

Where's the ML in DH? And Where's the DH in ML? The Relationship between Modern Languages and Digital Humanities, and an Argument for a Critical DHML

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Abstract

This article addresses the relationship of the disciplines of Modern Languages and Digital Humanities in Anglophone academia. It briefly compares and contrasts the nature of these “disciplines” – most frequently conceived of as either inter- or transdisciplines – before going on to examine in some detail the participation of Modern Linguists in Digital Humanities and that of Digital Humanists in Modern Languages. It argues that, while there is growing evidence of work that crosses “disciplinary” boundaries between DH and ML in both directions, more work of this sort needs to be done to optimise the potential of both disciplines. It also makes a particular case for Digital Humanities to remain open to critical cultural studies approaches to digital materials as pertaining to the discipline rather than focusing exclusively on more instrumental definitions of Digital Humanities. This argument is consistent with the concerns raised by other scholars with regard to the need for heterogeneity of approach and in particular for increased cultural criticism in Digital Humanities scholarship. Furthermore, we argue that this is where Modern Linguists can make their most decisive contribution to Digital Humanities research, offering what we term a “critical DHML” approach. We illustrate our arguments with a range of examples from the intersection of ML and DH in the broad field of Hispanic Studies, including the major findings of our own research into digital cultural production in a Latin American context conducted over the last ten years.

A global DH is not one that works towards homogenizing all DH work but rather one that manages to make a heterogeneous landscape enriching for all that participate. [Galina Russell 2015]

In the Digital Humanities, cultural criticism – in both its interpretive and advocacy modes – has been noticeably absent by comparison with the mainstream humanities or, even more strikingly, with “new media studies” (populated as the latter is by net critics, tactical media critics, hacktivists, and so on). We digital humanists develop tools, data, metadata, and archives critically; and we have also developed critical positions on the nature of such resources [...]. But rarely do we extend the issues involved into the register of society, economics, politics, or culture... [Liu 2011]

The lack of intellectual generosity across our fields and departments only reinforces the divide-and-conquer mentality that the most dangerous aspects of modularity underwrite. We must develop common languages that link the study of code and culture. [McPherson 2012, 153]

Introduction

The decision of *DHQ* to start publishing a series of special issues focusing on Digital Humanities “in different languages or regional traditions” is a very welcome development. As Hispanists who have worked for the last decade on critical digital culture/new media studies in a Latin American context this is an initiative that we very much wanted to engage with, and we took as our inspiration the special issue dedicated to Digital Humanities work “in Spanish”. What we address in this article are issues that arose from this initial inspiration but which, however, expand from this to ask questions about what Digital Humanities really is, and what its relationship to Modern Languages (ML) might be; and a converse set of questions about what is happening in Modern Languages and how greater engagement with Digital Humanities is undoubtedly necessary. Our argument is therefore not focused so much on a dialogue with other DH practitioners working in Spanish-language contexts, but on a dialogue with the disciplines – most frequently conceived of as either inter- or transdisciplines – of Digital Humanities and Modern Languages in an Anglophone academic context.

1

We are mindful of the fact that scholars working in Anglophone Digital Humanities institutional contexts are currently very open to, and encouraging, of DH initiatives in other languages and contexts and are keen to foster the “global DH” that Isabel Galina Russell (cited above) has called for (of this, more later). However, we would like to argue that what scholars working within Modern Languages institutional frameworks in Anglophone academia can contribute are a much more diverse range of projects and materials conducted in languages other than English and that may or may not self-identify as pertaining to “Digital Humanities”. (Indeed, such materials and the way in which ML scholars approach them are typically more readily embraced by media and communications studies via denominations such as new media studies, internet studies, or digital cultural studies than they are by Digital Humanities.) Related to this expansion of projects and materials, Modern Linguists also tend to approach their materials through the application of the still very useful methodologies of the critical cultural studies scholar. Such methodologies are of course not altogether lacking in DH, but critics such as Liu and McPherson (cited above) have called for a deeper and more sustained cultural criticism to be developed within DH, and this is one way that Modern Linguists can help shape Digital Humanities as it develops.

2

In this article we therefore propose that the heterogeneity that Galina Russell argues should be allowed to flourish in an ideal “global DH” also has to extend, as some have already argued, to heterogeneity of approach within Digital Humanities itself, so that cultural criticism of digital products and close textual analysis is accorded a more significant role. Furthermore, we concur with Galina Russell that it is time for all the various and different versions of DH to compare and contrast their situatedness globally, hopefully eschewing the construction of any sense of centre/periphery or “one true DH” as the exercise unfolds. And moreover, as DH embeds itself within academia across the globe, it is also time to be alert to the dangers of institutionalisation – of “Balkanisation” – so that this new (inter/trans)discipline does not lose the ability to speak in the vernacular of the humanities, instead keeping alive the “common languages” that allow it to dialogue with earlier (inter/trans)disciplinary frameworks such as ML.^[2] We propose that a name for one such a common language might just be “critical DHML”.

3

Definitions #1: Digital Humanities

Digital Humanities has developed rapidly over the past several decades, from supportive “humanities computing” in the 1980s, through the adoption of the now accepted “Digital Humanities” label from 2004 onwards [Schreibman et al. 2004], to the much more self-possessed discipline that it is today, with its own centres, networks, journals and self-

4

identifying Digital Humanists. Part of this latter phase of DH's development have been the illuminating and ongoing debates about its nature and shape, with debates on DH discussion lists, and recent publications in the field – most notably *Debates in the Digital Humanities* [Gold 2012] and *Understanding Digital Humanities* [Berry 2012]^[3] – that have sought to reflect critically on the development and consolidation of the discipline, flagging up some of the lacunae and aporias in its theory and praxis. While not wanting to spend too much time going over very familiar ground for a *DHQ* readership, we highlight below some of the key issues and tensions in the definition of DH that help us to identify where ML scholars might best fit in.

Digital Humanities is most often conceived of as an “interdiscipline” welding together computing and the traditional humanities. With respect to the complex interdisciplinary nature of DH, Julie Thompson Klein gives a very detailed account of this issue in her *Interdisciplining Digital Humanities: Boundary Work in an Emerging Field* [Thompson Klein 2015]. Of particular interest, is her discussion of two different types of interdisciplinarity at work in DH: instrumental/strategic/opportunistic interdisciplinarity which seeks to foster discourse between disciplines to “create a product” or “meet a designated pragmatic need”, as opposed to critical or reflexive interdisciplinarity which “interrogates the dominant structure of knowledge and education with the aim of transforming them” [Thompson Klein 2015, 18]. Arguably, it is the latter form of interdisciplinarity that we, as ML scholars, see as most clearly aligned with our own objectives.

Furthermore, we note that DH scholars have deliberately and productively sought to leave the definition of DH as open as possible, with the editorial “welcome” in the first issue of *DHQ* not stipulating the boundaries of DH, but rather inviting it to be defined by its contributors [Flanders et al. 2007, para. 5]. Others such as Alvarado have urged, in confessional mode, “Let’s be honest — there is no definition of Digital Humanities, if by definition we mean a consistent set of theoretical concerns and research methods that might be aligned with a given discipline, whether one of the established fields or an emerging, transdisciplinary one” [Alvarado 2012, 50]. This gesture towards transdisciplinarity, or disciplinary openness aimed at addressing complex research questions that do not sit neatly within any traditional discipline, is something that we welcome, and that offers rich possibilities for cross-fertilisations with ML, as with a range of other disciplines. Thompson Klein conceives of transdisciplinarity as a framework which evidences similar critical potential to critical/reflexive interdisciplinarity and she makes clear the relationship of a transdisciplinary DH to some of the other fields of critical enquiry that are the basis of much ML research: “*Transdisciplinarity* in DH is also aligned with ‘transgressive’ critique and critical imperatives in other interdisciplinary fields of cultural studies, media and communication studies, women’s and gender studies [...]” [Thompson Klein 2015, 21].

Yet, despite this disciplinary openness, scholars have at the same time recognised that as DH takes shape, inevitably certain practices emerge and come to be accepted as the norm. Indeed, the same *DHQ* editors noted earlier in their editorial that,

Digital Humanities is by its nature a hybrid domain, crossing disciplinary boundaries and also traditional barriers between theory and practice, technological implementation and scholarly reflection. But *over time this field has developed its own orthodoxies, its internal lines of affiliation and collaboration that have become intellectual paths of least resistance.* [Flanders et al. 2007, para. 3, our emphasis]

Thus, as has been recognised widely by the DH scholarly community, even if rigid definitions of DH are theoretically avoided, the academic practice that goes on beneath the DH rubric creates a kind of common-law definition that quickly acknowledges “orthodoxies” and “intellectual paths of least resistance”. If these orthodoxies are starting to take shape, we now look at DH scholars who have recently outlined the *modus operandi* of DH to see how ML might contribute to these debates and position itself in fruitful dialogue with DH.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s work has been at the forefront of debates on DH’s shape and its future direction, and her observations provide a particularly useful delineation of the discipline, and, in our view, of where ML can fit. Fitzpatrick argues that DH has two concurrent but quite different *modus operandi*: one that “bring[s] the tools and techniques of digital media to bear on traditional humanistic questions” and another that “bring[s] humanistic modes of inquiry to bear

on digital media” [Lopez et al. 2015]. She notes elsewhere that such differences of approach “often produce significant tension” [Fitzpatrick 2012, 13–14], such that, for many “hard core” and quite pragmatic Digital Humanists the second approach is separated off from DH to form a “cousin discipline” that goes by the name of critical cybercultural studies, internet studies or new media studies. Nevertheless, Fitzpatrick goes on to make a plea for retaining the plurality of approach that DH theoretically embraces:

The particular contribution of the Digital Humanities, however, lies in its exploration of the difference that the digital can make to the kinds of work that we do as well as to the ways that we communicate with one another. These new modes of scholarship and communication will best flourish if they, like the Digital Humanities, are allowed to remain plural. [Fitzpatrick 2012, 14]

It is certainly true that the former of the two ways identified by Fitzpatrick has seen exponential growth in recent years. From the preservation and archiving of manuscripts via digital means to data mining methodologies for large corpora of humanities materials, our broad field of the humanities has seen sweeping changes to its practice, with digital tools enabling humanities research to achieve a breadth and arguably also a depth never before seen. Robust models have been put forward for DH as regards this first path, and new tools and methodologies are constantly under development. 10

It is arguably the second of these two paths – the “bringing humanistic modes of inquiry to bear on digital media” – that has been under-theorised and under-represented in debates on the nature and shape of Digital Humanities. This is not to say that the scholarship is not taking place – a significant amount of work on digital cultural production is taking place across a variety of disciplines –; rather, the issue is that this scholarship, and the debates arising from it, do not always find their way into discussions of DH. There are multiple factors that have led to this, including the pragmatics of a field that is large and unwieldy, and also the fact that scholars of digital cultural production might not necessarily self-identify as Digital Humanists, and their publication outlets, conferences, and arenas for debate may not coincide with those preferred by Digital Humanists. 11

If Fitzpatrick set out a neat binary division in the modus operandi of DH, in an alternative but complementary conceptualisation of what DH is, David Berry conceives of it as a series of waves of development, arguing that 12

first-wave Digital Humanities involved the building of infrastructure in the studying of humanities texts through digital repositories, text markup and so forth, whereas second-wave Digital Humanities expands the notional limits of the archive to include digital works, and so bring to bear the humanities’ own methodological toolkits to look at “born-digital” materials, such as electronic literature (e-lit), interactive fiction (IF), web-based artefacts and so forth. [Berry 2012, 4]

While these two waves synchronise with Fitzpatrick’s discussion of the different modes of DH scholarship, Berry then goes on to argue that third-wave Digital Humanities would constitute cases where as much attention is paid to what difference the digital makes in the study of digital cultural production as it is to the cultural aspects of the production itself. In other words, this would involve supplementing “the humanities’ own methodological toolkits” with theoretical insights from software, critical code and platform studies.

This is a point that is best exemplified in some of Tara McPherson’s work where she argues that we need to understand computer programming in order to perceive the politics embedded in its development, and thus be able to critique the resultant technologies for the ways in which they replicate those political agendas. More specifically, McPherson argues that we need to grasp the way that programming languages have typically been based on modularity and “lenticular logics”^[4] which curb relationality and “privilege[...] fragmentation” [McPherson 2012, 144], and that those same concepts also underpin the “covert racial logic” of the post-civil rights era in the USA and account for the limitations of 1960s identity politics, such that the architecture of contemporary computing is, from its very base, predestined to best represent a particular, hegemonic worldview. 13

Furthermore, Berry also argues that third-wave Digital Humanities researchers should endeavour to challenge unhelpful disciplinary boundaries, as well as problematise “the ‘hard-core’ of the humanities, the unspoken assumptions and ontological foundations which support the ‘normal’ research that humanities scholars undertake on an everyday basis” 14

[Berry 2012, 4]. This endeavour to challenge disciplinary boundaries is one which, as we argue in this article, is pertinent to all of us, ML included. We would also suggest that the particular “hard-core” of the humanities that might be fruitfully challenged in ML would include national or area studies paradigms that still structure our departments and research projects but that need to be problematised in order to ensure that our research is capable of analysing materials that exist beyond such paradigms, and that our teaching remains relevant in a globalising Higher Education sector. In summary, this third-wave Digital Humanities that is as critical of the digital as it is of the cultural, and which is open to tearing down disciplinary boundaries as well as internal orthodoxies where necessary, is essentially the basis for what Berry and others now term a “critical” Digital Humanities.^[5]

If, as these publications suggest, the time is ripe for some serious critical reflection in this regard, we argue here that engagement with the discipline of Modern Language studies and, in particular, with the work that is done by ML scholars in the field of Digital Humanities understood most broadly, is particularly relevant and can contribute productively to the further development of DH.^[6] As DH continues to mature and see itself less as providing tools, and more as enabling critical ways of thinking, ML can contribute linguistically- and culturally-specific cultural studies approaches to digital materials, a contestation of assumptions regarding (unstated) Anglophone models of the digital, and a re-thinking of area studies, all of which we set out below.

15

Definitions #2: Modern Language Studies

As regards the contributions that Modern Languages can make to the Digital Humanities debates, recent interrogations within our own discipline mean that we find ourselves in a position which encourages us to engage with these questions. For, just as DH has been attempting to define itself, so too, ML has faced the need to examine its own practice. In particular, a challenge for ML has been taking up the gauntlet of the Worton report, which charged it very prominently with the task of promoting a “clear and compelling identity for Modern Languages as a humanities discipline” [Worton 2009, 37].

16

The need for Modern Languages to articulate its identity “as a humanities discipline” whilst still negotiating its position as what is essentially a transdisciplinary exercise – and with diverse forms of interdisciplinarity to be found in the work of many individual ML scholars to boot – has been a constant problem. ML has always had to grapple with this tension: on the one hand, the specificity of ML-qua-discipline, and the need to articulate what ML scholars have in common and that makes our research distinctive in comparison with that conducted by scholars working in other disciplinary contexts; and on the other, the fact that ML is, in effect, a multiplicity of disciplines (ML scholars are, variously, historians, literary scholars, film studies scholars, sociolinguists, and so forth). Indeed, indicative of this understanding of ML as constituting a multiplicity of disciplines is the key change in our draft subject benchmark statements in 2015 which moved from identifying the “discipline” as “modern language studies” (as it appeared in the previous 2007 statements) to identifying it as “languages, cultures and societies”, precisely in order to clarify the range of humanities disciplines across which we work [QAA 2015]. ML has thus been faced with the challenge of what Charles Forsdick has called “prevent[ing] the interdisciplinary from becoming the undisciplined” [Forsdick 2011, 42]. Those of us researching in Modern Languages of necessity start off from this basis of multiplicity and yet (attempted) coherence: negotiations of our identity as ML scholars, *and* being constantly engaged in a trans- and interdisciplinary exercise.^[7]

17

The trans-, as well as inter-, disciplinary nature of Modern Languages is perhaps what makes us so difficult to “read” from the perspective of other, often more consolidated, humanities disciplines. Indeed, to take this statement quite literally, we may as frequently seek to publish our research in gender or film studies journals as we do in those dedicated specifically to Hispanism or Latin American studies, for example. Equally, particularly before the very recent consolidation of Digital Humanities as a discipline with departments, centres, journals, and so on, the use of digital technologies at all stages of the DH research process often led to the circumvention of the traditional circuits of cultural capital, providing greater flexibility, but a research field that was more diffuse, multiple and ephemeral.^[8] And perhaps because both Modern Languages and Digital Humanities share similar issues with disciplinarity, and therefore with “readability” – and this despite the general belief that both ML and DH are all about dialogue and translation across (disciplinary and/or linguistic) boundaries –, this should encourage us all in both ML and DH to strive to develop

18

common languages between us, to keep the doors open to dialogue even if we all also need to strive to articulate coherent disciplinary identities for more pragmatic, institutional purposes. Furthermore, this has to be seen as a two-way dialogue: on the one hand, ML can benefit enormously from the insights of DH, which have shown us new ways of working and thinking; on the other, as we argue below, DH can also benefit from ML's interventions in its debates.

Relationships: Where's the ML in DH? Where's the DH in ML?

With regard to the benefits that Modern Languages has experienced in its engagement with Digital Humanities, digital technologies have, in a variety of ways, changed the way in which we research as ML scholars, across the whole cycle of the research process, from textual preservation, through analysis, to archiving and dissemination. Medieval manuscript scholarship was one of the first areas within ML to embrace DH, with examples such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison *Dictionary of the Old Spanish Language* project that started in the 1970s and developed its own tagging system [Nitti 1979]. Building on this early initiative, the Liverpool *Cancionero* project began in the mid-1980s, using Madison tagging norms, and led to the *Electronic Corpus of 15th-Century Castilian Cancionero Manuscripts*, which included codicological MS descriptions, digitised MS images and digital transcriptions of the corpus. These two projects, pioneering in the field, led the way not only in making use of digital technologies to bring together a dispersed corpus for the first time, but also in developing tagging systems for medieval manuscripts that have changed the way that scholars access such texts.

19

If the *Cancionero* project is a prime example of how ML scholarship has integrated DH tools in the analysis of manuscripts, and, essentially, mobilised DH in relation to already existing (pre-digital) sources, other projects have used DH tools and methodologies in the creation of their corpora. Such is the case, for instance, of the HERA-funded collaborative *Travelling Texts, 1790-1914* project which undertakes systematic scrutiny of reception data from large-scale sources (library and booksellers' catalogues, the periodical press), and thus uses DH approaches in the creation of its data. In a similar vein, Kirsty Hooper's digital history projects, such as her *Hispanic Liverpool* database of nineteenth-century Liverpool residents who were born in the Hispanic world, or her *Atlantis Project: Women and Words in Spain, 1890-1936*, involving a database of bio-bibliographic information about women writers in Spain, make use of databases to explore "what the details of forgotten lives can tell us about wider questions in cultural history". In these and other projects, the advent of what are loosely termed "big data" approaches have had a significant impact on how ML scholarship conceives of itself.^[9]

20

Corpus linguistics is another area within ML that has spearheaded DH approaches, with the Real Academia Española's *CORDE (Corpus Diacrónico del Español)* project – a textual corpus of all time periods and geographical regions in which Spanish has been spoken, up to 1974 – and the *CREA project (Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual)* – a corpus of contemporary Spanish, which takes up where *CORDE* leaves off – being two of the leading and most widely-used resources. These, along with similar projects in other of the Iberian languages – such as the *CICA* corpus of Old Catalán, or the *Corpus do Português* – have had a significant impact on the way in which ML scholars approach corpora. Scholars such as Mark Davies have demonstrated how these large-scale databases provide an "entirely new perspective on what can be done with historical corpora" [Davies 2010, 142], allowing for a wide range of queries and the searching of topics in an in-depth way that was not possible previously.

21

Yet archiving pre-digital corpora or creating new corpora from disparate pre-digital materials, and the "big data" approaches that such corpora facilitate, are not the only achievements of Modern Linguists working with Digital Humanities approaches. Digital Humanities approaches in ML also extend to the generation of new analytical methods, as seen, for example, in the work of Hispanist and film studies scholar Catherine Grant who has developed highly innovative video essays on films, both celluloid and digital. These video essays are not just a way for Grant to disseminate her work in public fora – via her *Film Studies for Free* or (co-edited) *Mediático* blogs – but constitute a new form of methodological approach in itself which allows her to view films differently, for example allowing her to analyse excerpts of a film and its remake simultaneously and thus discover things that older, less accurately synchronic methods of comparative analysis arguably could not have revealed. The innovation in Grant's work, then, is her conception of digital interventions as not purely instrumental tools, but as creative outlets that combine both research and object of study. This innovative methodological development, and others like it, has not yet been fully embraced by DH – Grant's

22

work, for instance, has not yet been taken up by any DH companion or compendium –, but arguably there is a fruitful conversation to be had about new digital analytical and methodological approaches resulting from it.

All of these – and many others besides – are examples of how ML has benefitted from DH tools and methodologies, and how ML in its various forms has engaged with DH approaches. The bigger projects for corpora in particular are also indicators of the growing ways in which these and other ML projects have had to conceive of themselves as collaborative, involving computer scientists as much as linguists, and requiring a re-thinking of the “lone scholar” model. In this regard, DH is one of the drivers within a general paradigm shift that has seen humanities scholarship more broadly move away from this “lone scholar” model, motivated by a generalised understanding that there is a need for more inter- and transdisciplinarity, as we seek to answer bigger, more complex questions. Digital Humanities tools and methods have, thus, contributed to the growing ways in which we as ML scholars have re-evaluated our practice as researchers, and have enriched our research field.

23

In this changing landscape of ML research, which in many cases relates to existing manuscripts, records or corpora and how they may best be mobilised through the digital, an emerging field has also been that of the digital as object of study in ML. Profound and significant changes to our objects of study have been wrought by digital creators and users living in other parts of the globe, and working in a variety of languages. The large and vibrant communities of digital practice in non-Anglophone contexts – from net artists and authors of electronic literature, through to hacktivists and tactical media practitioners – have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to the ways in which we think about and use digital technologies today. Here, ML’s findings as regards digital content creation in various locales and communities around the globe can provide insights that would enrich DH, and contribute to its ongoing shaping of itself as a discipline.

24

With regard to the ways in which DH has started to engage with ML, it is important to note the significant efforts that DH associations have made to include the pluricultural and the plurilingual [see [Spence 2014, 53]]. The recent creation of both the Asociación de Humanidades Digitales Hispánicas (HDH) in Spain and the Red de Humanistas Digitales (RedDH) in Mexico are good examples of the growth of a self-identifying Hispanic DH. The Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) DH2015 conference, which was held in Sydney, Australia, included papers in French, German, Italian and Spanish as well as English, and the next ADHO conference will be held in Mexico City in 2018. At the same time, there has been an active debate on DH discussion lists about how heavily Anglophone a purportedly “global” DH really is, with Hispanic DH scholars fighting back. Galina Russell’s recent article [Galina Russell 2014] provides an illuminating overview of these debates within the DH community as it grapples with issues of geographical and linguistic diversity, and summarises recent developments that have attempted to create a more global DH community.

25

Within these attempts to ensure a greater linguistic and geographical diversity in DH, ML can make important contributions as regards critical analysis of the digital object of study. It is important to note that the first steps in this process have already been taken, with pioneering scholars such as Paul Spence who have aimed to bring digital critical cultural studies into the DH fold. A scholar whose work straddles ML and DH, Spence set down in a recent article as one of his six key proposals the need to “crear unas humanidades digitales verdaderamente globales” (to create a truly global digital humanities)^[10] [Spence 2014, 52], and within the same article, argued for bringing scholars such as comparative literature theorist Laura Borràs – and the critical cultural studies that she represents – into the domain of DH.^[11] This impetus from Spence is one that we pick up on in this article: we argue that one way of achieving this truly global DH is to bring the critical cultural studies of ML into the DH fold, and we detail here what the advantages of such a manoeuvre might be.

26

One particular way in which an ML-inflected approach to DH can be constructive is in the study of (digital) objects. All too frequently, digital technologies, their applications and their analyses have been developed in a predominantly Anglophone environment. Notwithstanding some landmark volumes which have aimed to contest Anglophone models, such as *Internationalizing Internet Studies* [Goggin 2009], or the multi-authored *Net Lang: Towards a Multilingual Cyberspace* [Maaya Network 2012], it still remains the case that digital culture theory is dominated by the Anglophone. What ML can provide is a pluricultural and plurilingual understanding of digital culture, an attention to cultural and

27

linguistic specificity, and even a questioning of some of the predominantly Anglophone assumptions underpinning many of the purported “universal” theories of digital technologies.

As regards the positioning of this research within DH, if, as DH scholars have noted above, attention to digital cultural production remains relatively underdeveloped within DH, but is, nevertheless, a key component of DH’s development, then our work in this area can help to strengthen DH’s profile overall. Furthermore, the cultural and linguistic insights that ML can contribute are key to ensuring that DH’s approach to global digital culture is as well informed and contextualised as possible. As we illustrate below, ML approaches can help develop new insights into how these cultural forms are negotiated by users crossing languages and cultures; we can offer relational and situated approaches; and we can demonstrate how plurilingual and pluricultural understandings of cultural heritage can bring enhanced understandings of these cultural products.

28

A DH informed by ML approaches would, for example, look at the digital as object of study, both in terms of the reconceptualisation of existing cultural formats in their meeting with the digital, and in terms of the advent of new platforms that have transformed our understanding of what a “text” is. It would offer an analysis of new cultural forms being developed at the interface between literary-cultural expression and new media technologies, exploring the transformations in conventional understandings of genres and cultural-artistic codes stimulated by the advent of digital technologies. And most importantly, it would explore how these new digital genres – as varied as hypermedia fiction or game art – do not build exclusively upon an Anglophone heritage, but respond to and continue a rich tradition of cultural, literary and artistic experimentation undertaken by writers, artists and thinkers working in many different languages and countries.

29

Furthermore, an ML-inflected Digital Humanities would also allow us to consider how some of the key terms regarding digital technologies might be inflected differently in distinct cultural contexts. It would allow DH to engage more closely with research that explores to what extent these new digital cultural forms foster greater interaction and afford greater agency to the user, and what the implications of this might be when users cross languages and cultures. Here, Puerto Rican scholar Leonardo Flores’s leading work on electronic literature and digital poetics [Flores], and the work of Colombian scholar-practitioner Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez on hypertext authoring systems [Rodríguez 2000], would be of particular use in tracing how digital genres mutate and are re-worked by users according to their linguistic and cultural contexts. Similarly, the co-edited work of Chilean poet and theorist Luis Correa-Díaz and Hispanist Scott Weintraub [Correa-Díaz and Weintraub 2010] [Correa-Díaz and Weintraub 2016], and of author and theorist Loss Pequeño Glazier [Glazier 2002] on digital poetics, along with the work of the aforementioned Laura Borràs [Borràs et al. 2010] [Borràs 2017 (forthcoming)] on electronic literature have been pioneering in analysing how digital cultural forms are inflected and experienced differently in different cultural contexts. Their work has helped move cultural and literary studies forward by exploring how digital technologies make us re-think some of our existing assumptions about genre, whilst at the same time reminding us of the embeddedness of these digital technologies within particular socio-cultural codes.

30

Perhaps even more significantly, an ML-inflected DH would allow us to explore the ways in which a deep understanding of cultural and linguistic specificity can help us to understand better – and even problematise – some of the assumptions around the globalising nature of digital technologies. Building on our own experiences as Modern Languages scholars, in which we have had to explore how the implicit nation-state assumptions that conventionally underpin Modern Languages practice need to be re-thought in the light of the opportunities presented by digital technologies for a re-signification of locality, we can offer an enhanced understanding of the digital-as-globalising debates. We can explore how cultural identities that transgress nation-state boundaries may be expressed and enabled through digital technologies, and how non-Anglophone or plurilingual contexts might provide us with models for understanding the processes of de- and re-territorialisation offered by many digital technologies.

31

One potential way of opening up these debates between these multiple vectors – between DH and ML on the one hand, and between digital tools and digital objects of study on the other – has been the recent Writing Sprint organised in collaboration with Liverpool University Press’s Modern Languages Open platform.^[12] Focused around the key topic of “Modern Languages and the Digital”, the writing sprint explored how digital technologies are changing the shape of Modern Languages research and publishing, and asked how the conceptual, methodological and practical bases of

32

Modern Languages research are having to adapt to the challenges of the digital. Key to the Writing Sprint was the bringing together of scholars working both in Modern Languages and in Digital Humanities institutional contexts, and with expertise across the whole range of the research process, thus putting into dialogue digital ethnographers with big data scholars, digital editors with digital critical scholars, and so forth. The Writing Sprint thus aimed to open up these dialogues from tools to objects of study, and one of its main findings was the need for us to be working collaboratively – across institutions, across disciplines, and across languages – and that an in-depth and critical engagement with the digital is central to this collaboration.

Within this broad context of the contributions that ML scholarship has made to the development of DH, we now move on to some specific examples of our own work in the field of Latin American digital culture studies in order to draw out the connections with the paradigm of “critical” Digital Humanities, working with a hybrid Modern Languages and Digital Humanities framework that one might like to term a “critical DHML”.

33

Latin American Digital Cultural Production

Our first publication, the anthology *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature* [Taylor and Pitman 2007], was intended as no more than a “toe-in-the-water” collection of essays to explore new forms of literary production, but in retrospect it marked a much more significant change in terms of our disciplinary identities. The shift to look at Latin American engagement with the internet revealed to us the need to move on from an albeit well-contextualised literary studies disciplinary approach – the discipline in which we were both trained – to a cultural studies one, and to others still further removed from our original schooling, in order to embrace the increasing variety of the materials and practices we wanted to study.^[13] Given that we are scholars of Modern Languages, the (trans/inter)discipline, the concept of shifting from one discipline to another, as well as from one language to another as we move across the dominant languages of the region, sat well with us, and this increasing diversification of disciplines continues in our more recent work.^[14]

34

Our key findings from the collection were that it was possible to conceive of Latin American cultural producers as often choosing to strategically resist new technologies, albeit while simultaneously using them, and that they had reason to do this because of their non-conformity with the neo-colonialist rhetoric underpinning most Anglophone discourse concerning “cyberspace” (qua “new frontier”), and that they even made claims for the need for “new architectures of language” [Martín-Barbero 2000, 69] that went as structurally deep as code. As Raúl Trejo Delabre has argued: “the formats for making and organising websites have been determined by technology and subsequently by the customs of the biggest community of Netusers in the world; i.e. the citizens of the United States”, and thus “there is no Latin American *language* in which to express our specific content in that global hall of mirrors that is the Internet” [Trejo Delabre 1999, 330, original emphasis].

35

In a comparable way to the consolidation of European languages in the region such that it is impossible for most to speak in anything but “the master’s tongue”, it is probably too late for Latin Americans, or indeed any of us, to develop a form of programming that overcomes modularity and lenticularity [see [McPherson 2012]] – not even open source software can really offer such a radical revision of the paradigms of computational culture, it seems. However, it also became apparent through our work on this collection, how Latin American writers, for example, might attempt to resist, however ironically, the modularity that underpins the functioning of hypertext [see [Pitman 2007]]. In this way our collection sought to offer a postcolonialist critique of the presence and use of the internet and associated technologies in the region and one that tried to dig deeper than a superficial critique of representation on computer screens. Furthermore, if we read “Latin Americans” as “raza”,^[15] or at the very least as a differently situated (and very large) group of people to “white” US citizens, this collection provides copious examples of academic work in the broad field of Digital Humanities that does not focus on “white” subjects, and some that explicitly focuses on the role that race, as well as gender and other identitarian vectors, plays in such cultural production. In this way we can be seen as having made an early contribution to the recently emerged fields of critical/postcolonial Digital Humanities.

36

In our 2012 book, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*, we set forth an important confrontation of Latin American cultural studies and digital culture studies, and proposed a theorisation of a post-regional approach to Latin American (digital) cultural studies. Our volume brought into dialogue two disciplinary fields – namely, internet studies

37

and Latin Americanism – and, working in negotiation between these two disciplines, we proposed an innovative theoretical model for understanding how the defining discourses of Latin America are reconfigured online. Our contention in this publication was that Latin American digital culture, and the theoretical and analytical models we proposed for it, engage with some of the central issues that are at the heart of both internet studies and Latin Americanism today. The questioning of the project of area studies, and of Latin American studies as one such area within that, has been widely debated since the 1990s, and represents a potential troubling of the very foundations on which, ostensibly, we Latin Americanists base our research, demanding a re-assessment of what it means to engage in Latin American studies in our contemporary, globalised world. However, we went on to argue that to talk of Latin American online cultural practice is not an outright paradox, but rather emblematic of new forms of rather more deterritorialised Latin Americanism which take into account the problematisation of area studies. Indeed, we argued that it is at the intersection of these two developments – on the one hand, a rise in scholarly debates on Latin American (popular) culture and new media, and, on the other hand, the deconstruction of the term “Latin America” itself – that the study of Latin American online cultural production lies. This, then, was our contribution to challenging through internet studies a key aspect of “the ‘hard-core’ of the humanities” that Berry hoped critical/third-wave Digital Humanities would address.

In a more recent publication, our research has explored the need to re-think some of the assumptions around globalising digital technologies when looking from a ML perspective. Taylor’s 2013 volume engaged with one of the most topical issues in discussions about the internet in recent years: the extent to which online content can be understood as rooted in a particular place. Taylor’s book explored this issue taking as examples a vibrant community of Latin(o) American artists to investigate how, in their online works, they engage in re-imaginings and representations of offline place. Building on and dialoguing with recent debates on tactical media, as well as upon the rich Latin(o) American-specific heritage of the resistant appropriation of hegemonic tools in a broader sense, the book demonstrated how networked digital media offers the possibilities of rethinking place and territory, and how Latin(o) American net artists make creative use of this possibility. The book’s two overarching questions – firstly, the role that digital technologies play in allowing for the formulation of place-based affiliations, and secondly, how alternative modes of expression and dissemination enabled by digital technologies may be appropriated to give voice to oppositional or resistant discourses – are, we argue, of particular relevance to DH today. The book’s potential contributions to DH therefore include an awareness of the rootedness and of the (cultural, linguistic, ethnic) specificity of how, where, and why digital technologies are used, coupled with an understanding of how these digital technologies are used to express profound social, political and ethical concerns.

38

Conclusion

All of these instances discussed above – our own and those of other scholars – demonstrate the potential for the further development of a “common language” between ML cultural studies and critical DH in which more of us working in these two disciplines ought to seek to achieve fluency. The development of this kind of common language may also prove to be an important factor in helping to avoid disciplinary “Balkanisation” as DH settles into traditional institutional structures. For as long as scholars of both Digital Humanities and Modern Languages continue to be able to conceive of themselves as promoting a “critical” or “reflexive”, rather than instrumental, strategic or opportunistic, kind of interdisciplinarity, and/or a transdisciplinarity that is transgressive, critical and genuinely open to other perspectives, to borrow Thompson Klein’s terms cited earlier, then at an epistemological level, they will be capable of working together and speaking the same language. On a more pragmatic level, they will need both a political climate, within and beyond Higher Education – a climate that, for example, does not seek to manage the dialogue between disciplines as one might a business enterprise –, and the kinds of resources – most importantly, time – that are conducive to creative, speculative engagement with other points of view that may, or may not always, bear fruit.

39

Indeed, as Modern Linguists we have seen our own discipline re-think itself over recent years in ways that seem promising with regard to avoiding Balkanisation. In both institutional structures, where individual language departments have been reconfigured into schools or departments of languages (or bigger) – meaning that individual language areas move out of “silos” to work together – and in intellectual debates about the nature of ML, which have increasingly led us to understand ourselves as being located across disciplines, ML today straddles conventional departmental structures

40

and disciplines in ways that are conducive to reaching out to DH and to the development of a “critical DHML” language.

This hybrid “critical DHML” language is what many more young academics ought to be speaking, and there are already many positive signs that it will, indeed, be the language spoken in our classrooms and conferences, and written in our academic journal and blogs. These signs include the increasing numbers of adverts for lecturing posts (mainly in the USA) that specifically seek academics who work in both Digital Humanities and Latin American/Hispanic studies, and those for postdoctoral or postgraduate study in Hispanic Studies where an interest in DH methodologies is an explicit criterion for appointment or where the research programme is co-supervised between a DH and an ML scholar.^[16] They may also be discerned in the existence of the growing volume of joint DH and ML conferences and other events within Anglophone academia;^[17] and in the emergence of new or reconfigured research “centres” such as the recently established Latin American and Latino Digital Humanities initiative at the University of Georgia (UGA) and the recently reconfigured Centre for World Cinemas and Digital Cultures in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds.

41

To return to *DHQ*'s initiative to start publishing special issues dedicated to Digital Humanities “in different languages or regional traditions”, which was the original motivation for this series of reflections on the relationship between DH and ML, perhaps a parallel initiative is what is also necessary: one that does not seek to separate off work written in modern foreign languages and dealing with differently situated materials into discrete entities (special issues) because surely this is also evidence of what McPherson termed the logic of “lenticularity” or what we discussed above under the rubric of “Balkanisation”. What we really need, among other things, is a special issue dedicated to “critical DHML” that probes further the common language that binds us.

42

Beyond that, the next steps for achieving such a hybrid language are both pragmatic and intellectual. Following on from our discussion of ways to avoid disciplinary “Balkanisation”, pragmatic next steps will also include continuing to forge dialogues through shared trans- and interdisciplinary workshops, panels, conferences and public engagement events that bring together our two disciplines, and that ensure that ML is embedded in DH, and vice versa. These developments, coupled with a commitment to equipping the next generation of researchers, through doctoral training and postdoctoral opportunities, as fully-fledged hybrid DHML scholars, are essential in developing our shared language and, eventually, in normalising it. Intellectual next steps include ensuring that both ML and DH are attuned to thematic working. The current shifts in the UK research environment, with the increasing need to work collaboratively, and to address global challenges that cannot be solely answered by any one discipline or methodology, offer fruitful opportunities for the development of our shared language. The continuing development of the synergies between ML and DH, and of thematic working that cuts across disciplines and methods, can help situate both ML and DH at the forefront of approaches to these global challenges.

43

Notes

[1] To be clear, Modern Languages is not the only other discipline with which DH should enter into dialogue, nor do we seek to claim that it is, absolutely, “the most relevant” discipline for DH. Nevertheless, as academics situated within Modern Languages institutional frameworks, we are most interested in exploring areas where we think ML can help expand the objectives of DH and where DH can help ML expand its own disciplinary horizons.

[2] While DH and ML share an epistemological basis in inter- and/or transdisciplinarity, and some of our argument relies on comparisons and suggestions made on this basis, we also seek to move beyond considerations about the nature of disciplinarity and disciplinary change *per se* in order to place the emphasis more firmly on the relationship between DH and ML in its particularity. The study of disciplinarity, even with specific reference to DH, is already extensive and we will refer to this as necessary to advance our arguments. For now, it is worth mentioning that research in DH and ML can be either interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary and we will henceforth use this terminology selectively, depending on the argument being advanced. Where we do not wish to advance an argument based specifically on the distinction between inter- and transdisciplinarity, we will refer to them simply as disciplines. We would also note that quite often terms such as interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are used almost interchangeably in the work of otherwise very accomplished critics, thus complicating any easy definitions.

[3] We are mindful of the fast pace at which new volumes and/or expanded editions of volumes about DH are being published. While the volumes noted here were some of most significant at the time we started to write this article, we will consider newer volumes and expanded

editions of volumes such as Gold's in due course.

[4] McPherson describes both the "racial paradigms of the postwar era" and the evolution of programming languages as evincing "lenticular logics" because, like the "3-D" images on lenticular (ridged) postcards that you can tilt to see different perspectives, or even completely different images, such that it "makes simultaneously viewing the various images contained on one card nearly impossible", both the racial paradigms and the programming languages evidence "a way of seeing the world as discrete modules or nodes, a mode that suppresses relation and context. [... that] manages and controls complexity" [McPherson 2012, 144]. With respect to race in particular, she argues that a society that structures its approach to race through "lenticular logics" "secure[s] our understandings of race in very narrow registers, fixating on sameness or difference while forestalling connection and interrelation" [McPherson 2012, 144]. She also makes a compelling case for the way in which programming languages have evolved following the same logic in order to manage complexity through rules of modularity, separation, simplicity and so on [McPherson 2012, 145].

[5] For more on Berry's arguments regarding critical approaches to the digital see [Berry 2014].

[6] ML is not the only discipline that has been slow to be embraced by DH but by now it is the most conspicuous in its absence from debates in the field. In Svensson and Goldberg's *Between Humanities and the Digital* [Svensson and Goldberg 2015], the editors do much to expand the disciplinary horizons of DH, reaching out to the often overlooked disciplines of religious studies/theology and archaeology, for example. It is also pleasing to see the development of Postcolonial DH over the past several years (cf. the *Postcolonial Digital Humanities* website, <http://dhpoco.org>, edited by Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam). Nonetheless, in both Svensson and Goldberg's compendious volume, and in Gold and Klein's 2016 significant update of *Debates in the Digital Humanities* [Gold and Klein 2016], which is also notable for its inclusion of black, and black feminist readings of DH, Modern Languages never features as a discipline at all, with the issue of DH projects that exist in other languages being glossed over as a simple issue of translation.

[7] It is worth noting that this growing debate about ML as inherently interdisciplinary and as offering transdisciplinary approaches takes place against a backdrop of growing suspicion about disciplinary boundaries; see, for instance, Sandra Harding's reminder of the constructed, situated nature of all knowledge, and her critique of authoritarian moves to police the boundaries of disciplines and/or suggest that in and of themselves they can offer a "theory of everything" [Harding 2015, 122]. Her appeal for a "disunited" and "heterogeneous" approach to the construction of forms of knowledge is kith and kin with transdisciplinary dialogue and critical interdisciplinary approaches.

[8] Examples of the circumvention of traditional circuits of cultural capital offered by digital technologies include the use of social media platforms for dissemination of research findings, or the use of blogs and wikis as publishing tools instead of traditional editorial outlets.

[9] Deriving initially from the physical sciences to refer to projects involving very large quantities of data (such as the one petabyte of data per day generated by the Hadron Collider) that exceed our capabilities to deal with it, "big data" approaches are also being developed within the humanities. Although big data definitions in the humanities are still being agreed upon, we draw on Andrew Prescott's reflections on big data in the humanities as involving projects when data is on such a scale that the "tried and trusted" approaches must be re-thought, and meaning a "shift in the cultural record that we have to deal with" [quoted in [Messner 2015]]. We do not, by this, mean to suggest that big data approaches are necessarily entirely novel, or that they necessitate the overthrowing of all our conventional humanities methodologies. Rather, we take on board Prescott's reminder that one can argue that big data goes back to classical antiquity [quoted in [Messner 2015]]; and Hitchcock's exhortations that, in the rush towards big data approaches, we must not forget the "small data" approaches that have always characterised Humanities methodologies as well as "remember the importance of the digital tools that allow us to think small" [Hitchcock 2014].

[10] All translations from Spanish are our own, unless otherwise indicated.

[11] For further examples of DH projects in Spain see [Spence and González-Blanco 2014].

[12] The writing sprint process itself can be seen at the writing sprint blog *Modlangdigital: The Modern Languages Open Writing Sprint*, <https://modernlangdigital.wordpress.com>, and a summary of the experience has now been published as a more static piece on the Modern Languages Open platform [Taylor and Thornton 2017].

[13] The shift is evident in the rather awkward title that balances the field of "cyberliterature", which is what we had originally set out to write about, with that of "cyberculture" conceived most broadly.

[14] Incipient in the first collection were attempts to move towards a more sociological approach – internet ethnography, as it is most often called – as various scholars sought to explore projects for digital inclusion or examples of digital activism, and this research thread continues to this day in Pitman's work on self-defining "digital indigenous peoples" in Brazil, or particular social media groups based around technofeminist concerns or sexual identities. Our colleague Tori Holmes's work is also significant for its work in developing internet ethnographic frameworks

for working with digital content produced by favela residents in Brazil [see [Holmes 2013]].

[15] The word “raza” in Spanish means “race” but it is also used more broadly to mean a “people” and when Latin(o) Americans refer to themselves as “raza” they tend to mean the latter, thus including all different racial groups within Latin American society under this rubric, although sometimes privileging a certain mixed “white” Spanish-indigenous American racial profile at the same time.

[16] For example, a postdoctoral position was advertised at the University of Warwick in 2015, in conjunction with Kirsty Hooper’s AHRC funded project “Imperial Entanglements: Transoceanic Basque Networks in British and Spanish Colonialism and their Legacy”, for a candidate interested in DH methodologies. King’s College London now offers co-supervised PhDs in “Digital Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies”, for example, with one supervisor based in the relevant ML department and the other in the Department of Digital Humanities.

[17] One notable example of this was the 2010 “Exploring the Archive in the Digital Age” conference at King’s College London which included contributions by staff from what was then still the Centre for Computing in the Humanities as well as those from across the traditional humanities departments and was organised by the Department of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies.

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