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The Digital Humanities in Ireland

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If the digital humanities are to thrive they must be allowed to remain culturally dissonant. The ways in which DH is practiced will differ across national contexts, with each region having peculiarities representative of the culture-specific conditions which shaped the field as it first emerged and later developed. While scholars tend to belong and contribute to international communities of praxis, doing DH in one place might look very different to doing DH somewhere else. Disciplinary cultures are often transnational, but where scholars are trained and where they work will usually impact upon their own, individualised perspective of that discipline.

This paper traces the history of the digital humanities in Ireland, providing on account of DH as it exists in a specifically Irish context. It mimics the Busa narrative, uncovering equivalent figures from Irish DH's origin story, while detailing some of the key initiatives and institutions to have contributed to the national development of the discipline. As a small island with a close-knit academic community, culturally torn between US, British and European influences, Ireland represents an opportunity to examine DH as a national project, and how such a project might be contrasted with international norms, what it achieved, and where it has failed.

Si les humanités numériques doivent prospérer, il faudra leur permettre de rester culturellement dissonantes. Les façons dont l'on pratique les HN varieront et dépendront de contextes nationaux, où chaque région a des particularités qui représentent leurs propres situations culturelles qui ont façonné le domaine à son début et ultérieurement. Tandis que les chercheurs ont tendance à contribuer et à faire partie de communautés internationales de praxis, les HN faites dans un endroit peuvent être très différentes par rapport à celles trouvées ailleurs.

Les cultures disciplinaires sont souvent transnationales, mais le lieu où les chercheurs ont été formés et où ils travaillent affectent normalement leur propre perspective individualisée de la discipline en question.

Cet article suit l'histoire des humanités numériques en Irlande, en fournissant un récit des HN comme elles existent dans un contexte spécifiquement irlandais. Cela imite la narrative Busa, en dévoilant des

figures équivalentes de l'origine des HN en Irlande et en détaillant des initiatives et institutions clés qui ont contribué au développement national du domaine. En tant que petite île ayant une communauté académique très unie, et déchirée entre les influences américaines, britanniques et européennes, l'Irlande représente l'opportunité d'examiner les HN comme projet national, d'examiner la façon dont un tel projet peut être contrasté avec des normes internationales, ainsi que d'examiner ce qui a été achevé et ce qui a échoué.

It is now almost a decade since Kathleen Fitzpatrick sat down to write a lunchtime talk and puzzled over whether her title should be "What is Digital Humanities?" or "What are the Digital Humanities?" (2012). A year prior, Stephen Ramsay had landed in Los Angeles for the 2011 MLA, ready to offer his famous "Who's In and Who's Out" paper which would go on to prove as provocative an address as anyone might hope to pronounce in three short minutes. Ramsay's presentation had the desired effect, drawing a variety of responses throughout the subsequent years, largely as a reaction to his somewhat controversial claim that digital humanities scholars should be capable of coding. Ramsay's forthright contentions have had much utility in a field where its practitioners do not always agree on how it is they should be occupied, and thus benefit from occasional provocations which give cause to reflect on what DH might or might not be to each of us. But the real value in his paper is to be found in his short but inimitably eloquent defence of DH as something of substance: "Digital Humanities is not some airy Lyceum. It is a series of concrete instantiations involving money, students, funding agencies, big schools, programs, curricula, old guards, new guards, gatekeepers, and prestige. It might be more than these things, but it cannot not be these things" (Ramsay 2013, 240).

Fitzpatrick and Ramsay, writing at that critical moment when DH was truly in a state of expansion, aptly express the field's central tension: there is no one digital humanities, and everyone will have their own interpretation of what being a "DHer" entails. Evidence for this dissonance—and the digital humanities are dissonant (O'Sullivan 2018b)—can be found in the great many disciplines that coalesce around DH gatherings (Weingart and Eichmann-Kalwara 2017) and in movements like

#myDHis, which saw scholars and practitioners across the DH world take to social media to offer their own personal definitions of the field. There are many factors contributing to the dissonant nature of DH, but one of the great contributors is the most essential of scholarly dictators—disciplinary cultures. We all belong to disciplinary cultures which hold significance beyond the pragmatics of operational and methodological norms; the intellectual communities and sub-communities to which we belong have a direct and real influence on interpretation and expression. Different disciplines do things in different ways, and as obvious at this may seem, we tend to forget it and assume *our* way is *the* way. And while for many DH remains other, there are many others within DH.

Fitzpatrick's conclusion that the digital humanities will flourish if "allowed to remain plural" (2012) suggests that those of us committed to this nexus can be hopeful of its future: DH will remain plural whether we like it or not, because, pragmatics aside, disciplinary cultures are not just about people, they are about place. Like other fields, the way DH is practiced in Europe will differ from North America, and each individualised national context will have its own set of particularities and peculiarities; many scholars will belong to broader international networks of exchange, but few will be capable of escaping the impression left by their day-to-day interactions. While disciplinary cultures are formed through complicated unions, *where* scholars are based, *where* they have been trained, *where* they hope to end up, will always have a bearing on their thinking. Returning to Ramsay, the "concrete instantiations" to which he refers will differ greatly depending on their cultural contexts: and thus, if we are to appreciate DH in Ireland, we must consider DH as Irish.

The account that follows is intended to act as an initial attempt at filling some of the gaps in an Ireland-specific disciplinary history. It is no way an exhaustive list of DH projects, nor would it be possible to provide such an all-encompassing treatment in a paper of this scope. The projects and figures discussed all play or have played a central role in the emergence of DH in Ireland but are by no means the only projects and figures which could have been selected. The paper was largely developed through desk work and will hopefully serve as a foundation and provocation for more thorough and focused histories of Irish DH in the years to come.

North American perspectives are often the most visible when it comes to "shared" discourses of what it is that DH is or might be, a consequence of the region's socio-economic dominance in the age of late capitalism: the technologies, institutions, publishers and public spaces in which these conversations take place are often international only in the sense that when we speak of globalised we really mean Americanised. This position is not intended as an overt criticism of American DH—which is a brilliant thing full of brilliant people—and DH in the context of continental Europe has never had a more distinct voice, owing in part to the work of bodies like the European Association for Digital Humanities (EADH). Rather, this is simply to say that, beyond and within these two continental superpowers there exists smaller, more peripheral communities where DH is still DH, but not quite the same DH. To suggest that we tirelessly produce even more case studies of DH in specific, localised contexts—often mundane conveyances which do little but recount accomplishments—might betray something of a penchant for tedium. Indeed, one might legitimately ask: who really cares? Why do we need an account of DH in Ireland or anywhere else when the reality is, as articulated by Ramsay, that DH is now something and we should just progress in the spirit of whatever that thing is wherever it is that it is being done? We need such accounts because it is our role as active participants in the formation and development of such localised contexts to ensure that they are made visible, and that through such visibility they are critiqued with more exacting utility than can be achieved within the largely unspecified "what is DH" debates that tend to dominate the field. Irish DH is its own DH, made so by the peculiarities of an Irish academy which is in many respects considerably different to its international counterparts, and so we should problematise it in its own right. This is doubly important at a time when, far beyond DH, the Irish academy continues to re-brand and essentially Americanise itself for the purposes of attracting a higher volume of international students required to redress a sustained lack of state funding.

The beginnings of the digital humanities in Ireland

In March 1993, Irish rock band The Cranberries released *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?*, a question which the island's institutions—DH already the coming force across broader international settings—also began to ponder. On a

site at the centre of the University College Cork campus there stands a dour sort of building, typical of 1970s utilitarian architecture—it is the Kane Building, largely known as the campus' science building, having long housed departments like Physics and Chemistry. But tucked away in a quiet corner of this building there is an office where, for a great many years, the bookshelves were stacked with texts relating to the computational rather than natural sciences, and indeed, some other very strange things of the humanistic sort—this was the office of Peter Flynn, who might be considered one of the first pioneers of DH in Ireland.[1] Recently retired, Flynn was first drawn to computers in the 1970s, seeing them as instruments for typesetting and publishing. Graduating from the London College of Printing in 1976, he went on to work with the UK's Printing and Publishing Industry Training Board where he became exposed to the Board's research on effects of computing in the print industry (Flynn 2017). After several years in private enterprise, where he built his technical expertise in networking technologies, he joined UCC in 1984, going on to lead the institution's electronic publishing initiative while contributing to milestones projects like the Corpus of Electronic Texts (CELT) considered to be one of the country's—and the world's—longest running digital humanities projects (see CELT 2020).

Ireland's first computers were largely installed for the purposes of commercial and scientific data processing: when the Irish Sugar Company, Comhlucht Siúicre Éireann Teo, purchased the country's first programmable computer in 1957, the BTM HEC 1201, it was to calculate how much they owed beet farmers supplying their factories in Carlow, Mallow, Thurles, and Tuam (Lillington 2009). The HEC (Hollerith Electronic Computer) 1201, manufactured by the British Tabulating Machine Company (BTM), was one of Britain's first mass-market business computers. The appeal of the HEC 1201 was that it was programmable and had a little bit of memory,

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[1] There are countless individuals and organisations that warrant acknowledgement for the successes of DH in Ireland, but as is the norm with lists of such a manner, however diligent one might hope to be there will always be someone who has been unintentionally excluded. Thus, this paper has refrained from attempting to offer an exhaustive list, for those people who have made these contributions, many of whom I am privileged to consider colleagues, know who they are and while they deserve every opportunity for public recognition, will appreciate why it would be careless of me to offer it here.

saving users the need to completely program and configure the system from scratch each time it was rebooted. Speaking to *The Irish Times*, former BTM representative and Fellow of the Irish Computing Society Gordon Clarke recalls how operators at the Irish Sugar Company used punched cards to complete their calculations as farmers streamed in and out of their plants (Lillington 2009). While the HEC 1201 cost the Irish Sugar Company £33,000, a sum which was over 100 times the annual salary of a clerk, its success would lead to other major firms following suit, such as Jacobs Biscuits and Esso Ireland, while the ESB and Aer Lingus purchased IBM systems in the 1960s (Lillington 2009). The education sector also favoured IBM over BMT, with Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, and University College Cork all purchasing IBM 1620s in the 1960s.

Reflecting their corporate counterparts, Irish universities first saw the computer as a means of automating routine tasks, such as payroll and student registration. The impact of computing on scholarship was largely isolated to the sciences and engineering, though it was not really until the 1980s, when the capabilities of and access to computers had greatly improved, that researchers in these fields really began to benefit. So, while computers first came to the island in the late-1950s, and multiplied in number for some three decades, when Flynn arrived at UCC in the mid-eighties, there was little going on for a man with interests in both text and technology. He arrived, nonetheless, at a hugely exciting period in the State's history, a time when a major societal change was being facilitated by several of Ireland's universities: the Internet was coming to Ireland. For a more comprehensive account of Ireland's first computers and how access to the Internet developed in a national context, one would be very well served by TechArchives.irish, an inimitable online resource developed and maintained by Irish technology journalist, John Sterne. Of particular note are two of the site's timelines, "Ireland's first computers 1956–69" and "How the internet came to Ireland 1987–97," as well as the great many testimonials recounting the experiences of Ireland's tech trailblazers (Sterne 2020).

Flynn soon found himself at the heart of networking developments in Europe, contributing to various activities coordinated by the European Commission's Réseaux Associés pour la Recherche Européenne (RARE) working group, established

to develop international network infrastructures to support research and education. As a representative of HEAnet, Ireland's national equivalent of RARE, Flynn was nominated to serve on the WG3 group, an assignment which led him to Zurich in 1991, where he first encountered his counterpart from CERN, a certain Tim Berners-Lee. Flynn relates how, at that first meeting of RARE WG3, Berners-Lee introduced those in attendance to "his new information-compatibility system", already used at CERN so that researchers could share information in a consistent format—that system was HTML, the future language of the web (Flynn 2017).

Flynn personifies the pioneering attitude of the Irish academy when it comes to the use of technology in the arts and humanities—websites are not, in themselves, acts of scholarship, but in being one of the first to walk on the web, Flynn was expressing an eagerness to explore what this new frontier might do for the dissemination of knowledge. A technician with an interest in publishing and human-computer interaction, Flynn held the mottled disciplinary background that would later come to be the hallmark of the digital humanities scholar. What is perhaps most noteworthy about Flynn's contributions to DH in Ireland is that, returning from his interactions in Zurich positioned to be among the Internet's trailblazers, the immediate potential he saw related to a proposal received from one of his colleagues—the late Donnchach Ó Corráin, a historian.

Professor[2] in the Department of History at UCC, Ó Corráin proposed, in 1990, the creation of a research database of Early Irish texts to be called the *Thesaurus Linguarum Hiberniae* (Flynn 2017). Around the same time, one of the major initiatives of the international DH community, the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), had come to fruition, and Flynn recognised this as an opportunity to create an open resource which would be TEI-compliant and thus sustainable in longer term.

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[2] International readers might benefit from a little context here: in Ireland, the rank of professor is usually reserved for a select few senior scholars, typically chairs or heads of departments. Irish lecturers are the equivalent of professors in the "American model," but use "Doctor" as their title. As alluded to in a previous note, some Irish institutions have begun renaming their lecturers as professors for the purposes of better marketing themselves to international students, but for the most part, the rank of professor is reserved by Irish universities to designate an individual who has had a highly-distinguished career.

TEI encoding would also play a role in Mavis Cournane's 1998 doctoral thesis, *The application of SGML/TEI to the processing of complex multilingual historical texts*, which must surely be one of the earliest instances of a DH-related PhD in Ireland. In acknowledging those who contributed to the effort, Flynn makes special mention of Professor Marianne McDonald, University of California, San Diego, who had funded the renowned *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, and also provided the resources necessary for Ó Corráin's project (see **Figure 1**). He also thanks Michael Sperberg-McQueen and Lou Burnard, editors of the TEI Guidelines, and Elaine Brennan, who served as Assistant Director of the *Women Writers Project* from 1988–1993 (Flynn 2017).

There are interesting parallels between the efforts of scholars at Brown University seeking to develop the *Women Writers Project* and the intentions of Ó Corráin and Flynn.[3] Writing on the earliest days of the *Women Writers Project*, its first

Figure 1: CURIA contributors at the Royal Irish Academy in the early 1990s. Pictured from left to right are Professor Donnchadh Ó Corráin (UCC), Peter Flynn (UCC), Professor Marianne McDonald (UCSD), Dr Patricia Kelly (UCD), Professor Aidan Clarke (TCD), and Professor Desmond Clarke (UCC).

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[3] UCC had a similar initiative which might be counted as one of Ireland's first digital humanities projects, the Munster Women Writers Project, directed by Patricia Coughlan and funded by the Irish Research Council from 1999–2001. I was made aware of this project through the Twitter account of Tina O'Toole, a literary scholar based at the University of Limerick.

director, Susanne Woods, remarks: "I knew that the computer could do interesting things with texts, but I was not sure what" (1994, 18). To satisfy this curiosity, she went to speak with those who did know how such things work, Flynn's equivalents at Brown. Courtesy of some translation by Brennan, who Woods admits had a stronger grasp of technical matters, it was soon apparent to the latter what might be accomplished. It is unclear how technically adept Ó Corráin himself might have been, but one can imagine a similar conversation between he and Flynn as they worked out the former's vision for his database of early Irish texts. It is in such collaborations that we find the origins of the field, in the foresight of scholars who, to borrow further from Woods, "suspected that there was a bigger revolution out there than most of us could envision" (1994, 18). It is interesting to see how DH origin stories from around the world follow this same pattern of collaboration, with scholars from the arts and humanities, quite unable to code, seeking out those who can in an effort to realise some machine-driven vision.

However the early exchanges between Flynn and Ó Corráin progressed, what emerged was Ireland's first website. Having contributed to the development of HTML 2.0 (Berners-Lee and Connolly 1995), it was fitting that Flynn would become Ireland's first webmaster, implementing the webserver that Ó Corráin would require at a time when only eight others were in existence worldwide. As the project was also being supported by the Royal Irish Academy (RIA), it would eventually come to be known as CURIA, an amalgamation of Cork University and Royal Irish Academy, and its first document, the Irish saga *Aislinge Óenguso*, went online in March 1993 (Flynn 2013). Incidentally, the resource would also make Flynn the father of 404 errors, when, having removed the file without informing Berners-Lee, he became the first person ever to break a link on the web (Flynn 2013).

Running SunOS 4.1.3b on a Sun SparcStation IPX, the server accommodating UCC's CURIA project successfully hosted a major corpus of machine-readable Irish manuscript texts from 600AD to 1600AD—the archived home page of this server can still be viewed online at curia.ucc.ie—and in many respects, the digital humanities in Ireland had been born. It is commonplace within DH to see the efforts of collaborators from technical disciplines effaced by research narratives which privilege the input of

principal investigators—thankfully, this has not been the case here. I do appreciate that there are possibly many contributors to CURIA and CELT who feel they warrant recognition in this essay, and I hope they appreciate that I cannot mention everyone in an article of this scope. Saying this, Flynn's contribution to the digital humanities in Ireland deserves rearticulating and should not be understated: had he not been a techie with a love of text, and indeed, open and collaborative in spirit, Ireland's national DH origin story might be entirely different and may not now have the benefit of its earliest research endeavours.

Ó Corráin recognised the affordances of computation to the arts and humanities in an era long before the DH moment, long before the term "digital humanities", and perhaps even "humanities computing", as the field was once known, were commonplace within the Irish academy. Ó Corráin was raised in Killorglin, Co. Kerry. In 1964 he graduated from UCC with a Bachelor of Arts, going on to further studies in early medieval Irish history. His career as a professional academic began at University College Dublin, where he lectured for three years before returning to his alma mater for the entirety of his prodigious career. In addition to the great many seminal scholarly works that he penned, Ó Corráin, who was appointed Professor of Medieval History in 1999, was a member of the Royal Irish Academy—members of the Royal Irish Academy are elected in recognition of their academic achievements—founded the Medieval Academy of Ireland and edited its interdisciplinary journal *Peritia*, and was a visiting scholar at institutions like Cambridge University and the University of Pennsylvania. He was, in no uncertain terms, a major figure in Irish academia. Ó Corráin's standing as a scholar can be seen in the many obituaries and public tributes that emerged in response to his passing (Murray 2017; *The Irish Times* 2017; "Chancellor Expresses Sadness at Death of Professor Donnchadh Ó Corráin" 2017).

Ó Corráin's intellectual and professional standing are not being detailed for the mere purpose of tribute—his position within Irish academia dismisses several prevailing notions about the emergence of the digital humanities. In particular, Ó Corráin's interest in the application of computers to research in the arts and humanities dispels the myth that DH was once the strict reserve of a few renegade scholars content to remain on the margins of disciplinary norms—a compelling

treatment of the DH "underdog" motif can be found in "Revolutionaries and Underdogs" by Julianne Nyhan and Andrew Flinn (2016)—and that DH went from nothing to something in a very short space of time, suffocating opportunities in more traditional pursuits as administrators attempted to keep pace with the fashionable. There have, of course, been many DH scholars whose work has had to contend with a lack of recognition, even respect, from peers and institutions, and the rise of DH has not always seemed entirely sustainable, or indeed, altogether thought-out when adapted to specific institutional and curricular conditions, but to construct DH as some new thing, to suggest that it is simply a fleeting darling, does disservice to figures like Ó Corráin who, for the duration of his stellar career, saw the intellectual value in methods from beyond the established norms of his discipline. He demonstrated this value in projects like CURIA, which was later renamed as the aforementioned CELT—for more on CURIA and CELT see Willard McCarty's "Risky, experimental, emergent: the timeliness and genius of CURIA and CELT" (2015)—and is now over two decades old and offers a textbase of over 18.5 million words drawn from, at the time of writing, 1,622 contemporary and historical documents spanning a range of disciplines, including literature (see CELT 2020).

Ireland's early digital humanities scholars were all about curation and sharing of the sort found in CURIA and CELT, the remediation of print materials and the creation of web-based resources with searchability the guiding ethos. This spirit is seen in other early projects, like *Ricorso: Digital materials for the study and appreciation of Anglo-Irish Literature*, established in 1996 by Bruce Stewart, now Professor of English Literature & Language at the Federal University of Rio do Norte, Brazil, as well as Reader Emeritus in English Literature at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland (Ricorso 2020). Originally called EIRData, Ricorso was renamed in 2004, and has been affiliated with various institutions throughout its existence, including the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco and the University of Ulster, Coleraine. Stewart describes *Ricorso* as "the result of a confessedly personal response to the amazing potential of information technology as this became manifest in the late 1980s" (2011), a response which saw him diligently compile bibliographic records, textual extracts, and critical commentaries relating to Irish literature. Decades since

its foundation, *Ricorso* remains an essential encyclopaedic source on its subject, and Stewart's "Reflections on Irish Studies in the Informatics Age" was an early contribution to Ireland's emerging DH canon (2004).

In 1999, a similar resource, *IRITH (Irish Resources in the Humanities)*, was developed by Susan Schreibman with aim of providing a singular portal through which all such resources relating to Irish Studies could be catalogued. Schreibman is yet another pioneer of the digital humanities in an Irish context, receiving her PhD from University College Dublin in 1997 for a thesis on modernist poet Thomas MacGreevy. Her doctoral work led to a Newman Postdoctoral Fellowship during which Schreibman began developing *The MacGreevy Archive* (2020), the first of many interdisciplinary projects she would lead, including *The Versioning Machine* (Versioning Machine 5.0 2020) and *Letters of 1916* (Letters 1916–1923 2020). Leaving Ireland for the United States to take up a brief post at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, in 2001 Schreibman was appointed Assistant Director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, an institution with which many of the field's most prominent figures have been associated. She later became Assistant Dean and Head of Digital Collections and Research at the University of Maryland, before returning to Dublin in 2008 to become the first director of the Royal Irish Academy's newly-formed Digital Humanities Observatory. In addition to the accomplishments outlined, Schreibman has served on the Board of the Text Encoding Initiative, the Executive of the Association of Computers in the Humanities, and has Chaired the Modern Language Association's Committee on Information Technology. Having been Trinity Long Room Hub Senior Lecturer in Digital Humanities from 2011–2014, she was appointed Professor of Digital Humanities at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth before moving to Maastricht University.

Digital humanities in the time of the DHO

If there is an approximate point at which Ireland's DH community transitioned from the academic margins to the mainstream, it is the foundation of the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO). In 2007, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the governing body for higher education and research in Ireland, gave a grant to the Royal Irish Academy for the purposes of developing DH under its Humanities Serving

Irish Society (HSIS) initiative. This activity would be driven by the DHO, established with €28m worth of funding from Cycle 4 of the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLI), a major €1.2bn allocation made by the Irish Government in 1998 to support the strategic development of research across Ireland's institutes of higher education (Benneworth, Gulbrandsen, and Hazelkorn 2016, 100–103). Cycle 5 of the PRTLI brought funding for the state's first cohort of doctoral candidates pursuing PhDs in Digital Arts and Humanities. The use of "digital arts and humanities" as opposed to just "digital humanities" in Ireland can be read in two respects: as the intentional effort to represent the Irish DH cohort as one "comprised of scholars acting as both cultural critics and producers, combining performative and traditional humanist practices in an exciting mix that enhances the work of both" (O'Sullivan, Murphy, and Day 2015), or as simply a further resistance to American terminology, with most Irish institutions and members of the public favouring the term "arts" over "humanities." In 2010, as the decade came to a close, the scene for Ireland's own "DH moment" had been set: the DHO had been established to support and promote the work of digital scholarship within Irish arts and humanities, and resources were in place to fund a new generation of scholars who would view DH as their discipline.

Unfortunately, the ambitions of this era were never fully achieved. The foundation of the DHO and all that represented in terms of support for digital humanities in Ireland coincided with the Great Recession and global economic collapse, a downturn which was particularly felt in Irish education, a system which is predominantly funded by the exchequer. As the recession took hold in Ireland, support for higher education—particularly in the arts and humanities—diminished, and in August 2013 the activities of the DHO ceased. Furthermore, the status of landmark projects like *IRITH*, which announced on *Humanist* in March 2010—the main discussion listserv for the DH community—that it was moving to DHO hosting (Cullen 2010) is presently unclear. It is troubling to think what further issues the digital humanities in Ireland might face as a consequence of a lack of sustained funding, and if the future of the field will have parallels with other disciplines now considered to be less "fashionable" than might once have been the case. To borrow the words of John Keating, another major figure in Irish DH: "It is inconceivable that a software company would consider

halting funding of their products' maintenance immediately after release; yet an analogous position is faced by many highly significant digital humanities projects in Ireland currently" (2014, 26).

It is also curious that Irish DH emerged from the period as being somewhat fragmented. The vision for a national cohort was never realised, in that, rather than cross-institutional programs for research and pedagogy, Ireland's major centres of DH ended up going it alone. It is encouraging that there are now DH activities, in one guise or another, at several major universities, but the Irish DH community is one comprised of individuals rather than institutions: people are working together, but they are doing so without much of a formal national framework. The emergence of DARIAH Ireland, led by the Irish Research Council and a steering committee coordinated by UCC's Órla Murphy, is seeking to alleviate this fragmentation (see DARIAH Ireland 2020).

Ireland's DH moment might be criticised for having brought about a period of "inorganic growth" wherein scholars and institutions artificially—one might argue—aligned themselves with activities necessary to "capitalize on opportunities presented by the growth of the Digital Humanities" (O'Sullivan, Murphy, and Day 2015), typifying the type of tactical convenience against which Kirschenbaum warns (2012). This era could also be viewed as being successful, actively encouraging forms of scholarship which had previously been underprivileged, setting the scene for the current situation wherein school leavers and graduates alike can pursue degrees entirely dedicated to the digital humanities.

However this period in the history of Irish DH is judged, what is curious is that it never really brought about an upsurge in the use of computer-assisted analysis, despite the overall program being hugely concerned with "[l]inking A&H research to new digital and computational tools and methods" (Benneworth, Gulbrandsen, and Hazelkorn 2016, 100). As already noted, the challenge in charting DH origin stories is that many scholars disagree on what it is that constitutes "real DH". Many of the early adopters recognised the value of the emerging web, but one could argue that the first webmasters were not the first DHers, that seeing the computer as a tool for

dissemination is not the same as embedding computer-assisted tools and techniques within the methodologies and ideologies of arts and humanities research. It is potentially fair to say that "DH as analysis" did not come to Ireland until much after "DH as online presence," and many scholars contend that the latter is something lesser, if not even DH. Whatever one's stance on what "real DH" entails, it is important to remember that early digital projects, even those that might now be considered to be "just webpages," represent what was once "a rarity within some communities of practice" (O'Sullivan, Murphy, and Day 2015). We take for granted that the creation of a webpage, while not quite what DH might mean in a contemporary context, was once all that could be managed by scholars looking to leverage new technologies for the purposes of supporting the arts and humanities—it would be decades before most scholars could access the expertise or resources necessary to analyse cultural objects via computer-assisted methods. In an age where we are surrounded by screens and intuitive interfaces, we forget that even the simplest of computational tasks once took a comparatively vast amount of investment: it is in this respect that scholars in the arts and humanities should be commended for recognising the potential of computers, even if they themselves might not have been aware just how rich the analytical potential might have been. Still, the question remains: is Irish DH all about digitisation, or is computational analysis also part of the national disciplinary culture?

One of the DHO's most utilitarian undertakings was the creation of DRAPIer, a database of Irish Digital Humanities research projects (DRAPIer 2020). Exploring this resource lends further evidence to a visible absence within Ireland's DH community: where is all the analytics? When scholars speak of "text analysis" in the context of DH scholarship, it is generally taken that they are referring to the use of computer-assisted, largely statistical methods designed to measure and classify some aspect of the materials with which they are concerned. An example of such research would be authorship attribution, wherein documents are statistically clustered by their stylistic proximity; for an illustrative example, see "Measuring Joycean Influences on Flann O'Brien" (O'Sullivan et al. 2018). While DH means a lot of different things to

a lot of different people, text mining is a *major* part of what lies under the so-called "big tent" (Weingart and Eichmann-Kalwara 2017). Yet, the history of DH in Ireland is one in which high-profile cases of such research activities are a rarity.

This is not necessarily a criticism, but a peculiarity worth noting. Ó Corráin is often credited for his use of "computer applications in the humanities, especially the creation of corpora and the analysis of text" (Murray 2017), though it is difficult to see where exactly the late historian did the latter—his contributions, like many others, were in the gathering rather than mining of corpora. However, when searching DRAPIer, one does encounter a selection of projects which might be considered to be early examples of DH as analytical as opposed to disseminative, and it is fitting that one of the earliest, cited as having started in 2005, is an *Irish*-language project entitled *Líonra Séimeantach na Gaeilge* (LSG 2020). Using natural language processing, the project uses a wordnet to generate a comprehensive semantic network of the Irish language. Developed by Kevin Scannell, it represents a shift towards the computational potential that many of the pioneers of Irish DH recognised without necessary practising themselves. Incidentally, Scannell is Irish American, based in Computer Science at Saint Louis University, Missouri, having studied mathematics at both MIT and UCLA before taking up a postdoctoral position at Rice University in Houston: one of the early exemplars of Irish DH as post-web—that is, as more than the creation of searchable web resources—did not originate at an Irish institution.

This would change a little over time, and as the DH moment set in, Ireland was well represented within the field's international community of scholars by academics working across a range of topics and techniques, and most major DH conferences have featured contributions from scholars who are now considered foremost among the national experts in their respective fields, as can be seen in The Index of Digital Humanities Conferences (2020). It is anecdotally evident that some of these scholars have gone on to build careers specifically in DH, while others have decided to keep it as a smaller part of their research or left academia entirely. But however a particular scholar identifies, Ireland and its institutions have always been well represented at international gatherings. It would be interesting to see a comparative list of scholars

from Ireland and Irish institutions who have *published* in the field's major peer-reviewed journals.

Irish digital humanities at present Volume 52, Numbers 1 & 2 of *Éire-Ireland*, published in the Spring/Summer of 2017 was a special issue called, "Ireland and the Contemporary." The introduction begins with a provocation: "Is it possible for scholars to study the contemporary?" (Kelleher and Wolf 2017, 9). The editors contend that the proximity of the contemporary to the present makes it unattainable as an epoch suited to scholarly analysis: not until the present has become the past can it be reliably treated. Of course, this provocation is rhetorical in that the issue being introduced contains just that, a comprehensive and wide-ranging assessment of all Irish cultural scholarship in the most contemporary of senses: contributions include everything from a survey of online poetry publishing in Ireland (K. Keating 2017) to digitally-crowdsourced social histories of Dublin (Fallon 2017). While not necessarily intended as a specifically-DH oriented issue, "Ireland and the Contemporary" contains a great number of essays which avail of digital practices, or indeed, engage with reimagined humanistic practices which have been shaped by the digital as cultural. In many respects Kelleher and Wolf's special issue is precisely what our community needs, explorations of what it means to be a scholar of the Irish arts and humanities in a digital age.

It is clear that DH in Ireland means a lot of things, it means curation and dissemination, analytics, screen-driven experimentation and the disruption of the cultural marketplace, it means ephemeral communities and collectives. But database projects still dominate Ireland's DH story. Database projects are those which create public web-based resources and information retrieval systems explicitly intended to act as the foundation for the creation of future knowledge and meaning through the provision of access to cultural materials. Major examples of relatively recent projects such include Trinity College Dublin's The 1641 Depositions Project (2020) and the IFI Player (2020), launched by the Irish Film Institute in 2017. Considering the origins of DH, it is somewhat felicitous that there are strong connections between IBM and the *Depositions* project (Sweetnam and Fennell 2012). (With thanks to my colleague Shawn Day for pointing me towards this reading.)

The IFI Player is a particularly useful example because it possesses an essential—and surprisingly rare—awareness of how it is that cultural content is consumed by contemporary audiences. The IFI Player takes the Institute's Irish Film Archive, the major resource for Ireland's national history of moving images from as far back as 1897, and presents this hugely important cultural heritage material on an application that can be downloaded on Apple devices, including Apple TV, Android and Google Play, Amazon Fire TV, and Roku boxes. In essence, the content of the Irish Film Archive has been *shared* in the truest sense of the word: it has been repackaged for popular devices favoured by digitally-engaged audiences. It may seem like such a simple idea, but it stands relatively alone as a state-funded project seemingly attuned to the consumptive habits of the present.

It is heartening to see that Irish DH has not abandoned its roots and is still about sharing, but through forms appropriate to the day—what are the digital humanities if they cannot account for the ways in which everyday humans interact with the digital? The connection between the *digital* humanities and the *public* humanities is cultivated in such projects, as they privilege convenience, a trait which is often neglected by scholarly endeavours which fail to recognise that the general populace do not always have the time or specific resources required to seek out cultural materials shared in constrained fashions. The IFI Player—even in its branding with the colloquial "player"—is *everywhere*, and consequently, so too is the rich heritage it offers public audiences. While I disagree with Sample's position that DH is all about sharing (Sample 2013), when sharing is the central aim, then it is good to see it done properly. The affordances of the screen are simply underutilised in many digital projects.

It is good to see the wider community of DH practitioners in Ireland recognise the value of the digital in transforming how we share knowledge, but it is striking that there continues to be comparatively fewer analytical projects than there are projects focused on dissemination. This is potentially because digital resources— ie. websites—are easier to incorporate into projects and proposals that are really concerned with non-digital methodologies and research approaches. Whatever the reason, there have been few analytical projects completed that match the scope of

Irish DH's sharing initiatives. Computer-assisted approaches to literary criticism, for example, have largely been confined to individual scholars—either based in Ireland or studying Irish materials—working on isolated one-off studies and papers (Howell et al. 2014; Reeve 2016; O'Sullivan et al. 2018). The scope of these smaller research projects in no way diminishes their significance, but it is remarkable that of Ireland's "flagship" DH projects, only a small few have had an analytical emphasis. Among those few are *Nation, Genre & Gender* and *Industrial Memories*, both of which are based at University College Dublin, and the product of strong collaboration between the School of English, Drama and Film, the UCD Humanities Institute, and the Insight Centre for Data Analytics. UCD's Gerardine Meaney and Derek Greene are about to embark on a further major project, funded by a €2.5 million European Research Council (ERC) Advanced Grant, that will conduct a text analysis of nearly 36,000 books (NovaUCD 2019).

Nation, Genre & Gender (2020) uses computer-assisted network analysis to map the interactions between characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Phineas Finn*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, affording investigators an opportunity to compare social structures in Irish and British fiction of nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Grayson et al. 2016). The *Industrial Memories* (2020) project led by co-investigators Emilie Pine and Mark Keane, uses text mining to examine Ireland's 2009 Ryan Report, the Report of the Commission into Child Abuse. Using analytics, the project identifies patterns in the report which illustrate the system of institutionalised child abuse instigated by the Catholic Church in Ireland between 1936 and 1999. In addition to network maps representing connections between key figures within this system of abuse, the project uses colocations—a method of identifying words which hold semantic associations—to build a visual representation of the narrative of abuse contained within the report (Pine, Leavy, and Keane 2017; Leavy, Pine, and Keane 2017).

The ERC-funded *RECIRC: Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing* (RECIRC 2020) project led by Marie-Louise Coolahan at NUI Galway created an extensive database and used digital tools to interrogate their data, conducting quantitative analyses of the reception and circulation of women's writing from

1550 to 1700. UCC's Claire Connolly has led, alongside local and international collaborators, a number of digital mapping projects designed to analyse coastal cultures in Ireland and Britain (see Deep Maps 2020; Ports, Past and Present 2020).

In July 2019, University College Cork became the first Irish institution to host the Electronic Literature Organization's annual conference and media arts festival. Electronic literature, or e-lit, refers to creative literary works that have some element of computation inherent to their aesthetic (Heckman and O'Sullivan 2018). The occasion highlights an important facet of Ireland's DH community: scholars who study creative juxtapositions of cultural practices, like literature and screens. At the same meeting in 2015, hosted by the University of Bergen, a panel on Irish e-lit featured a selection of scholars and practitioners engaged with this new paradigm (Karhio et al. 2015), a cohort which continues to produce (Karhio 2017; O'Sullivan 2018a). Beyond explicitly literary practices, there is also growing interest in multimodal adaptation (see Joyce Today 2020) and virtual reality (Graham 2017), all closely aligned with new media studies. It is worth noting that many of these projects are focused on figures like Joyce: negative interpretations might see this as evidence of DH's inability to disrupt canons, though it might also be regarded as a further revival of Irish culture. The Irish Literary Revival was based on a desire to re-impose the Irish identity through a rejection of colonial voices—British rule has long been lifted, but Irishness—whatever that may be—remains suffocated by the sustained influx of British and American popular cultures. Such suffocation is driven by screens, by Netflix, YouTube, and Instagram, so it is only right that these spaces should be appropriated for re-imaginings of figures like Joyce, still so important to modern heritage in a relatively fledgling state.

In 2012, scholars, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders gathered in Dublin and Maynooth for a three-day programme entitled, "Realising the Opportunities of Digital Humanities," organised by the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI), Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI), Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO), and Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (DARIAH-EU; see DRI 2012). The current situation is one wherein major projects are happening, degree programmes are maturing, collegiality is being fostered, and meaning is

being made through the application of technology to arts and humanities research—in this sense the opportunities of DH have been realised in Ireland. Whatever the general perception of DH within the broader Irish academy—many scholars are still tasked with resisting institutional attempts to constitute DH as a service rather than discipline, and throwaway remarks unaccompanied by genuine intellectual debate are not uncommon—the contemporary situation is one of, to return at last to Ramsay, "concrete instantiations." Programmes exist, institutions exist, funding is being allocated: DH in Ireland is now a real thing because it is made up of very real things and people who are doing.

The future of the digital humanities in Ireland

The digital humanities will only have a future in Ireland if there is a willingness on the part of individuals and institutions to learn from past failings. While the Irish DH story is, at a general, national level, a positive one, many of the disciplinary challenges that one encounters in international contexts are replicated in Ireland. Criticisms of DH due to racial, gender and socio-economic imbalances are as prevalent in Irish DH as they are elsewhere. The tensions between those who see DH as an intellectual endeavour, and those who see it as a service, are present. The confusion between DH as critical inquiry and DH as public humanities is present. The anger from those who see DH as stifling opportunities for other disciplines is present. And for all that Irish DH has achieved, it still has much to accomplish. Irish DH needs more of the computer-assisted analytical sort, because sharing, however valuable, is fruitless if it does not lead to insight. Irish DH needs more new media studies, because our long lineage of creative and literary traditions are being increasingly fused with computation, and it is time for that fusion to be recognised by arts funding agencies and cultural organisations. Irish DH needs more interrogation because DH as it is articulated elsewhere cannot simply be mapped wholesale to the institutions, students, funding models, and publics that one encounters on this island.

And Irish DH needs to speak up for itself. As DH begins to go through its postcolonial moment (see Risam 2018), we are reminded that there is very little Irish language DH of the computer-assisted analytical sort, we are reminded that most of

our students are taught DH through North American and British perspectives, and we are reminded that there is no regional society for digital humanities. (I believe that this latter issue is currently being addressed by a project funded under the recent AHRC-IRC DH networking call, "UK-EI Digital Humanities Association: A Network for Research Capacity Enhancement", led by Jane Winters [University of London] and Michelle Doran [Trinity College Dublin].) This is a critical imitative, because it will speak to the cultural differences of DH which are quite readily apparent to anyone engaged with the international community. European DH seems to privilege cultural analytics and is naturally less anglophone than Irish DH, while North American DH is much broader, incorporating wider cultural criticism and theory, as well as information science and librarianship, which is an entirely different animal in the United States than it is in Ireland. American libraries, comparatively well-funded and resourced, play a prominent role in the development of DH centres and activities, a useful strategy in interdisciplinary domains where it is sometimes best to house such initiatives in neutral spaces. I write this in the knowledge that libraries are not neutral, a fact of which I was grateful to be reminded courtesy of a tweet from @merisamartinez's on June 23 of this year (her account is private).

There are, of course, other cultural differences, but the point is that while many Irish DH scholars are enthusiastic members of the European Association for the Digital Humanities (EADH), the Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH), and indeed, the umbrella Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), a regional body would be a worthwhile undertaking. The United States (the ACH, while it has international membership, is essentially the national DH association for the United States), Canada, Japan and Taiwan,[4] among others, have their own regional associations. Certainly, considering the high proportion of Irish institutions of higher

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[4] The following organisations currently make up the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations: Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH), Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH), Canadian Society for Digital Humanities/Société canadienne des humanités numériques (CSDH/SCHN), centerNet, Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa (DHASA), European Association for Digital Humanities (EADH), Humanistica, L'association francophone des humanités numériques/digitales (Humanistica), Japanese Association for Digital Humanities (JADH), Red de Humanidades Digitales (RedHD), Taiwanese Association for Digital Humanities (TADH).

education doing DH in some shape or form, Ireland should add its name to that list. This is not to say that existing bodies like the EADH are unwelcoming or do not represent Irish interests, but simply that Irish DH is substantial and peculiar enough in its own right to have its own national body. It is through such a body that Irish DH might be positioned to overcome some of the challenges faced nationally.

Fore among these challenges is sustainability, the fact that DH programmes, initiatives and cohorts have had a tendency to implode over the years, suggesting that individuals rather than institutions are driving the digital humanities in Ireland. Irish DH, like DH anywhere, will not thrive if it continues to be dependent on a series of well-placed, influential champions encouraging its further development. There are places in Ireland which seem to have figured out what institutionalised DH looks like, but most of the models implemented can only be replicated with significant administrative commitment and financial investment the type of which might not be present everywhere.

Irish DH has long suffered from a quiet parochialism. Everyone wants to be "the first" to do something, even us educators, who should be far more concerned with charting courses for others than we should be planting flags. The realities of the increasingly neoliberal marketplace—conditions from which education has not been immune—are causing institutes of higher education to promote their offerings with grand statements that tend to diminish the value of that which might not be perceived in the public gaze as the "new, big thing." We need to resist allowing DH to be dragged further into that process. It is natural when uncharted space appears— and much of DH remains uncharted—that everyone is eager to claim it as their own because it can be used in the desperate justification for survival that is destroying state-funded higher education. But the DH arms race in Ireland needs to come to an end, and in its place should come the revival of the inter-institutional, national cohorts and research agendas that were central to everyone's vision during the time of the DHO.

DH in Ireland is anything but some airy lyceum, and that in itself is a monumental achievement on the part of those individuals and institutions committed to developing the new disciplinary structures and cultures from which so many are

benefiting. But the legacy of that work will be no legacy at all if it remains local, if it fails to move beyond isolated institutional and individual contexts, into a wider, national ambition for the digital humanities and truly interdisciplinary, inter-institutional research agendas and frameworks. The legacy of that work will be no legacy at all if it remains fixated with the development and formation of bodies and the creation of titles, with very little actual research conducted and new knowledge created in the community's name.

Ending on a positive note, there are a lot of good people working towards the betterment of Irish DH, many of whom do not even really consider themselves to be primarily scholars of DH, so one can be confident that the conversations and self-reflection required for the discipline to thrive is already happening at institutions across the island.

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