Three Phases of the Digital in SF / Three Faces of SF in DH

Lisa Swanson | University of Utah
DHU3 | February 24, 2018
“I can distinguish control modules,” the computer said, “but I can't tell which—” It paused as its eye roved about on the fone screen. “I distinguish a roll of punched tape mounted above your heart mechanism. Do you see it?”

“Dinner with Aileen again...A sweet girl, always has something to say, not like those women in the scuttle who let their handbag computers carry all the conversation. Today at the Lost and Found I saw three of the things quietly chatting in a corner, until they got into an argument.”

“With his hands in the pockets of his jacket, he stared through the glass at a flat lozenge of vat grown flesh that lay on a carved pedestal of imitation jade. The color of its skin reminded him of Zone’s whores; it was tattooed with a luminous digital display wired to a subcutaneous chip.”

“The Stuff of Science Fiction: An Experiment in Literary History”

by Stefania Forlini, Uta Hinrichs, and Bridget Moynihan

DHQ 2016.10.1
The authors mine the “Bob Gibson anthologies of speculative fiction — unique, hand-crafted and fan-curated anthologies of SF’s ‘great unread’ [in order to] contribute to scholarly assessments of the evolution of SF, and to develop information visualizations that enable researchers, students, fans, and the general public to explore the collection from different perspectives, promoting fluid movement between close and distant reading.”

—Forlini, Hindricks, and Moynihan
The Corpus

Science Fiction Studies
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The Process
1. Conversion to txt
2. Concatenation
3. NLTK
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My Collaborator
Maria Alberto
Doctoral Student in English at the U of U
The Process
1. Conversion to txt
2. Concatenation
3. NLTK
$ cd desktop/1970s
$ cat * > seventies.txt
$ cd ../1980s
$ cat * > eighties.txt
The Process
1. Conversion to txt
2. Concatenation
3. NLTK
$ python

>>> import nltk
>>> from nltk.book import *

>>> a = open("textfile.txt", "rU")
>>> text = a.read()
>>> text1 = text.split()
>>> nameoftextfile = nltk.Text(text1)

>>> import sys
>>> reload(sys)
>>> sys.setdefaultencoding('utf-8')
Findings
>>> seventies.concordance("digital")
No matches
1970s
Digital=0
Computer=58

>>> seventies.concordance("computer")
Displaying 25 of 58 matches:

ructs of modern SF (e.g., HAL, the computer in 2001) may be equated with human time machine, the first electronic computer functioning within a human head, t
ranny to this machine. The Central Computer of Diaspar is much less totalitarian
“Well-Doer” in Zamiatin’s We. The computer never obstructs Alvin; when he lea
r’s machine stops, but the Central Computer of Diaspar seems truly eternal. So
lizes transcendence too. 9Hal, the computer for the Jupiter probe in 2001’, mi
uld have, nor does the intelligent computer though he is similar, say, to the leness. This trick would require a computer at least as good and probably some
s of primitives, but in those of a computer scientist, in "Izzard and the Memb
s as "neutral entiti es." Whether computers are a pre.requi site of a succes
In the 1980s, things start to change:
Digital=5
Computer=86
In the 1990s:
Digital=61
Computer=315
In the 2000s:
Digital=287
Computer=338
In the 2010s:
Digital=295
Computer=582
Next steps:

1. searches for bodies, virtual, material, cybernetics, information theory

2. searches for authors: Vinge, Gibson, Cadigan, etc.

3. searches for all of the above in other sf journals: *Extrapolation, Foundation*

4. searches for all of the above in DHQ, Wired, etc.
Thank you!

Lisa Swanstrom

swanstro@gmail.com

http://swanstream.org