Scholarly Editions, Historians' Archives and Digital Libraries: The Pragmatics and the Rhetoric of Digital Humanities Scholarship

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Introduction

Digital library technology and digital systems supporting archives of structured text had a major impact on the humanities scholarship of the past decade yet this effect is not fully understood. The main objective of the proposed paper is to examine the practices of scholarship and the rhetoric of disciplinary identity connected to digital systems as new mode of communication, focusing on digital libraries and their integration in the largely paper-based traditional disciplines of the humanities fields.

Recent rhetoric and the pragmatics surrounding digital resource development in the humanities will be examined by reviewing writings of digital humanities scholars on the effects they recognize in the practice and theory of their disciplines contingent to that development. Some of these scholars are also developers of exemplary digital resources in their disciplines and authors of an extensive body of texts that define digital humanities and explore the disciplinary issues brought by the transition of documents and texts from print to electronic media. The texts and the theories of the archive presented in writings of these scholars are integral to the ideologies of development because they integrate native perceptions.

Research Questions

Within an overall framework focusing on the emergence of digital humanities as an arena of digital library development, a program of research for information science is organized around the following research questions:

- How do the existing humanities projects reflect the changing notions of scholarship?
- What are the effects of these projects on research in the humanities?
- How are the humanities' fields as traditionally paper-based disciplines responding to the proliferation of electronic resources?

These are the crucial questions not only for the humanities scholarship but also for scholarly communication in general with implications for digital library developers who are working with these communities.

Theoretical Framework

Disciplinary knowledge production depends on systems of verification and past knowledge. Humanities, sciences, social sciences and their dependent fields can reflect significant differences in how they engage in knowledge production. The importance of understanding such protocolary forms from within their meaning- systems, calls for understanding the rhetorics and the pragmatics of knowledge production of particular fields. For epistemic cultures, argumentation is basis of knowledge building, and citation is the practice of integrating the existing canon of the discipline with new knowledge. Therefore, a study of transformation of a disciplinary knowledge production depends on understanding its argumentation (rhetoric) and various practices (pragmatics) by which an archive is established. Building digital resources is integrative creation by which individuals use "digital tools to perform tasks that once could be accomplished with … other reproduction devices" (Borgman 2003) and in the process, "they add ideas, data, analysis, effort, and other forms of value" (Lessig 2001). While bibliometric techniques explore the relation of the archive of knowledge in particular disciplines, it is important to focus on these recreative

processes by which new knowledge emerges. In the humanities, the archive enables citation of the canon in the process of building new knowledge (through literary interpretation or evidentiary material for historical practice). An implicit theoretical framework for this study is a combination of LIS **bibliometric studies** (Borgman & Furner 2001), **citation analysis** and argumentation (Budd 2001) and the study of epistemic cultures and knowledge production (Knorr Cetina 1999), **theories of the archive** from across the disciplines and outside of the archive and library fields (Manoff 2006). The effects in knowledge production can be **direct** (i.e. effects on creative output and argumentation), and **indirect** (changes of pedagogical practices and learning). The effects of technology are also **cumulative**; they are part of the maturing process and should be studied longitudinally, as "complex adaptive systems" (Marchionini 2000). The pragmatics of digital library development and the theorization of that development are part of the same process of adaptation and construction of tools and meanings.

Method

To understand the effects and identify the perceived effects of the digital libraries on the humanities scholarship, the exemplary sources from the humanities journals and documentation – building on preliminary findings of an empirical study of citation practices in Classical Studies and English Literature (Dalbello, Lopatovska, Mahony, & Ron 2006) and the exemplary projects – to develop an argument about how the humanities fields responded to the proliferaton of electronic resources (pragmatics). The perceived effects and the defining framework for the emerging scholarly environment is examined using published documentation of exemplary projects, literature on digital humanities in information science field, and the literature of the digital humanities (including writings on electronic text from the late 1980s to media ecology field – as a context for the evolving disciplinary rhetoric of digital humanities).

Findings

The following stages were identified as significant to understanding the development of techniques for knowledge creation enabled by digital tools:

1. *The Precursors: Searching Corpora*
2. *Maturation and Institutionalization: The Mechanical Advantage*
3. *The Digital Archive as Humanist Laboratory*

Apart from the identification of uses of the tools for critical reading and cross-text exegesis, the analysis of literature revealed that the rhetoric of humanities scholarship assumes some form of technological determinist approach in which technology is perceived as in some way intensifying the experience of materiality of the archive. This conforms to the finding that protocols of knowledge building in the humanities are still largely determined by traditional practices of citing paper-based resources (Dalbello, Lopatovska, Mahony & Ron 2006).

Conclusion

This preliminary examination of the pragmatics and the rhetoric of digital library development aims to understand the constructivist approaches that humanities scholars bring to the idea of the archive and the digital tools that they use to create knowledge. These findings can help developers of digital tools to create relevant collections of primary sources for user communities in the traditional disciplines.

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