Title: Reading Response 1

Author: Arka Maitra

Date: February 3, 2023.

Course: Advanced Topics in Digital Humanities (ENGL 877)

About: This piece is a small exploration of the different ways in which “What’s in a Name” by Lauren Tilton and Taylor Arnold addresses issues of collaboration, accessibility, and experimentational freedom in DH labs. It is a discussion post of 682 words.

Prompt: How can DH labs foster collaboration, experimentation, and open access.

The article "What's in a Name?", talks about these three very principles as the core tenants of Digital Humanities. Collaboration among peers and interdisciplinary collaboration can work through both DH labs as open community spaces as well as DH labs as research units created around the goal of supporting one or more particular projects. If we consider labs functioning as open community spaces then collaboration may occur somewhat organically, where people with similar research or creative interests may come into contact with each other's work through the open accessibility of information within the lab's framework. In a setting where the lab functions more as a research unit carrying out work related to specific projects, the dynamic between collaborators may change in the sense that potential collaborators need to be invested in similar fields of work, if not exactly the same, in which case the specific people running the research have complete power to choose whether potential collaborators may have something of value to offer to the research already being done. In that sense it creates an unequal power dynamic between collaborators. In either case, the work of each collaborator needs to be recognized and acknowledged in a decentralized way, as equal contributions, and not just the work of the subject or area specific researchers, but also the technical experts who are equally valuable to the creation of a DH project.

The topic of collaboration to a large degree depends on the level of accessibility that all those involved or interested have to the work being done, and all the information being produced as a result. Open accessibility of both information and resources to all the members of the larger organization that the lab is a part of is, in my opinion very important if the lab is to be a perennial part of the Humanities. Being open access opens up the entire gamut of possibilities not only for those interested in the Digital Humanities, but also to those working to further their research work through Digital Humanities, or even those who had no idea that their line of research could benefit from being attached to certain aspects Digital humanities. If researchers, scholars, students remain unaware of the possibilities that Digital Humanities labs bring, then it may become difficult to retain the viability of labs as active research spaces which retain their necessity beyond specific research projects, in the eyes of the administrators, who in the centralized university structure, have power over allocation of funds. Funds, or the lack thereof may be the most daunting issue facing DH labs, both in their existence as open community spaces for creative and research works, and also as decentralized work environments. Open accessibility makes it impossible for the lab to procure funds from potential viewers as they would have to pay to access the work they are interested in otherwise. Decentralization of the actual workspace by acknowledging all contributions as equal to the production of the project, makes it less recognizable than if they were under the name of a well-recognized member of faculty, making them less marketable to potential funders.

This brings me to the last topic, "experimentation", which is fostered by the lab as a decentralized, collaborative, open community space, where information and resources are readily available, where you can brainstorm and bounce ideas with fellow practitioners, where hierarchy of rank does not bring out the question of "should I?" in the minds of budding researchers and scholars. It is also fostered by the availability of funding, which provides impetus to potential digital humanists to dedicate their time and labor wholly into their project. The answer to the question of how to foster these principles in the Digital Humanities space is beyond me, other than a fanciful wish of decentralizing the entire university structure and also the world at large. All I know that DH labs have immense potential to foster collaboration, experimentation, and open accessibility within its spaces, as these principles are intrinsically linked to its conception as a space within the humanities, all it requires is the monetary backing to do so.