

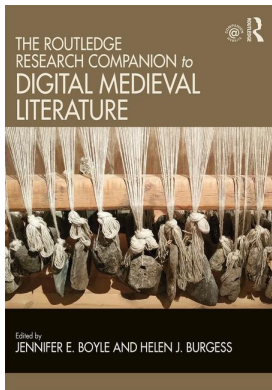
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Jennifer E. Boyle, Helen J. Burgess

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Whitney Trettien

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CREATIVE DESTRUCTION AND THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Whitney Trettien

Destruction was my Beatrice.

—Stéphane Mallarmé

Tenison's Library was founded in 1684 as a place of study and repose for the people of Westminster. Christopher Wren designed its building with help from John Evelyn on the site of what is now the National Portrait Gallery off Trafalgar Square, and its benefactor Thomas Tenison, later Archbishop of Canterbury, "furnished [it] with the best Modern Books in most Faculties, the best of its kind in England."¹ By the nineteenth century, though, it was in utter disrepair. After Tenison's death in 1715, the library had all but stopped collecting items, and "a state of suspended animation gradually resulted": "the gap between those shelves and the readers who should frequent them gradually widens into a chasm," one writer elegized, "until no footstep comes to wake the echoes and no finger to disturb the dust where reposes in silence the learning of ages."² By 1851, the situation was so dire that the collection's curator Philip Hale published *A Plea for Archbishop Tenison's Library*, requesting help to maintain the building and secure the institution's future; but it was perhaps already too late to save many of the books from destruction. According to a possibly facetious footnote in an 1861 issue of *The Book-Worm*, the caretaker, a boatman on the Thames by day, was rumored to sport a pair of suspenders that his daughter had pasted with illuminations cut from the library's medieval manuscripts – an ironic illustration of the institution's state of decay.³

The library was auctioned off in parcels in 1861, and with it two curious books: *Fragmenta manuscripta* and *Fragmenta varia*, large folios pasted with pieces of manuscripts and early printed books. The former, now held at the University of Missouri, contains over two hundred mostly medieval specimens dating from the eighth through to the seventeenth centuries, including bits of music, calendars, annotated religious texts, even a volvelle that has come loose from its page. Some pieces appear to have been culled from the binding waste of printed books; others are entire leaves or bifolia rescued from old volumes. Toward the end are a smattering of later ownership marks and pen trials extracted from flyleaves. *Fragmenta varia*, now at Cambridge University, picks up historically where the Missouri volume leaves off with specimens of early printing – woodcut initials, title pages, more ownership marks. According to Milton Gatch, the bibliographer who has done the most to illuminate the history of these

remarkable books, their chronological ordering and division are most likely the product of their rebinding in the early 1850s, as part of Hale's project to repair Tenison Library.⁴ The collection of fragments itself, though, dates to the end of the seventeenth century. It is the work of the shoemaker-turned-bibliophile John Bagford, a secondhand book dealer with a habit of rescuing old manuscripts from the dustbins of secondhand bookshops and binderies. Bagford was indiscriminate in his collecting, gathering anything that might illuminate the past, which is in truth everything; and so his collections mushroomed with portfolios of old bindings and armorial stamps, printer's marks and handwriting specimens, even an entire scrapbook devoted to samples of paper. At least two of these scrapbooks, *Fragmenta manuscripta* and *varia*, were on public display at Tenison Library during the first decade of the eighteenth century, where they served as an advertisement for Bagford's larger project: a complete history of the book, told through exemplary specimens of early text technologies.

"'Construction' presupposes 'destruction,'" wrote Walter Benjamin in *Passagenwerk*, his own fragmented history of modernity.⁵ He describes *creative destruction*, that generative force that – like Shiva, creator and destroyer of the world, or Friedrich Nietzsche's version of Dionysus – forges new meaning by way of ruination. Drawing energy from Bagford's and the boatman's book history, this essay adopts creative destruction as a heuristic for probing the currently fraught relationship between technology, history, and interpretation in literary studies. It does so to ask big questions about the present and its past, namely: what role do media technologies play in forming and disseminating historical knowledge? What role *should* they play? What is the political potential of literary criticism, and how can scholars best realize it? A short chapter cannot fully address these topics. However, by tugging on the thread of creative destruction, I hope to unravel some of the current debates that bind the field now called "digital humanities" to reveal more clearly the stakes of the digital turn, especially for those of us who study literature's deep history.

* * *

I have introduced "creative destruction" by citing Benjamin and Nietzsche, but today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, one is more likely to stumble upon the term in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. There, this capacious oxymoron has become shorthand for the Austrian-American economist Joseph Schumpeter's theory of capital, first outlined in his 1942 classic *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. Schumpeter drew attention to the fact that markets co-evolve with dynamic social, cultural, and natural environments. Within this evolutionary process, he argued, wealth accumulates through co-constitutive cycles of technological innovation and industry restructuring. He named this mechanism "creative destruction" and described it as the "process of industrial mutation – if I may use that biological term – that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is," he emphasizes, "the essential fact about capitalism."⁶

Although the term lay dormant for many decades, it gained currency with the growth of the tech industry during the 80s and 90s. Schumpeter was proclaimed "the prophet of bust and boom" by the *New York Times* in 2000 and quoted approvingly by Alan Greenspan, then Chairman of the Federal Reserve.⁷ As Greenspan testified in 1999, the "evident acceleration of the process of creative destruction, . . . reflected in the shifting of capital from failing technologies into those technologies at the cutting edge," seemed to be largely responsible for the decade's phenomenal economic growth.⁸ Even after the boom had bust, Greenspan continued to trumpet Schumpeterian creative destruction. "The result through the 1990's [sic] of all this seeming-heightened instability for individual businesses, somewhat surprisingly, was an apparent

reduction in the volatility of output and in the frequency and amplitude of business cycles for the macroeconomy,” he said in a 2002 speech.⁹ By connecting prosperity to upheaval, Schumpeter’s paradoxical term seemed to perfectly capture the rapid cycles of novelty and obsolescence that escalated the growth of the personal computing and communication technology industries, inaugurating the information revolution.

The phrase has lost ground in more recent years; it is a “glamorizing term” that “excuses a lot of suffering,” Paul Krugman recently grumbled.¹⁰ Yet the tech industry remains enamored with the idea of expansion through volatility, now propagated under a new tagline: “disruptive innovation.” Coined by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen in his 1997 book *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, “disruptive innovation” originally described how newer, smaller companies are counterintuitively better positioned to exploit market gaps, even with an inferior product. The term has entered the cultural bloodstream more generally, though, especially in Silicon Valley, which now seems to be in a constant state of disrupting itself. CNBC annually publishes the “Disruptor 50,” a list of the most “disruptive” companies, and every year the technology blog *TechCrunch* hosts a high-profile festival called “Disrupt,” where “revolutionary start-ups” compete for seed money. “This is an era of disruption,” Grant McCracken writes in a blog post on *Harvard Business Review*. “Not disruption as the occasional event, but disruption as the constant, chronic condition of our professional lives.”¹¹ The phrase has become so overused that Judith Shulevitz threateningly titled an August 2013 *New Republic* article “Don’t You Dare Say ‘Disruptive’.”

It is against this backdrop of Schumpeterian-cum-“disruptive” rhetoric that the recent angst about the relationship between the humanities and digital technologies has materialized. To many scholars observing these trends over the last two decades, the language of creative destruction and the “always innovate” attitude that it signals seem to have leached into Western culture writ large, including – and especially – the beleaguered halls of literature departments. The story will be familiar to anyone reading this: facing mounting student debt, shrinking public spending, and an increasingly ambiguous sense of the importance of a liberal arts education, which seems to have few defenders in high places, college administrators have dangerously flirted with and even adopted the mantra of disruptive innovation. This business-oriented strategy aims to restructure higher education as a form of technologically-mediated content delivery. “The Business Model of Higher Ed is Antiquated,” blazons the subheading of a *Forbes* article titled “Higher Education Is Now Ground Zero for Disruption,” written by a man whose byline proclaims that he writes about “the new, new thing.”¹² Humanities degrees are expensive and offer no guarantee of employment; by contrast, learning technologies like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are cheap for students and, in a job market that sees the value of a degree in the tangible skills it confers, effective.

To some scholars observing these trends, the hybrid field marking its work as “digital humanities” seemed particularly guilty of “disruptspeak.” New computational methods of analysis were said to be restructuring the tried and true practice of close reading as a form of distant reading, a non-human, numerical approach to interpreting an unreadably large corpora of novels. New technology-oriented grant programs were bringing funding to humanities departments long parched by the lack of money for research, graduate students, and new faculty. The most prominent of these programs, the National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Start-Up Grants, once judged projects according to their level of “innovation.”¹³ As Richard Grusin writes, neatly summarizing the position of many critics, “it is no coincidence that the digital humanities has emerged as ‘the next big thing’ at the very same moment in the first decades of the twenty-first century that the neoliberalization and corporatization of higher education has intensified.”¹⁴ So prevalent is the idea that digital humanities and disruptive

innovation go hand in hand that a special collection is now forthcoming from Punctum Books cheekily entitled “Disrupting Digital Humanities.”

Scholars who self-identify as “digital humanists” – including, tactically, myself – have done a poor job responding to such criticism. I believe this is largely because the thing reified as “DH” and “the DHers” in these critiques feels like a straw man to many of us who design digital projects, work with digital archives, and attend or teach skills-building workshops. The aesthetic, social, and political commitments of digital practices in the humanities are unrecognizable in this mangled bogey-man of neoliberalism, especially for those – including, non-tactically, myself – who see digital practices and web-based communities actually bolstering ideologies whose academic stock (shall we say) had plummeted in recent decades, including feminism. Similarly, it is hard to take seriously this caricature of an omnipotent “DH” when public-facing digital projects about obscure women writers and Black artists – projects that have mass appeal and pedagogical purpose, garnering hundreds of page views a month – bear less tangible value within an anti-populist academy than expensive, little-read monographs. Nonetheless, issues of promotion and tenure might be considered “first-world problems,” as Richard Grusin puts it.¹⁵ We must take seriously and respond to the broader critique – not in order to defend this thing called “digital humanities” (which, as the consistent scare-quotes should indicate, I don’t find coherent enough to defend as a field) but to defend destructively creative techwork in the humanities. “DH” and “the DHers,” insofar as such things exist, will recede from the horizon of the academy’s gaze; scholarship’s reliance upon networked technologies, including commercial hardware and software, will not. Now is the time to consider anew the nexus of archival technologies, power, critique, and resistance – which is, after all, ultimately what is at stake in the debates about the future of literary studies in the digital age.

Let’s zoom in, then, on some points of contention. First, as suggested above, the language of disruption seems to have introduced a binarism between “innovative” methods, presumed better by dint of their novelty, and now denigrated “traditional” methods such as close reading and cultural criticism. Moreover, by defending the value of teaching programming and digital design in literature programs, practitioners seem to be giving leverage to the idea that the humanities should be judged according to their use-value – an idea that many critics see as antithetical to the inherently non-utilitarian nature of critical inquiry. In a paragraph that encapsulates much of this thinking, and so which is worth quoting at length, David Golumbia writes:

The fact is that the humanities academy in the United States has been under attack from a wide range of conservative political forces for decades, particularly under the assumption that the humanities are useless or fail to teach skills necessary for employment. Cultural scholars who have looked at this situation consider it in part a mark of the inherent resistance to market absolutism found in the humanities; sites of resistance to such politics are disappearing, and it is no surprise that those remaining are targets of increased political activity on a number of fronts. It is possible to locate in literary-interpretive practice, including that of the New Critics and their philological predecessors like Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer, a generalized ethics of the encounter with the other in language that interpretive humanities offer. While the Right likes to paint such ethics as inherently leftist, a more neutral examination suggests they are compatible with almost any conservative or liberal political philosophy other than market absolutism.¹⁶

It is taken for granted here that the knowledge produced in a field like literary studies is not a product at all, at least not one that can be sold, exchanged, or patented in the pursuit of accumulating wealth. It does not directly grow capital and therefore is, to apply Bertrand Russell’s

distinction, “ornamental” to a market-based system, in contrast to the more “instrumental” knowledge generated in engineering and the sciences. Its *non-instrumentality* renders “literary-interpretive practice” ipso facto *anti-capitalist*, according to this line of argument. That is, simply critical reading *alone* bears the mantle of an “inherent resistance to market absolutism.” This anti-market logic applies even in the absence of any explicit ideological commitments on the part of the reader or her methods; indeed the humanities are presented as powerful *because* they resist capitalism *by design*. Thus it follows that literary hermeneutics is “compatible with almost any liberal or conservative political philosophy *other than market absolutism*” (emphasis added).

There is much to consider here, perhaps most especially the need for an allied front of resistance against the various forces that seek to eradicate the humanities as so much superfluous fluff to modern society. Nonetheless, the argument is built on a series of leaps in logic that elide important differences. For instance, it seems true to me that the set of interpretive practices often dubbed “critical thinking” resists the logic of markets, in the same limited sense that by watching the birds play in the gutters outside my kitchen window for the last eight minutes I have resisted the logic of markets: both activities are wastefully un-, even anti-productive, accruing no economic value (except in indirect ways). However, the “humanities” as a specific precipitate of professional disciplinary formations are not coterminous with these unmarketable moments of thought but rather are precisely their translation into marketable commodities with exchange value: books, articles, chapters like the one you read. It is true that these commodities are traded within relatively artificial systems governed more by an inflated valuation of prestige and ego than wealth; but it remains a marketplace nonetheless. That critical thinking or “literary-interpretive practices” can be said to operate outside certain market-oriented logics, then, does not give those practices the *political* power to resist those logics. If it did, one might suppose the many brilliantly subtle close readings of literature that critics have churned out over the last few decades would have done a better job saving us from budget cuts.

This is the problem, and the danger, of refracting everything through the lens of economic ideology, especially when that ideology is ambiguously conflated with very specific political contingents: it defangs critique. Resistance is not a genetic function of literary criticism but an explicit political action on the part of the thinking humans who practice it. It sparks in the friction between inquiry – active, critical *questioning* – and the absorption of that process into the technological, social, legal, archival, and of course economic systems that collaboratively structure that thought as it is communicated to other humans across space and time. Thus while one can *argue against* neoliberalism or market absolutism within the discursive space of literary studies, one cannot *resist* it without engaging creatively and destructively with the material mechanisms that mediate – and thus accrue or deny power to – that act. This is why the many Marxian movements of the last century, including most recently the Occupy movement, invested resources so heavily into developing new systems of communication while exploiting gaps in existing technologies. It is why punk culture fomented zine networks, and the Women in Print movement of the 1970s, recently illuminated by the work of Trysh Travis, argued that “feminists needed not merely a room, but an entire print culture of their own.”¹⁷ The medium is the message.

Today, the digital turn – currently, although neither necessarily nor entirely, constituted as “digital humanities” – offers the best potential for fostering resistance to the conservative forces that seek to devalue interpretive inquiry. This is the case because it forces attention to that frictive zone where critical acts are taken up by technologies, woven into the material world, and enmeshed within a network of social and cultural practices. For instance, for much of the twentieth century, literary historians considered the publishing industry and the archival and information sciences separate from scholarship and largely irrelevant to the work of

criticism itself. However, this illusion is difficult to maintain in digital projects, which necessitate a more cross-disciplinary, cooperative approach. Partly as a result of the pressures of digital scholarship, then, a fruitful space of collaborative inquiry has begun to flourish around issues like the politics of metadata, the economics of scholarly publishing, and the public domain. By drawing attention to systems of mediation, this shift has also galvanized discussion around long-neglected issues like access and disability, as well as the critical valences of different modes of representation and how they invisibly shape discourse. And it has empowered scholars to take publishing (by which I simply mean making an idea public) under their own control while developing frameworks for accreting value to previously undervalued practices, such as editing, technical design, and creative criticism. Of course, these are complicated issues with no easy solutions. Simply engaging in digital or collaborative scholarship alone won't solve them, nor is such work any more *inherently* resistant than "literary-interpretive practices" are. Rather, the productive entanglement of the humanities' interpretive work and its self-conscious mediation holds the greatest *possibility* for catalyzing change.

This possibility has most been realized at the fecund node where the concerns of book history, media studies, information sciences, and digital scholarship meet. I don't think this is an accident. Historians of information and technology deal with tangible objects and infrastructures, and as such are accustomed to thematizing the points of contact between immaterial ideas and the material systems that store, archive, and communicate them. Scholars working across these areas know well that archives are not neutral zones of accumulation but battlegrounds of interpretation; that no discourse remains untainted by the technologies that mediate it; and that moments of media transition – which are all moments – are always hybrid, containing simultaneously progressive and regressive values. Because of their methodological commitments, these fields are capable of historicizing the emergence of electronically-mediated methods, thereby deconstructing the false oppositions that unwittingly guide the discourse of both critics and advocates, such as humanities/neoliberalism or thinking/making. Thus historians of text technologies are best poised to seize the technological and rhetorical upheavals of our time as an opportunity to rewrite history in ways that are both more culturally salient and politically potent.

Much as their predecessor Bagford did. For the remainder of this essay, I would like to return to Bagford and his scrapbooks, last left on display in the Tenison Library at the beginning of the eighteenth century. I have chosen Bagford as my case study because his cut-and-paste book histories take a different tack on "literary-interpretive practices" – one in which creative destruction with text technologies is not the oppositional *bête noire* of inquiry but rather is its generative force. I realize that in applying the phrase "creative destruction" to cut-and-paste practices of the late seventeenth century that I am detaching it from its specific Schumpeterian formulation, as well as from the controversial language of disruption. This is intentional. To fight neoliberalism in the academy today we must become better at honing the distinction between, on the one hand, material practices that float free of historically contingency – what media archaeologists, following Ernst Robert Curtius, have called recurrent "topoi" – and, on the other hand, their rhetorical figuration in specific moments. Put more concretely, tools like scissors have existed for many centuries and during that time have been used to do many of the same tasks, such as cutting paper or cloth; however, the gendering of scissors (for instance) has changed drastically over the years. By dividing tool from discourse, while recognizing the necessarily artificial nature of those distinctions, we can extract digital processes and practices from the language of novelty, plugging them into much longer histories of making and design. At the same time, these histories will enable us to more sharply distinguish what is "digital" about particular social configurations, methods, or scholarly forms, and what transcends a

specific technical milieu. These preciser, deeper critical histories are our best leverage against the contemporary ‘disruptspeak’ that values innovation *über alles*.

The example of Bagford is particularly pertinent in this respect, since he worked in a moment that was, much like our own, in flux – but differently so. By his lifetime, the shift from manuscript to mostly printed communication was many generations ago; no new writing devices had recently entered the market (excepting perhaps the steel fountain pen), and no new advances in presses, ink, type, or paper were in the process of “disrupting” the printing trade. Yet precisely because of this temporal distance, a new historical consciousness was beginning to coalesce around printing’s origins at the end of the seventeenth century, especially in contradistinction to the writing technologies that came before it.¹⁸ Distinct periods and genres of print were coming into view – the “antient” blackletter of Caxton and his contemporaries; the folios of Shakespeare and Jonson; ballads and broadsides – all of which were beginning to seem categorically separate from the manuscripts that preceded the sixteenth century. In short, the relations between technology, history, and interpretation were shifting under the accumulating weight of the past. The book as a platform was beginning to have its own history.

Motivating this new historical consciousness was a robust market in second hand books.¹⁹ James Raven estimates that “the number of London booksellers who dealt in ‘old libraries’ increased three-fold by the end of the seventeenth century” as the market became “increasingly active and well organized.” Auctions of old books and manuscripts, “which appear to have been uncommon before about 1650, also rapidly increased in size and frequency.”²⁰ This growing trade fed the libraries of a new generation of antiquaries and aristocrats, who began to amass collections of an unprecedented scale and diversity. At his death in 1753, Sir Hans Sloane held over 50,000 books and manuscripts in a collection of 117,000 antiquarian items.²¹ The library of the Harley family was comparably large at Sir Edward Harley’s passing in 1741, with an estimated 7,618 manuscripts, 50,000 printed books, 350,000 pamphlets and 41,000 prints.²² Even a much less wealthy collector such as Samuel Pepys was able to acquire around 3,000 volumes in the booming second hand markets of the late seventeenth century. (By comparison, the Cotton Library, largely assembled over a century earlier, contains less than a thousand manuscripts.) All these ageing books helped give rise to a sense of shared national heritage and would eventually lead to the founding of the British Museum in 1753 from the consolidated libraries of Sloane, Harley, and Cotton. Thus the insistent material presence of the past forced the creative destruction of history – history as both a story of what came before and as the physical archive that testifies to that narrative’s truth.

This macro restructuring of history occurred in tandem with a variety of smaller material transformations that both fuelled and were fuelled by these larger shifts. For instance, the coalition of large collections encouraged a need for order, stability, and uniformity of appearance, which prompted many projects to rebind libraries of books en masse into matching and more permanent leather covers. Harley had many of his items rebound in a distinctive gold-tooled red morocco, now known as “Harleian binding.” Pepys, too, had his entire collection rebound in matching leather, transforming a motley assemblage of differently-bound books into a visually cohesive library of texts. Even Pepys’s ephemeral materials were renovated for the new century. As Patricia Fumerton has pointed out, his broadsides and ballads were cut apart and pasted into large folio volumes, since (it would seem) he considered their conformity to a homogeneous standard more important than preserving them in their original, occasionally irregular forms.²³

This destructive process of updating the book’s hardware generated much waste, which to Bagford was just more stuff to collect. First there was the waste of the binding itself, some of which Bagford gathered into a book of specimens. He would use this collection to write

two essays, “Of booke binding antient” and “Of booke binding Mouderne,” illustrated with samples.²⁴ Then there were the fragments of paper cut from the margins of pages or ends of books in the process of rebinding. Bagford saved these, too, producing a collection of specimens that could, among other things, aid in the dating of manuscripts.²⁵ And there were the title pages and fragments of medieval manuscripts and printer’s waste that spilled forth from the front, headband, and flyleaves of old books in the process of disbinding them. As we have seen, Bagford intended to dredge knowledge from this fragmented heap, narrating the origins of printing technology by reconfiguring these scraps into collages of new knowledge. For his efforts, Bagford would later gain a reputation as a “wicked old biblioclast” who, according to William Blade, “went about the country, from library to library, tearing away title pages from rare books of all sizes”;²⁶ but more often than not he seems to have served as a kind of mudlark of libraries, gathering up what otherwise would have sunk into oblivion.²⁷ As Bagford writes of his own collecting practices:

I have hat grate oportunities not onley in ye large Auctiones & libereary[e]sI have be[en] concerned In but by ye franch Libertes Mr Christophher Beatman Booksell[er] geves me in the turning over the Liberearyes which he so often byes and for his time hath hat most good Booke[s] pased throw his hands then anyon Bookseller in Europe: this his kind[n]es in geving me leave at all tims to take out of ye Wast fragments of ould writinges ye blank <wast> leave title pages Grate Letters devis[e]s headpeces &c . . . mane thousandes of them which never before was collected by any one[.]²⁸

Although Bagford is a singular figure, he was not alone in his interest in fragments.²⁹ Pepys also saved specimens of medieval handwriting which he pasted into three folio volumes alongside pages from sixteenth and seventeenth-century copybooks. This large “Calligraphical Collection,” as he called it, held “Original Proofs of Hand-writings of the Ancients in Several Ages within the last 1000 Years,” assembled with the aim of evincing the printing press’s deleterious impact on the arts of handwriting.³⁰ Apart from Bagford, though, few were more invested in saving this cultural detritus than Humfrey Wanley. Once apprenticed to a draper, Wanley, like Bagford, enjoyed no formal schooling; yet through careful examination of original documents, he became perhaps the most skilled paleographer and calligrapher of his time. (Indeed, when Pepys wanted help dating the fragments of his “Calligraphical Collection,” he turned to Wanley, whose notes are copied into Pepys’s volumes.) His talents led him first to a career as a cataloguer, and his organizational prowess marks many of the most significant collections of early manuscripts, including the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts at the Bodleian and the manuscripts in the University, Trinity, and Corpus Christi Libraries at Cambridge.³¹ Later, around 1708, Robert Harley hired Wanley as librarian of his collection. In this role, Wanley catalogued items, sought new materials to fill gaps in the library, and oversaw the purchase of many important smaller collections, including those of John Foxe, John Stow, John Covel, and Sir Simonds D’Ewes.³²

Like Bagford and even Pepys, Wanley had a wide appreciation for all forms of textual production, taking care to save not just the most gorgeous or pristine manuscripts but even worn, moth-eaten books. Deirdre Jackson quotes a letter he wrote to a merchant in Cyprus advising that he not reject any books outright, since “even Fragments may be welcome, to us, who know how to render them useful.”³³ When he worked as a cataloguer with the Bodleian, Wanley proposed to the curator a plan to pluck the medieval manuscript paste-downs from the bindings of the library’s collection of early printed books and save them in a scrapbook of handwriting specimens, to be consulted by patrons of the library.³⁴ Although this plan never

came to fruition, he does seem to have begun gathering binding waste and fragments on his own. His goal was eventually to produce “a small & portable book, which may be easily carried along on a Journey, or into a Library” in order to aid readers in accurately dating and identifying medieval manuscripts.

Importantly, Bagford, Pepys, and Wanley all planned to turn their books of specimens into printed histories, illustrated with engravings of the scraps they had gathered. Sloane even promoted Bagford’s history of printing in the pages of the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*, printing letters from Bagford and Wanley’s description of his scrapbooks.³⁵ Yet none of these projects were realized. All that remains of these intended histories are many lists, notes, drafts, some published plans, a few facsimiles, and of course the scraps themselves, which are stuffed into odd corners of various libraries and archives – sometimes with printed materials, at other times with manuscripts, always a problem.³⁶ Are these fragments each individual items, or part of a larger collection? If part of a collection, how should an institution catalogue its hybrid assemblage of print and manuscript materials from many centuries? Ironically, it would seem that the large-scale archival restructuring that originally helped bring these fragments to light have no conceptual mechanism for absorbing them back into their fold, no category to make them make sense within the institutional logic of modern libraries. Thus even as these books clearly participate in the late-seventeenth-century’s turn to history – and do so explicitly by narrating new histories of text technologies – they also materially resist the discursive terms upon which that turn pivots, including the naturalization of divisions like print/manuscript and ancient/modern.

By the end of the century, then, the co-emergence of loosely interconnected interests – including the antiquarian and second hand book trade, intellectual curiosity about the past, and the excess supply of old stuff that fed them both – had braided together market supply and archival demand, generating a new allegiance between historical knowledge and technology. What I am attempting to draw forth from this dense, dynamic knot of competing concerns (treated superficially here) is the cascade of restructuring that energizes each new twist, what Schumpeter describes in the context of twentieth-century economics as the “perennial gale of creative destruction.”³⁷ The accumulation of old books and manuscripts begat new collecting habits; new habits begat new historical narratives; new narratives begat new hardware, turning cultural detritus into cultural heritage. Each reconstellation destroys some of what came before and thus disables the past’s full participation in the knowledge formations of the present. Yet it also creates something new, enabling new futures to come into being, including, in the case we are examining, our own. Between the poles of loss and possibility, these scraps remain as small sites of resistance to cultural ruination. They oppose not through a politicized critical discourse (whatever that might mean at the time) but by cultivating an oppositional ethics of care for media technologies as the bearers of past lives, and as crucial collaborators in the human pursuit of knowledge. Under pressure to conform, consolidate, and unify a national library, these collections stand against the devaluation of fragments and a fragmented past, produced by scholars who, even as they and indeed their books contributed to those pressures, simultaneously nurtured concern for these torn, ragged, discarded bits of history, written by human hands. To quote Wanley again, “even Fragments may be welcome, to us, who know how to render them useful.”

Today, Bagford’s scrapbooks have yet again undergone a hardware update. This time, it is for the web-accessible Digital Scriptorium, where anyone can view digital photographs of every fragment in the *Fragmenta manuscripta* at the University of Missouri. The individual scraps do not scroll together like the leaves of the book, as they would have, perhaps, after they were rebound by Hale in the nineteenth century. Instead, each fragment is presented as

an individual unit with an image of both recto and verso. Only metadata, authored by a new generation of cataloguers, links these scraps together. What began as Bagford's project of assemblage, then, is now digitally disassembled. This creative destruction seems so extensive that one hesitates to still mark the collection as "Bagford's"; the delicate links by which he connected the remnants of the past have been severed, a casualty of many processes of remediation. What remains is yet another, and new, pile of technologically-mediated scraps that await careful reconfiguration by someone who "know[s] how to render them useful."

If there is a problem with "traditional" literary critical methods today, it is that they often *don't* know how to render these fragments useful. The moment of cultural and technological remediation whose surface I've scratched in this chapter is invisible to literary critics who attend only to a text's content, treating critical editions or indeed any historical texts as transparent windows onto the past. This is a luxury we can no longer afford in a hyper-technologized age – not because neoliberalism has succeeded in making criticism seem superfluous, but because these myopic methods render us powerless to *oppose* such claims. Unless our methods are connected to a larger sense of their own material and technological entanglements, they remain limited in their ability to foment sites of resistance against the forces that seek to undercut critical, historical inquiry. Only in acknowledging and historicizing how media technologies remediate, disseminate, and store scholarship in the humanities and its subject matter can we begin to rework these networked technologies in ways that challenge a hegemonic, market-driven notion of what contemporary techne is, or could be.

Notes

- 1 "Public Libraries in London About the End of the Last Century," *The Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1790, 585.
- 2 "The Tenison Library," *The Saturday Review* 295, no. 11, June 22, 1861, 638.
- 3 William Blades, "The Minor Libraries of England," *The Book-Worm* X (October 1866): 158.
- 4 Milton McC. Gatch, "Fragmenta Manuscripta and Varia at Missouri and Cambridge," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 9, no. 5 (1990): 457. Gatch is responsible for identifying these books as Bagford's, and his work on Bagford and other contemporaneous scrapbooks is extensive; see e.g. "John Bagford, Bookseller and Antiquary," *Electronic British Library Journal* (1986); "John Bagford as a Collector and Disseminator of Manuscripts," *The Library* 7, no. 2 (June 1985): 95–114. On Bagford's scrapbooks of bindings, see Cyril Davenport, "Bagford's Notes on Bookbindings," *The Library* TBS-7, no. 1 (1902): 123–30.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 470, N7, 6.
- 6 Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1942]), 83.
- 7 Sharon Reier, "Half a Century Later, Economist's 'Creative Destruction' Theory Is Apt for the Internet Age: Schumpeter: The Prophet of Bust and Boom," *New York Times*, June 20, 2000, www.nytimes.com/2000/06/10/your-money/10iht-mschump.t.html
- 8 Quoted in Reier, "Half a Century Later, Economist's 'Creative Destruction' Theory Is Apt for the Internet Age: Schumpeter: The Prophet of Bust and Boom."
- 9 Harris Collingwood, "The Sink-or-Swim Economy," *New York Times*, June 8, 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/06/08/magazine/the-sink-or-swim-economy.html
- 10 Paul Krugman, "Creative Destruction Yada Yada," *New York Times*, June 16, 2014, <http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/creative-destruction-yada-yada/>
- 11 Grant McCracken, "The Five Stages of Disruption Denial," *Harvard Business Review* (blog post), April 15, 2013, <https://hbr.org/2013/04/disruption-denial/>
- 12 Todd Hixon, "Higher Education Is Now Ground Zero for Disruption," *Forbes* (blog), January 6, 2014, www.forbes.com/sites/toddhixon/2014/01/06/higher-education-is-now-ground-zero-for-disruption/#728790425bd9
- 13 This Start-Up Grant program has recently transitioned to the Digital Humanities Advancement Grant program, partially under pressure from critics of "innovation" as a metric. See Brett Bobley,

- “The SUG Program Is No More; Please Welcome Digital Humanities Advancement Grants,” *Office of Digital Humanities* (blog), posted April 7, 2016, www.neh.gov/divisions/odh/grant-news/the-sug-program-no-more-please-welcome-digital-humanities-advancement-grants
- 14 Richard Grusin, “The Dark Side of Digital Humanities: Dispatches from Two Recent MLA Conventions,” *differences* 25, no. 1 (2014): 87.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 16 David Golumbia, “Death of a Discipline,” *differences* 25, no. 1 (2014): 158.
- 17 Trysh Travis, “The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications,” *Book History* 11 (2008): 282.
- 18 Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially the chapter “Faust and the Pirates: The Cultural Construction of the Printing Revolution.”
- 19 Little is known about this market, since, as Matthew Yeo points out, book historians have focused almost exclusively on the production of new volumes and the monopoly of the Stationers’ Company at the peril of having missed the influence of the many auctioneers, second-hand dealers, importers, and even Haberdashers who worked outside of or alongside Stationers in the trade; Matthew Yeo, *The Acquisition of Books by Chetham’s Library, 1655–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 81ff.
- 20 James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 106ff. On the second-hand trade, see also Ian Mitchell, “‘Old Books – New Bound’? Selling Second-Hand Books in England, c. 1680–1850,” in *Modernity and the Second-hand Trade*, ed. Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 139–57.
- 21 Alison Walker, “The Library of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753): Creating a Catalogue of a Dispersed Library,” paper presented at *World Library and Information Congress*, Milan, Italy, August 23–27, 2009, www.ifla.org/past-wlic/2009/78-walker-en.pdf
- 22 Deirdre Jackson, “Humfrey Wanley and the Harley Collection,” *Electronic British Library Journal* (2011): 1, quoting Nicolas Barker et al., *Treasures of the British Library* (London: British Library, 1988), p. 54.
- 23 Patricia Fumerton, “Remembering by Dismembering: Databases, Archiving, and the Recollection of Seventeenth-Century Broadside Ballads,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 14, no. 2/Special Issue 17 (September 2008), <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/14-2/fumerrem.htm>
- 24 Cyril Davenport, “Bagford’s Notes on Bookbindings,” *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 7 (1904): 123–62.
- 25 British Library, MS Harley 4712.
- 26 William Blades, *The Enemies of Books* (London: Elliot Stock, 1888), 18. On Bagford as a biblioclast, see also Alfred William Pollard, *Last Words on the History of the Title-Page* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1891), 3.
- 27 Gatch, “John Bagford as a Collector,” 108ff.
- 28 British Library MS Sloane 1435, fols 3v-4, quoted in Nickson, “Bagford and Sloane,” 52–3.
- 29 For a history of collecting printed fragments, beginning with Bagford and stretching into the twentieth century, see Arthur Freeman, “*Everyman* and Others, Part I: Some Fragments of Early English Printing, and Their Preservers,” *The Library* 9, no. 3 (2008): 267–305.
- 30 Montague Rhodes James, *Bibliotheca Pepysiana; a Descriptive Catalogue of the Library of Samuel Pepys, Part III* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1923), 115.
- 31 Cyril Ernest Wright, “Humfrey Wanley: Saxonist and Library-Keeper,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* xlvii (1960): 121; see also Eileen A. Joy, “Thomas Smith, Humfrey Wanley, and the ‘Little-Known Country’ of the Cotton Library,” *Electronic British Library Journal* (2005), Article 1.
- 32 Brian W. Hill, *Robert Harley, Speaker, Secretary of State, and Premier Minister* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 226.
- 33 Quoted on Jackson, “Humfrey Wanley and the Harley Collection,” 7.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 John Bagford and Humfrey Wanley, “An Essay on the Invention of Printing, by Mr. John Bagford; with an Account of His Collections for the Same, by Mr. Humfrey Wanley, F. R. S. Communicated in Two Letters to Dr. Hans Sloane, R. S. Secr.,” *Philosophical Transactions* 25 (1706–1707): 2397–410. On the promotion of Bagford’s printing history and its subscribers, see also Gatch, “John Bagford as a Collector,” 97ff; on the relationship between Bagford and Sloane, see Margaret Nickson, “Bagford and Sloane,” *Electronic British Library Journal* 9, no. 1 (1986): 51–5.
- 36 To the great confusion of all future researchers, the British Library has at several points split up and reorganized its large collection Bagfordiana, extracting printed fragments for the Department of Printed Books in 1890, for instance. See Gatch, “John Bagford as a Collector,” 96n4; see also Colin

- G. C. Tite, "Manuscripts Supplied to Robert Harley by John Bagford: Further Information from BL, Harl. MS. 5998," *Electronic British Library Journal* (2012), Article 10. As Gatch notes, see also Cyril Ernest Wright, *Fontes Harleiani: A Study of the Sources of the Harleian Collection of Manuscripts* (London: British Museum, 1972): 478–9, for the material removed from Harley and Sloane manuscripts at the British Library.
- 37 Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 84.

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