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Review of Berry, David M., and Anders Fagerjord, eds., *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017)

In early 2014, Matthew Kirschenbaum published an essay entitled "What Is 'Digital Humanities,' and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things about It?".[1] Punning on the title of a 1979 article on stylistics by Stanley Fish, Kirschenbaum's piece joins the growing roster of essays and books that reflexively seek to define the still-emerging intersection of digital tools, methods, and approaches with humanistic study.[2] The latest to join the line up of texts that are aimed at those who might have heard things – terrible, or otherwise – about the digital humanities and who might want to know more is David M. Berry and Anders Fagerjord's *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age*.

Indeed, this book sits within a distinctive generic space. As the authors note, "this book will not teach you how to create a relational database or program an advanced algorithm". On the other hand, the work also will not teach "how to interpret archaeological findings or a Victorian novel, either" (8). Instead, *Digital Humanities* aims to survey the histories, eruptions, and epistemic contexts within which its eponymous field – if "DH" can even be called a field – has sprung.[3]

Certainly, Berry and Fagerjord are not the first to explore this meta-terrain.[4] However, as a clearly articulated, accurate, and concisely critical introduction, this book is exemplary. Within a relatively short page count, *Digital Humanities* manages to span the genealogies of DH; the epistemic nuances of "computational thinking"; the implications of computational modelling and archives; the institution-wide infrastructural changes of which DH forms a part; ideas of digital methods and tools; interface criticism; and their perceived future need for a "critical" digital humanities.

This breadth is both an admirable trait but it does also present a structural challenge. For it is not always clear to me at whom this volume is aimed. While the work purports to be "an essential book for students and researchers" I wondered whether, for instance, the discussion of markup schemas, such as TEI, on page thirty should have first defined what a markup language is and does. Certainly, this would be redundant if the book is aimed at those with a technical background (as I have). However, if it is to be an introductory volume, then even a short glossary would, I think, have been helpful.

On the other hand, for someone who wanted to get their head quickly around the scholarly literature, the different sub-groups, and the politics of DH, this work is an excellent primer. It concisely lays out the different historical groupings but also the challenging political contexts within which DH has grown. For instance, need to know what "hack vs yack" means? This book has you covered. The work is also, I felt, mostly fair on the political challenges of the digital

1   Matthew Kirschenbaum, 'What Is "Digital Humanities," and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things about It?', *Differences*, 25.1 (2014), 46–43.
2   Stanley E. Fish, 'What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things about It?-Part II', *Boundary 2*, 8.1 (1979), 129 <https://doi.org/10.2307/303144>.
3   Alan Liu, 'Is Digital Humanities a Field? — An Answer From the Point of View of Language', *Journal of Siberian Federal University, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7 (2013), 1546–52.
4   See, for just a selection, *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. by Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Steven E. Jones, *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2014); *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. by Susan Schreibman, Raymond George Siemens, and John Unsworth (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2016); *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Daniel Allington, Sarah Brouillette, and David Golumbia, 'Neoliberal Tools (and Archives): A Political History of Digital Humanities', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2016 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/neoliberal-tools-archives-political-history-digital-humanities/> [accessed 29 May 2016].

humanities. Many figures have, for instance, warned of the entanglement of DH within paradigms of neoliberalisation of the humanities. Berry and Fagerjord do not shy from this debate; they express the concerns fairly and call for a greater critical stance within their own fields. This is not a book to proselytize, even while it details the exciting possibilities that digital research work could bring to the humanities.

It is, of course, practically a rule in academic book reviewing that one must find something with which to disagree in the book one is reviewing. Also as usual, this relates to my own sub-area of interest. For, if I were to pick out one area on which to train a slightly more critical gaze, it would probably be the authors' discussion of open access on pages 114-7. I found it curious that, at this point, the citation of preceding work on the subject became much thinner than I would have liked. For instance, there was no citation of either Peter Suber or John Willinsky. I also believe that some, such as David Golumbia, will take issue with Berry and Fagerjord's assertion that an engagement with open access "may also be important for digital humanities to contest attacks on its perceived neoliberalism" (116). Certainly, I stand with Berry and Fagerjord on this, but this is not representative of all thought on the matter.

In all, though, *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique* is a book for our time. It comes just as another wave of assault on "critical" approaches in literary studies rolls over us and asks us to consider what it means to unreflexively adopt digital approaches amid humanist thinking.[5] The work and the authors value computational thinking so long as it is not at the expense of the centuries of humanistic tradition on which it could build. The work thinks about its subject at both the institutional and the personal research level; it is an important book for those "on the ground" doing the research and for university managers who must implement the research architectures that will allow the digital humanities to thrive. While I earlier expressed my qualms about the sometimes deep-end plunges of the material, I would recommend this volume to any newcomer who wanted a fair and true institutional history of the digital humanities. At the same time, many old dogs could also learn a few tricks from this work; a benignly deceptive introductory overview that also serves as a guiding critical compass for the future of the digital humanities.

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5   Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

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