

Roopika Risam and Kelly Baker Josephs, eds. *The Digital Black Atlantic*.

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APARAJITA DE

Since the introduction of a digital turn to humanities scholarship shifted the contours of the conventional modes of examining the production and dissemination of culture and identity, digital humanities scholarship has created both nebulous and interdependent discourse communities. In one of the earliest anthologies arguing for the emerging field and its far-reaching influence, Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth have advocated for an independent yet interconnected field thus, “The digital humanities, then, and their interdisciplinary core found in the field of humanities computing, have a long and dynamic history best illustrated by an examination of the locations at which specific disciplinary practices intersect with computation” (Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth 2004, xxiv). In its evolution as a fast-growing field of research and archival work, the fluidity of Digital Humanities allows for exploring newer ways of representation, politics, and research mediation. Furthering that conversation, in 2016, Roopika Risam had discussed Digital Humanities within the conceptual framework of intersectionality, underscoring the need to decolonize and delink Eurocentric critical theories that have traditionally marginalized the works of Black feminist scholars while they si-

multaneously advocated for a certain kind of hierarchization and institutionalization of local knowledge. The current edition of essays, *The Digital Black Atlantic*, expands that conversation by intersecting Digital Humanities and Black Diaspora Studies.

This volume of diverse essays reconfigures and reinterrogates the scant sites of representations that include and embrace intersections of diaspora studies, more specifically Black and African diasporas and their connections with Digital Humanities. The editors, Roopika Risam and Kelly Baker Josephs, offer a foundational perspective to their critical niche. It is a “juxtaposition—of disciplines, cultures, and methods—within the African diaspora,” they advance (2021, ix). Aimed to transform the conversation around the digital inquiries and inequities centered on African diaspora cultures’ digital production, this volume of essays offers scholars and the advanced students of diaspora and digital humanities a set of tools, citations, diverse perspectives, terms, and a discursive foundation to enable a more inclusive and complex relationship within and between the disciplines of diaspora, Digital Humanities, Black and African diasporas.

Pivoting on Paul Gilroy’s seminal *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and*

Double Consciousness (1993), the editors' nuance is on the side of an expansive definition of Black Studies within and beyond the Atlantic. In a classic decolonial gesture, each writer independently forges a challenging, transformational, and inclusive space to realize the potentials of the digital black diasporas. Individual chapters may well be assigned for advanced undergraduates to underscore the fluidity of areas of inquiry within this focus. In the subsequent chapters of the edition, writers foreground the frameworks of a conceptual methodology of Blackness as it relates to the Digital Humanities, provoking conversation on revisiting the limitations and intersections within traditions of Black Studies and the demands of digital humanities and its methods (see Risam and Josephs 2021, xiv). Methodologically, this approach integrates empirical experiences through games, memory projects, digitized book projects, and data with the questions of contemporary Black Atlantic perspectives and theoretical modes of studying cultural production. Diverse voices of archivists, game studies scholars, historians, cultural and literary studies scholars, and librarians inform the diversity the editors seek to assimilate in the volume. In reevoking the traditions of Black Studies, what is revealed is the exclusion or glossing over of Black histories, Black presents, and futures (see Risam and Josephs 2021, xiv). As a progressive site for the reemergence of critical Black politics, the volume boldly sets out to articulate the need to institutionally shift the contours of Black digital production and scholarship around it while simultaneously reminding its audience that we can do more to advo-

cate the dismantling of those systems that oppress (or exclude) black bodies, voices, and experiences. In the inherent and liberatory possibilities of a volume of this kind, a more complex engagement with the afterlife of this work, of its valence in policymaking, with which more privileged scholars curate and document black lives digitally, seems to be an avenue to explore further (See Noble 29).

The collection is divided into four sections, each strategically titled. The first section begins with "Memory" and reinterrogates the "histories of contemporary archival impulses toward African diasporic experiences" (Risam and Josephs 2021, xvii). The second, called "Crossings," emphasizes how Black Atlantic digital humanities negotiate temporally and spatially. The third, "Relations," brings out the connections and resonances created by the continuous exchanges in the dynamic Black Atlantic digital and analog spaces. The concluding section, "Becomings," articulates the aspirations and emphasizes the growing scholarship of the digital Black Atlantic diaspora. For this reviewer, each section encompasses and informs the overall interdisciplinarity of the book and its emphasis on the transformative and agentic significance of such a perspective in thinking about the Black Atlantic, the digital Black Atlantic, and about the construction of Blackness in the diaspora. The essays of the first section of the book are particularly incisive. For instance, Janneken Smucker's "Access and Empowerment: Rediscovering Moments in the Lives of African American Migrant Women" discusses the strategies of student engagement in revisiting oral histories

in Southern Black women's narratives as they moved from the segregated South to urban Philadelphia (Risam and Josephs 2021, 49-56). The emphasis on how oral histories change and transform the narrative of the Black experience in the United States is singular and emplaces the genre from a predominantly white, literate, privileged scenario to a more diverse one (49). Following Smucker's, Angel David Nieves' essay is a refreshing take on oral history and queer witnessing that reinvigorates this volume's aims of advocating for equitable and diverse spaces to foster renewed engagement with forms of praxis to "reveal complexity, contradiction, and frustration regarding the development of intersectional lives" (Risam and Josephs 2021, 59).

The relevance and interconnection of the essays in this section become more insightful when they are located transnationally. Under "Crossings," local and global sites of production are discussed. Alexandrina Agloro presents a fascinating study of how *the Philippi Music Project* enables a music-centric community of care through transnationally located digital ubuntu, in Cape Town, South Africa (69-76). The question of access and intersection informs the collaborative arguments forwarded in "Radical Collaboration to Improve Library Collections" by H el ene Huet, Suzan Alteri, and Laurie N. Taylor (95-107). Here, the authors talk of nomenclature in library cataloging systems of well-funded institutions in the West which, while providing access to literature and culture from the African diasporas, reify and reduce canons based on geographic locations, as they

subsume local complexities and interdisciplinary connections. This chapter pairs well with Amy Earhart's earlier essay on the technologies of recovery that hold the potential to restore the history of Black textual production from the editorial standpoint (31-48). Another one at a later section titled, "Black Atlantic Networks in the Archives and the Limits of Findings Aids as Data" also reconnects to the earlier two chapters by navigating the ways and means of transcribing the metadata used to describe archival collections of the Black experience (168-180). In forging pathways for allowing agency and inclusivity to produce knowledge on the Black experience, this essay advocates for a more liberatory standard for using archival finding aids to create network graphs (169). This connection amongst voices and essays within the sections creates a symphony fostering breadth, interconnections, and a social justice framework.

The concluding section of the book, titled "Becomings," teases out the possibilities for continuing conversation along the diverse scope of the field. This section includes essays discussing Digital Humanities projects to videogame research, to revisiting tropes of biases and prejudices that connect the discussion of Africa in video gaming to the "transatlantic European slave trade" (184). A co-authored chapter titled "Musical Passage: Sound, Text, and the Promise of the Digital Black Atlantic" explores the sound of Jamaican life from the 1680s, recreating musical notations to recover artistic voice and the real authentic in the history of the enslaved and the colonized. In the collaborative chapter by Kaiama L. Glover and Alex

Gil, which concludes the volume, the book's attempts at understanding and dismantling intertwined networks of access and hierarchization find a reinforcement.

The authors speak of a collaborative project using storytelling techniques to elaborate on the series of interactive and content-oriented maps they created to trace the migratory movements of intellectuals from the Francophone world to the Anglophone with better access. This conversation opens future avenues for discussions on access and ability of coders, globally situated with strategic information yet with limited percolation. For this reviewer, the last chapter engenders the expectation of an Afterword reflecting on the new frontiers and questions that a project of this kind raises. Questions on environmentally situated Digital Humanities projects, the intersection of disability and access within Digital Humanities and Black Diaspora studies remain unasked, and the volume invites researchers and students to continue to widen the scope of that conversation. An index of the critical terms and scholarship used would have also proved useful. Overall, the salient feature of the volume is to point to the need for generating and

expanding the scope of the conversation around the Black Atlantic by incorporating global and transnational voices in Digital Humanities scholarship for recentering the inclusive project of a liberatory Humanities; and this volume is a rewarding experience into the experimental, novel, and imperative recovery process towards that goal.

References

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