Becoming the digital humanities as discourse(s) of subjectivation

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The digital humanities (DH) since their nominal conception in the early 2000s [1] can be characterized by their near-constant discussion of what the DH are [2], what they can be, and to which extent. [3] This discussion revolves around the struggle to find a common definition and purpose of what has been described at the same time as a field encompassing heterogenous humanities' fields (DH as an "umbrella term", e.g., Terras 2011; Kirschenbaum 2012), a sub-discipline of their respective mother fields, a meta-discipline (e.g., König 2021), a toolbox of methodologies (e.g., Jannidis et al. 2017), or a workflow even (such as of a digitization process). [4]

This contribution argues to reframe these negotiation processes of external and intra-community discussions of the DH – concerning what belongs (not) to the DH, the negotiation of their framework(s), modes of operation, and place within/outside the established disciplines (including the im/permanence of their institutions, be it physical centers or immaterial working groups) — as a subjectivation discourse following the conception of Michel Foucault. [5]

The Foucauldian subject

Foucault's concept of subjectivation describes the process of (re)forming an individual to a subject: this subject is created by power relations, and in turn is able to create its own power relations (compare to e.g., Foucault 1987; Vogelmann 2017, p. 11). However, this doesn't produce an "anthropological constant" (Schrage 2008, p. 4125): the relational power dependencies of subjects are influenced by their socio-historical context(s) as the "realm of potentiality of its existence" (Campos 2015, p. 113). As such, the subject itself is subjected to change within a discourse.

Foucault ([1969] 1973) interpreted the participation in discourses and their relational power dependencies as "practices of subjectivation" (" *Praxis der Subjektivierung*"). The participation of individuals in discourses revolve around power (i.e., the individual shapes what is acceptable content in negotiation processes in the discourse) and position (i.e., the individual positions themselves into/against the group of dis- course), which allows for a means of agency of the individual (compare, e.g., to Wiede 2020). Foucault regarded the membership in these discourses as a form of reduction of complexity: the participation practices are based on time-dependent epistles (the so-called "truths," which are subject to change over time), which are part of the socio-historical context(s), and are structured by a distinct set of rules (practices called "technologies of self"). These set the possible range of behavior in the discourse, and thus provide finite limits to complex interactions, thereby reducing complexity. [6] These practices are subject to constant calibration in the discourse community, and hence change. The discourse emerges out of the practices of sub-

jectivation of individuals, which at the same time are influenced by the practices already existing within the discourse in an iterative, cyclical process. In his later work, Foucault differentiated more between the possible degrees of surrender of the subject to the discourse, taking into account more variation of behavior.

Subjectivation discourse(s) of the DH

This contribution argues that many discussions in the DH can be characterized as such discourse(s) of subjectivation – based on a meta-study of the discussions on their definition – in order to become a subject in the Foucauldian sense and to establish a means of agency. This process thus enables the DH to become an independent field, of which individuals position themselves to be a/part of. These specific practices of subjectivation of individuals in this discourse would then involve for example, publishing in specific DH journals, participating in discussions about DH, or declaring to be a 'digital humanist' in the DH community, through which the individual researcher becomes part of the DH discourse(s). They therefore subject themselves to a particular set of rules, the "technologies of self": practices that are considered to belong to the DH, such as DH-specific requirements for good scientific practice (e.g., method criticism, algorithmic criticism, FAIR data principles), or certain research behaviors, such as collaborative work or experimentation as 'ideal' ways of working.

The socio-historical context(s) of the subjectivation discourses of the DH can be seen as the ongoing digitalization of society and of the sciences, and the shift in focus to their potential for research. It can be argued that the DH emerged as an 'update' of what was previously known as 'humanities computing,' against a backdrop of much easier access to technical infrastructure and resources, such as the internet, and the spread of computers. The digitalization can be framed as a regulative normalization through which entities are transformed into subjects (compare to Foucault 1999; Schrage 2008, p. 4125).

Foucault pointed to the changing epistles in the discourses, which are evident as well in the discourses of DH. So far, no unified answer – or singular practice in the Foucauldian sense – has been found in the last decades that would yet remain uncontested, e.g., as to how the DH can be defined. Instead, they are subjected to a high degree of change, following the Foucauldian idea of the constant calibration of practices in negotiation processes within the subjectivation discourses. These can be framed as permanent self-assurance and self-actualization of the values, goals, and nature of the DH themselves, and as form part of the subjectivation of the DH, and their members within.

This contribution argues that discussions of the nature and place of the DH act as a means of formally establishing the disciplinary in/dependence of the DH, and as such provide and create agency for the subjects of the discourse(s).

Outlook

Also part of these discussions is the question on the future of the DH in the face of the problems of the contemporary world hat have gained traction in recent years: raising questions of inclusion (e.g., postcolonial DH and the exclusion of the Global South in the digitalization efforts of the last decades of the 'Global North'), representation (e.g., LGBTQ+ perspectives of a queer DH, or absences

in archives, a question becoming more urgent in the phase of eased access to digital & retro-digitized resources), and quests resulting from climate change (e.g., green DH, and questions of sustainability of the digitalization of the humanities). Even the theme of this DH 2023 conference on the revolutionariness of the DH fits well with this development on the "presentism" of the DH, when asking about the potential of DH to contribute to current political events (questioning responsibility and privilege) and to building a new future. This up-to-dateness can be seen as part of the DH's self-perception as modern and future oriented – or in other words, digital – and as part of a self-actualization of the subjectivation discourse(s) in the DH.

Notes

1. The first note of the term 'digital humanities' is usually credited to Blackwell's "A Companion to digital humanities" edited by Schreibman et al., but it has been stressed that a seminar at the University of Virginia's English Department by Johanna Drucker and John Unsworth already bore that name in 2001 (Drucker and Unsworth 2002; compare to Allington et al. 2016; Crymble 2021, p. 29). The introduction of the term 'DH' effectively renamed what has been previously known as 'humanities and computing' or 'computing in the humanities', shifting focus to the possibilities resulting from access to personal computers and the internet, and the mass digitization projects of the turn of the millennia.
2. As exemplified by the "Day of Digital Humanities" Conference sport coming up with a new definition collected among its participants, or as in the consequent influx of digital humanities readers and introductory works, exemplarily here Schreibman et al. (2004), Terras (2011) or Sahle (2015).
3. Consequently, the Call of the DH Graz 2023 also fits this discourse on the future extent of the DH concerning their revolutionary power(s).
4. This overview remains necessarily uncomplete. For a more extensive discussion compare also to chapter 2 and 6 on defining and becoming the DH of Petz (2022).
5. The following draws in large parts of the chapter 6, esp. 6.1 in Petz (2022, pp. 163–4).
6. An illustrative example for the "technologies of self" would be practices that produce or restrict femininity in sports (Thorpe 2008).

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