HISTORICAL SOURCES THROUGH THE LENSES OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES PROJECTS:

WHAT DO WE SEE?

Dr ARIANNA CIULA

DEPARTMENT of HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY of ROEHAMPTON (LONDON, UK)

ARIANNA.CIULA@ROEHAMPTON.AC.UK

@ARICIULA

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DIGITAL HUMANITIES (DH)

“digital humanities explores how the questions posed in humanities scholarship are transformed and extended by the digital – both by means of tools and epistemologies” (Ray Murray)

• Early-modern European Context → humanistic scholarship intertwined with FORMAL and EMPIRICAL studies (Bod, Maat and Weststeijn 2010)

  The Humanities deeply influenced and even shaped the exact sciences

• DH as renewed connection to formal/empirical studies

  Is DH different from other formal/empirical Humanities approaches?
LENS METAPHOR

• Scientific optical instruments
  • Galileo Galilei
LENS METAPHOR

• Scientific optical instruments
  • Galileo Galilei
  • Our days: from studying the starts to microorganisms
LENS METAPHOR

• Scientific optical instruments
  • Galileo Galilei
  • Our days: from studying the stars to microorganisms

• Knowledge machine
  • Optical aids used in the production of art
  • Hockney–Falco thesis; visual argument (Hockney 2006)

• Creating and studying our cultural production
SO... WHAT DO WE SEE?
OBJECTS

SPECIFICITY of objects of study \(\rightarrow\) typical of the Humanities

E.g. via digitisation

“Digitization involves the creation of a binary representation of an object which already exists, rather than the creation of new and novel pictorial information” (Terras 2008)

also an interpretative act \(\rightarrow\) make choices and take decisions
OBJECTS

Archimedes palimpsest project

• Simple but powerful display

Henry III Fine Rolls project
OBJECTS

Archimedes palimpsest project

- Minute examination & reconstruction of features
• **Minute examination & reconstruction of features**
Minute examination & reconstruction of features
→ DH connected to material culture approaches & material sciences
OBJECTS

SPECIFICITY + formal MODELLING
(Abstraction, classification, manipulation)

E.g. via creation and manipulation of digital models

of primary sources/components production/transmission/use
SPECIFICITY + formal MODELLING (Abstraction, classification, manipulation)

E.g. via creation and manipulation of digital models
SPECIFICITY + formal MODELLING
(Abstraction, classification, manipulation)

E.g. via creation and manipulation of digital models
OBJECTS

SPECIFICITY + formal MODELLING
(Abstraction, classification, manipulation)

E.g. via creation and manipulation of digital models of texts and historical entities
OBJECTS

SPECIFICITY + formal MODELLING (Abstraction, classification, manipulation) → DH connected to textual (critical) scholarship and publishing

E.g. via creation and manipulation of digital models

Transformation using the example EpiDoc P5 stylesheets:

- **Duke Databank style**: [ὁμο(?)]λογῶ

(Source) Epidoc guidelines 8.22
OBJECTS

SPECIFICITY + formal MODELLING
(Abstraction, classification, manipulation)

E.g. via creation and manipulation of digital models
Ada, daughter of Earl David, wife of Malise of Strathearn

Gilbert Hay (I), Lord of Efford (d. 1263), Earl of Strathearn (d. 1271)

Alexander II, king of Scots (d. 1249)

Malcolm IV, King of Scots (d. 1165)

William Curl, earl of Buchan (d. 1236)

Alexander Comyn, earl of Buchan (d. 1254)

Gilbert Hay II, Earl of Efford (d. 1271)
OBJECTS

Blending of perspectives

E.g.

• Textual vs. contextual and material
E84 Information Carrier (the physical document)

P7 took place at

P14 carried out by

P4 has time-span

P4, P7, P14

Measurable (subclass of E77 Persistent Item) (Superclass of Monetary value)

transfers

from to

Transfer (subclass of E7 Activity and of E28 Conceptual Object) (superclass of Entry)

attests (subproperty of P70 documents)

E31 Document (conceptual object) (one transaction?)

E65 Creation (of record)

P94 has created

P128 is carried by
OBJECTS

Blending of perspectives

E.g.

• Textual vs. contextual and material

• Historical vs. other disciplines (e.g. linguistics)
Chapter 90

Section 1

Αλεξανδρόνια ἔστησε εἰς αὐτῶν τὸ ἑλέον ἠθίον προσβεία, τὰ μὲν καὶ αὐτοῖς ἔγον ἄρωντες μὴ ἐκέλοντος μὴ ἐλλοκομήνα ἔστειλεν σάμητος, τὸ δὲ πλέον τῶν ἄμμισθών ἔστειλεν καὶ φοβουμένων τοῖς τοι ταυτικοῖς αὐτῶν τὸ πλῆθος, ὅ περὶ οὐκ ὑπήρχε, καὶ τὴν ἔς τὸν Μηδικὸν πλῆμεν τόλμημα γενομένην.

Section 2

ἔστησε τούτου μὴ τείχισεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἔξω Πελοποννήσου μᾶλλον ὅσοι εἰσῆλθεν ψυχοκαθαλέον μετὰ σφόν τοὺς περιβάλλοντας, τὸ μὲν βουλομένον καὶ ὑποτιθὴ τῆς γνώμης οὐ δηλοῦντος ὑπὸ τούς Ἀθηναίους, ὡς δὲ τοῦ βαρβαροῦ, εἰ αὐτὸς ἐπέλειθο, οὐκ ἂν ἔχοντος ἀπὸ ἐκεῖρο ποθέν, ὡσπερ τοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν Ὠθημάτων, ὄρμοις τῆς Πελοπόννησος παῖν ἐφακός ἄναχωρησεν τῇς καὶ ἀφορμήκανεν εἰς τὸν.

Section 3

τοὺς Ἀθηναίους Θεμιστοκλέους γνώμης τούς μὲν Λακεδαιμονίους ταῦτα ἐπώνυμα ἀποκρίνείται ὅτι τείχων μὲν αὐτοῖς πρέσβεις περὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀποκρίνείται ὅτι τούς Ἀθηναίους ἔστειλεν σάμητος, τὸ δὲ ἐκείλεν ἀποτελέσθη ὅτι ἐπίστατος ἦς τῇ Ἰωσίῳ Ἐαῖστης ὅτι τὴν Ἀλεξανδρόνια ἀπολύοντος ἄρων ὑποτιθήθη ἐκ τῆς ἀναγκαιότητος ὑπόστας τοῖς τείχισεν δὲ πάντας πανδημεῖς τοῖς ἔντειχας καὶ αὐτοῖς καὶ ναυακηκτίσας καὶ παῖσαν 1, ἀφαιρεῖται ὥστε ἀνθρώπους ὡς Ἀφανείας.
MEDIUM

Machines (software and hardware)

- Digital medium as publication medium with own constraints and opportunities
Ciula and Lopez 2009

**FINE ROLL**

1 HENRY III (28 October 1216–27 October 1217)

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1. [No date] Kent. Robert Arcus has made fine with the king by 100 m. for his delivery from the king's prison, and he is to serve the king with three knights (se quarto millio) for a year, namely by Robert himself, Hascolph de Soligny, and two of Hascolph's nephews, and he gave hostages for rendering that fine at the set term and for performing faithful service to the king.

2. 17 Dec. Billif of the honour of Dewersury. William Blot has made fine with the king by 60 m. for having the custody of the land and heir of Roger de Morpury, for which custody Raeland Blot, his brother, had made fine with King John, the king's father. He found Robert son of Payn and Ralph of Broughton as pledges for rendering the aforesaid fine to the king.

3. 17 Dec. Fairfax. Osbaldwine of Oxfordshire gives the king the moiety of 56 m. for having a writ to distress the abbot of Braem to render to him the charters for 56 m., which Jordan Clerk, his brother, committed to him to keep. He has letters to distress the abbot, and the sheriff of Oxfordshire is ordered to take security from John for the moiety of the aforesaid 56 m. Witness the earl.

4. 30 Dec. Lichfield. Gloucestershire. The abbot of Twombury has made fine with the king by 20 m. for having his confirmation of the land of Goringston, which he purchased from Robert Bigg. Order to the sheriff of Gloucestershire that, having accepted security from him for rendering the aforesaid 20 m. to the king, he is to cause the same abbot to have full seizin of the aforesaid land with its appurtenances without delay. He paid 20 m. at Winchester to W. earl Marshal and is quit. Witness the earl.

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1. The payment to the Marshal is clearly separated from the entry by a horizontal line.

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**Ciula and Lopez 2009**

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Machines (software and hardware)

Digital medium as publication medium with own constraints and opportunities

Print → Web

→ DH connected to information studies

→ DHers creating new intermediaries to the past

Ciula and Lopez 2009
MEDIUM

Machines (software and hardware)

- Digital medium as publication medium with own constraints and opportunities

- Means for operationalising concepts – e.g. algorithms and datasets
  - How to correlate methods in (big) data analytics to historical (or literary) sources?
MEDIUM

Machines (software and hardware)

• Digital medium as publication medium with own constraints and opportunities

• Means for operationalising concepts – e.g. algorithms and datasets
  • How to correlate methods in (big) data analytics to historical (or literary) sources?

(Pechenick, Danforth and Dodds 2015)

• OCR errors
• Dominance of scientific literature
• Messy metadata (inaccurate data)
• What does popularity means?
MEDIUM

Machines (software and hardware)

- Digital medium as publication medium with own constraints and opportunities
- Means for operationalising concepts
- Technologies within ethical perspective

Minimal computing -
http://www.globaloutlookdh.org/minimal-computing/
MEDIUM

Machines (software and hardware)

- Digital medium as publication medium with own constraints and opportunities
- Means for operationalising concepts
- Technologies within ethical perspective

→ DH akin to techno-sciences and research management-aware (reliance on technical infrastructures and high budget research)
→ DH critical of infrastructure - outdated vertical metaphor?
  “Within digital humanities, the idea of infrastructure is particularly unhelpful because it encourages a prejudice that digital work is a supporting activity, subsidiary to research and teaching.” (Prescott 2016)
  “[...] use technology self-reflexively as part of the very knowledge, and not just instrument, of researching and acting ethically on society” (Liu 2016)
Machines (software and hardware)

→ DH connected to public humanities and ‘citizen science’ from machines to humane project (McCarty 2012)
OBSERVERS

Subjectivity

• Evident link between models and our role as observers/creators/interpreters
• Complex boundary between factual observation of the past and its context of interpretation → subjectivity of the humanities (Small 2013)
OBSERVERS ➔ AGENTS

Agency

• Ourselves and others making intellectual and technical choices/interpreting
  • e.g. in creating/selecting models, establishing units of analysis / pinpointing a theory of objects/texts
text as idea, intention, meaning, semantics, sense, content

text as a visual object, as a complex sign

text as document: physical, material, individual

text as a work, as rhetoric structure

text as a version of ..., as a set of graphs, graphemes, glyphs, characters, etc. (... having modes ...)

text as linguistic code, as series of words, as speech

Sahle (2012)
OBSERVERS

Agency

• Ourselves and others making intellectual and technical choices/interpreting
  • engagement with interpretative agents of the past (engage with meta-modelling)
  → DH of the humanities in long shelf engagement with literature
(Agency → in the sources)
OBSERVERS ➔ AGENTS

Agency ➔ FUTURE

• Planning re-use, documentation, sustainable technologies, community engagement with respect to standards

➔ In DH balancing out specificity of objects of study with need for flexible, sustainable and re-usable resources
CONCLUSIONS

What we see ...

• Primarily
  • OBJECTS → in detailed and expanded (also distorted) form
  • Lenses → own INSTRUMENTS, tools, media
  • OBSERVERS (ourselves) → interpreters

• Consequently
  • Abstraction, patterns, threads connecting epistemic traditions
  • Other creators, observers and interpreters → in the PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE
  • Power and limits of technology → SOCIAL and ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY and AGENCY
THANK YOU!

Dr ARIANNA CIULA
ARIANNA.CIULA@ROEHAMPTON.AC.UK
@ARICIULA