

The State of Digital Humanities, 2010

(ripped from the blogosphere and twitterverse)

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I'd like to open with a few minutes of video. It's a viral video from 2009, part of a group of parodies based on a 2004 German-Austrian film, *Der Untergang* (The Downfall) which movie draws on various sources to depict the final days of Adolf Hitler's life in his bunker, in Berlin. You have probably already seen this parody, since it's had a good deal of play lately, but I choose to start with it here because I think it sets the scene for my topic pretty well, not least in the ways in which it was already out of date when it was made. The underlying film was directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, written by Bernd Eichinger, and nominated for an academy award for best foreign film; Bruno Ganz plays Hitler. According to Wikipedia (remember that reference as you watch the clip...), Wim Wenders and others felt that "The Downfall" humanized barbarism and strategically overlooked suffering; some of you may find this clip offensive, and I apologize if that's the case, but I assure you, it's not gratuitous. Here's what Wikipedia has to say about the parodic versions of the film:

One scene ... in which Hitler launches into a furious tirade upon finally realizing that the war is truly lost, has become a staple of internet viral videos. In these videos the original audio of Ganz's voice is retained, but new subtitles are added so that he now seems to be reacting instead to some setback in present-day politics, sports, popular culture, etc. One parody depicted Hitler flying into a rage in response to being banned from Xbox Live: This video accumulated a vast number of YouTube views and was posted on video game related sites....[Another version] released during the 2008 American presidential campaign imagined Hitler as Hillary Clinton, enraged by Barack Obama's victories over her in presidential primaries.... Another video featured Hitler as Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, outraged over the NDP–Liberal Coalition. In February 2009, a Downfall parody video protesting parking problems in Tel Aviv, Israel sparked a heated debate with Holocaust survivors about the legitimacy of jokes

involving Hitler and the Nazi regime. The film's director, Oliver Hirschbiegel, spoke positively about these parodies in a 2010 interview with *New York* magazine, saying that many of them were funny and they were a fitting extension of the film's purpose: "The point of the film was to kick these terrible people off the throne that made them demons, making them real and their actions into reality. I think it's only fair if now it's taken as part of our history, and used for whatever purposes people like."

So, here's an instance of this parodic trope, focused on traditional vs. digital humanities:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VREJV—VHSw>

"We'll always have informal learning networks...." my favorite line in this clip; there's more, but from here on, it turns into an advertisement for a site intended to educate academics about copyright and new media.

So, just to make my own position clear, I don't think traditional humanists are Nazis, and I don't think Hitler, as a historical figure, is funny, but I do think that this clip gives a reasonable facsimile of the view from the bunker. However, it's not the bunker of traditional humanities; the perspective, being parodic, is obviously from the bunker of digital humanities. The perspective is that of the embattled digital humanist, full of *schadenfreude*, imagining his or her department chair as the leader of a doomed and dying empire.

I've been working in the area of digital humanities since 1990, when (at NC State, as a brand-new assistant professor) I began working with some other junior colleagues (Eyal Amiran, Elaine Orr, Greg Dawes) to develop Postmodern Culture, the first peer-reviewed electronic journal in the humanities (now in its 20th year). If I consult my own experience from 1990 until now, I have to say that I have rarely felt as though I was fighting entrenched and hostile authority figures. In fact, from the very beginning, my personal experience at NC State and at Virginia was that department heads like John Basset and Michael Levenson, deans like Mike Reynolds, provosts like Peter Lowe, presidents like John Casteen, and especially librarians like Susan Nutter and Karin Wittenborg have encouraged my experimentation, and have supported my digital humanities activities. So, in that sense, my personal experience suggests that the Hitler

parody is off-base: if there is a rearguard action, it's not an imperial or monolithic one, and it doesn't come from the top—it's more likely to come from the ranks.

On the other hand, the bits of the clip that focus on tenure do ring true, from my own experience of going up for tenure in an English department, in 1995, for work in the digital humanities and eventually getting tenured, in 1996. But even there, it needs to be said that there was more support than opposition—it's just that it's difficult to achieve or grant tenure when opinions are divided, and it's in these discussions about tenure that faculty and departments confront their own identity politics most directly: every time you affirm that some new person belongs in your pantheon, you are saying something about both tradition and individual talent—you are redefining your own professional commitments and rearticulating your vision of the future of your discipline. And in those discussions, the bunker mentality does sometimes set in, especially when it feels like battles are being lost, territory ceded, and guards changed.

However, even granting that, I think that this particular Hitler parody is dated—maybe appropriate to 2004, but not to 2010. Note that, in the original version, the enemy is Stalin and the Russians. So, if Hitler is traditional humanities, Digital Humanities is Stalin. Stalin sapped the Third Reich, at great cost to his own population, but he also went on to institute his own version of totalitarianism and ultimately to do even more damage than Hitler did. And though digital humanities has a tradition of considering itself to be persecuted, hence the choice of Hitler as the representation of The Enemy, I think we need to consider the possibility that, at this point in the evolution of the university, we could seem more like Stalin than like the Jews. And I say this even though, as a recent blog-post asserted, “One of the things that people often notice when they enter the field of digital humanities is how nice everybody is” (<http://www.foundhistory.org/2010/05/26/why-digital-humanities-is-%E2%80%9Cnice%E2%80%9D/>). We're nice, but so are the aliens on “V.”

So, for example, if we turn to a recent blog post from video-game theorist Ian Bogost, on "The Turtleneck Hairshirt (Fetid and Fragrant Futures for the Humanities)," we find rhetoric like this, in the concluding paragraph of the posting:

"If we want the humanities to become central, it is not the humanities that must change, but its members. We must want to be of the world, rather [than] hidden

from it. We must be brutal. We must invoke wrath instead of liberation. We must cull. We must burn away the dead wood to let new growth flourish. If we don't, we will suffocate under the noxious rot of our own decay."

—http://www.bogost.com/blog/the_turtlenecked_hairshirt.shtml

I take that to be the un-parodic statement of the point of view that informs the DH-Downfall parody. "We must be brutal" – in essence: we must kill all the old farts. Where does that vehemence come from? In part, I think it arises from a sense that the humanities are hunkered down in a position of deliberate irrelevance, as represented, for example, in Stanley Fish in a NY Times Opinion piece from January 6, 2008, called "Will the Humanities Save Us?" in which he says:

"To the question "of what use are the humanities?", the only honest answer is none whatsoever. And it is an answer that brings honor to its subject. Justification, after all, confers value on an activity from a perspective outside its performance. An activity that cannot be justified is an activity that refuses to regard itself as instrumental to some larger good. The humanities are their own good."

—<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/will-the-humanities-save-us/>

Fish could be channeling Walter Pater here. In Bogost's blogpost, he begins by quoting Cathy Davidson, former colleague of Fish and your neighbor here at Duke, who makes what is, by comparison, a fairly Arnoldian argument:

"I truly believe that most universities would be entirely grateful for a visionary humanities program that addressed the critical needs of literacies for the twenty-first century. That would not have to be all we need to do, but why we aren't making that our mission, staking that as our invaluable inestimable value in a radically changing world, is beyond my comprehension."

Bogost replies, ventriloquizing those he opposes:

"We do not want change. We do not want centrality. We do not want to speak to nor interact with the world. We mistake the tiny pastures of private ideals with the megalopolis of real lives. We spin from our mouths retrograde dreams of the second coming of the nineteenth century whilst simultaneously dismissing out of our sphincters the far more earnest ambitions of the public at large—religion, economy, family, craft, science."

In other words, I think, Bogost sides with Davidson, against Fish, albeit with a little less emphasis on utility, but with a shared emphasis on connecting to the world outside academia. He says, "It's not "the digital" that marks the future of the humanities, it's what things digital point to: a great outdoors. A real world. A world of humans, things, and ideas. A world of the commonplace."

For Fish, that orientation represents a capitulation to instrumentality, usefulness, the profit motive, etc. If you'd like to follow that thread, I invite you to see Fish's January 18, 2009 review of Denis Donoghue's book "The Last Professor," also in the NY Times, in which he sets the deliberate inutility of the humanities against what he takes to be the position of the contemporary corporate university, foreshadowed by Richard Teller Crane (of Crane plumbing supply—the toilet guy) in 1911, when he said that "No one who has 'a taste for literature has the right to be happy' because 'the only men entitled to happiness ... are those who are useful'" (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/the-last-professor/>).

As entertaining as the rhetoric of all this may be, I have to believe that there's something more going on than the triumph of toilets and over truth and beauty. It could be about funding: the National Endowment for the Humanities now has an Office of Digital Humanities, which is running programs called things like "Digging Into Data" (<http://www.neh.gov/odh/>). Bill Bowen, President of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, in his 2004 Annual Report, estimated that "taken together, grants with a technological emphasis in the library and scholarly communication, research in information technology, and other programs, represent just over 20 percent of total [Mellon] Foundation grant-making today." Perhaps traditional academic humanities feel this is curtailing the funding available to the projects and pursuits that they cherish. (http://www.mellon.org/news_publications/annual-reports-essays/annual-reports/content2004.pdf, p.17). Then there are digital vs. print library collections: library budgets for the humanities are battlegrounds these days, but in terms of dollars spent the humanities are at war with the sciences, not with each other, and the action around digital vs. print in the humanities is a skirmish on the side.

However, this probably isn't the whole story. Harriet Zuckerman (also from the Mellon Foundation) and Ronald G. Ehrenberg (Director of Cornell University's Higher

Education Research Institute) published an article called "Recent Trends in Funding the Academic Humanities and their Implications" in the Winter 2009 issue of *Daedalus*, and in this article they said that the real competition for NEH funding, as far as academic humanities are concerned, is coming from public programs aimed to reach audiences outside the academy, while in private foundation funding, the real competition is coming from museums and archives. Given these starting conditions, I'd observe that digital humanities may give academic humanities an edge in both areas, since it offers new ways of reaching the public and new opportunities to work with museums and archives, but even this is a matter of marginal advantage—it's not the main event.

A more plausible explanation for the friction between digital and traditional humanities is that it's about jobs—after all, even aesthetes have mortgages. Between Fish's "Last Professor" post in January of 2009 and Bogost's "Turleneck Hairshirt" in February 2010, the *New York Times* published an article, just before the most recent MLA Convention, which cited the Modern Language Association's forecast that

...faculty positions [in the humanities] will decline 37 percent, the biggest drop since the group began tracking its job listings 35 years ago. The projection, based on a comparison between the number of jobs listed in October 2008 and October 2009, follows a 26 percent drop the previous year."

Now, it's worth reminding ourselves that for decades we have been producing approximately twice as many humanities Ph.Ds as there are jobs, but a 37% drop-off in a single year is a fairly dire indicator, nonetheless. At about the same time, William Pannacker (alias), writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, saw the digital humanities as perhaps the one bright spot at this year's MLA convention. His piece opens as follows:

Amid all the doom and gloom of the 2009 MLA Convention, one field seems to be alive and well: the digital humanities. More than that: Among all the contending subfields, the digital humanities seem like the first "next big thing" in a long time, because the implications of digital technology affect every field. I think we are now realizing that resistance is futile. One convention attendee complained that this MLA seems more like a conference on technology than one on literature. I saw the complaint on Twitter.

—http://chronicle.com/blogPost/The-MLAthe-Digital/19468/?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en

So when, in the midst of general gloom, the spotlight falls on digital humanities as a vibrant and viable specialization, it's bound to attract some notice, especially among bright, goal-oriented graduate students who are approaching the job market. For that matter, it wouldn't be too surprising if the definition of digital humanities became a matter of keen and perhaps political interest to search committees with limited opportunities to hire. With that in mind, consider this comment posted by "Palefire" in response to Bogost's piece:

I am a recent Ph.D graduate who is out in the job market this year. Although I came from a strong humanities background, I wrote my dissertation in new media... and by that I mean I looked at storytelling in video sharing sites, ARGs [alternate reality games], virtual world, oh, and the novel. . . . What I have seen lately is the recent increase in the "digital humanities" programs. I would consider myself as working in the field of digital humanities but some questions that came out in my recent interview led me to realize that what I've done may not have been exactly digital humanities. Frankly, I was a bit startled by this realization. The line of questioning suggested that "digital humanities" is something other than "new media studies" and the implication was that my research fell under the second category. . . . So, I am no longer sure that my research area was "digital humanities" after all... It begs the question then, what was it??? And really, is digital humanities [so] different [from] new media studies that I am faced with the task of having to explain how my research relates to digital humanities or even justify its validity within the context of digital humanities?

Bogost replies, "You're absolutely right that there seems to be a strong, forced schism between the digital humanities and new media studies. I'm not sure I fully understand it yet..."

My colleague in Media Studies at Illinois, Lisa Nakamura, posts on the same blog to say, of Palefire's dilemma, that

"digital humanities" boils down to using computers to do exactly the same silo-ed and intellectually buttoned down work that people did before. It is the opposite of

expansive. But it's always easier to get money for equipment (ie computers to make a million concordances of literature that people don't even read anymore and sure as hell don't want to read lit-crit about) than it is to re-envision a field. People in this kind of digital humanities are very concerned with "preservation" in every sense of the word—preservation of the status quo, of themselves and their jobs, and of the methods and fields of the past.

In response to this, Matt Kirschenbaum (University of Maryland Associate Professor of English, Assistant Director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities) chimes in to redirect us to another blog, *Academhack*, written by David Parry at UT Dallas, and specifically to a post in that blog, where Parry talks about a paper Brian Croxall didn't deliver at the last MLA convention, titled "The Absent Presence: Today's Faculty." Brian's paper was delivered by his session chair, because Brian didn't get any job interviews and therefore couldn't afford to come to the conference. Brian is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Clemson University and his "research is in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature, technology (especially media), and psychological trauma." He's also a contributor to the *ProfHacker* blog, and a frequent Tweeter.

A side note—this is the point at which I actually picked up the thread in real time, because I follow Matt on Twitter, and he tweeted something about the schismatic distinctions being made, which piqued my interest. If there is a schism between digital humanities and new media studies, then Croxall, along with Palefire and Lisa Nakamura fall on the media studies side, which doesn't seem to be doing quite as well as those buttoned-down digital humanists. Matt, by contrast, is a kind of cross-over figure, and he rejects the distinction, which makes sense, given the nature of his own work. More important than all this, though, is the intensity and the timeliness of the exchange across disciplines and institutions—much of it in new formats like blogs and twitter, but some, notably, in a discussion group, *Humanist*, that's been going on for twenty years now, and that can legitimately lay claim to founding this kind of academic discourse.

But back to Croxall: his MLA paper was about the status of adjunct faculty, and the most quotable part had to do with his salary making him eligible for food-stamps. That got a lot of attention on Twitter, and many people (myself included) followed links

from other people's tweets to Brian's blog, where they read the paper. In fact, many more people read it online than actually heard it delivered at MLA, or than heard any paper delivered at this MLA convention. Within a matter of days, thousands of people had read it.

The whole of Parry's Academhack post on Croxall's paper is well worth your attention, but I'll just read you the last couple of paragraphs, to give you a sense of it. Parry writes:

The fact that Brian's making public of his paper was an oddity worth noticing means that we are far away from the rise of the digital humanities.... The fact that a prominent digital scholar like Brian doesn't even get one interview at the MLA means more than the economy is bad, that tenure track jobs are not being offered, but rather that Universities are still valuing the wrong stuff. They are looking for "real somebodies" instead of "virtual somebodies." **Something which the digital humanities has the potential of changing (although I remain skeptical).** In the panel at which I presented, an audience member noting the "meme" about the rise of the digital humanities asked if all of this "stuff" about digital humanities just reflected our fascination with gadgets, or how we balance our technology with humanities, how does the digital affect the humanities in a non-gadget way? ...I said instead of thinking of the word digital as an adjective which modifies the humanities, the humanities 2.0 model, I am more interested in ... how the digital can fundamentally change what it means to do humanities, how the digital might change the very concept of "the humanities." I don't want a digital facelift for the humanities, I want the digital to completely change what it means to be a humanities scholar. When this happens then I'll start arguing that the digital humanities have arrived. Really I couldn't care less about text visualizations or neat programs which analyze the occurrences of the word "house" in Emily Dickinson's poetry. If that is your scholarship fine, but it strikes me that that is just doing the same thing with new tools. Give me the "virtual somebodies" who are engaging in a new type of public intellectualism any day. Better yet, if you are a University and want to remain relevant in the next moment, give these people a job.

In response to this, also on Academhack, Steve Ramsay (University of Nebraska, Associate Professor of English, and someone who definitively belongs in the digital humanities camp) posts to say:

"Great post, but I'm not sure I agree with your answer to the question about our fascination with gadgets. You dismissed the question as insufficiently broad-minded and visionary — as if re-imagining humanistic discourse was the only revolution worth having, all else being “just the same thing with new tools.” I think that undervalues the way that new tools facilitate “new type[s] of public intellectualism.” No one would say that the printing press was just a faster version of the scriptorium, or that the Republic of Letters was just a bigger version of Bede's monastery. The *techne* of scholarship — the gadgets of the early modern period and the networks of communication in which they flourished — were precisely what allowed that new intellectualism to flourish. And indeed, one doesn't even have to look at things on that scale. I think it's easy to demonstrate that the concordance (a mere “tool,” by any measure) changed theology, and with it, the course of western philosophy. I can now search for the word “house” (maybe “domus”) in every work ever produced in Europe during the entire period in question (in seconds). To suggest that this is just the same old thing with new tools, or that scholarship based on corpora of a size unimaginable to any previous generation in history is just “a fascination with gadgets,” is to miss both the epochal nature of what's afoot, and the ways in which technology and discourse are intertwined."

It was actually Ramsay's response to which Kirschenbaum referred, back in the land of the Turtleneck Hairshirt—where, after presumably reading all of the above, Palefire, the recent Ph.D. grad, returns to post again, saying:

I've been systematically going through job openings, and I am not sure that some of the departments know what they are looking for when they open a “digital humanities” position. My impression is that some institutions know that they need it, either to stay at the cutting edge or to attract students, but not sure what for or what the role of this shiny new thing is going to be in their departments.

So, where does all this blogging and tweeting leave us? There's a thread here that's about relevance and audience, and another that's about method and discovery, and both of these are framed, inevitably, in terms of tidal shifts in the job market. With respect to the tide, I think Palefire is correct: it seems to have turned in favor of the digital humanities at least inasmuch as that sub-specialty offers a discernible advantage in a down market. Why is this so? I'm not sure that question can be answered, except with speculation. However, were I asked to speculate, I would guess that the availability of digital humanities jobs is due, in rank order, to

- 1) the likelihood of persuading your dean that hiring a digital humanist is a competitive move at this point, and that it's likely to bring in grant funding;
- 2) a desire to offer courses that attract tuition-paying undergraduates, and
- 3) a sense that this might be the Next Big Thing in method (though maybe not in theory).

However, it's also clear, from Palefire's interview experience, that work on digital topics in the humanities won't always count as digital humanities. And it's possible that humanities work using social media to reach a broader audience won't necessarily count as digital humanities, either.

This orthodoxy is unfortunate, in my view, and yet, at the risk of seeming self-aggrandizing, I think I need to take some responsibility for the situation I'm describing. My responsibility, if it exists, is at least shared, since it would derive from my involvement in two collaborative efforts: the Blackwell Companion to Digital Humanities (2004)—arguably the text that definitively established the term "digital humanities"—and the ACLS report on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences (2006)—which seems to have had a significant effect on funding agencies. If I'm 'fessing up, I would also need to mention—in connection with the orthodoxy that Palefire encountered in the job interview—an article called "What is Humanities Computing and What is Not?" published in 2002 (<http://computerphilologie.uni-muenchen.de/jg02/unsouth.html>) but first delivered as a paper at the University of Maryland in 2000, and again in revised form in Texas in 2004. On the other hand, around the same time, I was making the argument for reaching a broader public, in papers like "The Crisis of Audience," delivered at the American Library Association's annual

meeting in 2004 (<http://www3.isrl.illinois.edu/~unsworth/sparc.2004.html>) and in "Public Networks, Vernacular Computing" delivered in London in 2005, and in other forms and venues subsequently. For that matter, Parry's dismissal, in *Academhack*, of "text visualizations or neat programs which analyze the occurrences of the word "house" in Emily Dickinson's poetry" could easily refer to my work on the (collaborative) NORA and MONK projects, which applied text-mining to humanities digital libraries, work discussed in a number of talks delivered from 2005 onward, at the National Humanities Center, Harvard, Rutgers, Rochester, Michigan, and Microsoft Research in Redmond, Washington.

So, I'm obviously sympathetic to the position that Steve Ramsay articulates, that "new tools facilitate 'new type[s] of public intellectualism.'" But I would also agree with David Parry when he says that "I don't want a digital facelift for the humanities, I want the digital to completely change what it means to be a humanities scholar." I think we need new methods to answer new questions, and I think we need new methods to reach new audiences. In fact, I'm enough of an optimist to think that new methods will bring us new audiences, and new audiences will bring us new questions.

Of course, it's an open question whether this change in the tide will come in time to help Palefire or Brian Croxall, or others, get tenure-track positions—but we also know that the tide doesn't turn at the same time in all places. In this case, I would say it turned first in public research universities, is turning now in ivy-league universities, and hasn't yet really begun to turn in many colleges and universities that are primarily focused on teaching. Let's look at some evidence for these suppositions, in a recent exchange on *Humanist*, the email discussion group about humanities computing that Willard McCarty started in 1989 and which he still emcees. The exchange has to do with a recent conference at Yale University, on "The Past's Digital Presence" (<http://digitalhumanities.yale.edu/pdp/>).

The first thing to note is that the conference was organized by graduate students, not faculty. The co-chairs of the event were Molly Farrel (Ph.D. in English expected in 2010, dissertation title "Counting Bodies: Imagining Population in the New World"; <http://mollyfarrell.wordpress.com/>), Heather Klemann (Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature, no date given, dissertation title "Literary Souvenirs: Didactic Materialism in

Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Fiction,"

<http://heatherklemann.wordpress.com/>), and Taylor Spence (Ph.D. in History expected in 2011, dissertation title "The Liberal Schoolmaster"). How did these students get drawn into the digital humanities? Were they led to it by their professors? Apparently not. Taylor says of himself that "his interest in the digital humanities has a very practical bent; it has come from using the ever-evolving set of digital tools in the many hours of his scholarly research" (<http://digitalhumanities.yale.edu/pdp/2010/01/17/taylor-spence/>). However, it is notable that the list of sponsors, on the conference home page, seems to include every humanities department and program. And it's also notable that, except for keynotes by Peter Stallybrass and a closing panel with Ed Ayers, Rolena Adorno, Willard McCarty, and George Miles, the papers are delivered by graduate students and recent grads from a very broad range of universities: City University of New York, NYU, UC Santa Cruz, University of Delaware, Stanford, University of Virginia, Dharma Drum College in Taiwan, University of Windsor in Ontario, University of Illinois, University of Georgia, Rochester Institute of Technology, University of Texas at Dallas, The Folger, Brandeis, University of Toronto, Columbia, Washington State, the Sorbonne, and yes, a couple from Yale.

In his Feb. 21, 2010 Humanist post about the event, Willard quoted Ed Ayers, who, on the closing panel, "summed up the moment by saying that he thought it might well prove a watershed event in the history of our field in the U.S." In his post, Willard went on to talk about the graduate student participants, noting that "quite independently of the work us older ones have done for so long, these students see the possibilities now visible and question them as befits the humanities." The first, quoted, remark was the one that drew the most immediate response and provoked an exchange that was still going on a week later; the second remark needs more attention than it has gotten, so I'll come back to that later.

Responding to the notion that the Yale conference might be a watershed moment for digital humanities, Amanda Gailey, an assistant professor of English at the University of Nebraska (one of those public research universities where the tide turned early on), responded to Willard on Feb. 22nd, saying:

"As someone for whom graduate school isn't too distant a memory (I've been done for about four years), I find that the "watershed" comment overlooks the work that many grad students have been doing at non-Ivy schools for several years now. A wave of us—well, maybe a ripple more than a wave—have been presenting our work on DH as students for quite a while. Importantly, many of us who did not attend Ivy League schools and who professionally defined ourselves as digital humanists before it became an MLA buzzword were arguably taking many more risks."

Amanda's complaint is not simply that earlier work by risk-taking graduate students outside of the Ivies is being overlooked, though. Later in the same post, she says something that sounds quite a bit like Lisa Nakamura's complaint about digital humanities as same-old-same-old, except this time focused on credentialing:

"Frankly, I view the late arrival of the Ivies as a worrisome indicator that DH will soon be locked down by the same tired socio-economic gatekeeping mechanisms that prevent many people with talent from succeeding at so many other academic disciplines. I say this not at all to denigrate what is surely fine work coming from those schools, and even perhaps from students and staff who can relate rags-to-riches stories of their academic career paths. I simply want to suggest that to my mind, the conference may be a watershed, but not because DH has finally earned the benediction of the Ivies. Instead, it is quite possible that a hitherto unproven field, within which smart people not housed at the most selective and expensive universities could actually earn influence and rewards, is becoming less egalitarian."

Again, this is ultimately about jobs, about access to professional livelihood, and, in the moment when DH arrives at Yale, about whether a comparative advantage hitherto enjoyed mostly by graduate students at public research universities will now be appropriated by the elite private universities.

Meanwhile, we hear on Feb. 24th from someone at an even further remove from the elite institutions, when Kathy Harris, an Assistant Professor in the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San Jose State University, writes to say:

"Though both [Willard and Amanda] are absolutely right in their suppositions (that Digital Humanities has been around long enough to become a mainstay and that private Ivies ... getting involved signals to the rest of the community some validity), I think there's some short-sighted celebration about the extension of Digital Humanities from or into 2nd and 3rd tier U.S. universities. This may be true for 2nd and 3rd tier Research I institutions, but we are still grappling with issues of funding, authority and networking for Digital Humanities at teaching institutes."

What's interesting about this post is that the trajectory of digital humanities (is it being extended from or into 2nd and 3rd-tier US universities?) is of less significance than the fact that, wherever it's coming from or going to, it seems to be bypassing institutions that focus more on teaching than research. Privilege, it seems, is all relative. Harris goes on to ask:

"[D]o the centers and bastions of Digital Humanities [all, at this point, in public research universities] have an obligation to bring along their "lesser" public institutions? Most of the university and the Cal State system has a profound distrust of Digital Humanities or Digital Studies. What is its purpose? Who is funding it? Are faculty really interested if they have to teach a 4-course load? I'm still waiting for my teaching institute to fully accept DH: in T&P issues, in funding my research, in giving me time to play with the tools in the classroom. After 5 years, I still struggle with convincing my Department that this facet of my research and teaching is innovative and authoritative — every day, people, every day. So, before we declare that the gate has been thrown open, let's think about the broader version of higher education, please."

My last foray into blogging as a bellweather of the state of digital humanities, 2010, comes from Alan Christy's blog, *Notes from A Non-Native Speaker* (subtitled "What is this digital humanities you speak of?"). In particular, I'm interested in his February 17, 2010 post, called "Becoming a Digital Humanist." In it, he writes about

Alex Reid, a professor in the English Dept. at the University of Buffalo, [who] has a post up today that I found in a tweet from Dan Cohen, the Director of the

Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. The post is called "Strategies to Develop the Digital Humanities" and it triggered one of my "non-native speaker" reactions. Reid may very well be effective in the way he approaches the question of developing digital humanities, but there is something that is missing here for me. It's like I don't speak his language. I walk away from reading the post feeling like I'm not quite part of the digital tribe. This isn't meant necessarily as a criticism of Reid. I'm just trying to articulate where the cogs miss. Reid builds his argument on a formula from Gladwell (which Gladwell? not sure. Malcolm, maybe? I guess my ignorance is showing) that classifies technology users as "innovators, early adopters, early majority and late majority." Reid proposes that "one way of approaching supporting digital humanities is to identify faculty who are innovators and early adopters and support their efforts in these areas." These faculty, who he distinguishes from "print humanities faculty" have distinct needs: 1) more technology and 2) more money (since their work requires collaboration, which means hiring grad students and tech specialists, traveling to meetings and other management costs). Another way he proposes, sticking with the Gladwell formula, is to identify emerging practices among early adopters and support them in ways that would help those practices move from an early adopters phase to an early majority phase. He blocks that out in the following steps:

1. Identify a technology/tech practice poised to tip toward the early majority.
2. Recruit innovators and early adopters already using it for research/teaching.
3. Support and publicize their activities on the campus.
4. Make it easier for more early adopter types and early majority folks to get on board.

Here's what feels wrong about this: what drives this list, it seems to me, is technology trends not humanities developments. Put another way, the necessity comes from adopting the technology, not from wrestling with a problematic in humanities research or teaching.

—<http://www.alanchristy.net/>

Now, check the tide: Christy is from UC Santa Cruz; Kathy Harris is from San Jose State. Right now, I'd say that's a good indication of the level. Both are clearly engaged and aware, wondering how, whether, and why they might incorporate digital humanities into their own work. Christy, at a UC campus, looks at this from a scholar's point of view, and asks, quite rightly, what's the humanities problematic that would drive him to learn what he needs to learn, and why the driver should be technology. Elsewhere in his post, he talks about how he's incorporated Keynote (Mac's version of powerpoint) into his teaching, and how that's changed what he can do in the classroom. At a Cal State campus, Harris wonders when she'll have time or support even for incorporating this stuff into her teaching, much less her scholarship. Neither feels like an insider, but neither is dismissive, either. Both would probably be well-served by the maturation of digital humanities services, as represented in the Scholar's Lab at Virginia (<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/scholarslab/>), where the focus is on providing library-supported access to digital resources—not just text and images but maps and other kinds of data—with some library-style training on how to use those collections, either for teaching or for research. Both would probably be well-served by something like Nines, which collects digital artifacts and scholarship in 19th-century studies, and provides tools for creating, sharing, analyzing, and exploring collections derived from nearly half a million “peer-reviewed digital objects from 78 federated sites” (<http://www.nines.org/>). We're entering the age of mass production, and leaving the age of digital incunabula, and that's actually a good thing for those who can't, or don't want to, devote their lives to *building* the library, and would rather use it, instead. And for those slightly younger than either Harris or Christy, for those who grew up using Google, the impending availability to researchers of millions of volumes, billions of pages, coming out of Google Books by way of the HathiTrust, is going to take “library services” to a new level rather quickly. Immodestly, I would suggest that the recent library-based instantiation of the MONK project is a preview of what these services may look like. It makes 150M words of literary text (from both commercial and public domain sources) available for word-level analysis and exploration by half a million users across the Big Ten, presenting a quite reasonable cross-section of genres, periods, and authors (<https://monk.library.illinois.edu/cic/public/>). A smaller collection of about 50M words,

focused on American literature and without the commercially licensed material, is also available to the general public.

Finally, back to that remark Willard made, about the graduate students in the Yale conference—the remark generally overlooked in the dispute about watersheds. What he said was that "quite independently of the work us older ones have done for so long, these students see the possibilities now visible and question them as befits the humanities." This is perhaps the most interesting point, and the one on which I will end. Coming up behind Christy and Harris, Gailey, Ramsay, Bogost, Kirschenbaum, McCarty, Ayers, Stallybrass, and me, is a generation of graduate students who essentially learned to do research with digital tools; they aren't necessarily aware of the history that's implicit, just barely submerged, in the exchanges we've been considering here—they actually don't care all that much about the back-story. They're interested in grabbing these tools, using these new library services, and making their own mark, and they have some interesting questions to ask. I'd like to read those dissertations. I wouldn't hold it against them that they're at Yale, either. I understand and appreciate Amanda Gailey's point about the egalitarianism of digital humanities, and I do think that's real—digital humanities has been good at community-building and that is definitely something we want to preserve—but to expand the community further, we're going to need to have good answers for honest questions from people like Alan Christy, and we need to have something to offer people like Kathy Harris. We're going to need to reward the people who think of creative ways to apply digital tools and methods in the humanities, rather than worrying about whether, in so doing, they are doing "digital humanities," and we're also going to need to reward the sincere efforts that people like Parry, Croxall, and many others are making, to become a new kind of public intellectual. Innovative ideas and methods that lead to scholarly discoveries and effective pedagogy will be key to the survival of the humanities—but without access to an audience outside the academy, we're just going to become the newest owners of a used bunker. And we already know how that movie turns out.