She concludes by arguing that it is not that the digital humanities needs 'theory', but it cannot be humanistic without the theoretical, conceptual, and relativist readings of technology provided by humanities.

The section on teaching the digital humanities demarcates one of the newer and somewhat neglected debates in the field. Indeed Luke Waltzer stresses in his article 'Digital Humanities and the Ugly Stepchildren' of American Higher Education' that this is because the field has aligned itself to the traditional 'output' structures of the academy that value research over teaching . He goes on to state that because the field has an overdependence on projects and grants and short-term contracted work , there is little time for 'hard to measure areas like curriculum and pedagogy'. Indeed, the debates in section reflect some of the larger tensions within the humanities as a whole and the role of teaching of learning within it. And these tensions are not eased by the new complexities of computing.

The teaching section, as with the others in this extensive book, contain numerous shorter blog-post, but dare I say I am not convinced of the value of including then in an edited collection, even one about the digital humanities. Perhaps a better approach would have been to include them in the online version where fresh and novel applications could have been attempted. However, the actual review of the book was completed online through an open peer-to-peer review process, so perhaps some of this momentum will carry into the online version and create precedents for other books of this kind.

The book is a valuable contribution to the digital humanities in terms of outlining the debates in the field, even if the debates outlined are almost exclusively theoretical with very little reference to the important technical milestones in the field. To many researchers in the humanities, technology is often viewed empirically as 'a thing', an object that exists in a functionally, utilitarian context free of the other debates that constitute humanities research. However, once computing technology impacts upon the outputs and significance of humanities research—and the way that it is done—there is a need to understand computing not just as ' a thing', but also as a part of the way we construct and advance knowledge. As an introduction to some of the debates that surround computing in the humanities, especially for someone that may be new to these debates, this collection is an excellent example of how critical, interpretive humanities scholars are advancing computing within their own discursive structures.

Biographical Statement

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