

What's digital about Digital Humanities?

Introduction

Fifteen years ago, the author of this chapter was participating to a digital humanities unconference (see: thatcamp.org): among the many topics discussed, the participants wondered if 'analog' Humanities and 'digital' humanities would one day converge. One answer came out: it would not be possible to see both converge without traditional humanities adopting digital humanities' practices (and for instance unconferences, openness – open access, open data and so on – etc.) Those practices were not all digital *per se* – some were induced by the use of digital tools, but others seem more to be a question of sheer traditions, not necessarily linked to the use of any digital tools. Wikis, for instance, did not invent collaboration.

What's digital in Digital Humanities? though the answer seems obvious, but the three words or expression – 'digital', 'humanities', 'digital humanities' – of this expression bear ambiguities and ambivalences. None of them have easy definition, all the more that there are variations from one country to the other. We could also add that their history, their temporality – from a centuries old word (Humanities) to an expression coined around 2004 for Digital Humanities – are quite different. 'Digital' – from latin, related to fingers and by extension numbers under 10 and, starting around 1945, what is related to computer opposed to analog technologies – and 'Humanities', both latin words, but with meanings that are older for humanities, with strong traditions, and more recent with 'digital' (its change of meaning at least), and a tradition that is being built, in a way. That's what's digital humanities is trying to confront, centuries old traditions and a decades old other one.

Questioning the digitality of Digital Humanities is questioning those definitions and temporalities and how they are confronting within the term "digital humanities". The aim of this chapter proposal is to evaluate the *digitality* of digital humanities. In *The Archived Web*, Niels Brügger notes that many publications about "digital and X" (p. XX) have been published, without much reflection on what *digital* means. If we stand from a particular use of electricity that is at the center of the binary system that is a computer, *digital* means the use of '0' (no electricity) and '1' (electricity) as an alphabet (Finneman, quoted by Brügger). The problem of such a definition of *digital* is that 0/1 are to be seen as building blocks. Let's then follow Brügger:

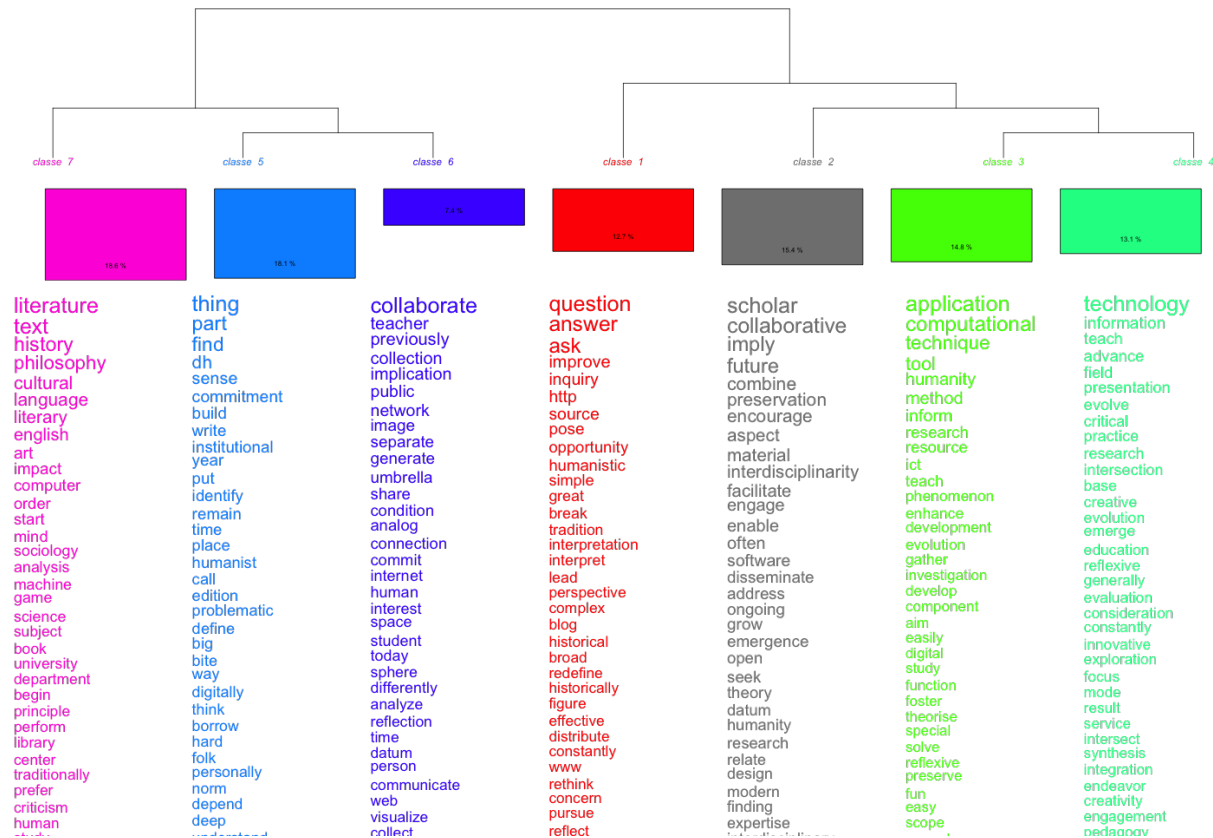
In the present context, the term digitality is used to capture the specific ways in which the digital bits are materialized and combined in a concrete media artifact and in concrete texts.

So, what's the digitality of Digital Humanities? In other words, what's *digital* in the *digital* humanities? How did (still do) Digital Humanities set up specific ways to transform digital bits, to materialize them into concrete artefacts, and maybe more cultural ones (see notion of 'digital' as a culture ie Doueihi).

The answer to those questions depends on *how* Digital Humanities can be defined. And this *how* is far from easy. Based on a database made of *Day of DH* quotes - a yearly event mobilising quite broadly the DH community –, Jason Heppler created the website *What is Digital Humanities* that relies on 817 different definitions of DH. Nevertheless, there are canonical definitions of Digital Humanities:

Especially since the 1990s, with the advent of the World Wide Web, digital humanities has broadened its reach, yet it has remained in touch with the goals that have animated it from the outset: using information technology to illuminate the human record, and bringing an understanding of the human record to bear on the development and use of information technology. (http://digitalhumanities.org:3030/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405103213/9781405103213.xml&chunk.id=ss1-1-3&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ss1-1-3&brand=9781405103213_brand) ((schreibmanCompanionDigitalHumanities2004?)).

This definition – that also describes the transition from Humanities computing to Digital Humanities – describes a sort of return ticket of the Humanities to information technologies. But this return-ticket



The History of Digital Humanities as a myth

Origines du terme:

- Companion, en 2004
- première conférence: Sorbonne, 2006

Quelle différence avec Humanities computing? Quelle définition de base des DH? Selon définition, les Annales faisaient déjà des DH.

Roberto Busa, first digital humanist?

Was Roberto Busa digital? What's the digitality of the index tomiscus? digital => finger => manual work => Busa

A counter-history of Digital Humanities?

What's the digitality of the school of the Annales?

On complète par Svensson: Landscape, etc DHQ:

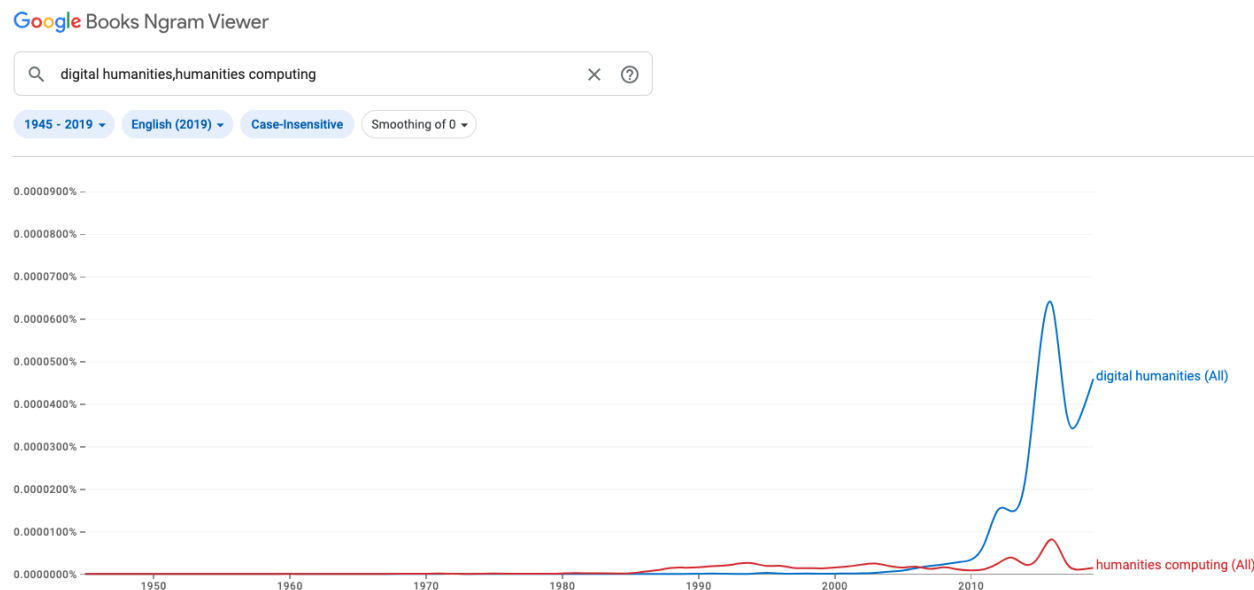
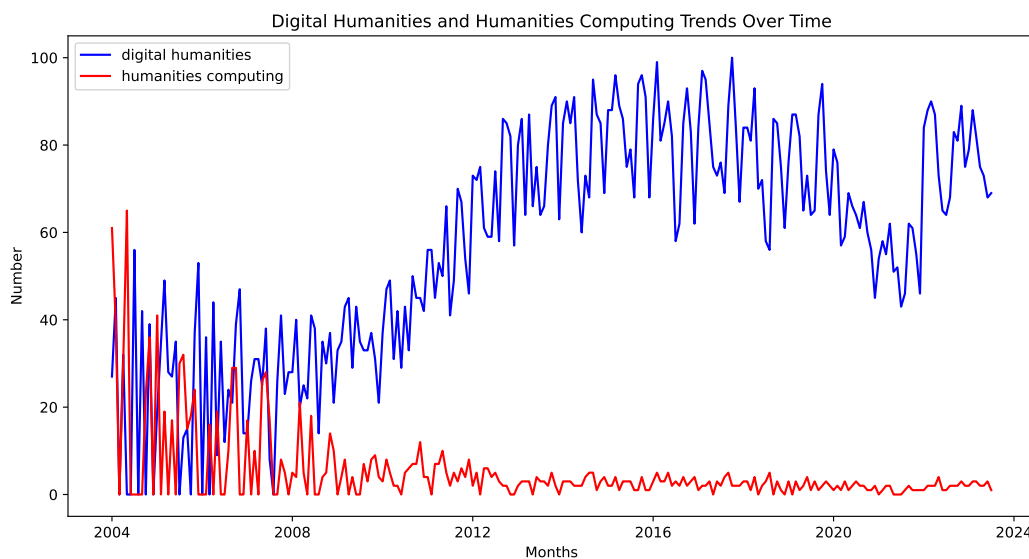


Figure 1: comparison of 'digital humanities' and 'humanities computing' with Google Books Ngram Viewer (31/07/2023)

The Great Rename: when Humanities Computing became Digital Humanities



Digital Humanities beyond digitality

manifesto todd presner => il y a quelque chose à mettre ici: DH comme communauté, DH comme se voyant 'fer de lance' des sciences humaines et sociales -> là, on est au-delà du numérique.

manifesto Paris => interdisciplinarity

- importance of practices
 - THATCamp 2009 => debate on Digital Humanities / Humanities relationships
 -
- importance of debate
- question of diversity
-

Conclusion: digital humanities as a part of the digital culture

On passe à la notion de numérique comme ‘culture’ (Doueïhi) -> notion de numérique comme culture sort du numérique stricto sensu, et donne une meilleure idée de ce que sont les humanités numériques.

In fine humanités numériques caractérisées par des éléments non-numériques se fondant sur la rencontre entre l’ordinateur et les sciences humaines.

À lire: - Debates in the digital humanities (2012,)