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Are tools all we need? Digital Humanities in the time of its institutionalisation

Testo & Senso
n. 12, 2011
www.testoesenso.it

1. Introduction

If I were to define the «Digital Humanities moment»[1] that we seem to have been experiencing in recent years, I would highlight three key points: its quantitative growth, its institutionalisation and its definition as a discipline.

1. The quantitative expansion of the field, in terms of contributing scholars, centres, projects and funding has been visualised by Melissa Terras in an impressive infographic;[2]

2. By 'institutionalisation' I mean the recent multiplication of centres, departments, teaching programmes, networks, associations, chairs, grants, fellowships, courses and 'alternative-academic' career paths in the field. And, of course, the funding policies that lie behind all this;

3. The debate within the Digital Humanities community on its definition as a community of practice or a discipline in its own respect is almost as old as Digital Humanities itself. However, as Matthew Gold writes: «As the digital humanities has received increasing attention and newfound cachet, its discourse has grown introspective and self-reflexive».[3]

In the first part of this article (*2. Institutional models*) I shall pinpoint some models of institutionalisation that are emerging in the international scenario.[4] Against this background, I shall then discuss (*3. Tools*) some concepts central to Digital Humanities' self-definition, such as those of practice, 'building', centre, project, product and tools, particularly questioning the opinion that the creation of friendly digital tools is the key issue in the future of the field.[5]

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1 Cfr. Gold 2012.

2 Cfr. Terras 2011. A tangible phenomenon that has struck the Humanities community is the steep increase in the number of Digital Humanities sessions in annual Modern Language Association conferences since 2009: see Kirschenbaum 2010, pp. 58-59 and Mandell 2012.

3 Cfr. Gold 2012, p. x.

4 It is not the goal of this paper – nor would it be possible here – to provide a complete directory of centres, networks and initiatives. For centres, the most useful directories are the CenterNet portal; the survey The Academic Capacity of the Digital Humanities in Canada (limited to that nation) and Zorich 2008 (for the USA). The data in Terras 2011 may be useful for a general overview. For associations, networks and portals see the Mind Map of the Digital Humanities. 'Social' mapping is also precious: see, for example, the Zotero collection Centers, Organizations, Institutions in the Digital Humanities group library, the Delicious link list Digital Humanities centers by user gwijthoff, or Diigo. My selection in paragraph *2. Institutional models* will solely be driven by the need to collect a diverse pool of examples functional to the discussion in paragraph *3. Tools*. All links in this article were retrived on 1 October 2012.

5 I shall immediately pay my debt of gratitude for the general ideas developed in paragraph *3. Tools* and elsewhere to the 'Roman school' of Digital Humanities, and in particular to Tito Orlandi, Raul Mordenti, Dino Buzzetti, Domenico Fiormonte and Fabio Ciotti. It is through their writings that I entered Digital Humanities some years ago,

2. Institutional models

2.1 The research centre

One institutional model with a respectable tradition in the field consists of the creation of a centre with a large and stable staff of resident digital humanists.[6] I shall describe only one example here: the King's College Department for Digital Humanities (DDH), one of the forerunners in the shaping of this model.[7]

At its core is a combination of teaching and research, with the latter based on product-oriented projects. Its financial sustainability is based on the success of its teaching programmes and – to a larger extent – on the attraction of research grants for specific projects, often realised in partnership with external public and private cultural institutions. The DDH's website states that the department «has generated over £17 million in research grants over the past 7 years». It lists 18 ongoing and 84 completed projects.[8]

The evolution of the DDH from 'centre' to 'department' in 2009 is not devoid of significance. Its strength has always been its ability to bring together digital humanists from different 'traditional' disciplinary backgrounds, rather than simply providing technical support to humanists in other departments. Both this goal and the fusion of research and teaching are best achieved by an independent research institution such as a department.

This stable and numerous body of digital humanists[9] collaborating on a daily basis in the same workspace has built, over the years, a shared patrimony of expertise in the actual deployment of technology, a key factor in the 'building' aspect of Digital Humanities.[10]

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and in the last few months – thanks to my post-doctoral bourse at the Centro Linceo Interdisciplinare 'B. Segre' of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome – I had the pleasure of their openness to discussion and exchange. I am also grateful to James Pearson-Jadwat for his precious advice, going well beyond a mere linguistic revision of my English. Of course, all controversial opinions and possible mistakes in this article are exclusively mine.

6 Cfr. Svensson 2009, paragraph 26.

7 Formerly the Centre for Computing in the Humanities (CCH).

8 To name just a few examples of the DDH's various areas of interest, partners and funders, the Art of Making in Antiquity project is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and digitises slides of ancient Roman stone carvings; Breaking of Britain is an «AHRC funded [...] database» of «documents relating to Scotland 1286-1314»; while the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland is supported by a diverse pool of funders, such as «The British Academy, The Friends of the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland [...] and private benefactors».

9 As of 1 October 2012, the DDH consists of no less than 20 academic staff, 23 research staff, 2 affiliated staff, 8 visiting research staff, 2 emeritus staff, 6 professional services staff and 14 research students.

10 Cfr. Ramsay 2011b and Ramsay 2011c.

2.2 The 'hub' model

A different model involves a lightweight 'hub' within a university, the staff of which are less numerous and have a stronger technological profile. It provides support to Humanities scholars from other departments, coordinates interdisciplinary collaboration, and secures visibility and long-term sustainability for the products of research (typically websites).[11]

An example of this model is the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH) at the University of Virginia, with a staff consisting of only 8 people and a dog, all (except the latter) with Information Technology degrees. Humanists throughout the university – and beyond – can become 'fellows' of the Institute for one or two years. During this time they receive technological support in creating a product (typically a digital edition or archive). After the initial phase of a project, IATH continues to help ensure the project's long-term development and sustainability, but with a lesser degree of engagement.

2.3 Libraries and individual major projects

While most institutions worldwide follow one of these two models or some combination thereof (with the 'hub' being prevalent), other entities have been successfully growing around libraries and individual projects.

The Scholars' Lab at the University of Virginia Library, just to name one example, features a rich research agenda with 17 ongoing projects, a teaching program, Praxis, and a Graduate Fellowship in Digital Humanities.

In other cases, a 'centre' does not host a vast number of time-limited projects: on the contrary, a single major project sits at the core of the institutional organisation of research. One could mention the Perseus and Canterbury Tales projects, both early pioneers (since 1985 and 1989-1990) and still at the cutting edge in their respective areas (textual *corpora* and scholarly digital editions).

The institution hosting the Perseus Project, Tufts University, is only one of many large funding bodies supporting it, while a specialised publishing company, Scholarly Digital Editions (SDE) has emerged from and grown around the Canterbury Tales Project.

11 Compare Svensson 2009, paragraphs 27-28, with a slightly different categorisation. For a historical perspective see also Flanders & Unsworth2002.

2.4 Internationalisation and networks

The Anglo-American Digital Humanities community, mostly based in the UK, the USA and Canada, has largely shaped both the discipline and its international institutions.[12]

As is the case with other areas of research and technology, it seems that the regions of the world with the most political and economic power are shaping one of the 'next' phases of Humanities studies. The foreseeable addition of the two other 'strong' global regions (Europe and the Far East) to the original Anglo-American core will not change the essence of this scenario.

As Digital Humanities research grows in other countries, the regional communities' call for a greater role follows different paths.

A grassroots approach lies behind the Digital Humanities Manifesto and the survey Who are you, digital humanists? Both initiatives are open to all cultures, but are mostly successful in France, Italy and other European countries. More specifically centred on Francophone countries is the Carte des digital humanities francophones.

In addition, digital humanists of different nations are creating associations and networks on a national and regional basis with a varied agenda:

- To promote Digital Humanities in their own country's research policy;
- To foster national collaboration and coordination;
- To network more efficiently with well-established international research communities and institutions.

The three oldest and most important international associations, ALLC (Europe/UK), ACH (USA) and CSDH/SCHN (formerly SDH/SEMI, Canada), now «constituent organisations» of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), have both a disciplinary and a regional character.

A number of online initiatives aim to constitute a reference point in the field by creating and supporting a worldwide virtual community of scholars, sharing information and coordinating initiatives. As opposed to the aforementioned associations, these portals have a global scope, but are exclusively written in English and mostly based in the USA or the UK.[13]

The three ADHO constituent organisations' regional model of aggregation is mirrored by others like the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH), which joined ADHO in December 2011. The Red de Humanidades Digitales de México (2011), though based in that country, has all Spanish-speaking countries as its declared scope and the development of Digital Humanities in Latin America as its central vision.

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12 Cfr. Fiormonte 2012.

13 Among so many others, one could mention arts-humanities.net; DHCommons; Project Bamboo; Digital Humanities Now; Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC); THATCamp: The Humanities and Technology Camp. For a comprehensive list, see Spiro 2011.

Also very recent is the proliferation of national associations, spanning from the Japanese Association for Digital Humanities (JADH) to the Italian Associazione per l'Informatica Umanistica e la Cultura Digitale (AIUCD), both founded in 2011.

The European Community is playing a relevant role by sponsoring institutional collaboration networks such as DARIAH-EU, CLARIN, ESF/NeDiMAH and more specific initiatives like Interedition (on digital editions) or Europeana (a digital archive for «Europe's cultural collections»).

A very interesting case to discuss is that of Germany, which is rapidly becoming one of the leading countries in Digital Humanities. Germany's successful strategy includes many factors:

- National networks well-connected with the national, European and international frameworks, like DARIAH-DE, the Digital Humanities Deutschland (DHD) association and TextGrid;[14]

- Research centres inheriting decades-long, methodologically grounded local traditions of study, like the Cologne Center for eHumanities (CCeH) or the Zentrum für digitale Edition Würzburg (ZDE);[15]

- No less than 26 university-level teaching programmes, laying the basis for the long-term development of the discipline by new generations of scholars.[16]

3. Tools

3.1 «Less yack, more hack»

The mother of all controversies in the field is the theory *vs.* practice tension provocatively recalled by the motto of THATCamp unconferences, which constitutes the title

14 DARIAH-DE is the national branch of DARIAH-EU. DHD was founded in July 2012 as a branch of the European ALLC and is therefore under the global umbrella of ADHO. TextGrid, which focuses on digital textual studies, is supported by the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung and by DARIAH-DE. The idea behind TextGrid recalls that of Canada's TAPoR, a text-oriented grid connecting researchers from six Canadian universities.

15 The CCeH is led by Manfred Thaller. Cologne also hosts the connected Institut für Dokumentologie und Editorik. One of the leading figures of Würzburg's ZDE is Fotis Jannidis.

16 There are 26 programmes listed in Thaller & Sahle 2011, but their number is growing: see the announcement of a new curriculum planned by Technischen Universität Chemnitz.

of this section: is Digital Humanities less about yack (endless methodological and theoretical discussions) and more about hack (hands-on applications of technology)?[17]

I do not mean to indulge in the 'theory *vs.* practice' dilemma in general terms. The answer, at this level of abstraction, would obviously be that both aspects should be adequately present in the activity of researchers who create formal models of Humanities concepts and research questions (a highly abstract activity) and then, based on this modelling, establish digital procedures (and therefore algorithms, and then code) implementing those models.[18]

Even Stephen Ramsay, immediately after affirming: «Personally, I think Digital Humanities is about building things. [...] If you are not making anything, you are not [...] a digital humanist», admits that «the discipline includes and should include people who theorize about building, people who design so that others might build, and those who supervise building».[19] In a brilliant response to the ensuing discussion, Alan Liu uses the metaphor of engineering: in the 'building' process, the digital humanist is the engineer who «performs the calculations and creates the drawings», not necessarily the contractor who actually puts one brick on another (i. e. writes the code).

This having been said, I believe that it will be more productive here to focus on a more specific question: what exactly does a digital humanist 'build'? 'Tools!' would be the answer of many people. So, the question becomes: what is a 'tool'? Are tools all that we need to release the potential of Digital Humanities?

3.2 Tools and research

In his blog post Why DH has no future, Ted Underwood states: «humanists can be interested in digital technology a) as a way to transform scholarly communication, b) as an object of study, or c) as a means of analysis» – three different research agendas that today tend to be grouped into the general label of 'Digital Humanities'.[20] My next considerations here will regard branch 'c' only.

Underwood mentions the opinion that Digital Humanities will eventually vanish as all Humanities become 'digital'.[21] He rightly suggests that this, sooner or later, is going to happen for branch 'a' above (the transformation of scholarly communication). Branch 'c', writes Underwood, will have a more complex destiny: «I'm confident that we'll build a few

17 The theme of 'theory', just to name an example, occupied the whole 'Conversations' section in the first issue (2011, Vol. 1, No. 1) of the newly-born community-sourced Journal of Digital Humanities. One of the most lucid recent outlines of the disciplinary issues in Digital Humanities is Thaller 2012.

18 Cfr. Unsworth 2002 and Orlandi 2010.

19 Cfr. Ramsay 2011a.

20 Cfr. Underwood 2012. He recalls Matthew Kirschenbaum's definition of 'Digital Humanities' as a tactical term coined by a coalition of academic forces with overlapping cultural agendas: cfr. Kirschenbaum 2012.

21 Also see Kirschenbaum 2012, p. 416. But the argument (curiously found most often in the essays of its confutants) appears and is confuted already in McCarty 1999, paragraph VII.

tools that get widely adopted by humanists», while «the development of new analytical strategies» will remain marginal in the big picture of humanistic research and «may well get absorbed by informatics [...] [o]r become a permanent trade mission to informatics».

This is where I would like to start from, as I find the distinction between «tools» and «new analytical strategies» a useful way to set out the question.

3.3 What is a tool, really?

My first point is that the opinion that all Humanities are destined to one day become Digital Humanities is tightly connected with a specific concept of a 'tool', and has some important implications that it might be useful to point out. It implies that Digital Humanities is not a discipline: it is simply Humanities studied with digital tools. The historical role of today's Digital Humanities is therefore to build those tools for tomorrow's pan-digital humanists – and then, having carried out its mission, die heroically. These tools should be made so 'friendly' that tomorrow, for instance, all scholarly textual editors will be able to produce their editions using such tools without needing any digital awareness – just as people like me drive cars without being motor mechanics, and as most people (not me, though) write reports with Microsoft Word without being software developers.

An important digression: apart from Digital Humanities research proper, the social consequences of the general 'alienation' of people from the 'source code' of their digital life are only destined to increase as larger portions of our lives become mediated by digital technologies. This is the real central issue of the Open Source movement, which I fully support. What I shall discuss below can be seen as a narrow aspect – regarding specialist research – of the general issue.

In my opinion, the aforementioned somewhat 'instrumental' conception of Digital Humanities is the origin of the mantra «All we need are tools»: if not all scholarly editions are digital, if not all excavations use GIS, it is because digital humanists have not yet built the Microsoft Word of digital scholarly editions or the Google Maps of archaeological GIS.[22]

My second point is that not every procedure is suitable for implementation as a friendly 'tool', but only those that have become somehow 'standard'.

A user need not know a tool's internal functioning to use it. Actually, he or she should not bother to find out: this is part of the reason why tools are built. A user does not build, mould or tweak their tools.

A potter uses a number of tools, possibly even including a clay-producing machine, whose input, procedure and output are so standard that the whole process can be implemented

22 One might usefully compare the exposition of this opinion in Robinson 2005, paragraphs 13-17 and its confutation in Orlandi 2010, 88-87.

by a mechanical tool operable by anyone.

To a potter, however, clay does not represent a 'tool'. It is not that there is no way to build a friendly tool to transform clay into pottery (industrial serial production exists), but we think of a potter as someone who knows enough about clay to mould the former into whatever he needs to. As this is starting to sound too lyrical for what I actually mean, I shall add that the same applies to orthotic manufacture, as long as it requires a practitioner to mould thermoplastics into a specific orthosis for a specific person's ankle.

In my metaphor, Informatics is the digital humanist's clay.[23]

I agree with Ted Underwood that some procedures will become so standard that they will be implemented as friendly tools, «get widely adopted by humanists» and therefore fall out of Digital Humanities research proper. This is what is already happening in (Digital) Papyrology, for instance.[24]

At the opposite end, there will always be non-computable humanistic research questions that will also fall outside the reach of Digital Humanities.

But I do believe, and this is my third and last point, that there will always be a large and ever moving zone in between, where digital humanists will have to mould the clay of formalised modelling and algorithms to tackle specific research questions. This I see as the *proprium* of Digital Humanities research.

Papyrology is a very interesting case.

3.4 (Digital) Papyrology

XML/TEI, EpiDoc, SoSOL and Papyri.info are performing the miracle of turning virtually all papyrologists into digital papyrologists (which, by the way, is why papyrologists are my heroes these days). However, this only holds true for a specific set of the discipline's scholarly tasks: the encoding of papyri in XML/TEI, their online publication, their

23 Contrast McCarty 1998: «To the craftsman a tool is only a mere object when it is in the hands of a novice or an incompetent; mastery of it means that the tool becomes a mental prosthesis, an agent of perception and instrument of thought». Though McCarty is using a positive notion of 'tool', nothing is more distant from the 'user' mentality than the craftman's deep, symbiotic understanding of their tool, which is in fact close to my 'potter' metaphor. I believe that there is no way that Digital Humanities can be really 'transformative' if not through this 'mastery'.

24 These tools are destined to become so successful that they will be used as 'black boxes', whose computational nature will become invisible – and indifferent – to their users. In this, they will follow the fate of so much digital technology ubiquitously 'embedded' in our cars and televisions. Underwood thinks that this will eventually happen with topic modeling, but it is already happening for some procedures. Other than the example of Papyrology, which I will go back to shortly, nearly all classicists I know use string matching on vast textual *corpora* through the very friendly TLG online or Diogenes interfaces. Thanks to Perseus and Diogenes they also use morphological analysis, often without having a clue – nor caring – about what happens in the engine of the car they are driving.

collaborative editing, and the managing of their bibliography. This set of digital procedures is amazingly complex and truly remarkable, yet we should bear in mind that it does not coincide with the whole of Papyrology as a discipline.

At the opposite end of the range of papyrological research there are skills that require human intuition, like criticising the content of a papyrus against the background of ancient societies in the conceptual framework of Reception Studies – most probably a non-computable activity.

In the middle, however, between what is already so well computed as to make computation disappear and what is non-computable, there is an area that the expansion of Digital Humanities can conquer. For Papyrology, this frontier today runs through OCR, complex pattern recognition, semi-automatic *lacunae* integration and authorship attribution for fragments.[25]

3.5 Queer texts, or why Digital Humanities might, after all, still have a future

The frontier, of course, will always be advancing, but I do not believe that this middle area – which is what I consider Digital Humanities research to be – will disappear. I do not think there will be a point when the area covered by friendly tools will coincide with all computable humanistic research questions, because, due to the nature of cultural artifacts, the procedures involved differ too much from case to case to allow for their general standardisation or the construction of a complete set of standard tools.

I shall make one example only, taken from my own main research interest: scholarly digital editions, one of the very first applications of computing in the Humanities.

A question often asked is: are existing tools friendly enough to be generally adopted by the scholarly editorial community? I propose to reverse the question: have standard procedures been universally defined, so that friendly tools may implement them?

I think that the question should be broken down and asked according to different types of editions:

- For multi-testimonial 'critical' editions of texts whose testimonies do not carry the complexity of medieval manuscripts, like a modern or contemporary published novel, XML/TEI-based methods for markup, processing and presentation have been defined – and are actually in deployment.[26] In this area the times might be mature for building friendlier

25 Among the many who are moulding the clay to create the right golem for these tasks, one could mention Oxford's Ancient Lives Project.

26 One of the main tasks of the new online version of the journal Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing is to offer a venue «for rigorously edited digital small-scale editions». A multi-testimonial edition published in the journal's first issue is Raabe & Harrison 2012. Yet, it might be noted that TEI is currently

heirs to Oxygen, The Versioning Machine, Juxta or CollateX (or a friendlier combination thereof);

- In addition, editions of single documents like manuscripts, epigraphs and papyri seem to sail smoothly through standardisation. For papyri, as I said above, we are in fact starting to see the first general-use tools. However, the text *vs.* document relationship is currently one of the main focuses of TEI work,[27] and things become more complicated when manuscript collation or genetic editions are involved;

- For editions based on medieval manuscript collation, the precious work in progress of the Canterbury Tales Project shows that both the encoding of manuscripts (between 'document'- and 'text'-layer) and their collation (at graphemic and linguistic level) still involve much software clay-moulding and, behind that, much methodological work;

- Genetic editions too are, to date, a very lively building site. We already have a number of such editions,[28] and even tools like The Versioning Machine. However, the TEI Workgroup on Genetic Editions is now performing a revolution in the TEI modelling of the text/document relationship. Future tools will have to be built taking into account this new framework, but if one thinks of the immensely diverse nature of textual documents, it is hard to imagine a standard procedure – and therefore a general-use friendly tool – for such editions.

Certainly, some of these lines of experimentation will lead to community-wide standard procedural definitions. However, I believe that the diversity of texts, documents and textual traditions (mono- or pluri-testimonial) will always confront some researchers with texts that will not be manageable by the defined standard procedures (and tools).

The tradition of Cicero's Catiline Orations and of Homeric poems includes both manuscripts and papyri.[29] Various collections of *excerpta* and anthologies include fragments of texts in a version (historically determined and culturally significant) different from the 'vulgate' of those texts.[30] Medieval manuscripts have *scholia* that on the one hand may be seen as a corpus of texts in their own respect (and as such have been published in print editions), but on the other hand 'live' in the document/codex where they are found.[31]

For the most common textual traditions, standard procedures and hence 'black box' tools will probably come to exist. But editing 'queer' textual traditions like the one I exemplified above will require digital philologists able to mould the informatic clay, that is to build (or rather adapt) their digital methods (a term that I prefer over 'tools'). If this is the

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redesigning the much-criticised module 12 Critical Apparatus: see TEI Wiki's page Critical Apparatus and Burghart 2012.

27 See the Manuscripts Special Interest Group of the TEI.

28 See the Digital Variants portal, Pierazzo & André 2012; Clement & Divay 2012.

29 An important project on Homer's very complex textual tradition is Homer Multitext.

30 On the general questions regarding digital editions of fragmentary texts, see the publications by Monica Berti, Matteo Romanello, Alison Babeu, Gregory Crane and the portal Fragmentary Texts, curated by Monica Berti.

31 I proposed a digital model for *scholia* and other forms of commentaries in Monella 2008.

space of Digital Philology research, it is not going to disappear.[32]

Some of those who create or tweak digital methods for their own research questions will also be so generous as to standardise procedures and create friendly tools for digitally unaware users.[33] But eventually, as humanists at large become more and more generally involved in the 'black box' use of digital tools, it will become apparent that Digital Humanities as a discipline is not mainly about friendly tools, but about moulding thermoplastics to adapt to peculiar ankles.

3.6 Digital Humanities centres between 'instrumentalism' and 'project fever'

These issues of disciplinary definition – and especially the 'instrumental' conception of the field – are very relevant to the varied process of institutionalisation discussed in paragraph 2 above.

The 'hub' model discussed in paragraph 2.2 has the potential to creating interdisciplinary communication between humanists and computer scientists.[34] Its success, however, relies on the quality of these cultural encounters. A merely instrumental conception of Digital Humanities may lead humanists to see the 'hub' as a centre of services required to provide them with 'black box' tools that they will simply use, without really engaging in the complex nature of the computational procedures involved.[35] This danger will only increase if

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32 This is a point where I disagree with Ted Underwood, who sees this central core of the discipline eventually being absorbed by Computer Science. Borrowing Alan Liu's engineering metaphor, I think that Digital Humanities is to Computer Science what Structural Engineering is to Mathematics. Structural engineers master numbers, but are in the business of buildings. Someone without a deep acquaintance with buildings, however good a mathematician he or she may be, cannot design them. So I think that the *differentia specifica* of Digital Humanities will not dissolve into Computer Science for the same reason that Structural Engineering does not dissolve into Mathematics. McCarty 1999, paragraph VII uses a similar metaphor: Computer Science «is to humanities computing as mathematics is to physics». A fundamental difference between the two images, of course, is that Physics is not about building, but about understanding.

33 Which is to say that initiatives like Bamboo DiRT, a directory of already developed tools, are certainly laudable. The list «I need a digital research tool to...» on DiRT's home page is particularly interesting, as it spans from very 'general' standard tasks such as Use an iPad or Take notes/annotate resources to expert procedures such as Analyze texts, the listed resources of which mostly require the application of specific Digital Humanities skills to actual research.

34 A famous example is the Rossetti Archive edited by Jerome McGann, one of the first two 'resident fellows' at IATH.

35 For a criticism of «instrumentalism» in the name of «Cultural Criticism», see Liu 2012, particularly p. 498, and Fiormonte 2012, pp. 61-62. Kirschenbaum 2012, pp. 418-419 reminds us that the awareness of the need for Digital Humanities to emancipate itself from an instrumental definition has already appeared in the materials of the IATH seminar Is Humanities Computing an Academic Discipline?, held at IATH in 1999. On that occasion, Willard McCarty wrote: «Consider in particular two institutional frameworks within which humanities computing has been done: the computing centre, which is as a rule predicated on its own relegation to providing subservient technical services and the conventional academic department [*scil.* of another discipline], whose scope of vision is necessarily constrained to its own set of interests. From either standpoint, humanities computing is very difficult to think about clearly» (McCarty 1999, paragraph II). In a very recent post, Liu & Thomas III 2012 warns that «[w]e

academic research policies require that any humanistic project has a 'digital side' to it to be funded.[36]

Certainly, the 'research centre' model discussed in paragraph 2.1 can contribute to avoiding Digital Humanities becoming an excuse for humanists to do the usual things the usual way, just with a new, glossy digital 'tool' – and more grants.

Recently, however, the Head of King's College DDH, Andrew Prescott, has rung an alarm bell about what he calls 'project fever': when the pace of the research is determined by the short lifespan of 'projects' oriented to the delivery of a product, «The digital humanities remains as no more than a software factory». The result is «a high proportion of projects which reflect intellectual agendas of other researchers and lack genuine innovation». Prescott questions the idea of 'project' no less than I question that of a 'tool' when he asks: «Does the concept of the project inherently restrict the digital humanities to a subsidiary role?».[37]

4. Conclusion

In today's international scenario, the academic system is investing a great deal in Digital Humanities.[38] At some point the discipline will be required to show that what it has elaborated is really different to and better than traditional research methods. Allowing humanists to do the usual things with the same old paradigms, yet with a new digital tool, will probably not seem to be enough.

From this perspective, I suggest that 'instrumentalism', 'project fever' and an excessive focus on friendly tools should not get the upper hand over the methodological work necessary to build digital applications which possess real added value by comparison with traditional research practices.

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have too often outsourced digital humanities to a special center on campus» and proposes «to integrate the digital humanities systematically through our departments – to infuse departments with digital technologies and practices so as to create models of organically interrelated humanities digital research, teaching, administration and staff work».

36 Cfr. Meister 2012, p. 80.

37 Cfr. Prescott 2012a and Prescott 2012b. The three quotations are taken from Prescott 2012a, slides 17, 16 and 18 respectively.

38 Its position in the United States' research agenda is shown by significant political choices like the creation of an Office of Digital Humanities within the National Endownment for the Humanities (NEH) in 2008, and by the very recent appointment of John Unsworth, a very active member of the Digital Humanities community and institutions (and inventor of the current name of the discipline), to the USA National Council on the Humanities by President Barack Obama.

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