



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Affordances and limitations of algorithmic criticism

Verhaar, P.A.F.

Citation

Verhaar, P. A. F. (2016, September 27). *Affordances and limitations of algorithmic criticism*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/43241>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/43241>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/43241> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Verhaar, Peter

Title: Affordances and limitations of algorithmic criticism

Issue Date: 2016-09-27

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been a very enjoyable and a deeply rewarding experience. On the whole, and despite some occasional difficulties, it felt like a great privilege to be able to develop my knowledge about a topic which fascinates me profoundly. Pursuing a PhD degree unavoidably implies many hours of solitary work, which, in my case, were mostly spent reading, writing or programming. To a great extent, the motivation and the enthusiasm that I felt during all (or most) of these activities were born out of the gratifying and humbling feeling of being supported by many different people who advised me, encouraged me or otherwise inspired me.

First and foremost, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my promotor Adriaan van der Weel. When I was just a regular humanities student, roughly around the turn of the millennium, he first introduced me to the miraculous world of digital texts. His lectures sparked a fascination which has stayed with me ever since. He has been a very inspiring, a very patient and a very conscientious supervisor, who motivated me in many different ways to get the most out of myself. Our many discussions about the topics of this thesis have strongly sharpened my critical thinking, and have contributed enormously to my overall academic development.

I want to extend my gratitude to Paul Hoftijzer, Fleur Praal and Erik Kwakkel, my other colleagues at the MA Book and Digital Media Studies, for their support and for their continuous interest in my dissertation. When it became clear, at the beginning of 2014, that our research institution LUCAS had made available a number of grants for external PhD candidates, Paul made sure that some of this funding could be used to free me from my teaching duties in the fall of 2014. During this period, I could work on my dissertation in a much more focused manner, and my research made an enormous progress because of this. In a similar fashion, Fleur was always willing to take over some lecturing duties or correction work from me whenever the work on my dissertation was hectic. Preparing classes and teaching classes together with Fleur has always been a great pleasure, and the many debates that we have had, about digital scholarship or about the changing ways of reading, were often useful directly for the argumentation that I was constructing in my thesis.

I am thankful also to my second promotor, Karina van Dalen-Oskam. After we had discovered that the revised PhD regulations of Leiden University contained rules which stipulated that all PhD students must be assigned two *promotores*, she gladly accepted the invitation to take on this responsibility. The fact that she had not been involved in some of the earliest stages of my promotion can perhaps be considered a disadvantage, but this was clearly balanced out by the simultaneous benefit that she could evaluate the thesis from an entirely fresh perspective. The

meticulous and insightful feedback that I received from her greatly helped me to improve the contents and the structure of this dissertation.

I am grateful to Korrie Korevaart, Viola Stoops, Thony Visser and Geert Warner at the LUCAS institute for facilitating my research and for assisting me with all kinds of practical matters on numerous occasions.

I have formally written this thesis as an external PhD candidate, which meant that I mainly had to carry out the research in my spare time, next to my work as a university teacher and as a project manager at Leiden University Libraries. The combination of these activities was occasionally rather overwhelming, and at times I certainly wished, to quote MacNeice, that I could make time elastic. These practical challenges were forcibly attenuated, however, by the fact there were many interesting and relevant interconnections between my daytime job and the work on my dissertation. While this is perhaps most obvious for my work for Book and Digital Media Studies, there were also many fruitful opportunities for cross-fertilisation between my research and my work for the university library. The projects that I have been involved in enabled me to develop my knowledge about a wide range of topics which are connected to my research, including digital scholarship, open access publishing, text mining, data mining and research data management. I feel grateful to all the close colleagues I have had to pleasure to work with, and in particular to Fieke Schoots, Isabel Brouwer, Saskia van Bergen, Cynthia van der Brugge, Lucas van Schaik, Birte Kristiansen, Kurt De Belder, Kees Konings and Bas Vat. Specifically, I want to thank Laurents Sesink, who has been my manager during the last two years. He stimulated me to reflect critically on some of the practical challenges surrounding digital scholarship, and he also alerted me to many new and exciting developments. Importantly, he understood that the final stages of my research project were very time-consuming, and he generously allowed me to work on my thesis occasionally, at moments when I should actually be doing work for the library.

I am sincerely thankful to my fantastic brothers Erik and Marcel, not only for their willingness to act as *paranimfen* during my PhD defense, but also because of their unwavering interest in my thesis, and because of their valuable comments on preliminary drafts of this thesis. I also wish to express my deep gratitude to my parents, Riet and Frans. They have always encouraged me to pursue a PhD degree and have been warmly supportive ever since I started this research project. I want to thank them both for the countless times they took care of my children, and I specifically want to thank my mother for letting me stay in her woodside home during some of her holidays. Such days, on which I could concentrate on my thesis in isolation and without any distractions, were all highly productive, next to being very pleasant.

I dedicate this dissertation to Mariëlle, Eline and Lars. Mariëlle has supported me, listened to me and believed in me throughout the entire writing process, and I am deeply indebted to her for making it possible for me to work on my dissertation, next to our hectic family life. She is a great mother to our two beautiful children,

who were both born while I was working on this dissertation. Looking back, both at becoming a father and at writing a dissertation, it is clear to me that there are strong similarities between these two activities. As is the case for fatherhood, I now realise that I did not have a realistic image of what it would be like to pursue a PhD degree before I actually began this process. Both endeavours have dominated my personal life in the last five years, and they often made the very notion of having some spare time to myself seem like a distant memory from the past. Like writing a PhD, raising children demands patience, dedication, forbearance and perseverance, but ultimately, the sense of accomplishment, the elementary happiness and the immense feeling of pride that can result from watching the stages of development in both of these areas is indescribable and immeasurable.

Curriculum Vitae

Peter Verhaar (1976) studied *English Language and Literature* at Leiden University. During his studies, he spent one year abroad, at University College Dublin in Ireland. He graduated cum laude in 2002, with a master's thesis about the plays of the Northern-Irish dramatist Brian Friel. After his graduation, he briefly worked at the Peace Palace Library in The Hague, and, from 2003 to 2005, he was employed by IDC Publishers in Leiden as a metadata specialist. During this same period, he worked as teacher of Academic Writing in English at the University of Amsterdam, and he also studied computer science as a part-time student at the Open University. In 2005, he began to work as a project manager at Leiden University Libraries. Initially, his focus was mostly on providing digital access to the library's extensive special collections. After 2008, his focus shifted to projects in the fields of research support and digital scholarship. Since 2004, he has also worked as a university lecturer at the MA programme Book and Digital Media Studies at Leiden University. He has taught several courses about text encoding, database theory, the digital humanities and media theory, among many other topics. In the fall of 2010, he began to work on a dissertation as an external PhD candidate, at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society.