Chapter 17
Revolutionaries and Underdogs

Abstract Taking the work of Passerini (1979) and Portelli (1981) as a theoretical backdrop, this chapter will describe, contextualise and interpret a narrative (or 'story') that was recalled in a number, but not all, of the oral history interviews. This narrative concerns interviewees' experiences of having been ignored, undermined or marginalised by the mainstream academic community. For the purposes of discussion we will refer to this as the 'motif of the underdog'. We will complement this analysis of the oral history interviews by looking to the scholarly literature of the field and examining a theme that often occurs there, namely DH's supposedly revolutionary status (referred to below as the 'motif of the revolutionary'). Our analysis will raise the question of how DH managed to move from the margins towards the mainstream while continuing to portray itself as both underdog and revolutionary? Drawing on literature from social psychology, the history of disciplinarity and the wider backdrop of oral history, we will argue that the motifs discussed here can better be understood in terms of their function rather than their internal coherence.

Introduction

> *But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very damages wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrator's effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context* (Portelli 2006, pp. 37–8)

This book utilises oral history as an approach to meaning making which is not focused on what happened in the past (or at least not only what happened in the past). Rather, we utilise it in the manner suggested by Portelli (above) as a collaborative process by which the narrator and interviewer combine in the present to make sense of the past and their lives and experiences. The use of oral history methodologies (both in interviews and their subsequent interpretation) towards the production of histories of DH offers the tantalising possibility of revealing hidden histories and filling archival gaps with individual narratives. Furthermore, by taking the interviews together as a group that is, in turn, a subset of the more broad and loose DH community, they can be used to identify and analyse the shared narratives,

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silences and misremberings, community motifs and foundation myths that are essential to the binding of a community. Shared narratives and ways of understanding can be both inclusive and exclusive and help to determine a community's relationship with the present and future as much as with the past. The identification of narrative tropes and motifs, the importance of story-telling, and the interaction and interplay between individual memories and collective myths and stories are all, as this final chapter will argue, essential components in this process (Abrams 2010). Ever since the publication of *Myths We Live By* (Samuels and Thompson 1990), and indeed before that under the influence of Passerini (1979) and Portelli (1981), oral history has been recognised as a valuable tool for exploring individual and collective narratives and stories, how they give meaning to the past in the present and how they can play a powerful function in articulating shared identity. We argue below that this seems especially true of an academic community such as DH which perceives itself to be misunderstood and the recipient of hostility and antagonism but is, nevertheless, in the process of establishing itself in the academic mainstream.

Narratives and stories can salve the complexities and tribulations of daily life. They allow us to imagine alternative lives, to encounter novel situations and to engage, however indirectly, with creative and imagined communities far beyond our immediate social settings. Stories can play important roles in professional life too; indeed, many academic disciplines tell stories about their creation and development and identify with various labels. These can offer a coherent and stable narrative about where a discipline perceives it has come from, what it believes it is doing and why it has taken the shape and course that it has. This serves an important purpose given the inherently 'changing nature of knowledge domains over time' (Becher 1989, p. 21) and the social contexts in which such knowledge is created, shaped and transmitted. Indeed, Weingart and Stehr also emphasise the social dimension, writing that disciplines are:

> intellectual but also social structures, organizations made up of human beings with vested interests based on time investments, acquired reputations, and established social networks that shape and bias their views on the relative importance of their knowledge … Disciplines are diffuse types of social organization for the production of particular types of knowledge (cited by Trowler et al. 2012, p. 7–8)

Within such conditions, Taylor, who looked at the role of 'heroic myths' in the discipline of Geography, has argued that their function is to create an 'overall purpose and cohesion to the very obvious disparate researches of members of the geography community' (Taylor 1976, p. 131).

Considering the nature of DH, which is very much characterised by such 'disparate researches', it is plausible to expect that stories should play an important cohesive function for it too. However, the stories that Digital Humanists tell about their discipline, and the labels that they apply to it have received little critical analysis (with the exception of McCarty who has critiqued the applicability of established metaphors like 'Tree' and 'Turf' to DH and argued for others such as 'archipelago' and 'Phoenician trader', as outlined in Chap. 1).

Taking the work of Passerini (1979) and Portelli (1981) as a theoretical backdrop, this chapter will describe, contextualise and interpret a narrative (or 'story')

that was recalled in a number, but not all, of the oral history interviews. This narrative concerns interviewees' experiences of having been ignored, undermined or marginalised by the mainstream academic community. For the purposes of discussion, we refer to this as the 'motif of the underdog'. We will complement this analysis of the oral history interviews by looking to the scholarly literature of the field and examining a narrative that often occurs there, namely DH's supposedly revolutionary status (referred to below as the 'motif of the revolutionary').

Though we will explore some fundamental contradictions that cross cut the motifs of the revolutionary and underdog our aim is not to invalidate or ridicule them or the significance of their telling. Indeed, it is possible to be both an underdog and a revolutionary – many, if not most revolutionaries are by definition in the minority and spend much of their time being pursued by hostile forces. For much of this time they might act as a vanguard for change but their inability to influence or affect that change would have them characterised as underdogs. Our analysis will raise the question of how DH managed to move from the margins towards the mainstream while continuing to portray itself as both underdog and revolutionary? Drawing on literature from social psychology, the history of disciplinarity and the wider backdrop of oral history, we will argue that the motifs discussed here can be better understood in terms of their function rather than their internal coherence.

The Motif of the Underdog

Interview Perspectives

One of the most evocative memories recalled during the oral history interviews is what we refer to as the motif of the underdog. It refers to interviewees' recollections of how they or their research was ignored, ridiculed, or, more rarely, blocked by the mainstream academic community. Space will not allow all references to this motif to be included here; rather, an exemplary selection that also goes beyond the interviews included in this book is presented.

Geoffrey Rockwell discussed at length the opposition he encountered c.1994 when he developed and set up early courses in Humanities Computing in Canada, for example, the 'Combined Honors in Multimedia and Another Subject program' at McMaster University. He recalled, in particular, the opposition he faced when presenting the details of such courses to Faculty Council for approval:

> In the early years, taking courses through, you would hit Faculty Council and … people would get up and go, you know, "I don't understand why we are running computing classes, this is like 'Pencils in the Humanities.'" … I distinctly got the feeling that there was a class of people for whom this was seen as a Trojan horse. The Humanities were under attack, people felt that back then and ... now the Humanities were not even the Humanities! (Rockwell 2012)

He also recalled the opposition he encountered over hiring decisions and at various committee meetings:

> A second type of response was “you guys are intellectually lightweight.” I can remember one way that that manifested itself was through hiring. Because we were not a department until 2005, whenever we hired a tenure track Prof …. there was the question of whether or not the department that they would naturally fit in would host [them]. [A]nd Chairs, especially English, would inevitably tell me that, you know, “you may think this guy is interesting because he can programme, but I gotta tell you, intellectually he’s a lightweight.” ... The third type of argument that we got … was just blatant sarcasm and ignorance. … I think there was a class of older Profs who just literally felt: “I’m too old to understand this” and, you know, sometimes that could mean that they’d be quite supportive – “I’m too old to understand this, I was before the computer generation, you know, I wish I could know about this and I respect your knowledge but I don’t get it at all.” So that’s a positive spin on it, but there were also people going “I don’t understand it, it must be bullshit,” you know, “[t]his isn’t the good old stuff; we used to do Philology.” (Ibid)

A hint of the ‘intellectually lightweight’ refrain is also detectable in the interview with Nitti (see Chap. 9) who recalled how a colleague gibed that he had been given his tenured position only because he was able to attract grant money.

In his interview, McCarty recalled that ‘the coolness of the reception is what I felt from the people that weren’t using computers’ (McCarty et al. 2012). Indeed, this coolness seems to have contributed to his founding of the online, international seminar Humanist which has been running since 1987. Of its founding, McCarty wrote ‘Humanist was initially founded for those who worked in computing support and who encountered, among other things, a ‘lack of proper academic recognition’’ (1992, p. 209).

Towards the use of computing in Philosophy more generally, Huitfeld (see Chap. 15) recalled that an attitude of ‘scepticism’ and ‘even sometimes … hostility’ was to be found. However, he portrays the Wittgenstein scholars as pragmatic and reasonably open to such developments such was their desire to access the material. He also commented ‘there was a certain scepticism towards whether an electronic edition could ever substitute a real, connected publication in book form, but apart from that there was no problem’. This comment implies that it was the more pedestrian (at least conceptually) uses of computing that were acceptable to the wider discipline. This issue is also touched on by Bradley (see Chap. 14) who recalls how most academics routinely used email, the web and word processing in their research (that is, tools that have not emerged from the DH community). The resistance he encountered mostly pertained to potentially disruptive uses of computing in research: ‘there was also the group of people who had a natural resistance to the whole approach that text analysis represented. Text analysis is a more fundamental disturbance of how you look and think about the text you’re working with and I think most people just don’t see it as relevant to what they’re trying to do’. Within the context of electronic publishing, Unsworth recalled that his decision, as a junior faulty member, to set up a peer reviewed journal raised some eyebrows, and all the more so because it was published electronically (Unsworth et al. 2012).

Others recalled stronger opposition. Thaller (see Chap. 13) said that some historians viewed computing as an affront to the methodological basis of their discipline or 'as a kind of vulneration against the principles established by Ranke'. Yet, he emphasises that their primary objection was to the use of quantitative methods in history and the computer was, in turn, rejected as a facilitator of this. Harris (see Chap. 8) recalled that while undertaking her PhD in the 1970s 'one of the graduate advisers swore that I was trying to destroy literature by using the computer'. Both Harris and Sperberg-McQueen raised the issue of employment. Harris recalls that when she was finishing her PhD 'in this oddball field' she was initially unable to secure an academic job. She went directly from working as a bar tender to teaching in a Computer Science department.

Perhaps the most poignant recollection is that of Sperberg-McQueen (see Chap. 12), who described his mounting disappointment and dismay at his unsuccessful academic job search. He recalls that the regret he felt over the loss of an academic career afflicted him on a daily basis for many years after finishing his PhD. He communicated the deep sense of loss that he felt by recalling a conversation with his wife where he asked her 'if someone loses their leg do you expect them to forget that they ever had a left foot?' Though not captured in the transcript, the emotion in Sperberg-McQueen's voice whilst recalling these events is notable on the audio recording. Careful to emphasise that 'causality … is probably a far step' he recalls how 'I always thought that in later years [the tutor who had warned him off computing in the Humanities] must have told his students the same thing and pointed to me as an awful example: "he's never gotten a job in Philology", as indeed was the case'.

Interviewees did not all interpret the scepticism they encountered negatively. Some, such as Craig (see Chap. 3), discussed how (albeit from the perspective of one who had secured a tenured post) such scepticism could be beneficial because it offered a 'very good sort of proving ground'. Nevertheless, he regretted not having persuaded more colleagues to take up such work and said that many feel that the time it takes to learn such techniques is not outweighed by the quality of the results they can facilitate.

Notwithstanding the discussion above, it is important to note that feelings of marginalisation were not universally experienced. While discussing the advisor who warned him off computing, Sperberg-McQueen also recalled the advisor who had set him to work on computerising the bibliography of the Elder Edda, thus evoking the range of attitudes to the role of computing in the Humanities that existed. Hockey (see Chap. 6), Ott (see Chap. 4) and Nitti (see Chap. 9) stated that they had encountered little hostility. Hockey and Ott believed this was due to the positions they held where part of their job was to support those interested in using computing in Humanities research. Nitti, Short and Hockey also recalled how they benefitted from collaborations with well-known, mainstream Humanities scholars and Hockey speculated that many of those working in DH benefitted from such alliances (this may well be the case and it is interesting that it is rarely discussed in the interviews we have carried out).

Most significantly, Rockwell carefully points out that the resistance that he encountered (discussed above) ceased:

> In fact, one of the things that strikes me the most is how quickly it changed from something I had to fight to explain … It seemed like overnight there was no longer a battle, it was just accepted (2012).

These are issues that we will return to below.

Cross-Referencing the Evidence

Before moving on it is important to address the context in which the motif of the underdog tended to be recalled. In many cases it was raised in response to a particular question asked of all interviewees, namely 'what about scholars who were not using computers in their research – do you have some sense of what their views were of Humanities Computing?' Therefore, it might be argued that this motif may not arise with the same frequency were this particular question not asked. This may be so. Indeed, in contrast with documentary research a hallmark of oral history is the active participation of the researcher in the creation of the resource. As Portelli put it: 'The content of oral sources … depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, dialogue, and personal relationships' (2006, p. 39). Far from being an unmediated, autobiographical account of the past 'as it was', the dialogic nature of oral history is multi-layered. It includes 'a conversation in real time between the interviewer and the narrator and [also] what we might call external discourses or culture' (Abrams 2010, p. 19).

Nevertheless, it is important to state that there is no evidence to suggest that the motif of the underdog is a fiction that came into being in response to this question. Rather it was a narrative (or 'myth to live by') that circulated about the community and formed part of shared DH 'discourses and culture'. This can be demonstrated with reference to the wider literature of the field where the theme is variously and independently mentioned. For example, as cited in Chap. 1, in his retrospective on the occasion of the quarter century anniversary of the journal CHum*,* Raben discussed the peripheral nature of the field and how its publications were often not accepted by conventional journals (1991, p. 341). Brink evoked the cold-shouldering referred to above when he wrote that despite years of work 'here we still are, looked at as somehow slightly suspect, slightly irrelevant to the core activity of humanities research' (1990, p. 105). That employment prospects could be hampered by computing was blogged about by Rockwell. Referring to conditions that had been prevalent during an earlier stage of his career he asked 'How many times were we warned not to do computing or not to put it on our CV if we wanted to be taken seriously as humanists?' (Rockwell 2011). Various references to the 'odd ball' nature of the subject referred to above can also be found, for example, Spiro uses the term 'misfits' (2012) to refer to its practitioners.

We find an echo of the 'intellectually lightweight' charge in Kaltenbrunner's study of a COST-funded, international and collaborative project that aimed to build a digital resource based upon an existing digital database. Senior scholars working

on the project deemed the digitally-mediated work to essentially be non-scholarly (though they had engaged with it in a superficial way only) and delegated the development of this aspect of the project to graduate students and research assistants because their time was allegedly 'not as valuable' (2015, p. 219). Various articles have also addressed the low take up of DH methodologies and outputs by mainstream Humanities (see, for example, Olsen 1993; Juola 2008; Prescott 2012a). That this has become less true in recent times is suggested by a 2014 survey of four institutions in the USA that revealed that 'nearly 50% of respondents reported not just making use of digital tools and collections, but also creating them' (Maron and Pickle 2014, p. 5).

Questioning the Motif

For all the references to the motif of the underdog discussed above its consistency can be questioned in various ways. Firstly and most obviously is that the motif is often recalled by those who occupied, or went on to occupy, senior academic positions such as professor. Appointment and promotion boards tend to comprise senior staff representatives of all faculties in a university and not just representatives from a candidate's immediate faculty. The fact that such boards approved senior appointments in the area of DH can be construed as evidence that such marginalisation was not as systemic as might be assumed (which is not to say that it did not happen). It also suggests a temporal dimension, and the possibility that ambivalence was stronger in the earlier period and eventually receded to a point where academic appointments and promotions where approved. Further interviews must be carried out with those who worked in the field at a later stage before such a claim can definitively be made. However, in general we have noted that the motif of the underdog does occur less frequently in oral history interviews with younger members of the field (see, for example, Siemens et al. 2012). So too, in the interviews included in this book the very many forms of support and assistance that individuals received, not only from the mainstream Humanities but also from the commercial and other sectors are in evidence.

Secondly, as argued in Chap. 1, DH has (in terms of 'institutional hallmarks' such as the founding of centres and teaching programmes, the appointment of faculty and other tenured positions and the expansion of the community) been undergoing a process of moving from the margins towards the mainstream. This process has not followed a steady upward trajectory and individual experiences of it may vary depending on one's geographical location, institution, position or disciplinary interest (cf., for example, Gold 2012). Yet, on the whole, the subject has been growing in strength and vitality. In this context, the frequent mention of the myth of the underdog in oral history interviews is especially interesting because in light of more recent developments other narratives are also available to interviewees, for example, the (albeit rather trite) narrative of 'triumph over adversity'. Perhaps it is not surprising that interviewees should recall painful memories more readily than pleasant ones. Viewed from this angle we may interpret the motif as one that grants an insight

into interviewees' individual experiences and narratives of personal struggle and sacrifice that triumphal stories of the forward march of DH do not accommodate.

It is interesting that few references to the word revolutionary are to be found in the oral history interviews. Thaller was one of the few to mention it, noting that 'the people at [DH] conferences considered themselves, well, if not as a group of elite, at least as a group of revolutionaries who grumbled against the conservative people trying to keep away from their inter-disciplinary work, which at that time was rather innovative in many humanities disciplines'. While the motif of the underdog often occurs in the oral history interviews it is the arguably corresponding motif of the revolutionary that often occurs in the field's scholarly literature, as set out below. Before exploring what we argue to be the deeper interconnections between these motifs an analysis of relevant literature that uses the term 'revolutionary' is presented.

Revolutionaries

A review of the main DH journals (namely *Literary and Linguistic Computing*; *Digital Humanities Quarterly*; and CHum) shows that 'revolution' is a term that preoccupies the field. In the discussion below we focus mostly on scholarly articles that contain the term 'revolution' and its associated forms. Space has not allowed us to follow up what appear to be related terms or movements, for example, hacktivism or more indirect allusions to revolution.

References to many revolutions occur in the literature, for example, the 'computer revolution', the 'information revolution', the 'communication revolution', the 'quantum revolution', the 'technological revolution', the 'ebook revolution', the 'revolution in human-computer interaction', the 'community revolution', the 'metadata revolution', the 'printing industry revolution', the 'digital revolution', the 'mobile revolution' and even the 'cost-effectiveness revolution'. They are invoked in various ways. Despite the destructive import that the term revolution often has, in DH literature it frequently functions to provide some overarching background and structure to the otherwise disparate activities of the field. An example of this is when an external revolution is referenced to provide a contextual and predictive framework for the potential contributions of DH. For example, notwithstanding that 'the first generation of digital classics has seen relatively superficial methods to address the problems of print culture', Crane et al argue that 'cyberinfrastructure' for digital classics may prove transformational. In support of this, an analogy between movable type and cyberinfrastructure is set out in order to imply a kind of equivalence between them:

> Rarely, if ever, can we predict the full implications of relatively modest technological change. Gutenberg did not think that, in using movable type to print a Latin bible, he was creating a technology to make translations of the bible ubiquitous, enable new forms of Christian worship and facilitate revolutionary change (Crane et al. 2009)

Such comparisons can serve to provide a relatively new discipline such as DH with a genealogy that connects it with a distinguished past in addition to foretelling

an auspicious future: 'these new technologies will have a major role to play because they are the culmination of the revolution that started with the invention of printing' (Schneider and Bennion 1982, p. 35)

The relationship of DH to such revolutions is variously construed. Sometimes, the revolution is seen as external to the field but capable of transforming its ways of working. Bolton, for example, wrote that the 'October Revolution', which saw the arrival of the IBM personal computer, redressed some of the 'strange couplings' that came about in a time when Humanities Computing was bound to the mainframe and Computer Scientist (1991, p. 431). Some portray DH as a bridge to the digital revolution: 'Academics wishing to join the 'digital revolution' may have an introduction to the field of Digital Humanities through the discipline of textual markup' (Terras et al. 2009, p. 298). Others view the revolution as a potential threat. A proposal for teaching computers in the liberal arts curriculum warns: 'we can ill afford to sit back as spectators while the computer revolution takes its course' (Cramer and Taylor 1973, p. 418). Indeed, McCarty has addressed the fear of computing that can be noticed in the professional literature of DH and the Humanities more generally (2013).

The revolution is also described as something that is (or should be) happening within DH. For example, various of its methods are described as 'revolutionary' (Robinson and Taylor 1998). Milic wrote of how his

> mildly revolutionary [doctoral] proposal was received with an absolute lack of sympathy, the notion of a dissertation in English ornamented with statistics, charts, tables and complex linguistic jargon and formulas (as it supposedly would be) being anathema to the conservative senior professors of that period (1982, p. 19).

Sometimes individual scholars are portrayed as revolutionaries. Burton wrote how Busa had 'revolutionized the fields of concordance-making and of computer applications'(Burton 1981, p. 4). Sands characterises Meserole as one who would become a 'prominent figure in the vanguard of this new revolution' (Sands 1967, p. 113).

Sometimes the field as a whole is characterised as having revolutionary intent: 'So, when does the Humanities Computing Revolution Start?' asks Brink who proceeds to lament its continuing peripheral position (1990, p. 105). Clubb advises DH to avoid repeating the mistakes of other disciplines 'in their own revolution' (Anon 1971, p. 61) Bosak's closing talk to TEI 10 mapped out the communities role in the 'revolution' (1999).

Considering the above it is surprising that explanations of and concensus on what the revolution will entail are difficult to find in the main DH journals (and one notices a parallel here with ongoing debates about how DH is to be defined). An exception is the work of Berry who discusses the DH revolution in terms of a Kuhnian paradigm shift (Porsdam 2013). More often, however, the nature and scope of the 'revolution' must be inferred.

In a number of discussions the use of the term revolution evokes the determined overthrow of existing approaches and the drawing of lines between the traditional and emergent. Regarding authorship attribution, for example, it is argued that the work of

Mosteller and Wallace 'combined with the late twentieth-century revolution in computing, inaugurated a new era for "non-traditional" statistically based studies of authorship' (Holmes et al. 2001, p. 315). For others the revolution is happening in epistemology (Beacham and Denard 2003). Discussing analytical modelling (a methodology that is fundamental to DH), McCarty argues: 'It's great and revolutionary success for the humanities is to force the epistemological question—how is it that we know what we somehow know—and to give us an instrument for exploring it' (2008, p. 256).

It is not only research problems that are in range. The revolution can result in new genres of computer-mediated conversations (Potter 1996). It can also be about professional processes, as in Ott's discussion (1979) of preparing classical editions, where he states that he believes the revolution will result in editors being able to access areas that were otherwise blocked to them, such as typesetting. Discussing 'instructional materials' DeBloois warns that 'Old structures must yield to the pressure of the technology revolution' (1984, p. 192). Prescott does not use the term revolutionary but draws approvingly on Badmington's desire to see 'the destruction of this cold, grey building. I wish for the dissolution of the departments that lie within its walls. I wish, finally, that from the rubble would arise the Posthumanities' (Prescott 2012b). Spiro does not use the word either but the title of her article certainly evokes it: '"This Is Why We Fight": Defining the Values of the Digital Humanities' (2012). The Digital Humanities manifesto 2.0 situates the activities of DH within the aims of the Humanities yet it frames its 'inaugural role' as being both distinct from and a challenge to the ways that Humanities is now done. It asserts that 'the [DH] revolution promotes a fundamental reshaping of the research and teaching landscape' (Presner et al. 2009, p. 8) and also contrasts 'our [i.e. DH's] response' with 'the traditionalists response' (Idem, p. 6). Of the manifesto, Fish wrote '[t]he rhetoric of these statements (which could easily be multiplied) is not one of reform, but of revolution' (2012).

However, a certain contradiction in such uses of the term can occasionally be detected. The technologies used in the DH revolution may be 'the culmination of the revolution that started with the invention of printing' (Schneider and Bennion 1982), yet in some formulations it is the medium and culture of print technology that is to be challenged. For example, discussing hypermedia, Bolton argues that 'the idea of a snapshot, fixing the state of a discipline in time through the medium of print, is one of the things that hypermedia are rapidly revolutionizing out of existence' (1996, p. 81). Other understandings of 'revolutionary' are apparent too, Jessop for example, equates it with something that is 'lacking in rigorous scholarly value' (Jessop 2008, p. 281).

In addition to the apparent disagreement about the results of the revolution a number of articles also disagree with or critique its appropriateness as an aim. The problematic nature of such 'revolutionary' rhetoric for the perception of the field is occasionally discussed (see, for example, Goldfield 1993). Some argue that revolution is not an appropriate goal (Byerly 1978) and that the computer may offer other important possibilities that are not necessarily revolutionary, like new creative affordances (Beatie 1967). Others believe that in any case the computer is 'unlikely to spread into those areas of history in which investigators lack or reject the habit of

putting part of their work into quantitative form, [and] the prospects that the computer will revolutionize historical analysis as a whole in the near future are slight indeed' (Tilly 1973, p. 327). Others remark on the various expected revolutions that didn't come off (see, for example, Lawrence et al. 1986, p. 121; Byerly 1978). Indeed, a degree of frustration with the unimaginative use that some scholars (Raben 1991) and some students (Ess 2000) have made of the fruits of the computer revolution is also to be encountered.

Neither is the timing of the revolution agreed upon. For Potter (1991), Smith (1994, p. 316) and Prather and Elliott (1988) it remains very much a subjunctive and contingent upon other factors. The latter, for example, argue that the revolution that has taken place in Computer Science methodology '… could have had a dramatic effect on the way we look at the musical encoding process' (p. 137). As McCarty wrote:

> It may seem with all the activity we are witnessing, so much we cannot see it all, that the long-awaited revolution has begun … But actually it's been proclaimed before—e.g. by literary critic Stephen Parrish at the first conference in the field in 1964—but then 'postponed owing to technical difficulties' (Mahoney 2011: 56). The truth is that the great cognitive revolution for us has not begun even once. (2014, p. 292)

In summary, the term 'revolution' and associated forms occur frequently in the literature of the field but detailed discussions of what it might require or achieve, and how this might shape the research agenda of the field are difficult to find. Furthermore, there is not a consensus that an appropriate aim for the field is to foment revolution or even on whether the revolution is ongoing or still in planning.

Two interrelated questions arise from this summary: what influenced the take up of the term revolutionary in the field of DH and why does it continue to be used in what is often such an imprecise way?

Origins of the Term Revolutionary

Space will not allow a detailed exploration of the issues that helped to give rise to the field's preoccupation with the term 'revolution'; instead, we here outline two of many possible influences before going on to discuss in detail the context lent by the oral history interviews. The most obvious is, of course, the wider context of technology and computing which so frequently promises and is analysed in terms of revolutionary changes. As Mahoney remarked, '… [C]omputers and computing … have always been surrounded by hype (it was – and may still be – the only way to sell them)' (2005, p. 120). Relevant too must be influential developments and debates in wider academia such as the publication of Kuhn's highly influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (published in 1962, with subsequent editions appearing in 1969 and 2012*)*. This book argued against Whiggish or Positivist interpretations of the History of Science, which view it as a process of constant progress. It argues that periods of normal Science, when Scientists share a common paradigm (or shared

opinions and practices about a field's theories, methods, problems and achievements) are broken by sporadic revolutions that interrupt such periods of normal Science and push it forward.

The interviews we have carried out suggest a further way of examining and contextualising the revolutionary rhetoric of DH. At first glance, the role of underdog and revolutionary may seem rather removed from one another but as commented earlier, the view of revolutionaries as vanguardist minorities bring these motifs together. As with the motif of the underdog, certain tensions can be noted once the surface of the motif of the revolutionary is scratched.

The more obvious way that the metaphor is inadequate is in its sketchy definition. As we have seen above, despite many references to DH's revolutionary nature or potential there is little agreement about the form the revolution should take or what exactly is to be transformed. Furthermore, the metaphor has a number of unfortunate historical associations. As history shows, revolutionaries can, in time, become oppressors. Did Digital Humanists consider themselves immune from such processes? This is an issue that we will return to below. Also, as argued elsewhere (Nyhan 2016), it is notable that despite the revolutionary claims of some individuals, the transactions of the inaugural year of Humanist (1987) indicate that acceptance from the mainstream Humanities, or the Academy more generally, was a dominant concern of DH. In summary, then, the question arises of why such a problematic and ill-defined metaphor was used so often in the writings of the field?

Whilst noting the previously discussed irony of oral history practitioners often also adopting the motifs of underdogs and revolutionaries bent on transforming history and systems of knowledge production more generally, we will now argue that oral history opens the possibility of interpreting these motifs in a less literal way by considering them not in terms of their veracity but rather in terms of their potential function and symbolism for the group that wielded them. Above we asked how DH was able to move from the margins to the mainstream while espousing a narrative of both underdog and revolutionary. We will now argue that this process can be better understood when such motifs are not viewed as literally true (or necessarily internally coherent) but instead viewed as powerful labels, or shared expressions of identity, around which DH proceeded to rally and bind itself.

Narratives and Groups

As discussed in Chap. 1, not only are definitions of the term discipline contested but the question of whether DH can best be categorised as a discipline, an interdiscipline, a community of practice, and so on, continues to be debated. So too, for a good deal of the period under discussion, Humanities Computing was in the process of becoming more established and then 'transforming' into DH. For such reasons, we thought it important to consider the motifs discussed here in more universal

terms by drawing on the social psychology concept of group processes. Indeed, the literature on group processes provides an intriguing framework to explore some of the dynamics that may be at stake.

According to Brown 'a group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of it and when its existence is recognized by at least one other' (2001, p. 3). He examines a number of elementary processes of groups, the first being 'changes in self-concept': 'our social identity – our sense of who we are and what we are worth – is ultimately bound up with our group memberships' (Idem, p. 28). Considered in this context one possible way of interpreting the interplay of the motifs of the underdog and revolutionary becomes clear. It must have been painful and disquieting to have one's academic competence (and, to some extent, social identity) questioned at the individual and group level in the way that a number of interviewees recalled. One wonders whether the motif of the revolutionary might (also) have been developed and evoked as a shield and form of redress against such attacks? Given the prevalence of the motif it is also plausible to argue that it functioned as a kind of 'common goal' (or 'task interdependence' (see Idem 37–40)) around which the group could organise itself. As mentioned by McCarty (see Chap. 3), the exact nature of the contribution that computing has made to the Humanities is not agreed upon. Perhaps the aim of securing (albeit rather vague) revolutionary changes can be seen as providing a common cause for the group to rally around while undertaking a deeper analysis of the changes the discipline might ultimately herald. This brings an added dimension to the criticism of the use of this motif by some in the group: failure to attain the expected revolutionary changes could conceivably have the effect of undermining the very rationale of the group's existence.

The second elementary process that Brown discusses is that of 'initiation into the group', a ritual that tends to take place especially in 'established or formal groups and organizations' (Idem, p. 30). Such initiations can vary widely and range from a positive experience where certain benefits are conferred on new member (like financial and other employee benefits that some organisations give new members) to 'a distinctly unpleasant (not to say painful) experience in which the newcomer is mocked, embarrassed or even physically assaulted' (Idem, p. 30–31). From the literature that Brown cites it seems that such initiation ceremonies are invariably conducted by existing members of a given group. Thus, the motif of the underdog cannot be seen as an initiation ceremony because all interviewees report that the resistance they encountered emanated from outside the field of DH. Yet, given the regularity with which the motif is recalled, one wonders whether it may have taken on a form that was akin to that of a 'right of passage' in that one marker of becoming a Digital Humanist was the endurance of such vicissitudes?

In this regard it is notable that the motif of the underdog can be traced from what is commonly held to be the 'foundation myth' of DH. This is based on Busa's recollection of how he met with Thomas J. Watson, Sr, CEO of IBM and convinced him to fund his *Index Thomisticus* project for what would turn out to be the next 30 years:

> I knew, the day I was to meet Thomas J. Watson, Sr., that he had on his desk a report which said that IBM machines could never do what I wanted. I had seen in the waiting room a small poster imprinted with the words: "The difficult we do right away; the impossible takes a little longer," (IBM always loved slogans). I took it with me into Mr. Watson's office. Sitting in front of him and sensing the tremendous power of his mind, I was inspired to say: "It is not right to say 'no' before you have tried." I took out the poster and showed him his own slogan. He agreed that IBM would cooperate with my project until it was completed "provided that you do not change IBM into International Busa Machines." I had already informed him that, because my superiors had given me time, encouragement, their blessings and much holy water, but unfortunately no money, I could recompense IBM in any way except financially. That was providential! (Busa 1980, p. 84)

In the extract above, Watson can be read as symbolising the power and success of IBM as he sits behind his desk, slightly aloof, one imagines. Busa, a Jesuit priest, of all things, ventures into the hive of capitalism and ambition (as Jones wrote, 'Priest walks into CEO's office: it sounds like the beginning of a joke' (cited in Jones forthcoming)). Though Busa emphasises his canniness with his observation that 'IBM always loved slogans', the attention he draws to the waiting room, and the small poster that he acquired there, serve to underline the asymmetrical power relations that he implies to be at play. Although Busa describes how he emerged victorious due to his wit and the grace of his god, he again emphasises his underdog status by describing how his order could not provide the funds that were so essential to the project (and that only IBM could bestow). In this regard, Jones' finding that the meeting between them was not even recorded in Watson's formal datebook is all the more telling (Ibid).

That negative 'initiation' experiences can be used to the advantage of a group is suggested by Arson and Mills who drew on the theory of Cognitive Dissonance to argue that 'the more severe the initiation, the more attractive the group would appear [to the initiate]' (cited in Brown 2001, p. 32). One wonders whether the frequent recalling and citing of the motif of the underdog evokes a similar process as interviewees use it not only to underscore what they perceive to the attractiveness of the group but also to underline their resilience in embracing insults and reutilising them as a mechanism for fostering cohesion?

Space has not allowed us to consider other related questions about the relationship of the individual to the group or about the intergroup relationship between DH and the wider Humanities. For now, we will point out that as groups also define themselves through a process of differentiation (see Crozier 2001 for a discussion of this in academic disciplines) the motifs discussed here serve an important function in differentiating DH from the mainstream Humanities, thus reinforcing DH's status as a group and as a functioning, supportive community.

Conclusion

Above we asked how DH has been able to move from the margins to the mainstream while portraying itself as at once a group of underdogs and revolutionaries. We have argued that this process can better be understood when such motifs are interpreted on a utilitarian rather than literal level. In this reading, the motifs of the

revolutionary and underdog are not only self-sustaining and interdependent, they also play important social functions in the way that they have contributed to DH's sense of purpose and unity. This seems all the more important in an area such as DH which is especially characterised by the 'disparate researches' of its members. Thus, we propose that the motifs of the underdog and revolutionary have played an important role in the development of DH as a discipline and in its movement from the margins towards the mainstream.

Notwithstanding this, we believe that DH must now reflect on the centrality that such motifs continue to be given when retelling its history and to ask whether new motifs are needed as the discipline moves forward. Three arguments can be put forward in support of this claim. The first is the disquiet of some of its members at the way the field continues to trade in outmoded and inaccurate metaphors. As Rockwell put it: 'What concerns me … is that within digital humanities we are still trading stories, we're still acting as if we're the underdog and we're not' (2011). Thus, there is a discord between how the field portrays its situation and the realities of that situation. Our second and third arguments are framed in terms of the complications that we hold to arise from this.

Above we demonstrated that the revolutionary motif occurs often in the literature of the field but that it is poorly defined. Our second argument is that the motif is also an inadequate means of communicating the aims of the discipline to other researchers and members of the public. This is evidenced by the way that DH is portrayed (or sometimes vilified in the mainstream media). Since 2012, a rush of essays and opinion pieces have appeared in publications like, inter alia, the *New Republic* (Kirsch 2014), the *Los Angeles Review of Books* (Marche 2012), the *New York Times* (Leroi 2015) and *Inside Higher Ed* (Straumsheim 2014). These essays are mostly written by non-specialists in the area of DH and the publications they appear in have far greater readerships than the typical academic journal. In them the field's revolutionary intent is often emphasised and accorded a degree of destructive import that it does not usually have in the DH literature. Kirsch, for example, argues that DH poses an existential threat to Humanities and that its revolutionary rhetoric has an 'undertone of menace, the threat of historical illegitimacy and obsolescence' (2014).

He goes on to argue that the parity that DH accords to building, tool-making and images, on one side, and thinking and writing, on the other, is a threat to the Humanities:

> In this vision, the very idea of language as the basis of a humane education—even of human identity—seems to give way to a post- or pre-verbal discourse of pictures and objects. Digital humanities becomes another name for the obsequies of humanism (ibid).

The reaction often made to such essays by the DH community is that their writers do not seem to understand DH or what it aims to do. This is a reasonable response. However, the more important question of how and why such egregious misunderstandings and misrepresentations arise seems to go unasked. Numerous texts have appeared that seek to define DH (see, for example, Terras et al. 2013). Yet, while Kirsch and others have failed to grasp the basics of what the field does they certainly have not failed to grasp its supposedly revolutionary nature. As it continues to move from the margins towards the mainstream DH must pay more careful attention to how

it is communicated to the public and to those outside of its immediate frame of reference. A crucial prerequisite of such a development is a critical analysis of the usefulness of the revolutionary rhetoric that it often uses to describe and project itself.

The third argument that we will put forward also pertains to the future of the field. Above we argued that the motif of the revolutionary offered DH a way of discovering its *raison d'etre* and a means of coalescing around a common goal (if even to reject that goal, as we have seen in some of the articles cited above). Yet, looking at the scholarly areas that DH has been criticised for not engaging with, one wonders whether the motif of the revolutionary has paradoxically proven to be one that shut down truly radical thinking? After all, if one is assured of their revolutionary status what need is there to reflect critically on the agenda and research trajectory of the discipline? We might go further and say that in such circumstances it is not even necessary for a "revolutionary" discipline to articulate what makes it revolutionary. As discussed in Chap. 1, the field has been convincingly criticised for its paucity of engagement with issues that are at the heart of the unfolding encounter between human and machine, for example, cultural criticism, gender issues, postcolonialism and posthumanism (and, we would add, emerging modes and structures of knowledge production and digital epistemology). Though some progress in relation to such lacunae can be noted of late, we propose that responding to such 'grand challenges' will involve not only new research agenda but a wider reflection on the ways that the field perceives and projects itself, and how this may be advance or stifle its progress. The shaking off of its revolutionary mantle may well be important in this regard.

In conclusion, then, as DH becomes more institutionalised and mainstream, we ask whether it can and should maintain its revolutionary and radical discourse about its origins? Whereas once such rhetoric may have fostered 'an overall purpose and cohesion' (Taylor 1976) we ask whether it is still performing such a service today? Does creating a sense of purpose and cohesion have the same importance and weight that it once did? Indeed, could the means of achieving this have also served to circumscribe the intellectual agenda of the field? We believe that it is important that the community pays closer and more critical attention to the stories, metaphors and labels that it uses to describe itself and to the impact this has not only on how those outside DH perceive it but also on how DH understands its frame of reference. Is it time to become more aware of the stories that are told and to ask whether new stories and foundation myths and, most of all, new and more critical histories of DH are needed? We propose that in this way a better understanding of the history of computing in the Humanities has the potential to contribute to conversations that are as relevant to the present and the future as they are to the past.

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