Chapter 1
Tracing the Development of Digital Humanities in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter traces the development of digital humanities in Australia, with reference to major projects, events, and the establishment of the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH). It begins by referring to national exemplar projects that predate the establishment of the association in 2011, as well as to major events and initiatives that formed a foundation for the Australian field. It outlines the history of the establishment of aaDH as a professional association, reflecting on its directions over the past decade, and describes the parallel development of major research infrastructure initiatives that have supported the field's further growth. The chapter is written from the perspective of the association's founding president.

INTRODUCTION

The Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH) was established to serve a growing digital research community in Australia, New Zealand and more widely in the Asia-Pacific region. ("aaDH President's Welcome", 2011)

The field of digital humanities has expanded rapidly over the past decade, with new centres, associations and activities proliferating worldwide, including in Australia and New Zealand. Digital research in the humanities is linking scholars and practitioners across Australasia, Asia-Pacific and globally. In Australia, government policies for research funding and infrastructure, including most recently the "2016 National

Research Infrastructure Roadmap", have acknowledged the importance of digital humanities as a collaborative framework that connects the arts and sciences and is bringing together researchers and information technology experts with collecting institutions and the public to address complex social and cultural challenges in new ways.

This chapter traces the development of digital humanities in Australia, with reference to major projects and events leading to the founding of the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH). It discusses national exemplar projects, as well as significant activities and initiatives that formed a basis for the Australian field. It outlines the history of the establishment of aaDH as a regional association, reflecting on its directions over the past decade, and describes the parallel development of large-scale infrastructure that has supported the field's further growth. Looking back, it becomes clear that many projects and activities were pointing in the same direction without necessarily being linked directly, but as they progressed and connected with each other, the dispersed and disparate work across disciplines, institutions and sectors began to cohere with a common purpose—and from this confluence the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH) was formed.

BACKGROUND

A range of large-scale digital projects and events provided the key context and impetus for the development of the digital humanities field in Australia. As is the case in many parts of the world, such institutional activities tend to be associated with particular research centres or groups, and are typically collaborative enterprises. Major projects have helped to determine priorities and interests for the field as a whole and to foster communities of practice. In historical and disciplinary terms, many can be linked directly back to the humanities computing tradition that predated and provided the foundation for digital humanities as it is now known. More recent projects, while not the focus here, are branching out in new directions, but they continue to follow the same principles and deliver the same kinds of benefits. Leading projects have facilitated cooperation across geographical, cultural and disciplinary boundaries and integrated data in ways that enhance capacity, scale and accessibility. Through these characteristics they have been able to stimulate, generate and support new kinds of research activity. Smaller-scale projects can be equally innovative, and in the Australian context they have also contributed to the expansion of the digital humanities field over time. However, the aim here is to highlight a selection of the most visible and active projects that can be regarded as iconic exemplars. They are large-scale collaborative initiatives that have been influential in the field, and through their high profile and long reach, they have played a significant role in

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