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## Do(es) Digital Humanities (DH) Transform American Studies on Both Sides of the Atlantic?

### Abstract

Although the history of Digital Humanities (previously known as “humanities computing”) can easily be traced back to the immediate post-WWII years, it was only in 2009 that *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and several other journals and newspapers recognized DH as “the next big thing”—and then as “The thing” (Gold, 2012, p. ix). Yet, despite the proliferation of professional journals, conferences and other fora, DH was (or: has been) somewhat slow to make an overall transformative impact on the Humanities, at least at the level of methodology and epistemology (Brennan, 2017). More recently, similar concerns were raised by Richard Jean So, who also criticized humanities departments for their slow acceptance of data-driven and quantitative approaches (2021, p. 40). This overall sluggishness was noted in 2018 by Mari Yoshihara as well in the field of American Studies, when the editor of the leading American Studies Journal *American Quarterly* dedicated an entire issue to Digital Humanities with the clear objective of orienting the journal toward a “critically-aimed digital practice” (Yoshihara, 2018, pp. vii-viii). The aim of this paper is to explore in what contexts DH as a phrase has appeared since the early 2000s in the journal of the American Studies Association (ASA), the *American Quarterly*, and in the *European Journal of American Studies* (EJAS), published by the European Association for American Studies (EAAS). A similar comparison is made with respect to the available conference themes and topics of these two organizations to highlight the relative importance attached to DH by both professional bodies. The paper concludes that the American Association has been significantly more eager to embrace the methods and approaches offered by Digital Humanities, yet this activism has mostly been manifested in the areas of feminism and critical race theory.

**Key words:** Digital Humanities; American Studies; American Studies Association; European Association for American Studies

### Absztrakt

Annak ellenére, hogy a digitális bölcsészet modern kori gyökerei könnyedén visszavezethetők a második világháború utáni évekig, az oktatásügyi, szakmai folyóiratok (hasonlóan a szélesebb közönségnek szánt sajtótermékekhez) csupán alig több mint egy évtizeddel ezelőtt ismerték fel a területben rejlő potenciált. A túlfűtött várakozásokkal ellentétben a digitális bölcsészet mostanáig sem forradalmasította a humán tudományok kutatási-ismeretszerzési módszereit, bár hatása kétségkívül nem lebecsülendő. Jelen tanulmány az amerikanisztika tudományterületének vonatkozásában vizsgálja a digitális bölcsészet esetlegesen tetten érhető befolyását, górcső alá véve az egyesült államokbeli American Studies Association és a European Association for American Studies folyóiratait és konferenciáit. Az összevetés eredményeként kijelenthető, hogy a tengeren túlon a digitális bölcsészet hatása jóval jelentősebb az amerikanisztika berkein belül, ugyanakkor ez a befolyás legfőképpen a feminizmus és a kritikai rasszelmélet területeit érintő cikkek és előadások vonatkozásában érvényesül.

**Kulcsszavak:** digitális bölcsészet; amerikanisztika; American Studies Association; European Association for American Studies

## 1. Introduction: Digital Humanities and American Studies – Similarities and Intersections

“Digital Humanities” (DH) – quite similarly to American Studies” – has always been a notoriously elusive term whose origins, institutional beginnings and current interpretations sometimes generate heated debates, most recently against the backdrop of postmodern critical theory and identity politics. A perennial dilemma concerning the history of the field is whether the origins of DH should be associated with the invention and application of IT devices (in which case the history begins in the post-WWII years) – or, since the genuine roots of computational thinking are much older, earlier pioneers are also to be recognized for their (sometimes several centuries-old, and largely forgotten) contribution.

The former view is frequently illustrated by the story of the canonical founder of DH (or: “humanities computing”), Jesuit priest and philosophy professor Roberto A. Busa, who – with the help of several typists, assistants, and IBM computers – started to compile a comprehensive list of concordances based on St. Thomas Aquinas’s works in 1949 (Berry – Fagerjord, 2017, Ch. 2). Eventually, the immense work took more than three decades to complete. Currently, the Roberto Busa Prize is awarded triennially by the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations (ADHO) “to recognise outstanding lifetime achievements in the application of information and communications technologies to humanities research” (Roberto Busa Prize). Although ADHO’s website still recognizes Busa as “the first pioneer of humanities computing,” more recently this interpretation has come under serious criticism e.g. by Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan (2018), who even recommend to “mentally replace” Busa’s name with that of Josephine Miles, an English professor at Berkeley, who did similar concordance work with Dryden’s poetry from the 1930s onwards. Naturally, this attention shift cannot be separated from the rise of third- and fourth-wave feminism during the past decades.

As far as the origins of computational thinking are concerned, the historical roots of DH may be as old as cryptanalysis itself, whose “father” is generally thought to be al-Kindi, an Arab scholar who used relative frequency analysis to decipher encrypted texts in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Broemeling, 2011, p. 255). The recorded history of cryptology (the practice and science of cryptography and cryptanalysis) goes back in time even further: David Kahn in *The Codebreakers* traces its origins to the ancient Egyptian scribes who are known to have experimented with innovative hieroglyphic symbols as early as 4,000 years ago (1973, pp. 64-65).

Yet, it was definitely the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that brought revolutionary changes almost overnight. With the increasing availability of (mainframe) computers in the 1960s, linguistics research found computational methods especially useful. The first major machine-readable, representative corpus of contemporary language use (the “Brown Corpus”) was compiled by Henry Kučera and W. Nelson Francis – effectively founding the field of corpus linguistics. The same decade witnessed the publication of first professional journal related to humanities computing: *Computers and the Humanities* (CHum), founded by Joseph Raben (Berry – Fagerjord, 2017, Ch. 2). Although the articles published in the early professional journals were mostly focused on text experiments (Sula – Hill, 2019, p. 202), the technical breakthroughs of the following decades spectacularly broadened the field for researchers and enabled them to turn their attention to sound, video and multimedia applications as well.

The name “Digital Humanities” is said to have been originated with John Unsworth, the founding director of the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia, who suggested it in 2001 instead of “Digitized Humanities” as the title for the new *Blackwell Companion to Digital Humanities* (Kirschenbaum, 2012, p. 5). Indeed, as Google Ngram Viewer proves, “Digital Humanities” started to overshadow “humanities computing” soon afterwards, with skyrocketing popularity from 2007 onwards.

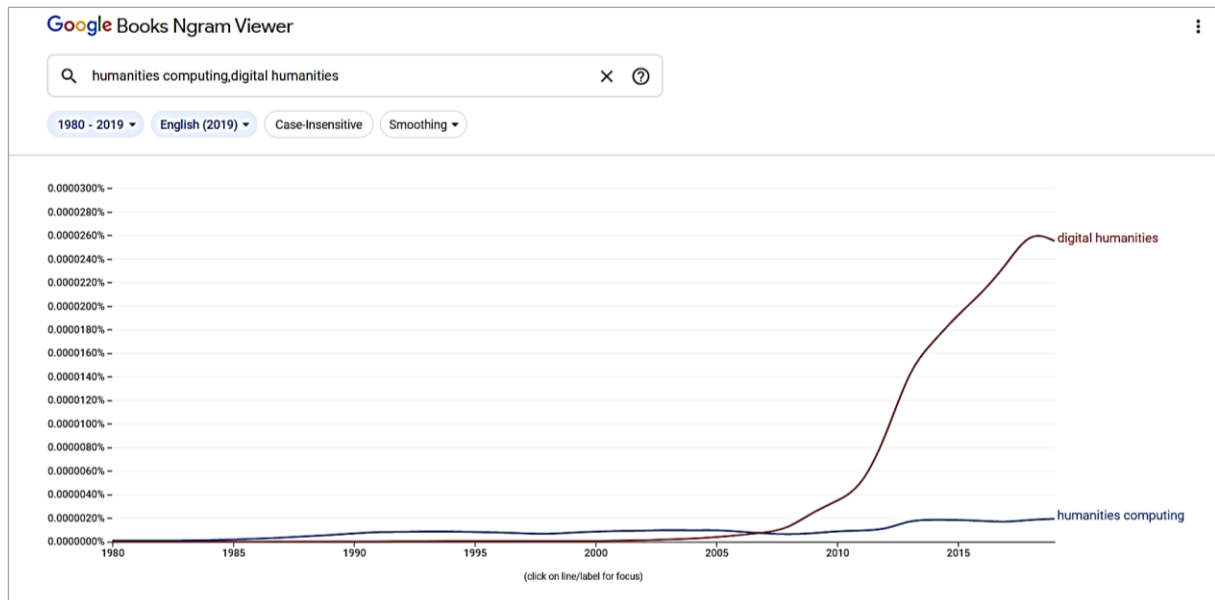


Fig. 1: The normalized frequency curves of “humanities computing” and “digital humanities” in the Google Books “English 2019” database.

In the 2016 edition of *Debates in the Digital Humanities* Matthew K. Gold optimistically declared that DH, “as a field, has arrived” (Gold – Klein, 2016, p. ix), yet, due to the traditionally interdisciplinary “big tent” approach, he acknowledged that it could “at times be difficult to determine with any specificity what, precisely, digital humanities work entails” (ibid.).

Historian Jason Heppler has collected hundreds of (informal and more formal) definitions from workshop participants throughout the years at <https://whatisdigitalhumanities.com>. Most respondents shared the view that DH was mostly about “applying computational methods in humanities research and teaching” (Heppler, 2015). According to David M. Berry, “Digital Humanities incorporate key insights from languages and literature, history, music, media and communications, computer science and information studies and combine these different approaches into new frameworks” (2019).

Sennyey (2018) identifies five major themes in the recent discourses and debates about the nature of digital humanities in the United States: the tools used; the methodologies employed; (the degree of) computational thinking involved; whether DH is a separate (sub)field of science; the hype factor – or the various synergies of all of these (pp. 111-114). He outlines four criteria (two out of which should be minimally met) in order for a project to be reasonably regarded as belonging to the field of DH. These are: dealing with digitally processible and presentable data; the analysis of huge corpora/(big) data sources; the structuring (segmenting, tagging, etc.) of the data for computational analysis; and the employment of automated analytical processes for the (re)processing of data (pp. 115-116).

Despite the heterogeneity of the field, the phrase “digital humanities”—as Alan Liu observed in 2016 (p. 1549)—has increasingly been taking the singular verb, behaving as a collective noun characterized by singular concord. A recent Google Ngram Viewer usage trend search corroborates that the tendency toward singular concord has been continuing:

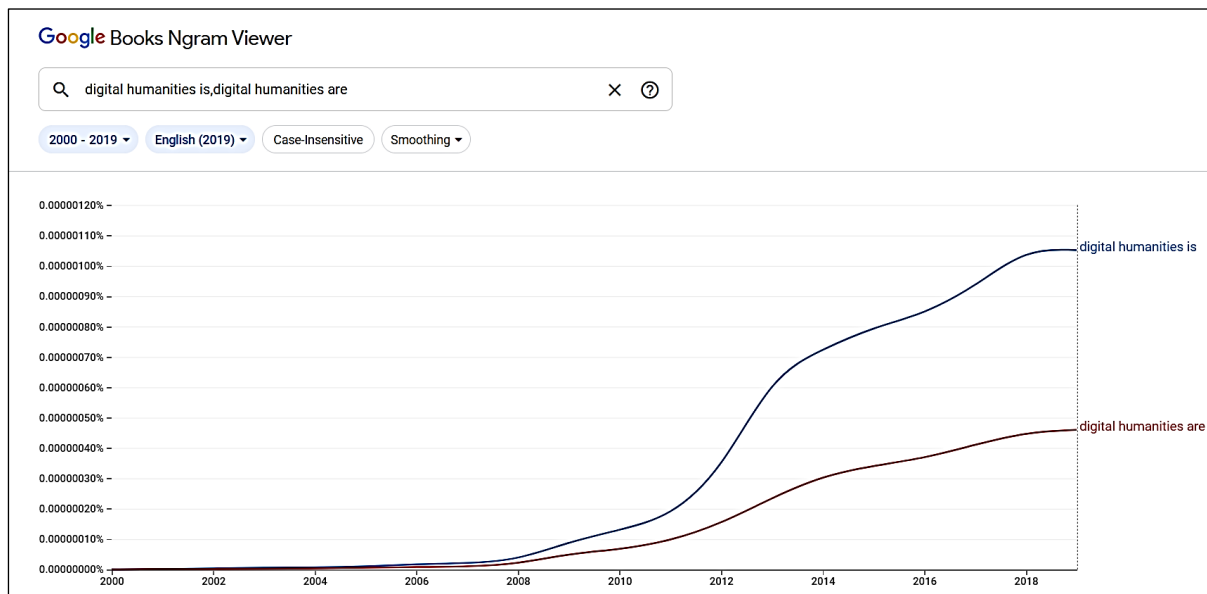


Fig. 2: The normalized frequency curves of “digital humanities is” and “digital humanities are” in the Google Books “English 2019” database.

A similar tendency toward singular concord can be observed with respect to the phrase “American Studies” as well. Here, the singular form has become dominant since the mid-1950s:

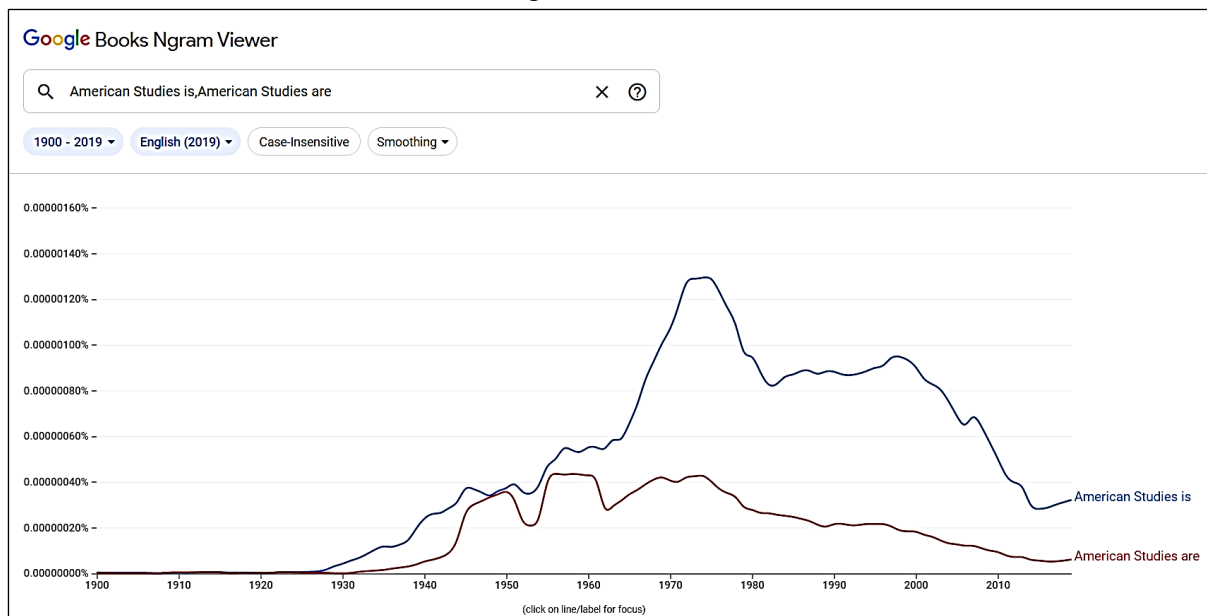


Fig. 3: The normalized frequency curves of “American Studies is” and “American Studies are” in the Google Books “English 2019” database.

Additionally, Google Ngram Viewer correctly identifies the institutional beginnings of American Studies around the late 1920s: it was then that English departments launched courses combining the study of (US-)American literature and history, frequently labeled as “American

Civilization” (Oppermann, 2016, p. 13). Interdisciplinarity and regional studies were strengthened during the New Deal.

Overall, there have been three major phases in the history of American Studies (Paul, 2014, pp. 18-25):

1. The “Myth and Symbol School” (from the late 1930s to the 1950s) identifying (and perhaps constructing) myths and symbols attesting to and promoting the uniqueness of the US. This phase was characterized by national/nation building-oriented perspectives and frequently served Cold War propaganda goals.
2. The “Critical Myth and Symbol School” (from the 1960s and 1970s) undertook the critical reexamination and reevaluation of the founding myths of the US from subnational viewpoints (emphasizing violence, racism, sexism, exploitation, genocide), recognizing the multicultural legacy of the country.
3. The “New Americanists” (from the 1990s) have been focusing on transnational (transatlantic, transpacific, hemispheric) perspectives, postcolonial and multilingual contexts, often critiquing the “American Empire.”

Similarly to Digital Humanities, American Studies is also considered to be an interdisciplinary field characterized by “an eclectic array of practices and pedagogies” (Lipsitz, 2015, p. 1). It is motivated by the aim “to understand the multiplicity of the social and cultural lives of people in—and in relation to—the United States, both past and present” (Deloria – Olson, 2017, p. 6) but, on the whole, American Studies “resists definition at every turn” (p. 1).

For American Studies, Digital Humanities definitely appeared on the radar screen in 2018, when a special issue of the leading American Studies Journal, *American Quarterly* was dedicated to Digital Humanities in its entirety. This event was regarded by Matthew K. Gold as a symbolic milestone, signaling the “arrival” of DH in the domain American Studies (Gold, 2019).

## 2. Aims, Databases and Methods

This paper attempts to assess the more or less measurable recent impact of Digital Humanities on American Studies in the US and in Europe as reflected in the relevant documents of the largest and oldest professional organization of the field, the American Studies Association (ASA), comparing the findings to the results of a similar examination focusing on the equivalent information sources of the European Association of American Studies (EAAS). Both of these Associations were founded in the first half of the 1950s. The analysis relies on three sets of data:

1. The homepages of the respective organizations (<https://www.theasa.net> and <https://www.eaas.eu>). Here, references and links to DH-related content are compared.
4. The online official journals: ASA’s *American Quarterly* (AQ) (accessible via Project MUSE® at <https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/13>) and the *European Journal of American Studies* (EJAS) (available at <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/index.html>). AQ requires subscription but the search engine of the page can be used for free: keyword searches list the article titles in which the search string appears but the text itself is inaccessible without subscription. To partially compensate for this shortcoming, the full-text version of the key, thematic issue of the journal (September 2018, Vol. 70, No. 3) was obtained (which includes the majority of all DH-references published in AQ so far).

*EJAS* articles, on the other hand, are freely readable online and downloadable as well. Online *AQ* volumes are available since March 1996, while the first electronic *EJAS* issue dates back to the spring of 2006.

5. The programs of past annual meetings of the ASA (1997–2019) (<https://www.theasa.net/annual-meeting/past-meetings>) and the biennial conferences of the EAAS (2004–2021) (<https://www.eaas.eu/conferences/eaas-biennial-conferences>).

In each of these sources, attention was focused on the contexts in which “Digital Humanities” as a (case insensitive) phrase appeared. The data reflect the status of the sources as of May 8, 2021. All textual searches, frequency and collocation analyses were carried out and the topic models were built with the help of Voyant Tools, a web-based reading and analysis environment for digital texts (<https://voyant-tools.org/>).

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 *The ASA and EAAS Websites*

The ASA self-description and mission statement emphasizes that “[We Are] ... dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of U.S. culture and history in a global context” (About the ASA), which is largely in line with the “New Americanist” research directions and priorities. The “American Studies Association” entry in the Encyclopedia of American Studies (linked from the ASA website) explicitly mentions the ASA caucuses that had been established by 2010, including the Digital Humanities Caucus (Stephens – Bonner, 2018). Currently, there are 19 caucuses within the ASA, ranging (alphabetically) from Academic and Community Activism (seeking to promote social justice) to War and Peace Studies (to analyze violence and conflict) (Caucuses).

The Digital Humanities Caucus—founded in 2009—works “to support the study of digital research and teaching within an American studies framework” (Digital Humanities Caucus). The “Resources” webpage of the DH Caucus contains highly useful links to theoretical works as well as to projects and practical applications (Resources). The activism of the DH Caucus can be seen in the growing number of panel discussions, roundtables and thematic sessions organized by this community since 2010.

The EAAS, on the other hand, appears to be lagging behind its American counterpart in the area of Digital Humanities. Although one of the eight thematic networks of the association is the Digital Studies Network with a mission “to facilitate the communication and collaboration between scholars, researchers and postgraduate students in Europe with an interest in... digital literary forms, digitality and popular culture,... [and] digital humanities,” the specifically DH-related results of these activities are hardly visible on the EAAS homepage (EAAS Digital Studies Network). Furthermore, Digital Humanities as a phrase has only recently shown up on the agenda of the EAAS Biennial Conferences.

#### 3.2 *American Quarterly vs. EJAS*

Although the adjective “digital” has regularly appeared in articles and reviews in both *AQ* and the *EJAS* (at least since the beginning of their online availability), writings related to “digital humanities” proper began to be published considerably later, following the consolidation of the phrase in both professional and popular discourse.

At the moment, the Project Muse search engine finds 233 records in the *AQ* archive that mention “digital” at least once. The similar figure for “digital humanities” is 65, out of which 36 are concentrated in the September 2018 thematic issue (Vol. 70, No. 3). The authors are practically all affiliated with U.S. universities—there are no exceptions among the top ten contributors to the more than 60 articles and reviews.

The very first reference to DH can be traced back to September 2011 (Vol. 63, No. 3), when Kara Keeling and Josh Kun remarked that “...many communications, media, and digital humanities scholars have been arguing [that] internet platforms and digital networking tools have democratized the tools of media production” (p. 447). Nevertheless, DH-related foci had been adopted from time in *AQ* articles, at least since 1999, when the journal published an experimental online issue discussing “hypertext and American studies scholarship” (Tilton et al, 2018, p. 362).

Still, the real breakthrough (or watershed) in the relationship between American Studies and DH arrived with the deliberate reorientation of *AQ* in September 2018 with a special issue titled “Toward a Critically Engaged Digital Practice: American Studies and the Digital Humanities” (Vol. 70, No. 3). The articles in the special issue were mostly related to (the possible solution of) problems stemming from discrimination against and disempowerment of various minority groups in education, urban settings, queer video games, etc., and resonated with the goals that Matthew K. Gold set for DH scholars and practitioners in his 2019 introduction to *Debates in the Digital Humanities*: socially-oriented work and the promotion of racial and social justice (Gold – Klein, 2019).

A quick look at the word frequency lists based on the titles of those articles that contain the phrase “digital humanities” either in the title or in the body of the articles before 2018, in the 2018 special issue, and between 2018-May 2021 reveals that the only consistently and visibly represented racial minority throughout the years was the African-American community:




Pre-2018 titles				2018 special issue titles				Post-2018 titles			
 Terms				 Terms				 Terms			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Term	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Term	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Term
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	american	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	digital	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	digital
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	digital	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	humanities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	history
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	studies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	mapping	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	blk
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	archive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	american	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	century
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	black	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	studies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	humanities
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	print	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	black	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	academic
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7	african	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7	media	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7	accessible
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	alan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	project	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	african
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	appendix	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	anti	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	american
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	archiving	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	becoming	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	americans
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	chicana	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	archive
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12	collective	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12	eviction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12	archives
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13	community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13	inequality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13	arguments
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14	confronts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14	introduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14	bird's
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15	culture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15	james	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15	black
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16	data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16	practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16	blindness
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17	debt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17	problems	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17	books
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	experience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	queer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	centering
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	filipino	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	city
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20	humanities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20	4dh	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20	claiming

Fig. 4: Word frequency lists based on the titles of those AQ articles that contained the phrase “digital humanities” either in the title or in the body of the articles before 2018, in the 2018 special issue, and between 2018-May 2021.

The topic model building tool by Voyant Tools identifies the following term clusters in the full-text corpus of AQ’s 2018 special issue, titled “Toward a Critically Engaged Digital Practice” (see Fig. 5). (The underlying algorithm uses a technique called Latent Dirichlet Allocation—for the details see <https://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!/guide/topics>.)



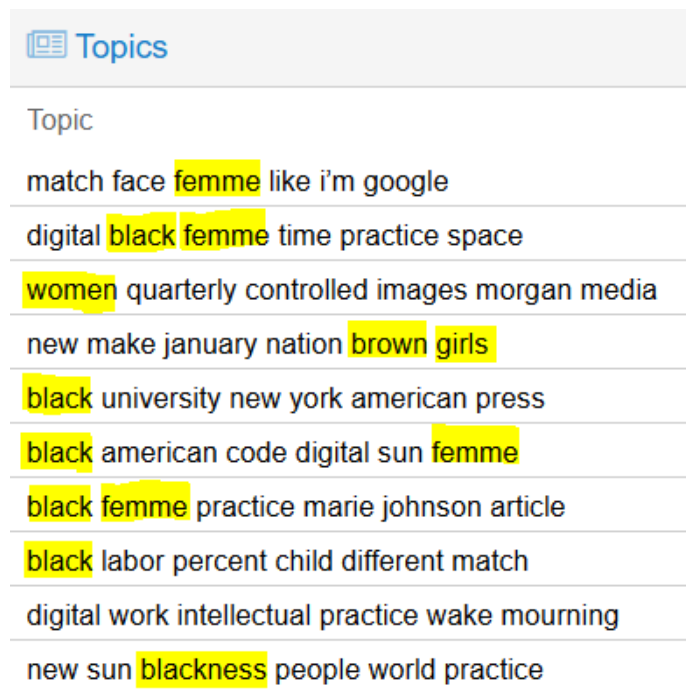


Fig. 5: Topic model of AQ’s 2018 special issue. (Voyant Tools, 6 terms, 10 topics, 1,000 iterations.)

The most frequent collocates of “black” in the specific volume also reveal the dominance of a black feminist perspective:

Collocates		
	Term	Collocate
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	girlhood
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	girls
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	lives
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	women
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	femme
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	girl
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	power
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	feminist
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	queer
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	panther
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	code
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	scholar
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	people
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	twitter
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	trans
<input type="checkbox"/>	black	panthers

Fig. 6. The top 10 most frequent collocates for “black” in AQ’s 2018 special issue (full text corpus)

The expectation that *EJAS* articles containing the phrase “digital humanities” might lend themselves to a similar analysis turned out to be totally unfounded. DH is not mentioned at all in the *EJAS* articles, only a few times in the book review section. Even those four instances (one in 2013 and three in 2017) are just marginally relevant, as the books themselves were not related to DH or “humanities computing” or to the realm of “digital” in general.

Chronologically, the first reference to DH cropped up in a review by Michael Boyden about Johannes Voelz's *Transcendental Resistance: The New Americanists & Emerson's Challenge*—in which Boyden remarked that “Emerson’s lecture-derived style might have been put into relation with the new positivism of the Digital Humanities in the age of twitter” (Boyden, 2013, p. 4). The remaining three reviews from 2017 also refer to DH in an indirect, somewhat marginal way, mentioning it among several other scholarly fields as an illustrative example (see at <https://search.openedition.org/results?q=%22digital+humanities%22&s=European+journal+of+American+studies&pf=OJ&st=anneedatepubli>.)

Although the term “digital” can be found 79 times in 23 *EJAS* issues (see <https://search.openedition.org/results?q=digital&s=European+journal+of+American+studies&pf=OJ&dp=120&st=-datemisenligne>), it is virtually never a keyword in any of the pieces. The only counterexample is David Deacon’s article, titled “‘Some Unholy Alloy’: Neoliberalism, Digital Modernity, and the Mechanics of Globalized Capital in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Counselor*,” in which “digital capitalism” functions as an important element of the argument.

*EJAS*’s keyword catalog does not include “computer” or “virtual,” either. “Internet” is definitely there, but a closer look reveals that the two articles linked from the concept are in fact political analyses (see <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/9588>).

### 3.3 *The ASA Annual Meetings (1997-2019) and the EAAS Biennial Conferences (2004-2021)*

Similarly to the one-sided DH impact on *AQ* versus *EJAS*, the comparison of conference programs (subject lists, session/panel and paper titles) reveals much the same pattern: a clearly visible (yet not decisive) DH impact on the ASA research directions since the early 2010s, as opposed to the almost negligible influence on this side of the Atlantic as far as American Studies is concerned.

#### 3.3.1 *ASA Annual Meetings*

The first time that significant attention was paid to the “digital” in an ASA conference program happened in Detroit in 2000. Here, the session titled “Worlding the US Wide Web” included a paper on the relationship between the digital economy and US consumer culture, while another one investigated the manifestations of American imperialism behind the allocation of Internet domain names (Schedule: Friday). “Digital Humanities” appeared on the agenda for the first time in 2002—seven years before the foundation of ASA’s Digital Humanities Caucus—when Charles Sheaffer from the Uni. of Minnesota made a presentation on “The Death of the Frontier and the Birth of the Digital Humanities” in the Disciplining the Humanities session of the 2002 ASA Annual Meeting in Houston, Texas (Saturday’s schedule).

From 2009 onwards, the Digital Humanities Caucus has decisively been shaping the DH agenda at the ASA Annual Meetings. (All members of the caucus leadership are Americans and affiliated with U.S. institutions.) The first DH-related panel discussion (“Neoliberalism, Multiculturalism, and the Means of Digital Humanities Production”) took place in 2009 in Washington, D.C. (ASA Program Book). The topics and themes proposed by the DH Caucus have centered around four major focal points so far:

1. Resisting the corporatization of higher education (2011-13);
2. Strengthening feminist perspectives (2014);
3. Critical engagement (2017-18);
4. Exploring the relationship between DH and American Studies (a perennial theme).

Political and professional concerns have frequently intertwined among the priorities of the Digital Caucus (see Fig. 7):

<p><b>Transforming</b> Scholarly <b>Research</b> in the Digital Age (2011)</p> <p>What Can the Digital Humanities Bring to <b>American Studies</b>, and Vice Versa? (2012)</p> <p>New Platforms of <b>Knowledge Production</b> and <b>Resistance</b> (2012)</p> <p>Digital Humanities and the <b>Neoliberal University</b>: Complicity and/or <b>Resistance</b> (2013)</p> <p>New Platforms of <b>Knowledge</b> and <b>Dissent</b> (2013)</p> <p><b>Feminist</b> Making I: Building <b>Critical</b> Contexts (2014)</p> <p><b>Feminist</b> Making II: Producing Cultural <b>Critique</b> (2014)</p> <p>The Fun and the <b>Fury</b> (2014)</p> <p>Scripting the Reader in <b>Electronic Literature</b> (2015)</p> <p>The Shadow <b>Archive</b>: Digital (Re)Assemblages of Ephemera (2015)</p> <p>Digital Humanities <b>Mentoring</b> (2015)</p> <p>Centering Digital Humanities Projects in <b>American Studies</b> (2016)</p> <p>Homing/Redefining Digital Humanities in the Academy from an <b>American Studies</b> Perspective (2016)</p> <p>Sustaining <b>Dissent</b> in the Digital Humanities (2017)</p> <p>Toward a <b>Critically Engaged</b> Digital Practice: Scholarly Digital Publishing in American Studies (2017)</p> <p><b>Race, Social Media</b>, and the Digital Humanities (2018)</p> <p>Talk Story as <b>Digital Methodology</b> (2019)</p>
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*Fig. 7: ASA Digital Humanities Caucus panel/session titles since 2011 (with highlighted keywords)*

### 3.3.2 EAAS Biennial Conferences

The conference themes are available at <https://www.eaas.eu/conferences/eaas-biennial-conferences>, whereas the detailed programs can be downloaded from the organizers' linked websites (with the exception of the 2012 Izmir schedule, which can only be viewed online at <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/6673375/conference-program-eaas2012org/2>).

The earliest available event on the online Biennial Conference list is the Prague conference in 2004; consequently, the word “digital” has routinely appeared in the programs ever since. “Digital Humanities,” however, is a definite latecomer: the first recorded mentioning of the phrase was at the combined 32<sup>nd</sup> European Association for American Studies and 63<sup>rd</sup> British Association for American Studies Conference in London. Here, a roundtable talk was devoted to the theme of “Placing Digital Humanities in American Studies” (EBAAS, 2018, p. 10). (Similar discussions had taken place six years before at the ASA annual meeting in Denver, Colorado.)

Nevertheless, DH is likely to remain a permanent feature of the EAAS conferences as well: the most recent event in Warsaw (postponed to May 2021) witnessed the convening of the first explicitly DH-themed workshop sponsored by the EAAS Digital Studies Network. As the title (“Citizenship, Space, Renewal: Challenges of Critical Digital Humanities”) suggests, the European association is trying to follow the “critically engaged” direction preferred by the ASA Digital Humanities Caucus (EAAS, 20/20 Vision).

Overall, the topic model-based comparison of all sessions (including panel discussions, roundtables, and individual paper titles) of the ASA Annual Meetings and the EAAS Biennial Conferences reveals noticeable differences between the representations of potentially identity-politics-related themes on the two association's respective agendas. Whether these differences

continue to exist in the future – or there may be a transatlantic renaissance of subnational research orientations (also assisted by the shifting priorities of Digital Humanities research) – remains to be seen.



ASA Annual Meetings (1997-2019)	EAAS Biennial Conferences (2004-2021)
<p> Topics</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>interdisciplinary activist making national</p> <p>america <b>black</b> atlantic <b>african</b></p> <p>media activism trauma collaboration</p> <p>committee popular art <b>latin</b></p> <p>american <b>race</b> studies century</p> <p>nineteenth performance <b>sexuality masculinity</b></p> <p>cultural nation representation state</p> <p>culture america global imagination</p> <p>war public early twentieth</p> <p>transnational <b>asian</b> cultures americas</p>	<p> Topics</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>american mail studies fax</p> <p>university american literature chair</p> <p>room session germany usa</p> <p>workshop non conformism war</p> <p>mail fax studies department</p> <p>american studies book published</p> <p>american science research fiction</p> <p>cyp april cyprus nicosia</p> <p>new information culture cultural</p> <p>board conference meeting newsletter</p>
<p><b>Shared concepts: “american”; “studies”; “culture”; “cultural”; “war”</b></p>	

Fig. 8: Topic models of the ASA Annual Meetings and the EAAS Biennial Conferences. Potentially identity politics-related terms are highlighted. (Voyant Tools, 4 terms, 10 topics, 1,000 iterations.)

#### 4. Conclusion and Future Research Possibilities

The comparison of the three, selected data sources from the websites and archives of the US-based American Studies Association (ASA) and the European Association of American Studies (EAAS) – including their official journals; conference themes and programs – shows that Digital Humanities has had a measurably different impact on American Studies as practiced in the US and in Europe.

While both professional organizations have a similar, DH-oriented thematic network or caucus, ASA’s Digital Humanities Caucus has left a significantly more conspicuous imprint on both the *American Quarterly* articles and on the Association’s Annual Meeting program. Without doubt, the most significant achievement for DH until now – as far as the examined documents are concerned – was the publication of *AQ*’s critical DH-oriented special issue in 2018. That volume – stemming from the shared desire of many DH and American Studies scholars and practitioners to promote social justice—represents a (partial) return to the second-phase concerns of American Studies scholarship, which emphasized and exposed the continued existence of racism, sexism, exploitation as experienced from the subnational perspectives of minoritized groups (and individuals). Additionally, from a current perspective, the unmistakable influence of identity politics can definitely be detected as a crucial influence on research directions, reflecting Progressive Activist priorities (Czeglédi, 2021). The very phrase “identity politics” was

introduced by black feminist activists in the 1970s (*ibid.*)—and the focal concerns of *AQ*'s 2018 special issue appear to be resonating with the agenda of the forerunners.

The *European Journal of American Studies (EJAS)* has not come out with a similar, dedicated issue yet. Moreover, *EJAS* is also seriously lagging behind *AQ* in terms of peer-reviewed articles explicitly related to DH themes. As a matter of fact, the number of these articles is zero at the moment.

The comparison of the conference programs also reveals that ASA is at least 6-8 years ahead of the EAAS in terms of DH engagement. The European association's first thematic roundtable was organized only in 2018. Nevertheless, as the most recent EAAS conference program foreshadows, DH is likely to remain a permanent feature at American Studies conferences on this side of the Atlantic as well.

Naturally, this examination has had its fair share of limitations. Full access to *American Quarterly* is only granted to subscribers (although the titles and the abstracts are informative to a degree). *EJAS* has been available online from 2006 onwards – yet, the real DH-impact came (or: failed to come) after that year, so this is a tolerable shortcoming. Similar reservations about the conference programs may also be valid: only the paper titles (and, in some instances, the subject indexes) are available, not even the abstracts. However, the simultaneous, chronological comparison of the journal articles and the conference programs still allows the plotting of trends – and both sources essentially tell the same story.

A possible extension of this research could involve the analysis of the materials of the regional ASA chapters in the US and those of the EAAS member associations. However, these journals are often unavailable online—and even when they are, subscription is required for full access.

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