A Political Economy of the Digital Humanities: New Directions

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Approaches to the economics of digital humanities have emphasized particularities. Such interventions are critical to advancing a more equitable DH, addressing the ethical treatment of contingent workers, assessing the labor within DH centers, or critiquing the notion of "alt-ac" or other forms of academic labor outside tenure streams (Keralis, 2018; Flanders, 2012; Boyles et al, 2018). But we haven't grappled with the political economy of DH *as a field* within which such issues persist. Despite repeated, and often high profile, denunciations of DH as a neoliberal traitor, DH scholars have yet to respond with their own political economy (Allington, Brouillette, and Golumbia, 2018). And while critical theories of race, gender, sexuality, post-coloniality, indigeneity, and ecology have pushed DH in exciting new theoretical directions, it remains shocking that field-level theories of political economy have remained largely invisible.

Our roundtable addresses this critical gap, advancing new directions in a political economy of DH, which incorporates Marxist and post-Marxist concepts of class, labor, ideology, and hegemony for a new scholarly horizon of DH. We anticipate our roundtable will generate discussion and interest in this new area of engagement, which are more relevant given the fallout from the pandemic, which has accelerated austerity and inequality. The acceleration of economic anxiety caused by COVID-19 will have long-term effects on DH and will exacerbate existing inequalities among its practitioners.

Our roundtable is designed to activate interested participants to help map coordinates for a new political economy of DH, crowd-sourcing responses to current economic inequalities and injustices. Much like our comrades in organized labor, this roundtable will reserve time to formulate strategies for organizing a DH worker's caucus dedicated to advocacy. For too long, work supporting labor justice for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and non-tenure-track faculty has been undertaken by individuals in contingent positions (Alpert-Abrams et al. 2019). How might DH collaborate with organized labor or Association of American Universities to coordinate, especially since many DH-ers are non-tenure-track? How might we place pressure on our professional organizations (such as Association for Computers in the Humanities) to lead on graduate and postdoctoral labor issues, advocacy for workers, economic justice, austerity, neoliberalism, bureaucracy, and important issues of political economy? This roundtable builds on scholarship from the panelists, who have been engaged in advancing this project, but also establish possibilities for future organizing through a bottom-up, discursive approach.

References

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