DH Revisited: Continuing Debates and Work on the Ground

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Objectives:

- Review recent statements on DH.

- Review and critique how we see our roles.

- Review research on disruptive change and innovation.

- Particularize with experience.

- Caveat!

In the beginning...ca 1949

- Fr Roberto Busa
  2006, Wikipedia

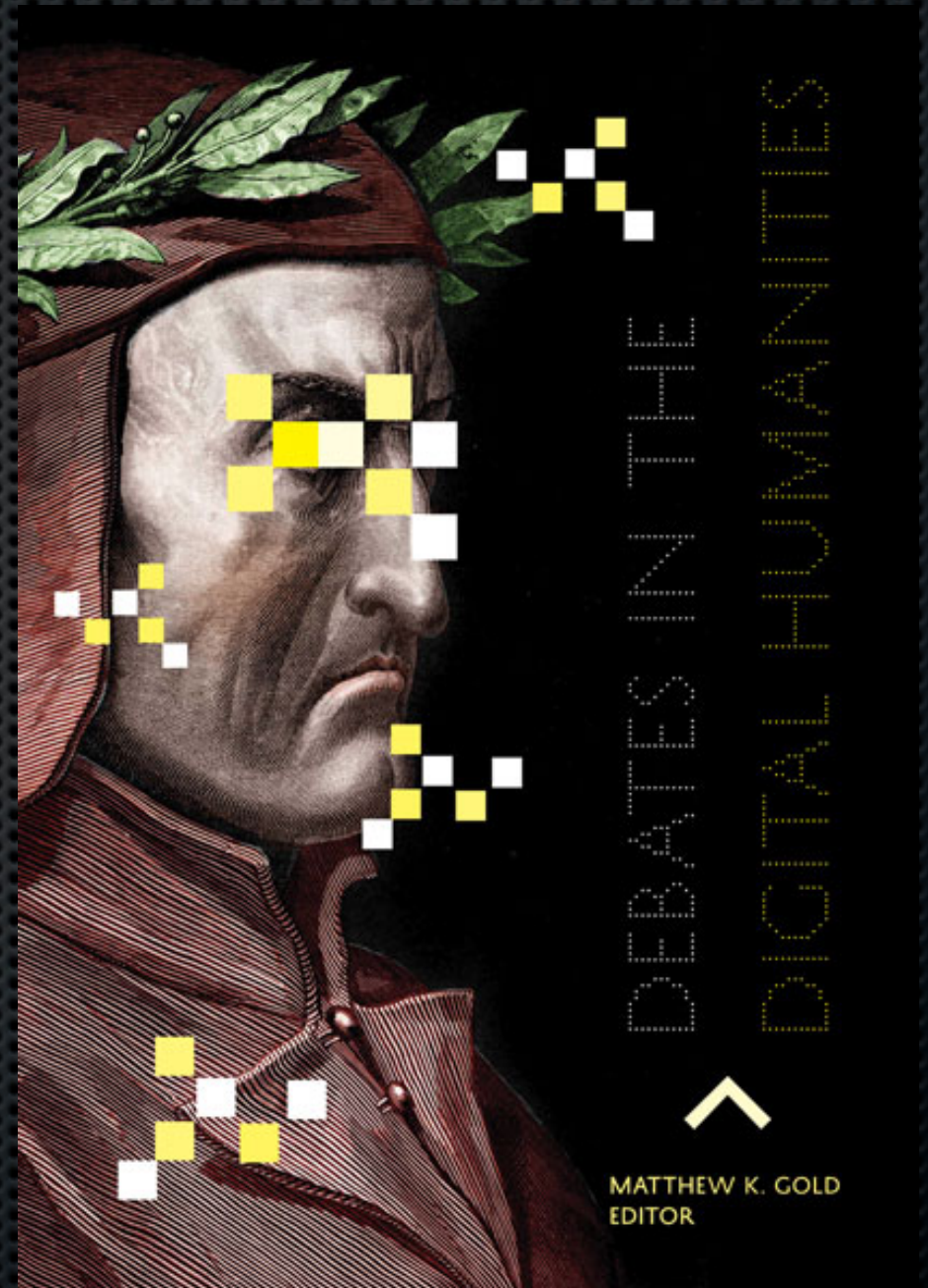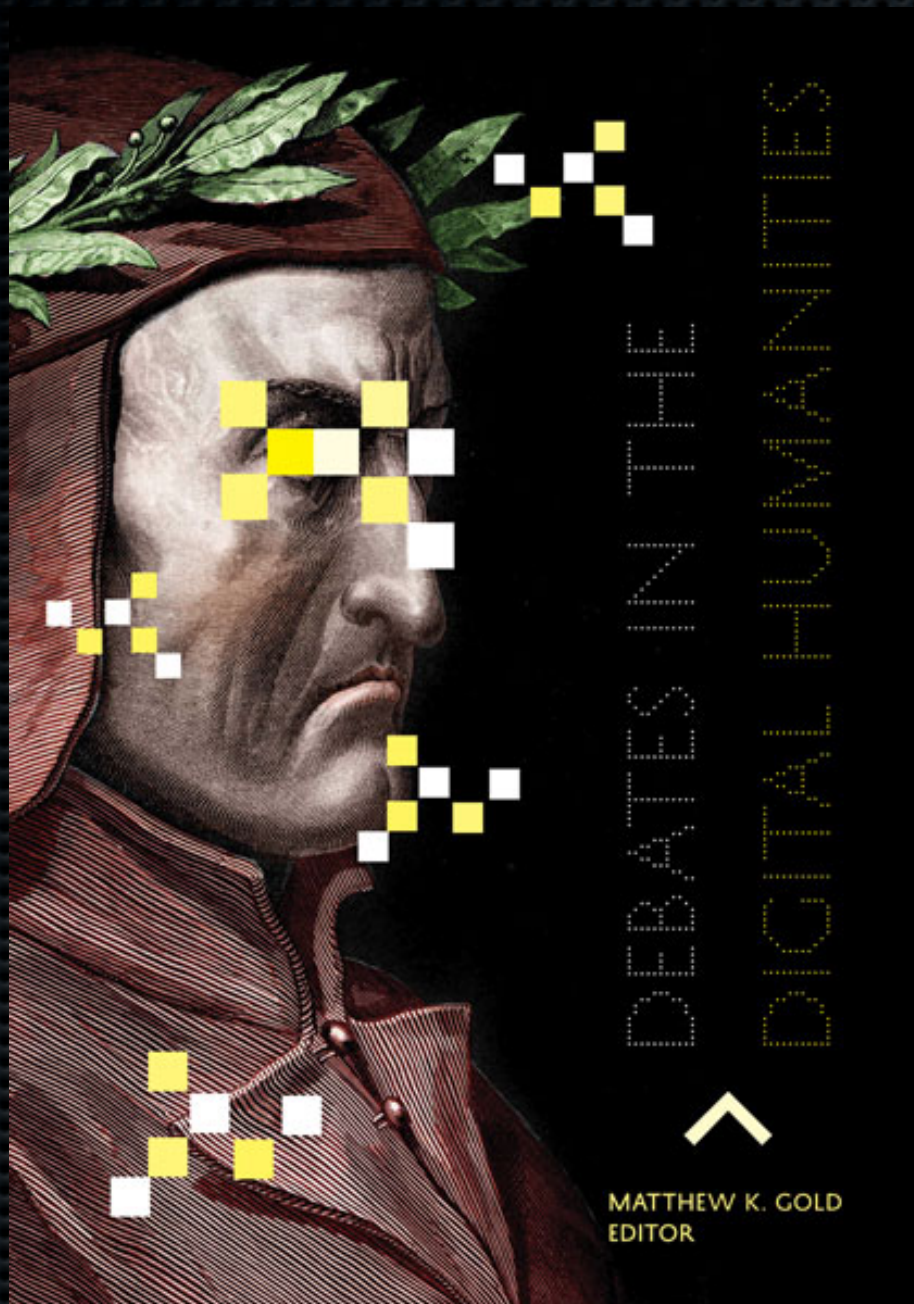- *Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64?*

DH Debates, Questions like:

- Is/Are? Singular/Plural?

- What's in? What's not?

- Critiquing vs Making?

- Is programming skill necessary?

- Does the D dumb down the H?

Does DH need **theory**? Does it have a **politics**? Is it accessible to all members of the profession, or do steep infrastructural requirements render entry **prohibitive** for practitioners working at small colleges or cash-strapped public universities? Are DHers too **cliquish**? Do social media platforms like Twitter **trivialize** DH's professional discourse? Can DH provide meaningful opportunities to scholars seeking **alternatives to tenure-track** faculty employment? **Can it save the humanities? The university?** *Gold, M. (2012). The digital humanities moment, Debates in the digital humanities, xi.*
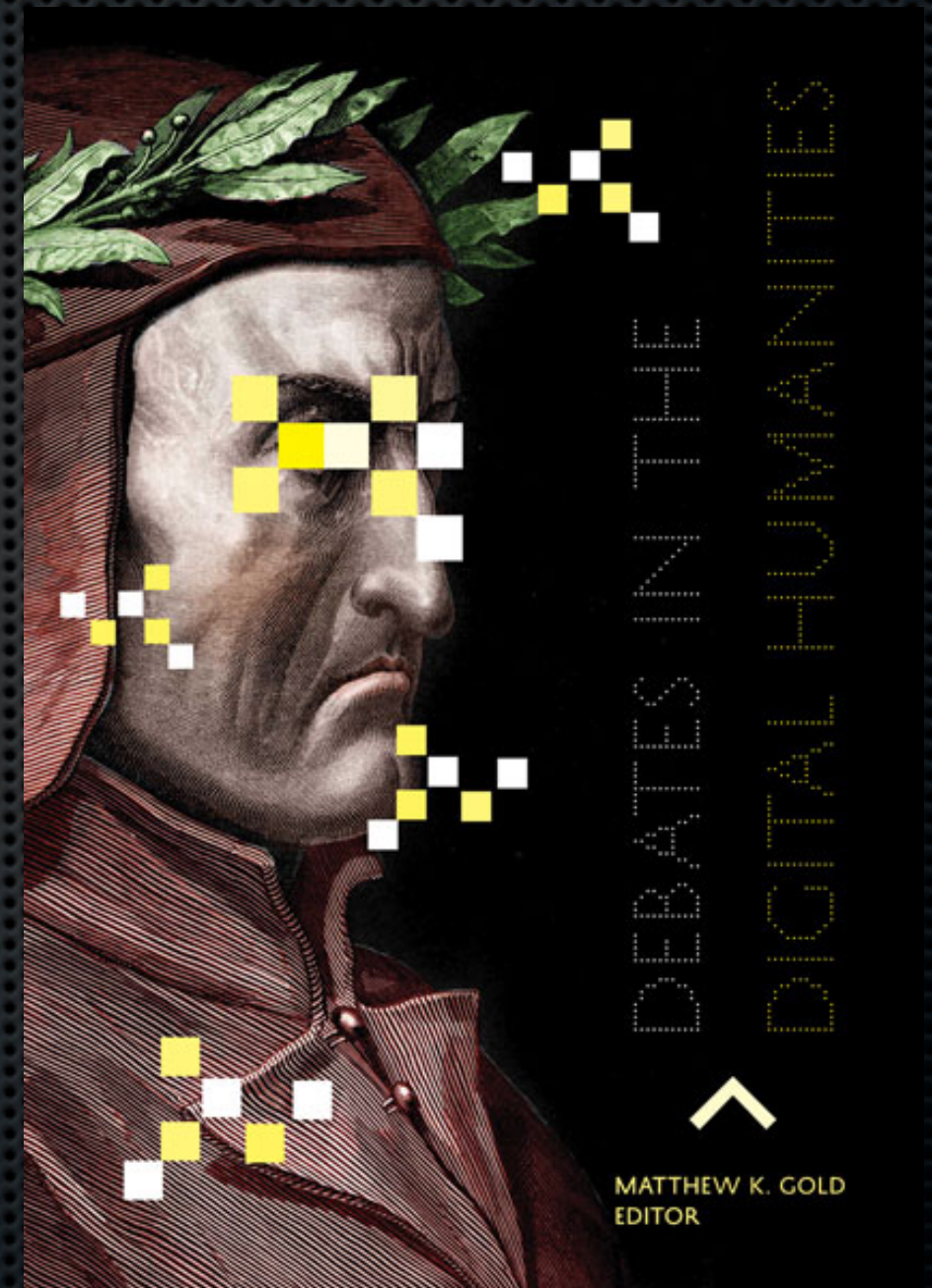
DEBATES IN THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

MATTHEW K. GOLD
EDITOR

"Let's be honest--there is no definition of digital humanities, if by definition we mean a consistent set of **theoretical concerns and research methods** that might be aligned with a given discipline." *Alvarado, R. (2012). The digital humanities situation, Debates in the digital humanities, 50.*

"[W]hat **questions** does digital humanities answer that can't be answered without it? What humanities **arguments** does digital humanities make?" *Scheinfeldt, T. (2012). Where's the beef? Does digital humanities have to answer questoins?, Debates in the digital humanities, 56.*

"The **cultural authority** of digital technology is still claimed by the fields...in which **quantitative, engineering, and computational sensibilities prevail**." "[A] host of protocols...have been absorbed from disciplines whose **epistemological foundations and fundamental values are at odds** with, or even hostile to, the humanities." *Drucker, J. (2012). Humanistic theory and digital scholarship, Debates in the digital humanities, 85-86.*

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Digital_Humanities

DIGITAL_HUMANITIES

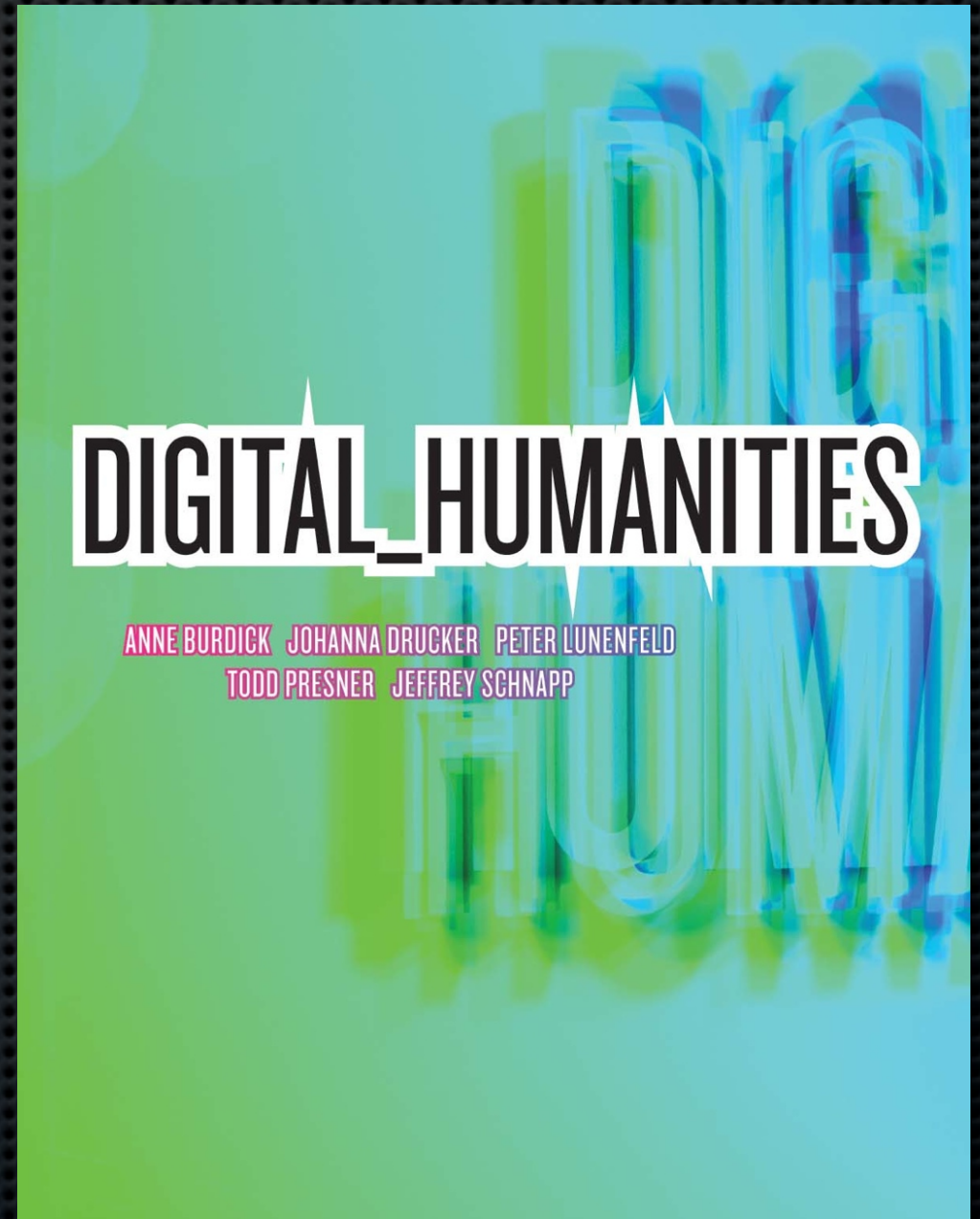ANNE BURDICK   JOHANNA DRUCKER   PETER LUNENFELD
TODD PRESNER   JEFFREY SCHNAPP

"We refuse to take the default position that the **humanities are in "crisis,"** in part because this very rhetoric of crisis has persisted for well over a century, however many mutations it has undergone." *Burdock, A., Drucker, J., Lunenfeld, P., Presner, T., & Schnapps, J. (2012). Digital_Humanities, 7.*

Digital_Humanities

"Digital Humanities is a **production-based** endeavor in which theoretical issues get tested in the design of implementations, and **implementations are loci of theoretical reflection and elaboration**." *Burdock, A., Drucker, J., Lunenfeld, P., Presner, T., & Schnapps, J. (2012). Digital_Humanities, 13.*

Digital_Humanities

"Projects that are dependent on **deliverables as their only measure** of success are likely to be **at odds with a research mission** that supports innovation and imaginative, risk-taking work. **Intellectual challenges, not technical ones** ... have always driven and will continue to drive the development of the Digital Humanities." *Burdock, A., Drucker, J., Lunenfeld, P., Presner, T., & Schnapps, J. (2012). Digital_Humanities, 16.*

The Dark Side of the DH

- MLA 2013

- Deliberately provocative

- Humanities Messiah?

- "Cruel Optimism" (Berlant)

"... DH is best when it **takes on the humanities, as well as the digital**. Maybe, just maybe, by taking on the inhumanities, we'll **transform the digital** as well." *Chun, W. (2013, January 9). The Dark Side of the Digital Humanities – Part 1.*
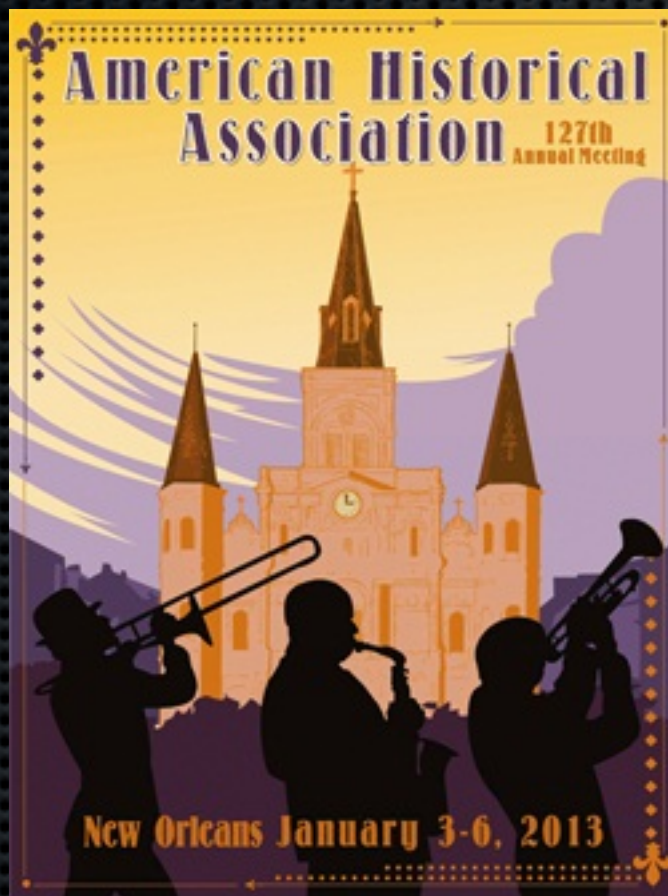
"...I worry that digital humanities projects might serve as something like **gateway drugs for administrators addicted to quick fixes and bottom-line approaches** to the structural problems facing higher education today...." *Grusin, R. (2013, January 9). Center for 21st Century Studies, The Dark Side of the Digital Humanities – Part 2.*

"... [I]t is the digital humanists that serve as cashiers, no longer ordinary school-masters peddling language as symbolic capital but **academic service staff providing skills-based training**—visual literacies, communicative competence, technological proficiency, data management—reinstantiating in the process **the very categorical distinctions between theory and practice that DIY and maker culture have long sought to challenge**." *Raley, R. (2013, January 9). Center for 21st Century Studies, The Dark Side of the Digital Humanities – Part 4.*

American Historical Association

- Pedagogy vs Research
- Digital History
- Preparation & Skill Sets

"History professors spend **four times as many hours teaching as researching**, said Robert Townsend, deputy director of the AHA, but graduate programs don't reflect that ratio. Rather, he joked, he and other history Ph.D.s have traditionally been expected to **learn about teaching like they learn about sex** – 'on the street.'" *Flaherty, C. (2013, January 7). Educator or Historian? Inside Higher Ed.*

"[Digital historians] are **primarily self-taught**, but we are **not self-taught in isolation**. There is a **community** here on twitter and blogs–history done in public, if not public history. And, there are a range of ways that that community supports its members in **learning new skills, building new tools, and producing new research**." *Leon, S. (2013, January 5). Digital Methods for Mid-Career Avoiders?, [Bracket] Images, Teaching, Technology.....*

Journal of Library Administration

- Special Issues, 53(1) 2013

- Digital Humanities in Libraries: New Models for Scholarly Engagement

Challenge

"The field of DH has matured to a point where it needs institutional support, ... **libraries can be natural places for such support**. [T]here is a desire on the part of libraries and library leaders to get involved in DH activities. However, it is **not enough to simply add DH to an existing set of library services**. Library administrators' enthusiasms for supporting DH must come with ... a commitment to the **possibility of failure and a loosening of control**. DH is messy. It involves uncertainty, deep collaborations, and a flexibility that is **foreign to traditional library culture**." *Rockenbach, B. (2013). Introduction. Journal of Library Administration, 53(1):6.*

"[G]rassroots innovation and a few enterprising, proactive staff are no substitute for **library leadership** providing **sustained vision, guidance, and support** for these new initiatives." *Vinopal, J. & McCormick, M. (2013). Supporting digital scholarship in research libraries; Scalability and sustainability. Journal of Library Administration, 53(1):38.*

"[T]he success of library DH efforts often [depend] on the **energy, creativity, and goodwill of a few overextended library professionals** and the services they can cobble together." *Posner, M. (2013). No half measures: Overcoming common challenges to doing digital humanities in the library. Journal of Library Administration, 53(1):44.*

"When libraries do DH well, they are **in it for the long term**. That means **permanent staff, hard funding, real space** to work, and an understanding that some projects will succeed and **some will fail**. But what we often see now is libraries **hedging their bets**: willing to wager a postdoc or two, but not more. Alas, this strategy often leads to **more frustration** than exciting DH projects." *Posner, M. (2013). No half measures: Overcoming common challenges to doing digital humanities in the library. Journal of Library Administration, 53(1):49.*

Synopsis thus far:

* Top-down action is required.

* Cobbling, piloting, and experimenting are NOT ok.

* Only the "big boys" need apply.

"The impulse is to provide **self-effacing service**, projecting **quiet and efficient perfection**, with the abiding goal of *not distracting the researcher from his or her work*...laying a smooth, **professional veneer** over increasingly decrepit and under-funded infrastructure— effectively, of **hiding the messy innards** of an organization from one's faculty, the very people who might become a library's strongest allies if the building in which they operate were not a kind of **black box**." *Nowviskie, B. (2013). Skunks in the library: A path to production for scholarly r&d. Journal of Library Administration, 53(1): 58.*

"Altering the organization of the institution, doing away with reference desks, introducing new media, and all other growing pains libraries endure are **ill-informed** developments **if the librarians, paraprofessionals and support staff have not re-imagined themselves and their skill-sets**." *Vandergrift, M. & Varner, S. (2013). Evolving in common: Creating mutually supportive relationships between libraries and the digital humanities, Journal of Library Administration, 53(1):74.*

"[U]ntil librarianship moves away from our **academic inferiority complex**, and embraces the calling of digital work in contrast to the **vocation of servitude**, digital humanities will continue to be led by **smart, capable, progressive faculty members** in English and History." *Vandergrift, M. & Varner, S. (2013). Evolving in common: Creating mutually supportive relationships between libraries and the digital humanities, Journal of Library Administration, 53(1):76.*

Now we're getting somewhere!

- DH scholarship will not and can not be tidy.

- There are new roles for librarians, if we are willing to re-imagine ourselves.

- We must be vulnerable by letting scholars look inside our black boxes.

- Librarians must be more than higher paid graduate assistants.

Service?

"The [DH] field has worked very hard to correct the **misconception that digital humanities is a service activity**. For libraries to approach digital humanities as a service to be provided runs somewhat counter to the grain of the field at this stage in its development." *Munoz, T. (2012, August 19). Digital humanities in the library isn't a service. (http://trevormunoz.com/notebook/2012/08/19/doing-dh-in-the-library.html)*

"[A] true DH research-and-development team is one library department that will **never appear conventionally service-oriented**." *Nowviskie, B. (2013). Skunks in the library: A path to production for scholarly r&d, Journal of Library Administration, 53(1): 59*
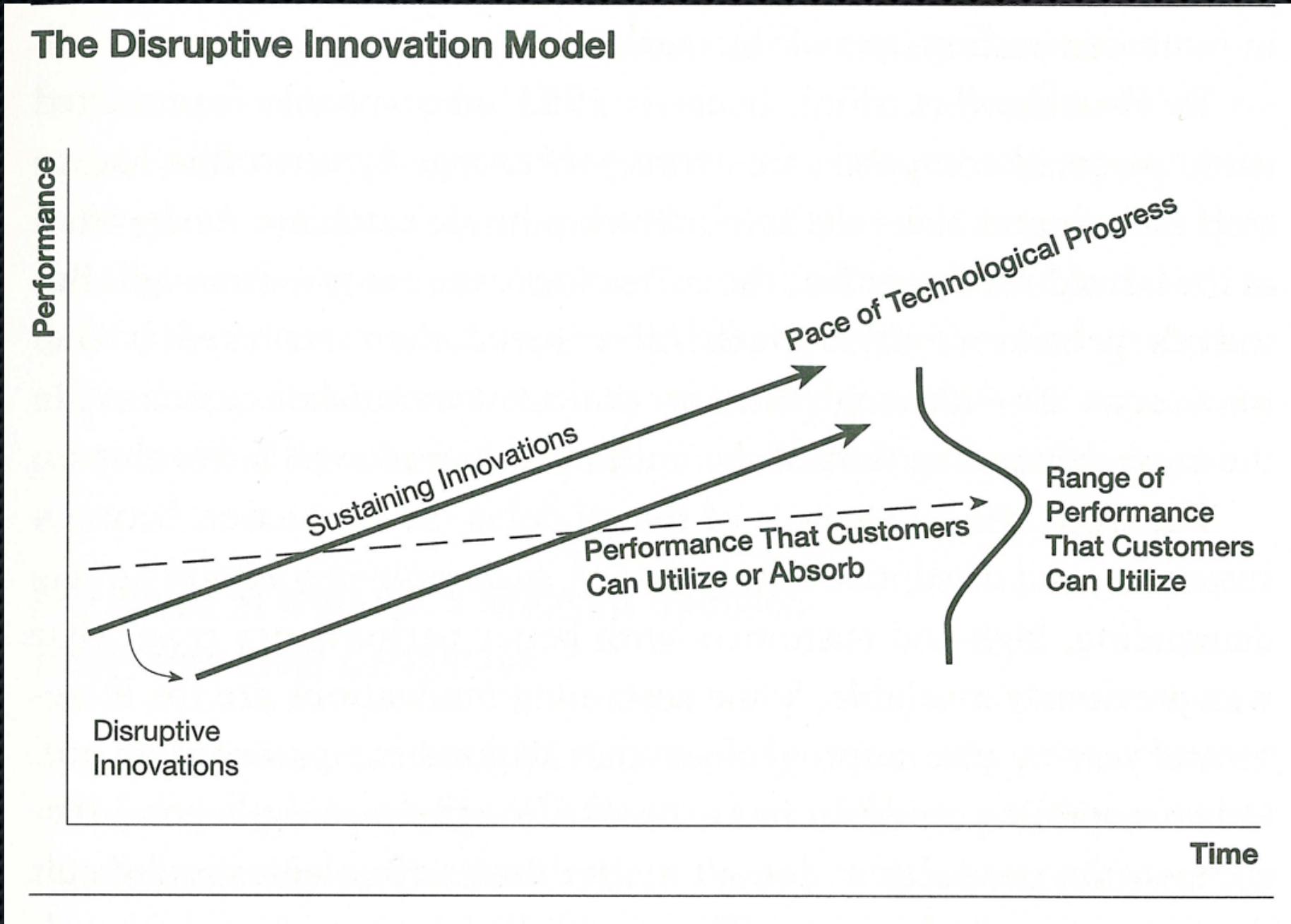
Think of it this way:

- Academic service, as in not research or teaching.

- Service, as in not a collaborative activity.
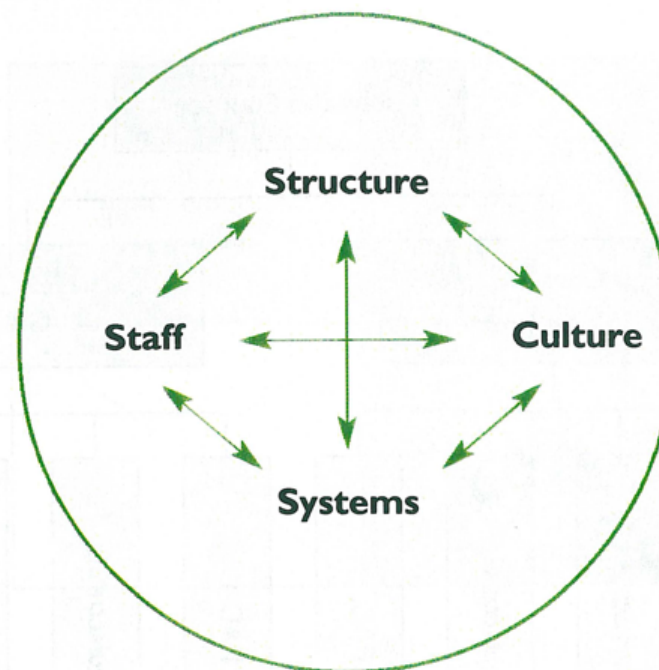
- Service, as in service bureau.

Innovation

Christensen, C. & Raynor, M. (2003). The innovator's solution, 33.

Organizational DNA

FIGURE 1. Organizational DNA

Structure	Formal reporting structure, decision authority, information flows, task/process flows
Staff	Leadership traits, staffing policies, competencies, promotion policies / career paths
Systems	Planning, budgeting, and control systems; business performance evaluation criteria; incentive/compensation systems
Culture	Notions about behaviors that are valued; embedded business assumptions; decision biases

Govindarajan, V. & Trimble, C. (2005, Spring). Organizational dna for strategic innovation, California management review, 49.

Strategic Experiment Characteristics

Strategic innovation proceeds with *strategic experiments,* which have the following ten characteristics:

Translated into library lingo:

- Require departure from library's proven track record, e.g., forgetting.

- Leverage some existing assets and capabilities, e.g., borrowing.

- Target poorly defined or previously ignored outreach areas.

- Very high potential for faculty engagement in long run.

- Require development of new knowledge and capabilities.

- Ambiguity and uncertainty are common.

- It can remain difficult to know whether the experiment is succeeding or failing for several quarters. Feedback is delayed and ambiguous.

Govindarajan, V. & Trimble, C. (2005, Spring). Organizational dna for strategic innovation, California management review, 48.
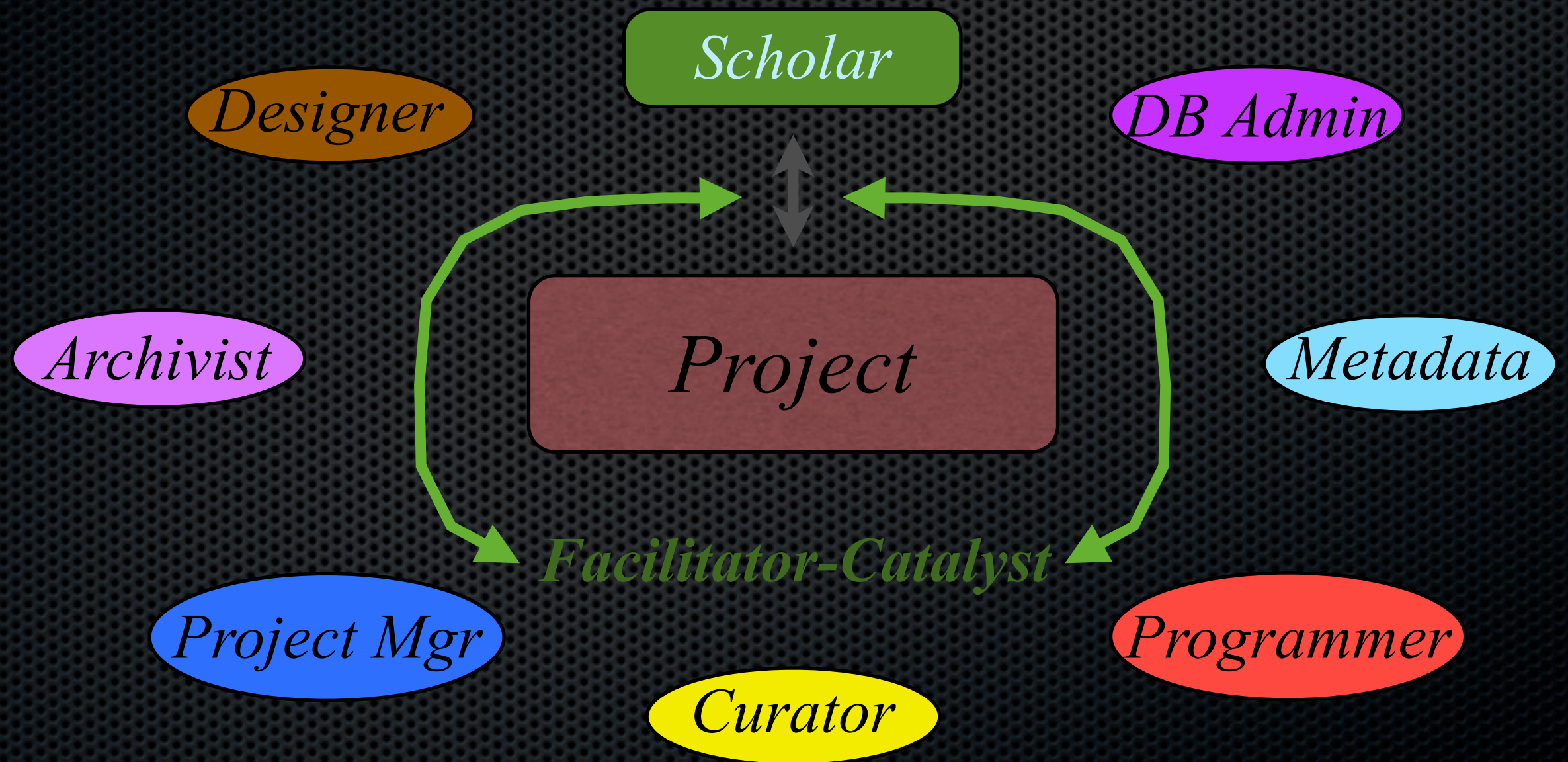
Alabama Digital Humanities Center

- Conversation

- Community

- Collaboration

Alabama Digital Humanities Center Project Model

Scholar

Designer

DB Admin

Archivist

Project

Metadata

Facilitator-Catalyst

Project Mgr

Programmer

Curator

Success:

* Be bold, take risks.

* Build community.

* Forget former service models.

* Change the conversation.

* Engage & embed.

Alabama Digital Humanities Center

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