

ATTR Spring Seminar, Athens 13–17 March 2023

Digital Humanities 2.0

Abstracts & Readings

(Preliminary version, primo January)

David M. Berry (University of Sussex)

Digital Humanities 2.0: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and the Humanities

Machine learning has become an important tool for the goal of leveraging technologies around artificial intelligence. The successful turn to machine learning has also been driven by the limited capacities within disciplines to cope with an ever-growing mountain of digital data, so-called Big Data, combined with a political economy that sees huge economic potential in mining this data for research insights and economic outcomes. Indeed, the deployment of machine learning in digital humanities has increasingly begun to resemble other kinds of computational services with a notional layering of abstractions available as code libraries and application programming interfaces (APIs), and also as services available from third parties. To create systems in this way is to already begin to reveal the depth model that is implicit in computational layers, often wrapped inside each other. Whilst the notion of layering in computational systems is very common this is also very much the logic of producing a “black box” that can handle machine learning processing with a simplified interface for inputs and outputs. For example, an important area of machine learning for digital humanities is that of topic modelling. Topic modelling is a technique that uses statistical methods to surface topics in a specific corpus of textual materials. As such it is used to process texts to provide an automated way of discovering structures, in this case topics, that are contained within the texts. However, these systems are often difficult to interpret raising problems of legitimacy, trust and understanding. In response the notion of explainable systems has been offered as a counter to these problems. Explainability raises interesting questions about how a digital infrastructure might “self-document” or “explain” itself. The aim of this talk is to radicalise the notion of explainability within the context of a form of life within the computational milieu, but also think through the implications of interpretability more generally for an ethic of digital humanities practice. I argue that a commitment to an explainable form of life within the digital humanities would not only deepen its ability to explain and communicate its practices but would also reconnect the discipline back to the humanistic notion of a life worth living.

Required reading

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Recommended reading

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Jens-Morten Hanssen (National Library of Norway)

Introduction: The National Library's Digital Research Infrastructure

Jens-Morten is the Head of Section for the NLN's DH-Lab. He and his colleagues will present the infrastructure for digital research at the Library, including most recent developments and project.

Lars Johnsen (National Library of Norway)

Digital Research Methods and Tools:

Accessing the Archives of the National Library of Norway

The digital archives of the National Library are available both for reading through the online library (nb.no) and via the Digital humanities lab (nb.no/dh-lab). DH-lab provides access to features of texts and their building blocks, words and phrases. In the seminar we show how textual features are extracted and their relevance for research questions. For example, we will look at how key words and concepts from one text show up in other texts. Texts are compared and possibly grouped together using measures based on quantitative features, like frequency counts of words, their cooccurrences and the distance between them. The methodological part will concentrate on the relevance of quantitative features, while the tools show how to work with an implementation of these features in the context of DH-lab and the texts provided by the National Library.

Ellen Nesheim Wiger (National Library of Norway)

Bokselskap – Digital Editions, Corpus, Cooperation and Encoding

A presentation about digital text collections, corpus and different types of editions and publishers at the e-book website *Bokselskap* (<https://www.bokselskap.no/>). The website is developed by The Norwegian Literature and Language Association (NSL), with support from The National Library and the Arts Council Norway. I will also talk about useful tools, as well as encoding (TEI) and formats for storage (XML) and presentation (i.e. EPUB, XHTML).

Required preparations

Required joint preparations for these three presentations is to explore the web pages of the NLN. Relevant pages are available in Norwegian only, but all uses would probably get some idea of the services offered and the options available:

- https://www.nb.no/ngram/#1_1_1_1_3_1810%2C2021_2_2_2_12_2
- <https://www.nb.no/dh-lab/>
- <https://www.bokselskap.no/>

Ellen Rees (UiO)

Project Development: From Ph.D. to P.I.

Both empirical evidence gathered from the higher education sector in Norway and research on the development and institutional impact of external research funding suggest that early career scholars are increasingly expected to secure external funding in order to advance their academic careers. Yet grant-writing is a highly idiosyncratic genre, the rules of which are largely implicit and under-communicated. This presentation will make explicit some of the genre expectations inherent in grant-writing, with an emphasis on the role of computational methods in project design within the humanities and adjacent fields.

Required reading

ATTR Grant Templates (PDF)*

Rees, Ellen. 2022. “Norwegian Romantic Nationalisms (NORN).” ERC Advanced Grant Application. (*CONFIDENTIAL*: Please do not distribute to non-participants!)*

Recommended reading

Bloch, Carter, Ebbe Krogh Graversen, and Heidi Skovgaard Pedersen. 2014. “Competitive Research Grants and Their Impact on Career Performance.” *Minerva* 52: 77–96.*

Velarde, Kathia Serrano. 2018. “The Way We Ask for Money... The Emergence and Institutionalization of Grant Writing Practices in Academia.” *Minerva* 56: 85–107.*

Frode Lerum Boasson (NTNU)

Title: TBA

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Required reading

Bushell, Sally, Butler, James O., Hay, Duncan, Hutcheon, Rebecca. 2022. "Digital Literary Mapping: I. Visualizing and Reading Graph Topologies as Maps for Literature." *Cartographica* 57, 1, pp. 11–36.*

Wilkens, Matthew. 2013. "The Geographic Imagination of Civil War-Era American Fiction." *American Literary History* 25, 4, pp. 803-840.*

Recommended reading

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Anders Skare Malvik (NTNU)

The Geographical Unconscious: Of Counting and Close Reading Space in Amalie Skram's Novels

Over the last decade, many digital humanities projects have found ways to extract, count and map placenames from large collections of digitized books. While such projects offer new insights to the study of literary geographies, they are also haunted by an old crux of digital humanities: How do we know that a map of aggregated placenames reflects what's going on in the books from which the placenames were extracted? Indeed, the question of how to productively combine "distant" and "close" reading is still pressing in the digital humanities.

My presentation will deal with this question by combining close reading with quantitative measures of *geomorphemes* (any single words representing space or place). Taking the collected novels of Norwegian writer Amalie Skram (1846–1905) as my example, I will suggest that literature holds a "geographical unconscious" that can be uncovered by counting and visualizing geomorphemes. While such words ("kitchen", "street", "city", "floor", "field") can be ordinary and unnoticeable, they are crucial linguistic building blocks of the spaces that we imagine when we read Skram's fiction. Building on Fredric Jameson's notion of a "political unconscious", I will argue that the distribution of geomorphemes in Skram's novels can be read historically as symbolic structures that negotiate social and political antagonisms over access to space.

Required reading

Bushell, Sally, Butler, James O., Hay, Duncan, Hutcheon, Rebecca. 2022. "Digital Literary Mapping: I. Visualizing and Reading Graph Topologies as Maps for Literature." *Cartographica* 57, 1, pp. 11–36.*

Wilkens, Matthew. 2013. "The Geographic Imagination of Civil War-Era American Fiction." *American Literary History* 25, 4, pp. 803-840.*

Recommended reading

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Mari Lending (Norwegian School of Architecture and Design)

Excursion: Acropolis and the Acropolis Museum

Professor Mari Lending is arranging for a top expert excursion centered on the Acropolis and on the magnificent Acropolis Museum sitting at the foot of the Acropolis hill.

Recommended reading

Lending, Mari. 2009. "Negotiating Absence: Bernhard Tschumi's New Acropolis Museum in Athens", *The Journal of Architecture* 14(5), 567–89.*

Athanasius Antonopoulos (Athens) and Jennifer Knust (Duke)

What is Saved by an Image of an Image of a Manuscript?

Preservation, Destruction, and the Library of Congress's Microfilming Projects, 1949-1952

Between 1949 and 1952, the Library of Congress of the United States sponsored expeditions to monastic libraries in Jerusalem, Sinai, and Mount Athos for the purpose of photographing manuscripts. Designed to collect textual evidence for the International Greek New Testament Project (IGNTP) while also compiling lists of the libraries' contents, the Library's intellectual and diplomatic missions offered microfilms to a wide scholarly audience; interested researchers could contact Library representatives to purchase duplicate copies, thereby avoiding the costs and complications entailed by visits to distant lands. Today, one does not even need to contact the Library; the microfilms are digitized and freely available online. Such philanthropic initiatives made precious cultural objects more readily accessible; even so, they also participated in the wider practice of employing photography as a prelude to destruction and planned obsolescence. Revisiting the role of microfilm, we ask: What is saved and whose interests are served when the sharing of images—or now, image of images—are received as a sign of humanitarian progress and generosity? Who or what places an object or its holding library in need of digitized protection? And what kind of political, economic, and historical agent is an image of an image, whether displayed by a national library or an institution of higher learning? Do we need a new holistic approach to the image of an image? Do we need a new way to present an image of an image in the context of digital humanities? In an era of the transition from a microfilm image to its digital presentation, do we need to accompany this transition with a new theoretical framework with standards based on historical, cultural, ethical, theological (in case of biblical manuscripts or manuscripts with theological texts), or educational factors? Repurposed during and after World War II to capture endangered manuscripts on film, coordinate intelligence gathering, and justify a designation of the United States as leader of "the free world," microfilm was once hailed as a solution to storage dilemmas, an alternative to plunder, and a way of preserving what might otherwise be lost. At this point, however, microfilm is not only obsolete, it is also rapidly disintegrating and, when incorrectly stored, dangerous. A history of the IGNTP, the Library of Congress, and these enthusiastic, Cold War era expeditions calls into question the innocence of digital democratization and its presumed role as an indisputable public good.

Recommended reading

Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Translated by Relia Mazali and Ruvik Danieli. New York: Zone Books, 2012.

Clark, Kenneth W. *Checklist of Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai Microfilmed for the Library of Congress, 1950*. Washington, D. C.: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1952.

Kasotakis, Damanianos. "The Manuscripts of Saint Catherine's Monastery (Sinai) through the Photographic Lens: From Glass Plates to Digital Spectral Imaging." PhD diss. University of Ioannina School of Education, 2021.

Khalil, Osamah F. *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Power, Eugene. *Edition of One: The Autobiography of Eugene B. Power*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, Inc., 1990.

Saunders, Ernest W. *A Descriptive Checklist of Selected Manuscripts in the Monasteries of Mount Athos Microfilmed for the Library of Congress and the International Greek New Testament Project, 1952-53*. Washington, D. C.: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1957.

Weitzmann, K. & Kessler, H. L. *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*. Chicago, Ill. University of Chicago Press, 1971

Weitzmann, K. & Galavaris, G. (1990). *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts*. Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 1990

Naomi Nelson and Andrew Armacost (David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

The Many Lives of Early Manuscripts: The Library's Role(s) in Advancing Interdisciplinary Digital Humanities Projects and Programs.

Libraries, archives, and institutional repositories have been key agents and facilitators in preserving digital content, producing databases and repositories of texts, and supplying image surrogates of cultural heritage items. As stewards of materials, they have a unique role in facilitating access, building connections and communities, and ensuring the visibility of materials.

Digital projects have enabled libraries to continue their historic mission to make materials available and have enabled access in ways that were not previously possible. New methodologies and questions can be matched with a broader range of materials than ever before. While the evolution of technology has brought new insight and discovery, it has also brought a proliferation of overlapping tools, related and competing projects, and a range of successive and iterative undertakings. Interdisciplinary work has increased the range of questions that may be of interest and enabled a growing range of potential projects to support areas of inquiry.

What opportunities exist for repositories participating in this evolving digital landscape? What responsibilities and challenges exist? As the scale of digital content increases how might institutions become stewards of past projects at the same time as they are facilitators of new content? How might the role of Libraries evolve as we reconceptualize our work?

Required reading

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Recommended reading

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Johanne Ostad (National Library of Norway)

**Digitizing the Cultural Heritage of Others:
Policies, Reflections, and Possible Consequences**

The National Library of Norway contains an almost endless amount of material documenting our cultural heritage and history. An important part of this are the private archives, consisting of several hundred shelf meters of original source materials. This encompasses letters, diaries, photos, manuscripts, notes, maps, and much more. The documents all have different provenance, and some stem from other countries or from marginalized groups within our own borders.

The aim of the library is to digitize the entire collection, which implies digitizing not just cultural heritage representing majority Norwegian culture, but also material representing the cultural heritage of others, such as Santal folk tales, Sami letters, and religious texts from

Nepal. Working in the archive, research librarians and archivists prioritize and reflect on a daily basis what and how to digitize this kind of material. But are we sufficiently aware of the possible pitfalls and consequences the digitization might have? Do we possess the right amount of cultural sensitivity and knowledge to know when and how to hold back and when to proceed?

In the course of this session the participants will be presented with examples of actual cases from our digitization work on archive material. They will be encouraged to discuss the different aspects of these cases and share with the group how they suggest dealing with them. The aim of this session is to raise awareness and increase focus on the different facets of working with other peoples' cultural heritage – be it as an archivist, scholar or simply an interested human being.

No readings

[Items marked with an asterisk (*) are available from the ATTR administration.]