INTRODUCTION

Resistance in the materials

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Close to the submission deadline for contributions to this volume, one author contacted us to convey how difficult it had been following-out the material of their essay. They expressed with some surprise how the topic had generated organically its own productive distractions and resistances, calling forth flows between obsolete and contemporary materialities and amid theoretical framings and methodologies that stretched historically. The articulation of this author's difficulties – difficulties that in the end culminated in a wonderfully coherent and challenging piece – may be anecdotal to the overall scope of this handbook, but they are endemic to a kind of perceptual divide more broadly regarding digital labor (indeed any production labor) within the humanities.

The so-called "Digital Humanities" has become the proving ground for debates over the corporatization of the university and the increasing prominence of neoliberalism within education more broadly. An indicator of its growing power across campuses, even among the varied programs, practices and theories that define the field, is the now familiar truncated acronym, "DH." David Golumbia, associate professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University, has offered one of the most "devastating" critiques of DH as a field, focusing on how the political history and economic trajectory of DH has launched it into technical terrain largely at odds with the most pressing and disruptive aspects of the humanities, particularly practices and theories that are based in the messiness of "texts" and cultural politics. As Golumbia summarizes, "responsibly knowing texts (and histories) is exactly what DH consistently pushes aside as intellectual practice."[1]

Golumbia's incisive criticisms are important at a moment when traditional humanities programs are being defunded at an alarming rate while there seems to be an almost profligate number of new funding streams for digital and large-scale computational projects. And yet for practitioners and critics such as the two editors of this collection, academics who work across unwieldy boundaries of disciplinary expertise and, as outlined in more detail below, weirdly resistant multimodal materialities, the dichotomy of neoliberal (digital) and traditional (text-based) humanities seems a reductive abstraction. As N. Katherine Hayles has observed recently, we seem entranced by a version of "resistance" as practice in the humanities that elides the imbrication of analog thinking with digital logics, as well as the longstanding tensions between "surface" and "deep" reading methodologies, and across multiple forms of production and labor.[2] These abstractions and elided intersections are perhaps no more apparent

than in the editorial process itself. Editorial processes in this sense refers not just to the collation and manufacture of *representations* of the types of historically-inflected digital work contained in this volume but the very digital projects themselves.

The earliest uses of "editing" invoke the process of "bringing forth" a text or project, but also carry with them the unavoidable interpretive contexts that emerge organically with such processes. There is an argument to be made that it is the "traditional" humanities that only fairly recently have become attracted by the idea that more conventional textual practices do not themselves carry the burden of neoliberal calculation or elisions of critical reflexivity within their inherent labors. As Rodney Jones insists, all literacies – not just digital or media literacies – are fundamentally about "how *people* work."[3] With this critical and historical view of the process of how people work in bringing forth representations of knowledge, we offer some examples of the labor at work in this largely analog book and the largely digital projects contained within its covers. Returning to the problematic of both resistances and distractions pointed to in the anecdote that opened this introduction, how might we compare productive resistances to the labor of bringing forth across mediums?

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If there is a single problematic that digital media has brought to our collective attention, it is how publishing any kind of intellectual labor is a largely invisible undertaking. Blogs, digital collections, and print-on-demand enterprises have redrawn our focus to how little deep attention we have paid to how intellectual property has been controlled, owned and distributed by entities often far removed from the practices of the traditional humanities. If there has been a computational and machine logic at play in our work long before DH, it comes in the form of corporate publishing. This collection betrays these complex forces. This "handbook" – one we feel brings a significantly important and under-represented perspective to the field (historically informed digital and new media studies) – finds its initial form in a conventional academic publication, though a web companion will accompany the volume as well. Our two names will be attached to this publication, but there is a deep cadre of editorial assistants and typesetters whose "close" reading and labors are not transparent. And, of course, librarians, peer reviewers, journal editors, graduate interns and scholarly advisors will continue to do this work for minimal reward and very little recognition. In a very real sense, it is the work of the digital and new media theorists and practitioners contained within this volume that allows us to re-connect with these resistances and problematics: through their attention to peopled and unpeopled "mediation" and its traces across historical periods and across *all* modes of production, they reveal the vacuousness of oppositions like analog vs. digital; deep vs. surface; and critical vs. computational.

Throughout the chapters in this volume there is resistance everywhere we look: institutional resistance to the unseen labor of DH work; resistance to open access publication and dissemination of research in an era of diminishing institutional support for publishing; resistance in the manuscripts studied to translation technologies like Optical Character Recognition; resistance even in the physical materials themselves to more fine-grained attempts – such as spectrography – to get "inside" the text; and even more general resistance, as Amy Earhart says, to textual "preservation strategies."[4]

Michael Widner, for example, argues for the productive cross-resistances that premodern and digital modes of reading bring to the crucial work of mark-up into machine-readable schemas such as TEI. He argues for the inherent value of traditional humanities practices and close reading, demonstrating that there would be no corpus for digital scholars to work from without such labor. He suggests that we must first be close editors and calls for a "return to the scriptorium" as an antecedent to the potential of digital distant reading. Similarly, but inversely, Eric Weiskott demonstrates how the invisibility (to all but a digital, multispectral vision) of

the surfaces of medieval texts reveal traces that resist the conclusions of traditional manuscript studies. He shows how digital methods can augment and even enhance the principles of close editing and scholarship.

Johanna Drucker's skepticism about DH in the context of the embodied rituals of both scholarship and textual production show up in several of the contributions. Christine McWebb draws on Drucker's concept of the performative text to argue for a "polysemous interaction" across a text's multiple modalities that mirrors processes found in the practices of both medieval and digital readers and writers. Andrea Harbin and Tamara O'Callaghan speak to how specific performatives of the medieval text were made invisible by the transition into print, and how augmented reality overlays can mix the virtual and the physical to re-capture medieval modalities which resisted the "logocentrism" of print technologies. Lara Farina and Katherine Richards offer examples of creative play around collecting (images; objects) and how such experimentations reveal the limits of digital remediation and traditional scholarly practices. Toby Burrows further invokes Drucker to investigate how the often fragmentary DIY and institutional appropriation of early images create situational "afterlives" to these images that become traces back to our evolving adaptations to the visual sensorium.

Several of the essays in this volume have a direct or oblique connection to the exciting and ground-breaking collaborative project, *Global Middle Ages*. Geraldine Heng offers a critical overview of how this project emerged in the aftermath of September 11 in the US as an attempt to disrupt the nucleus of "the West" through critical immersion in multiple "alternate periodicities . . . offering overlapping repetitions-with-change; or history as oscillating between ruptures and re-inscriptions." The project mixes highly innovative technologies and digital media with more traditional modalities to investigate the very creation and composition of a "cultural text." Again, this project is based fundamentally not in technocratic smoothing or erasure but in using mediation to evoke the seams, disruptive thresholds, and productive resistance in producing and publishing a cultural text. Highly sophisticated digital environments such as the *MappaMundi* and *Virtual Plascenia* from Roger Martinez, Lynn Ramey and their collaborators, provide an immersive environment for critical interactions with the complexities of human agency in the temporal and spatial encounters between Jewish, Christian and Muslim premodern citizens, and serve as multi-sensorial enhancements to traditional textual excavations. These projects work with re-animating the texts of traditional humanities scholarship by affectively sensorially enacting "archival intersectionality."

Two of the most theoretically-inflected pieces in the volume focus specifically on our leading assumptions about contemporary digital and traditional analog labors within the humanities. Whitney Trettien takes up the figure of "creative destruction" to explore, beyond the current image of DH, the "fraught relationship between technology, history, and interpretation in literary studies" more broadly. Taking issue with some of the more sweeping and reductive generalizations about those engaged in DH work, she takes a cross-historical perspective on what it means to intervene in the "material mechanisms" of the systems that carry forward literary expression and history – whether those interventions are mediated by hand or by other prosthetic techne. The term "creative destruction," a modality of interpretive labor informed by the thought of Walter Benjamin and Friedrich Nietzsche, points to the powerfully disruptive potential of any *act* of interpretation that seeks to re-contextualize and re-fragment texts and cultural contexts creatively. Trettien's demonstrations excavate a complex and creative feedback loop across texts, technology, and cultural heritage, and across the practices of critically-informed DH practice and the cutting and stitching of the early modern *Fragmenta manuscripta*. Each of these acts destroys something of the cultural coherence of a given "text" but also unleashes something new and creates a space for nascent formations of meaning and possibility.

The feedback loop between embodied practice, texts and intervening techne is a process engaged in Martin Foys' fascinating foray into the cybernetics of "remanence," a cyber-forensics term that refers to the traces "on the materials of media after information is removed." Foys appropriates this term to investigate the implications of mediated interventions into medieval texts and artifacts and how media disruptions and their feedback loops "allow [. . .] a part of what has disappeared in the past to always be traced in the present, and therefore reimagined." As Foys stresses, "any act of erasure also encodes new information on the surviving substrate, enriching its status as both archive and communication." Foys' re-theorizing of remanence in a cybernetic framework leads him to some striking comparisons of "durability" – across contemporary Xerox commercials and medieval and Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. In the same vein as Trettien's conclusions, Foys gives us pause over the idea that any remediating exercise can ever be immaterial in its effects (particularly the digital). Both Trettien and Foys offer a theoretical framing that speaks to all of the DH labors in this volume, where the projected fantasy of DH reconstruction and economic obliteration are confronted with the material realities and ghostly traces of creative destruction and remanence.

Finally, there is also the matter of a more immaterial resistance, spelled out most plainly in our own hearts about what it is we do as editors or creators – a kind of inner anxiety about our own "expertise," however it is measured, recorded, or performed. Digital work is particularly acute in this respect: we either muddle through cobbling together our own unique set of hybrid expertises for each project, or we assemble a "team" of disciplinary experts who may or may not speak the same language or work under the constraints of the same reward systems. Both approaches shape the work we do (or *can* do, given constraints of disciplinary and technical skills). Yet as is suggested by so many of these contributions – projects and theories based in collaboration, feedback loops, distributed remainders – perhaps we are overvaluing individual expertise too much. After all, there is value to be had in an estuarial mixing of knowledges and labors, however imperfect, that creates new communities built around love of the material, rather than available resource allocations. Weird scholarship has the potential to thrive in such a space.

The projects and investigations in this volume offer a dual call, then: to acknowledge the wide range of practices, knowledges, and most crucially labor that goes into work in digital medieval studies; and to accept that perhaps resistance in the materials is an opportunity for weird, partial, and disruptive scholarship.

Notes

1 David Golumbia, "The Digital in the Humanities: An Interview with David Golumbia," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 30, 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/digital-humanities-interview-david-golumbia/#!
2 N. Katherine Hayles, "Opening the Depths, Not Sliding on Surfaces," in *Digital Humanities and Digital Media: Conversations in Politics, Culture, Aesthetics and Literacy*, ed. Roberto Simanowski (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016), 265.
3 Rodney Jones, *Digital Humanities and Digital Media*, 243.
4 Amy Earhart, *Traces of the Old, Uses of the New: The Emergence of Digital Literary Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 84. Qtd in Widner, "Toward Text-Mining the Middle Ages," in this volume.

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