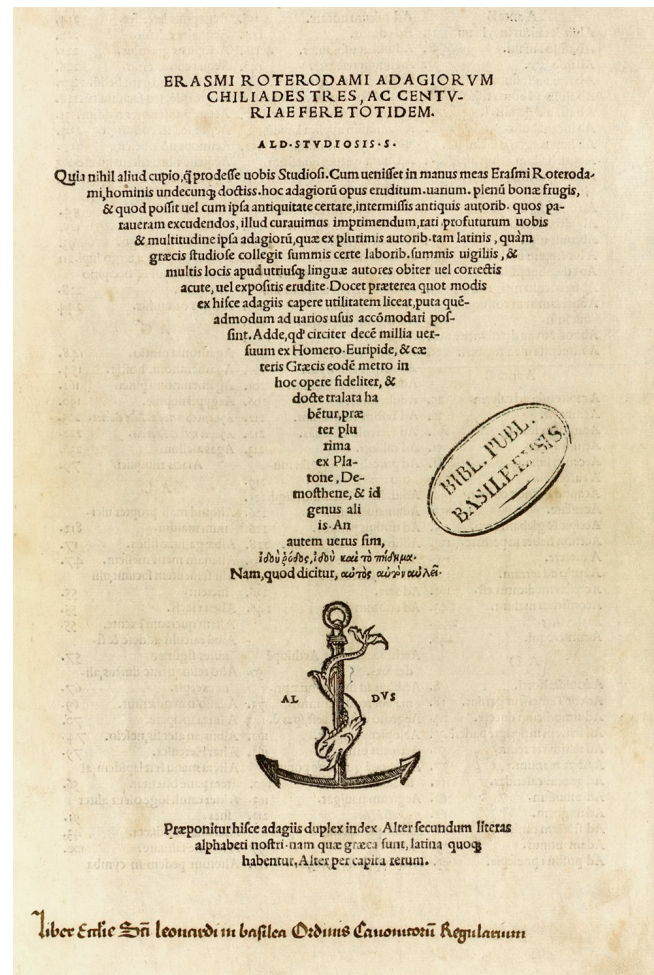February 4, 2026

Data in the Humanities

Week 2 — Histories of the Humanities

Today's plan

1. Review upcoming workshops & events.
2. Discuss survey results.
3. Presentations! (Shreya & Mileena)
4. Discuss readings.
5. Review sources for DH news & discussion.

Over the next week,

workshops,

- Wed 2/4 (Today!) DiScho 🪩 Discovery Hours: Georectification with AI. "What information is contained in an image that tells us when and where it is from? This is a traditionally difficult task for humans and requires experience. New developments in AI promise both possibilities and challenges." (DiScho)
- Thu 2/5 How to Create and Collect Geographic Data using QGIS (PUL)
- Mon 2/9 Intro to Programming Using Python (PICSciE)
- Tue 2/10 Commons Visualization Lab Open House (PICSciE)
- Tue 2/10 Making Maps and Presentations using QGIS (PUL)

and events:

- Mon 2/9 Québec Day at Princeton – Artificial Intelligence, Ethics and Public Policy: Challenges and Perspectives
- Tue 2/13 Scenario for a Past Future and Avant-Garde Immersive Worlds (Lewis & CDH)
- Wed 2/14 Annual Douglass Day Transcribathon (w/ HTR) (CDH, PUL, PPL, et al.)

Coming up in 507

Wk 3: the command line

Wk 4: Obsidian, hypertext, personal knowledge mgmt

Wk 5: what is a CSV?; adopt a dataset

Wk 6: Open Refine

Wk 7: ArchiveLens / offline AI

Wk 8: Visualization
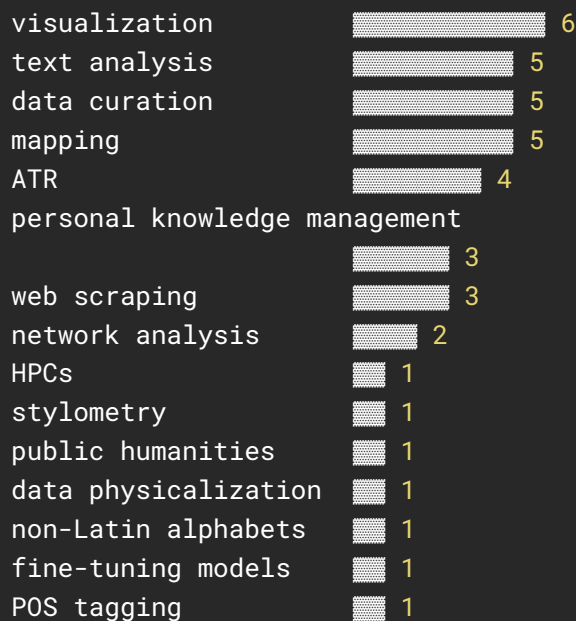
Survey results.

Departments you're coming from:

1. History (4)
2. Music (3)
3. Architecture (2)
4. English (2)
5. German (2)
6. East Asian Studies
7. Psychology
8. Community College Faculty Program

Survey results.

Are you primarily interested in...	Number of Respondents
Better understanding the intersection of technology & culture today	7
Learning how to use data and computation in your research	6
Gaining skills that are transferable to careers outside academia	1

Survey results.
What do you want to learn?

```
visualization                    ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓  6
text analysis                    ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓  5
data curation                    ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓  5
mapping                          ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓  5
ATR                              ▓▓▓▓▓▓  4
personal knowledge management

                                 ▓▓▓▓  3
web scraping                     ▓▓▓▓  3
network analysis                 ▓▓▓  2
HPCs                             ▓  1
stylometry                       ▓  1
public humanities                ▓  1
data physicalization             ▓  1
non-Latin alphabets              ▓  1
fine-tuning models               ▓  1
POS tagging                      ▓  1
```

Survey results.
How are you using AI?

STAGE	COUNT	USE
📚 Research	▓▓▓▓ 4	Translation
📚 Research	▓▓▓ 3	Text summarization
📚 Research	▓ 1	Building bibliographies
📚 Research	▓ 1	Metadata extraction
📚 Research	▓ 1	Asking about research trends
🌐 Curation	▓▓ 2	ATR / VLMs
🌐 Curation	▓ 1	Orthographic standardization
📐 Analysis	▓ 1	Programming
📐 Analysis	▓ 1	Text analysis
📝 Writing	▓▓▓▓ 4	Editing writing for grammar & usage
📝 Writing	▓▓▓ 3	First-draft ideation; editing for structure & content
🧑‍🏫 Teaching	▓ 1	Creating teaching materials

Survey results.
What are your concerns about using AI?

— "Long-term cognitive performance loss" if not doing the reading or learning yourself. / That AI becomes a "crutch." / "Doing the work changes you" (Robin Sloan). (x3)

— Hallucinations and inaccurate data, especially when summarizing readings. (x3)

— Cost prohibitive (x2)

— Environmental impacts

— Human impacts

— Hindrance to developing your own writing style

— Performance metrics vary widely across models and tasks

Survey Results

In general, I view AI as a useful tool for things human *can't* do, but not a replacement or even time-saving measure

I try to use AI only where a substitute is infeasible or cannot accomplish the same thing.

...to help break down complex theories [and jargon]. I find this extremely useful, especially for people from non-English backgrounds in Western academia

machines cannot replicate ... interpretation, analysis, and criticism [that] emerge from historical consciousness, a grasp of literature and training in specific scholarly orientations

How would one cite the influence of an LLM on one's writing?

Week 2 Readings

(Shreya & Mileena introduce Hayot & Small)

Eric Hayot, *Humanist Reason: A History. An Argument. A Plan* (Columbia University Press, 2021), Chapters 1 & 4.

Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities,* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013). Introduction.

Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), Introduction: "The Quest for Principles and Patterns."

Lindsay Thomas and Abigail Droge, "What We Learned About the Humanities from a Study of Thousands of Newspaper Articles," *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, May 24, 2022.

Break.

The humanities are...

the study of the expressions of the human mind (Dilthey)

humanities = understanding; science = explaining (Dilthey)

the quest for patterns in humanistic material based on methodological principles (Bod)

"careful observation applying rigorous skepticism about what is observed ... focus[ing] focus on small, complex units of evidence" (Hayot)

"the cultural practices of reflection, argument, criticism, and speculative testing of ideas" (Small)

descriptive, appreciative, imaginative, provocative, speculative, critical (Small)

defining the humanities contra...

The humanities' "tendency to value qualitative above quantitative reasoning; their distrust of proceduralism; their greater faith in interpretative than in positivistic thinking; their orientation as much toward historical analysis as toward synchronic structural analysis ... their concern with what can be known or understood even though it is incapable of empirical verification" Small, *The Value of the Humanities,* p. 29

the mind › operation of the mind › knowledge › branch of knowledge › humanistic studies

humanistic studies NOUNS (48 terms)

❝ Cite   Sort by Date ⬍

arts c1300–
In *plural.* Certain branches of study, esp. at a university, serving as a preparation for more advanced studies or for later life, *spec.* (a) (in...

liberal arts a1398–
Originally: the seven subjects of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) considered...

humanity 1483–
Frequently in **the humanities**. In *singular* and *plural.* Literary learning or scholarship; secular letters as opposed to theology; *esp.* the study of...

anthroposophy 1588–
The knowledge of the nature of human beings, esp. with regard to spiritual or psychological matters. Also: human knowledge or wisdom. Now *rare.*

humanistics 1716–
Humanistic studies or writings.

human science 1833–
(In *plural*) those academic subjects in which people or their actions form the object of study, as contrasted with the natural sciences or physical...
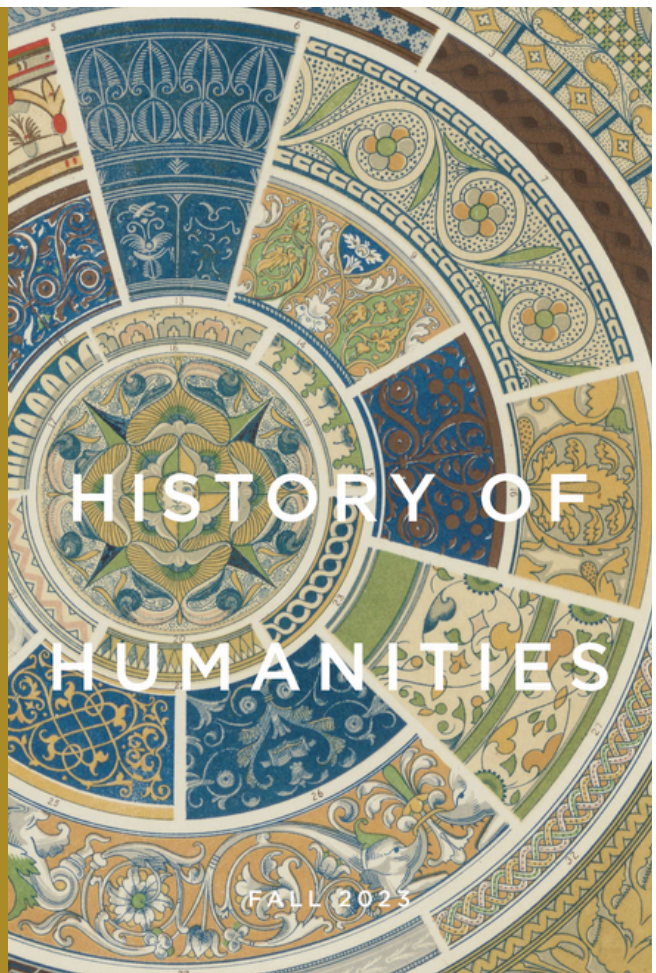
RENS BOD,
JAAP MAAT &
THIJS WESTSTEIJN
(EDS.)

The MAKING
of the
HUMANITIES

VOLUME 11

*From Early
Modern to Modern
Disciplines*

History of

HUMANITIES

FALL 2023

Small (2013)

distinctive specificity of the humanities

"It is in such circumstances (offensive and defensive) that the qualities by which the humanities claim distinctive purpose become most sharply apparent:
Small, *Value of the Humanities,* p. 29–30

- their tendency to value qualitative above quantitative reasoning;
- their distrust of proceduralism;
- their greater faith in interpretative than in positivistic thinking;
- their orientation as much toward historical analysis as toward synchronic structural analysis;
- and their attention to the role of the perceiver in ascertaining even the most philosophically secure of knowledge claims;
- (relatedly) their interest in the specificity of the individual response (its content and its style) over and above the generalized or collective response, and
- their concern with what can be known or understood even though it is incapable of empirical verification.

Small (2013)

describing humanities practices

The work of the humanities is frequently descriptive, or appreciative, or imaginative, or provocative, or speculative, more than it is critical. It includes ways of attending to objects of study that are, variously, technical, aesthetically evaluative, curatorial. Its public purposes can include maintaining and reanimating knowledge of the cultural heritage, explication of the products and process of culture, the stimulation of public curiosity in new subjects——again, not primarily critical activities. In the main the humanities are as concentrated on the character of an individual response as on any generalizable knowledge claims, and they typically have an interest in the colour and temper of that response that goes well beyond conveying knowledge or pursuing a critical interpretation of it. Not least, the humanities are rightly most admired when their practice rises to an art: a writing, or speaking or creative performance, that bears the stylistic and temperamental imprint of the individual voice. Their work is not always conducted from a position of high seriousness; some of its best expressions will seem trivial, silly, even frankly irresponsible judged from the position of the philosophically or politically committed critic.
—Small, *The Value of the Humanities,* p. 26.

Small (2013)

surveying arguments for the value of the humanities

1. that the Humanities study the meaning-making practices of culture, and have a distinctive understanding of what constitutes knowledge and understanding;
2. that, they are useful to society, but often at odds with or at a remove from the descriptions of 'usefulness' preferred by economists;
3. that they contribute to human happiness;
4. that they are a force for democracy; and
5. that they are a good in themselves, to be valued 'for their own sake'.
(Small 2013)

Hayot (2021)

the modern humanistic method

The modern humanistic method is an empirical method of acquiring knowledge that has characterized the development of the humanities since at least the tripartite division of the university into the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, but which draws on methods that go back thousands of years in other forms of humanist practice. It involves careful observation applying rigorous skepticism about what is observed, given that cognitive assumptions can distort how one interprets the observation. It tends to focus on small, complex units of evidence, including historical events, cultural artifacts, and social processes; and to formulate, on the basis of close interpretation and observation of that evidence, both the individual qualities of that evidence and their potential generalizability into larger principles, which might be tested against other complex units. This inductive-deductive looping produces further refinement (or elimination) of generalizations. These are principles of the modern humanistic method, as distinguished from a definitive series of steps applicable to all humanistic enterprises.

–Hayot, *Humanist Reason,* p. 182.

What counts as
Humanities & Social Science
here? 🎓

Sources for DH news & ideas.

Newsletters

Academics

DH Now ☞

Humane Ingenuity, Dan Cohen ☞

Atlanta Interdisciplinary AI Network (AIAI)

Generative History, Mark Humphries (Substk)

Ben Breen, Res Obscura (Substk)

Jason Heppler

The Stone & the Shell, Ted Underwood

Tech Observers & Experimentalists

Blood in the Machine, Brian Merchant (Substk)

Cybernetic Forests, Eryk Salvaggio (Substk)

Ethan Mollick, One Useful Thing (Substk)

Kyle Chayka (Substk)

Maggie Appleton ☞

Gary Marcus (Substk)

Wild Information, Claire L. Evans

Astral Codex Ten

Almost every newsletter can be accessed via an RSS reader!
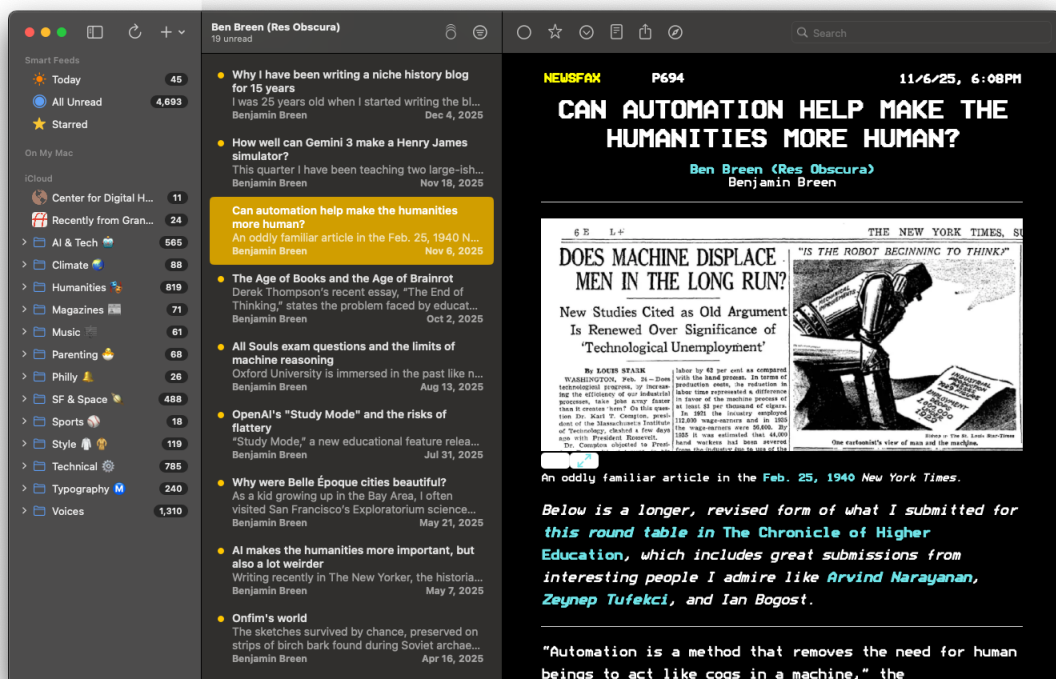
Social Media

[Amanda Visconti](#)'s Bluesky [Quickstart Guide](#)

Campus Groups

[LLM Collective](#): hands-on experiments and conversations, co-hosted by PICSciE, CSML, DDSS

[Integrated Ethics in CS](#) (undergrad-focused)

Center for IT Policy (CITP):

- [Bias in AI Reading Group](#)
- [Lunchtime seminar series](#)
- [CITP Book Club](#), reading *Breakneck: China's Quest to Engineer the Future* by Dan Wang

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