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INTRODUCTION

Feminist modernist digital humanities

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The theme of this cluster on digital archives (DH), and indeed of our journal issue, is feminist interrelations – digital, ecological, prosthetic, esthetic. Our cover image, “Networks,” traces Mina Loy’s personal relationships (Figure 1). (Green: influenced by) (Pink: enemy) (Bright Blue: acquaintance) (Dark Pink: friend) (A Darker Blue: collaborator) (Yellow: lover) (Orange: spouse).\textsuperscript{1} Vaguely taking the shape of a stingray, the network’s appearance reminds us of “A Jellyfish” by Marianne Moore, both subjects variously of this issue’s cluster on digital archives and a general essay on Moore’s unbounded, prosthetic animals (Mason):

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure1}
\end{figure}
Visible, invisible,
a fluctuating charm
an amber-tinctured amethyst
inhabits it, your arm
approaches …

Moore’s poem speaks to the interrelation between a network and its interpretation. An “amber-tinctured amethyst,” the jellyfish captures points of light, the nodes of a network, in a visualization that is at once a static artifact and a digital corpus yielding information. Simultaneously reflective and bearing material weight, it suggests the interactivity of a digital resource with the reader/interpreter. And Moore’s “fluctuating” jellyfish might also conjure the reader’s shifts while viewing Loy’s “Networks” of relationships, from chart and theory to language and its implications. Elsewhere in this issue, a discussion of Moore’s prosthetic, hybrid animals sheds further light on the interrelation between interpreter and digital knowledge system: “[The “you”] enters into a situated relationship with the creature, discerning its various parts and connecting with them” (Mason).

In our CFP we asked, what might feminism offer DH? Across this cluster, essays agreed that feminist DH is not just “about women,” but entails a collaborative feminist practice of breaking down boundaries, enabling new syntheses based on situated knowledges, shifting subject positions and interpretations. Until recently, DH has been prominently associated with scientific neutrality, “big data,” quantification and the ensuing practices of distant reading or macroanalysis. However, as feminist theorists (and many modernist writers) have long observed, purportedly “objective” knowledge systems can and do inscribe exclusionary, hierarchical assumptions. Indeed, outside feminism, a recent PMLA article celebrating “old-fashioned” literary, archival research describes the perception of a digital archive as a “closed” text: “ostensibly objective and complete, it requires a reduction of information, using the narrowest of data sets to ‘function effectively on a large scale.’” In contrast, Marlo Starr cites the “open text” “gleaned through tactile confrontations with manuscript archives,” allowing for the “small data” of a writer’s intimate “human details” and compositional processes.

In this cluster, projects including Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde, The Marianne Moore Digital Archive, and Women of the Early Harlem Renaissance variously demonstrate how digital archives can heighten our engagement with human detail, aesthetics, “design,” or the composition process – from using multimodal presentation and interpretation to convey Mina Loy’s verbal, visual, performative avant-garde (Churchill, Kinnahan, Rosenbaum); to tagging black women modernist poets’ thematic sources of racial uplift (Singh); or merging writers’ self-archiving materials, such as Moore’s calendars recording “when she washed her very long hair” (Miller). Moreover, feminist DH is also “about women,” diversity, sex/gender issues, and contemporary feminist awareness. The rapid growth of DH over the last decade spanned the often described “postfeminist” era’s turn from 1980s and 1990s’ feminist critique. For younger academic women like Shawna Ross – co-author of Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom – working in DH brought home the current need for feminist discourse within and beyond academia. Elsewhere, Ross describes how her experiences with the longtime, largely “white, male,
European, cisgender” DH community effected her transition from postfeminist in college and graduate school to outspoken advocate of feminist critique:

As an undergraduate and graduate student, I unconsciously adopted an attitude of postfeminism; believing that my forebears had accomplished what they needed to do, I believed myself free to pursue research without explicitly foregrounding feminism. Yet my recent experiences as a junior faculty member doing work in the digital humanities have thoroughly disabused me of these assumptions. The digital humanities is rooted in earlier humanist computing communities that have traditionally been resistant to literary theory, and as a result, women in . . . the digital humanities have worked in contexts that are resistant to feminist critique.8

In this cluster, Ross urges the need for feminist forms of collaboration in DH and applies Donna Haraway’s theory of situated knowledges, which includes maintaining the uncompromising spirit of interrogation along with (acknowledged) accountability, positioning, and partiality.

Elsewhere in the cluster, feminist critic Pamela Caughie and her graduate student coworkers Emily Datskou and Rebecca Parker experienced a different revelation with regard to DH and the “problem of gender” while compiling a digital edition of transgender artist Lili Elbe’s life narrative, *Man into Woman* (1933). Broadly, original TEI coding standards offered only two choices for encoding gender: male or female. However, even the addition of new terms “genderqueer” or “transgender” fails to capture the temporal process of change in sex over a period of time: “We… had to identify a male subject who at times presents himself as masquerading as a woman, at other as being inhabited by one, and who eventually becomes a woman” (Caughie, Datskou, and Parker). Recognizing the need for a digital “trans-ontology” not only compelled them to envision new forms of feminist intervention in DH – including merging “clusters” of datasets collected by collaborative groups – but to rethink the larger problem of gender ontologies.

Our CFP also asked, what might DH offer feminist modernist scholarship? Digital archives such as Amardeep Singh’s *Women of the Early Harlem Renaissance: African American Women Writers, 1900–1922* bring much needed racial as well as gender diversity both to DH (which also flourished over the recent “post-race” decade) and to modernist conceptions of Harlem Renaissance writers.9 In keeping with the notion of DH as big data and media hype, Miriam Thaggert noted in the first issue of *Feminist Modernist Studies* that the Harlem Renaissance is more often associated with the urban “wild Jazz Age of Cotton clubs or rent parties” than “the nonobtrusive figures of female writers not fully appreciated during their lives.”10 Accordingly, *Women of the Early Harlem Renaissance*, Singh asserts in this cluster, offers “a technology of recovery” within the Black Digital Humanities. His ongoing project charts the emergence of feminist, race-consciousness, and uplift over two decades in the poetry of a small group of African American women writers. Poets such as Angelina Grimke, Carrie Williams Clifford, and Georgia Douglas Johnson shared a sense of outrage at early twentieth-century American racial injustice and the ongoing threat of violence. By way of Scalar’s visualization and tagging structures, this project identifies key recurring themes vital to their emergent poetics of uplift; including the importance of motherhood, the role of the black church, and Christian imagery.

*Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde* goes beyond mastery of coding to offer an experimental platform for defining Mina Loy’s feminist avant-garde which Suzanne Churchill, Linda Kinnihan, and Susan Rosenbaum here term the “*en dehors garde*”
(“coming from outside”). Unlike male dominated Futurism, Cubism, or Surrealism, the less recognizable en dehors garde allows for experimental forms shaped by feminism, gender, race, and other orientations on modernism’s margins. Illuminating Mina Loy’s feminist, sex/gender inflected en dehors garde, this site offers multimodal presentation and interpretation to convey the visual, verbal, and performative dimensions of her work. Similarly, arguing that some “modes of interpretation flourish more productively working from digital sources,” Cristanne Miller focuses on the Marianne Moore Digital Archive or MMDA’s role both in making available Moore’s numerous unpublished notebooks and interpreting their possible connections to her poetry’s “hybrid” modernism. Through color coding and textual searches across notebooks, the user easily navigates quoted conversations, prose descriptions, reading notes, or draftings with bearing on her poetry’s famous method of inserting actual quotations from multiple sources. And while Caughie, Datskou, and Parker relate their “trans-ontology” to the abovementioned project on Elbe’s Man into Woman, they also discuss how their thinking on DH, gender and temporality might apply to the sex/gender slippage in other modernist works such as Virginia Woolf’s Orlando, Djuna Barnes’s Nightwood, or Radclyffe Hall’s Well of Loneliness.

Ultimately, our CFP might have asked, what can DH do for women modernists? Using the Modernist Podcast as a case study, Sean Richardson and H. Green shift from the largely textual DH to the aural podcast and its feminist potentiality as a method of knowledge sharing. Among other things, the podcast lends a platform for the voices of female modernists alongside an array of female scholars, they claim, “open[ing] sites of resistance, communication, collaboration and critique” outside the spatial/textual constraints of the written word or conferences venues. Further, hearing the voices of Virginia Woolf or H.D. “realizes these women [modernists] as embodied figures.” In “Prototyping Mina Loy’s Alphabet,” Margaret Konkol describes her own actual construction in 3D printing of Loy’s unbuilt children’s toy devised to teach children the alphabet she unsuccessfully marketed to F. A. O. Schwartz. Konkol discusses the ways in which Loy’s construction of this alphabet game engages in “prototyping” – a practice associated with digital manufacture – which she defines as “engaging with material forms of knowledge in order to explore how epistemological and ontological problems have been worked through in physical embodied practices.” Konkol further applies Loy’s prototyping in the game to her poetry’s theory of language as “kinetic, geometric, recombinant, and open to mutation.”

Finally, although this cluster of brief essays can only point toward new directions, its authors elaborate the distinctly feminist practices and theories underpinning their pioneering interventions in DH’s often confining discourses. As Jacqueline Wernimont noted when asked at a DH conference why she labeled her interventions “feminist” rather than “generally liberatory,” such (postfeminist) absorptions of feminism not only fail to recognize its intersectional nature but elide once more “the many ways in which feminists and feminist paradigms have effected change.” This cluster seeks to foreground the ways in which feminist thinking continues to change and expand both DH and modernist studies.

Notes
4. In terms of feminist modernism, such efforts have manifested in visual representations of the links among modernist women writers which build upon Bonnie Kime Scott’s now familiar “web” in her introduction to *The Gender of Modernism*. Recently, feminist modernist “webs” have taken more expansive, physical form, as in the map constructed by participants at the 2015 International Woolf Conference held in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania and the collection that followed, *Virginia Woolf and Her Female Contemporaries*.
5. Starr, “Slow Writing,” 197. Starr here quotes from Daniela Agostinho’s “Big Data, Time and the Archive,” and refers to Lyn Hejinian’s distinction between an “open” and “closed” text.
6. Ibid., 197, 198.
10. Thaggert, “Black Modernist Feminism and This Contemporary Moment,” 43.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Notes on contributors**

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*Cassandra Laity* is currently visiting at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She was a co-founder of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) and a former editor of *Modernism/Modernity* (2000–2010). She has held grants and fellowships from the NEH, Mellon Foundation, and Beinecke Library. She is the author/editor of four books on gender and modern poetry, including the forthcoming *Elizabeth Bishop and H.D.’s Queer Ecologies: Radical Natures*. Her most recent essay appeared in *Contemporary Women’s Writing* (2016), “Eco-Geologies of Queer Desire: Elizabeth Bishop’s Love Poetry and Charles Darwin’s Beagle Geology Travel Narratives” (https://academic.oup.com/cww/article/10/3/429/2447411).

**References**


