

## The Great 20th-century Hole; What the Digital Humanities Miss

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Over the past few years, there have been endless debates about the definition of the Digital Humanities. Many angles are considered - the practitioner of DH as builder, as coder, as theorist, as user - and also where the practitioner of DH sits and works - in the library, at home, in a 'laboratory', in the computer science department or with other disciplines.

However, this paper argues that that another angle has been ignored - a temporal one. The Digital Humanities has an uncritiqued bias towards the pre-20th century. The projects, papers, books and conferences that constitute the field of Digital Humanities (or at least in the Digital Humanities within the western tradition) have taken as their objects of study the classics, the Middle Ages, the early modern period, the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. The twentieth century - arguably the most important era for study for the humanities - remains relatively untouched as a point of investigation. Whereas there is a mass of projects related to the digitisation of early printed books, manuscripts, maps, early photography, those related to film and media, contemporary books, or modern letters, documents or recent politics are relatively scarce.

The paper draws in evidence from projects such as Europeana Newspapers, programmes like Digging into Data; centres such as the King's College London Department of Digital Humanities; events like the annual DH conference and books such as the recent Debates in the Digital Humanities to indicate the extent of this bias. It explores the extent to which projects relating to the twentieth century feature within such academic endeavour.

The paper explores the reasons for this bias. Not surprisingly, reasons of licensing and copyright play a role. The copyright status of much twentieth-century material creates a barrier that seems to block engagement from the outset. Indeed, it will be argued that this key problem, and one one that the community has been not only been slow to address but even to recognise. But there are other reasons to consider as well - issues relating to economics, file formats, and ambitions and relationships of individual disciplines within the humanities to the digital.

It concludes that if the Digital Humanities wishes to fully live up to its potential it needs to conceive of itself in a particular way and tackle these problems as part of a larger alliance. The type of partnerships that scholars within the DH umbrella have formed - with librarians, archivists, publishers - need to be reformulated and strengthened. The twenty-century hole is a massive problem for the digital humanities and only one that can be dealt with by the community by presenting and articulating the issue as part of a larger group of interested stakeholders.