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Towards the post-Digital in the Humanities? NACMM and Platform HARAKAT as case studies

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the complexity that frames the relationship between Globalization and Decolonization this text aims to unveil the potentials (and the burdens) of the Digital Humanities in relation to artist residencies focusing on North Africa as a geographical framework. Through the text I wish to argue that the Digital Humanities should be seen as both an imperative and an exclusionary process by asking the following questions: What is the impact and social projection of the Digital Humanities in relation to the evolution of artists in residencies in the region? What are its methodological innovations, beyond the application of certain technologies? And in what way do they interconnect and hybridize knowledge(s) in an era of widespread prejudice? These questions, framed by a vision that contemplates, reflects and acts in favor of the different realities and responsibilities of the artists in residency model, are the ones

through which first NACMM and afterwards Platform HAKAKAT have evolved with the aim to promote the encounters of imaginaries and realities that shape the contemporary Mediterranean.

Keywords

action Research, post-representational cartographies, artists in residency programs, North Africa, epistemicide, travel, digital humanities

Hacia la era postdigital en las humanidades El NACMM y el proyecto Platform HAKAKAT como estudios de caso

Resumen

Considerando la complejidad que enmarca la relación entre la globalización y la descolonización, este texto pretende descubrir las potencialidades (y las cargas) de las humanidades digitales en cuanto a las residencias de artistas, centrándose para ello en el norte de África como marco geográfico. Con este texto, deseo argumentar que las humanidades digitales deberían considerarse al mismo tiempo un imperativo y un proceso excluyente al formularnos las preguntas siguientes: ¿Qué impacto y proyección social tienen las humanidades digitales en relación con la evolución de los artistas en residencias ubicados en la región? ¿Qué innovaciones metodológicas adoptan estas humanidades digitales, aparte de la aplicación de unas determinadas tecnologías? ¿Cómo interconectan e hibridan los conocimientos en esta era de prejuicios generalizados? Estas preguntas, enmarcadas dentro de una visión que contempla, reflexiona y actúa a favor de la variedad de realidades y responsabilidades del modelo de artistas en residencias, son las preguntas a través de las cuales han evolucionado primero el NACMM y posteriormente Platform Harakat, con el objetivo de promover el encuentro de los imaginarios y realidades que configuran actualmente el Mediterráneo.

Palabras clave

investigación de acción, cartografías postfigurativas, artista en programas de residencia, norte de África, epistemicidio, viaje, humanidades digitales

Introduction

In an article in the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* from March 4th, 2017,¹ the following statement can be read: “North Africa is a front of great instability that threatens Europe”. The article, titled *The Hybrid Threat*, describes the different routes used by migrants and smugglers through the Sahel and the Maghreb regions, controlled by the so-called jihadists, affirming that, in this transit, Europe is the final goal. This journalistic text appears as the paradigm of the bias that currently characterizes the portrayal of North Africa by Western media as a zone of permanent conflict and the contamination of

popular imaginary with regard to the populations and cultures of the region. In contrast to the prevailing confrontational discourses insistently imposed by news media and institutions alike, artistic residencies (from now on ARs) appear as another type of space that can potentially provide an alternative approach to promote productive interactions, knowledge exchange and fruitful criticality.

This text aims to unveil the potentials of the field of Digital Humanities² in rearticulating the impact of ARs’ regional and international networks. In order to do so, the paper proposes the expansion of ARs in North Africa as a research framework. Throughout this essay, I wish to argue that the interaction between the field

1. <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20170304/42527034121/norte-africa-amenaza-europa-yihadismo-crimen-organizado.html>.

2. Digital Humanities is an area of scholarly activity at the intersection of computing or digital technologies and the disciplines of the humanities. It includes the systematic use of digital resources in the humanities, as well as reflection on their application. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities

of Digital Humanities and AR networks requires revision: On one side, I will suggest that AR networks are in need of broadening their field of action and reflection with major involvement in the Digital Humanities. On the other side, I will argue that Digital Humanities, as we know them, unwillingly develop as a disciplinary approach to knowledge gathering and dissemination, obliterating decolonization as a necessary process within the field.

The questions that frame *Towards the post-Digital in the Humanities?* can be articulated as follows: What are the impact and social projection of Digital Humanities in relation to the evolution of ARs in the region? In what way could the symbiosis between the field of Digital Humanities and AR networks interconnect and hybridize knowledge(s) in an era where binary thinking is winning the battle of a multiverse³ world? And what could be its methodological innovations, beyond the application of certain technologies?

Adopting a viewpoint that contemplates, reflects and acts in favor of the different realities and responsibilities of the AR model and its global networks, these questions are also the ones that are shaping the development of two projects that I have been involved in as part of CeRCCa, the AR I am coordinating: NACMM_North Africa Cultural Mobility Map⁴ and Platform HAKAKAT.⁵ The overall aim of these projects is to give an alternative view on the way in which media (press and online news portals) essentializes the image we have of North Africa while giving visibility and promoting the complex encounters of imaginaries and realities that shape the region.

1. Global networks, local needs

During the last twenty years, the contemporary art world has witnessed a wave of new ARs that are no longer located in Europe and the USA but spread throughout the world. Low-cost airlines, high-speed digital communications and the idea of the nomad artist can be seen as the main reasons behind the expansion of ARs. The starting point for understanding the use of digital technologies in the AR field is the will to interconnect and create networks of mutual support and promotion. In that sense, the creation of what nowadays is considered the main networks of AR programs worldwide, Res Artis⁶

and Transartists,⁷ can be seen as the proto-history of the ambiguous and still deficient relationship between AR networks and the field of Digital Humanities. While acknowledging the relevance of the work developed by Res Artis and TransArtists, in this chapter I wish to stress the importance of optimizing their function as global agents in relation to local needs through Digital Humanities.

Quite significantly, the birth of ResArtis took place at what for some people and for many centuries had been considered the center of the world and the cradle of ancient Greek civilization: the Sanctuary of Delphi where in 1992 the 4th Conference of European Cultural Networks took place. If we look at “The very beginning” section on Res Artis’ online portal, the following statement can be read: “One afternoon (...) we were sitting together on a terrace enjoying cooled wine, tasty pistachios and the wonderful sight finally wondering why we hadn’t thought yet on forming our own cultural network of residential arts centers. All of a sudden the entire round pointed at me, nearly shouting in one irrefutable voice: And you are going to invite us to your Künstlerhaus in Berlin! That’s how it really began”.⁸ 25 years later, Res Artis has become an association of over 600 centers in over 70 countries constituting one of the largest AR networks worldwide, only comparable to TransArtists. TransArtists was funded a few years later in Amsterdam in 1997. It operates not so much as a network of AR programs, but rather as a platform focused on its users, which are primarily the artists. Today, TransArtists is the biggest global source of information on ARs, with around 1400 residency opportunities. Through the effort of a small team, TransArtists’ online platform articulates an impressive database and archive of resources including a complete survey of regional and national AR networks, platforms, and related organizations, and a literature section with key documents, articles, interviews and resources on cultural mobility while providing artists’ first-hand experiences, research, contacts, and advice. Since the creation of Res Artis and TransArtists, the number of other smaller regional networks has grown steadily. Examples of these online networks are China Residencies in China, AIR_J in Japan, Arts en résidence - Réseau National in France, Artinres.fi in Finland, Mapping of AiR centers in Germany, AiR Platform NL in the Netherlands, Art Motile in Spain and Mapping of residencies in Brazil, to name just a few. These networks differ in methodology and scope

3. *Multiverse* is used here in contraposition to universe or universal as proposed by decolonial thinker Ramon Grosfoguel in ‘The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century’ (2013).

4. The NACMM – North Africa Cultural Mobility Map is a research and info-platform about residency and mobility initiatives for artists, writers, and researchers interested in traveling and developing projects from within North Africa. The aims of the NACMM are to promote a better understanding of the socio-cultural contexts of the region and to strengthen artistic and research collaborations between North African countries. Our objective is to bridge the gap between different cultures through mutual understanding and knowledge sharing. <http://www.nacmm.org/en/>.

5. Named after the word movements in Arabic, Platform HAKAKAT embodies the inherent contradictions of traveling: movements occur despite and because of a paradox simultaneously promoting, impeding, and forcing mobility. Adopting a cross-disciplinary perspective, Platform HAKAKAT proposes to retrace the past and contemporary mobility of knowledge(s), bodies and practices focusing in the Mediterranean, the Sahel, and West Africa regions. <http://www.platformharakat.com>

6. <http://www.resartis.org/en/>.

7. <https://www.transartists.org>.

8. Michael Haerdter, Director of Künstlerhaus Berlin in http://www.resartis.org/en/about/about_res_artis/res_artis_history/res_artis_the_very_beginning/.

but share an interest in the mapping and networking of AR programs in each region.

Since the 1990s, the development of these regional and international digital networks has enhanced the expansion of ARs on a global scale. This globalization of the AR phenomenon has been juxtaposed with an increasing interest in ARs' function as articulators of binomial creativity/social activism. Indeed, because of the popularization of new media and the proliferation of ARs in socio-political and ecological contexts affected by conflictual realities, most ARs don't limit themselves to offering creative individuals hospitality and an inspiring place away from everyday preoccupations, but aspire to function as local catalysts of interdisciplinary artistic and activist creation through the promotion of a way of understanding mobility, hospitality, and cultural exchange reactive to the socio-political contexts they inhabit. In that sense, the term artist in the AR nomenclature has started to become reductionist. The contradictory realities in which ARs operate become unavoidable and need to be acted upon through a critical and pro-active approach that surpasses artistic production per se, expanding into other fields and disciplines. How do AR networks adapt to this transdisciplinary expansion within a particular community of practice? In what way does mobility enhance activism? And how can the Digital Humanities help to critically enforce constructive attitudes in this context?

The relevance of these questions becomes obvious if we take into consideration that the development of ARs into axes of socially engaged practices is framed by the unequal rise of mobility as a crucial aspect of our societies. The contemporary praising of mobility as integral to the AR praxis needs to be called into question as, more often than expected, it does not acknowledge that the possibilities of being mobile embody a fundamental contradiction: movements occur despite and because of a paradox simultaneously promoting, impeding, and imposing mobility. As T.J. Demo asserts "Singing the praises of nomadism today within the narrow scope of the European framework, without the radical political demands for equality, appears self-congratulatory, even narcissistic. In such cases, nomadism suggests a contemporary neoprimitivism, one that subscribes to a fantasy of freedom from all attachments, but which cruelly operates in a system that denies that freedom to the very itinerant peoples from whom it borrows its name" (Demo, 2013). In line with T.J. Demo's remarks, it is essential to approach the AR model critically by asking ourselves who is being excluded from the celebration of mobility and which realities and traditions are being ignored in the construction of the AR narrative. We can't forget that, in contrast to the expansive and nomadic tendency of the material and emotional flows described by Arjun Appadurai as "global scapes" (Appadurai 1996), globalization also articulates through exclusion and responds

to a hierarchical format of creation of knowledge and experiences based on inequality and the will to render exclusion invisible.

In response to these somehow depoliticized "scapes", since the 1970s we have witnessed the articulation of several discourses that aim at confronting different forms of cultural hegemony while exposing processes of social and cultural discrimination. These discourses articulate the empowerment of voices silenced in the contemporary neo-colonial era proposing decolonization as a means to counterbalance the destruction of knowledge(s). At the same time, they try to address the impulse to neglect the diversity of ways of doing and understanding that characterize our multiple realities through the recovery of spaces of enunciation. According to the Puerto Rican academic and activist Ramon Grosfoguel, the destruction of the diversity of knowledge(s) is not a novelty but has been carried out systematically since what Grosfoguel refers to as "the long 16th century" which spans from 1450 to 1650, through what he conceptualizes as the "four epistemicides". From Grosfoguel's point of view, the outcome of these epistemicides is the homogenization of the theories and practices considered valid to understand and interact with our environments. Particularly relevant to the topic at hand, his argumentation becomes revealing if we take into consideration that, from his perspective, western-centric artistic and academic traditions have played a fundamental role in this process (Grosfoguel 2013). The way in which the expansion of ARs is being historicized by the main AR international networks is a good example to support Grosfoguel thesis. If we look at the history of ARs on the Res Artis and TransArtists online platforms, we will see that their global spread is narrated as a process that geographically expands from the west to the rest. The question here is, which traditions of traveling and exchange are being excluded through this account? Are ARs a western-centric model? Taking into consideration the North African context and the rich tradition of traveling ingrained in Arab cultures, the obliteration of these alternative histories becomes paradigmatic of a way of making invisible other forms of understanding AR history. Can this be considered as a contemporary example of epistemicide?

Despite the great potential of ARs as spaces from which to share, rearticulate and affect our consciences through interdisciplinary artistic creation and interaction with civil society, it is important to realize that the benefit they represent is only one part of the contradictory context in which they operate. Following *Mobility Matters* (2008),⁹ the final report on artist's mobility developed by ERICarts, artist mobility throughout the globe has experienced a dramatic increase within western practitioners and researchers, but the possibilities of the vast majority of artists outside the western fortress are left unchanged. ARs' problematic side is revealed if we take into account that mobility adopts systems of domination, privilege, and exclusion.

9. http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/policy/cultural-creative-industries/documents/mobility-matters-report_en.pdf.

Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge that hospitality also hides a form of rejection and cultural exchange can also accommodate certain interests, adopting acceptable formats, leaving the system that reproduces inequalities unchallenged. The question could then be: Why is the impossibility of physical as well as epistemological exchanges not only common but, as we have seen in the *Hybrid Threat*, encouraged?

During the past few years, debates on the inequalities of opportunities and availability of resources in the context of the global AR sector have been articulated and promoted from within ARs' international networks. The cases of TransArtists and On the move,¹⁰ to name the most active structures in that regard, are clear examples of the constant evaluation processes that shape their very existence. Great efforts have been made to put in place meetings and think-tanks reflecting upon urgent topics such as ecological impact, migration policies and the access to mobility. Initiatives and campaigns have been organized in order to quantify and document the multiple restrictions to mobility that face individuals and organizations alike after the disastrous consequences of the implementation of the borders imposed, for example, through the Schengen EU agreement in 1995. The collection of testimonies and data to make the contradictions of mobility visible within the cultural field and the AR sector is indeed a crucial step forward to address this situation.

The question is though, how can this task be more efficient so as to maximize its impact? In that sense, the tools being developed by Digital Humanities become of utmost relevance. The adoption of Digital Humanities within the field of migration research becomes exemplary if we look, for example, at the *Mare Clausum* project, the *Sea Watch vs. Libyan Coast Guard* case, 6 November 2017,¹¹ developed by Forensic Architecture, a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. *Mare Clausum* documents Italy's and the EU's undeclared operations to stem migration across the Mediterranean. However, the interaction between AR networks and the field of Digital Humanities is still deficient. It is important to address this downfall and look for solutions to AR networks' underuse of the possibilities offered by Digital Humanities as a means to interconnect the diversity of data and multitude of experiences that are now scattered. The futurability of interdisciplinary knowledge within AR networks should be empowered through the strategies currently in use in the field of Digital Humanities, such as textual mining, analysis, and digital visualization. This interaction will help to interlink the resources of each network, while at the same time giving them the necessary tools to better expose the problematic issues they try to address. Taking into consideration these remarks, how can we articulate the interaction between AR networks and Digital Humanities in terms of social justice and the hybridization of knowledge(s)?

2. Decolonizing the AR field?

During the last decade, there has been an interesting process of self-assessment within a good number of AR networks. The organization of a multitude of seminars and conferences¹² are examples of the interest in reflecting on the soft power and global responsibilities of AR programs and networks. As briefly introduced in the previous chapter, in this process, the way in which the history of ARs is being narrated could be a relevant point of departure to understand the complexities and potentials of the decolonization of the AR field.

Coinciding with what Castells describes as "the triumphant moment of capitalism" (Castells 2009), the unprecedented global expansion of ARs that took place after the 1990s can be seen as embedded in the geopolitics of globalization. The parallelism between the triumphant moment of capitalism and the development of ARs becomes revealing if we look at the history of ARs' expansion from the perspective of decoloniality. According to Herbert Schellier, the 1960s utopian/subaltern activism, which also affected the AR model, coincided with the moment in which many former colonies became independent. As part of these independence movements and especially concerning information and culture, during the 1970s, and as a follow up to the 1955 Bandung conference of non-aligned countries, the former colonies demanded "a greater variety in sources of information, less monopolization of the forms of cultural expression, and the preservation of the national cultural space from the pervasive commercialization of western cultural outpourings" (Schellier 1991). Seen from the perspective of the AR networks' contemporary landscape, how have these demands been addressed? As Joost Smiers rightly points out: "It is important to be aware that artistic expressions in different cultures present themselves in diverse ways; they may have distinct entrepreneurial infrastructures, meanings, financial underpinnings, artistic professions, attentiveness of audiences, and many other kinds of struggles and contradictions. Although it may be confusing and conflicting, in this continuous hegemonic struggle, it is exactly this multitude of artistic expressions that should have the right to exist with its own conditions, and they should certainly not be organized by just a few enterprises" (Smiers 2004). Following the current historiography of ARs' global expansion, is the AR model, seemingly rooted in the Western context, adequate or necessary in other regions, other traditions, and other socio-cultural conditions? Despite the constant efforts made by AR networks to adapt to our multiverse world, accounts developed through linear and Euro-centric perspectives prevail. This narrative is constructed through a "West -to- the -rest" approach and continues to celebrate mobility as integral to artistic creation.

10. <https://on-the-move.org>.

11. <https://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/sea-watch/>

12. For a detailed explanation of the different Conferences and Symposiums please visit http://www.TransArtists.nl/articles/research_trans_artists.945.html

Annika Waenerberg's *Glimpses from the History of travel among artists* (Waenerberg 2005), together with Joaquín Barriendos Rodríguez' essay *Global Art And Politics Of Mobility: (Trans) Cultural Shifts in the International Contemporary Art-system* (Barriendos 2007), are the texts I will focus on in order to rethink the current historiography of AR through a decolonial approach.

Following Waenerberg's thesis: from today's perspective, travel among artists appears to be poles apart from the period when the artist's profession was still a novelty. The fact that artists travel for the sake of their art has been ingrained so deeply that it is now taken for granted. Consequently, travel studies can be seen as an interesting tool to understand why the journey has been seen as integral to artistic development. Through her historiographical research, Waenerberg proposes that in western societies there are four basic motives to explain artists' interest in being mobile. These categories are pilgrimage, success, learning, and compulsion. The originality of Waenerberg's research resides in her approach to artists' mobility from a truly interdisciplinary perspective, which encompasses cultural, sociological, and psychological approaches to travel studies. For example, she argues that the correlation between pilgrims and artists is reflected not only in the similarities of what she names organized benevolence but also in the collectives' material outcomes. Traditionally pilgrims had already been bringing back souvenirs, objects, notes, and drawings from their travels. Waenerberg states: "It was no longer sufficient to hear the accounts of others, but things had to be seen and proved. Both Italianesque fantasy art and accurate documents of eyewitnesses were excellent sales items. Similarly, artists' endeavor was to get inspiration from places that were considered authentic and to behold genuine, original works, sensing its true atmosphere" (Waenerberg 2005). Furthering her historical analysis, Waenerberg originally constructs parallels between the 17th century wealthy aristocrats' Grand Tour adventures and artists traveling within artistic communities: "The Grand Tour gave the finishing touches to the education of an increasing number of young aristocrats at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, turning young men into men of the world. To the courageous and the fortunate, the Grand Tour presented an excellent professional prospect and a claim to fame. The manner in which one became a man of the world also became a cultural ideal of 18th-century bourgeois artists" (Waenerberg 2005). Indeed, success, learning, and most importantly, what she conceptualizes as the "Escape to Arcadia", an ideal that links Greek philosophers, Renaissance polymaths, and contemporary creative escapists can also be seen as the reasons behind artists' mobility through AR programs, AR networks becoming essential in this process. The Arcadia in the AR field can be associated not only with its physical representation — isolated and astonishing

locations in seemingly ideal surroundings — but also psychological longing, that is to escape from our routine, our every day, by moving to new, exotic, and exciting locations and artistic hotspots. Pilgrimages and the Grand Tour were accepted as a means for improving one's competence and prospects, and travel to exotic lands became a useful and rewarding way of learning within the realm of bourgeois sophistication. However, as it could be in the case of artists' mobility, it is fascinating to remember that the journey, which became the ideal of cultivation, had begun as an escape.

Moving between the intertwined landscapes of historiography and the field of Digital Humanities, the example of the Grand Tour becomes relevant if we look not only at the richness of such a trip but also which privileges made it possible and most importantly who was excluded from it. Relevant to my argument here is *Travelers on the Grand Tour*¹³ a project developed by a dedicated team of researchers from the Stanford Humanities Center and one great example of the achievements of the application of Digital Humanities in the field of historical research. The Grand Tour was a phenomenon which shaped the creative and intellectual sensibilities of some of the eighteenth century's greatest artists and writers. Besides its impressive database of resources, which is astonishing for the diversity of media and mediums applied, the project misses to acknowledge the social, political, and economic conditions that endowed it. In that sense, the hidden connections between the rise of grand tourists coincidentally matching the widespread of slavery should be taken into account. An initial way to do so would be if a more critical analysis is applied making use for example of the valuable information gathered under the Slave Societies Digital Archive¹⁴ a project developed within Vanderbilt University, which aims at preserving endangered ecclesiastical and secular documents related to Africans and people of African descent in slave societies. As argued by Gareth Austin of the Graduate Institute in Geneva in *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*, the capitalism upon which Western wealth was built was not particularly laissez-faire. Without the cheap cotton produced by African slaves the industrial revolution would have been less and arguably the long and expensive travels of the grand tourists, mostly English aristocrats, financed through the accumulation of capital in few hands would have remained a dream. It is not my intention here to further elaborate on the linkages between the Grand Tour and slavery but to underline how the invisibility of such connections and reciprocities exemplifies the still prevailing whitewashing within humanistic and artistic discourses. In other terms, we need to think about how different forms of ignorance linked to race are produced and sustained and what role they play in promoting racism and white privilege. As Sullivan and Tuana (2007) point out "(...) the ignorance that underpins racism is not a simple gap in knowledge, the accidental

13. <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/casestudies/grandtour.html>.

14. <https://www.slavesocieties.org>.

result of an epistemological oversight. In the case of racial oppression, ignorance often is actively promoted". The example above shows us that by breaking the boundaries of our conceptual and epistemological comfort zones we can reach an understanding of our realities that surpass the narrowness of a preconceived history while at the same time learn and enrich other ways of knowing and understanding. In that sense the current debates demanding the decolonization of the Arts and the Humanities through a rethinking of History in the light of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos conceptualizes as the Epistemologies of the South" (Santos 2014) becomes unavoidable. Critical thinking and decolonization within Digital Humanities have to be seen here as a fundamental task.

Following this same thread, the relevance of Waenerberg's account on traveling amongst artists resides not only in its transdisciplinary approach to travel and artistic creation but also in the way she expands the chronological framework of her research back to the Middle Ages proposing a highly relevant archeological approach to AR studies. Besides her valuable contributions, it is worth noticing that her analysis remains Eurocentric. Her approximation of the history of traveling and ARs can be challenged, for example, if we look across the Mediterranean into North Africa. The necessity of this geographical shift resides in the intention to unfold a decolonial analysis to the relationship between creativity, knowledge, and travel, while at the same time looking for new ways to think about ARs in terms of how the history of the phenomenon is currently narrated. This shift will allow AR studies to give voice to alternative modes of cultural and knowledge exchange, and to visibilise other histories of traveling that have been either ignored or placed at the periphery of the AR phenomenon. A way to implement this shift would be to focus, for example, on the rich tradition of mobility, hospitality and cultural exchange characteristic of Arab cultures, and more specifically on the *Rihla*. The *Rihla* travel practice originated in medieval Maghreb and served to connect Muslim "men of letters" of the region to the collective consciousness of the *ummah* or Islamic community across the Islamic world, thereby, generating a larger sense of community. There are three types of *Rihla*: *Rihla* or the journey within the Maghreb, typically to meet with other "men of letters" before traveling beyond the local area; *Rihla hijaziyya*, or the journey to the *Hejaz*, which would be transmitted within the community of scholars and beyond via oral or written reports; and *Rihla sifariyya*, or the journey to foreign lands, including embassies and missions. Following Houari Touati's investigations in *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, "The attachment of Muslim men of letters to travel had little to do with superstition, nostalgia or tradition but was rather a matter of method" (Touati 2010). What is to be learned from the adoption of a transcultural approach to mobility? What impact could this shift have in terms of the way AR history is being explained? And how can Digital Humanities become relevant as a tool to enforce epistemological resonances?

3. Towards the post-Digital in the Humanities? NACMM and Platform HARAKAT

Linked to cross-cultural approaches in the field of Digital Humanities is the idea of the post-Digital. This chapter is an attempt to introduce the post-Digital in the current debates that shape Digital Humanities by means of two case studies: NACMM_North Africa Cultural Mobility Map and its evolution into Platform HARAKAT.

Heavily affected by the different issues highlighted throughout this paper, NACMM_North Africa Cultural Mobility Map was created as a research and info-platform on residency and mobility initiatives for artists, writers, and researchers interested in traveling and developing projects from within North Africa. NACMM's aims were to map out the different AR programs that operate in North Africa in order to address: firstly, the invisibility of such programs within the global ARs networks; secondly, the lack of awareness amongst AR programs regarding the existence of similar initiatives in the region; and thirdly the deficiencies of AR in terms of inter-regional knowledge transfer and mutual support. Overall, the project also aimed at developing a better understanding of the AR sector in North Africa as a first step in deconstructing the portrait of the region as a hybrid threat, as proposed by the title of the article cited at the beginning of this text, while at the same time thinking about ARs and their histories from a cross-cultural perspective.

Since 2016, and thanks to the support of different funding institutions, NACMM has evolved into an online platform, which includes a map of 70 AR programs operating in the region; information about funding opportunities with more than 20 organizations listed; and a database of resources with 90 entries. In order to go beyond the mapping impulse, one of the crucial aspects of NACMM has been the realization of a series of video interviews with artists, curators, researchers, and AR coordinators from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon. The interviews are heterogeneous in the sense that they not only include the thoughts, worries, and hopes of different AR program coordinators but also engage in the current debates on the development of contemporary creative and research practices in North Africa. The aim of this archive is to provide a deeper insight into urgent questions that need to be addressed, such as the relationship between art and activism, censorship, and the history of AR, while portraying a better understanding of the socio-cultural realities of the region. Together with the cartography of AR spaces and the interviews conducted, in 2017 NACMM was further expanded to also include funding and resources sections. The need to include these sections is based on the fact that the economic sustainability of cultural organizations, as well as the support given to artists, writers, and researchers in the context of North Africa, is almost nonexistent. Besides a panorama that might seem discouraging sometimes, organizations and individuals are not aware of the diversity of resources available. NACMM's funding section was created with the aim of providing tools

to multiply the opportunities that currently exist. This funding section was further complemented with a database of resources gathering an interdisciplinary repertoire of resources, which includes a variety of info-platforms and online archives focusing on research conducted in the fields of art, humanities and social sciences in North Africa.

A crucial aspect of NACMM has been its development as a collaborative network of cultural organizations working on the promotion of artistic mobility and exchanges in North Africa. This network is made up of CeRCCa in Barcelona, Le18 in Marrakech, Jiser in Barcelona and Tunis and Atelier Observatoire in Casablanca, together with several collaborators such as Maison de la Image in Tunis, Rhizome in Algiers and El Madina in Alexandria. The collaboration with the different partners has been articulated through the organization of several partner meetings in Barcelona (September 2016), Algiers (February 2017), Tunis (May 2017) and a final meeting in Barcelona (July 2017). These meetings articulated NACMM development and promoted the project through roundtables, field visits, public presentations, and exhibitions, which gave voice to regional AR coordinators, curators, and artists. The meetings also set up the framework to promote the interconnection and hybridization of specific knowledge(s) concerning not only ARs themselves, but most importantly their expanded field, that is the issues that they, by their very existence, bring into question. In methodological terms, these gatherings adopted Participatory Action Research as a self-reflexive praxis. As defined by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (first published in Portuguese in 1968), Participatory Action Research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a community of practice to improve the way they address issues. Participatory Action Research challenged traditional social science by moving beyond reflective knowledge created by outside experts, towards active moment-to-moment theorizing, data collecting, and inquiry. Central to the development of reflective theory is an interest in the integration of theory and practice and the conscious application of lessons learned from experience. In short, the relational schema proposed by Participatory Action Research, in light of Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory* from the 1970s, is composed of four elements:

1. Doing something, having an experience.
2. Reflecting on the experience.
3. Concluding from the experience, developing a theory.
4. Planning the next steps to apply or test the theory.

The reasons for choosing this method to help develop NACMM responded to both the need to gather data on the field so as to have a clear perspective of the number and nature of the AR programs existing in the region, while at the same time benefitting from a constant feedback loop from NACMM partners in regards to local and regional needs. Action Research was applied to stress the importance

of collaborative, participative, transformative and useful research throughout the project's development, while empowering and offering practical and real solutions and improvements within the field.

In terms of visibility and knowledge sharing, and judging from the support received by several funders, as well as NACMM's selection to participate in international conferences and expert gatherings, the project can be seen as fundamental, as it responds to the need for a better knowledge of the cultural landscapes that shape North Africa. Due to its scope, approach, and final results, NACMM could be considered, then, a successful project. A closer look into its implementation, though, will highlight several gaps that made NACMM a somehow contentious endeavor. The main concerns, which were made explicit through NACMM's partner meetings, can be summarized in the necessity of the partners to strengthen collaboration not as much as through the creation of a cartography by means of the Digital Humanities but also through the development of a project that would both approach local and regional needs, while at the same time providing structural funding to each partner. In that sense, the main challenges faced by NACMM were not only methodological but also conceptual and epistemological. A closer look at what has been conceptualized as post-representational cartography will help us to better understand the ambiguity of NACMM achievements.

Sebastian Caquard and William Cartwright's post-representational cartography "is based on the idea that maps are never finished, but are rather always in the process of becoming. They come to life throughout the mapmaking process as well as through their use in a specific context with a specific purpose. This processual positioning emphasizes the importance of taking into account both the production and the consumption of maps instead of focusing on the map as representation" (Caquard and William Cartwright 2014). Caquard and Cartwright reflect upon cartography not only as a way of communicating spatial information, but also as an emotional journey: "at a personal level, maps can serve as a therapeutic and healing process. While at a collective level, maps can contribute to leaving cartographic traces, making these experiences more visible and more tangible. The cartography of these stories can take the form of sketch maps of itineraries, of artistic representations of more personal and emotional dimensions, and of online collaborative maps". One of the many examples of this approximation to cartography is the work of artist Bouchra Khalili, who adds the importance of oral traditions in rendering new cartographies and mapping movements of populations. Following this approximation to cartography, the act of mapping has to be understood not only as a tool for self-reflection, but also as a political process of meaning-making. Since the 1980s, critical cartographers have revealed the hidden stories of power and control embedded in both historical and contemporary maps. These deconstructionists' endeavors "were used as foundations to reconstruct alternative mapping forms charged with political activism and so supporting novel and inventive cartographic expression to

provide alternative ways of thinking about landscapes, territories and planning” (Caquard and William Cartwright 2014). The demands to look at the cartographic impulse from a vigilant standing point has given ground for the emergence of what has been conceptualized as critical re-cartography, a process that is embedded in both post- and decolonial thinking. Interestingly enough, it has been through the adoption of these several criticalities, as well as the different methodologies intertwined in map-making, that NACMM has evolved into a much more complex project.

Conceptually and methodologically, NACMM was faced with a disjuncture based in three main areas of concern: the first relates to North Africa as the geographical focus; the second, to Cultural Mobility as a phenomenon; and the third, to mapping as practice. From these concerns, the following questions were raised: Under which criteria does North Africa become relevant as a coherent socio-cultural entity? Who is being included and excluded when we talk about cultural mobility? And why and for whom is it relevant to create a map of AR programs in the region? If the aim of NACMM was to make visible, interconnect, and empower AR initiatives in the region, were there other means to do so? These were the set of questions that had to be addressed. In epistemological terms, the challenge was less apparent but more revealing as it brings us back to the fundamental questions that also affect Digital Humanities: the deconstruction hegemony through the reactivation of alternative knowledge(s).

In order to address these questions, the need to rethink NACMM into a much more complex project was materialized in the creation of Platform HAKAKAT.

Platform HAKAKAT, meaning “movements” in Arabic, is a project that aims to reactivate alternative ways to narrate the history of artistic mobility taking the Arab context as its framework. Platform HAKAKAT proposes a revision of a western-centric history of artistic mobility by reactivating forgotten, or rather, invisible modes of cultural exchange. By documenting the temporary spaces and practices of encounter ingrained in the Arab culture, Platform HAKAKAT wants to construct an archeology of globalization which is confronted nowadays by an oxymoron: the promotion of artistic mobility and the construction of political, social and cultural borders against this same mobility. By rethinking NACMM, Platform HAKAKAT proposes to create a critical archive reflecting on the past and contemporary mobility of knowledge(s), bodies, practices between the Mediterranean, the Sahel and Western Africa through curated and creative cartographies. Its objectives are to portray the traditions and contradictions of artistic mobility in the region today, to stress the links that shape these regions and to reactivate cultural heritage and collective memory to provide a space for critical reflection and action.

In order to do so, Platform HAKAKAT gathers a selection of resources branched into three different categories: Knowledge(s), Tools, and Actions. With the intention to interrelate these resources and to go a step beyond the archival impulse, the Platform HAKAKAT

team also propose a series of curated dialogues, which are gathered within conceptual Cartographies.

“Knowledges” works as an interdisciplinary constellation of resources reflecting upon the Platform HAKAKAT ethos. It includes Interviews, Texts, and Interventions comprising a selection of research, curatorial and artistic projects from the region and/or about the region concerning the project key themes: nomadism, migration, and travel. The aim of Knowledges is to portray a variety of sources from which to reconsider taken for granted modes of knowledge production and dissemination.

In the “Tools” section, the Platform HAKAKAT team selects a repertoire of resources focusing on different modes of knowledge gathering. “Tools” include Networks and Platforms, Archives and different Info-sites, which are focused on memory, activism, experimentation and tradition in the Arab world and beyond.

Functioning as experimental mappings, the “Cartographies” section will be Platform HAKAKAT’s curatorial project space. Making use of the different resources gathered in the platform, the Platform HAKAKAT team will develop several conceptual mappings as a starting point to put visual, textual, and sound pieces in dialogue. These conceptual mappings, which will reflect upon specific topics, will become the seed for Platform HAKAKAT’s thematic curatorial journeys. In relation to these Cartographies, and in order to go from data gathering to relational and collaborative practices, in the “Actions” section Platform HAKAKAT documents the different projects developed in collaboration with other organizations and individuals. From critically reactivating cultural heritage to co-creating nomadic residences and reviewing alternative ways to rethink and interact with the public space, Platform HAKAKAT’s team engages, at different levels and through different formats, in projects that enhance the meaningful mobility of knowledge(s) and practices. Some examples of the actions developed by Platform HAKAKAT are “The art of getting lost”, a project reflecting upon the experiences of the urban sphere of Barcelona and Alexandria from both a historical and a contemporary perspective; “Beyond Qalifa Thania”, a research and practice-based program that brought together researchers in architecture, sociology and the visual arts to actively study the cultural, social and geopolitical space of the Sahara desert and trace back the stories of the old caravans, learning about their influence on current day cultures and societies; and “Resistances by the sea”, an artistic research project focused on the many ways in which gentrification processes, or lack thereof, affect several coastal Mediterranean cities. The “Actions” section in Platform HAKAKAT can be understood as the means by which the critical analysis of the AR phenomenon has moved from an initial conventional mapping exercise to practicing mapping in phenomenological terms, i.e. through experience and practice.

Participatory Action Research, post-representational cartographies and the need to center the human situation in research have to be seen here as different modes of articulating what was initially thought of as a digital platform into a project embedded in the social fabric. In this

sense, the proposals NACMM and platform HAKARAT bring to the field of Digital Humanities go in line with the paths proposed from the post-digital, i.e. an approach to the digital characterized by the integration of the analogical and the relational, the interest on DIY non-hierarchical modes of creation and a will to counterbalance monopolization.

Conclusions

As it couldn't be otherwise, the definition of Digital Humanities is being constantly reconsidered due to the fluid nature of the digital and the continuous evolution of the humanities. The present text is an attempt to reflect on the field of Digital Humanities in light of the current debates on decolonization. Taking the AR phenomenon in North Africa as an area of investigation and the evolution of NACMM as a case study, this paper attempts to look critically at and bring the Digital Humanities closer to the current debates on the limits of epistemology and methodology. Through the practical examples of NACMM and its evolution into Platform HAKARAT, I ventured to extract a series of propositions, which are summarized below:

- a) The visualization of alternative knowledge(s) through Digital Humanities needs to be approached in light of fieldwork and critical archiving.
- b) Collaboration and Action Research should be considered as desirable factors in the field of Digital Humanities.
- c) The post-Digital in Digital Humanities has to be seen as a way to democratize the field through action.

These propositions respond to a perceived need to humanize the digital by eroding the division between the digital and the analog while adopting a holistic perspective. The need to address the epistemic dualism between the digital and the analog is seen through the decolonial turn in knowledge production, which has an ambiguous approach to digitalization. On one side, Digital Humanities are seen as an essential tool to visualize and archive data; on the other, the accumulation of information and the impulse to classify knowledge can also be considered exclusionary if we consider that the evolution of the digital has been monopolized through expertise and sophistication. Moving away from the monopolization trend, the paper acknowledges and promotes the significant value of Digital Humanities by proposing a post-digital turn, that is, an approach to the digital characterized by the integration of the analogical and an interest in DIY non-hierarchical modes of creation in order to democratize the field of Digital Humanities achievements through a constant dialogue with the relational and the collaborative. Despite and because of its contradictions and limitations, NACMM and its evolution into Platform HAKARAT can be seen as a humble attempt to put these proposals into practice.

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