Out of the vast array of textual traces in a culture, the identification of units suitable for analysis is problematized. If every trace of a culture is part of a massive text, how can one identify the boundaries of these units? What is the appropriate scale? There are, we conclude, no abstract, purely theoretical answers to these questions. To a considerable extent the units are given by the archive itself—that is, we almost always receive works whose boundaries have already been defined by the technology and generic assumptions of the original makers and readers. But new historicism undertakes to call these assumptions into question and treat them as part of the history that needs to be interpreted.

—Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt,
*Practicing New Historicism*, 14–15

I begin with one of “my own traveler’s anecdotes” from a journey to digital humanities.¹ In 1996, I attended the American Literature Association (ALA) meeting held in San Diego, California. I was particularly interested in the “New Vistas in Whitman Studies” panel during which my former professor, Kenneth Price, was to introduce his new scholarly project, something he called
The Walt Whitman Archive (WWA). The large group of attendees waited impatiently while the conference organizers struggled to set up a computer projector, probably the very first such technology used at ALA. As the talk began, murmurs were heard critiquing the technological issues that slowed the timely start of the presentation. Yet, as Price began to show page after page of Whitman’s manuscripts, people in the room started to nod. Such was the era of the digital archive, where scholars outside of specialized fields of literary studies began to come into contact with digital humanities forms.

Digital edition production peaked in the early 1990s, and by the mid-1990s the digital archive began to emerge as the dominant form in American digital literary studies. The shift from edition to archive is not uniform, with digital edition production continuing into the contemporary period. Instead, the digital archive became the dominant, but not exclusive, form in American digital literary studies. The shift from digital edition to digital archive is related, in large part, to the rise of new historicism. While only a handful of scholars working within the new historicist framework embraced digital scholarship, their incorporation of new historicist theories into technological methodology has defined the field. Jerome McGann, The Rossetti Archive (RA); Kenneth Price, The Whitman Archive (WWA); Martha Nell Smith, the Dickinson Electronic Archives (DEA); Cathy Davidson, HASTAC; Alan Liu, Romantic Chronology; and even Stephen Greenblatt, with his undergraduate course “A Silk Road Course: Travel and Transformation on the High Seas: An Imaginary Journey in the Early 17th Century,” have experimented with digital technologies.

Students of these scholars—including Andrew Jewell, The Willa Cather Archive; Amanda Gailey, Race and Children’s Literature of the Gilded Age; and Craig A. Warren, the Ambrose Bierce Project—have continued the trend. Jerome McGann’s creation of NINES, the Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship, coalesced the individual efforts of schol-
ars and positioned the archive in the center of the digital literary field. As the digital archive moved to the center of digital literary studies, so too did new historicist thinking. Multiple versions of one text are not the centerpiece of the digital archive as they are in the digital edition; the text is understood to be in conversation with an ever-widening gyre of materials that include literary, cultural, and historical texts. This new historicist conception of the archive imagines the text within an expansive system, with the textual materials positioned in a network of conversation with a wide range of cultural materials. Scholars working within the rubric of new historicism positioned the physical archive and print materials as the centerpieces of their work. The digital environment would serve as a mechanism for refining the archive.

In 1982, Stephen Greenblatt used the term new historicism in his introduction to the Genre special issue, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. While there are other, earlier uses of the term, Greenblatt’s articulation of new historicism launched the emergence, and some might say dominance, of the critical practice in the American academy. New historicism perceives literature as located within a historical, cultural, and social matrix and that this matrix allows for a deep reading of the text in question. At the same time, the scholar is to maintain a self-reflexive critical stance in relation to the text. While there is agreement on aspects of critical representation of the text, new historicists resisted a monolithic definition of their approach. In “The Historicist Enterprise,” Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds point to “sharp differences between the concerns and practices of various New Historicists.” Regardless of dissension, they believe that “the enterprise has discernible features.”

H. Aram Vesser pinpoints the following as central tenets of new historicism:

1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; 2) that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling
prey to the practice it exposes; 3) that literary and non-literary ‘texts’ circulate inseparably; 4) that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses unalterable human nature; and 5) that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.\(^5\)

Or, in Louis A. Montrose’s definition:

The writing and reading of texts, as well as the processes by which they are circulated and categorized, analyzed and taught, are being reconstructed as historically determined and determining modes of cultural work; apparently autonomous aesthetic and academic issues are being reunderstood as inextricably though complexly linked to other discourses and practices—such linkages constituting the social networks within which individual subjectivities and collective structures are mutually and continuously shaped.\(^6\)

The shifting definitions remind us that new historicism is, as Greenblatt emphasizes, “a practice rather than a doctrine,”\(^7\) and while those working within the boundaries of new historicism never fashioned a shared definition of the term, these interpretations suggest how we might imagine a coherent critical approach through which to analyze the digital archive.

Greenblatt may have launched our contemporary understanding of new historicism, but Jerome McGann brought new historicism to the digital age. Donald Waters, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation program officer, identifies McGann’s 1983 *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* as the text that launched literary digital humanities.\(^8\) Waters’s assessment hinges on McGann’s theory of textuality: McGann contends that “the apparitions of text—its paratexts, bibliographical codes, and all visual features—are as important in the text’s signifying programs as the linguistic
elements,” and “that the social intercourse of texts—the context of their relations—must be conceived an essential part of the ‘text itself’ if one means to gain an adequate critical grasp of the textual situation.” In fact, McGann acknowledges that the theory of text articulated in his 1983 volume contributed to his decision to experiment with digital scholarship, but he believes that his introduction “to UNIX computing systems and to hypermedia” in the 1980s was equally as important. The emergence of new ideas regarding text and technology made McGann decide, “when circumstances were right I would undertake building a computerized hypermedia model for scholarly editing.”

McGann found the appropriate circumstances in 1993 when the University of Virginia launched the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH) under John Unsworth’s directorship. Unsworth’s experience with the electronic journal, Postmodern Culture, convinced him that the open access, web-based delivery of materials, rather than the proprietary stand-alone CD-ROM used by the majority of the contemporary digital edition projects, was most suitable for IATH’s digital projects. One cannot overstate how important Unsworth’s insistence on the web-based model would prove to the future of digital literary work, for without Unsworth’s leadership we may well have continued to produce our digital projects on the CD-ROM, a form that has stymied digital textual editions production with issues including interoperability, speed of use, and limited storage size. McGann reminds us that Unsworth’s web-based approach moved “against nearly every current in humanities computing scholarship, which was dominated by ‘stand alone’ ideas and technologies (epitomized in the early and short-sighted choice of CD-ROM as the venue for carrying humanities texts and hypertexts).” The RA began as a small HTML prototype, what McGann labels “a kind of thought experiment.” Once the prototype was developed, the RA discussed expansion through a partnership with the University of Michigan Press. The project
with the Press proceeded to the point where the website license for *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Research Archive* was advertised in Michigan’s fall 1999 catalogue and a site mock-up featured on the catalogue front page (see fig. 2.1).

The publishing relationship disintegrated when McGann insisted that the site be open access and extensible, an untenable financial arrangement for the Press. The *WWA* has a similar history. After an initial HTML prototype was developed, Price and his coeditor Ed Folsom worked with Primary Source Media to distribute a less robust version of selected materials as a CD collection titled *Major Authors on CD-ROM: Walt Whitman.* Ultimately the *WWA* chose to proceed with a more robust, open ac-
cess version of the archive. With their insistence on open access web-based projects, the RA, WWA, and other projects of their ilk launched new standards for digital literary studies.

As the digital archive form began to be replicated by other scholars, so too would the underlying theoretical model derived from new historicism. In 1993, when McGann launched his Rossetti Archive, he coined the term digital archive to describe his work and, in doing so, rejected the textual studies linked term digital edition that had driven digital humanities work during the previous period. The archive offered possibilities that the book did not: “When a book is produced it literally closes its covers on itself,” but archives, in McGann’s mind, are “built so that its contents and its webwork of relations (both internal and external) can be indefinitely expanded and developed.” The web of relations is crucial to the archive form and is derived in large part from new historicist conceptions of the archive. Working in reaction to perceived limitations of new criticism and post-structuralist criticism, new historicists centered their research within the physical archive. Marjorie Levinson aptly calls new historicism “a kind of systems analysis,” a statement oddly predictive of the way that computer technologies would be enacted in the digital archive and an emphasis on how archives became the sort of space in which the scholar would piece together textual interrelations. If an intervention into an archive is a sort of systems analysis, the intervention is also, in reference to Derrida’s Archive Fever, a constructed and deconstructable entity. No archive can be “without outside.” Archival instability, a legacy of Derridian conceptions of power and truth, continues to inform the way that digital literary scholars understand the work we undertake. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the 2009 DHQ special cluster entitled “Done.” Underlying this special cluster is the insistence that digital works are highly mutable and perceptions of completeness are purely subjective. Brown et al. write, “‘Doneness’ circulates discursively within a complex and
evolving scholarly ecology where new modes of digital publication are changing our conceptions of textuality, at the same time that models of publication, funding, and archiving are rapidly changing."20 The multiple factors influencing the conception of completeness as well as the type of projects produced within the evolving parameters lend to the charge of instability. However, viewed within the new historicist legacy of Derridian archive, we might better understand why reading the archive through a complex set of power dynamics becomes more important than locking down a set of protocols of production.

The digital archive seems designed to meet the needs of the scholar interested in producing the “thick description” criticism central to new historicist work. Derived from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, thick description was the practice of “giving the act its place in a network of framing intentions and cultural meanings.”21 Thick description necessitated the examination of a broad selection of materials including literature, political documents, art, newspapers, material objects, and more, and new historicist scholars read materials from the Society for the Prevention of Premature Burial next to biblical texts and altar clothes.22 Using “an empirically responsible investigation of the contemporary meanings informing literary works (their parts, their production, their reception), as well as other social texts,” according to Marjorie Levinson, new historicists “regard these meanings as systematically interrelated within the period in question, but since we do not organize the system by a dynamic concept of ideology on the one hand, and of structural determination on the other, our inquiries do not give rise to a meaningful historical sequence.”23 Levinson’s catalog of parts, production, and reception harks back to book history approaches, but the emphasis on social texts as dynamic and indeterminate prepares the way for a world of bits and bites, of interrelated and indeterminate nodes of meaning. The digital environment would attempt to represent what Brook Thomas calls “a literary work’s embeddedness within
a larger system of textuality” and could cross “the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics.” Certainly McGann saw the RA as a “self-reflexive system,” a “laboratory to study books,” and a reflection of social text theory. Even critics such as W. Speed Hill recognized that the RA was a natural outgrowth of McGann’s theoretical approach:

... if you forego the search for the single, authorially sanctioned, text-as-end-product-of-the-editorial-process, the logic of your position inexorably drives you beyond the codex and toward the archive. If meaning is dependent upon context, and contexts are multiple—indeed infinitive-only an infinitely extensible archive can contain the relevant data.

In the heady days of digital archive development, the web seemed to provide a natural test bed for McGann’s theoretical articulations and a new digital literary genre was born.

While the digital environment would allow experimentation with new historicist ideas, new historicism also afforded the digital authority. As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars were concerned that the digital space was seemingly unreliable, the antithesis of the peer reviewed, press-driven world of academic scholarship. How would those interested in producing digital materials resolve this problem? One of the means of shoring up the reputation of digital work was found in new historicism. “The practice of New Historicism,” according to Sonja Laden,” is also authorized by the archive, or the library, as a more or less official repository of records: at once a site for storing a variety of material artifacts and documents and ... a metaphorical site of ‘how people imagine what they know and what institutions validate that knowledge.’ The choice of the term archive, then, does more than describe the gathered materials. The mimesis of
the rare book archive, a form understood and given great value in scholarly circles, provides a means by which to bring value and authority to digital work. Influenced by Derrida’s conception of the archive, new historicists well understood the way that their use of archive both as authority and construction gave weight to the work they commenced. Derrida’s insistence that archives “inhabit this unusual place, this place of election where law and singularity intersect in privilege,” and “[a]t the intersectional of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes once visible and invisible.” Derrida’s conception of the archive as law and yet not may indeed point to why those working within new historicism were invested in digital archives. Such scholars understood that, like Derrida’s archive, the new Internet age and the transfer of texts to digital forms were acts of authority, of fixing, and of “gathering together” to give form, while the process of creating such slippery human knowledge within computer code was impossible, the very deconstruction that Derrida insists upon.

Derrida’s reading of the archive underpins the modeling of the text in digital archives. New historicism treated texts “as objects and events in the world, as a part of human life, society, the historical realities of power, authority, and resistance,” but, following Derrida’s line of thinking, new historicism rejects absolutes. This duality is reflected in the digital archive’s textual representation that rejects the sure codifications that were dominant in the earlier digital formulation of the edition. Eschewing genres that suggested power differentials within criticism, new historicist digital scholars rejected “literature” as the most valued term and flattened the categories “literature” and “historical document,” instead adopting the broader category “digital object.” While the term digital object is common in computer parlance (digital object architecture, digital object identifier), digital object is used far more loosely in digital literary studies, often slipping between
object, text, image, and document, a slippage seemingly related to the digital archive’s new historicist theoretical roots. While the digital edition utilized the simulacrum of the scanned page or art image, hence the high-quality digital images contained in archives such as the RA or WWA, those constructing the digital archive did not fetishize the image as was true in the earlier digital edition form. Instead, digital archives emphasized that “object” was a generalized concept much as new historicists used the term “text” to apply a lack of preference for form or genre or a baseline from which to begin criticism. Unsworth demonstrates his preference for the valueless digital object when he argues that “it is best if the authoritative name of a digital object has as little meaning as possible, and instead conveys the information we are tempted to load into the semantics of the name by some other means—for example, by breaking it out explicitly in different attribute values, or different database fields, or in some other way making it explicit rather than implied. The only thing one really wants a name to do, in short, is to distinguish this thing from other things, and so the only really required quality of a name—in the world of digital objects, at least—is uniqueness.”

Unsworth’s concern is with the best way to process a large number of related objects, but the emphasis on forcing a gap between meaning and object is crucial in this stage of digital production where the digital archive relegates the materiality of the text to an equal status as the social web of the texts, a very different position than that found in the digital edition where the image is primary.

The rejection of an object’s individuated ascribed power is greatly influenced by the work of Foucault. A key figure in new historicist theorization, Foucault is interested, in the words of Stuart Hall, in “the relationship between knowledge and power, and how power operated within what he called an institutional apparatus and its technologies (techniques),” ideas that form the foundation of how digital archivists understand the way by
which texts and technologies interact and build knowledge within the archive. To Foucault, “The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge.”

Perhaps we should not be surprised that digital archives are imbued with Foucault’s ideas of apparatus and his emphasis on techniques, roughly translated to technologies, though Foucault would not have imagined the impact of desktop computers when he was writing of such technologies. The digital archive balances an understanding of how the technologies, including the open access web, metadata, and interface, impact the understanding of an object, hence McGann’s chiding of Ed Folsom’s representation of the *WWA* in a *PMLA* issue focused on database.

McGann, echoing Foucault’s understanding of apparatus, argues that “no database can function without a user interface, and in the case of cultural materials the interface is an especially crucial element of these kinds of digital instruments. Interface embeds, implicitly and explicitly, many kinds of hierarchical and narrativized organizations.”

The insistence on reading the archive and its power broadly is also a call to balance materiality with meaning. Margaret Ezell emphasizes that the digital archive model must represent the materiality of the object intertwined in a social matrix, in effect creating a balancing act that preserves textuality through a systems approach; “That the very materiality of women’s handwritten artifacts is its own system of textuality can easily be lost again in a system that privileges the linguistic.”

Certainly the move away from an overemphasis on materiality that occurs in the digital archive period is influenced by the work of Foucault and other new historicists who reject narrow representations of meaning and object.

In 2005 NINES released Collex, the search and collection interface developed for its federated collection of nineteenth-
century materials. The interface is a tribute to McGann’s belief that technology is intimately enmeshed with social understandings of the materials it represents, and, as such, Collex enacts the theoretical representation of new historicism’s journey into digital archive development. “A Ruby-On-Rails application,” Collex “allows users to search aggregated sites, collect, annotate, and tag the online objects they discover, and to repurpose those objects in illustrated, interlinked essays or exhibits.” Collex allows users to explore peer reviewed scholarly projects, selected special collections library catalogs, and related commercial collections and journals. Yet Collex is far more than a mechanism to search through the collected NINES materials as it “embodies interpretive acts” and facilitates the new historicist understanding of objects within a social system. Collex treats each object as an individual item, which allows the user to theorize relationships among the objects and to remix the archive accordingly. As users build relationships, Collex ingests the findings, recognizing “the contexts in which they <individual objects> are placed by a community of scholars.” At the same time, Collex transparently reveals the constructed nature of its network through its ever-shifting tags. Tags are user-generated words that describe objects found in NINES, modeled on the crowd sourcing uses of word clouds in sites from flickr to Delicious. As users attach tags to individual digital objects, such as scholarly articles, poems, or paintings, the word cloud and the search are altered, reminding the user that the objects exist within and are impacted by a scholarly community using the site (see fig. 2.2).

The manipulation of the digital archive materials through the Collex tool is akin to the use of a box of papers found in a special collections room. Grouped by subject, patrons pull various papers and objects from a box, ordering the items by interest and possible connectivity. As patrons finish with the materials they return them to the box in new constellations that represent interpretations. Unlike the earlier digital edition, where scholar-
creators worked to fix the original text to one meaning, digital archives reveal the social construction of meaning through interface, design, and use.

The lure of the rare book room echoes in the construction of digital archives from this period. At the heart of digital archive construction is the desire for immersion in a wide range of textual materials, what Kenneth Price calls “the ideal of... all-inclusive resources for the study of given topics.”41 New historicist scholars who perceived the archive as the space of scholarship viewed the digital as a tool for enacting the ideal of textual inclusion. For example, the WWA is premised on the problem of Whitman’s manuscripts, “scattered in over sixty different institutional repositories, and poetry manuscripts have been located in twenty-nine repositories.”42 The construction of an inclusive digital archive would return the manuscripts to a central location, the WWA, and, even better, allow for additional materials to interact with Whitman’s writing. Such concerns have led to the hallmark of digital archives, the ever-expanding archive.
The Willa Cather Archive (WCA), for example, has increasingly expanded the interrelated materials housed on its site, evolving from publication of a scholarly edition to the inclusion of letters, images, audio and movie clips, interviews, speeches, public letters, and a geographic representation of Cather’s life. The organic archive, however, could quickly become the unbounded, never-ending digital project. Like new historicist work, often described as scholarship without easily defined boundaries, digital archives tend to be porous rather than restrictive. The possibility of ever-expanding materials, however, is a greater problem in the digital environment, where press conventions are not active, digital storage is capacious, and additions and corrections might continue indefinitely. Ed Folsom connects the expansiveness of the WWA to the huge, unfinished Whitman print project, the *Collected Writing of Walt Whitman*, noting that the editors of the *Collected Writing* “thought, just as Kenneth Price and I foolishly thought when we began the *Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive*, that they’d be done with the project in a few years.” What Folsom misunderstands, however, is that an edition of writings, whether print or digital, is far more contained than the idealized digital archive driven by the underlying principles of organicism and the unbounded understanding of the text. Developers of digital archives have attempted methods of border control, including the most common method, a focus on a particular author, period, or geographic location, but most archives continue to struggle with material selection.

Digital archivists were also impacted by the newly expanded canon, in part a result of new historicist work invested in revaluing texts for their historical and cultural impact rather than just literary style. Such scholarship brought works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, among many others, into a far broader canon than existed during the new critical period, leaving digital archivists further concerned with how to delineate boundaries for archive construction. In fact, the im-
pact of canon expansion might be traced from print to digital in a number of early archives, including Stephen Railton’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin & American Culture*. Jane Tompkins’s 1985 book *Sensational Designs* successfully argued for the central position of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the nineteenth-century American canon. Re-situating sentimental fiction as an important form of literary production and one worthy of study, Tompkins drew upon contemporary feminist and new historicist work, arguing that “novels and stories should be studied not because they manage to escape the limitations of their particular time and place, but because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.” The importance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and similar sentimental fictional texts is not found in their literary value, claimed Tompkins, but in what the texts reveal about the culture from which they came. The job of the literary critic, then, is to examine the multiple threads of history and culture in which the text is produced, providing deep readings that reveal new insight into the text. Rejecting the formalist reading of literature, “stylistic intricacy, psychological subtlety, epistemological complexity,” Tompkins sets *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* within a web, and here I use the term in all of its multiple meanings, of cultural and historical materials. Stephen Railton’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin & American Culture* reiterates the new historicist argument in digital form by situating Stowe’s text within a network of cultural and historical texts, digitally enacting Tompkins’s argument. Produced at the University of Virginia in partnership with the Electronic Text Center, Special Collections Alderman Library, IATH, and the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, the site compiles cultural materials that illustrate the centrality of Stowe’s text to nineteenth-century culture. Called a “Multi-Media Archive,” the site includes various versions of *Uncle Tom* novels, images, songs, tracts, critical essays, reviews, adapted plays, songs, and movies. Organized around responses to and adaptations of the novel,
the archive represents a place in which a scholar might conduct broad and deep historical and cultural research, the hallmark of the digital archive moment. While Railton does not identify as a new historicist, there is every indication that new historicism informs the materials selection and that the archive argues for the importance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the novel, using the same criteria as Tompkins’s scholarly work. Where Tompkins’s scholarship points to the centrality of the sentimental novel, Railton’s archive includes a number of pretexts from sentimental culture. Where Tompkins’s scholarship points to the centrality of religious piety, Railton’s archive includes Christian texts. Railton even extends Tompkins’s argument for the cultural standing of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by including multiple responses to the text, such as reviews and adaptations, and by creating an archive where the selected materials show the significance of the novel within Stowe’s contemporary culture.

No matter that the idealized digital archive was expansive, the signature style of new historicism, the anecdote, reinforced the continued centrality of the individual item. Peppered throughout new historicist scholarship, the anecdote “is drawn from diverse archival disciplines . . . [and is] placed alongside authorial ‘culturally sanctioned’ literary texts.” Anecdotes range from a painting read against a Shakespeare play to a bawdy broadside illuminating a religious text, with the anecdote reinforcing the new historicist belief in “the value of the single voice, the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision, the transient sketch.” However, the new historicist commitment to viewing the object or the anecdote within a larger connective social web created an unresolved tension between the individual and the collective that would be replicated in digital archives. Scholars developing digital archives idealized organic and expansive datasets but faced limitations including economics, scale, and form that have limited the produced archives to the point where the final product might be read as a collection of anecdotes. Instead of seeing the
contradiction as insurmountable, scholars such as Alan Liu view the anecdote as a form of “random access. If the new historicism is a kind of relational database, then the anecdote is its query.”\textsuperscript{48} Anecdotes might be seen as the way into history, as “the random anecdote’s interior contradiction, irony, or aporia . . . exposes the fault lines in the ‘reality’ of history itself.” In its digital version, “New Historicism is the intuition simultaneously of random access (an atheist transcendent) \textit{and} determination (a bowing down or conviction).”\textsuperscript{49} Though the anecdote might appear limiting, even retrograde, Liu’s analysis situates it as a wedge through which to view the moments that do not fit, the space in which scholars might successfully probe for new findings.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of new historicism is digital literary studies’ rejection of the innate meaning of both individual objects and the structures in which they function. New historicists scrutinized form and materials, studied what was in and out of the archive, and questioned the power relations formed by the construction of and use of the archive. If new historicism is distinguished “by its lack of faith in ‘objectivity’ and ‘permanence’ and its stress not upon the direct recreation of the past, but rather the processes by which the past is constructed or invented,”\textsuperscript{50} so too are digital archives characterized by the same. Scholars who engage in digital archive creation also refused to view the archive and the technology used to create it as naturalized or organic and remained self-reflexive about all aspects of the archive, from materials selection, to metadata, and to interface design. Writing about \textit{The Women Writers Project}, Margaret Ezell underscores that “how archives are put together, maintained, and accessed affects the stories that are told about them and the stories that their contents tell.”\textsuperscript{51} Technologies used to create archives, such as TEI/XML, the de facto metadata standard in digital literary studies, have been carefully dissected.\textsuperscript{52} New historicist insistence on social construction bleeds into the way scholars understand metadata and the encoding of texts. Martha Nell Smith is clear
that the TEI is not a naturalized computer code but a socially produced form impacted by cultural and social values; “Meeting the challenge [of encoding texts] requires asking in as many ways as can be imagined how to go about reckoning the hierarchies apparently accepted by coding for rendering the images and texts in digital format, hierarchies that stubbornly resist parity between the intellectual/textual object and physical object but that insist one must be subordinate to the other.”

53 We should not underestimate the importance of such an understanding of self-reflexivity, as it provides a methodological means for digital humanities to focus on a broad set of theoretical engagements from critical code studies to datamining. The notion of a scholar’s purview as broad and diverse, interconnected and social rather than limited to a particular author or literary text, crucially influences the direction of digital literary studies. As digital archivists began to interrogate code and connectivity they were implicitly arguing for an expansion of study akin to the interdisciplinary interests of new historicism, or the big tent of digital humanities.

As this analysis demonstrates, the impact of new historicism on the theoretical and structural conceptualization of the digital archive is foundational to the way that literary digital humanities has evolved. However, one crucial, muted issue that has deep roots in the new historicist past continues to plague the evolving field—the growing hostility between literature and history scholars working within the digital environment. David Parry’s post on his AcademHack blog provides one example of this tension:

Digital Historians have leveraged the digital to expand and engage a wider public in the work of history. As examples of this think of Omeka, or leveraging social media to engage in crowd sourced projects. That is, Digital Historians have often begun by asking “how does the digital allow us to reach a larger/public audience?” Now this could be because many of the folks working in Digital
History come from a public history background . . . But in the case of literary studies the “digital” projects have not, as much, changed the scope of the audience. So that if you look at digital literary projects they often look remarkably similar to projects in the pre-digital era, just ones which have been put on steroids and run thru a computational process. Seems to me that the Digital Historian model is a better one.\textsuperscript{54}

We might dismiss Parry’s post as symptomatic of academic Balkanism, yet the expressed division between literature and history scholars is not an isolated incident. Historian Edward Ayers has stated, “The irony is that history may be better suited to digital technology than any other humanistic discipline.”\textsuperscript{55} To historians like Dan Cohen, digital work is most appropriate for history because of scholarly approach. Cohen posits,

We need to recognize that the digital humanities represent a scary, rule-breaking, swashbuckling movement for many historians and other scholars. We must remember that these scholars have had—for generations and still in today’s graduate schools—a very clear path for how they do their work, publish, and get rewarded. Visit archive; do careful reading; find examples in documents; conceptualize and analyze; write monograph; get tenure. We threaten all of this. For every time we focus on text mining and pattern recognition, traditionalists can point to the successes of close reading—on the power of a single word. We propose new methods of research when the old ones don’t seem broken.\textsuperscript{56}

On the one hand, Cohen’s representation of the threat of digital humanities rings true. New approaches to research create tension within scholarly fields, particularly as scholars must learn new
techniques. Situating the archive as a central trope in the battle over digital humanities, Cohen suggests that the close reading approach, “the power of a single word,” is a traditionalist methodology not appropriate for the new digital form. However, as the previous discussion of both the archive and the edition reveals, close attention to individual objects, such as the word, remains a guiding principle in digital literary studies. While the data driven model has much to offer scholarship, those that come to the digital from a new historicist background are suspicious of a monolithic use of data, not because it is data but because the individual moment, which can become occluded in such a data dump, has the power to rewrite and disrupt the larger narrative only when it is located by a scholar through an interpretive moment. To digital literary scholars, the uniqueness or individuality of an object needs to be understood as potentially disrupting the larger context, rather than a piece that is always viewed within a continuous narrative. Here Alan Liu’s understanding of the anecdote as random access in a database is illuminating, as the anecdote allows disruption through “the single word,” the very object that Cohen dismisses. The dangerous trend toward the homogenization of digital work in the supposed interdisciplinary digital humanities masks the methodological concerns that promote such differences and needs to be resisted as the broader digital humanities develops.

If the digital humanities are interdisciplinary, why the continued conflicts between history and literature? The history of interdisciplinarity in the academy provides one means of reading the dislocation. Joe Moran’s Interdisciplinarity traces the rise of disciplines from Aristotle through current academic structures and contends that, “Broadly speaking, the development of disciplines has not merely created self-contained bodies of knowledge, happy in their isolation; it has been accompanied by frequent attempts to assert the superiority of certain fields of learning over others.” Moran’s “self-contained bodies” that house interdisci-
plinary thought provide a means of understanding the fraught relationship of history and literature. If digital interdisciplinarity is based on traditional assumptions of multi-disciplinary knowledge housed within one body, then hierarchical tensions surely will occur. Far more productive is the emphasis on interdisciplinarity built through collaboration. It is also likely that the struggle between history and literature might be more fraught than other disciplines because of the two disciplines’ historical emergence:

The two subjects were sometimes taught together in early degrees at dissenting colleges in the nineteenth century, and they developed as fully-fledged academic subjects at around the same time. Each of these disciplines contains elements of the other: literary studies often draws on historical material, while everything, including literature, could be said to have a history. The obvious connections between the subjects, however, have not always encouraged co-operation; they have often led to greater territoriality, as each subject has sought to consolidate its own separateness and uniqueness.59

The tensions between history and literature are nothing new, according to Moran, yet certain periods heighten the anxiety. New historicism was one such moment where clashes between literature and history peaked, and the new age of digital archive work seems to have reignited the battle.

Yet we need to recognize that the reason disciplinary tension appears in contemporary discussions is because disciplines still matter. Disciplines govern our academic lives, from our graduate training, to our position in the university, to the type of work valued, to our ability to advance in our careers. Universities continue to organize knowledge groups into traditional subject areas, so it should come as no surprise that we find it difficult to work outside our traditional structures. If we agree that one scholar
cannot move intellectually across all disciplinary fields, then we must learn how to use the generalized umbrella term of digital humanities to bring together scholars from multiple fields. One of the strengths of the broad digital humanities is its ability to pull together diversely trained scholars, as “there may be human intellectual limits to interdisciplinarity: given that most research in the humanities is undertaken by scholars working on their own, it may be difficult for these people to become conversant in the theories, methods and materials of two or more disciplines, without producing significant gaps in their knowledge.”

We pretend that disciplinary boundaries have ceased to exist at our peril. Instead of shying away from such complexities, we should embrace the heady dissention. While the old/new historicist split created controversy rather than interdisciplinary cooperation, it also generated intellectual stimulation and fertile ground for experimentation. This tension between fields could prove fruitful for digital scholarship, generating new intellectual questions. Moran cautions that “[m]any of the examples of interdisciplinarity I have examined so far represent a kind of nostalgia for the lost unity of knowledge, and they see the discipline of English as the best way of restoring this.”

By shifting interdisciplinarity out of one body to many bodies, by rejecting a coherence of approach, we may move away from the seduction of unity. To model interdisciplinarity, we must reject calls to lock down digital humanities to a particular methodology, instead privileging a broad range of approaches.

The archival turn in American digital literary work has created a theoretical foundation of use and analysis that underpins our current work. The construction of digital archives has brought cohesion to the field and allowed for the development of standardized approaches to the work that literary digital scholars are interested in undertaking. Yet, we need to remember that new historicism has taught us that the archive is our construction. Without careful attention to the way in which the archive
structure itself represents our theoretical approach we have done a disservice to the possibility of digital work as more than just technique or application. As Louis Montrose wrote during the height of new historicism: “Inhabiting the discursive spaces traversed by the term ‘New Historicism’ are some of the most complex, persistent, and unsettling of the problems that professors of literature attempt variously to confront or to evade.” The scholarly complexity articulated by Montrose remains persistent and valid in contemporary digital studies. As Caroline Steedman reminds us of physical archives, “The Archive is not potentially made up of everything, as is human memory; and it is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away that is the unconscious. The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there.” As our new historicist forerunners have taught, the digital archive has the potential to disrupt and fragment, even as it provides coherence and the most productive scholarship works within these gaps.

The central position maintained by digital archives in the late 1990s and early 2000s is diminishing. Fewer digital projects are adopting the term archive, and scholars are turning their attention to datamining and geospatial representations. Yet the archive remains an important form that those working within the field must engage, as it strengthened the reputation of digital scholarship and laid the theoretical foundation for current work. We will continue to see projects that are best developed in the digital archive form, much as we continue to see digital editions. Yet there are new trends in digital literary studies that must also be tested and examined as we move forward.