

Length and Breadth: Why diversity is a core intellectual value in the Digital Humanities

Daniel Paul O'Donnell
@danielPaulOD
daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

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@DanielPaulOD
daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

“There's a solid consensus that the conference is there in order to hear from diverse groups, but whenever one opts for diversity, it usually means opting for less quality (otherwise there would be no issue), so the danger is that one loses sight of this, very central goal of the conference.”

“We are the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations, not the Alliance of Diversity Organisations.”

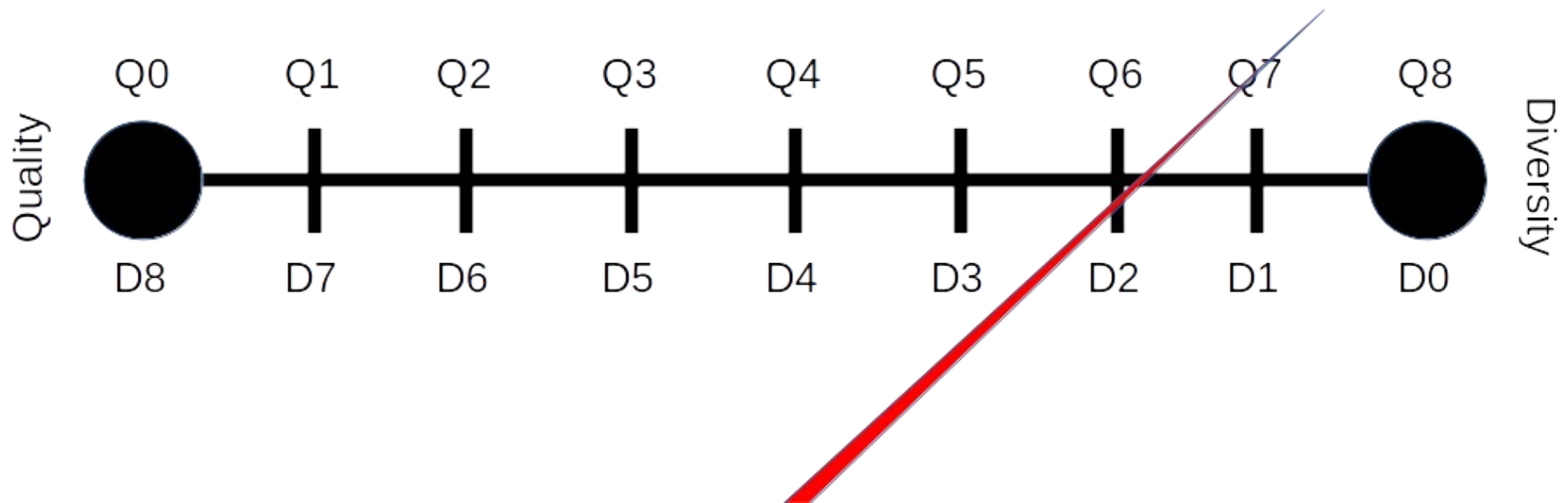
Is diversity a core value
of the Digital Humanities?

Does it (compete with|intersect with|oppose)
quality?

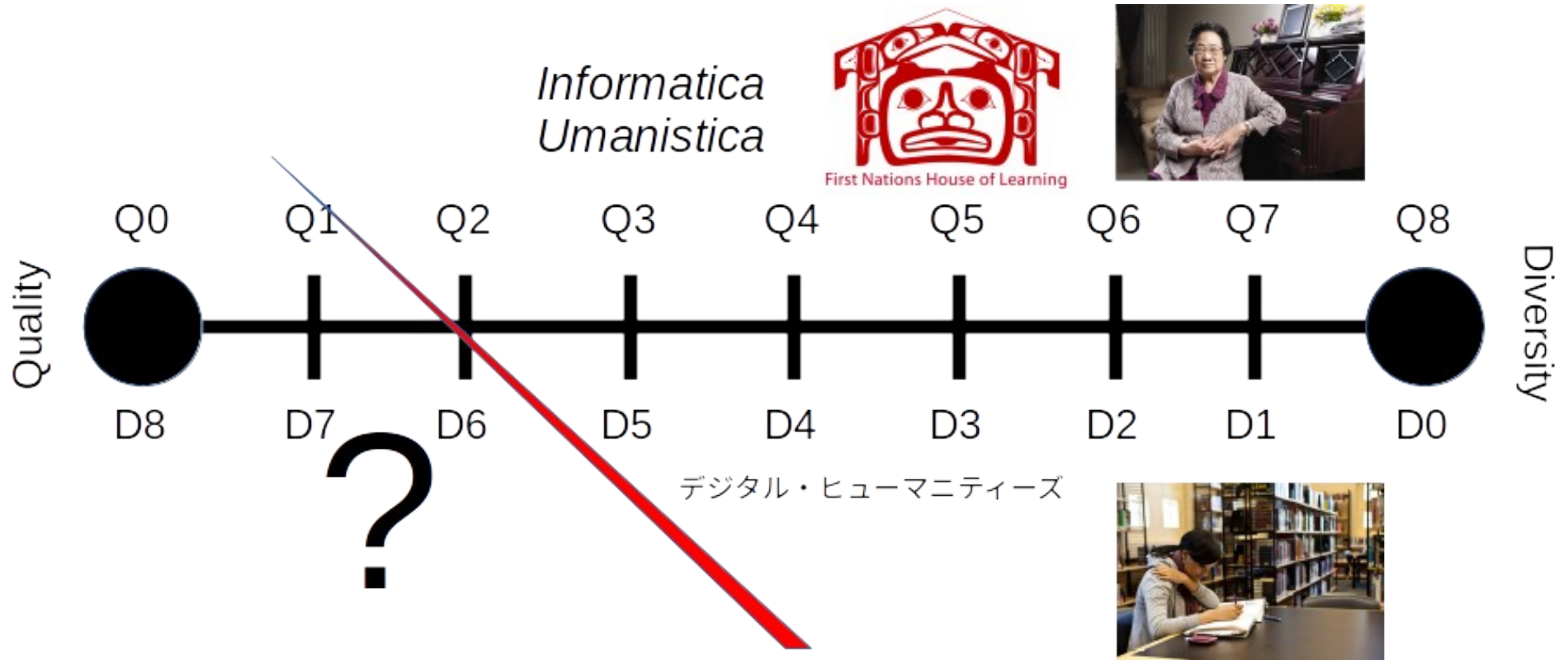
Is it “just” a moral good or good manners?

Is it intellectually important?

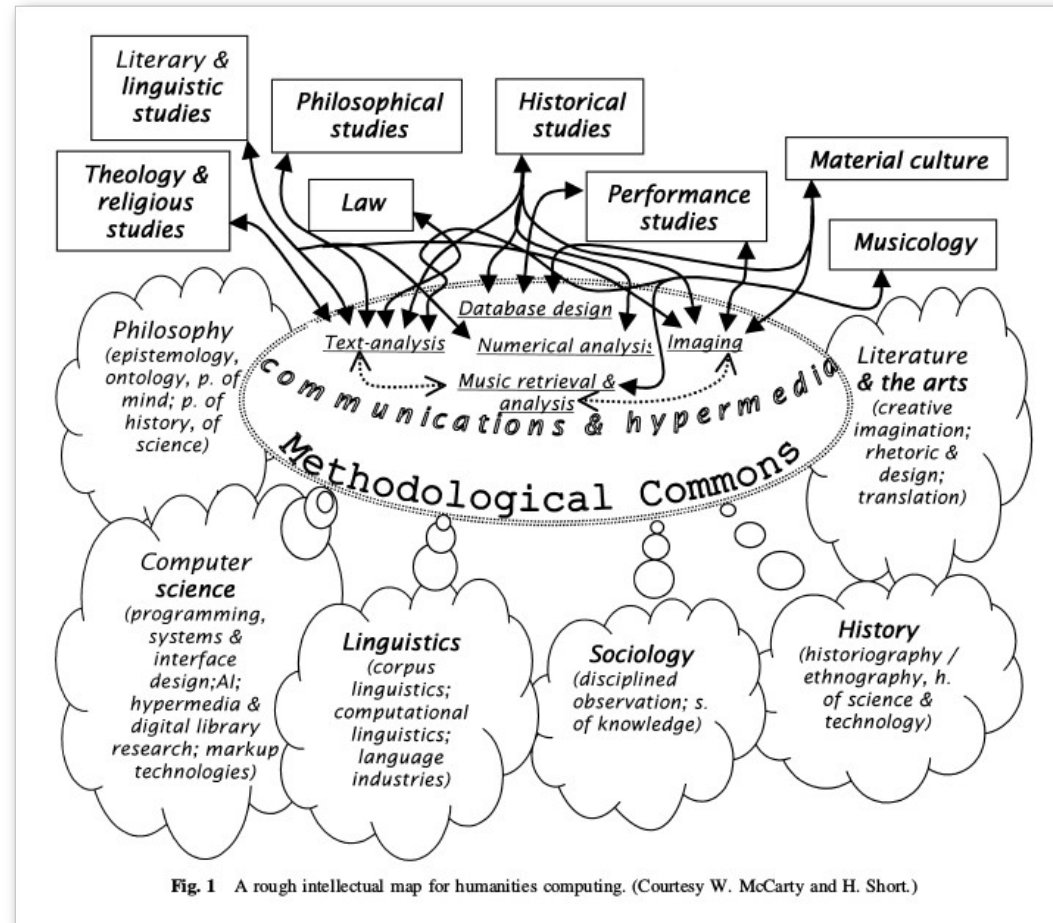
In some sense an odd question to ask...



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Digital Humanities Series

The goal of the Digital Humanities series will be to provide a forum for ground-breaking and benchmark work in digital humanities. This rapidly growing field lies at the intersections of computers and the disciplines of arts and humanities, library and information science, media and communications studies, and cultural studies. The purpose of the series is to feature rigorous research that advances understanding of the nature and implications of the changing relationship between humanities and digital technologies. Books, monographs, and experimental formats that define current practices, emergent trends, and future directions are accepted. Together, they will illuminate the varied disciplinary and professional forms, broad multidisciplinary scope, interdisciplinary dynamics, and transdisciplinary potential of the field.

Humanities computing is undergoing a redefinition of basic principles by a continuous influx of new, vibrant, and diverse communities or practitioners within and well beyond the halls of academe. These practitioners recognize the value computers add to their work, that the computer itself remains an instrument subject to continual innovation, and that competition within many disciplines requires scholars to become and remain current with what computers can do. Topics in the Digital Humanities invites manuscripts that will advance and deepen knowledge and activity in this new and innovative field.

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@DanielPaulOD
daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

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The Digital Humanities is
a paradiscipline that intersects
with Humanities domains

It is an approach and set of techniques that
grows in response to problems

DH vs. other disciplines

- Medieval studies
 - A period to which techniques are applied
 - In-scope is defined by the temporal and geographic origins of the objects under analysis:
 - Belongs to period 600-1500
 - Comes from Europe
 - Part of Human Culture
 - You are in!
 - Philosophical, literary, computational, archaeological approaches all welcome



DH vs. other disciplines

- Digital Humanities
 - Techniques that are applied to (historical and other) disciplinary problems
 - In-scope defined by the use of computational techniques or interest in intersection of computation with discipline
 - The problem involves computation/digital culture ✓
 - It is more broadly applicable ✓
 - You are in!
 - Don't care if it is text, or medieval, or architecture, or video

In historical domains “length” is more important
than “breadth”



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@DanielPaulOD
daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

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Series celebrate repetition of method across lots of examples

The Early English Text Society, present, past and future

Anyone who reads Old and Middle English literary texts will be familiar with the mid-brown volumes of the EETS, with the symbol of Alfred's jewel embossed on the front cover. Most of the works attributed to King Alfred or to Aelfric, along with some of those by bishop Wulfstan and much anonymous prose and verse from the pre-Conquest period, are to be found within the Society's three series; all of the surviving medieval drama, most of the Middle English romances, much religious and secular prose and verse including the English works of John Gower, Thomas Hoccleve and most of Caxton's prints all find their place in the publications. Without EETS editions, study of medieval English texts would hardly be possible.

From the first book published in English through the age of Spenser and Shakespeare, this incomparable collection now contains more than 125,000 titles listed in Pollard & Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue (1475-1640)* and Wing's *Short-Title Catalogue (1641-1700)* and their revised editions, as well as the *Thomason Tracts (1640-1661)* collection and the *Early English Books Tract Supplement*. Libraries possessing this collection find they are able to fulfill the most exhaustive research requirements of graduate scholars - from their desktop - in many subject areas: including English literature, history, philosophy, linguistics, theology, music, fine arts, education, mathematics, and science.

Goal is long line of examples not (necessarily)wide variety of methods

We rely considerably on the precedents set by authoritative earlier editions in our series as a means of ensuring some uniformity of practice among our volumes. Clearly discretion must be used: departures from practice in earlier editions are likely to have been made for good, but particular, reasons, which do not necessarily suit others. Moreover, if they wish to make an argument from precedent, editors should follow EETS editions, in preference to those of other publishers. Once again, please consult the Editorial Secretary in cases of doubt.

In DH breadth of method is more important than long line of examples

- The important thing is not “*What* can we edit next?”
- Rather
 - “*Can* we edit *that*?”
 - “Can we do something other than ‘edit’?”
 - “What can we apply computation to next?”
 - “How does this affect our computation?”

It is the variety of new problems,
not the number of successful examples
that moves the field forward



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@DanielPaulOD
daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

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@DanielPaulOD
daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

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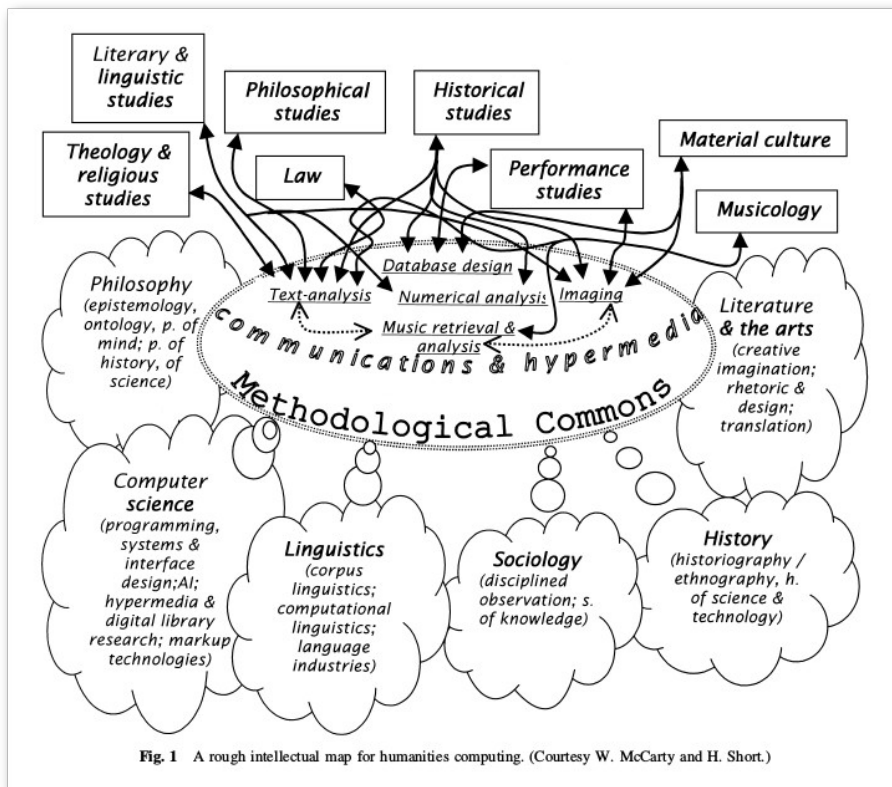
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daniel.odonnell@uleth.ca

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A DH where everyone agrees with me is dead.
A DH where everyone's like me is dying.

Variety of new problems

- McCarty and Short's image has boxes and bubbles, not columns and silos
- It is the way that the domains intersect through computing methods that is “the field”



Two implication

1) Means it is possible to digital work without doing Digital Humanities:

- Digitally-enabled humanities work rather than digital humanities work
- Using computation to advance historical work rather than using historical examples to advance our understanding of how to solve humanities problems computationally
- A structurally marked-up transcription and edition of a straightforward medieval manuscript is medieval studies, not DH

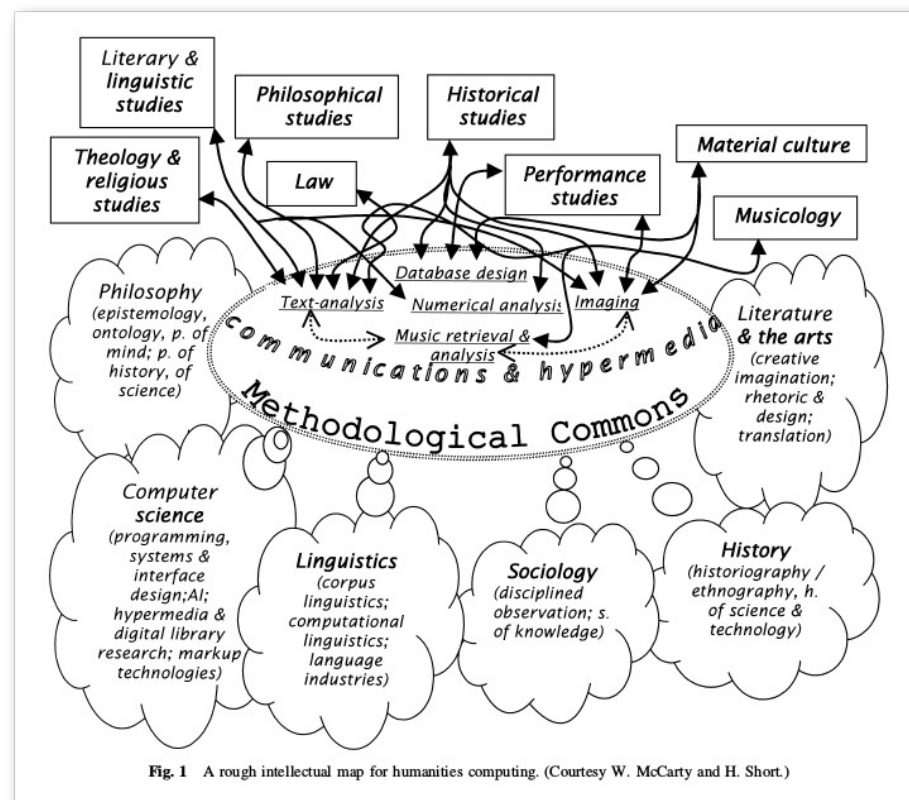
Two implications

2) Diversity (of problem) is *more important* than Quality (of work) if you are doing Digital Humanities

- DH Began as text-focussed discipline:
 - Databases, stylistics, and text-representation
- It is exciting because it isn't that any more
 - New subjects (text, images, 3D)
 - New techniques (XML, GIS, Crowd sourcing, wikis, visualisation, etc)
 - New arenas (Academy, GLAM, popular, etc.)
 - New people (Scholars, Crowd, Journalists, Citizen scientists, etc.)

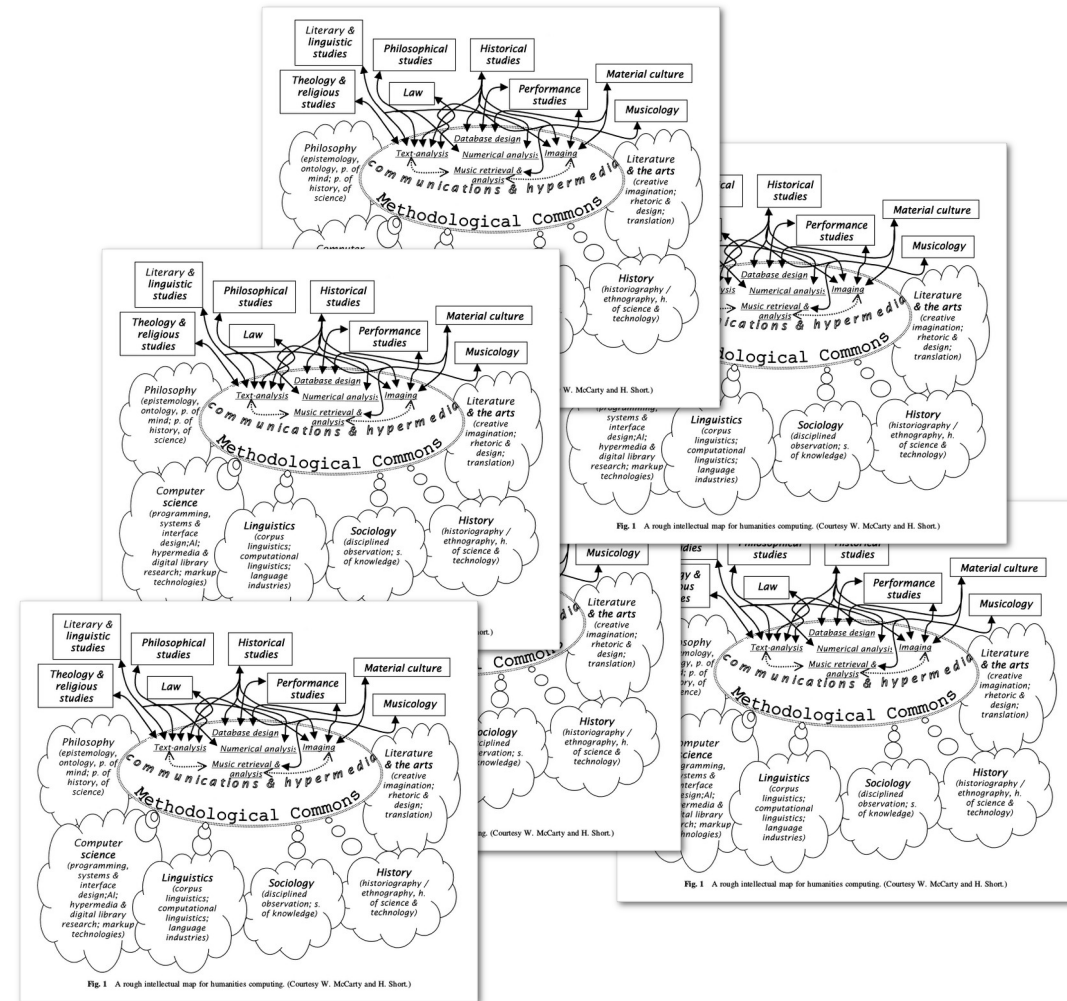
Not just ... diversity (of problem)

- The flaw in McCarty and Short's diagram is that it assumes there is a *single* methodological commons
 - One “Communications & Hypermedia”



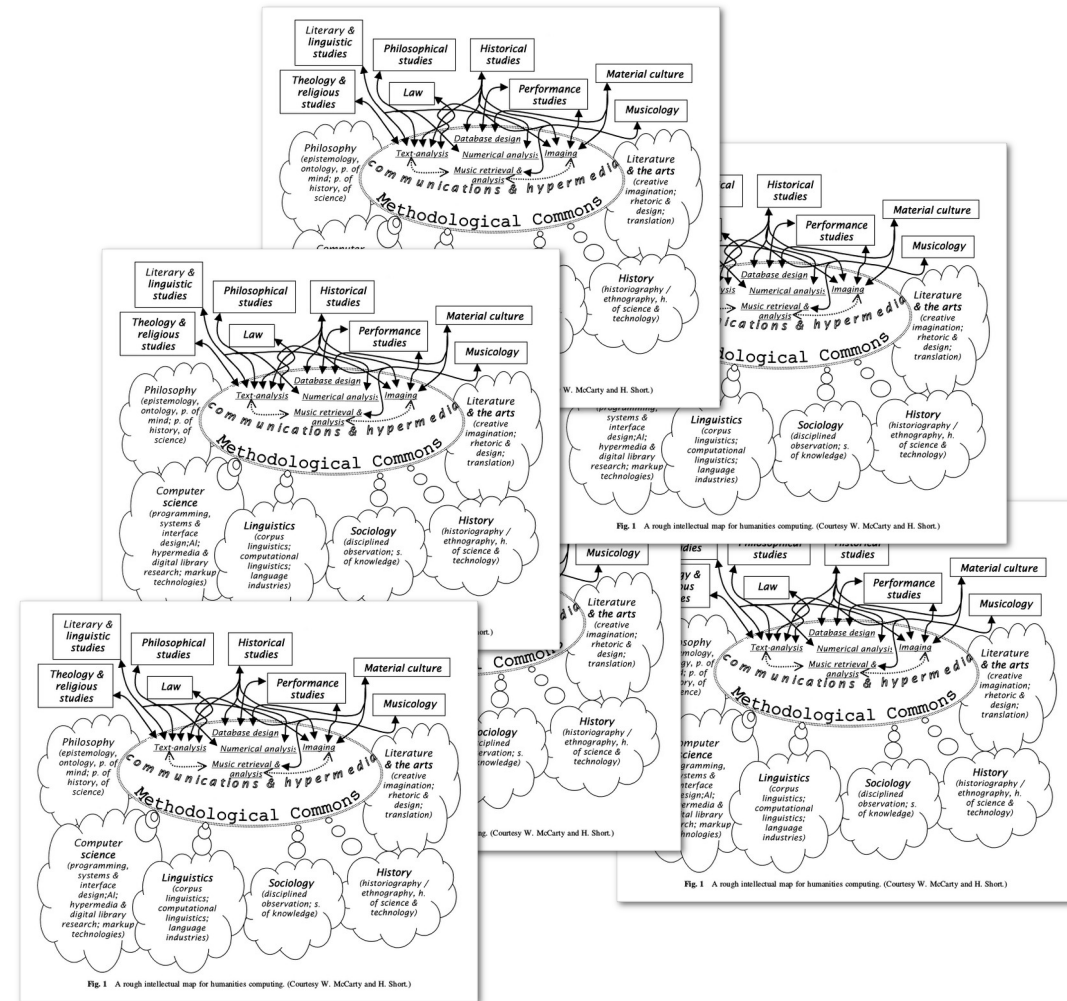
Not just... diversity (of problem)

- Great disciplinary realisation of the last 5 years is that diversity of people, region, language, context is as important as diversity of application
- There should be as many ovals as there are clouds and (disciplinary) boxes



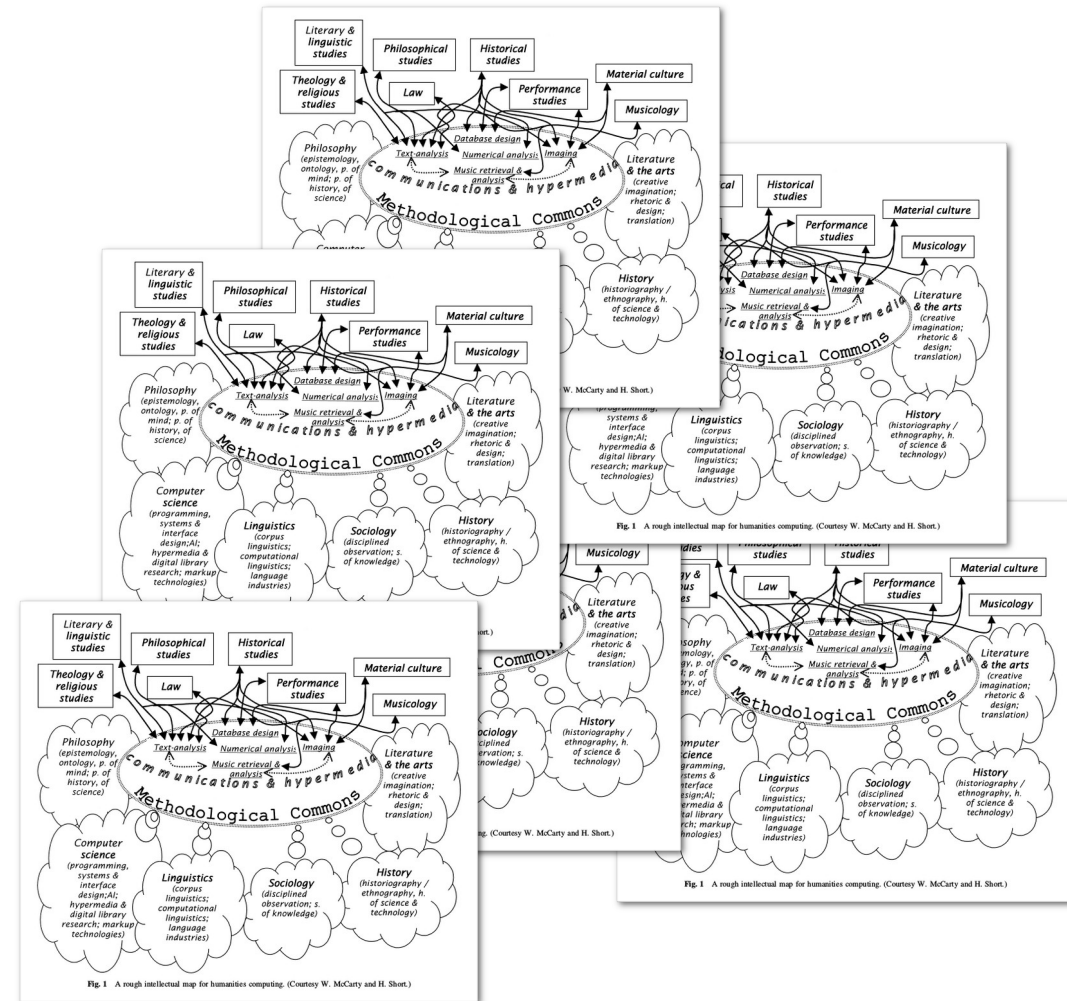
Not just... diversity (of problem)

- Why are some groups able to control attention and others not?
- How do (groups of) people differ in their relationship to technology?
- How do you do digital humanities differently in high- vs. low-bandwidth environments?



Not just... diversity (of problem)

- How does digital scholarship differ when it is done by the colonised and the coloniser?
- How is what we discuss and research influenced by factors such as class, gender, race, age, social capital?
- Etc. !!!



Conclusion

- DH depends on a supply of problems to continue its development
- Because it exists at the intersection of fields and involves the study of this intersection, its growth needs to be measured by its width rather than its bulk
- A DH that never got beyond a traditional interest in text, concordances and editing would be a DH that had died
- The same is true for a DH that cannot get beyond a narrow group of practitioners bringing a relatively limited set of problems

... no matter how well they do it.

Thank you!

@danielPaulOD
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