IJIDI: Book Review

Losh, E., & Wernimont, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Bodies of information: Intersectional feminism and digital humanities*. **University of Minnesota Press. ISBN 9781517906115. 491 pp. $35 US.**

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D igital tools are often integral to the survival of marginalized groups (p. xii), yet the structure of digital humanities is typically presented as an overwhelmingly White, heterosexual, cisgender, male endeavor. The voices and frameworks of marginalized peoples are either absent all together or not integrated into the larger work of digital humanities. When they are integrated, there is little to no attempt in most cases to make the types of connections that intersectional feminism is grounded in, thus eliminating or obscuring perspectives that could improve lives and scholarship.

Losh and Wernimont's anthology brings together 25 of these obscured perspectives, allowing both the novice digital humanities student and the more experienced scholar to enrich their understanding of digital humanities and the role that intersectional feminism can and should play in scholarship. In multiple places, the editors and contributors point to the work of Katherine Hayle and her notions of how "information lost its body" (p. xiv, 47, 144, 163, 213, 275). In other words, information became such an electronic concern post-World War II that we have become disconnected from the creators of information and their biases and intentions. It has become a "transcendent entity" that has been "abstracted from materiality, embodiment, and reflexivity" (p. xiv). And this abstraction has allowed for the previously noted obscuration of voices. The volume's overarching argument lies in the belief that integrating intersectional feminism into the framework and day-to-day work of digital humanities will assist in mitigating this abstraction and boosting the practicality of digital humanities scholarship. Though I would argue against the general notion that practicality is *required* of education and research, when focusing on marginalized groups, actionable outcomes are a primary concern as these are how we make changes in systems and improve access and inclusion.

One particular point of interest is the interrogation of data visualization and its uses. Data visualization can be both a means of protest, resistance, and access expansion (as demonstrated in Knight's "Danger, Jane Roe") and a means of manipulation and control (as demonstrated by the colonization of information this volume is arguing against). The employment of visual strategies to disseminate and re-embody information and scholarship not only makes much of the information more accessible to the world outside the academy, but it also forces those already a part of the discipline to meet the data and its implications in a much more visceral way. It also allows for the use of techniques not often incorporated in formal scholarship which helps redefine and/or reframe them. Fine arts have long subverted the notions of what is possible with so-called traditional crafts (i.e., "feminine" arts) like fiber arts, but the possibilities

inherent in these media have not been fully explored in adjacent yet entirely separate disciplines such as humanities and the social sciences.

Knight cites Gaviria's notion that data presented using these types of media are intentionally provoking an emotive and visceral response from the reader/viewer which forces them to resituate the information in the context of its creators, subjects, and implications. This resituating of the data is critical to the rehumanization of the data that we use every day in our research. STEM fields, while not necessarily intentionally doing so, tend to separate the data from the subjects in an effort to be neutral and provide analysis of the data without bias, but as we know, bias is inherent in all work, regardless of field. So the result of this attempted neutrality is really just sterilization and dehumanization of the information, removing all context and implications—and also any potentially fruitful connections that might have been made. As noted by Risam, even our supposedly objective coding and algorithms are deeply embedded with the creator's biases. The example she uses is the flawed YouTube algorithm which labeled LGBTQ+ videos as not suitable for those under the age of eighteen despite their lack of violence, profanity, or nudity (p. 47). Both Virginia Eubanks (2018) and Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) also discuss this issue extensively from separate angles—social services and the digital poorhouse and reproduction of racism in search algorithms, respectively. "Algorithms [are deployed] with biases that are not obvious but reflect the values of engineers who create them and the purposes for which they were created" (p. 47).

None of this is to say that we need to entirely scrap digital humanities and the work that has already been done. Eichmann-Kalwara, Jorgensen, and Weingart rightfully state that "it is possible to acknowledge an ontology's shortcomings while still occasionally using that ontology to a positive effect" (p. 79). By taking existent digital humanities frameworks and integrating feminist methodologies, attention can be drawn to the complex and problematic politics, results, and residual consequences of colonialism. The intent is to discover ways to present and explore data that "represents people's lives *as they have been experienced*, not as they have been captured and advanced by businesses and governments" (p. 132).

However, the solution to the issues discussed in this volume cannot be found in simply increasing access to data for marginalized groups. We must use the work of intersectional feminists to understand the colonial system in which digital humanities and, indeed, all disciplines are inextricably rooted so that it cannot be replicated or reinforced by future work. "Equity is proactive, not passive," (p. 148) and it requires far more than simply agreeing and understanding that people are marginalized and oppressed. There must be active commitments to re-centering the voices of marginalized people and to reserving space for those marginalized voices. Systemic problems such as racism, colonialism, heterosexism, transphobia, and many others do not just appear overnight, and they cannot be solved overnight. But if scholars make the concerted effort to understand their work as being rooted in a discipline which has these systemic issues and to ensure that their work does not replicate them, digital humanities (and other disciplines) will be able to expand their reach and potential to provide the difficult solutions needed.

In terms of usability, this volume scores high for educational and research purposes. Those focusing on digital humanities will find a wealth of information to improve and decolonize their practice. In addition, practitioners at the library level would also benefit in that it provides a lens through which to view current and future materials in order to ensure a balanced and representative collection. I will say that though there is some international focus, it is generally more broadly couched in case study and philosophy, allowing for broad applicability.

LIS has, of late, become ever more interested in digital humanities. Rightfully so as it combines the connected field of information technology with the social science and humanities blend often found in library-focused research. This particular volume offers a much-needed exploration of the colonized nature of information used at the intersection of these foci. This is not to say that LIS does not incorporate intersectional feminism. However, it is not a focus as often as one might hope, and this type of research will become more and more necessary as academia and the general library world work to improve diversity and inclusion through decolonization of our institutions. Though I and many readers are LIS focused, digital humanities spans and touches many disciplines—nearly all of them in some way, in fact—and this volume would be an appropriate addition to the libraries of most of them as a central text in understanding how to take our work and develop it in a more fruitful and productive way.

References

Eubanks, V. (2018). *Automating inequality: How high-tech tools profile, police, and punish the poor*. St. Martin's.

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. NYU Press.

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