BEYOND EXPECTATIONS: IMAGINING DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE HUMANITIES

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This paper examines the imaginaries within and about digital humanities (DH) as a scholarly field and as an area of practice. The paper draws on an ethnographic study conducted from 2010-2013. Through case studies, surveys, interviews, and observations the study explored humanists' engagement with digital tools and resources, analyzed teams developing digital tools, and examined digital resource use within university departments. The fieldwork was carried out at twenty-three educational, research and funding institutions in the US and Europe, and it involved 258 participants including researchers, faculty, students, administrators, librarians, software developers, policy makers, and funders.

The term "digital humanities" came to prominence in the early 2000s as an updated designator for the field of humanities computing, but also as a tactical term aimed at positioning DH within institutional, financial, and disciplinary structures of contemporary academia (see: Kirschenbaum, 2012). Over the past ten years, this term has been increasingly used as an overreaching designator of humanists' engagement with digital technologies. One root of this generalization was a lethargic response from the broader humanities community to digital scholarship. Another root emerged from the efforts of the DH community to establish itself as the leader of digital knowledge production in the humanities. This community aspired to "play an inaugural role" in the humanities' encounter with digital scholarship, maintaining that it held "the potential to use new technologies to help the humanities communicate with, and adapt to, contemporary society" (see: Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0).

Yet, an important element of narratives about the DH spotlights boundaries, mostly charted through negative identification as to what does not constitute DH work. Ramsay (2011) posits that scholars' use of technology that excludes making or building falls outside the DH boundaries. Burdick and colleagues (2012) describe even narrower boundaries, excluding "the mere use of digital tools for the purpose of humanistic research and communication" (p. 122). The same approach is evident in Fitzpatrick's (2012) rhetorical question, should the floodgates of the DH be opened so widely as "to include … 'every medievalist with a website'," followed by her categorical response: "undoubtedly not" (p. 14).

Boundary work in DH is particularly relevant today when humanists' engagement with technologies increasingly becomes the "new normal." Humanities scholarship, even the "mainstream" one, already follows the route of digital scholarship as a condition of contemporary research. A full transition in that direction is both inevitable and necessary. However, the question that needs further discussion is what that "full transition" means, to whom, and what parallel paths it could take. An additional question is whether the DH field represents the best route for that transition, given that it still resides on the margins of humanities scholarship (see: Juola, 2008; Thaller, 2012). Meanwhile, an evolution of humanities scholarship has been slowly unfolding in the background, transforming humanists' research and teaching practices (see: Liu, 2009). It would thus be constructive to move beyond the debate about "digital" versus "mainstream" humanities towards differentiating between digital humanities and digital scholarship in the humanities. My conceptualization of digital scholarship in the humanities draws on Jankowski's (2009) definition of e-Research, as well as on Wouters and Beaulieu's (2006) argument for conceiving of digital scholarship beyond computation.

Digital scholarship in the humanities refers here to humanities scholarly activities carried out with the use of digital tools, resources, and methods across the spectrum of computational complexity. Regardless of the level of computational complexity, digital scholarship in the humanities prompts changes in the ways humanists' envision, carry out, communicate, and organize their work and approach their objects of inquiry. Instead of provisionary classifications, transformations in the ways of knowing define the boundaries of digital knowledge production in the humanities.

Disentangling digital humanities from digital scholarship in the humanities is a prologue to rethinking a set of disciplinary, educational, organizational, and funding questions. One of the important aspects of this process is to understand how expectations formulated within the DH might influence digital scholarship in the humanities.

Expectations have a multifaceted role in the early stages of an academic field, as they help articulate visions, direct strategies, set goals, and form shared values, thus pre-disciplining the imagination about the field (see: Brown et al., 2003; Borup et al., 2006). Initiatives in the DH field have been part of such elaborate envisioning of digital knowledge production in the humanities. These initiatives were vital for developing digital research infrastructure in the humanities, including tools, methods, corpora, journals, professional associations, centers, and educational initiatives. Yet, less favorable effects of this field on humanities digital knowledge production should also be assessed.

One risk is that expectations formulated within the DH field monopolize a broader, longterm transition of humanities disciplines towards digital scholarship. Furthermore, expectations generated in the early visions of a field, which Mokyr (1991) aptly terms hopeful monstrosities, commonly fail to meet their promises, so much so that "disappointment seems to be almost built into the way expectations operate" (Brown et al., Op.cit.). Such disappointments come at a price, namely damage to the credibility of various stakeholders and misallocated resources and investments. The need to regulate

the promise/disappointment dynamics thus mandates developing and implementing quality control criteria for digital knowledge production in the humanities. It is essential to encourage a widespread dialog among stakeholders to mitigate potential mistakes and resource misallocations without hindering innovation in scholarly work.

The transition of humanities disciplines towards digital scholarship is a complex process that needs to be handled in an equally complex, systematic, and inclusive manner. This necessitates a widespread dialog among the stakeholders embedded into all the phases— from planning to evaluation—of educational, research, and organizational initiatives concerning digital scholarship in the humanities.

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