Humanities Digital Deluge: A Grid-Based Solution to Serendipity, Sustainability, and Scholarship?

Paul Ell

Centre for Data Digitisation and Analysis, Queen's Belfast, United Kingdom

A step change is evident in the development of electronic research resources of value to scholars in the humanities. Gone are the days when a few technically savvy research centres developed strategic e-resources for scholars, such resources being regarded as key to the work of many researchers. In the UK the Arts and Humanities Research Council estimate that in excess of 50 per cent of funded projects result in some form of electronic resource. We are at the point in the humanities where the majority of scholars are creating resources be it a small relational database or a journal paper which in due course is added to a JSTOR collection. The proliferation of resources offers both opportunities and challenges. Humanists have never before had access to such a scholarly corpus which far exceeds in its comprehensiveness the best of university libraries. However, existing issues concerning interoperability between e-resources are becoming far more complex as multimedia materials, often small, often with limited metadata, often residing outside a secure archive, and increasingly disparate, develop. In part because of this, arguably, digital humanities has yet to deliver a step change in scholarship to match that change in the availability of material. This paper examines in practical terms how Grid technologies might address some of the challenges facing e-resource access and use in the humanities. It will focus on the development of Grid infrastructure to facilitate both spatial and temporal management of e-resources. It will examine methodologies to address the challenge of harnessing the value of small, poorly documented resources, and will highlight developments in semantic text mark-up with Web 2.0 community participation reflecting work funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities with UC Berkeley and Queen's University and research supported by the Joint Information Systems Committee with CeRch at King's College London and Queen's.