



*Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study
in the Humanities and Social Sciences*

The Digital Humanities Paradox

Seminar @ NIAS' Lecture Room, Thursday 8 December, 16.30 - 18.00h

On Thursday 8 December 2011, at 16.30h [Jan-Christoph Meister](#) from Hamburg University will hold a seminar in which he will present a talk entitled 'the DH paradox - A modest proposal concerning the relation between digital and analog conceptualizations of human artefacts'.

Description

The term "digital humanities" is the latest successor in string of labels that have been attached to techniques, methods, theories and practices positioned at the intersection of two methodological paradigms: that of the traditional humanities on the one hand, and that of computational science and computational engineering on the other.

While some of the earliest and more discipline specific, practice oriented designations – notably "computational linguistics" and "computational stylistics" – enjoy wide-spread acceptance to this day, others have proven either too region or culture specific (e.g., the German "Computerphilologie", or the more recent "e-Humanities" label) to dissipate throughout an essentially international research arena, or too obviously grounded in historically contingent parlance to withstand the inherent tendency of all discourse to pick up more recent social and technological trends. "Humanities Computing" was perhaps the latest victim of a discursive modernism that tends to be more successful the less self-reflectively a scholarly practice is practiced regarding its own conceptual primitives and foundations. In the absence of discipline-inherent philosophical critique, the intellectual horizon of a field becomes over shadowed by vague ideas and superficially understood dichotomies borrowed from other discourse traditions.

A case in point is the pervading undertone of the C.P.Snow inspired "two cultures" ideologeme in the mostly unsystematic discussion on how the Humanities relate to CS and ICT in a methodological perspective. At the core of many such debates lies a misconceptualisation of the actual difference between a digital/mathematical vs. an analog/humanistic modeling of phenomena: 'digital' and 'analog' are called up as buzz words, rather than used as defined concepts.

Meisters talk will explore these concepts in terms of their more fundamental distinction and then proceed to argue that advanced DH might already have begun to prove the distinction as such obsolete.