Sylvan leaves in Arcadia: A critique of the digital humanities

Luke Strongman
The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

Dr Luke Strongman has published in the areas of postcolonial literature and theory, New Zealand literature, post-modern research pedagogy, creative industries, globalisation, and environmental psychology. He teaches in the Humanities degree major at The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand where he is Lecturer in Humanities and research facilitator for the School of Information and Social Science.

86 Wyndrum Avenue
Private Bag 31914
Lower Hutt
DD: + 64 4 913 5936
Luke.Strongman@OpenPolytechnic.ac.nz

Abstract: This article provides a critique of the emerging discipline of the digital humanities. Taking the form of a philosophical enquiry, the essay examines central issues that follow from the amalgamation of digital computing architecture with traditional humanities’ methodologies. Using theoretical and literary analysis, the development of new disciplinary practices proposed by the binary combination of structural (technē) and semantic (poetic) contexts constituted by the digital humanities is problematised. The article points to ways in which developments in the digital humanities have the potential to revise and transform communicative practice within the discipline, as well as delineating the ethical-political features of disciplinary change.

Introduction

The methodology employed in this essay is qualitative and analytical. It is based on inductive and deductive inferences following from interpretative and critical readings of philosophical, communication and digital literatures derived from both print-based and Internet searches. The article highlights and explores central features of the textual landscape (text-scape) and the methodological problematics of the emerging field of the digital humanities. In particular, an examination is made of a dichotomy at the centre of the digital humanities paradigm, the problems posed by the disciplinary integration of computer architecture and software with the traditional analytic and creative methodologies of humanist research.
If the humanities have traditionally been characterised by the study of the many disciplines of human culture through epistemologies informed by both subjective and objective critiques transmitted through oral- and print-based learning, the digital humanities combines these fields of intellectual enquiry more closely with digital computing architecture. The accepted model of technology and cultural change—that new technologies are applied to old uses, that those old uses change and new uses develop, which are then adopted by communication institutions producing new cultural forms and meanings—is problematical because it fails to account for the intellectual issues, debates and resistances that are encoded in paradigmatic change (McQuail, 1998). A core question emerges from this Gordian knot—can linear and organic creative realms effectively co-exist; will they inevitably lead to the creation of new ontologies of humanist research as well as differences in epistemological approaches? This paper seeks to reservedly confirm the latter whilst acknowledging significant differences in the scope, form and methodologies of emerging digital genres.

The digital humanities is concerned with the creation of new knowledge in the manipulation of digital data. As a critical adjunct to digital archives, the digital humanities is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in conception. It involves the interaction and syncopation of digital computing architecture with the humanities’ disciplines, including history, philosophy, linguistics, art, music, anthropology, and literature, in fields such as visual art theory, new media arts, archaeological computation, visual anthropology, human geography, and digital recordings of aural texts.

What are the components of the digital humanities? It comprises new media, computer-based technology, digital library collections, open access digital or collaborative scholarship through the Internet and World Wide Web, humanities database silos, digital institutional repositories, online learning, knowledge transfer and curatorial digital preservation techniques. Practice in the digital humanities involves textual analyses utilising software, language learning, linguistic instruction, and computer-based research. It involves data presentation and analysis in the cultural domain, computer applications for the arts, music, architecture, information management, forecasting, and modelling, and the presentation and analysis of data in
the academic curriculum. Many of the uses of these digital domains have yet to be theorised. Relatedly, issues of funding are dependent on the ‘soft’ financial input from corporations, sometimes independently of universities. This leads to the perennial academic concerns of freedom of voice and independence of criticism, in turn raising such questions as to whether funding avenues determine the results in ‘paid for’ projects or if there are academic ideals which transcend the project. Are the ethics involved corporate or academic?

The field of the digital humanities can be divided into theory and practice, but like any adjunct of the creative industries, it involves the intersection of government, industry and education. Large sums of public and corporate money have been spent creating digital library collections using advances in the technologies of data storage since the mid-1990s. Terabytes of humanities data are selectively available, distributed across the database networks of many institutions: libraries, universities, government departments, and private corporations. Some of the data are publicly available on the Internet; some of have variously restricted access according to the position and affiliation of the researcher. In this digital realm the international transferability of material published on the Internet creates a virtual world in which physical print-based essentialisms of knowledge creation are supplanted by a culture of digital immediacy. However, the problems this presents in relation to issues of authenticity in knowledge creation are only tangential to the present article.

These new digital platforms represent excellent opportunities for research and teaching, but are met with disciplinary scepticism from traditional practitioners who either cannot envision their application in existing pedagogical practice or for whom they represent challenging hybrids of traditional disciplinary technique. There are also issues of economies of scale encountered in such projects, which can seem daunting to the uninitiated.

An example may be found in the potential applications of KAREN (The Kiwi Advanced Research and Education Network) to the digital humanities in New Zealand, with the aim and purpose of allowing learning and research to be distributed across a variety of systems and databases, enabling high-speed access to databases.
and the pedagogical networks of related practitioners through the Access Grid communication facilities.\(^1\) Smaller scale enterprises include web-based databases.

The Alliance of Digital Humanities Organization (ADHO, established 2002–2005) holds that scholarship and insight into the human condition is part of an association that involves the physicality of storage devices and data manipulation. The risks of non-participation in the digital paradigm include jeopardising disciplinary currency and networking benefits, and limiting access to useful information and knowledge creation sources. As with any disciplinary specialisation, adaptation of present humanities’ practitioners to the digital humanities paradigm will depend on issues of transferability in the marketplace and ease of use. However, immediate areas for application include ODL teaching and eResearch capabilities.

Other cross-institutional data-sharing projects include primary-source web sites in literature and history such as the William Blake Archive, a hypermedia archive sponsored by the University of North Carolina; and the Internet Shakespeare Editions, a democratic Canadian Internet open-share project site hosting annotated Shakespearean texts and multimedia and sponsored by the University of Victoria, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and Innovation Development Corporation. A third example is provided by the American ‘Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War’, an Internet repository of ethnographic knowledge and epistolary narratives of the American Civil War period hosted by the Virginia Center for Digital History. The purpose of such databases is multidisciplinary and amorphous, acting as a consolidation of knowledge and a site for reference and dissemination.

The formats and sites of these systems of digitised text will change the way people conceive of and practice research and the kinds of terminology employed in their research activities. For example, ‘data-mining’ involves sorting through large amounts of data and retrieving relevant information. ‘Text-mining’ means deriving high-quality information from a text. Yet in themselves these terms delineate only

---

\(^1\) See the KAREN ‘Kiwi Advanced Research and Education Network’ (next generation telecommunication) website at http://www.karen.net.nz/home. KAREN’s digital infrastructure currently offers: 1) Virtual reality recreations of places, objects and events; 2) Access to digital documents; 3) Text-mining, topic maps, access to multi-media text annotations; 4) Online collaborative research and teaching tools (KAREN, 2008).
partial processes; synthesis and critical reflection are still required to produce emerging research. These projects sustain interactions of an a-linear but instrumental fashion; they retain an interpretative element. Advantages of data storage, retrieval, manipulation, and presentation and distributed access in the digital humanities may be contrasted with disadvantages in the application of intuitive and creative technique in textual analysis, which may ultimately lead to revision of the nature and scope of traditional disciplinary practices.

Humanist scholars have traditionally had the capacity to organise large bodies of information gathered from libraries and archives, many of which are currently undergoing transfer to digital information stores. The more digital transfers and assemblages that are made, the greater is the risk of databases being created with less stable notions of canonicity. The Internet is growing, yet it is hard to assimilate rhizomial networks within traditional academic structures. At least four critical concerns arise from the amalgamation of print-based and digital research: Issues of information redundancy, questions of veracity and accuracy, de-centered notions of authenticity and the political meaning of digital infrastructure in which the message is subservient to the medium rather than constituting it. This suggests that new disciplinary forms may evolve. Databases are dynamic. Most are being constantly revised and updated; however, archivists, curators and users may have different strategic imperatives determined by funding constraints. New notions of disciplinary canonicity may be formed or recombined. As Katz points out, “Technological constraints produce a specialist knowledge requirement with infrastructure around administration” (Katz, 2005, p. 110).

Educators in the humanities need to decide how methods of storing and analysis will enhance study, and what impact they will have on traditional forms of knowledge recording, methods of scholarship, and interpretative practices. Arguably, the digital humanities tend to focus on the curatorial/instrumentalist rather than the creative/generative side of humanities research. There is more emphasis on design, visualisation and presentation than on the traditional forms of aesthetic content, so the medium does, very obviously, have an influence on the message in terms of ability to access it. Physical availability, cost and semantic stringency are all considerations, as well as scholastic concerns about the ease of document modification. Access to
digital databases, who will use them, and how they will be used becomes paramount. The issue becomes one of scholarship and authenticity. For example, the study of the digital humanities threatens to skew the kinds, quantities, and forms of traditional academic analysis and disciplinary boundaries towards an increasingly social science and statistical focus.

Some disciplinary recalcitrance may be explainable. There are those who feel compromised by what they see as the forceful elision of the connection between computer functioning and human thinking. Computer functioning in its serial (left-brain) and parallel (right-brain) forms may be the best and most sophisticated model we currently have to approximate human thinking (and is especially promising in its quantum form), but the methodologies of computer functioning do not wholly map or mimic human thinking, though they may represent applications of it in binary technology. For example, computers do not possess consciousness and cannot experience existential qualities such as qualia and emotion, which are essential for the subjective states of poesis.

Similarly, there are no intrinsic politics of computer functioning. The outcome of data gathering is heuristically equal for the computer (which cannot itself meaningfully experience its own functioning); and the data displays of links and hyperlinks in digital libraries are those which are predetermined. Once the program or search has been set to run and the results delivered, it is of course human thinking that imposes patterns of meaning on the research data. Digital humanism is an augmenting of humanism and cannot wholly be separated from pre-existing practices; engagement in the former should not foreclose practical historical knowledge of the latter.

Whilst there is the possibility that a computer program points to associations where they were not seen previously, determining the value of these associations is a human activity (Unsworth, 2005). As Sven Birkerts has suggested, the concerns are that academics may become technicians of “auxiliary brains”, mastering not the subtleties of knowledge, but the information gathered from retrieval and referencing (Birkerts, 1994, p. 17). Similarly, instead of relying on memory and cognitive dexterity, people may come to rely on technical functions in place of the perceived wisdom built up over many years (Smith, 2005). The implication is that the analysis involved in such
practices is regimental and superficial and replaces human manipulation, as opposed to the organic, intuitive, poetic and plastic practices of traditional research.

Philosophical concerns with the parallels between human thinking and computer organisation and functioning aside, integrating software programs into traditional forms of research also has consequences for disciplinary formulation—the way in which disciplines are conceived, structured and defined. The argument advocating the integration of computer analyses with traditional forms of research in the humanities will change the way we understand and define disciplinary boundaries. The risk is exponential. Practitioners, analysts and researchers may be deterred by jargon or reinvest in knowledge of physical culture informed solely by the economic regimes of market forces.

However, if the capacity to manipulate text digitally is a skill that offers the opportunity to revise language freely up to the moment before it is stored or transferred, determining the fit of computer technique with existing disciplinary traditions and aesthetics will be difficult. There may be a generational difference between traditional practitioners who are sceptical of the methodological benefits of the digital humanities and those who are more technologically literate and who recognise it as the inevitable harbinger of change.

This is evidenced, for example, in the overlap between data-mining and traditional forms of literary criticism. Frank Kermode’s study, *Shakespeare’s Language*, includes, as well as traditional literary analysis, decompositions expressed in terms of percentages between Shakespeare’s use of prose or poetry in a given play (Kermode, 2000). Kermode’s text demonstrates the adaptation of social scientific technique to literary analysis. Furthermore, such analyses may be extended to word usage. An example is provided by Unsworth in which a computer-determined study was made of erotic language in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The computer program identified key words for erotic terms in Dickinson’s poetry that subjective researchers did not (Unsworth, 2005). What Unsworth’s example shows is that whilst the computer program identifies patterns that may be counter-intuitive, it is the researcher’s responsibility to derive meaning from the findings and interpret them. Whilst there is an essential elasticity in human thinking that is unequalled by the semantic indifference of the algorithmic parameters of the computer, computer analysis may
enable us to see new interpretations of data that we were predisposed to dismiss as irrelevant.

The production of text-mining software, used in organising, discovering, visualising, and exploring significant patterns in large collections of data, may change the context of research; and in subtle and not so subtle ways will change the form of humanities’ research by expanding the range of acceptable procedures, functions and parameters of the discipline. Whilst this may provide unexpected results, how insightful is it if the computer is responsible for the findings? Computers are all about method; they are epistemological to the core and designed by human beings. Computers are objects as well as instruments of interpretation; they are artefacts of procedural epistemology.

On the negative side a flattening effect may be discerned in studies in which statistical significances are prioritised over the possibilities for the deepening human engagement and reinforcement of cognitive development that is germane to disciplinary study. If, as Unsworth (2005) suggests, the “…goal of data-mining (including text-mining) is to produce new knowledge by exposing similarities or differences, clustering or dispersal, co-occurrence and trends” (p. 7), then data analysis is aimed at analysing patterns based on words that apply to meaningful correlations or coincidental correlations and meaningful visualisations, and which may instruct users on their use. However, creativity depends on familiarity with design and procedure. Many traditional practitioners may view the time spent in acquiring operational knowledge of the field as tedious or tangential or consider that the field is now changing too quickly to be meaningful and the knowledge generated to be too superficial and context independent.

Is it justified therefore to assume that the digital humanities results in the erosion of language abilities, the flattening of historical perspectives and invasions to the private self, as Birkerts (1994) suggests? If analytical strategies that are usually carried out by people are left to computers, will we be turning knowledge creation into information creation and losing the capacity to humanly perform certain kinds of mentalistic functions? Certainly, the digital humanities may revise peoples’ understanding and experience of symbolic knowledge manipulation and the somatic experience of virtual proximity, but on the other hand, if textual analyses germane to the digital humanities are run by software programs, people may lose the capacity to
themselves perform such tasks. Literary analysis, for example, is based on qualitative differentiation and language-based intuitive comparisons that are not statistical at base but are intrinsically related through humanistic methodologies to subjective as well as to objective experience.

A further claim from humanities’ traditionalists is that humanist sources are multifarious, incongruous, and diffuse; they are generally harder to coordinate and manipulate than statistical research data (Katz, 2005). At the basis of this line of argument is the distinction between techne and poesis. Statistics and poetry are different things.

Inevitably this shifts the emphasis from traditional analysis in the humanities, which may encompass notions of style, tradition, enquiry, canonicity, and critique, towards a scientific understanding of research and investigation in which much of the work done is statistical in nature rather than explorative of language, semantic-based phenomena, and even ephemera. Digital and computational methods for the humanities require an infrastructure. The question remains whether the requisite quantitative information involved in the creation of new knowledge through making critical discriminations between ideas and texts in the humanities can be derived from data collections that are distributed and accessed by software and statistical analyses rather than from subjectively informed interpretations of accepted sources of canonical texts and ideas. The answer is not clear, as the field is in a nascent stage.

Certainly humanities research will be increasingly based on the social-scientific model in this paradigm, so the kinds of disciplinary knowledge produced will be of a different nature—to what extent will writers also be required to be designers; and poets, programmers? In this new paradigm the researcher needs to take the computer system, its architecture and software into account, as well as the subject of research. As a consequence, disciplinary boundaries must be broadened to encompass the kind of software performing analyses, as well as the methodology used to obtain a result or an analysis. This re-orientates the researcher to the digital infrastructure in new ways that depart from the accepted paradigm of intuition, critical distinction, synthesis, and poesis. From the disciplinary perspective much will depend on how these new insights are presented and the ways in which traditional semantic pursuits may be preserved. Internet and digital-architecture based technologies will transform the
intellectual landscape in much the same way as Diderot’s *Encyclopedie* did in the late eighteenth century.

If the digital humanities largely involves a transition from traditional knowledge bases to the digital and virtual spheres, it raises a series of questions about the new forms of relationship engendered between technologists, government and educators as well as with the structure and organisation of technological change.

One could argue that the virtual environment of the digital humanities is more fluid and democratic than that of the traditional humanities by virtue of the prolificacy of the virtual medium; and that it may make knowledge more context independent. Furthermore, virtual spaces may create a realm of knowledge users rather than knowledge seekers, and there is a possibility that the growth of a knowledge democracy will relativise educational discourse. If this results in simultaneously raising standards of literacy (and numeracy) it will be a positive outcome. However, statistical knowledge can be superficial without interpretation and contextualisation. Humanists use sources that are created by the subjects of research—and also initiate and participate in the creation of sources. There is as yet no developed software package that can analyse evidence according to interpretive viewpoints evolving in people’s minds: computers cannot yet emulate the experiential states needed for the qualitative interpretations of humanities research.

If the Internet is not in itself social but maintains virtual social worlds, people are not themselves interlinked physically but electronically. Nevertheless, many people would agree that there are some orders of somatic response produced by virtual proximity that are also relevant to cognitive strategies in the workplace. The role that social proximity plays in knowledge generation may be basically qualitative rather than quantitative.

It is likely that the closer the digital field appears to come to emulating literary thinking, the more traditionalists will argue that representation is not experience and such techniques still neglect literary nuance, intuition and an essential component of subjective empathy from the quality of data. For example, traditionally humanities’ teachings have sought to engage with the idea of the acquisition of moral capacities.
Arguably, being objectified, computers cannot realistically convey such capacities, which follow from recollections of human form and life.

If the world of e-scholarship primarily involves the arranging, accommodating, and formation of digital data, digitisation facilitates the more ready dispersal of the text through ease of replication, ease of transmission, ease of modification and manipulation, equivalence of digital form, comparisons between digital forms, and the capacity for creating new methods of searching digital space. These are all linked together in the exploration of what might be termed the virtual realm of ‘inner-space’.

Interactivity in the form of virtual proximity takes on a new range of possibilities in the digital humanities’ world. There will be new combinations of communicative possibilities; new amalgamations of computer analysis and human analysis; and new relationships between author and user, including narrative-supplemented results and methodologies. In the dual functions of research and teaching, e-books and traditional texts in digital form can be analysed in new and non-intuitive ways through the application of social-scientific techniques. If this brings the humanities closer to social science, what impact will it have on traditional disciplinary scholarship? The digital humanities may revise the role that intuition, synthesis and poesis play in the generation of knowledge. Similarly, what are the consequences for publishing? Is a posting on the web the same as publishing a book with an academic print-based publisher?

All forms of publishing require that the publisher ensure quality control, which improves the product through professional editing. Online self-publication raises questions of authority, authenticity, quality, and longevity, and issues of intellectual property, economic transformation, sale to licensing information, of ownership and rights of use, and of access to information. There is the tremendous potential of global access to web-based information at the same time that the digital divide creates possibilities for great asymmetries in terms of access between government, industry and education. Access is often predicated on funding models that are directed to increasing privatisation. New methods of policing digital information and assessing the complex interactive multimedia products are needed. Interoperability or uniformity of standards should not be the only criteria but also the traditional values of clarity and ease of use should apply.
At present, during the process of transformation, there is division between traditional and new usage. Katz (2005) claims that “The scholarship of most humanists has been little affected by more sophisticated aspects of new technology. They still teach in traditional ways, though they are all too likely to employ . . . counterproductive technologies…” (p. 116). There are arguments on both sides—from traditionalists who believe that their disciplines will be negatively revised and important skills and scholarly interpretative facilities lost by the introduction of digital methods, and from digital industry workers who may believe that old scholarly models cannot impart the skills, information or collaboration needed for knowledge production in the digital era (Katz, 2005). A paradigm shift is under way. As Smith (2005) has pointed out, the belief that authors work best with a single authoritative edition is undermined by digital publishing. Traditional forms of editorial work, including the belief in the definitive edition and means for establishing a primacy of beliefs, are less clear in a digital democracy.

If science, following the Popperian model, offers a hypothesis that withstands being disproved, until contradictory evidence comes along, then different self-correcting mechanisms are present in the e-humanities (Popper, 1963). Editorial work involves making assumptions that lead to concerns with knowledge: veracity, accuracy, and trend, modalities such as aesthetics and stylistic concerns, values, and fit and relevance within the cultural moment become paramount. What people regard as being ‘true’ is often the best fit they have for a scenario within their current thinking, but the reasons people decide this is the case are often as much to do with the reception of an idea as with the idea itself. Arguably, with the plasticity of the virtual world, the critical concerns of ‘rightness’ among editors and critics are less likely to become acute (Smith, 2005). The amount of time consumed by shoring up correctness may suppress creation and validity of different versions—it may allow ‘both, neither or either’ to be true. If the Internet provides a less stringent form of publication, it does in most cases at least allow process to become more transparent. The disadvantages are the possibilities of inaccuracy, misinformation, over-interpretation or cursorily edited scholarship.

Many of the formerly mentalistic literary phenomena which fall under the rubric of the palimpsest or ‘transtextuality’ are given the appearance of new licence by the
possibilities for embedded virtual communication. These include metatextuality (the way one text may refer to another indirectly), ‘architextuality’ (discursive or enunciative modes or genres that transcend each individual text but which are nevertheless invoked by each text), and ‘hypertextuality’ (text ‘A’ could not exist without text ‘B’ but does not refer to it) (Genette, 1982, p. 13). Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in 1986. Intertextuality at first referred to a mentalistic literary phenomenon in which one text refers to another but now is a linking methodology within the so-called hypertext of the virtual sphere.

The humanities involve real people thinking, acting, and creating in the real world; the virtual world is a horizontal arcadia representing the expansion and expression of human mentalistic space that is replicated in symbolic capital contained within physical artefacts. While many of the interdisciplinary spheres can be described and critiqued in the digital domain, they may not be reducible to a page, a database, or a book. In researching the humanities, one must always be cognisant of projecting these findings, these imaginings and recreations, onto the validity of the experience of lived lives. New hierarchies of value and relevance are needed to discriminate among the kinds of knowledge produced from the digital humanities alliance. Digital encoding itself represents almost entirely a method of data storage expressed fundamentally as a binary relationship. Therefore we need to ask whether the digital humanities, by becoming a discipline in its own right, wrests some control from the academic to the bibliographic spheres; and in so doing subsumes critical territory.

As Birkerts (1994) has suggested, the digital humanities is potentially ‘anticontextual’. His critique of the possibilities and negative consequences of the expansion of the digital sphere of academia is worth quoting here in full:

[It] open[s] the field to new widths, constantly expanding relevance and reference, and they equip their user with a powerful grazing tool. One moves at great rates across subject terrains, crossing borders that were once closely guarded. The multimedia approach tends ineluctably to multidisciplinarianism. The positive effect, of course, is the creation of new levels of connection and integration; more and more variables are brought into the equation. But the danger should be obvious: the horizon, the limit that gave definition to the parts of the narrative, will disappear. The equation itself will become nonsensical through the accumulation of variables. The context will widen until it becomes, in effect, everything. On the
model of Chaos science, wherein the butterfly flapping its wings in China is seen to affect the weather system over Oklahoma, all data will impinge upon all other data. The technology may be able to handle it, but will the user? Will our narratives—historical, literary, classical—be able to withstand the data explosion? If they cannot, then what will be the new face of understanding? Or will the knowledge of the world become, perforce, a map as large and intricate as the world itself? (Birkerts, 1994, pp. 16–17)

On the one hand the digital humanities promises to open up vast realms of knowledge and encourages the spread of connections and inter-connections in scholarship, in which performative hierarchies are lateral rather than vertical; on the other hand it makes academics subtle representatives of software companies.

The advent of the digital humanities implies that format shifts have come a long way since their origins in the Renaissance. If the digital humanities is perceived as being wholly the future of the humanities discipline, then the medium of this futurity establishes itself in a new relationship with the past. Cyberspace is a virtual digital domain, infinitely more economical of space than is conventional three-dimensional storage. It may be that there is a place for both paper and digital forms, which compete not in terms of efficiency of space but in ease and conventions of use, and in access to hierarchies of cataloguing data.

Academics will be presented with alternative systems, so there will be new alliances between humanities’ scholars, computation specialists, and librarians, with new tools, new insights. New criteria will be needed for the assessment of knowledge, and new understandings and configurations of the relationships between academic, marketplace, and governance.

In many modern tertiary institutions, decisions about matters related to a given discipline may be made increasingly on commercial and political grounds. What needs to be taken into account is a knowledge strategy that attempts to influence how decisions are made in terms of the kinds of knowledge that will follow from such decision making. For example, knowledge about the natural world; knowledge about the things people create; knowledge about people themselves; knowledge about how to create knowledge, form separate, although inter-related categories which all may describe different forms of scholarly enquiry. Aristotle distinguished five states in
which truth may be grasped: craft (techne), scientific knowledge (episteme), practical intelligence (phronesis), wisdom (sophia), and understanding (nous).

Finally, instead of the principle of scientific falsification, for the practical purposes of negotiating one’s way in the world in a humanistic sense the ‘best fit’ schema of knowledge, assuming one set of beliefs until better beliefs come along, is more representative of the way people form and act upon their natural systems of beliefs. If Kuhn (1972) is right that knowledge grows in paradigms, one must be sure that the paradigm of the digital humanities does not become one of ‘techne’ only; that it is not wholly composed of the servicing of computer architecture and format. There has to be a corresponding shift in the efficacy of symbolic knowledge and poesis also.

References


Copyright Statement: Articles submitted for ANZCA08 remain the copyright of the author, but authors by virtue of submission agree to grant the Department of Communication, Journalism & Marketing at Massey University a copyright license to permanently display the article online for public viewing as part of this conference proceedings, and to grant the National Library of Australia a copyright licence to include the ANZCA08 Proceedings in the PANDORA Archive for permanent public access and online viewing. Articles first published in this ANZCA08 proceedings may subsequently be published elsewhere by authors, provided the next version acknowledges this original publication in the ANZCA08 refereed proceedings.
The digital humanities do fantastic things, said the eminent Princeton historian Anthony Grafton. I'm a believer in quantification. But I don't believe quantification can do everything. So much of humanistic scholarship is about interpretation. It's easy to forget the digital media are means and not ends, he added. As Brett Bobley, director of the endowment's office of digital humanities, explained, analyzing unprecedented amounts of data can reveal patterns and trends and raise unexpected questions for study. He offered the human genome project as an example of how an area of study can be transformed: Technology hasn't just made astronomy, biology and physics more efficient. It has let scientists do research they simply couldn't do before.