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MAREK DEBNÁR, ANDREJ GOGORA:
Digitálne trendy v súčasných humanitných vedách
[Digital Trends in Contemporary Humanities]
Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, Centrum digitálnych humanitných vied pri Filozofickej fakulte, 2019, 130 p.

Digital Humanities (DH) is an expanding field that uses digital technologies, resources and methodologies to advance humanities, research and teaching. It has the potential to address many of the changes occurring in the academic ecosystem, such as evolving practices of authorship and collaboration. DH is also causing a gap to emerge between those who use new digital tools to aid relatively traditional scholarly projects and those who believe that DH can change fundamental aspects of academic practice (Gold, *Ed.*, 2012). As the field has developed, debates have emerged about what it means to be a 'digital humanist', with some arguing that coding and technological infrastructure building are essential requirements for the field. The other group leans towards interdisciplinary collaboration and the use of DH as one of the methods in their research – adapting not the research to the method but the method to the research. Overall, the rise of the DH is significant for the humanities and their scholars, including ethnology and anthropology, because it introduces new research methods and pedagogies and has the potential to reshape academic practice. Gold (*Ed.*, 2012) describes that DH for one group of scholars represents a powerful political force that reshapes the fundamental underpinnings of academic practice. Patrik Svensson (2012) explains the discourse of the 'big tent', this is an inclusive conception of DH where there is an ongoing effort to embrace all humanities under this metaphorical tent and to unify the research of these disciplines and systematize it based on common technological requirements so that all fields are compatible and interdisciplinary research can take place. Marek Debnár and Andrej Gogora are the authors of the scholarly monograph *Digitálne trendy v súčasných humanitných vedách* [Digital Trends in Contemporary Humanities] (2019) which provides the reader with a brief introduction to the discipline in Slovak discourse in the form of historical development followed by explanations using concrete examples.

The phrase "digital trends" in the title of the book refers to a rather dynamic development in the humanities that is currently receiving increasing attention. A significant part of the text is therefore devoted to a detailed historical overview of the use of digital technologies in the humanities, including a chronology of what is currently referred to as 'digital humanities' or

'humanities computing'. Changes in the perspective of scholarship influenced by vast amounts of data (or metadata) and sophisticated computer algorithms are seen as catalysts for new directions and futures for traditional approaches in the humanities. The monograph focuses mainly on the Slovak discourse, as the authors state that many misunderstandings arise in domestic scholarship in interpreting the definition and field of DH research. As they write: "These misconceptions include, for example, the rather widespread notion, especially among the older generation, that it is primarily about the digitization of original documents, or the elementary use of office suites, multimedia or web services in humanities research" (Debnár, Gogora, 2019: 10). DH is not a derivative term from "digitization"; it is a field of research, study, teaching, and invention that is created by the intersection of computing technologies and techniques with the original scope of research in the humanities disciplines. Its scope is interdisciplinary based on methodological practices. It may involve the presentation, synthesis analysis and examination of information in electronic form. Gogora and Debnár describe how it aims to study the way in which these media affect the problems under study in the disciplines in which they are used, but also how these disciplines contribute to knowledge about computing. This relationship has been explored by many authors dealing with DH. The fundamental question of this relationship is then posed by Warwick (Warwick, Terras, Nyhan, *Eds.*, 2012): is DH an application of computational methods to humanities research or cultural heritage, or is it instead an application of humanities research methods to digital phenomena? But this is not the only author to address this question, Frabetti (2011, in Sabharwal, 2015: 28) referred to the digital humanities simply as "the humanities in dialogue with digital technologies", addressing the relationship between the humanities and technology. Frabetti points to the need to be aware of the implications of digital technology for the humanities, and not just of technology as a tool. This rationale can also be applied to Cohen and Rosenzweig's (2011, in Sabharwal, 2015: 28) technorealist approach, which advocates a middle ground between the positions of extreme technosceptics and cyberenthusiasts. Hall (2011) also addresses the reciprocal relationship between the humanities and technology when he writes: "as interesting as what computer science has to offer the humanities is the question of what the humanities... have to offer computer science; and, moreover, what the humanities themselves can bring to the understanding of computing and the shaping of the digital" (p. 2). On the first level, this makes the research methods of "humanities computing" accessible to a wider range of scholars, and on the second level it brings in the equipment that significantly affects their daily lives. Many publications then cover specific areas of practice, as the development of different tools for research or everyday life is ongoing.

After explaining the historical context, the authors of the monograph also focused on a specific area of practice, namely text analysis. IT tools for text analysis are constantly evolving and are able to process relatively consistently larger and larger archives of texts. "In connection with the digitization of books, journals and other texts into large electronic libraries and hypertext databases, there has arisen a need to rethink and redefine not only the notion of reading and its variations, but also to specify the possibilities of digital analyses of literary and scholarly texts" (Debnár, Gogora, 2019: 81–82). As the authors of the monograph mention this allows questions to emerge that have not been asked before and to change our approach to the study of literature. However, other authors criticize this method, for example Mark Alfano, in his paper *A case study on Nietzsche,* writes that "the latter (means distant reading) has been available for years, but despite promising to lead to new insights and complement existing approaches, they have made almost no inroads in philosophy" (Alfano, 2018: 86), as he goes on to state, there are 20 million articles, chapters and books available on

www.philpapers.org, but a search for "Digital Humanities" returned twenty-one unique publications, of which he himself is the author of three.[1] In the conclusion of the same paper, he further emphasizes the need to get the parameters of such research right and how easily inconsistencies can arise: "Rigorous, criticizable, correctable, and reproducible methods must be used to avoid the crisis of replication" (Alfano, 2018: 99). If we expect multiple researchers to examine a single complex text by a single author, it is necessary to set general rules and parameters for the research so that the systematics of the work are general and each researcher is able to participate without replicating the research of someone before them, and it is here that we see the greatest shortcomings of this research method, namely the absence of uniform methodological recommendations, or multiple alternatives to them.

In the last chapter, the authors examine how the author and his empirical form disappeared from literary theoretical research and how this led to a reorganization of the author-work relationship. This shift occurred in the early twentieth century with Russian formalism and phenomenology. The chapter emphasizes that the retreat of the author was not only due to new technologies, but also to shifts in theory and the search for new methods of literary research. Theorists and philosophers of this period sought other principles for organizing units of meaning in a text, such as its intertextual relations with other texts, its structure, and its choice of linguistic devices, "the digital age has once again raised the problem of the relation to the self, and hypertextual writing is a constant process of eclectic writing and self-publishing. It is in this way that we acquire a new virtual identity that makes digital communities possible and lies at their foundations" (Debnár, Gogora, 2019: 123), the authors explore how hypertextual writing is a continuous process of eclectic writing and self-publishing that allows us to acquire new virtual identities and create digital communities. The virtual network is the site where a constitutive practice of subjectivation occurs, leading to a new epoch of reading, writing and thinking. Overall, the chapter shows how the digital age has brought about a new understanding of the author and the subject and led to new methods of literary research that mark not only a return to the origins of philosophy, but also a new epoch of reading, writing, and thinking.

Digital Trends in the Contemporary Humanities is a valuable resource for researchers interested in the use of digital technologies in humanities research. The book provides a preliminary definition of the digital humanities, a comprehensive overview of its various aspects, and an explanation of its interdisciplinary nature. Through illustrative examples, the

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1   For a systematic overview of the use of DH and distant reading methods in philosophical research see: Gogora, A. (2016).

authors demonstrate the rapidly evolving nature of this field, which has the potential to impact both the research ecosystem and researchers within it. The book makes a significant contribution to the expanding field of digital humanities in Slovakia and beyond. It offers an excellent introduction to the potential applications of the digital humanities, and its structure and content will be appreciated by any researcher wishing to familiarize themselves with the field.

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