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On face value a most recent development in the history of the humanities—the advent of digital humanities—should represent an significant impetus for connecting disciplines to and from the field of humanities. The very nature of digital humanities as an inter- and multidisciplinary domain (Svenson 2010) should warrant the emergence of methodological connections and interplay between for instance computer science and various humanities domains. However, despite a history spanning at least six decades—if the computerized concordancing work of Father Busa is taken as a starting point (Hockey 2004)—and notwithstanding the high expectations about its potential for transforming and revolutionizing the humanities from both policy makers (Courant 2006) and humanists (McGann 2010), the connection of digital humanities to other scholarly disciplines is hardly without friction and far from seamless. Rather in contrast digital humanities are often vigorously and passionately attacked from the ranks of conventional humanists. Thus digital humanities has been portrayed as a scholarly empty answer to a presumed valorization crisis in the humanities (Fish 2010), as a managerial fad (Allington 2013), a big data ideology (cf. Kirschenbaum 2014), and many other ugly things (Kirsch 2014, cf. Worthey 2014).

As an exercise in the historiography of current humanities this paper compares the observed disconnect between conventional and digital humanities that is manifest in the Anglo-American dominated (cf. Prescott 2014) international digital humanities community to the development of digital humanities in the Netherlands in the last three decades. We focus most prominently on the differences between the rationales underpinning the various typologies that have been proposed for the major developments in digital humanities in the last three decades—i.e. first and second wave digital humanities (Presner 2009, Hayles 2012), digital humanities types I and II (Ramsay 2013), and humanities 1.0 and 2.0 (Bod 2013). From this comparison we are able to identify three key issues that will prove pivotal in answering the question whether digital humanities will establish itself successfully as a connective methodological trading zone and middle ground between humanities and computer science, or as an academic discipline in its own right. These key issues that we will highlight are: 1) the definition of scholarly questions beyond the conventional realms of humanities and computer science; 2) the status of mathematics & logic, code, and interfaces as viable means of scholarship; 3) the ability to define a hermeneutic frame and critical theory for digital scholarship.

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