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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

New Humanities and Literature

Course Code: ENG5EJ305(3) • Module 1 Notes

Unit 1: Introduction to Digital Humanities

Origins, Scope, and Paradigms of Digital Humanities

Digital Humanities (DH) represents a profound paradigm shift at the intersection of computational technologies and traditional humanist inquiry. Emerging from late-1940s "humanities computing"—pioneered by Father Roberto Busa's computational lemmatization of the corpus of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the *Index Thomisticus*) using IBM punch-card mainframes—DH has expanded into a vast interdisciplinary ecosystem. It encompasses algorithmic text mining, natural language processing (NLP), digital archives, geospatial mapping (GIS), network visualization, digital critical editions, and the critical hermeneutics of algorithmic culture.

From Close Reading to Distant Reading

In literary studies, DH challenges the exclusive hegemony of New Critical "close reading." Franco Moretti popularized the concept of **distant reading**: applying computational algorithms to massive corpora of thousands of digitized texts spanning centuries. Rather than obsessing over a tiny canon of canonical masterworks, distant reading maps macro-level literary patterns—the rise and fall of genres, stylistic evolution, shifting emotional valences, and global circulation networks. DH does not replace human interpretive reading; rather, it provides empirical, macroscopic lenses that reveal structural literary phenomena invisible to the individual naked eye.

Unit 2: What is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments? – Matthew G. Kirschenbaum

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum and the Institutional Genealogy of DH

In his landmark, widely cited essay "What is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" (published in the *ADE Bulletin*), Matthew G. Kirschenbaum interrogates the sudden institutional prominence of DH within contemporary university humanities departments. Kirschenbaum addresses why English departments specifically became the primary epicenter of the digital humanities revolution, identifying three converging factors: textual discipline, editing traditions, and the material culture of computers.

The Materiality of Text and the Legacy of Textual Scholarship

Kirschenbaum demonstrates that English departments were uniquely hospitable to computation because textual scholarship, analytical bibliography, and scholarly editing have always treated texts as physical, technological artifacts. Literature is not an airy, disembodied abstraction; it is mediated through manuscripts, type fonts, print signatures, bookbindings, and electronic files. He contrasts "tactical DH" (collaborative, project-driven software development) with "strategic DH" (broad institutional transformation). Kirschenbaum emphasizes that DH is characterized by a "tactile ethos"—a culture of building, tinkering, making, and sharing open-source digital tools that directly transforms academic collaboration from isolated contemplation into collective creation.

Unit 3: An Interpretation of Digital Humanities – Leighton Evans and Sian Rees

Computational Hermeneutics and the Epistemic Shift

In "An Interpretation of Digital Humanities," scholars Leighton Evans and Sian Rees investigate the philosophical and epistemological stakes of the computational turn in humanities research. They examine how the mediation of cultural artifacts through software interfaces, code databases, and digital metadata alters the nature of interpretation itself.

Beyond Instrumentalism: Critical Digital Humanities

Evans and Rees caution against an uncritical technological instrumentalism that treats digital tools as neutral, objective mirrors of truth. Every algorithm, database schema, and visual dashboard embeds ideological assumptions, classification biases, and historical exclusions. For instance, early digitized corpora systematically reproduced the racial and gender biases of patriarchal colonial archives. Evans and Rees advocate for a "Critical Digital Humanities" that deconstructs the black box of code, questioning who builds the infrastructure, what data is excluded, and how digital interfaces discipline human cognition. Digital tools must be subjected to the same rigorous critical skepticism that humanists apply to literary texts.

Unit 4: The Matrix – Dir. Lana and Lilly Wachowski (1999)

Cyberpunk Aesthetics and the Philosophy of the Simulacrum

Lana and Lilly Wachowski's cinematic masterpiece *The Matrix* (1999) is a monumental philosophical and cultural milestone, synthesizing cyberpunk aesthetics, Hong Kong martial arts choreography, anime visual dynamics, and Western philosophy. The film explicitly opens with Jean Baudrillard's post-structuralist treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* (in which Neo hides illicit computer disks), exploring the terrifying scenario where reality has been entirely supplanted by a hyperreal digital simulation.

The Desert of the Real and Posthuman Enslavement

The film's central narrative revelation—delivered by Morpheus to the newly awakened Neo—discloses that the year is not 1999, but approximately 2199: humanity has lost a war against artificial intelligence and has been enslaved in vast bio-electric pods, with their brains hard-wired into "the Matrix," an elaborate neuro-interactive digital simulation designed to keep humans docile while machines harvest their bio-thermal energy. Morpheus introduces Neo to the charred, subterranean ruins of Earth with the immortal phrase: "Welcome to the desert of the real." *The Matrix* serves as an allegory for capitalist alienation, institutional panoptic control, and the transgender journey of bodily and psychic transformation, showing that reclaiming human freedom requires unplugging from manufactured societal illusions.

Unit 5: Atticus: Anonymity, Art, and Avatars – The Cost of Fame and Likeability (TEDx)

The Masked Poet in the Digital Age

The TEDx talk by "Atticus"—the pseudonymous, masked Instagram poetry sensation whose minimalist verse has captured millions of online followers and New York Times bestselling status—explores the complex intersection of digital anonymity, celebrity culture, and artistic creation in the 21st century. Performing publicly only while wearing an anonymous silver skull mask, Atticus interrogates how digital social networks distort human identity.

The Algorithmic Self and the Commodity of Likeability

Atticus reflects on the psychological and artistic toll of the modern "like economy." On platforms like Instagram and TikTok, artists are relentlessly pressured to monetize their private lives, turning their physical bodies, domestic relationships, and personal vulnerabilities into branded commodities optimized for algorithmic engagement. Atticus argues that wearing a mask is not a gimmick, but a radical act of artistic self-preservation: by hiding his facial identity, he liberates the poetry from the author's physical appearance, gender, and social status. The audience connects with the unadorned emotional truth of the words rather than the curated image of a celebrity avatar. The talk illuminates how digital platforms simultaneously democratize literary distribution while threatening to commodify the human soul.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 1)

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2. Somatic Vulnerability, Medical Power, and the Narrative Self

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 2)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 3)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 4)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 5)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 6)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 7)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 1 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 8)

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