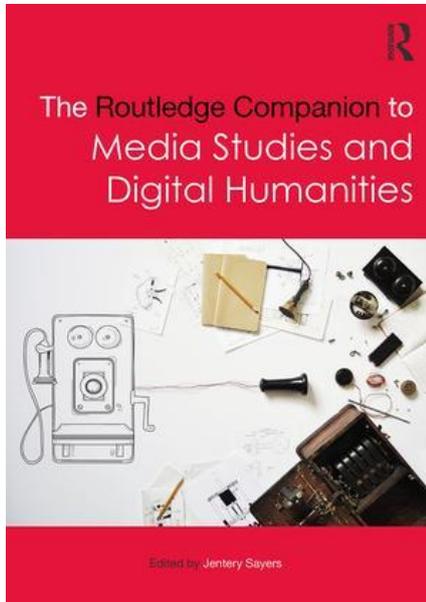




The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities

Edited by Jentery Sayers

New York and London, Routledge, 2018, pp. 584



Review by Roberta Facchinetti*

Since when the digital world took the stage, a plethora of scholarly publications has been advocating the central role of technologies in all the fields touched on by human knowledge, including the humanities, and, within the humanities, (new) media studies. Indeed, rather than being mere tools contributing to enhancing media, digital humanities have proved to “work with them” (1) and consequently force us to re-interpret and re-shape the media themselves.

The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities is a 500-page long book dedicated to the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) Community, an interdisciplinary group of humanists, artists, (social) scientists, and technologists sharing “ideas, news, tools, research, insights, pedagogy, methods, and projects – including Digital Humanities and other born-digital scholarship.”¹ The book starts from the tenet that the interplay between media and digital humanities is by now mandatory, since the two mutually inform and enrich each other in a highly diversified range of fields, as testified to by the 70 contributions to the five sections of the volume: Part I. Access, Praxis, Justice; Part II. Design, Interface, Interaction; Part III. Mediation, Method, Materiality; Part IV. Remediation, Data, Memory; Part V. Making, Programming, Hacking.

Part 1. The twelve contributors of this section target digital-mediated cultures and investigate how social justice work is activated through (new) media as a form of practice, by enhancing participation and by sharing different forms of activism involving new media. They concentrate particularly on feminist studies, online and offline feminist activism, social media and political disability issues, game studies and

* Roberta Facchinetti is Full Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Verona. Her main research interests, which are supported by the use of computerised corpora of both synchronic and diachronic English, focus on media linguistics, lexicography and ESP. On these subjects she has authored, co-authored and edited various books, articles, and special issues of journals, including *Specialized Discourses and ESP on the Web* (2017), *“Langue et medias: du terme au concept (et vice versa)”* (2017), and *“English in social media: A linguistic analysis of tweets”* (2015). She is an editorial board member of international journals and serves as a reviewer for scientific publications.

¹ <https://www.hastac.org/> Last Visited November 4, 2018.



videogames. Their main research questions are, among others, (a) how digital ontologies shape our methods of enquiry, (b) how scholarship related to disability and digital accessibility can favor understanding and critique of academic digital tools, thus promoting a more inclusive sphere, and (c) how far new media interactive narratives can address social and political trauma.

Part 2. This section focuses on the central role of design in critical and creative inquiry through media, challenging the widely entrenched opinion that design, interfaces and interaction are mere additive features. Being aware of such key role allows digital humanists “to think more complexly about such issues as the cultural work of technology, the epistemology of data, the infrastructure of knowledge production, and the deployment of critical methods of analysis” (142). Key issues featured in this section are the cultural implications of design, the design of space, speculative design, experience design, on the one hand, and affective play, critical play, wearable interfaces, deep mapping and smart subjects in the Internet of things, on the other.

Part 3, with eleven contributions, touches on various forms of mediation, affect and materiality significant for research in the humanities, including networks, television, moving images, analytics, and infrastructures. With reference to sound, for example, one chapter illustrates how creative practices and tools vary with each soundmaker’s cultural location and identity. A further chapter offers a critical humanities-based approach to software that engages the growing importance of algorithms. Others lay special focus on “physical computing,” a set of tools, technologies and practices used by artists, technologists, academics and hobbyists facilitating computer interaction with bodies and objects in the physical world.

Part 4. The twelve chapters of this section constantly swing between obsolescence and innovation, old and new media, past and present, in an attempt to answer a set of questions that have been gaining ground more and more over the last few years. Contributors mostly deal with broad-ranging issues like how media are visualized, when media become “data” and how such data change in format over time, and again how born-digital texts and new media art can be preserved, and which systems of knowledge and archival practices can be put into use. More specific themes also find their way in this section, like collaborative annotation, “augmented reality,” the teaching of digital African studies, and a scholarly study on 3-D histories of South Africa.

Part 5. With its eight contributions, this final section underscores the critical and creative dimensions of the intertwining between making, programming and hacking, on the one hand, and writing, ethnography and archival work, on the other. Focus is placed, for example, on programming and literacy, but also on expressive processing, on building interactive stories, and on critical code studies. Special attention is dedicated to learning from doing, citizen sensing, and how to approach design as inquiry. Of interest is also the emphasis on making things in order to make sense of things, on the reading of culture through code, and on the interpretation and creation of expressive processing.

As testified to by the wide array of topics featured in the *Companion*, its contributors come from very different backgrounds and working contexts and range from academics to practitioners, from field experts to activists. The chapters are indeed written by artists, designers and media theorists, by experts in digital culture, visual culture, and cyberculture, by scholars of communicative history and media, by academics working on digital diasporas, on the relationships between on and offline spaces, and on new civil rights in digital cultures. Some of the authors are experts in media infrastructures and sound design, professionals in the hermeneutics of play, race, gender and social justice, not to mention writers, filmmakers, and musicians.

A number of the contributors lead projects at the intersection between media and digital humanities, among which I will mention the following: marginalized groups’ use of digital media; feminist theory and gaming spaces; native Americans in the digital age; health and organizational communication; disability issues in the digital world; media practices contributing to political change; individual and community growth; and finally the interplay of power structures and identity in digital culture. All such projects are detailed in a 25-page long GLOSSARY OF PROJECTS, each accompanied by an explanation and its corresponding reference link.

Projects, authors’ background and the wide range of topics aptly testify to the fact that “the digital more and more infuses our everyday ways of being, writing, making, and thinking” (14) and that we need to move away from the cliché that digital technology has disruptive revolutionary effects on prior social, economic, and political arrangements. In contrast, this *Companion* convincingly argues that humanities not only positively intersect with the digital but rather increasingly operate within that conjunction in a most productive way.