

9-15-2016

# Digital Humanities & Italian Studies: Intersections and Oppositions

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## Recommended Citation

Hall, Crystal, "Digital Humanities & Italian Studies: Intersections and Oppositions" (2016). *DCS Faculty Publications*. Paper 2.  
<http://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dcs-faculty-publications/2>

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## Digital Humanities & Italian Studies: Intersections and Oppositions Crystal Hall, Bowdoin College

The question of the relationship between Digital Humanities (DH) and many fields is often framed as "What role can DH play in my field?" This query frequently carries an implied sense of augmenting the relevance of the field to today's students, administrators, or funding agencies. For practitioners in non-English languages, the relationship carries a less-frequently asked, but far more important question, posed succinctly by Italian digital humanist and media scholar at Roma Tre Domenico Fiormonte: "Is there a non-Anglo digital humanities (DH), and if so, what are its characteristics?"<sup>1</sup> As Italian digital humanist and historian of philosophy Dino Buzzetti pointed out in a recent conversation with me, in Italy an understanding of the humanities or Digital Humanities is rooted in the specific concerns of the discipline, something to which scholarly attention is now turning, perhaps retrospectively, notably by historians and art historians.<sup>2</sup>

For Italianists, this reflection seems particularly necessary, since, to name just two Italian-DH examples, Jesuit Father Roberto Busa is frequently indicated as the pioneer of humanities computing for his collaboration with IBM to produce the *Index Thomisticus*, and Franco Moretti has sparked much debate with his conceptualization of "distant reading" and

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<sup>1</sup> Domenico Fiormonte, "Toward a Cultural Critique of Digital Humanities," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, eds. Matt K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016): 438. Fiormonte has advocated against monocultural humanities in a number of venues, and an Italian version of the above paper was published as part of the Associazione per l'Informatica Umanistica e la Cultura Digitale 2012 conference proceedings: "Per una critica culturale delle Digital Humanities," *Dall'informatica umanistica alle culture digitali. Quaderni DigiLab Vol. 2* (Rome: Casa Editrice Università La Sapienza, 2012), pp. 220-42. Web. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7357/DigiLab-32>

<sup>2</sup> See the section dedicated to this in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, eds. Matt K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016): 289-389.

subsequent work with the Stanford Literary Lab. Yet, antagonisms to this pairing of fields exist. Moretti's influential contribution has also sparked criticism that DH scholars no longer read their texts. Some argue that the enthusiasm for building sites or tools has replaced writing, or at its most pessimistic interpretation, indicates that professors have sold out to techno-capitalist forces. According to these critics, the advantages of increased funding opportunities and appearance of relevance would then come at the cost of traditional, serious intellectual labor.

My contribution to this "State of the Discipline" discussion is to provide enough concrete examples of the kinds of work already happening and that could occur at the intersection of DH and Italian Studies to obviate discussions of relevance, labor, or intellectual rigor. Hopefully these examples will represent a substantial corpus from which to later attempt an answer to Fiormonte's question about Italian DH. I have conducted this research and reflected on these topics not as a modern cultural historian or theoretician, but because whatever modest steps I have been able to make in the field of Digital Humanities, I owe to my training as an Italianist, and as my Italian literary research moves forward, vice versa.

The paper is organized into two sections about the relationship between these two fields: a conceptual examination and a presentation of the facts on the ground. The first section considers the two articulations of the question of what each field can offer intellectually to the other. The second section examines the current state of the relationship between DH and Italian Studies at three widening scopes: in the classroom, at the program level, and in the professional development of Italian Studies scholars. Overall there seems to be significant

collaboration between the two fields in spite of the several obstacles that limit current capacities for work at this intellectual crossroads.

## **I. Intellectual Compatibility of Italian Studies and Digital Humanities**

### **What Digital Humanities offers to Italian Studies**

The role of Digital Humanities in 21st-century Italian Studies can already be seen in the fantastic projects that are publicly available. Certain of these projects focus on aggregation and archiving of resources.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these valuable repositories of primary and secondary materials, digital and computational tools allow for other methods of inquiry.

Digital humanists tend to articulate their work according to categories of objects of study: text, networks, images, and spaces.<sup>4</sup> Digital text analysis offers multiple methods for studying the ways in which meaning is made through the written tradition: providing access and navigability for textual archives,<sup>5</sup> close philological comparison of primary sources and

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the University of British Columbia project on Pirandello's *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/questaserasirecitasoggetto/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.) or the *Dante Today*, a crowd-sourced and curated collection of "Citings and Sightings of Dante in Contemporary Culture": <http://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>4</sup> These categories are not exhaustive of objects studied or created by digital humanists. See Miriam Posner's blog post "How Did They Make That?" (August 29, 2013) for an expanded list: <http://miriamposner.com/blog/how-did-they-make-that/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>5</sup> For example, the *Medici Archive Project* <http://www.medici.org/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

commentary,<sup>6</sup> collaborative collation of witnesses,<sup>7</sup> hyperlinked concordances,<sup>8</sup> syntactic and semantic analysis,<sup>9</sup> and thematic exploration.<sup>10</sup> Computational network analysis is driving the study of social media communities due to its capacities for identifying and comparing information gatekeepers, authorities, and organizers. The seminal paper on network analysis uses historical information from Medici Florence to demonstrate the power of analytics for suggesting new questions that can be asked about the relationships between dynastic families and their role in the local economy.<sup>11</sup> In addition to digital forensics, image analysis presents scholars with opportunities to isolate colors or patterns, examine and measure symmetry, quantify aspects of visual composition, and reconstruct broken or fragmentary artifacts. Spatial analysis can locate textual aspects in geographical space,<sup>12</sup> identify statistically significant

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the *Oregon Petrarch Open Book* project: <https://petrarch.uoregon.edu/>, the Dartmouth DanteLab <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/>, Brown's *Progetto Pico* [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/pico/](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico/), and the French Machiavelli project <http://hyperprince.ens-lyon.fr/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>7</sup> For example, the multi-institutional *Huon d'Auvergne: A Digital Edition* project <http://www.huondauvergne.org/index.html> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Brown's Decameron Web: [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/dweb/](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/) or the Italian *Intratext Digital Library* <http://intratext.com/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>9</sup> For example Dominique Lapiere and Jamie Tehrani, "Computational methods of literary criticism: an example of use in Marco Polo's *Devisement du monde*," *Semicerchio. Special Issue: The Mechanic Reader* 53.2 (2015): 70-81. In addition, the free online Voyant Tools has now been translated into Italian: <http://voyant-tools.org/?lang=it> (Accessed September 1, 2016.)

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Silvia Stoyanova's project on Leopardi's *Zibaldone*: <http://digitalzibaldone.net/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>11</sup> John F. Padgett and Christopher K. Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434," *American Journal of Sociology* 98.6 (1993): 349-99.

<sup>12</sup> This is particularly compelling in Andrea Gazzoni's map of places mentioned in Dante's *Commedia*: <http://www.mappingdante.com/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

hotspots of features, lead to the development of 3D-models,<sup>13</sup> and recreate soundscapes in order to better understand historical events.<sup>14</sup>

Given the web presence that predominates much of this work, seldom locked behind paywalls, these kinds of projects have sometimes been seen as an alternative to the specialist-driven niche publishing of monographs. Yet, we should be careful about assuming that because our scholarship exists on the web that it is any less challenging to produce or parse. Digital humanists are constantly confronted with ontological challenges, because digitization, computation, and digital presentation require the establishment of bounded categories for sorting, analyzing, and representing. To meet such a challenge, DH scholars must also be clear about the hermeneutics they employ. The combination of explicit methodologies for interpretation and ontological structures for analysis is both daunting and extremely powerful.

We should also be cautious of arguments that suggest that students who can learn how to use tools such as ArcGIS for mapping, or a pre-designed web interface for text-analysis, or an out-of-the-box tool for network analysis are better prepared to develop careers or be informed citizens. That would be the difference between pressing keys on a piano to make sound and playing (or perhaps composing) a sonata. I am not suggesting that Italian students should use technology solely for the sake of being aware of the technology; I think the students in our classrooms have much more to offer and can ask far more sophisticated questions of digital

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<sup>13</sup> The Venice Time Machine team is exploring many aspects of this work: <http://vtm.epfl.ch/> (Accessed August 22, 2016.)

<sup>14</sup> See Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: Sound, Architecture, and Florentine Urban Life* (University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2016).

cultures. Examples of this will be found throughout the paper, but I will return to this theme explicitly at the beginning of the second section.

### **What Italian Studies offers to Digital Humanities**

This formulation of the relationship is far more interesting to me, because it represents the strengths of the humanities, and in particular the critical aspects offered by Italian Studies, for identifying, contextualizing, and critiquing the power dynamics, representational qualities, and ambiguities of cultural output, including digital objects and experiences. This is not an attempt to argue that Italian Studies is unique among the other cultural studies fields in Romance Languages, but to demonstrate possible sites of connection with DH. As Italian cultural scholars we research and we introduce students to Italian authors and artists whose creations demonstrate certain nuances that invite a rethinking of digital tools through the formulation of new questions. In addition, Italian schools of thought as well as objects of study suggest the possibility for new digital or computational methodologies. These intersections or oppositions between the fields can shape the future of digital humanities, and by extension challenge groups to develop tools and methods with applications that are of interest more broadly in the humanities, and potentially the social and physical sciences.<sup>15</sup> The following list of possible contributions of Italian Studies to DH research does not pretend to be exhaustive, but I hope that it will inspire more.

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<sup>15</sup> This is the approach of Digital and Computational Studies at Bowdoin, where I, an early modern Italianist and DH scholar, collaborated with a colleague in Environmental Studies to teach an interdisciplinary undergraduate course. I brought the combined DH-Italian methods of cultural critique, historical inquiry, close reading, and computational analytics to students working on topics in environmental resource management.

## *Natural Language Processing (NLP)*

NLP is a branch of text analysis that aims to automate the identification and classification of words in digitized texts, including: assigning them a part of speech, mapping the grammatical structure of the phrase or sentence, matching words with a definition or meaning based on context or position in a sentence, identifying relationships between entities, and assigning a sentiment label to a passage. Italian examples of the sestina and double sestina, with their structural rules and their exploitation of the multiple meanings of the fixed vocabulary of rhyme words represent a challenge for natural language processing (NLP) techniques.<sup>16</sup> One need think only of the subtleties of Dante's use of *donna*, *tempo*, *luce* and *freddo* in the canzone-double sestina "Amor, tu vedi ben che questa donna" in order to reveal what would be a challenging and intriguing problem for computational experts. Providing a critical apparatus for distinguishing the interpretations of the words would make NLP tasks more sophisticated and would likely challenge the Italian scholar to approach the *Rime petrose* with different questions.

## *Stylometrics*

Stylometrics is a branch of text analysis that is primarily concerned with questions of authorship attribution and identifying lexical, syntactical, or structural similarities between passages. These methods predominate my work on the embeddedness (or uniqueness) of

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<sup>16</sup> To demonstrate to students the similar algorithmic properties of the Arabic ghazal tradition, creation, Patricia O'Neill developed the Ghazal poetry generator: <http://dhinitiative.org/demos/ghazal/introduction.php> (Accessed August 23, 2016).



Galileo's prose in Seicento written culture.<sup>17</sup> By addressing the morphological and grammatical variations of regional Italian during the period, this work seems to be offering a way to better understand and theorize what is happening during this kind of analysis in ways that research with 19th-century English texts cannot. In addition, Maciej Eder has indicated that cross-language studies would offer a way to validate stylometric and authorship attribution methods that are widely adopted by computational text analysis.<sup>18</sup>

### *Critique and Creation of Screen Culture*

Art Historian Pamela Fletcher has articulated the ways in which students and scholars who are trained in visual literacy and critical analysis have a skill set that makes them uniquely suited to confronting today's screen-driven culture.<sup>19</sup> The methods for connecting the elongated torsos, precariously lengthy necks, and contorted or off-balance bodies of Baroque portraits and sculpture to the cultural anxieties of the period should be extended to today's art as much as to the artifice of what we consume via digital screens. Visual cultural studies that investigate Italian artwork or use Italian scholarly methods of research can advance discussions of screen culture beyond the ways in which an understanding of portraiture conventions could help students be more thoughtful producers and consumers of selfies, or the ways in which

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<sup>17</sup> The URL for preliminary results and analysis is <http://research.bowdoin.edu/galileos-library/>

<sup>18</sup> Maciej Eder, "Does size matter? Authorship attribution, small samples, big problem," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 30.2 (2015): 168.

<sup>19</sup> See her piece "Reflections on Digital Art History," *caa.reviews* (June 15, 2015). Web. <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2726-.V8gZfY4hvw> (Accessed September 1, 2016)

iconography permeates screen life.<sup>20</sup> For Italianists, works like Giacomo Balla's *Cane al Guinzaglio* (1912) resist automated image analysis and categorization. That resistance to current methods of computerized consumption is also an invitation to imagining alternatives: new tools and approaches that have the potential to identify previously unconsidered avenues of study for the programmer and the humanist alike.

### *Privacy*

To my knowledge, this is an under-researched area in Italian Studies, but something in DH and digital cultural studies to which Italianists could contribute quite meaningfully. While Italy may not be unique in the European context of privacy discussions, this is nonetheless an area for future research. Italian authors offer literary explorations for historical parallels to the onset of the Information Age (i.e. Boccaccio's problematization of the personal and public during the rise of a new working class). More importantly, privacy seems to have only become mainstream in Italy out of concerns for data collection transparency and online identity protection. The Italian relationship to questions of privacy offers alternative paradigms and models for defining the perimeters for intrusion or interference into an individual's or community's activities.

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<sup>20</sup> Provocatively demonstrated by R. Luke Dubois in his piece "(Pop) Icon: Britney" (2010) that uses sound from the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna to emphasize the role of iconography in digital culture. See <https://vimeo.com/104755687> (Accessed September 10, 2016.)

### *Technological Hegemonies*

The imposition of a seemingly foreign preoccupation with privacy resonates with other concerns that have recently been labeled techno-imperialism or data colonialism.<sup>21</sup> Antonio Gramsci should be a more frequently cited voice in the scholarly conversation on this topic. Moreover, as a nation with a long history of negotiating its Mediterranean and continental identities as well as a relationship with American industry, Italy again represents a site of resistance and alternatives to the current status quo.

### *Technological Imagination*

The Futurists, then later Calvino and others from the Gruppo '68 and Oulipo confronted the potentialities of technological imagination in provocative and playful fashion. Many of their metaphors, games, and polemics still hold value for encounters with today's technologies. Perhaps most strikingly, Calvino anticipated the enormous undertaking of converting the memory of the world into electronically stored data. He frames this global archiving project as a preparation for the end of humanity, one that would only heighten the discrepancies between historical record and lived experience.<sup>22</sup> That space between experience and the archive, artifact, or data point is where humanists put their skills to work, an effort that is all the more vital as the size of the archives, the types of artifacts, and the scope of the data expands.

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<sup>21</sup> This comes back to Fiormonte's concerns about monocultural DH, but at the even larger scale of monocultural technology. An interesting case study can be found in B. Wai-Chu, Rodney and Chung-Tai Cheng. "Cultural convulsions: examining the Chineseness of cyber China," in David Kurt Herold and Peter Marolt, eds. *Online Society in China* (New York: Routledge, 2011) pp. 23-39.

<sup>22</sup> See "La memoria del mondo" in *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997) pp. 203-10.

## **II. Practical Considerations**

While these connections are conceptually possible, there are real concerns for the scholars who sit at the intersection of these two fields. At MLA 2017 Allison Cooper has convened the panel "A Roundtable on the Current State of Digital Humanities in Italian Studies," for a discussion about the challenges and successes of this work.<sup>23</sup> To learn more about the presumed broader community, I distributed an electronic survey to AAIS, Humanist, and AIUCD.<sup>24</sup> I have just completed collection of responses, and I hope to speak about preliminary results during my prefatory remarks on October 1 at Wellesley. According to my separate research on North American colleges and universities that offer Italian, 70% of those schools also offer some form of Digital Humanities, whether as classes, library support, or programs.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Italian Studies Classroom**

Three years ago I was given the challenge of working with colleagues outside of Italian at Bowdoin to design a new curricular initiative that linked the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences through digital and computational objects and methods. Called Digital and Computational Studies, ours is a field of inquiry that had not been articulated prior the steering

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<sup>23</sup> See the site dedicated to the panel for more details.

<https://dhis.commons.mla.org/2016/05/23/upcoming-roundtable-on-the-current-state-of-digital-humanities-in-italian-studies/>

<sup>24</sup> A copy of the survey can be found at: <http://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dcs-faculty-publications/3>.

<sup>25</sup> The data about these schools and programs is available for consultation online, and my methods are described in detail on that site. <http://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dcs-faculty-publications/1>.

committee's drafting of a mission statement and the teaching of the introductory course.<sup>26</sup>

While designing that course I returned to my undergraduate Italian curricula (from when I was a student and a professor) for a list of priorities and methods for investigating digital and computational objects responsibly. The list was extensive, far beyond the scope of the introductory course we were planning, but it is suggestive of the pedagogical connecting points between Italian Studies and the concerns of the DH community: anonymity, colonialism, deconstruction, feminism, hegemony, imperialism, labor, performativity, phenomenology, positivism, post-industrialism, semiotics, spectacle, structuralism, voyeurism. To make connections with the social and physical sciences, I turned again to the models from my Italian programs: for physiology in the digital world, Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg's work on the body; for environmental and infrastructure concerns, Tim Campbell's multi-disciplinary approach to postmodernism; for talking about digital objects, Penny Marcus's cultural approach to cinema studies; and for teaching programming languages, Lillyrose Veneziano-Broccia's pedagogical methods derived from Second Language Acquisition theory. In spite of these rich intellectual sites for connecting the objects of Italian Studies to those of DH, there are pressing needs of Italian scholars *in situ*: time and opportunity to learn new skills or research the connections. Time is already too limited and course content is already fixed according to curricular needs. I will address the professional development aspects of training in DH tools or methods in the final section.

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<sup>26</sup> More information can be found at our site: <http://www.bowdoin.edu/digital-computational-studies/index.shtml> (Accessed September 10, 2016.)

One possible solution to the problem of time in the classroom exists in the recognition of the limitations of technology and the priorities of training in humanistic work. During a recent lecture for the "Digital Classicist London" series, Gregory Crane outlined the important role of students at the nexus of foreign language study, contributions to new philological understanding of texts, digital analysis, and collaboration.<sup>27</sup> Crane emphasizes repeatedly that the tasks that are difficult for machines are also difficult for students. This converts human intervention in some automated text processing tasks into valuable learning experiences with outcomes that contribute to a body of knowledge greater than the exercise or the course. Crane's example of having Greek 101 students help to identify the start and end of passages on manuscript pages or wrestle with sentences that are difficult to map syntactically could easily be applied to some of the Italian digital humanities projects currently underway where the scale of the work is daunting, and the task itself of a type that typically goes unrecognized as research labor. In this configuration it becomes pedagogical labor, with more burden on the learner than the instructor. This is not free data entry from undergraduates taking Italian since these exercises are designed to help even elementary language learners engage with questions of material history and knowledge transmission or practice their understanding of grammatical rules.

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<sup>27</sup> Gregory Crane, "Philological Education and Citizenship in the 21st Century." King's College London. June 3, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPEPdgzlw1M> Accessed July 14, 2016.

## The Italian Studies Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

At the undergraduate level, pairing Italian Studies and DH has the potential to expand, challenge, and reinforce the kinds of knowledge currently valued in our programs, and in addition could offer new post-baccalaureate opportunities given students' valuable critical perspective and perhaps basic literacy in analytics, design, evaluation, invention, or regulation. For graduate students DH represents a complementary field of inquiry much like Architecture, Archaeology, Art History, Cinema Studies, Religious Studies, and Theater have been.

At the most reductive level of understanding DH, it could also be considered a skill like paleography or working in archives. Digital resources require a rethinking of knowledge practices and institutional infrastructures in order to bring digital materials to the same level of discoverability and access as the systems in place for locating, documenting, and using print and other resources that are material objects. Otherwise the digital projects and publications that we are generating risk being similar to manuscripts, dutifully preserved in small and large institutions, prior to Kristeller's *Iter italicum*. Although we may not be aware of it, the shared data repositories of established scientific organizations like NASA or NOAA, even the data available through the data.gov portal, are all rather recent developments. While this remains a challenge to be addressed by those already in the profession, there is an urgent need for a solution to better assist graduate students as they navigate this expanded intellectual terrain.

Yet, from the information I could gather, it appears that as students become more specialized in Italian Studies, fewer opportunities exist for formal instruction or integration of DH into their coursework. The table below shows the numbers of Italian programs by order of highest degree offered and indicates the percentage of those programs at schools that offer DH

courses at that level. Having a DH center, typically dedicated to faculty research, is considered separately. My goal with the data collection was to understand whether or not undergraduate and graduate students could elect coursework in DH while completing a degree in Italian. This is preliminary summary of available information as of July 2016, with a particular emphasis on organized DH programs and centers, not the single courses offered by faculty with DH research interests in various departments:

<b>Italian Program Type</b>	<b>Number of Schools with Program</b>	<b>% with DH program offered at that level</b>	<b>Raw number with DH courses at that level</b>	<b>% with a DH center</b>	<b>Raw number with at least a DH center</b>
PhD	25	28%	7	52%	13
Masters	17	18%	3	24%	4
Major	148	53%	78	63%	93
Minor	61	59%	36	66%	40
Service Courses	39	28%	11	28%	11

*Table 1. Summary of DH availability at colleges and universities that offer Italian.*<sup>28</sup>

This configuration puts the onus on the student to explore beyond their degree program (or even beyond standard course credit it would seem) in order to develop proficiency in DH. This also creates a "chicken or egg" dilemma in which hiring committees might seek recent PhD recipients with DH experience in order to train future graduate students, but there are insufficient programming opportunities for creating such candidates to enter the hiring pipeline. Once again, we turn to the question of professional development.

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<sup>28</sup> This draws from the same data available at: <http://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dcs-faculty-publications/1>.



## Professionalization in Italian Studies

Like the Hispanic Digital Humanities (HDH) network, RED in Mexico, and Humanistica in France, Italy boasts the Associazione per Informatica umanistica e Cultura Digitale (AIUCD).<sup>29</sup> Yet, while Italians and American Italian Studies scholars lead the way in critical theorizing about the methods of digital humanities, there are still no academic positions dedicated to the discipline in Italy, which is a lack of professional recognition that undermines the growth or even establishment of DH as a distinct field at Italian universities. The growing anxiety about the Anglophone predominance of materials and tools is perhaps best reflected by the creation of Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH), the Special Interest Group within the Association of Digital Humanities Organizations in order to facilitate the collaboration of scholars that represent the diversity of geopolitical and economic academic backgrounds.<sup>30</sup> In spite of these efforts, Domenico Fiormonte has brought to light how leadership in the international DH professional organizations replicates the Anglo-centric nature of the DH narrative.<sup>31</sup>

If we were to envision a more multi-cultural digital humanities, are there places where these conversations can happen? The Modern Language Association would seem to offer one possibility. In 2015, the MLA panels dedicated to DH topics were more general in their non-American or non-British approaches: offering panels on postcolonial studies, transatlantic

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<sup>29</sup> See their site: <http://www.umanisticadigitale.it/> (Accessed September 2, 2016.)

<sup>30</sup> See their site for more details: <http://www.globaloutlookdh.org/> (Accessed August 23, 2016)

<sup>31</sup> Domenico Fiormonte, "Toward a Cultural Critique of Digital Humanities," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. Matt K. Gold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016): 442.

studies and comparative literature (and one paper on Cervantes and Donne).<sup>32</sup> DH panels at the MLA in 2016 included Russian, French, Latin American, and, primarily, English projects.<sup>33</sup> Notably, there was a robust panel on "Digital Dante" that included seven of our colleagues. Subfield conferences seem to reflect more collaboration between scholars who are combining DH work with specialized research in Romance cultures. At the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Bruges (2016) one panel in a four-part series on "Cultural networks in the Renaissance" featured explicitly digital work on Italy, France, and Germany. A separate panel on "Visualizing the Early Modern World in Digital Space and Time" was equally diverse in its cultural coverage.

Aside from the valuable work being done on using technology in the second language classroom, few traces exist of digital humanities scholarship at AAIS conferences or of Italian scholarship in major DH journals.<sup>34</sup> In 2012 the MLA sponsored a session "Digital Humanities in the Italian Context," and in 2015 Lorenzo Fabbri organized a four-person panel on Digital Humanities and Italian Studies that was well-attended, and a recent CFP for Kalamazoo seeks contributions for "A Panel Discussion on Digital Humanities and Medieval Italy." The series of roundtables on "Italian Screen Studies: Methods and Priorities" proposed for AAIS/CSIS 2017 expands the definition of *screen* to text and media consumed on digital devices.<sup>35</sup> Other than a

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<sup>32</sup> Based on Mark Sample, "Digital Humanities at MLA 2015," [samplereality.com](http://www.samplereality.com) (Nov. 23, 2014). <http://www.samplereality.com/2014/11/23/digital-humanities-at-mla-2015/> (Accessed Sept. 2, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Based on Mark Sample, "Unofficial MLA 2016 List of 'Digital Humanities' Sessions," [samplereality.com](http://www.samplereality.com) (Dec. 23, 2015). <http://www.samplereality.com/2015/12/23/digital-humanities-at-mla-2016/> (Accessed Sept. 2, 2016).

<sup>34</sup> The limited data presented here is in part due to the very few programs available for previous conferences, something that AAIS is working to address.

<sup>35</sup> The CFP is available at <http://arts.leeds.ac.uk/italian-cinemas-italian-histories/resources/aais2017/> (Accessed September 15, 2016.)

piece by Domenico Fiormonte, the *Digital Humanities Quarterly* (DHQ) archives show only passing references to Italian, and most of those are of a speculative nature: what if Italian were more represented in this kind of computational work? In the more established *Digital Studies in the Humanities*, many of the articles on Italian topics over the 30-year history of the journal primarily reflect the computational linguistics focus of the publication, with exceptions for literary and historical studies of Dante (multiple contributions), Puccini, *La Stampa*, Renaissance poetry, Sardinian proverbs, Leon Battista Alberti, and Giovanni Rucellai. The exciting exception to this trend of visibility and venues for DH-Italian Studies scholarship is *Humanist Studies in the Digital Age*, which Massimo Lollini presented at an AAIS panel on scholarly journals in 2012 and the MLA 2012 session, shortly after the journal's launch.<sup>36</sup>

At the institutional level, a preliminary infrastructure would seem to be in place for facilitating more of these conversations. Seeing that 70% of schools that offer Italian also support some kind of work in DH is encouraging because it suggests that there are local resources for Italian Studies faculty members who are interested in exploring this avenue of teaching or research. Of course participation depends on the publicity of the event, as well as on the climate in the department. Beyond the institutional level, there are an increasing number of DH workshops and institutes open to visiting participants.<sup>37</sup> Exploring these national or international opportunities often requires a substantial monetary commitment. I have tried to avoid rhetorical questions thus far, but there are two open areas for which I do not have

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<sup>36</sup> See the journal's site <http://journals.oregondigital.org/index.php/hsda/index> (Accessed Sept. 8, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Subscribers to the Humanist list serve will receive frequent announcements of these workshops. Some of the larger events are the DHSI/Digital Humanities Summer Institute (Victoria, BC), the annual international DH conference (location varies), HILT/Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching (location varies), and Digital Humanities at Oxford Summer School (Oxford, UK).

even preliminary responses: Is this kind of integration and development a priority for the profession at large? If so, are there models of support that could help faculty members or graduate students explore these training opportunities?

The survey responses that I collected will hopefully provide more insight about what professional opportunities have been the most rewarding, how publication is happening at the intersection of these two fields, and the next steps that current practitioners would like to take.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond my own self-interest motivated by the fact that my professional identity sits at the intersection of these two fields, I do think that the stakes are high for supporting this kind of work. In the short term, both fields stand to gain infrastructures for collaboration, data exploration, digital resource sharing, and critically informed markup, framing, or contextualization of these resources.

In the longer term, the implications are amplified, and Italo Calvino has offered a way to think through these challenges. Intermingled with the imaginative fancy and dark wit of "La Memoria del Mondo", Calvino provides several observations about the data-fied world that he imagines, including two with particular centrality to the relationship of Italian Studies and Digital Humanities. The first is a dire prognostication about the world's data archive: "quel che resta fuori è come se non ci fosse mai stato."<sup>38</sup> Instrumentalist or determinist as we may feel about technology, this declaration of inclusion or exclusion remains true - either we design the

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<sup>38</sup> Italo Calvino, "La memoria del mondo" in *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997) p. 206.

tools to move our field forward or we do our best to knowingly and critically work within the technological system that we inherit from others. The second message from Calvino is that whoever controls the archive has the opportunity, willingly or unwillingly, to leave a mark on the records, which his protagonist describes as: "quella lieve impronta soggettiva, quel tanto d'opinabile, d'arrischiato, di cui hanno bisogno per essere veri."<sup>39</sup> Calvino's archivist directs the reader to the gap between expression and experience, with the important reminder that the entities that control the records of expression shape how and what we are able to interpret for experiences. There is vitally important humanistic work to be done here, as there always has been, and we need more humanists engaged in these questions now that we are facing the age of big data, algorithmic predictions, and technological hegemonies.

#### **Questions Raised in this Paper:**

1. How do digital humanities approaches connect with Italian Studies practices?
2. How can Italian Studies offer critical, valuable insights for developing or critiquing digital tools, methods, or products?
3. Does Italian Studies offer unique ways for collaboration with DH in comparison to Francophone Studies, Hispanic or Latin American Studies, etc.?
4. Are there opportunities for faculty and students at all levels to connect DH and Italian Studies at North American colleges and universities?
5. What are professional mechanisms for bringing together these two fields?
6. What challenges prevent more connections from developing between the fields?
7. What can be gained by doing this kind of combined teaching or research?

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<sup>39</sup> Italo Calvino, "La memoria del mondo" in *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997) p. 208.