

Rome, April 16th, 2015

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

In pursuance of the first circular letter of Jan 11th, 2015, with the proposal for the launch of a Humanities Computing Academy, and of your positive responses – 22 out of 34 addressees manifested their interest in the proposal – you will soon receive an invitation to participate in a meeting in order to finalize the text of the Statutes, organize its operating structure, and launch the new Academy. The meeting will be in the form of an On-line Conference, for which Geoffrey Rockwell and his Kule Institute for Advanced Studies (Alberta Univ.) have generously offered technical assistance, but possibly also the Garr Italian academic consortium may give the necessary instruments. We are making the necessary experiments. In any case the teleconference will be conducted from the Accademia dei Lincei, in Rome.

In the meantime I have considered opportune to circulate the following “personal reflections”.

With best regards, Tito Orlandi

SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Having in mind some of the remarks received together with the statements of interest, I submit some personal reflections which might clarify *my* understanding of the Academy's foundations. While the principles listed in the formal Proposal cannot be changed, or the Academy would become a different thing, a discussion on the following reflections (to be done in our future meeting) may contribute to our reciprocal understanding.

1.

Fundamental for the position of the Academy vis-à-vis the other HC/DH Associations is (a) the distinction between Humanities and Social Sciences; (b) the distinction be-

tween HC and DH.

(a) Humanities study the historical development in any creation of the human mind; Social Sciences study the human attitudes and behaviour in a way that may contribute to modify them. Social Sciences are outside the scope of the Academy.

(b) In a general way we can say that procedures based on the use of *computation* to process (interpret) historical data fall under the category of HC; procedures based on the use of *digital machines* to store, share, and disseminate historical data of any kind and their interpretation fall under the category of DH.

2.

The Academy deals with HC not because DH are less important or interesting, but because DH are covered by many other Associations, and their (of the DH, I mean) problems are either of technical (not computational) type, or concern the adequateness and availability of data, not their critical treatment.

On the other hand the Academy may take into consideration also DH achievements, when it is necessary to demonstrate to which of the two disciplines some enterprises belong.

3.

Also fundamental is the distinction between: the Turing machines as a universal computing instrument; the individual applications of the Turing Machine (simulating a non-computational machine with enormous improvements in space and time, but not in function); and the applications of applications of the TMs. Internet and Web are applications; texts images sounds etc. in the Web are applications of an application.

4.

When a research is recognized as computationally significant, it is also important to verify whether the formalizations which it requires – and in which consists the methodological advancement of computation – are in tune with the general structure, the historical achievements, the traditions, etc., of the *humanistic discipline* to which the research belong. E.g. in my opinion genealogical ecdotics is alien from the philological tradition; sentiment analysis is alien from literary criticism; etc. Humanities computing formalizes traditional humanities procedures, it should not as such intro-

duce unwarranted new methodologies.

Likewise, but in a different perspective, the research should conform to the traditional rules of scholarly behaviour which are typical of the operating environment of study and development of the humanities disciplines; e.g.:

- acquaintance with former studies on the same subject, without limits of language and cultural attitudes.
- Inserting the enquiry in the frame of the general activities typical of the discipline.
- Emphasizing and discussing the innovations which are supposed to be introduced by means of the enquiry.

One of the goals of the Academy should be to establish in HC the *traditional* accuracy and seriousness of humanities disciplines.

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And here is how I see the modes of operation of the Academy. The contributions of the Members are passed around to the other Members. If within (say) one month there is no preclusive objection (I distinguish between preclusive and constructive objections), they are eventually revised by the author and put on line. If there are preclusive objection, the matter is discussed and resolved in a general meeting. The constructive objections are only submitted to the author.

In the choice of the researches to be analyzed, I think that we should exclude those announced and not presenting some objective outcome.

The mailing lists/blogs of general interest for Humanities Computing, through which daily information on the Academy is disseminated might be (e.g.): Humanist, Center-net, H-net, Aiucd, Tei-l.