1   Introduction: Palgrave Handbook of Digital and Public Humanities

Anne Schwan and Tara Thomson

This collection brings together some of the most recent international scholarship and developments in the interdisciplinary areas of digital and public humanities. Alongside a critical exploration of the production, distribution and scholarship of culture in relation to digital media and technologies, the collection examines the possibilities and challenges of publicly engaged scholarship in the digital humanities and beyond. Working with a broad definition of "public humanities," each chapter interrogates the multifaceted interface of arts and humanities scholarship and engagement with wider "publics" beyond academia, from literary and cultural heritage to creative arts. The volume explores key concepts, theories, practices and debates within both the digital and public humanities while also assessing how these two areas are increasingly intertwined.

Underlining the multiplicity of "publics," each of them contingent and "constitutive of a social imaginary" (Warner 2005, 12), key questions of access, ownership, authorship and representation run through the collection as a whole and link the individual sections and contributions. One of the volume's aims is to offer wide geographical range, and to present scholarship and practice that engages with a multiplicity of historically underrepresented "publics" – in Nancy Fraser's (1992, 123) terms "alternative" or *subaltern counterpublics* – including LGBTQ+ communities (see chapters by Crompton, and Barker et al.), ethnic and linguistic minorities (see chapters by Delgado, and Tikhonov et al.), working-class communities (see O'Hagan's chapter), the incarcerated (see Gray and Schwan's chapter), or

those affected by hate speech, personal or collective trauma (see chapters by Paci, O'Mahoney, and Riley).

Arts and humanities researchers today face growing expectations from higher education institutions and funding bodies to produce socially relevant work that demonstrates wider engagement, value for money and – in the UK academy – measurable "impact" in social, cultural or economic terms. While it is not the collection's primary objective to make a case for the "value" of arts and humanities, or to conceive digital and public humanities as mere vehicles for achieving such recognition – we take the arts and humanities' right to exist for granted – it is essential to stay alert to such pressures for justification, and to acknowledge that these concerns over value are inextricably linked to the emergence of "public humanities" as a concept (see Schroeder 2021).[1] At the heart of this volume lies the conviction that these demands can and must be addressed both critically and creatively; at their best, outward-facing scholarship and practice at the intersection of digital and public humanities have the potential to generate new insights that can invigorate both academic and public discourse, and mobilize social justice agendas in the digital age, producing social, cultural and economic value almost inadvertently in the process. Conversely, unreflective practice and outreach activities risk reaffirming the often unequal power dynamics at play when so-called experts interact with publics. The collection seeks to assist scholars in arts and humanities, and practitioners in cultural institutions, in navigating these challenges with integrity while equipping them with new tools to contribute to critical agendas in provocative, ethical and meaningful ways.

1.1   Doing Digital and Public Humanities: Key Concepts and Debates

As Susan Smulyan (2021, 1) emphasizes in her Introduction to *Doing Public Humanities*, "[p]ublic humanities happens in collaboration," both within educational institutions and between universities and other communities. Similarly, in their Introduction to the most recent volume of *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (2019, n.p.) note, "digital humanities has always seen itself as a field that engages the world beyond the academy" and we are now in a moment to "usefully clarify our commitments to public scholarship, addressing our work not simply to 'the public' but also, as Sheila Brennan [2016, 386] has observed, to specific communities and the needs that they, and not we, identify as most pressing." Co-ownership, co-production, or co-creation is thus a theme that runs through many chapters of our volume (e.g. Toft Nørgård, Schreibman and Huang; Barker et al.; de Waard; Gray and Schwan; Popple and Ng), with contributors highlighting the new insights and experiences that emerge precisely in those spaces where academic and non-academic communities encounter each other; at its best, Matthew Frye Jacobson notes (2021, 167), such work results in "something wholly new in the social fabric," creating a circular flow of knowledge between academia, other organizations and communities. Rather than working with a one-directional model of "knowledge transfer," as it is sometimes referred to in the UK funding context – and what Robyn Schroeder (2021, 20), in relation to US-based public humanities, calls the "vertical" model that "maintains traditional expertise and endeavors to extend it 'downward'" – the volume as a whole promotes, to the extent possible, collaborative approaches where scholarly expertise and institutional resources help facilitate rather than dictate new project ideas. As some of the chapters demonstrate, though (e.g. Gray and Schwan), such work often involves careful balancing acts and a critical, self-reflexive pragmatism on the part of scholar-practitioners,

who need to be aware of potentially conflicting agendas, and their own privilege and biases. Nobuhiko Kikuchi's contribution to this volume is also an important reminder that phrases such as "public humanities" are contingent and resonate differently (or perhaps not at all) in different national-geographical contexts.

The public – and similarly the digital – humanities may best be defined as a form of critical "praxis" (Schroeder 2021, 5), in other words a "doing" (Jacobson 2021; Crompton, Lane and Siemens 2016) or practice that is grounded both in scholarship/theory and collective experience, rather than constituting a narrowly defined "field of study" (Schroeder 2021, 5). This conceptualization also aids in averting the risks associated with a fieldification or institutionalization of public humanities as a practice that scholars such as Marie Mullen (2014) have drawn attention to. Having said that, institutionalization does not necessarily bear negative consequences if it is achieved thoughtfully and, as the editors of the inaugural issue of *magazén: International Journal for Digital and Public Humanities*, a peer-reviewed journal associated with the relatively new Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities (VeDPH) at Ca' Foscari University put it, driven by an "urge towards openness and interdisciplinarity" (Fischer et al. 2020, 9).

In light of this debate, we choose not to capitalize digital and public humanities, concurring with Amy Earheart's (2016, n.p.) distinction of digital (and, we may add, public) humanities as a critical practice rather than a "monolithic and rigid, often exclusionary and uncritically dominant" field. This critical praxis of public and digital humanities is necessarily multi- and cross-disciplinary, reflected in the various disciplinary backgrounds represented by the volume's contributors, spanning the arts, humanities and social sciences.[2]

Although not every single chapter in the volume explicitly addresses the conjunction of the digital and public humanities, some contributors directly showcase what, with Sheila Brennan (2016, n.p.), we may call "digital public humanities" or "public digital humanities," defined "by the ways that it engages with communities outside of the academy as a means for doing digital humanities scholarship." Barbara Heinisch's (2020) discussion of "citizen humanities" as a "fusion" of digital and public humanities is also useful here. Heinisch (2020, 144) notes that "[w]hile the digital humanities provide the citizen humanities with data, tools, techniques and infrastructures that do not only facilitate humanistic inquiry but also communication and collaboration with different actors, the public humanities offer the means of communication and ways of engaging diverse publics in research activities." The collection as a whole articulates opportunities in this relatively recent juncture, and offers new directions in scholarly research in the digital and public humanities. Readers with a particular interest in the digital humanities will gain awareness of how their work might be publicly engaged, while scholars primarily grounded in the public humanities will find inspiration for how their work might make use of the affordances of the digital.

The volume joins a body of recent publications in digital and public humanities theorizing and showcasing the opportunities and challenges brought by these modes of scholarship and practice. Publications focussing on the role of the public humanities tend to be dispersed in journal articles or collections on participatory culture and public engagement (see e.g. Mitchell 2008; Mitchell and Soria 2018; Mullen 2014; Sandy 2013). Kath Burton et al.'s White Paper (2021) specifically comments on the challenges related to the publication of publicly engaged scholarship, while Sommer (2014) showcases innovative collaborations between policymakers and creatives to tackle civic challenges through art projects. The *University of Toronto Quarterly*'s special issue (Gibbs 2016) offers a more sustained

discussion of the shape and goals of public humanities; similarly, Smulyan's edited collection *Doing Public Humanities* (2021) provides a welcome addition to the literature, in its attempt to chart out the area's theoretical and practical parameters, as well as providing case studies, although its focus largely revolves around work coming out of Brown University's Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage.

Publications on digital humanities have proliferated more visibly, with new priorities including decolonization (see e.g. Risam and Josephs 2021; Schweitzer and Henry 2019), gender democracy and intersectional feminism (see e.g. Losh and Wernimont 2018; D'Ignazio and Klein 2020), critical race studies (see e.g. Nakamura 2007; Gallon 2016; Noble 2018), ecology (see Cohen and LeMenager 2016), community archives (see Popple, Prescott, and Mutibwa 2020), and ethics and care in relation to the digital (see Gold and Klein 2019). Some scholars in digital humanities have begun to explicitly address the potential of digital and public humanities intersections (e.g. Christie et al. 2014; Stommel 2018), with Jordana Cox and Lauren Tilton (2019, n.p.) going as far as framing "the digital public humanities (DPH)" as "a relatively new subfield," defined as "those practices that facilitate reflection and collaboration with participants outside of the academy through digital theories and technologies." Yet, as Will Fenton (2018, n.p.) notes in *Inside Higher Ed*, "the public mindedness of the digital humanities, measurable in the public availability of work once relegated to subject-area specialists, is often left implicit." This present volume, then, also responds to Fenton's (2018, n.p.) call "that digital humanists own their role as public humanists" in its multifaceted forms.

This handbook builds on emerging trends in scholarship on the digital and public humanities, while offering the first extensive and truly international collection on the digital

and public humanities as increasingly interconnected fields. Chapters typically offer specific case studies, embedded in wider theoretical reflections, thus serving as models for other scholars and practitioners, and facilitating future directions in scholarship and critically-informed practice.

1.2   Overview of thematic sections and chapters

The Palgrave Handbook of Digital and Public Humanities brings together 25 chapters and over 50 contributors based across four continents. The collection is divided into six thematic sections. The first one, "Scholarship, Creative Practice and Engaging with 'Publics'" explores new pedagogical approaches, questions of access, and the co-production of historical knowledge and creative outputs in relation to historically marginalized communities. Section two, "Making Memory, Making Community," turns its attention to digital and public humanities' roles in recovering personal and collective trauma, in mobilizing affect, and in forging new connections at familial or community level. Section three, "Mobilizing the Archive," reflects on attempts to engage students and other publics through curation and digital editing, digital archives and public humanities during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as digital archives' potential for giving voice to working-class and indigenous communities. Section four, "Digital Cultural Heritage," examines digital and public humanities in relation to museum collections and other innovative approaches to cultural heritage resources. Section five, "Engaging Space and Place," focusses on urban memory and community-making through investigations of digital mapping of historical soundscapes, film festivals and cemetery tourism. The final section, "Public Discourse, Public Art and Activism," considers the role of public historians and public artists in addressing hate speech and the climate crisis.

1.3   Coda

The US-based North Eastern Public Humanities Consortium (NEPH)'s White Paper (cited in Jacobson 2021, 169) sees the humanities as one necessary answer to the "crisis of atomization" affecting societies increasingly eroded by neoliberal politics. If the post-Crash economic climate of austerity made the humanities' ability to "generate counter-narratives to this atomization" (NEPH White Paper cited in Jacobson 2021, 169) particularly pertinent, the isolation and hardships experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic lend this promise a new urgency. At a moment when it is more than ever necessary to rebuild a sense of collectivity and community – and with renewed appreciation of the possibilities and limitations of the digital in underpinning human interaction – we hope that this handbook will offer a timely guide.

References

Bate, Jonathan. 2011. *The Public Value of the Humanities*. London: Bloomsbury.

Benneworth, Paul, ed. 2015. Special issue, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 14, no. 1 (February).

Brenna, Sheila A. 2016. "Public, First." In *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, edited by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled/section/11b9805a-a8e0-42e3-9a1c-fad46e4b78e5#ch32.

Burton, Kath, Catherine Cocks, Darcy Cullen, Daniel Fisher, Barry M. Goldenberg, Janneken Smucker, Friederike Sundaram, Dave Tell, Anne Valks, and Rebecca Wingo. 2021. "Public Humanities and Publication: A Working Paper." Routledge, Taylor & Francis and National Humanities Alliance. https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:37487/.

Christie, Alex, Jana Millar Usiskin, Jentery Sayers, and Kathryn Tanigawa. 2014. "Introduction: Digital Humanities, Public Humanities." *NANO: New American Notes Online* 5 (July). https://nanocrit.com/issues/issue5/introduction-digital-humanities-public-humanities.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, and Stephanie LeMenager, eds. 2016. Special issue, *PMLA* 131, no. 2 (March).

Cox, Jordana, and Lauren Tilton. 2019. "The digital public humanities: giving new arguments and new ways to argue." *Review of Communication* 19, no. 2: 127–46. DOI: 10.1080/15358593.2019.1598569.

Crompton, Constance, Richard J. Lane, and Ray Siemens, eds. 2016. Doing Digital Humanities: Practice, Training, Research. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

D'Ignazio, Catherine, and Lauren F. Klein. 2020. Data Feminism. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Earhart, Amy E. 2016. "Digital Humanities futures: Conflict, power, and public knowledge." Digital Studies/le Champ Numérique 6, no. 1. DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/dscn.1.

Gallon, Kim. 2016. "Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities." In *Debates in the Digital Humanities, 2016*, edited by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled/section/fa10e2e1-0c3d-4519-a958-d823aac989eb#ch04.

Fenton, Will. 2018. "Literary scholars should use digital humanities to reach the oft-ignored 'public' (opinion)." *Inside Higher Ed*. January, 29. https://www.insidehighered.com/print/views/2018/01/29/literary-scholars-should-use-digital-humanities-reach-oft-ignored-public-opinion.

Fischer, Franz, Diego Mantoan, and Barbara Tramelli. 2020. "A New Venture and a Commitment to Disciplinary Fusion in the Domain of Digital and Public Humanities." *magazén* 1, no. 1 (June): 7–16. DOI 10.30687/mag//2020/01/000.

Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 109–42. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gibbs, Robert, ed. 2016. Special issue, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (Fall).

Gold, Matthew K., and Lauren F. Klein, eds. 2019. *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/9781452963785.

Heinisch, Barbara. 2020. "Citizen Humanities as a Fusion of Digital and Public Humanities?" *magazén* 1, no. 2 (December): 143–80. DOI:10.30687/mag/2724-3923/2020/02/001.

Klein, Julie Thompson. 2015. *Interdisciplining Digital Humanities: Boundary Work in an Emerging Field*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Losh, Elizabeth, and Jacqueline Wernimont, eds. 2018. *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Mitchell, Tania D., and Krista M. Soria, eds. *Educating for Citizenship and Social Justice: Practices for Community Engagement at Research Universities*. Cham: Springer, 2018.

Mitchell, Katharyne, ed. 2008. *Practising Public Scholarship: Experience and Possibilities Beyond the* Academy. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mullen, Mary L. 2014. "Public Humanities' (Victorian) Culture Problem." *Cultural Studies* 30, no. 2: 183–204. DOI: 10.1080/09502386.2014.978802.

Nakamura, Lisa. 2007. *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Popple, Simon, Andrew Prescott, and Daniel Mutibwa. 2020. *Communities, Archives and New Collaborative Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Risam, Roopika, and Kelly Baker Josephs, eds. 2021. *The Digital Black Atlantic*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Sandy, Marie. 2013. "Tracing the Liberal Arts Traditions in Support of Service-Learning and Public-engaged Scholarship in the Humanities." *Humanity & Society* 37, no. 4: 306–26. DOI:10.1177/0160597613510704.

Schweitzer, Ivy, and Gordon Henry, eds. 2019. *Afterlives of Indigenous Archives*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press.

Small, Helen. 2013. *The Value of the Humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sommer, Doris. 2014. *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stommel, Jesse. 2018. "The Public Digital Humanities." In *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, edited by Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel, 79–90. Punctum Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdqv.

Warner, Michael. 2005. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.

---

[1] For more on this debate on "value" and "impact," see Bate (2011), Small (2013), and the special issue "Forum on the Public Value of Arts and Humanities Research" of *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* edited by Paul Benneworth (2015).

[2] For an in-depth consideration of interdisciplinarity in relation to digital humanities, see Klein (2015).