Human, Technology, and Culture Interaction? Mapping the Landscape of Technological 'Sister' Disciplines

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The Digital Humanities (DH) are commonly understood to operate at the intersection of many disciplines, including computer science, library science, media studies and the humanities. Less central to our understanding of the field has been the interests and methods it shares with Science and Technology Studies (STS), however, even as the emergence of the subfield of Critical Digital Humanities (CDH) makes the permeabilities of this border ever more relevant.

This short paper will explore the question of how we might more actively integrate STS into DH. To do so, it will weave together three components, based upon the results of the meta-reflective collaboration and integration work of the EVOLVE_AI project under the Human + Programme (https://humanplus.ie/), which has brought the paper's two authors together, and situated a Feminist STS project on human-machine relations in a Digital Humanities lab.

The first of the paper's elements addresses the emerging contours of the CDH, a field that, on the surface at least, encompasses values and approaches common to DH and FSTS. By looking at the range of drivers and actors currently expressed in work such as (Berry 2019), (Applegate 2020) and (Bassett et al 2017), the paper will distill the themes and practices the field seems to embrace. It will also, however, raise the question of whether the designation of CDH has in fact become a sort of 'false boundary object,' (to build upon Bowker and Star 2000), not so much facilitating communication across communities as actively obscuring diversity behind a veneer of consensus.

The second angle of approach we will present is one that enhances collaboration by making tacit practices visible, namely via a co-created taxonomy of practices. We exploit the power of this activity to develop 'not just an instrument to organise data, but also a tool to negotiate and build compromises between four different communities of practice." (Edmond et al. forthcoming) This artifact not only maps out shared and distinguishing characteristics of the primitives of our own practices, but also contextualises these findings in terms of further neighbouring disciplines and approaches, such as Human Computer Interaction (or HCI) and Full Stack Feminism (IFTE, http://ifte.network/full-stack-feminism/), to name two examples. The resulting generalised CDH research 'stack' includes a wide range of tools and techniques to work with and through the objects of study we face, and the values we imbue our work with, including such aspects as a recognition of the role of narrative and metaphor, the importance of actively building, and the need to engage with technology as more than an 'epiphenomenon.'

The final exploratory mechanism in this work will present two thought experiments that demonstrate the deeply conceptually informed but also highly applied work that can emerge at the intersection of STS and DH. Responding respectively to DH's potential "as a disruptive political force that has the potential to reshape fundamental aspects of academic practice" (Gold 2012, X) and the commitment to "move from reading and critiquing to building and making" (Ramsay 2011 in: ibid.) these reflections focus on the need for embodied AI to be imbued with culture and for humanistic scholarship to better embrace its own embodiment. Such explorations, we argue, can open up the potential for re-making disciplinary boundaries with a focus on assembling the tools and methods for scholarship on and under the recent digital condition in its transformative potential.

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