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Critical Theory and the Mangle of Digital Humanities

As the various fields of the digital humanities have begun to mature and gain institutional traction, a debate has started to coalesce around the relationship between the "critical" function of the humanities and the "building" and "making" claims of the digital humanities (Ramsay; Mandell; Liu 2011 and 2012). While "making" was obviously central to the formation of the artifacts and objects of study in the humanities (whether musical compositions, works of art, literary texts, or films), the institutional and disciplinary formations of the humanities have largely focused their intellectual energies on criticism and interpretation. It would not be much of an exaggeration to say this has been true of humanistic fields of inquiry for centuries, if not millennia, ranging from Platonic impulses to unveil illusions and Enlightenment ideals of critical rationality to the Marxist-inflected social and cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School, not to mention more contemporary modes of deconstructive critique in fields such as post-colonialism, feminism, critical race theory, and cultural studies. But recently, the digital humanities has distinguished itself as an enterprise deeply informed by design, making, and building, even developing "a materialist epistemology" (Ramsay and Rockwell, 77), something which seems to place it at odds with the conventional notions of humanistic inquiry characterized by "reading," "interpreting," and "critiquing." To be sure, one might argue that the accent has simply shifted, to engage with and shape the material, artifactual, design, and praxis-oriented aspects of the human cultural record. But that leaves a lingering question: What is the relationship between the

"critical" function of the humanities and the "building" and "making" espoused by the digital humanities?

Alan Liu has recently thrown down the gauntlet for digital humanists, arguing that "the digital humanities have been oblivious to cultural criticism," which, for him, moves the understanding of cultural, social, and economic dynamics to the foreground through, for example, approaches informed by New Criticism, Marxist social criticism, and the methods of *Kulturgeschichte* and *Kulturkritik* spawned, crudely put, since Hegel (Liu, 2012, 491). Without "adequate critical awareness of the larger social, economic, and cultural issues at stake" (Liu, 2011, 11), digital humanities, Liu argues, will not be able to engage seriously with the changing nature of higher education in the postindustrial state. I think that Liu is right, and I would add that without this critical awareness, the digital humanities will largely ape and extend the technological imaginary as defined by corporate needs and the bottom line through instrumentalized approaches to technology that are insufficiently aware of their cultural and social conditions of possibility, not to mention the critically transformative potential of the digital humanities to construct new models of culture and society. Such models, I will argue here, have the possibility of fundamentally rethinking the public sphere and knowledge systems by revealing the operations of structures of power and exclusion, while also imagining possibilities for heterological knowledge rooted in an ethic of participation without condition.

In a word, then, the purpose of this essay is to concretely connect the core values, methods, and concepts of critical theory with what I will call, following Andrew Pickering, "the mangle of digital humanities." The mangle, for Pickering, is a metaphor for understanding scientific practices, which are marked by a "dance of agency" played out through human, material, and social strategies of resistance and accommodation (Pickering, 22-23). As such,

digital humanities is a practice and performance of making which is conditioned by human, social, and material contingencies, all of which have the potential to engage in transformative praxis. I do not think, however, that the digital humanities have been completely oblivious to cultural criticism, and there are, in fact, a number of compelling initiatives and projects that either explicitly build these bridges or, in the instantiation of the project, perform such a cultural-critical function. To be sure, there is much bridge-building that still needs to happen and to that end, I will try to articulate a network of salient, conceptual sites of contact between critical theory and digital humanities in a speculative mode that moves beyond any pure factuality or givenness of either cultural artifacts or technologies.

While the intellectual origins of critical theory stretch back to embrace elements of the Kantian critiques of reason, ethics, and aesthetics, as well as, perhaps most saliently, Marxist critiques of political economy, we can situate the flourishing of critical theory in the 1930s and 40s with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. More than a world view or cosmology, critical theory was a method of dialectical critique for the analysis and transformation of society (Buck-Morss; Jay). Plenty of comprehensive accounts of the Frankfurt School intellectuals exist, which place them within the cultural-historical context of Germany during the rise of Nazism, American exile in the 40s and 50s, and the resurgence and application of aspects of critical theory within a wide array of disciplinary arenas from debates within postmodernism to possibilities for global democracy (Wolin). I will not rehearse that history in this short essay, but merely point to some of the key concepts and problematics that, I believe, should inform the cultural-critical function of the "making" in the digital humanities.

In its most programmatic formulations by Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer in 1937, critical theory was a method for engaging in productive social critique; it did not merely

ape, register, or cite the social or cultural conditions that existed, but sought to expose their conditions of possibility, their will to truth, and, perhaps most importantly, effect a transformative change. As Marcuse wrote: "[The] constructive quality of critical theory ... came from the force with which it spoke against the facts and confronted bad facticity with its better potentialities" (Marcuse, 143). In this regard, it is both a critical view on society and a constructive practice, one which is future-oriented and engaged in the imagination of a "coming society," even one that has unrealized and untapped utopian elements (Marcuse, 146). For Marcuse, explicitly citing the concluding questions in Kant's first critique, the task of critical theory is not to simply register 'what is or was' (questions of fact), but also pose speculative questions of 'what could or might be' as well as ethical questions of 'what should or ought' I to do (Marcuse, 146). Reformulating Marcuse's critique of traditional philosophy and its ways of investigating the world and creating knowledge, critical theory might be able to expose "the specific social conditions at the root of [digital humanities'] inability to pose the problem in a more comprehensive way" (Marcuse, 149-50). A "more comprehensive way," I suggest, takes us out of the domain of facticity and objective knowledge and into the domain of social practices, the speculative, the future-oriented, and the ethical.

For Horkheimer, "traditional theory"—whether that of philosophy or science—was about the pursuit of factual knowledge and the technological mastery of the world isolated from its social and material conditions, whereas "critical theory" was always aware of and engaged with the social and material conditions of both the researcher and object of study (197). Horkheimer denounces the seemingly objective intellectual pursuits of scholars, which largely accept the world as it is and pursue knowledge outside of or irrespective of social, material, and cultural conditions. Instead, like Marcuse and Adorno, he privileged notions of "negation" or "negative

dialectics," because it is here that he sees the power to interrogate and undo totalizing systems, expose immanent knowledge claims, salvage the heteronymous or non-identical, and, in the words of Ernst Bloch, recognize traces of the "not-yet-existing" (also, cf. Buck-Morss, 76). Particularly for Bloch, Adorno, and Benjamin, the notion of futurity, especially the utopian or messianic idea, was a crucial part of the transformative possibilities that they imagined for critical theory. In what follows, I will begin with social practices—particularly, "the mangle of digital humanities"—before turning to the critical-theoretical, speculative, and ethical dimensions of digital humanities.

Countless many critiques of "traditional theory" (Horkheimer) and "scientific objectivity" (Marcuse, 156) in the pursuit of knowledge have come in the wake of the Frankfurt school.¹ One need only look to the work of Georges Canguilhem and his student, Michel Foucault, to understand, via Nietzschean anti-foundationalism, the nexus of knowledge and power in distinguishing the normative from the pathological; or, more recently, the burgeoning field of science, technology, and society studies, marked by the critical work of thinkers such as Bruno Latour, Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, Ian Hacking, and Andrew Pickering. For Pickering in particular, science is a resolutely performative practice in which the material, temporal, social, and cultural dimensions of "doing" or "making" are characterized by "the mangle," which, in his formulation, is a "dialectic of resistance and accommodation" (Pickering, 22). In practice, this means resistance and failure (material, conceptual, and so forth) and the active human response to this failure through various kinds of accommodations, work-arounds, and revisions. In effect, what Pickering does—not unlike the critical theory articulated by Marcuse—is consider "the social dimensions of scientific culture ... in the plane of practice and, as always, in principle,

¹ Outside the Frankfurt School (although more or less contemporaneous), we might cite Ludwig Fleck's *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (1935), which influenced thinkers such as Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Kuhn.

subject to mangling there, just like and together with the material and conceptual dimensions" (Pickering, 61).

With Marcuse and Pickering in mind, we might ask: Where is critical theory in digital humanities practices? How do we characterize the mangle of digital humanities—that is to say, the performative dimension of resistance and accommodation that characterizes the "doing" of digital humanities through various kinds of agency: human, material, computational, conceptual, and disciplinary? As someone who has conceptualized, developed, and helped build a number of digital humanities projects, I would argue that they are all marked by the mangle of practice: sometimes things work out one way and sometimes they do not; sometimes funding exists to do one thing, but half way there, you need to change directions to accommodate something else; sometimes particular kinds of expertise exist and sometimes they do not (and sometimes you don't even know what kind of expertise you need); sometimes conceptual models map onto practice and sometimes the practice, or the software, or the storage system, or the data push forward new conceptual models; sometimes the work-around, the quick-and-dirty, the hack, or the kludge is all there is to move a project forward, not a set of systematic code and design principles followed in a replicable, logical order. Some digital projects iterate; some digital projects fail; some engender whole new fields of investigation, while others close in on themselves. Digital humanities is experimental, dirty, and completely suffused by social and material dialectics of resistance and accommodation, failure and revision, hacks and protocols.

But who wants to betray the kludge at the core of their practice? Who wants to expose the mangle of practice—the contingencies, resistances, accommodations, constraints, failures, agencies, and revisions—that make up every digital humanities project? Instead (and often for good reason), we encounter most digital humanities projects in their "un-mangled" state:

seemingly objective knowledge, stable systems, and (more or less) complete archives of factuality, which adhere to well-established meta-data and encoding standards to facilitate robust search, discovery, and use. Where is the mangle in such digital archives? Why do such projects look so much like "traditional theory" and "factual knowledge"? What is at stake in exposing and documenting this mangle of practices, performances, constructions, social relations, and disciplinary powers at the core of both the technological factuality ("the technical tools") and content-based factuality ("the cultural archive")? Of course, the two cannot and should not be extricated from one another, as they are recursive elements of any knowledge system. The point is to interrogate the stakes of their presumed "givenness" and, thereby, shift attention to their conditions of possibility, their cultural and social contingency, and, finally, their transformative potentiality. As the emerging subfield of platform and critical codes studies has already shown, the mangle of material, cultural, social, and conceptual forces denaturalizes the seeming objectivity and givenness of computational systems, platforms, code modules, inscription practices, and storage devices (Bogust and Montfort), revealing their structuring assumptions, protocols, and even ideologies of power (Chun).

To these forces, one would have to add the knowledge practices and rules for the control of discourse analyzed, for example, by Michel Foucault in his 1970 inaugural address to the Collège de France. Here, Foucault points to the rules of exclusion, the establishment of the difference between reason and folly, and the will to truth supported by a whole strata of practices and institutional sites, ranging from pedagogy, learned societies, and laboratories to libraries, the book publishing system, and, we might add, grant and funding agencies (Foucault, 219ff). Disciplines function, according to Foucault, as anonymous systems to regulate discourse through various kinds of practices of rarefaction, rituals, doctrines of truth, and social appropriations.

Foucault looks to the conditions of possibility of discourse and, thereby, focuses attention on "notions of chance, discontinuity, and materiality" (Foucault, 231), bringing both a critical and a genealogical principle to unmask the unification, normalization, and diffusion of discourse. Ultimately, his challenge is to "reestablish contact with the non-philosophical" (Foucault, 236), the so-called "noise" of the madman or the utterances of bare-life, which are not even "within the true" (Foucault, 224) or part of public discourse because such utterances are not recognized as knowledge worthy of the distinction between true and false, right and wrong, important and insignificant.

Foucault's investment in reestablishing contact with the "non-philosophical" accords, in many ways, with the critical theory of Benjamin and Adorno, both of whom articulated a philosophy of negative dialectics rooted in the preservation of the particular, the non-identical, and the heterological. For Benjamin, the task of the historical materialist was to "brush history against the grain," revealing the "barbarism" lurking within every so-called "cultural treasure" of civilization (Benjamin, 256-57). Writing after the Second World War and the Holocaust, Adorno considered genocide to be "the absolute integration" (362), the imposition of an identity principle in which the other was made to perish. Negative dialectics contravened the principle of synthesis (of historical processes, of knowledge systems), which Adorno defined as "the definition of the difference that perished" (157). Opposed to totalizing systems of knowledge, universal histories, and final syntheses, critical theory privileges the heteronymous, the particular, the voice of the other, and the fragment—all of which underscore openness, unfinishedness, and the refusal of closure in any knowledge system.

As such, the first challenge for digital humanities is to develop both critical and genealogical principles for exposing its own discursive structures and knowledge formations at

every level of practice, from the materiality of platforms, the textuality of the code, and the development of content objects to the systems of inclusion and exclusion, truth and falsehood governing its disciplinary rituals, doctrines, and social systems. This is what I earlier termed the critical-theoretical dimension of the digital humanities. But equally important is the speculative dimension of the digital humanities because it is here that one engages with the possible, the future, the not-yet, with that which might or could be. Here, I am especially interested in the subjunctive nature of speculative making, as the creation of a possible future, for this is what links it to the vaguely utopian dimensions of critical theory.

Nowadays, utopian ideas have a bad rap because they appear hopelessly naïve or programmatically prescriptive; however, without an idea of change for the better, there can be no constructive social critique. For the digital humanities, I believe that there is a utopian idea at its core: participation without condition.² To be sure, "participatory" is a foundational concept of many digital humanities projects insofar as they create conditions for engagement with communities and individuals not traditionally involved with humanities research and the documentation of the human cultural record.³ Participatory is arrayed against the rules of prohibition and exclusion, the rarefaction principles and fellowships of discourse that create knowledge hierarchies and closed communities of practitioners; instead, participatory culture is, in its best sense, open-ended, non-hierarchical, and trans-migratory, aimed at reestablishing contact with the non-philosophical. "Participation without condition" is not a principle that can be willed into place, but rather an ideal to build towards through imaginative speculation and ethically informed engagement, one which promises—in the Derridean sense of the *arrivant*—to

² The authors of *Digital Humanities* reference this notion once in our collaboratively authored book, and I build on that reference here (94).

³ For an excellent overview of modalities of "collaboration" and "participation" in the digital humanities, see Lisa Spiro's essay, "Computing and Communicating Knowledge: Collaborative Approaches to Digital Humanities Projects."

go beyond the limits and boundaries erected by prior formations of the humanities (Derrida, 2002).

Digital humanities scholarship has begun to render the walls of the university porous by engaging with significantly broader publics in the design, creation, and dissemination of knowledge. By conceiving of scholarship in ways that foundationally involve community partners, cultural institutions, the private sector, non-profits, government agencies, and slices of the general public, digital humanities expands both the notion of scholarship and the public sphere in order to create new sites and nodes of engagement, documentation, and collaboration. With such an expanded definition of scholarship, digital humanists are able to place questions of social justice and civic engagement, for example, front-and-center; they are able to revitalize the cultural record in ways that involve citizens in the academic enterprise and bring the academy into the expanded public sphere. The result is a form of scholarship that is, by definition, applied: It applies the knowledge and methods of the humanities to pose new questions, to design new possibilities, and to create citizen-scholars who value the complexity, ambiguity, and differences that comprise our cultural record as a species. I will now discuss several digital humanities projects, which I think tarry with this notion of participation without condition.

The "Voices of January 25th" and "Voices of February 17th" documentary projects are compelling examples of how social technologies like twitter can be used to give voice to people who were silenced in the 2011 revolutions in Egypt and Libya. Started by John Scott-Railton, a graduate student at UCLA, the projects used twitter to disseminate suppressed messages from dissidents to the world. Scott-Railton began the Voices of January 25th project when Egypt effectively "turned off" the Internet for five days in January of 2011. Relying on cell phones and later landlines, Scott-Railton began calling friends in Egypt who knew protesters and could

provide highly localized and accurate accounts of what was happening on the ground. He assembled a network of trusted informants who agreed to have their phone calls recorded and published to the world on AudioBoo, an audio hosting service. Scott-Railton simultaneously posted messages to twitter, often with links to audio files and other media reports that would help the world "see" and "hear" what was going on in Egypt in real-time. In effect, the digital portal became a global public sphere, however fragile and endangered, that was fundamentally linked to the deeply embodied and precisely located events on the ground. The tens of thousands of voices are now part of a living web archive and documentary memorial (Scott-Railton).

While the "role" of social media has been feverishly debated in fomenting, planning, and sustaining revolutions since twitter was first hailed—somewhat exaggeratedly—as a revolutionary technology in Moldova in 2009 (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu) and YouTube became a people's archive for election protests in Tehran during the summer of that same year⁴, it seems incontestable that the "public images" of broadcast media (often singular, uni-directional, and hierarchical) are being supplanted by decentralized, multi-directional "public utterances" that are changing the way in which events unfold, become represented, and are disseminated (almost instantaneously) on a global scale. Two decades ago, Paul Virilio thought that the physical space of the public sphere had become replaced by the media of the "public image" (9)⁵; but now we are seeing the reassertion of the public sphere through radically non-Cartesian geographies

⁴ For a sobering account of the dialectical underbelly of social media technologies, see, for example, Evgeny Morozov's analysis of the "dark side" of the twitter revolution, in which he shows how totalitarian regimes harness social media to track and detain dissidents: "Iran: Downside to the "Twitter Revolution"" and the broader treatment in his book, *The Net Delusion*.

⁵ Building on Virilio, Mark Poster provides a prescient analysis of how new collective voices, human-machine assemblages, and dialogical interactivities have the potential to "promote a decentralization of discourse, if not of democracy itself," by flouting traditional understandings of private property, public discourse, state authority, and moral proprieties (182).

enabled by what I would call the web's "contiguity of the non-contiguous."⁶ What this means is a massive contraction and alignment of the event (an embodied and location specific phenomenon), the representation of the event (through twitter messages, cell phone video and photographs, and so forth), and the dissemination of the event (through web-based social networks and information channels). The result is a significantly more adaptable, amorphous, global, but also ephemeral public sphere, one which may, for example, be constituted as a contiguous space connecting Westwood, California, and, simultaneously, Tahrir Square in Cairo or Benghazi, Libya.

Around the same time that Scott-Railton began the Voices of January 25th project, the HyperCities team at UCLA created a mash-up for live streaming and archiving twitter feeds from Egypt and visualizing them on a Google Map. The project, "HyperCities Now," made live calls to the standard twitter search API for tweets originating within 25 miles of Cairo's city center and containing hashtags such as #jan25 or #egypt.⁷ Over the course of several weeks, about 450,000 tweets from Egypt were archived, with the most tweets (nearly 25,000) occurring in the hours preceding Mubarak's resignation speech on February 11th, 2011, most of which expressed frustration over his reticence to speak. In all, the project archived messages from more than 40,000 distinct twitter users documenting the events of the Egyptian Revolution and, thereby, adding a substantial number of voices and perspectives to the historical record. In addition to Egypt, the team also mapped and archived twitter feeds from Libya as well as Sendai, Japan, following the earthquake and tsunami. Spearheaded by a team of volunteers from GISCorps and

⁶ This is a play on Ernst Bloch's famous idea of the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" to refer to the temporal dynamics of modernity. I am reworking this phrase to emphasize the ways in which geographically distant events and people may now be linked, via the web, as if contiguous with one another.

⁷ Sensitive to the risks involved in creating an archive that precisely maps twitter users, messages, and location, the HyperCities team truncated the exact latitude and longitude (when it was returned by twitter's location parameter) at the hundredth decimal place, effectively placing a tweet within a 2 mile radius, rather than at an exact GPS location.

CrisisCommons, the project mapped more than 650,000 social media feeds onto GIS data (including flood zones, evacuation centers, traffic, and public phone locations) so that real-time decisions for coordinating disaster relief could be carried out. By harnessing and repurposing the affordances of existing tools and technologies, the digital humanities team, led by Yoh Kawano, played a decisively interventionist, even public role in responding to and documenting the disaster.

Unlike the algorithmically aggregated, displayed, and archived data of "HyperCities Now," Railton-Scott's work was possible because of ever-expanding, although deeply fragile, networks of human witnesses who trusted him to steward and relay what they saw and experienced on the ground. In this sense, the project accords with an earlier project of curation created by Xarene Eskandar, also a graduate student at UCLA, documenting, day-by-day and often hour-by-hour and sometimes even minute-by-minute, the election protests in Tehran during the summer and fall of 2009. Utilizing the HyperCities platform, Eskandar, a native of Tehran living in Los Angeles, painstakingly documented gunfire, protest sites, photographs, twitter messages, and YouTube videos, creating a geo-chronology for thousands of reports and media object that she found online and through networks of contacts. This project, like Scott-Railton's, was profoundly connected to the original etymology of the term curation, meaning "care of souls" or, in some cases, "stewardship of the dead." Both sought to curate—care for, preserve, document, and archive—the lives, experiences, and actions of the protesters for a global audience, despite (or perhaps because of) the precarious material, social, and technical conditions of possibility for the very stories. At every moment, various agencies, resistances, accommodations, revisions, contingencies, and even failures constituted the "mangle" of practice of these digital humanities projects.

While the projects curate data in different ways, they have analogous goals of expanding the concept of the public sphere through an ethic of participation and community collaboration. They were each deployed extremely quickly—in a matter of days—as experiments or prototypes to intervene in an event that was still unfolding and unbounded. Far from complete or total archives documenting "the whole history" of the revolution or the disaster, they are motivated by several principles that I think accord with critical theory as a socially engaged praxis: a respect for multiplicity and difference through the creation of trusted social bonds, an approach to historical documentation that builds from the fragments of participatory discourse, and a concept of archivization made possible by the contingent material technologies of communication (ranging from mobile phones, social media applications, and decentralized data centers to MySQL, PHP, and JSON scripts). Far from simply documents of the past ("what was"), these archives are spectral, in that they pose haunting questions about the possibility of a future—in the Derridean sense of "what might come"—and, therefore, are motivated by a responsibility or promise that remains open and undetermined (Derrida, 1998, 36). As much as we may hope for a coming democracy, the future may also bring the disaster, and this is something with which these projects hauntingly reckon.

While there is a growing number of compelling cultural-critical archive projects and platforms that have emerged over the past few years—including "The Real Face of White Australia," which is part of the Invisible Australians initiative, and platforms such as Mukurtu, a content management system that foregrounds cultural difference, perspective, and responsibility through differential modes of access to sensitive cultural artifacts—I will conclude by discussing two projects by Sharon Daniel and Erik Loyer, both published in the online journal *Vectors*: "Public Secrets" and "Blood Sugar." The projects are audio archives of individuals who have

been precluded from participating in public discourse: *Public Secrets* gives voice to women in California state prisons, while *Blood Sugar* gives voice to heroin addicts at a needle exchange program outside of Oakland. In terms of genre, they might be considered "database documentaries," in that the segments of the stories—told by the women and men in their own words through interviews with the Daniel—are linked together in a back-end database that establishes sets of relations (conceptual, semantic, contextual, and so forth) and, algorithmically, generates links to the stories in a navigable front-end as interconnected documents. As users navigate the stories, they become enmeshed deeper and deeper into the lives of those whose speech is barely recognizable as speech because it does not, in Foucault's sense, stem from "within the true." That is to say, it is speech that has been deliberately silenced, squelched, and excluded from participation and adjudication within public discourse: In the case of *Public Secrets*, it is because the women are not allowed to transmit their speech beyond the prison walls and that (under most circumstances) their speech cannot even be recorded and disseminated;⁸ in the case of *Blood Sugar*, it is because the addicts live in a liminal zone of privation on the street, without basic civic or social services. In both projects, the speech from "inside" bears witness to the imposition of sovereign power over the other, of the transformation of a human life into bare life, of the reduction of humanity to mere biological functionality.

In discussion with N. Katherine Hayles, Daniel remarked that her projects shift attention from representations to modalities of participation in that the audio archives allow "others to provide their own representation" (qtd. in Hayles, 39). In this sense, her projects are predicated on an ethic of participation in which the most imprisoning of conditions have been punctured, if only in that moment of transmission beyond the locked confines of the prison and beyond the

⁸ Daniel notes that as a "legal advocate" working for the non-profit, human rights group "Justice Now," she was granted access to the facility and allowed to record the voices of the women inside, provided she adhered to the "Kafkaesque" search and surveillance procedures of the prison (2007).

conceptual, social, and civic walls of public society. But even more than enabling speech, the project also performs—through the dialogical interactivity of the interface itself—an ethical relationship, in which viewers/listeners are placed in the Levinasian position of responsibility vis-à-vis the voice and experiences of the other. It is a project that solicits careful and sensitive listening, of being open to the voice of the other, and, therefore, raises an infinite claim that haunts our own (relatively safe and secure) social, material, and cultural circumstances of listening.

Let me now conclude. Each of these projects offers perspectives and possibilities for digital humanities to develop a cultural-critical praxis rooted in an ethic of participation and curation. But perhaps one might object: What does it mean that these projects were all built on corporate platforms and software (such as Google Maps, Twitter, ArcGIS, and Flash)⁹? Do they inevitably speak their language, surreptitiously ape their worldviews, and quietly extend the dominance of the technological imaginary as put forward by corporations? Or, perhaps, might they create fissures, alternative narratives, incommensurabilities, and new moves within the existing platforms and paradigms? Such a deconstructive strategy is what Lyotard once termed "paralogy" for its "imaginative invention" of giving rise to the unknown, disturbing the order of reason, producing dissent, and imagining a new move from within the order of things (60ff). The imaginative ability "to make a new move or change the rules of the game" (52) by organizing and "arranging data in a new way" (51), for example, lies at the heart of curation in a cultural-critical mode. It teases out sites of tension and possibility that give voice to particularity and expand notions of participation; it destabilizes and de-ontologizes representational cartographies, corporate platforms, and technologies—not to mention so-called social truths and

⁹ It should be noted that they also use open standards, open source code, and free software, such as HTML5, MySQL, and PHP.

publicly accepted norms—through new modes of interactivity, memory mapping, consciousness raising, and forms of counter-mapping. One might cavalierly or cynically dismiss this as naïve, but I think it embodies the cultural-critical, weakly utopian possibility of the digital humanities.

The task, of course, is never finished, and, as such, it demands an ever-renewed alliance between the making practices of the digital humanities and the transformative social praxis of critical theory. As Foucault writes with regard to a philosophy that seeks to reestablish contact with the non-philosophical: "this philosophy was to examine the singularity of history, the regional rationalities of science, the depths of memory in consciousness; thus arose the notion of a philosophy that was *present, uncertain, mobile all along its lines of contact with non-philosophy*, existing on its own, however, and revealing the meaning this non-philosophy has for us" (Foucault, 236, my emphasis). Digital humanities suffused with critical theory strives to mediate between and render into contact the philosophical and the non-philosophical, the mapped and the unmapped, the human life and the bare life, the technologies of factuality and the fissures of the infinitely participatory. In this tension, sites for the heterological and the non-identical may inform and open up humanities knowledge in ways that truly enable participation without condition. As both an epistemology and an ethics of materialist making, the digital humanities might become a cultural-critical praxis that engages not only with what is, but also with what might be and what ought to be. Ultimately, this is why it is deeply wed to the critical lineage of the humanities.

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