

Preface

In thinking about the organization and arrangement of the content of this work—given the wide range and immense resources currently available on digital projects in the humanities—I was challenged and, indeed, intrigued by the thought of trying to add to the enormous oeuvre of information already available in this area. Every library worth its weight has a Web page devoted to online resources in the humanities (or at least devoted to *some* of the humanities). The larger academic institutions provide access to myriad Web portals on topics within the humanities, and many of these are large projects in and of themselves—both from the traditional side of the humanities as well as from the growing number of e-humanities and digital humanities projects. So what kind of unique or special addition to the literature could I provide? And, in what way would the material presented be organized?

At first, I approached the challenge from a traditional viewpoint: Why not subdivide the information into time periods? This is, after all, a very logical way to arrange information. Then again, I thought, another logical way to arrange the content would be to define the term “humanities” (as applicable to this issue of *Library Technology Reports*) and then deal with each aspect of the humanities separately, by time periods. But because of the vast number of Web portals in the humanities already available, and relisting or rehashing well-organized information widely available didn’t seem the best use of my time (or the reader’s time), I decided not to arrange the content in this way. (I do include some of the better-known and comprehensive Web portals dealing with the humanities. One has to start somewhere!)

Library Technology Reports has come to be associated with the presentation of cutting-edge—even

bleeding-edge—technologies that the library profession *should* take notice of and begin to incorporate into their practices. In deference to this approach and direction, I decided the term “innovative” would be the distinctive difference. Indeed, it is the defining term for this work.

An inventory of digital projects in the humanities, again, could just present an annotated list of Web portals that could be obtained by searching with Google. Finding truly “innovative” digital projects in the humanities, however, would be a challenge for me (the researcher and author) as well as for the reader.

What does the term “innovative” mean? Or, to be more precise and practical, what does the term “innovative” mean for the purpose of this work?

Ultimately, when choosing “innovative” projects or content to be included and discussed in this issue of *Library Technology Reports*, my selections were based on a number of criteria. In the bulleted list that follows, I try to provide an explanation or an example of a project I *did not* include, based on the criteria listed. But before you peruse the list, please take the following two points into consideration.

First, just because a project is mentioned in the bulleted list in *no way* means that it is not important, not needed by the scholarly community, not of value, or not unique in its focus or its content. What it does mean is that I wanted to show why I did not include that project, based on the criteria chosen for this particular work.

Secondly, the projects that were chosen, based on the criteria, were chosen due to input from many individuals as well as from my own personal exploration of cyberspace. Given the time limitations for the composition of this work, I am confident I *did not* discover or find every single “innovative” humanities project based on

my criteria; therefore, my focus is on what I did find and discover. In other words, I am sure that I missed a number of innovative digital humanities projects, even based on my criteria. With those two caveats and apologies, I provide my criteria for “innovative” digital projects in the humanities.

- Needs to be freely available (no restricted access or not password protected): Humanities content available through subscription will not be included here (i.e., Alexander Street Press, etc.). Although I initially was going to include interactive CDs produced by individual humanities scholars, or projects underwritten by grant monies, I had to abandon including these, as I discovered that I had plenty of content just with Web sites. (Electronic *Beowulf* and the “Turning the Pages” products of the British Library, therefore, are not included here, even though they meet many of the criteria.)
- Needs to be visually oriented: I have not included any projects that are basically text oriented. I realize the area of humanities computing is an important and vital area within the humanities, however, in order to be “innovative,” I have tried to identify digital humanities projects that go beyond marking up important humanities texts in SGML and truly try to present the humanities in a visual environment. Projects such as the Humanities Text Initiative will not be included.
- Needs to be interactive: By “interactive” I mean that it challenges the user to explore, navigate, and learn the content of the Web site or project in different ways. I also mean there is more than one format presented in the project. For example, I specifically tried to find projects that used combinations of sound, video, and 3D images to stimulate the user into exploring the content, which leads to the next item . . .
- Needs to be fun to explore, discovery based: There is something about the human experience of discovery and exploration that often is missing from much of the content on the Internet. Part of the joy of learning comes from the idea that, with just another click of the mouse, the user will find something he or she never expected to find, or something more than he or she expected. Projects that emulate this experience are the ones I feel are very “innovative.”
- Needs to be simple and easy to understand: The project has a user-friendly interface. The project needs to be for the public (not just for scholars). Because Hymn Tune Index, for example, is geared for scholars specifically, it is not examined in this work.
- Not just a database with a front-end search interface: Many digital projects in the humanities have a front-end search interface to a library online catalog, which not only assumes knowledge on the part of the user

of the contents of the project, but also provides no other functional way to access the information. Here, I am specifically talking about the lack of a “browse” mechanism, whereby the user can access or explore the content of the project without necessarily having any knowledge of that particular subject area. There are many digital humanities projects like this, which I think do provide a wealth of information as well as access to users—but only to users that know exactly what they are looking for; projects like this (databases with just a front-end search interface), such as the Digital Archive of Finnish Folk, are not examined in this work.

Humanities Text Initiative

www.hti.umich.edu

Hymn Tune Index

<http://hti.music.uiuc.edu>

Digital Archive of Finnish Folk Tunes

www.jyu.fi/musica/sks

Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative

<http://cdli.ucla.edu/digitlib>

American Journeys

www.americanjourneys.org

Ottoman Text Archive/Edition Project

http://courses.washington.edu/otap/m_main.html

- Goes beyond text digitization, or a compilation of sources: The majority of digital projects in the humanities can be placed into this area, and this is why I have excluded examining them in this work. In a sense, this aspect of humanities computing and of digital projects has become almost ordinary and commonplace; hence, they are no longer “innovative.” Not including them in this work for this reason, therefore, means the other criteria become that much more important and necessary as distinguishing characteristics. Examples of digital projects not included are the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, the American Journeys collection, and the Ottoman Text Archive/Edition Project.
- Has to be English-language based: This particular criterion has to be chosen, due to the fact the majority of this journal’s readers and users will be in the English-speaking world. It doesn’t mean there aren’t “innovative” digital humanities projects available in other languages; it only means that examining non-English-based projects wouldn’t be of particular use

for most *Library Technology Reports*' readers.

- Has to have a focus or emphasis on education/learning: This last criterion has something to do with the fun-to-explore and discovery-based aspect but goes beyond that. Projects examined in this work, generally, have some type of emphasis on learning and teaching the content in a broader context, or they provide educational or learning modules (within each of the projects) to assist users and teachers in the actual presentation and integration of the content into classroom use. Not only is this education/

learning aspect part of the content of the project, but it is also presented in a very visual, interactive way, as stated previously in the other listed criteria.

With these criteria in place, it became much easier for me to choose the content to be included in this work. In addition, the criteria, and the resulting, culled projects examined, enabled me to provide some detailed descriptions of “innovative” digital humanities Web sites and projects, ultimately providing a much more useful and exciting issue of *Library Technology Reports*.