

Opening the 'black box' of digital cultural heritage processes: feminist digital humanities and critical heritage studies

Hannah Smyth, Julianne Nyhan and Andrew Flinn, UCL

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1.0 Introduction

Why are the Digital Humanities so white?

Online Online Course (MOOC) format (Juhasz & Balsamo 2012). Moreover, building on the

2.0 Gender and digital humanities

In this section we discuss gender in the context of technology and digital humanities before giving an overview of recent Feminist Digital Humanities scholarship.

Gender is a cultural matrix that defines masculinity and femininity as separate and incommensurate (Abbate 2012 p. 3). Performances of masculinity and femininity are socially and culturally constructed and intersect with other power structures but are not contingent on biological sex. They are produced and re-produced by normative social roles and other dynamics between people and within society (Butler 1999). Along with factors like race and class, purported gender differences and characteristics can be called on to justify discrepancies of power and privilege, the distribution of labour and access to economies of opportunity and influence among social groups.

The scholarship of Feminist Technology Studies has shown technology to be a central stage for the performance and even ratification of gender (e.g. Faulkner and Arnold 1985). With regard to the history of computing, for example, gendered labour segregation confined many women to the lowest-ranking posts and resulted in the devaluing and overlooking of their work (e.g. Light 1999; Abbate 2012). Likewise, gender stereotypes can influence what counts as technology (e.g. Cockburn and Ormrod 1993). In early computing projects, the work assigned to women typically covered computer operation and programming (Hicks 2017), which was seen as lower in status and less difficult than the hardware-oriented work done by men (Light 1999). In other words, technology is not neutral but has been created in the interests of particular social groups, and against the interests of others (Liff 1987 p. 180). Computing in particular is an explicitly hegemonic project built on labour categories designed to perpetuate particular forms of class status (Hicks 2017 p.6).

Looking beyond computing, gender dynamics converge on DH via diverse processes,

Brown *et al*

-modelling informed by a Black feminist (intersectional) interpretation of method can be used to recover Black

analyses of textual corpora (Brown *et al.*, 2016). Weingart and Jorgensen hand coded mentions of body parts in canonical fairy tales and computationally analysed those references, noting that their findings reinforced that of previous feminist scholarship while being based on a more empirical approach (2013).

The interplay of gender, expertise and recognition in the field of DH itself is another area of ongoing enquiry. For example, Berens examined the intersectional human and

afternoon from the electronic literature canon and Molloy herself, along with other female hypertext trailblazers, from tenured university posts (Berens 2014). The esteem that is given to coding, and how this can exclude women from prominent areas of DH research has been addressed (Jackson *et al.*, 2008; Posner, 2012; Nowviskie). Despite some intimations (see Brown 2016), sustained analysis of how these debates essentialise gender has not been undertaken. A number of quantitative studies of the organisation and representation of the field of DH, as seen through conference, publication and other professional activities have also been undertaken, sometimes with gender as a point of focus (see Weingart).

Recent papers have discussed the transferrable lessons that Feminist Game Studies have for the project of articulating Feminist DH values (Losh 2015) and how an

and many case studies in heritage are, in this respect, concerned with issues of (mis)representation, marginalisation and (in)visibility

(Conkey and Spector 1984:3).

Moreover:

be politically or culturally neutral, as what is constructed has a range of implications for how women and men and their social roles are perceived, (Smith 2008, p.161)

In other words, the concept and consequences of gender do not exist in an intellectual vacuum, whether in analogue or digital contexts. So too it opens new areas of enquiry for a DH that has engaged little with heritage as a socially constructed phenomenon. The questions that this raises for digital heritage resources widen existing DH purviews to include an enquiry into issues like: what are the gendered and/or sex-differentiated power relations at play in the heritage process, the meanings, silences and contestations they produce? How is the discourse around heritage gendered? How have normative conceptions of gender been reproduced or challenged in conventional and counter heritages? And perhaps most importantly, what are the material consequences for individuals and society?

To adequately synthesize a constellation of studies over the past thirty years of the heritage field is not possible here and would be to repeat what has been done elsewhere (Reading 2015; Wilson, 2018). It will be more useful here to consider gender in relation to some of the foundational Critical Heritage Studies issues.

the current critical turn, within and beyond the canon of these disciplines and practices (Wernimont and Losh, 2016).

5.0 Methodologies

How, then, might we take up the challenge of examining the systemic gendered structuring of white privilege and patriarchy within heritage, particularly what has been dubbed the Authorised (Digital) Heritage Discourse (Caswell et al; (Smith, 2006)? How can we examine heritage both as product and process? How can we discover (perhaps not just to understand but also to counteract and reverse) the ways in which intersectional identities are hidden and marginalised in digital heritage materials? Which methodologies can assist researchers to processes, for example, the erasure of the feminised labour that underpins digital heritage?

A critical digital heritage study of gendered heritage processes will require a suite of methodologies and approaches. We might argue that an ethnographic approach to heritage processes and production and the organisations and systems that produce them is necessary given the tacit assumptions, informal practices and prevailing dominant orthodoxies and cultures at work in the production and presentation of AHD. The need to engage with the social process of heritage and public history production, in a sustained and deep fashion, to understand the public manifestations of dominant and exclusive narratives embedded in exhibitions and digital displays has been widely appraisal of exhibitions at the Science Museum (2002). Such an embedded and critically engaged approach would enable

incarceration of women and institutional abuse in Ireland have utilized oral history as a core methodology to give voice to the voiceless of the past. The Waterford Memories Project for example applies oral history within a digital humanities framework to investigate institutions for research, preservation, pedagogical and restorative social justice ends (The Waterford Memories Project, 2015).³ Similarly, *Industrial* was a digital humanities response to the 2009 Ryan Report into historical child abuse in Church institutions in Ireland. A public, multimedia database and data analysis resource of the report and its witness testimony was created to interrogate and understand its full weight and

platform, in order that their voices and perspective be respected and salient at every level of the project.⁴

6.0 Conclusion

This chap

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