

*Working the Digital Humanities: Uncovering Shadows between the Dark and the Light*

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Abstract

Situating digital humanities within larger changes to university funding and structures, Chun and Rhody complicate rhetoric surrounding “the digital” as the bright future of the humanities and higher education. Chun confronts a general euphoria surrounding technology and education by invoking Lauren Berlant’s term cruel optimism and challenges assertions that technical savvy yields more jobs for undergraduates and that MOOCs reduce the cost of higher education. Chun insists that if the humanities are at risk, it is because they have capitulated to a bureaucratic technocratic logic, and if the academy is at risk, it is because it has fueled false hopes that college degrees guarantee jobs and continues to sink students into debt. Rhody extends Chun’s assertion, pointing to ways in which digital humanities are often touted as a “bright hope” for all of the humanities—as a source of limitless grants and soft money, as a guarantee of employment, and as a site of uncomplicated acceptance of technological determinism. Revisiting the evolution of “bright” and “dark” imagery as it relates to digital humanities, Rhody revisits the terms’ uses just following the 2009 MLA Convention, pointing to how “bright” imagery refers to digital humanities not as a “solution,” but as a rallying point for hybrid scholars to address shared interests. Chun and Rhody demonstrate how the “dark side” of “the digital” is the “bright hope” that sustains the academy in the short term, as it reifies the existing, systemic dysfunction that threatens higher education as well as the humanities and its students.