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The process of making something—a work of art, a piece of furniture, a video—is what we're after when we want to learn how to do something. Process in this regard is technical, as in there is a technique, a set of steps that one can perform to reproduce the final result already achieved. How did they do that? How can I do that? These are the questions that spur interrogations about process. In candid interviews, we often hear an interlocutor ask an artist 'what is your process?' Asking about process is prying open a black box, looking for secrets that promise to demystify the end product, the thing being visually, sonically, or tactfully consumed.

In digital humanities, and certainly too in digital geohumanities, a large amount of mystery accompanies the resulting products, the very ends of long and circuitous processes that we call digital humanities scholarship. The mystery itself often times even looms larger than the intellectual content of the project, as if a glaring question has to be answered before a reader can comfortably engage with what the creator is presenting. Not knowing process can be bothersome and distracting if you want to do the thing yourself that you are consuming. Though discussions about method are a core part of any humanities curriculum, they have never set up the real and imagined roadblocks experienced now with the advent of new media in the production of scholarship. With the means of mainstream academic production rooted in text and print media for so long, technique was never brought into question. A critic could be skeptical about how a researcher went about structuring her argument, or how she garnered evidence, but not for hundreds of years has it made sense for a humanities scholar to question the kind of word processor she used, or which fingers she used to press the 'i' or 's' buttons on the machine to type out words. This has long been considered an irrelevant, personal choice, divorced so much from the logic or poetry of the

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content that it has never been in the way. Another way to say this is that *method* has always been fair game, but *technique* has rarely been discussed.

Technique, however—the detailed steps one should make to accomplish production in a particular medium—has become mysterious with the rise of digital humanities. We are grasping for process, much like the interviewer is grasping for process when he asks the artist how she made a painting. The analogy to art is not accidental. In the arts there is the studio, an actual space of creative production, but also a concept. At its root, the concept is a melding of technical instruction with experimentation and creation. It is about taking technical footholds and using them to go new directions that are specific to one's aims as an artist, or, in this case, a digital humanities practitioner.

My contention is that the digital humanities needs more discussion about method, not technique. The details of the process one uses to make something can never be copied down and repeated to great effect. This is because the intellectual milieu someone was working in to arrive at thousands of minute technical decisions is irreproducible. Though not impossible, it is surprisingly difficult to write down all the steps one took to create a digital asset, then share it with someone else, then have the other person perform those steps. Even when this works, it rarely serves someone who has learned the technique from someone else. The technical knowledge generated from doing a project is born from the intellectual specifics of the project. It is born from specific design and communication problems, solutions to which will always have their own pathways through the endless maze of technique. At its best, digital humanities scholarship is not about the mass production and distribution of data. It is about forging a path through relevant technologies to produce the vision of the author.

If not technique, then what? Method. Method has a process, too, though it is not algorithmic. Method also answers 'how,' but in a way far different from the detail of technique. Method in digital humanities should be about mental preparation, awareness of possibilities, a spirit of experimentation, being guided by a vision, and release from a fear of failure. This last point is especially important. British sculptor Lisa Le Feuvre contends that, against cultural norms of success, failure 'takes us beyond assumptions and what we think we know.' Through failure, she goes on, 'one has the potential to stumble on the unexpected . . . the inevitable gap between the intention and realization of an artwork makes failure impossible to avoid.'¹ To embark on a digital humanities project is to make techniques fit purpose. And to do this requires a lot of failure, which can seem to be a loss not worth enduring. A climb awaits the digital humanities scholar who needs to know enough of a certain software, for instance, to make it achieve her vision, even when working with colleagues who already know the software. This is because the author needs to know how her argument will be carried through the assets she is creating, and/or the platform she is building.

By failing, however, researchers gain a great gift: the possibility to move beyond what they thought they were doing. The design of the digital product is so integral to communicating the author's thesis that to focus only on technique, as if it were a simple key that lets one into DH club, is almost assuredly to leave one disappointed. Using a digital platform built for multiple applications has great potential to mask the author's voice because the digital platform was not made in conjunction with his or her intellectual purpose. Going through the design process grinds that voice and that purpose into something new; new insights and arguments are found where there was thought to be nothing at all. As digital humanities scholars Anne Burdick et al. point out—specific to geographical practice:

Radically innovative approaches to mapping could emerge from within the Digital Humanities to create environments for exploring differential geographies and developing into heterogeneous geospatial representations, beyond simply registering the phenomenological aspects of space on conventional maps. It remains a challenge how to conceive, design, and implement such platforms.²

The radical cartography envisaged by Burdick et al. is about representing space in new ways. This is a design problem for which there are no clear technical answers. In fact, the established technics of making maps almost perfectly exclude the possibility for representing new spatial ontologies from the outset, an observation established by critical GIS scholars since the early 1990s.³

Digital geohumanities is precisely set up for scholars concerned with advancing the representation of non-Euclidian spaces. Digital geohumanities is, I believe by definition, the methodological milieu that (finally) introduces creative, visual spatial production into the toolkit of geography, a discipline that has been so aware for so long (and so in need) of the possibility. Digital geohumanities opens the gates for making and using alternative spaces because it is nestled in the arms of the design process, not strict analysis. The key is to approach research with a process that organizes the challenges you expect to encounter, acknowledges that you will fail, and believes you will achieve some unknown version of your aims. This is very different from approaching research by learning the technics of a tool. I look to the tactile arts again for inspiration, this time from the Dutch sculptor Theo Jansen, creator of the *strandbeests*, life-like beach animals made almost entirely of PVC tubing. Writing about one of his plastic beasts, he asks 'Whatever made me think I could get it to walk? Some kind of irrational optimism, no doubt. Irrational optimism is something only we humans possess.'⁴ Jansen's insight to his own process is that he had no idea how to arrive at a walking, wind-powered plastic animal. His mental approach preceded his technical approach.

This is process, and this is method: an attitude of accepting failure as the norm that is foreign to most humanities practice. In this issue on digital geohumanities, the authors present work at various stages of the production process. My intention as editor is to catch them red-handed, in the act of making, in the midst of doing a digital geohumanities project. It is harder to look back after one has completed a project and talk about all the fears and failures encountered everyday along the way. In a discussion about digital humanities methods, it is far more valuable to peer inside the black box of production.

END NOTES

- ¹ Le Feuvre, Lisa. 2010. 'Introduction: Strive to fail.' In *Failure*, edited by Lisa Le Feuvre. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press; p. 12.
- ² Burdick, Anne, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, and Jeffrey Schnapp. 2012. *Digital Humanities*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press; Chapter 2: Emerging Methods and Genres; p. 40.
- ³ Pickles, John, ed. 1995. *Ground Truth: The social implications of geographic information systems*. New York: Guilford Press.
- ⁴ Jansen, Theo. 2007. *The Great Pretender*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers; p. 33. To watch a *strandbeest* in action, see: <http://www.strandbeest.com/>