

Chapter 2

A Manifesto of Numanities

Abstract The present chapter, the actual core of this book, is an attempt to assemble a mission for Numanities. That is, what are the most important and urgent actions that a platform of this sort (with its intents to rediscuss the role, the challenges and the potentials of the humanities in modern society) need to take in order to reacquire that social and cultural relevance that seem to be crucial, in order to defend and promote critical thinking and analytical reasoning; provide knowledge and understanding of democracy and social justice; develop leadership, cultural and ethical values? At the current, initial, stage of this platform, the mission will be articulated in a manifesto of seven points.

2.1 Rethink the Position of the Humanities in Modern Society

The humanities remind us where we have been and help us envision where we are going. Emphasizing critical perspective and imaginative response, the humanities – including the study of languages, literature, history, film, civics, philosophy, religion, and the arts – foster creativity, appreciation of our commonalities and our differences, and knowledge of all kinds. The social sciences reveal patterns in our lives, over time and in the present moment. Employing the observational and experimental methods of the natural sciences, the social sciences – including anthropology, economics, political science and government, sociology, and psychology – examine and predict behavioral and organizational processes. Together, they help us understand what it means to be human and connect us with our global community. (Broadhead et al. 2013: 9)

This lovely description of what the humanities are about should be a constant reminder for us throughout this whole monograph. We need to keep in mind what our identity is, but also how it can develop. And when we think about our identity, we may want to think of it in relation to the representation we are giving of it today. One of the suspicions that I maintain here in form of critical analysis is that in our struggle to preserve the role of the humanities in society made us lose the focus on what we were *really* defending. I shall elaborate on this further, but at this stage it is important to underline that, possibly, instead of interpreting our identity in that

multifaceted, eclectic and dynamic manner that all identities imply by definition (particularly the identity of a whole area of inquiry that is formed by several disciplines and interconnections among them), we decided to crystallize it into a specific portion of space-time (which I would locate in the territory of European culture in a period between Romanticism and Post-modernism), and thus we ended up struggling for familiarity rather than for identity. Also, in doing so, we contributed to an unfair image of the humanities as a way to knowledge that is more content (in fact, self-indulgent—as Post-modernism often shows) with its limits than its potentials. The “keepers of the republic” lost the republic, because they wanted to keep it in a relatively small garden surrounded by fences.

For this reason, and regardless of the importance that they may acquire in present or future scenarios, it is crucial that the humanities (regain the right to) have a recognizable and authoritative role in research and everyday practices. The keyword, here, should be “dignity”. If we compare the centrality of humanists in the past centuries with the marginality of nowadays, it is clear that the first crisis experienced by humanities, in order of moral priorities, is a crisis of “dignity”. As I often tell my students: there used to be a time when if somebody asked you “what do you do in life?” and you answered “I’m a philosopher”, or “I’m a poet”, they would have looked at you in admiration as a prominent figure of the community, indeed a “keeper of the republic”. Imagine the same answers now, the most you can expect from people is either “OK, sure, but what do you do *really*?”, or, at worst, a compassionate pat on the shoulder which basically means “Oh, poor thing, so you are unemployed”.

To recover dignity, the humanities must rethink their position and role at all levels, from the choice of research topics to the selection of the right platform to showcase them; from the approach to writing a project application, to the whole way they *read* and *interpret* the world.

In thinking of a “New Humanities” project, all these aspects should be considered, but—as mentioned at the beginning—self-critical assessment must not be forgotten. Indeed, what has so far been exposed has been the reasons why humanists should blame “the system”, not why they should blame themselves. In this manifesto, and starting from this first point, I intend to combine both aspects, critical and self-critical ones. Altogether, the argument is formulated in seven main “aims” that the humanities should rethink and pursue.

The goal of Numanities is to unify the various fields, approaches and also potentials of the humanities in the context, dynamics and problems of current societies, and in the attempt to overcome the above-described crisis. In fact, while “crisis” is the term that many scholars refer to, when they analyze the current condition of humanities, one should also keep in mind that the word should be taken not only in its negative connotation, but in a wider, etymological sense (that is, Greek *krisis*, which rather means “selection, judgment, turning point”). In other words, a crisis is a precondition for evolution.

Also, to discuss Numanities in terms of an “umbrella-concept” means also that there is no *specific* scientific content in it, and that is why it is preferable to set the present document in form of manifesto, rather than scientific paradigm or the likes.

That particularly means that the many existing new fields and research trends that are addressing the same problems (post-humanism, transhumanism, digital humanities, etc.) are not *competitors* of Numanities, but rather possible ways to them. What we are launching here is not a new “theory”, or “philosophical paradigm”: to pursue “Numanities” does not mean to adhere to a particular research trend, but it is rather the array of “scholarly attitudes” of those researchers who are working on relocating and redefining humanities. The goals set in the present manifesto are hopefully a summary of the *attitudes*, more than specific theoretical proposals.

There are brand new ideas about how the humanities can be modernized, refreshed, “rescued” from the crisis, revitalized, and they are all significant to our project (and book series related to it). I do not intend to go through all of them (also because I have no idea of how many I would ignore in such a hopeless attempt), but I can mention a few of those I have met during the research conducted for this book, which, like Numanities, (a) have approached the issue of the humanities’ reformation with a programmatic agenda (including other manifestos), (b) are also research concepts within an academic institution (like Numanities is for the International Semiotics Institute, at Kaunas University of Technology), and ultimately (c) have the fundamental goal (and spirit) of “rethinking the position of the humanities in the current society”. I shall proceed to mention these cases in no particular order.

Of great interest is certainly the project of the transformative humanities, which, as we shall often emphasize here, makes no mystery on the fact that

[...] the humanities of today are enveloped in the paradigms of the past. Even the most recent attempts to deal with the state and prospects of the humanities in the twenty-first century largely explore the socio-political and educational aspects of humanistic teaching and research in the academy, the place of the humanities in the curriculum, and their interaction with the natural and social sciences in the infrastructure of a university. Many of such attempts are devoted to historical ideas in the humanities and do not have much to say about their path to the future. (Epstein 2012: 10)

On the contrary, Epstein sees a great opportunity for the development and redefinition of the humanities in the current historical epoch, since “for the first time in history, humans now have the ability to create something (or even somebody) similar to humans themselves. Not just tools or symbols, but artificial intelligence, artificial organisms, new forms of life, and holistic human-like creatures” (Epstein 2012: 11), urging humanists not to miss the opportunity to perform “their own attempt to enhance the role of humans in the transformation of the universe and their own nature” (ibid.)

Epstein’s agenda, pursued in his Center for Humanities Innovation at Durham University, is mostly identifiable with the wider paradigm of transhumanism,¹ and

¹We shall leave to another discussion the controversies that have occasionally arisen around this notion, like the famous warning written by Francis Fukuyama in the special issue of *Foreign Policy* on the “The World’s Most Dangerous Ideas” (published in 2004). On that occasion, transhumanism enjoyed the company of none other than “The War on Evil”, “Business as usual at

revolves around eight main objectives (Epstein 2012: 293–294): (1) “To focus specifically on the potential of the humanities to transform the objects of their study”; (2) “To address problems of technical enhancement and biological transformation of humans, simulated reality and artificial intelligence from the humanistic perspective”; (3) “To [have] the capacity to respond swiftly to significant new trends or intellectual problems that [...] call for establishing new fields of research”; (4) “To develop new disciplines in the humanities that respond to the socio-cultural challenges of the 21st century”; (5) “To expand the genres of intellectual discourse, with particular emphasis on those creative and concise genres [like] manifestos, theses, aphorisms, fragments, programs, ideas and notes”; (6) “To examine how new informational technologies radically change”; (7) “To develop specific methods and criteria for the evaluation of the transformative power of thinking and intellectual creativity, imagination, inspiration, invention and originality in the humanities”; and (8) “[To develop] IntelNet—an electronic portal for intellectual innovations” (it can be found at <http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/intelnet2.html>).

Another project that is extremely welcome in the forum of Numanities was generated in the environment of the Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen, the “Dutch Society of Arts and Science”, and is best encapsulated in Tindemans et al. (2003). The main emphasis here is interdisciplinarity, considered an unavoidable destiny of modern research (and a priority for Numanities, too, as we shall soon see): “The future of every bit of science depends on the ability to use all instruments from the toolbox, whether they have their origin in and were even largely identified with the natural sciences on the one hand and the social sciences and the humanities on the other” (Tindemans et al. 2003: 13). The following are the main conclusions:

- Disciplines will remain with us, but no longer as the primary basis for research arrangements.
- Naming domains of heterogeneous scholastic enterprise may present creative challenges, but reference to the constituents and the specific tools will help explain what such innovations are about.
- Successful new departures—often embedded in and triggered by primarily ‘engineering’ type organizations—will require the support of more than one sector of society. There should not just be an industrial background or, conversely, exclusive government funding.
- Openness is what is most needed. Tribal behaviour, a characteristic of many existing research establishments, is to be avoided.
- Funding should be given wisely. As one discussant said, “what research needs is not just a budget, not just a focus, but both simultaneously”.
- It is also obvious that science—in the wider sense of including studies in the humanities and social sciences – must be truly embedded in society. (Tindemans et al. 2003: 15–16)

(Footnote 1 continued)

the U.N.”, “Free money”, “Undermining free will”, “Spreading democracy”, “Religious intolerance” and “Hating America”. Not bad.

Next, I shall like to mention the project “New Directions in Humanities”, which revolves around the website thehumanities.com and features three main outlets: “The International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities” (an annual event that, at the time I am writing these lines, has reached the 13th edition, the 14th being planned in 2016 at the University of Chicago); a rather rich variety of publications, including seven peer-reviewed journals and a book series published by Common Ground Publishing Books, consisting so far of about 40 titles; and a web community called “New Directions in the Humanities Knowledge Community” (where members have numerous chances to be involved, sharing video presentations, participating in boards and editing work in the various publications; the community is also on Facebook, Twitter, and Scholar).

The project was born in 2003 with the purpose of “developing innovative practices and setting a renewed agenda for [the] future [of the humanities]” (<http://thehumanities.com/about>). As with Humanities, here, there is no specific attempt to establish a new paradigm in the humanities, but rather to collect a number of them under a single umbrella. Very interestingly, their scopes are grouped under three categories of relations: Humanities-Science-Technology; Humanities-Economy-Commerce; and Humanities Themselves (<http://thehumanities.com/about/scope-concerns>). In the first case:

The new technologies and sciences of informatics [...] are infused to a remarkable degree with the human of the humanities: the human-centered designs which aim at ‘usability’; the visual aesthetics of screen designs; the language games of search and tag; the naming protocols and ontologies of the semantic web; the information architectures of new media representations; the accessibility and manipulability of information mashups that make our human intelligence irreducibly collective; and the literariness of the code that drives all these things. So too, new biomedical technologies and sciences uniquely inveigle the human—when considering, for instance, the ethics of bioscience and biotechnology, or the sustainability of the human presence in natural environments. (<http://thehumanities.com/about/scope-concerns>)

In the second case (Humanities-Economy-Commerce):

In the modern world, ‘economy’ and ‘production’ have come to refer to action and reflection pertaining to the domains of paid work, the production of goods and services, and their distribution and market exchange. At their etymological source, however, we find a broader realm of action—the realm of material sustenance, of domesticity (the Greek ‘oikos’/household and ‘nemein’/manage), of work as the collaborative project of meeting human needs, and of thrift (economizing), not just as a way of watching bottom lines, but of conserving human effort and natural resources. Today more than ever, questions of the human arise in the domain of the econo-production, and these profoundly imbricate human interests, needs and purposes. Drawing on the insights of the humanities and a renewed sense of the human, we might for instance be able to address today’s burning questions of economic globalization and the possible meanings and consequences of the ‘knowledge economy.’ (<http://thehumanities.com/about/scope-concerns>)

Finally, when it comes to the humanities themselves:

[...] the humanities are considered by their critics to be at best esoteric, at worst ephemeral. They seem to have less practical ‘value’ than the domains of techno-science and econo-production. But what could be more practical, more directly relevant to our very existence than disciplines which interrogate culture, place, time, subjectivity, consciousness, meaning, representation and change? [...] Within this highly generalized scope, [we] have two particular interests:

- Interdisciplinarity: The humanities is a domain of learning, reflection and action which require dialogue between and across discipline-defining epistemologies, perspectives and content areas.
- Globalism and Diversity: The humanities are to be considered a space where recognizes the dynamics of differences in human history, thought and experience, and negotiates the contemporary paradoxes of globalization. This serves as a corrective to earlier modes of humanities thinking, where one-sided attempts were made to refine a singular essence for an agenda of humanism.

The humanities come into their own in unsettling spaces like these. These kinds of places require difficult dialogues, and here the humanities shine. It is in discussions like these that we might be able to unburden ourselves of restrictively narrow knowledge systems of techno-science and econo-production. (<http://thehumanities.com/about/scope-concerns>)

In the light of these concerns, “New Directions in Humanities” declares to pursue the following areas of inquiry (<http://thehumanities.com/about/themes>): Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary humanities; The relationship of humanities to other knowledge domains (technology, science, economics); Making knowledge: research in the humanities; Subjectivity and objectivity, truth and relativity; Philosophy, consciousness and the meanings of meaning; Geographical and archeological perspectives on human place and movement; The study of humans and humanity, past and present; The future of humanities.

Additional insights on the (inter)disciplinary contents of this community are detected in their publications and conferences. For instance, the titles of their seven journals are *Literary Humanities*; *Book*; *Civic, Political and Community Studies*; *Communication and Linguistic Studies*; *Critical Cultural Studies*; *Humanities Education*; *Humanities: Annual Review*.

To conclude, as with a previous footnote on transhumanism, I shall like to avoid here the controversial aspects of some of these enterprises (because I am mostly interested in emphasizing their existence, contents and similarities with Numanities). However, it must be said that in some online forums (see, for instance, *Scholarly Open Access*, which offers the very useful service to list the so-called predatory open access publishers) “New Directions in Humanities” has been reported as a possible predatory environment, particularly its conference which, according to these criticisms, is not very transparent. Having said that, these questionable aspects are very far from “certified” predatory publishers and massive spammers like David Publishing Company, World Academic Publishing and the likes (for a full list, I very much recommend the above-mentioned service at the page <http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>. I take the public opportunity here to thank them for the great hand they lend to the scholarly community).

As a fourth example, we cannot overlook the amazing job that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is doing in creating a recognizable role for the humanities within the context of a technological institution (it is of course an issue I feel a particular interest in, as the International Semiotics Institute is currently in the same condition—a humanistic unit within a technological university). By employing the “value of the humanities” approach (their slogan is “Great ideas change the world”), MIT have assembled one of the most complete, eclectic and yet coherent units of humanities in the whole world. The MIT School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, one of five schools of the Institute, has 13 departments and grants S.B., S.M., and Ph.D. programs. Their mission is embodied in the word “Empowering”:

Generating practical solutions for the world’s great challenges requires technical and scientific creativity—and an understanding of the world’s human complexities: political, cultural, and economic. MIT’s Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences fields empower young scientists, engineers, thinkers, and citizens—with historical and cultural perspectives, and skills in critical thinking and communication—to help them serve the world well, with innovations and lives that are rich in meaning and wisdom. (<http://shass.mit.edu/mission>)

Within this framework, three areas of focus are identified: “Research and Innovation”, with currently 21 research projects with topics as varied as “Repairing America’s Social Safety Net”, “How do societies confront histories of injustice?”, “Production in the Innovation Economy”, “Why are some nations wealthy while others are poor?”, “How did slavery shape American universities?”, and so forth; “Teaching Critical Skills”, with 21 fields of study (alternating “classic” fields like linguistics, music and philosophy, with more specific/innovative ones like Comparative Media Studies, Science Writing and HyperStudio); and finally “Educating Leaders and Global Citizens”, an area that mostly revolves around the famous MISTI Program (MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives—<http://misti.mit.edu/>), whose mission is the creation of practice-oriented, international learning experiences for MIT students in relation to their course of study, and in collaboration with foreign companies, universities and research institutions (22 partner-countries altogether).

Thematically, all the activities are grouped into the so-called “Five great challenges” (<http://shass.mit.edu/mission/great-challenges>): Innovation/Creativity; Social innovation; Education; Environment; Health/Health care.

It is of course pleonastic to praise such a big and rich institution like MIT, but one has to do it anyway, as their offer in humanities is something to look up to, while searching for an effective, innovative-yet-historically-conscious, top-quality integration of humanistic research into society and interaction with science and technology.

To conclude—*dulcis in fundo*, as the Latins would have it—we cannot ignore the big movement of posthumanism and its various branches (including transhumanism itself, which some people treat as a “sub-genre” of posthumanities—although that would not be my case). When we started the project of Numanities at Kaunas University of Technology, I was of course involved in several discussions (mostly friendly ones) on what Numanities were, and how they were related to

humanities as such. A very recurrent question I would receive was “So... is this a sort of posthumanities?”. I am not sure why I was specifically asked this question, but I have three hypotheses, all of them revealing something about the solid connection between the two concepts. First, I may have been asked this question because both the prefixes “New” (“Nu”) and “Post” suggest an idea of advancement (at least in time, if not in contents). Second, because of all the various movements of reformation of the humanities, posthumanities is the one that is heard more often, in both scholarly and everyday environments (not to mention the artistic ones, where the word is particularly trendy, and has generated plenty of ideas and projects of connection between artistic and scientific practices). The third hypothesis (the most important, although—I fear—not many of those who asked me that question were in fact thinking about this): someone may have recognized a crucial and foundational common goal between Numanities and posthumanities. That is: they are both very committed to counterbalancing the dominance of subjectivism in the humanities with an emphasis on (a) non-human agents, other animals in particular; and (b) social practices (as opposed to individual ones). In her introduction to posthumanism (and to a whole book series on it, published by University of Minnesota Press), Cary Wolfe defines the field in the following way:

My sense of posthumanism is [that] it comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture) [...] and all of which comes before that historically specific thing called “the human” [...]. But it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (Wolfe 2010: xv–xvi)

Note particularly this attention for the “social” (which we find elsewhere too), but mainly this decentralization of focus from the “human” to the “not-only-human”, is something that we do not find in any of the other strategies of reformation for the humanities, neither the ones I mentioned above nor others I came across. Posthumanism is the main (if not the only) paradigm that takes this aspect into serious consideration. For Numanities, too, this is a crucial point, both from an epistemological and an ethical level. If an important goal behind the reformation of the humanities is the establishment of a fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation with natural sciences, then it is high time to open up to what science tells us about the continuities of humanity-animality, and how the former is not *alien* from the latter but simply part of it, just as *Homo sapiens*, like it or not, is an animal species. Wolfe is very clear on the role and the importance of the “non-human” in the posthumanities:

What began in the early to mid-1990s as a smattering of work in various fields on human-animal relations and their representation in various endeavors — literary, artistic,

scientific — has [...] galvanized into a vibrant emergent field of interdisciplinary inquiry called animal studies or sometimes human-animal studies. [...] I want to suggest that both rubrics are problematic in light of the broader context in which they must be confronted — the context of posthumanism. More specifically, [...] the questions that occupy (human-) animal studies can be addressed adequately only if we confront them on not just one level but two: not just the level of content, thematics, and the object of knowledge (the “animal” studied by animal studies) but also the level of theoretical and methodological approach (how animal studies studies “the animal”). Just because we direct our attention to the study of nonhuman animals, and even if we do so with the aim of exposing how they have been misunderstood and exploited, that does not mean that we are not continuing to be humanist — and therefore, by definition, anthropocentric. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of humanism [...] is its penchant for that kind of pluralism, in which the sphere of attention and consideration (intellectual or ethical) is broadened and extended to previously marginalized groups, but without in the least destabilizing or throwing into radical question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralization. In that event, pluralism becomes incorporation, and the projects of humanism (intellectually) and liberalism (politically) are extended, and indeed extended in a rather classic sort of way. (Wolfe 2010: 99–100)

Not by coincidence, one of the case-studies for Numanities I will present in this book is closely related to this approach, so brilliantly summarized by Cary Wolfe. Not by coincidence, on the scientific board of this book series we have Dr. Gisela Kaplan, a world-wide known ethologist, and Dr. Roberto Marchesini (the leading Italian anthrozoologist, who is also a director of the Center of Posthuman Philosophy in Bologna), plus the researcher Eleonora Adorni (from the same center) on the editorial board. And not by coincidence, finally, a monograph by Marchesini is planned as one of the first publications of the series.

Now. All these inputs from other fields that are gathered here also represent the state of the art of a movement that is still taking its relatively-first steps (some fields are older, some are younger, but we are anyway talking about paradigms that have been developing from late 20th century at their earliest). Such a picture cannot of course be homogeneous, and it may even be self-contradictory, at times (or simply contradictory, as there is no “self” yet, in a field that is indeed looking for a recognizable identity). So, it is our specific intention, in the project of Numanities, to represent the heterogeneity of the paradigm, in this initial stage of its life: heterogeneity that also means conflict, or at least confrontation, in some cases. Reasoning in terms of this book series, the readers should not be surprised if they will witness a given valid argument in one publication and an equally-valid counter-argument in the next one.

Numanities is not a discipline: it is a forum, a platform, an agora. We have a manifesto because every forum has its rules and etiquette, but these are not meant to affect the development of the discussion. Rather, they are meant to trace the characteristics of the “spirit” that animates the discussion, and—occasionally—to warn against going too much “off-topic”.

In the conclusions to this manifesto section, I shall propose a general list of “on-topic” humanistic areas of inquiry that are particularly relevant for this forum.

2.2 Reestablish the Dialogue Between Humanities and Institutions

A major problem in the current crisis of the humanities is that the latter and their institutional interlocutors (establishment, funding sources, management...) have ceased interacting in a fruitful manner. This communication breakdown can be particularly understood by considering two of the six types of analysis of the crisis that I have mentioned before: the “value of the humanities” approach and the “hyper-bureaucratization” approach. In the first case, it has become clear that institutions do not seem to appreciate the importance of the “uncountable” value created by the humanities. For instance (see also the “facts and figures” approach), we have seen that only a small, insignificant portion of public funds are allocated to humanistic research. In the second case, we have mentioned that the bureaucratic/managerial apparatus surrounding (in fact, swallowing) the academic world, is particularly designed to cut out any humanistic mentality or problem-solving skill.

Now. The spirit of this manifesto is first and foremost that of taking a thorough self-critical attitude before being allowed to proceed to criticize “the system”. Therefore, we shall start by declaring, rather firmly, that although few commentators will admit it, it is up to the humanities to make a serious effort to learn the “rules of the game” of modern society. Complaining should be allowed only when all other (proactive) strategies have been attempted. The sensation, at least when it comes to the majority of humanists commenting on this status quo, is that there is a pinpointed analysis of the system’s faults on one side, and a clear superficiality in pondering their own mistakes, inabilities and inactivity in the process. Most of all, nobody wants to admit that if we reached this particular situation, it is also (or perhaps mostly) because the academics have been, for decades, models of laxity, short-sightedness, recklessness and laziness. In more prosperous financial times, they just worried about themselves, their own position and their ego; failed to pave any path for future generations; used the general lack of institutional control for their own profit (instead of celebrating the value of that freedom), and did not care to treat their own research/teaching activities in terms of intellectual and economic investment. Humanists, unfortunately, have been in the front line in such an attitude, happy that the humanities did not need to be “justified” at an institutional level, as they enjoyed that “intrinsic value” that nobody had the courage to question. Except that now, guess what, someone had that courage, and indeed humanities lost that centrality that I mentioned in point 1 of the manifesto.

Totally taken by surprise by this frontal attack to their authority, humanists could not find a better solution than basking in self-pity for being now marginalized by the institutions, instead of facing the current difficulties by doing what they do best: reflect, analyze and look forward. Institutions are granting less and less funds to humanities, because they sense a lack of concreteness and profitability of the field, while humanists think that, if their research was concrete and profitable, it would simply not be humanist.

This, to begin with, is a historically-inaccurate assumption: tons of humanistic research and output were conceived with an empirical, foresighted and applied mind, profit included. Examples are many, and very famous. We could perhaps mention Filippo Brunelleschi, and remember that he was not hired to work on his famous dome (the “cupola”) by some aristocrat or patron. He had to win a competition held by a “corporazione”, the Arte della Lana (the wool merchants’ guild), which, in 1418, held a contest to solve the old problem of the dome in Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence’s then new cathedral. Brunelleschi had to compete with sixteen other colleagues, the most prestigious of which was another great artist of the period, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He won, and he got the project, delivering to history a most innovative architectural solution, the then-world’s biggest dome (and still nowadays the biggest made with stone), and one of the most recognizable symbols of Florence.

Or, if we want more general examples, it should be enough to remember that philosophy (in different parts of the world, independently) was born with the specific aim of developing concepts of moral conduct, political decision-making, healthy lifestyle, social interaction, educational processes... the nowadays-typical idea of the absent-minded, detached-from-life, unaffected-by-daily-matters philosopher could not be further from the original state of things, and was, in fact, a relatively recent invention (we shall see that later, in point 3 of this manifesto).

In order to regain centrality in society, an imperative for humanists is to moderate the complaining and self-pitying part and reinforce the knuckle down part.

And, let us make no mistake, this does not only apply to “funding applications” and the likes: it is the whole *social image* of humanists that can use a bit of restyling. The concept of “intellectual” has somehow split into two separate categories that do not communicate with (and in fact despite) each other: an anti-establishment “bohemian outcast” on the one hand, and the business-oriented “manager” of knowledge on the other. The former has only the talent, the latter only the money, much to the detriment of cultural and intellectual progress. What got lost in the process is the “architect” of knowledge: the intellectual who combines the vision with the engineering, the abstract with the concrete. Some humanists seem to think that such a figure would be entirely new and inappropriate for humanities: on the contrary, this is the most ancient humanist there is.² This transformation has of course many causes, and this is not the place (nor do I have the competences) to deepen the issue. However, one thing that looks pretty clear to me—at least on a general level—is that, in one way or another, we all got trapped

²And, by the way, to all the liberals who are at this point shocked by these remarks on bohemianism (and will be even more later on): have you noticed that bohemian is the *new conservative*? Political groups, Facebook pages, blogs and associations self-styled as “Conservative bohemians” are popping up like mushrooms all around the world, redefining the ideological agenda of a social category that has been normally associated to the “left-wing” environment. Then again, when we consider that bohemianism has individual freedom and spirituality among its main pillars, that should hardly sound like a surprise.

into the myth of the “Romantic genius”. The intellectuals and the artists who inhabit our cultural discourse (suffice to think about filmic representations of painters or composers) have to be tormented, instinctive and rigorously outside/against the establishment:

On the one hand, the Romantic genius was a brooding, sensitive loner tormented by doubts and condemned to be misunderstood, and on the other, an inspired poet-prophet whose sublime enthusiasm for *le bel idéal* leads to empowered and impassioned eloquence. (Waller 1992: 224)

The “genius” cannot be a quiet, rational, pragmatic person. It is quite outstanding, and yet unsurprising, that great minds like Leonardo or Bach were never subjects of a proper biographical movie: endless documentaries, a few TV portrayals, and of course a lot of references in various productions, but no one so far has had the nerve to create anything remotely comparable to movies like *Amadeus* or *Bird*, where not only the two protagonists, Mozart and Charlie Parker, are given the full Romantic treatment of troubled and supernaturally-inspired personalities, but they are also assisted or rivaled by “quiet” talents (Salieri and Gillespie, of course), whose role, among other things, is that of showing the limits of a rational (that is, ordinary) approach to art. Someone like Bach is a contradiction, in this respect: a composer should either display the stereotype of the childlike, explosive eccentricity of Mozart, or the other stereotype of the stormy, impetuous passion of Beethoven. If you *regularly* sit every single week to write a one-hour cantata (like Bach did in his Leipzig period), ending up writing 200 of them (none of which standing below the threshold of the masterpiece), and in the meanwhile you are also a devoted family man, and a very diligent professional who seeks for the perfection of his job and not for fame and glory—then we have a problem. We do not have anymore that mix of *maudit*, drama and magic that the *cliché* requires: we have instead rationality, sobriety and orderliness—something much less media-sexy.

The humanities, perhaps, should make an effort to emancipate from this Romantic cliché, and understand that another way of staying in society is possible. A successful dialogue with institutions is not automatically a successful dialogue with society as a whole, but it is a good step in that direction.

Now, for the same reason we do not want humanists to be just “bohemian outcasts”, we also do not want them to turn entirely into “managers of knowledge”: what we want, let me repeat, is a middle that in this case could not be more golden. Therefore, some specific aspects of this advocated dialogue can and should be also achieved by a clever and strategically-organized (again: less complaining and more action) process of reformation, if not revolution. And that articulated group of practices that we have called “hyper-bureaucracy” is, in my humble opinion, *entirely* on the wrong side of this dialogue, and as such it must be profoundly changed, if not—as I would sincerely hope—disintegrated.

I shall begin my analysis with three quotations. First: “[...] As to the demands from the Faculty, that is what they typically do nowadays: disturb quiet people”. This one, the softest, is a passage from an email written by my former PhD supervisor (and mentor and friend) Prof. Eero Tarasti to one of his students who

was asking him about a new system of assessment of doctoral studies introduced by the University of Helsinki.

Second quotation:

Imagine that managers are going to assess the quality of restaurant meals but they have no sense of taste. They have no idea – everything tastes the same to them. So what are they going to do? They will undertake evaluations such as how many minutes did it take for the soup to arrive at your table? How many words of explanation did the waiter use? And so on. Everything is evaluated quantitatively, so the obvious thing for a manager to do is to increase the amount of information gathered. As all these factors come into play, then you need more and more managers and managers need to cover themselves so they bring in more managers. So what happens is hyper-bureaucracy. My view is that this has its own momentum and there can be no limit to it and it is not something that can be rolled back. I would predict that the 33% expansion will be greater in 10 years' time because there is no mechanism that can put a stop to this. (Prof. Grahame Lock, philosopher at Oxford University, as quoted in Tahir 2010)

Third quotation:

Universities are increasingly populated by the undead: a listless population of academics, managers, administrators and students, all shuffling to the beat of the corporatist drum [...] Academic zombie speech is peppered with affectless references to DEST points, citation indices, ERA rankings, ARC applications, esteem factors, FoR codes, AUQA reviews and the like. Aca-zombies participate in numerous Rber-zombified, government-sponsored quality assurance exercises, presided over by powerful external assessors. Many zombies have long lost the capacity to distinguish between a place of learning and a money-making PR machine, mummified in red tape. They appear incapable of responding meaningfully to the tyranny of performance indicators, shifting promotion criteria, escalating workload demands and endless audits, evaluations and reviews. [...]

They even come to believe corporatist language promotes transparency and accountability. The viral effects of such delusions are such that many aca-zombies do not even realise they have already passed over into the valley of shadows. Work formerly conducted at university (remember teaching and research?) has been replaced by a sinister doppelganger: bureaucratically generated compliance.

The virus is also present among the overworked reserve army of sessional minions, trapped in a stygian netherworld of precarious short-term teaching contracts. This legion of lost souls is the raw material for University Inc, a sinister operation similar to the Umbrella Corporation of the Resident Evil franchise. Like the undead slaves of voodoo lore, these tutors, entranced perhaps by a misapprehension regarding the status of full-time academic zombies, are mercilessly exploited but expected also to continue producing and publishing scholarly research. [...]

Occasionally it is necessary, as in *Zombieland* and *Shaun of the Dead*, to pass as undead to survive. Paradoxically, it is the unthinking intellectual rigor mortis of the present bureaucratic plague that enables some to survive the worst aspects of zombification. (Gora and Whelan 2010)

There we go. In a crescendo of annoyance, frustration and fury, researchers and teachers (that is, in the metaphors, quiet people, restaurant chefs and finally human survivors in a land of zombies) display their concern over the massive increase of managerial staff within the academic world, and that phenomenon known as hyper-bureaucratization. Such staff overflows request all sorts of things from

academics: monitoring, assessments, deconstruction and reconstruction of programs according to new rules, measuring and quantitative analyses. The cunning promise of a simplification of the procedures in the near future (“once you have gone through the learning curve, you’ll see that everything will proceed faster”, or—more diabolically—“this is just an evolution, not a revolution, from what you were already doing”) is constantly deluded by repeated additions, so-called refinements, and most of all reshuffling and addition of more managers, who—in turn—are eager to introduce new procedures and new training sessions to teach them.

These people (Prof. Lock correctly remarked) have no competence in the academic work: they are not scholars-turned-to-managers, nor managers with *some* competence in scholarship. They are managers-full-stop. They may have worked in public administration, in a bank, in the best of cases in a governmental institution related to cultural policies, but that is about it. You quote Homer to them, and they happily reply that they also watch *The Simpsons*. The result is a particular case of the famous Putt’s law (Putt 2006: 159): there are people (academics, in our case) who understand what they do not manage, and people (the bureaucrats) who manage what they do not understand.

Now, academics are already very allergic to any form of intrusion into their work (especially comments on its quality) when such intrusion comes from an experienced colleague. If it comes from people they do not even acknowledge as “equals”, they get seriously irritated, and not without reason (why should a researcher be asked to perform administrative tasks by *administrative staff*? Is by any chance an administrator ever asked to write and publish—A-level, of course!—a scientific article?). Humanists are in the worst condition in this situation, because not only they do not acknowledge any authority in managers: they also do not understand a word of what they are told by them. While researchers and teachers in natural sciences will at least understand the numerical aspects of the tasks that are inflicted on them by managers (say, a financial plan, a budget statement...), and those in social sciences will get the methodology and the language, humanists will get frustrated with both figures and words, and that will anger them even more.

Not that one should be surprised, by the way, as humanists were not involved in this process in the first place. The whole managerial/bureaucratic system was conceived and developed within a territory (economics, social psychology, statistics, marketing research...) mostly inhabited by social and natural scientists, and where humanists were carefully left out of the picture. In that territory, for instance, the classic writings on bureaucracy and management (Marx, Mill, Weber... competences that humanists would have been eager and competent to contribute) are happily ignored, in favor of dynamic workshops, games of social facilitation, and of course plenty of markers and post-it’s. Humanists are not welcome in the creation of this apparatus, not only because their competences are not perceived as necessary, but also (mostly?) because they are the ones most likely to understand the basic fraud behind it: while bureaucracies are rhetorically advertised as the only way to ensure transparency, reciprocal control, fairness, etc., they are in fact the antithesis to participatory democracy.

And why is it humanists who can understand this? Exactly because they, on the contrary, *did* read their Weber, and they feel that “polar night of icy darkness and hardness” right inside their bones (I am intentionally giving no reference here: humanists know what I am talking about, while managers, for a change, may finally be prompted into reading the classics of management theory—or at least Googling the very expression I mentioned!).

Anyway: what are the consequences of hyper-bureaucratization, and how do they affect the humanities in particular (provided that, as we said, it is the whole of academia that is affected by this process)? I will enter into details in the “manifesto” section of this book (particularly point 2), however a general list can be compiled here (the first three already emphasized by Weber himself³):

1. Too much (and most of all, too redundant) red tape and paper work: action, decision-making and problem-solving, instead of being facilitated, are slowed down or even hindered. Humanists, as mentioned, suffer in particular for this, as they also need additional time to adapt to a *forma mentis* they were never familiar with in the first place. In one sentence: they are exactly asked to renounce to what they are best at.

The tragic case of the procurement system is possibly the most painful example of red tape delirium. Born to avoid lobbying and conflict of interests in the various service and material expenses that an academic institution faces, this “best of three offers” principle has become a neurotic practice that not only slows down and complicates procedures that once were very quick, but also determines a standardization and worsening of the service itself. First of all, a company owner who wins a procurement for—let us say—printing a book, knows already that s/he will get the money *before* printing, so the healthy principle of competition that was previously established in the tender with two other companies is threatened by the serious possibility that the service eventually delivered will not be as good as promised (as it so often happens with services paid in advance): knowing very well that the bureaucratic apparatus of the university is so laborious that the chances anybody will raise an issue (including legal means) are very low, the company makes a very clear point on why it was the cheapest in the tender. Bad quality and slow delivery are the two most recurrent disservices received by the academic institution.

I have a colleague in one of the universities I work for who is directing another institute, with whom we have a running gag: “...and the cookies are disgusting!” We use it to conclude most conversations or complaints about bureaucracy at this

³By the way, I am not only mentioning Weber because he devoted a consistent portion of his work to management and bureaucracy. I am doing that also because he was *not* opposed to bureaucracy as such, but to its excesses only. One of the main points I am trying to make in this book is that the humanities are especially powerful in *critical* assessment of reality. Their power is exactly in not being monolithic, unilateral and therefore ultimately unfair. If *50 shades of grey* had not become the title for a silly book and an even sillier movie, we could have exactly said that humanists can turn a generic black-or-white analysis of reality into one that catches most of the grey nuances of it.

university. It refers to the fact that the tender for cookies, to employ in conference coffee breaks and the likes, was won by a company in a town that—note—is over 150 km distant from where the university is. They became the symbol of our dissatisfaction against the procurement system, because they are objectively and empirically of a very bad quality, with something red on top (sold as jam) which is probably silicon, judging from the consistency and heroic resistance to any attempt at chewing it. Now, everything is wrong about this procurement: (1) Imagine how cheap the production of such cookies must be, if the company managed to win the tender despite 150 km of distance (that is, the overall price we pay *includes* transportation, and still they manage to outdo local companies from the competition); (2) Imagine the contribution to environmental protection that a similar enterprise carries out: vans filled with horrible cookies travel 150 km to delight our congress guests, then return happily empty to the factory for another 150 km; (3) Imagine what progress in image and reputation our institution gains by inflicting inedible coffee breaks to our international colleagues, and what interesting academic discussions take place while half of the crowd is stoically working their tongue around to remove indestructible pieces of red silicon from their molars.

And in all this... the cookies are disgusting.

This colleague I mentioned once explained me how she got around this embarrassing obstacle. Take note: she pretended she had an important meeting in another city, so she applied for refunding to the faculty (being a very important city, this one is a very likely destination for one-day missions for all of us—so, usually, the financial department does not question too much the reasons behind such trip: a meeting with some colleague for one of the many projects we have sounds already very credible). We have a document with a table reporting fuel costs, related to the average consumption of various car engine types, so my colleague filled the tank of her own car with the equivalent amount needed for a trip back and forth to this city (200 km in total, for the record). Of course, you understand, it has to be a car trip, not a public transportation one, otherwise one actually needs to buy a ticket. Given her reimbursement, she finally had the money *not* to go to that city, but instead walk less than 100 m from the faculty, and buy delicious anti-procurement cookies from the bakery round the corner.

Another episode I may mention in the procurement odyssey concerns the hotels where we accommodate the invited speakers of the conferences we organize. One of the universities I work for arranged a tender to get special offers from three 4-star, three 3-star, and three 2-star hotels. The cheapest in each category would get the exclusivity for our accommodation requests. Mind you: the cheapest. That was the only requirement. Nobody thought it would be wiser to establish *a set* of parameters (prestige of the hotel, distance from the university buildings, absence of architectural barriers, attention for different lifestyles in their restaurant menus, nicety of the location, etc.) in order to choose the cheapest option that would satisfy all, or most, of them.

Results. Great for the 2-star winner: very nice and clean hotel, located on a beautiful avenue, and very close to the faculty: students and low-budget participants can be happy. So-so for the 3-star winner: very nice hotel, very nice location in a

quiet neighbourhood, but also *very* far from the faculty: you need to use public transportation or a bicycle. Finally, terrible result for the 4-star winner, where of course we like to accommodate our plenary speakers, whom—as it happens—tend to be the most senior ones as well: the hotel as such is great, but it is not very close to the faculty—of that kind of distance that you might generally like to cover by walking, but not if you have your paper in less than 30 min, or if you have reached a certain age; and—most of all—the hotel is located in an area of the city, which is far from being the most attractive one. So, we give our most prestigious guests an image of ourselves as a city (and a country) that is not particularly appealing. And to add salt to the wound, this particular hotel won the tender by offering rooms that are only one euro cheaper than a hotel (which we would have loved to hire) located in front of the mentioned 2-star hotel—thus, very close to our faculty.

One euro.

One euro is enough to lose our face. This is what happens when these kind of calculations are made on an exclusively-quantitative basis.

Plus, of course, with only one euro of difference, you cannot help suspecting that a bit of behind-the-scene arrangement *did* take place, and someone, somewhere had some kind of interest to have that particular hotel winning the tender. But of course the procurement system is totally transparent, is it not?

2. Motivation to work for, and sense of belongingness to, an academic institution are discouraged and seriously endangered. Academics start perceiving the headquarters of their department/faculty/university as enemies who get in their way, do not trust them and merely harass them with unnecessary work. This is particularly a problem for humanists, because they are most often the “intellectual façade” of an academic institution. They represent it in the media with their magazine columns, TV appearances, interviews (a journalist who wants to write about a given university is more likely to approach the charmingly talkative philosopher from that university, rather than—say—the IT semi-autistic nerd⁴); they appear more often in public events, and so forth. An unmotivated, “unpatriotic” humanist, who is immediately visible and recognizable, is likely to be very vocal in his/her dissatisfaction, and is therefore the first to face the consequences.
3. The excessive reliance on schemes and regulations inhibit personal initiative and growth of the academics, who are treated more like machines than like individuals. The human factor is almost entirely neglected. For instance, current teaching programs, with all their requirements, precise scheduling, regular monitoring, fixed methodologies, “aims and objectives” mechanical templates, “at the end of the course students will be able to...” redundancy, etc., damage the teachers’ abilities to accommodate their work to the students’ need, and to assess them case by case. By now, teachers have to take too many *final* decisions *before* having even met their students. They are less and less enabled to understand what can be done, how, with whom, etc. They cannot “make a

⁴No offence meant. I hope it is clear I am talking about the stereotypical image projected by academics to the general public.

difference” as individuals, beyond institutional restrictions. Humanists pay the highest price for this, because they are naturally inclined to “make a difference” in their work by their personal talents, critical mind, individual style, unconventional choices and unique background. There is no need to recur to the fascinating scenario depicted by Peter Weir in *Dead Poets’ Society*: a teacher can make the difference with a much less fancy approach than asking the students to step on their desks, read poems in a cave and call him “Oh captain, my captain”. Still the point remains: a teacher can make students dig inside themselves and discover their true identity, showing them a path that will characterize their whole life. Teachers, in other words, have the ability to become mentors, if they are left free to do so.⁵ Nowadays, mentorship tends to happen only as a result of a special relationship established between teacher and student *in their spare time*, that is, if they are able to develop that relationship outside the spaces and the times of their class.

4. And since we mentioned it, “time”, in both the operative and the conceptual sense, get the most unfair treatment in the process. There is a fantastic website called [phdcomics.com](http://www.phdcomics.com), where the most hilarious and effective jokes about academia can be found. One of such comics is entitled “How professors spend their time” (<http://www.phdcomics.com/comics.php?f=1060>), and emphasize the three main problems related to the way bureaucracy (“service”) get in the way of an academic’s job: (a) it concretely occupies a good quarter of the employee’s working time; (b) it is not acknowledged as working time by the employer; (c) it is an extremely annoying imposition for the employee.

This is indeed the reality: bureaucracy takes a very consistent amount of time to be implemented, and yet does not get any recognition as “working time”. Where do academics take time to, for instance, compile and re-compile ad infinitum their list of publications for different goals and destinations (e.g., library, doctoral committee, project department, human resources, mid-term report, full-term report, accreditation of their job, accreditation of their department, accreditation of their faculty, accreditation of their university, and so on and so forth), within a situation where not only the various units do not communicate with each other (they could share the same “list of publications” document, for a start, but they never do that, do they?), but they also have different templates, criteria, order, parameters for

⁵If a personal note is allowed at this point, I have to say that I know very well what I am talking about, as I owe my academic career (not only its contents and methods, but the choice itself to embark on one) to my two mentors, Gino Stefani and Eero Tarasti, who—each in his own way and style—understood things about me long before I myself would realize them. For instance, I will never forget how, in 1996, after a not very brilliant in-class presentation, Stefani told me and the whole class that with that “strength” I would have gone far in the academic world. This was particularly “avant-garde” not only because I did not feel I had displayed any strength on that particular occasion, but mostly because my decision to become an academic was only taken in 1999: in 1996 my dreams for the future were totally directed elsewhere.

compiling that single set of information. So, today my list of publications will have to be arranged in chronological order, Times New Roman 12 and MLA style; tomorrow it will have to be by levels (A first, than B, C...), Arial 11 and Chicago Manual of Style; etc.

All this takes t-i-m-e, but in the end of the year report, the employee cannot write that, say, 10 hours of his/her work were used to write and rewrite the list of publications for twenty different purposes, simply because there is no entry in the report template that says “time spent complying with administrative tasks”. As hilariously-yet-tragically emphasized in the second statistic of the comic, that time is “outside”, it is entirely neglected by the institution. Once more, humanists generally suffer the biggest handicap in this process, because their activities are also the most difficult (or at least varied) to categorize, and tend to be more numerous in quantity. If, for example, the activity of a biochemist is very focused on a single (very important) experiment for five years, and that experiment results in *one* (very important) article in a prestigious scientific journal displaying the success of that experiment and maybe a groundbreaking discovery, that of course (and justly) corresponds to a great achievement and a career high. The humanist, in that time span, was likely busy with 15 conferences, 10 articles, one monograph, 5 public lectures, 8 different (big or small) research projects, 3 edited collections, 2 book reviews, 10 Erasmus missions, the preparation of a new study program, and who knows how much more. All of this has to be reported, and very probably categorized in a different way than the one I just listed, which brings us to the next problem;

5. Along with a “time” issue, there is also a categorization issue. One reason why bureaucracy takes a lot of time is because it claims to be able to map all the variables within a given task, while it generally fails to do so. That is particularly true in the humanistic academic environment, where—generally speaking—things make sense when developed into a narrative structure, not into a “this or that” classification. The above-mentioned report, as compiled by a humanist, would make much more sense if the scholar was enabled to write it in free form, where s/he has the chance to show the consequentiality of certain activities (and related choices), as part of a perhaps eclectic but very coherent discourse. But no. At the entry “conferences” the scholar has to separate the international from the national; the ones related to a given research project from the ones related to another; the ones that will result in a proceedings publication from the ones that will not; the ones where the scholar was invited as key-note from the ones where s/he was not... At the entry “articles”, s/he has to separate A level from other levels; peer-reviewed from not peer-reviewed; journals from edited collections; top publishers from less important ones...

The narrative is deconstructed and the result is a fragmented puzzle where the single pieces make much less sense than their sum. When this problem is raised, the hyper-bureaucratic apparatus responds in the worst possible way: it adds *more* variables, *more* categories, *more* tasks, in the vain illusion that sooner or later the

full spectrum will be covered, and failing once again to understand that this is not (This. Is. Not.) a quantitative problem. When we were kids, we would realize pretty soon that with a box of six tempera colors we could not draw very imaginative pictures; so we would ask our parents to buy a 12-tube box, but that, too, would not be sufficient; so we would ask for a 24-tube box, until that would not be sufficient either... and so on and so forth, until we grow up a bit, and (click!) we realize that colors can be “mixed”, and all we need is the three primary colors plus the two neutral ones. And from that small unit of five colors, we can develop any pictorial “narrative” we want, with all the tiniest nuances.

Needless to say, in this example hyper-bureaucracy corresponds to the stubborn child who keeps on asking for more and more colors, without realizing the qualitative aspect of those tubes: they can be mixed! This, too, takes us to the next step of the analysis;

6. There are two important paradoxes that result from this mentality, and they both have scientific names. One is the *Downs–Thomson paradox* about street traffic (Downs 1992: 30): if we try to solve the traffic problem by enlarging the roads and adding more lanes, we will only have more traffic. Translated: if we think that adding more procedures and more managing personnel (more tempera colors) will make bureaucracy lighter and more usable, let us think again!

The second one is known as the *Jevons paradox* (Jevons 1865: 146): an increase of efficiency generates an increase (rather than a decrease) of consumption. Translated: we are told that procedures are made more efficient (again, in a quantitative sense only: from 6 to 12 colors, from 12 to 24, etc.), but what happens is that we are getting more and more dependent on them. Bureaucracy develops in a rather organic way, and tends to fill all the empty spaces. Little by little, it gets to regulate not only the things that were in need of being regulated (if they really were), but also those that were simply standing in the way. What was before possible to do without, say, an authorization, now requires one; what was possible with two signatures now requires five, and so on.

Since we are into the realm of economic paradoxes and laws, perhaps we can also add a collateral effect of the constant reshuffling of personnel. It became known as the Peter Principle (Peter and Hull 2009: 9): anything that works will be used in progressively more challenging applications until it fails. It is a typical career-scheme in management (and a typical career goal of managers): if a manager X is good in the A position, s/he will get promoted to the B position (better paid, but with different tasks), if s/he succeeds there as well then there is C (better paid, but with different tasks), then D (better paid, but with different tasks)... until it turns out that, well, tasks became so different that X performs very poorly, the institution suffers a drawback, and X may also be fired (which, playing with words, may remind of how “fired” Icarus ended up for wanting to fly higher and higher). Of course, this situation tends to occur pretty soon (a promotion path from A to D and beyond is very optimistic, because normally X fails already at B or C), and activates a chain reaction: when X went, say, from B to C, manager Y was promoted from A

to B (and maybe s/he will fail in this new position, while X was very good there), and manager Z was hired for the A position (where Y was very good). All this, while instead if someone is good at something, s/he should be kept there, and, if anything, given a higher salary and more bonuses for his/her merits. On the contrary, what happens (using football as an example) is that a good defender is promoted to striker (bigger salary and more fame), while of course s/he has no clue how to score goals.

To put these reflections in practice, we could for instance mention the data reported by the *Times Higher Education* (Jump 2015) about UK universities. There, we learn two important facts: that support staff has increased by no less than one third in only seven years (between 2003 and 2010), and that such staff is the majority at 111 out of 157 institutions. So, in more than 2/3 of British universities there are more managers than people to manage (with peaks of over 60 % in such cases as the University of Bradford, the University of Wolverhampton and Durham University⁶). Which is more or less (keeping up with the football example), like having a football team with 11 players on the pitch and 16 coaches in the dugout. At the same time (of course!) the best UK academic institutions (Oxford, Cambridge, Institute of Cancer Research, King's College...) are all in the Top 10 of those with the *lowest* amount of support staff (the lowest being ICR with only 37 %). So: where there is quality there is less (need for) management.

Maybe it is time to focus on quality, for a change?

The conclusion to this whole entry of the manifesto is therefore the following: in order to re-open the dialogue with institutions, we certainly need to *learn* the “rules of the game”, and that is something we cannot escape from. At the same time, this must be counterbalanced by the equally-crucial necessity to *rewrite* such rules. In fact, we should learn such rules *because* we want to rewrite them, at least some of them.

Some of these rules have become necessary because of our laxity and selfishness: we need to admit that, and face the consequences. Some others must be instead understood in order to be corroded from the inside. The phenomenon of hyper-bureaucracy certainly belongs to the latter category. There is absolutely no doubt that every single scholar in this world, not just within the humanities, should roll up their sleeves (which is the point: “roll up their sleeves”, not complain) to develop solutions against the outrageous overload of paperwork, evaluations, self-evaluations, monitoring processes, performance assessments, and all possible (imaginable and, more and more often, unimaginable) tasks the employees of academic institutions are systematically and increasingly harassed by. This is depressing, demotivating, frustrating and ridiculous. And counterproductive, for what is worth: the melancholic irony that these sadist⁷ managers of knowledge are

⁶And I wonder what Mikhail Epstein thinks about such loads of management in the place where he has his Centre for Humanities Innovation.

⁷About sadism: not too long ago, during a faculty meeting, I sarcastically remarked that bureaucrats do actually enjoy making things more difficult for us. One colleague reproached me by saying that, well, expressing dissatisfaction for bureaucracy is one thing, but going as far as to say

obviously incapable of noticing is that most of these tasks are meant to “assess and improve” the quality of the academic work, but they are so time- and energy-consuming that the first and foremost process to get damaged by them is the production of quality itself.

“How do you work?”, “How much did you work?”, “Can you quantify this particular work?”, “And what about that other work?”, “How did you distribute the tasks of this work?”, “Was this work performed within the S.M.A.R.T. framework?”, “Can you do the S.W.O.T. analysis of your work?”... These and millions of others are the questions managers harass us by.

We, in turn, have only one question: “Can I go back to work, please?”

2.3 (Re)Learn the Noble Art of Empirical and Applied Approaches

Academic knowledge is traditionally divided into two main areas, the humanities and the natural sciences (though, by now, social sciences have become a credible third field, in between the previous two). Neatly separated nowadays, only a few centuries ago all sciences were branches of philosophy, which instead today is regarded as a sub-group of the humanities. As time went by, sciences grew more and more influential, autonomous and sophisticated, claiming space for separate labels; physics, chemistry, biology, but also sociology, economics (these two becoming eventually parts of social sciences), and so forth.

By 1959, the most famous acknowledgement of the existence of “two cultures” (separated by a “gulf of mutual incomprehension”) took place, as the English physical chemist and novelist Charles Percy Snow delivered a talk in the Senate House, Cambridge, subsequently published as a book entitled *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*:

I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups. When I say the intellectual life, I mean to include also a large part of our practical life, because I should be the last person to suggest the two can at the deepest level be distinguished. [...]. Two polar groups: at one pole we have the literary intellectuals, who incidentally while no one was looking took to referring to themselves as ‘intellectuals’ as though there were no others. [...] Literary intellectuals at one pole—at the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension—sometimes (particularly among the young) hostility and dislike, but

(Footnote 7 continued)

that bureaucrats are sadists is a bit too much. They, too, have to cope with rules, it is not easy for them either, etc. Well, that was of course a not-entirely-serious comment from my part. However, when you are shown—as I was—the document with the specifications for each of the faculty’s procurements for coffee breaks, and you bump into the entry “apples”, and you read that they have to be “second class” (in Lithuania there are three classes of quality for apples: premium, first and second—so we get the worst ones, but never mind) and (I kid you not) “not rotten yet”, you know that somebody, somewhere, is having a lot of fun.

most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other. Their attitudes are so different that, even on the level of emotion, they can't find much common ground. Non-scientists tend to think of scientists as brash and boastful. They hear Mr. T. S. Eliot, who just for these illustrations we can take as an archetypal figure, saying about his attempts to revive verse-drama that we can hope for very little, but that he would feel content if he and his co-workers could prepare the ground for a new Kyd or a new Greene. That is the tone, restricted and constrained, with which literary intellectuals are at home: it is the subdued voice of their culture. Then they hear a much louder voice, that of another archetypal figure, [Ernest] Rutherford, trumpeting: "This is the heroic age of science! This is the Elizabethan age!" Many of us heard that, and a good many other statements beside which that was mild; and we weren't left in any doubt whom Rutherford was casting for the role of Shakespeare. What is hard for the literary intellectuals to understand, imaginatively or intellectually, is that he was absolutely right. (Snow 1959: 4–5)

A funny, little exercise (which, at the same time, is also a slightly melancholic one) that we can do to better understand this split, is to check on any encyclopedia how many great intellectuals of the past belonged to both humanities and natural sciences until the very early 19th century, and how many of them became only humanists afterwards:

- Francis Bacon, (22nd January 1561–9th April 1626): philosopher, statesman, scientist and jurist.
- Galileo Galilei (15th February 1564–8th January 1642): astronomer, physicist, engineer, philosopher and mathematician.
- René Descartes (31st March 1596–11th February 1650): philosopher, mathematician and scientist.
- Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1st July 1646–14th November 1716): polymath, philosopher and mathematician.
- Isaac Newton (25th December 1642–20th March 1726): natural philosopher, physicist and mathematician.
- David Hume (7th May 1711–25th August 1776): philosopher, historian and economist.

And so forth. As opposed to:

- Immanuel Kant (22nd April 1724–12th February 1804): philosopher.
- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (27th August 1770–14th November 1831): philosopher.
- Arthur Schopenhauer (22nd February 1788–21st September 1860): philosopher.
- Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (28th July 1804–13th September 1872): philosopher and anthropologist.
- Martin Heidegger (26th September 1889–26th May 1976): philosopher.
- Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (21st June 1905–15th April 1980): philosopher, writer and literary critic.

Now. Despite this progressive separation, the humanities maintained for a long time a clear centrality within intellectual inquiry, via the commonly-acknowledged assumption that the liberal arts are at the basis of personal realization, education and citizenship (and perhaps—as Snow had suggested—also because humanists were

very quick in taking possession of the social label of “intellectuals”). Little by little (and—as one may have guessed from the previous list of philosophers pre- and post-19th century, I personally locate this process in a period between Romanticism and Postmodernism, therefore in the last two centuries), that centrality turned into a marginality (nowadays bordering with irrelevance) as it became clear that humanists were detaching themselves from reality, current concerns, socially-relevant matters, and empirical evidence, while the sciences were becoming more and more able to go the opposite way, and even be increasingly understood in the process (with “popularizing science” media programs and writings, with scientists like Einstein becoming pop icons, etc.).

By the 21st century, the humanities do not seem to be anymore able to “speak to the world” with the language of constructiveness and concreteness. Elaborating a bit on what Sokal (2008: 229) says specifically about postmodernism (on which we shall return in point 7 of this manifesto), we could say that this detachment materialized in two ways, “one crude, the other subtle” (as Sokal himself has it). The crude detachment was an opposition between objectivism/realism/pragmatism (represented by sciences) and relativism/subjectivism (as proposed by humanists). The subtle detachment was an opposition between that same realism and, on humanities’ part, a form of anti-realism/instrumentalism. In the former case:

Relativism and radical social constructivism have become hegemonic in vast areas of the humanities [...]. In many intellectual circles nowadays, it is simply taken for granted that all facts are “socially constructed”, scientific theories are mere “myths” or “narrations”, scientific debates are resolved by “rhetoric” and “enlisting allies”, and truth is a synonym for intersubjective agreement. [...] in numerous debates with sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, psychoanalysts and philosophers, [...] we have met people who think that assertions of fact about the natural world can be true “in our culture” and yet be false in some other culture. We have met people who systematically confuse facts and values, truths and beliefs, the world and our knowledge of it. Moreover, when challenged, they will consistently deny that such distinctions make sense. Some will claim that witches are as real as atoms, or pretend to have no idea whether the Earth is flat, blood circulates or the Crusades really took place. Note that these people are otherwise reasonable researchers or university professors. All this indicates the existence of a radically relativist academic Zeitgeist. (Sokal 2008: 229–231)

As for the latter case:

Roughly speaking, realism holds that the goal of science is to find out how the world really is, while instrumentalism holds that this goal is an illusion and that science should aim at empirical adequacy. [...] Relativists sometimes tend to fall back on instrumentalist positions when challenged, but in reality there is a profound difference between the two attitudes. Instrumentalists may want to claim either that we have no way of knowing whether “unobservable” theoretical entities really exist, or that their meaning is defined solely through measurable quantities; but this does not imply that they regard such entities as “subjective” in the sense that their meaning would be significantly influenced by extra-scientific factors (such as the personality of the individual scientist or the social characteristics of the group to which she belongs). Indeed, instrumentalists may regard our scientific theories as, quite simply, the most satisfactory way that the human mind, with its inherent biological limitations, is capable of understanding the world. (Sokal 2008: 231–232)

In order to approach the problem in a constructive way, we need to answer a few questions: What does it mean to be concrete and empirical, when it comes to the humanities? Can this be still achieved nowadays, or was it just a result of an outdated universalistic/encyclopedic conception of knowledge production? And most of all, is it worthwhile?

The thesis we want to defend, within the project of Numanities, is that the humanities have both the necessity and the potential to recover (and update/upgrade) that pre-Romantic inclination to combine what the American Educational Research Association calls “conceptual inquiry” with empirically-based scholarship. Although there is no pretension here to provide an exhaustive overview of the many existing attempts to integrate these two approaches (I shall limit myself to very few cases, plus some personal reflection), we may at least start by underlining that

the humanities and the sciences are not so disparate as many have been led to believe. Although some have argued that numbers simply aren’t important or appropriate in the humanities, if a literary critic were to argue for a new interpretation of why Hamlet sent Ophelia to the nunnery and gave only one line from the play as evidence, the critic would be laughed at by responsible literary scholars. Thus, numbers are important to literary scholars. In a like vein, music is generally regarded as a purely aesthetic experience, totally unrelated to science, yet a melody can be described very precisely with numbers. In fact, equipment that plays music which has been recorded digitally (i.e., numerically) is reputed to be the equipment of choice for serious listeners who want the highest quality of reproduction. Finally, even philosophy owes much of its development and theory to numbers witnessed by the important role zero plays in logic. (MacNealy 1999: 5)

The similarity becomes more tangible when MacNealy (1999: 7) makes a practical comparison of the methodological paths of the “two cultures”, showing that, at the end of the day, similarities are greater in number than differences:

Library-based research (typical of the humanities)	Empirical research (typical of natural sciences)
1. Encounter a dissonance	1. Encounter a dissonance
2. Define the problem	2. Define the problem
3. Define the research question(s)	3. Define the research question(s)
4. Plan search of published ideas and observations of others	4. Plan for systematic collection of directly observed activities, products, and other phenomena
5. Search for and analyze evidence—Methods: deductive, analogical	5. Collect and analyze the data—Methods: descriptive, experimental
6. Propose new theory or insights in a thesis and support essay format	6. Interpret findings in relation to theory and prior findings in an IMRAD format (introduction, methods, results, and discussion)
7. Argue for acceptance and significance	7. Argue for acceptance and significance
Purpose: Build theory Result: Theoretical (provide hypotheses)	Purpose: Build theory Result: Descriptive (provide or test hypotheses), Experimental (test hypotheses)

Also, MacNealy (1999: 8–10) argues that “lore” (accumulated knowledge, cultural experience, etc.) is an added value for both areas, serving often as a background and facilitator for research. Assuming thus lore as a special “eight step” (a bit like George Martin served as a fifth Beatle), we notice that five steps out of eight are identical, plus the purpose, while three steps and the category “result” differ. Moreover, the similarities show that, generally speaking, humanities and sciences tend to start and conclude inquiry in the same way and with the same purpose. All considered, this should not be really surprising, as it is only natural that all knowledge processes depart from the same point and try to reach the same destination. What changes significantly, besides the result, is the definition of what data are, their management and their interpretation (to make an obvious example, humanists tend to identify data collection with the search and analysis of other scholars’ already-published ideas and reflections, while scientists tend to prefer direct observation and measurements).

A source suggesting that, in principle, also the treatment of data could be done in the “scientific” way is the very interesting Peer et al. (2007), which not only makes a solid point on the importance of adopting empirical research in the humanities, but it also embarks into a structured categorization of the most important and effective forms of empirical inquiry that are suitable for the humanities. These are:

- The various types of research methodology
- The various types of research design
- The methods for data collection (with a particular focus on questionnaires)
- The experiment as such
- The various forms of statistical analysis (with a particular focus on SPSS software, descriptive statistics and inference statistics)
- The communication of results

There is of course no need to go into the details of these suggestions, but what interests us is that they show, and convincingly argue about, the existence of a concrete possibility for the humanities to approach data in a fully empirical way. However: now that we understand that this is *possible*, the main question is: is this *needed*? I am definitely not posing the question in terms of “identity of the humanities”: in fact, my humble suggestion is that we should not be too concerned with identity/authenticity problems at all, but rather with the question of making the humanities a more effective and credible form of knowledge production. Plus, if we really need to address ethical issues, I would rather insist on the need to recover dignity, rather than preserve identity.

Having said that, if identity remains a problem for some colleagues, I would not see why those particular stages of the research processes should be problematic. And I say this with the same emphasis I employ in maintaining that reading an e-book instead of a printed book does not pose any threat to our identity as readers. Not a single comma of the book we are reading changes, and even our beloved image of coziness consisting of reading a nice book on a sofa, by the fireplace, with a nice cup of herbal tea, while outside it is raining, cannot be really affected if what

we hold in our hands is a tablet, rather than an object of the same size and weight, except that it is made of paper.

Identity is something that we must search for in the typology of knowledge we produce, not in the modes of production. And, after more than a century, it is difficult to find a better definition of such typology (as opposed—one in fact complementary—to the typology pertaining to natural sciences) than the one we find in the hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey regarded the cognitive operations of *understanding* and *explaining* as two opposing modes of coming to terms with the reality that surrounds us. Explaining (“*erklären*”) is what characterizes the natural sciences: in them, causality is the central concept; a scientist is interested in explaining how the A element/phenomenon causes the B element/phenomenon (e.g., how a given virus causes a given disease). Understanding (“*verstehen*”), on the other hand, is what characterizes the humanities (and, I add, what the humanities do best, and better than other fields). In this, interpretation, rather than causality, is the central concept: a humanist is interested in discerning and recognizing the individual-psychological and social-historical conditions that made it the B element/phenomenon (which, as natural sciences have told us already, was caused by the A element/phenomenon).

That which has developed in the course of human history and which common usage has designated as “the science of man, of history, and of society” constitutes a sphere of mental facts which we seek not to master but primarily to comprehend. The empirical method requires that we establish the value of the particular procedures necessary for inquiry on the basis of the subject matter of the human sciences and in a historical-critical manner. The nature of knowledge in the human sciences must be explicated by observing the full course of human development. (Dilthey 1991: 57)

To keep up with the same example as before, while sciences have given us the most precious information that it was *that* virus to cause *that* disease (plus additional important information on how it was formed, what was its chemical composition, what could be the cure, etc.), the humanities complement that part of the story by analyzing the conditions and impacts of the disease (e.g., it is the result of a given psychological/existential condition of the subject, it affects certain layers of society, it generates forms of social discrimination, it is not properly faced by institutions, etc.), adding *significance* to *meaning*. There are also cases (AIDS being possibly the best-known) where the “significance” provided by the humanities ended up creating more awareness and a more effective response than the “meaning” produced by natural sciences (exposure of homophobia, marginalization of the ill, religious prejudice... not to mention the crucial role played by popular culture characters and events).

At this point, it becomes clear why the humanities would greatly benefit from incorporating a bit of the scientific method in their inquiries. Providing “understanding” instead of “explanation” is an important responsibility, to be kept as much “feet on the ground” than the natural sciences’ counterpart—unless, once again, one wants to lose credibility as “science”. If, among the interpretations of a given disease, a humanist started including propositions like “divine punishment”,

“consequence of a black cat crossing a street”, or “result of Venus’s conjunction with Mars in Aries”, then we know we are in trouble: with science, with institutions and (if we are honest) with ourselves. Even worse, to some extent, would be the waste of time of radical relativism and postmodern deconstruction of the problem: “Depends how we define ‘virus’”, “diseases are hyper-realistic simulacra”, etc.

Although a religious man and an intellectual product of Romanticism, Dilthey was an empiricist. His work on the philosophy of humanities was never detached from a scientific view of reality. He did not consider “humanities” as something different from “science”, but just as a different (complementary) kind of science than the natural ones. His encompassing definition of “science” is something we should always keep in mind:

By a “science” we commonly mean a complex of propositions (1) whose elements are concepts that are completely defined, i.e., permanently and universally valid within the overall logical system, (2) whose connections are well grounded, and (3) in which finally the parts are connected into a whole for the purpose of communication. The latter makes it possible either to conceive a segment of reality in its entirety through this connection of propositions or to regulate a province of human activity by means of it. The term “science” is here used to designate any complex of mental facts which bears the above characteristics and which therefore would normally be accorded the name “science”. (Dilthey 1991: 56–57)

Losing contact with reality is something that the humanities should seriously commit to avoiding, in order to recover dignity and credibility, and in fact—looking at their original status—identity too. Once more, in our attempt to analyze the situation in self-critical terms: there is a chance that the crisis of the humanities is not only due to the wild capitalistic mentality of most modern societies (an undeniable factor, of course), but also to those many humanists who got stuck somewhere between the romantic anti-rationalist individualism and the postmodern self-indulgent disillusionment of their ability to actually be *rational and concrete*.

While this particular point of the manifesto is not a plea against metaphysics, hardcore relativism or speculation per se, one must be aware that there is a risk in activating—say—a philosophical process that has no other goal than being speculative.

Among the much bad news involving humanities in this epoch, one is certainly positive: those institutions that are still promoting humanities in their programs have understood that a major strength of this field is to contribute to creating a “value-based society”. As we have seen, that keeps on happening also when humanities are joined by social sciences.

The philosopher (or any other humanist) who is ready to engage in metaphysical or ultra-relativist thinking (and, at the same time, to complain that no funding institution will understand the importance of it), might perhaps benefit from starting with the following questions (not to mention more empirical ones): does this process create a *value* (and, make no mistake, I am not necessarily talking about an *economic* one)? Do I aim to apply my precious reflections somewhere, to some existing problem of society? Will I improve somebody’s life? Am I speaking to the world (as opposed to “myself”)? If all questions are answered by “no”, the

philosopher still has the right to pursue his/her intuitions, but also has a duty not to be surprised if nobody finds motivations to support an initiative that is so clearly private. The great American composer Charles Ives always refused to make a job out of his art for this very reason: he wanted to retain the rights and not bother about the duties.

At the same time, the fact remains that most great humanists of the past, in all fields, had the gift of connecting great visions with great actions, or—in the most forward-thinking cases—they *set the bases* for their vision to become *real* eventually (and by vision I do not only mean reflections, but actual projects and plans: Leonardo's machines were incredibly *avant-garde* and visionary, and yet perfectly rational and concrete).

George Doran's S.M.A.R.T. criteria are nowadays a fashionable way to set objectives, in projects (sometimes even *too* fashionable). A project for rational humanities has certainly to be SMART: it has to be Specific (by targeting a specific area for development), Measurable (which indeed means empirical), Assignable (and—in comparison to Doran's formula—I would not only refer to human resources, here), Realistic (feet on the ground, indeed!), and Time-related (an idea of applicability has to be foreseen at some point).

However, if we want our own conceptual acronym (and—as you will discover during this book—we love both acronyms and conceptuality!), I would suggest that we keep it R.E.A.L. (see also Fig. 2.1):

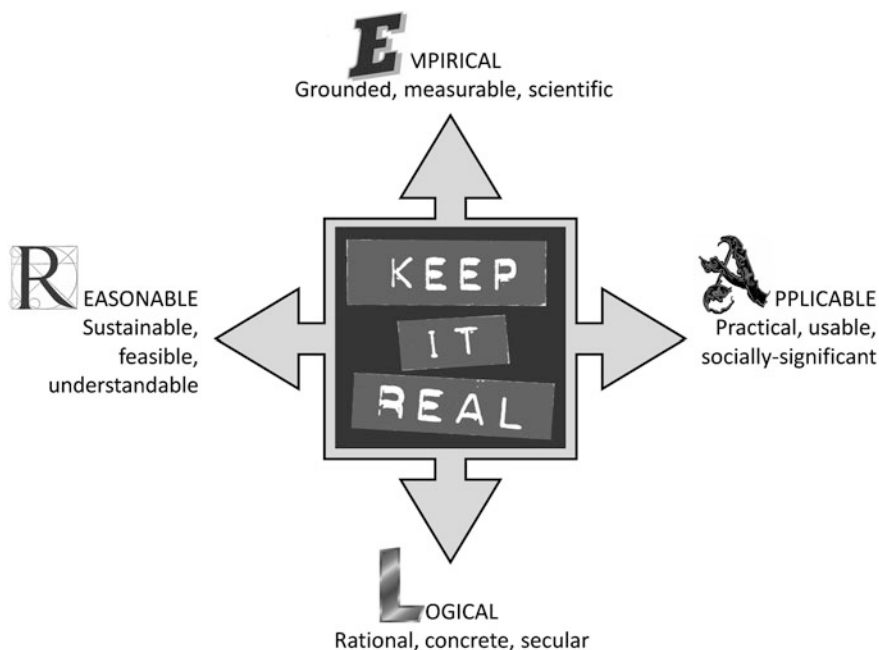


Fig. 2.1 The “Keep it R.E.A.L.” principle for the humanities

1. Reasonable: sustainable, feasible and understandable. As much as possible, we should keep our research objectives within a circumscribed field, and our argumentations into a mode that limits the excesses of relativism, subjectivism and the likes.
2. Empirical: grounded, measurable and scientific. As much as possible, humanistic inquiry should develop arguments that can be demonstrated and validated. It is not necessary to always design and perform a laboratory experiment (unless the type of research calls for it), but it is important to employ tools that bring those arguments outside the purely abstract/speculative realm.
3. Applicable: practical, usable and socially-significant. As much as possible, we need less speculation for speculation's sake, and more understanding of the current world, more creation of values, and—why not—more applied humanities.
4. Logical: rational, concrete and secular. As much as possible, the exaggerations of metaphysics, anti-realism and the likes should give way to tangible and scientifically-plausible forms of research. As humanists, we need to speak again to the world, by remaining *in* it.

I have been using the expression “As much as possible” in all the four entries of the acronym, because I intend to point out that a humanistic inquiry that meets all the four requirements of the formula “at full speed” exists only in an ideal condition, and it may not be very likely in reality. What is important is to orient humanistic research in these four directions, and try to cover enough ground to make this research scientifically and institutionally credible and dignified, and to re-form a powerful unit with the natural sciences that can be very beneficial for both sides and, most of all, for society. C.P. Snow's conclusions to his lecture are still resounding today:

Closing the gap between our cultures is a necessity in the most abstract intellectual sense, as well as in the most practical. When those two senses have grown apart, then no society is going to be able to think with wisdom. For the sake of the intellectual life, for the sake of this country's special danger, for the sake of the western society living precariously rich among the poor, for the sake of the poor who needn't be poor if there is intelligence in the world, it is obligatory for us [...] to look at our education with fresh eyes. (Snow 1959: 53–54)

2.4 Remember That the Humanities Have Always Taken Progressive Stands Within Societies, Not Luddite Ones

The humanist, the philosopher, the artist, the architect... for centuries, these roles were played by people who *looked forward* (the literal translation of the French *avant-garde*), who were able to predict mid- and long-term orientations in history (at various levels: creative, ethical, sociological...) by means of what, after the

previous point, we may call “pragmatic speculation”: a form of reasoning that derives from a deep understanding of the mechanisms and actions of a society, both at small and large scales.

There is a risk, for humanists, to become *uncritical scholars of the past*, and occupy the scholarly niches of traditions, folklore and philology, with an exclusive interest in memory, conservation and identity. While these, in themselves, are enterprises of enormous importance (there is no need to explain why), the crucial contact with *values* is occasionally endangered: an attitude of the type “traditions must be preserved because they are traditions” turns a good opportunity for reflecting upon a community’s identity and *its future*, into a tautological nostalgia for the “good old days”. When researchers do that, they are simply not doing their job properly, allowing personal biases to creep into what, instead, should be a solid scientific attitude. Failing to keep up-to-date with a society that is clearly not placing the humanities at the center of attention, may resolve into pub-like reminiscences of the past, rather than a proper study of it. Once again, the bound with reality is lost.

On the contrary, the role of the humanities, when dealing with the “past” (or any other topic), is to approach it in its organic, vibrant nature (e.g., as a key to interpreting the present or even predicting the future), never losing touch with reality, simply because the essence itself of the humanities is to provide the right (and the deepest) tools to interpret it.

Digital technologies are one of the best examples of how, generally speaking, technophobic humanists are missing an opportunity to connect the dots across the past, present and future. The sight of an e-book causes a melancholic preoccupation on how people are not reading *real* books anymore, how libraries are emptier, “where will we end up?”, and so forth. But what is a *real book*? Is it by any chance that printed object that before Gutenberg was *not* a real book? A tradition is always preceded by another tradition: printed books are less traditional than hand-written manuscripts, which are less traditional than stone carving, which are less traditional than inarticulate vocalizations.

The risk is that there is not really a defense of tradition, or integrity, or identity, but rather of *familiarity*. Maybe we defend what *we know best*, not what is best in principle. The “unknown” makes us fearful and lazy.

I shall devote one of my case studies to the topic of authenticity in music, emphasizing—in its conclusions—how the ideals of originality, truth, tradition and others encourage the creation of a transcendental discourse category that fails to define itself in spatial-temporal terms and become an ambiguous meta-dimension. What and where are “the good old days”? At which exact point of (human or even pre-human) evolution shall we reasonably locate the famous tradition to preserve and re-install?

In her very interesting book on Luddite and neo-Luddite movements, Fox (2002: 330–365) takes the recent example of a magazine called *Plain*, printed by a community of Amish people in Ohio. Its editor in chief, named Scott Savage, makes a very firm point on the magazine’s opposition to a modern life that is “moving at electronic speed. We’re finding that people can’t live at that speed. We’re being

crushed by that speed” (quoted in Fox 2002: 330). *Plain* has a specific editorial and lifestyle policy, articulate in several rules, and actively promoted among its readers. The first issue had the following statement of purposes:

Our mission is to develop a new fellowship of people who want to make peace with nature, create viable communities and strong families, and lead spiritually based lives. [...] We seek to open a space where people enmeshed in contemporary culture can begin to discuss its effects on their daily lives. A space where encounters with simpler, less mediated living can be shared. Where the unity of life, land and spirit can be experienced. (quoted in Fox 2002: 331–332)

And, Fox herself adds, although Savage is a deeply religious man,

he was starting from a different perspective than the Amish who, as the world changed around them, refused to accept those elements that interfered with their religious focus. Savage was rejecting a world that was already here because it was interfering not only with religion but with every other aspect of human life. He was seeking to unify what had become divided and isolated, to bring people back to older values as exemplified by older ways. He had sampled the new world and was intentionally turning his back on it. (Fox 2002: 332)

Among other rules, *Plain* objects to having any reference to itself on the internet, it does not have a phone line but communicates only via airmail, it is printed with the letterpress method, it features woodcut illustrations, and of course when Fox and Savage agreed to meet in New York for an interview, the latter preferred an overnight journey by train, rather than a practical flight.

Now, it is absolutely not my intent to criticize *Plain*, or similar enterprises. As a matter of fact, I have huge respect for anybody who goes all the way into the pursuit of an ideal, especially if this is an ideal for a better world. I am merely using a well-documented case (in a well-documented book like Fox 2002) to make my point. What is it, exactly, that Mr. Savage is against, and what is it that he is defending? Most of all, *which epoch* (or stage of human evolution) is he defending? The internet was invented in late 20th century, letterpress printing in the early 15th, xylography in the 3rd, rail transport in the 19th. That is: if we are not counting all forerunners, early experiments, geographical variations and the likes (e.g.: the World Wide Web was invented in 1991, but the precursor ARPANET is from 1969). All of these inventions were initially met with resistance from communities that were accustomed to previous technologies, but—what is much more important—they were *all* inventions. They were *all* technologies. A train is not less of an invention than an airplane. The resistance to railways generated in the 19th century by Luddism was something rhetorically expressed with the very same spirit as Savage’s concern about the present. I am absolutely sure that, after the invention of trains, plenty of people must have expressed themselves with those same words: “We’re finding that people can’t live at that speed. We’re being crushed by that speed”. How can Mr. Savage travel on a means of transportation that was the very symbol of the Industrial Revolution that Luddites were so much against? Why something that was the embodiment of dehumanization is now the embodiment of those-were-the-days coziness?

These are of course rhetorical questions, as the answers are plain to see: historical conditions change and must be contextualized with all their various contingent variables. Such contextualization is not an easy task, because it requires a degree of detachment from our individual condition, which may or may not be compatible with the social picture and the demands generated by the technological advancements (needs for new competences, to begin with). This, as very well argued by Brosnan (1998: 60–78), provokes anxiety, fear and lack of self-confidence in the subject.

There is nothing particularly special in *this* specific era, in terms of technologies and progress. The impact that the internet, cloning or touchpad screens have had on society is not of a different kind than that of the wheel, electricity or firearms in their respective times. On the other hand, one major difference may exactly lie in the attitude taken by humanists in the process. Generally progressive and forward-looking before Romanticism, artists and intellectuals began more and more replacing the concept of “utopia” with “dystopia” in their perception of the future, as in this famous passage by Thomas Carlyle:

Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. The sailor furls his sail, and lays down his oar; and bids a strong, unwearied servant, on vaporous wings, bear him through the waters. Men have crossed oceans by steam; the Birmingham Fire-king has visited the fabulous East; and the genius of the Cape, were there any Cameons now to sing it, has again been alarmed, and with far stranger thunders than Gamas. There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet firehorse yoked in his stead. Nay, we have an artist that hatches chickens by steam; the very brood-hen is to be superseded! For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils. (Carlyle 1858: 13)

As popular culture came onto the scene, dystopia and technophobia became even more evident presences (see the very interesting Jones 2006: 173–210). For instance, by the 1970s already it had arguably become the most recurrent rhetorical device employed in popular music (certainly within the area we commonly identify as “rock”) to address one’s own dissatisfaction towards a given social-political situation, or—better said—“the system”. The myth of “the system” as an evil, conspiring force that is distant and in fact opposed to “the people” (in turn a counter-myth) is a true topos that we find in literally hundreds of songs. Future hyper-technological, de-humanized, post-atomic, mind-controlling, Langesque-Kubrickesque depictions pop up so often that the temptation is to conclude that George Orwell’s *1984* is by far the most-read literary work by rock stars. Examples include songs like Pink Floyd’s “Welcome to the Machine” (where “the system” appears in the ever-hated disguise of the music industry), Emerson Lake and Palmer’s “Karn Evil 9” (on the album *Brain Salad Surgery*, featuring a cover by H. R. Giger, a dystopian painter by definition), or entire albums like Frank Zappa’s

Joe's Garage or David Bowie's *Diamond Dogs* (directly inspired by Orwell's masterpiece).

In other words, while always the result of a natural psychological process of fear and anxiety towards change, technophobia managed also to become a genre in humanities, or perhaps even a narrateme within their discourse. Once again, a big opportunity is lost (or at least, weakened): the humanities, methodologically, could be the most powerful and most reliable source for a critical assessment of technological advancement. Rather than withdrawing their hands from touching them, they could well dig into technologies in order to draw a credible interpretation of their state of the art, their potentials, their limitations, their advantages and their dangers. They could tell us much more about the difference between a tablet application that fights social discrimination and one that instead favors it, because they could work on subtleties that neither natural nor social sciences would be able to grasp (see also point 6 of this manifesto).

More to the point, they could offer another angle than just conservative resistance to new technologies. Interestingly enough, the mentioned *Plain* magazine seems to be particularly fond of the concept of appropriate technologies (of which, as I shall later declare, Humanities are fond as well, though in a re-adapted form). Ernst Schumacher is, for instance, often quoted by Scott Savage in his articles (Fox 2002: 332). But even admitting that the great German economist was skeptical of technologies in principle (and I myself have a rather different interpretation of his writings), how can one conciliate such feeling with the plain evidence that several new technologies are much more environmentally-friendly than old ones (and sustainability is an absolute pillar of the concept of appropriate technologies)? Can one really dare to compare the ecological impact of millions of printed copies of, some 700-pages-and-counting, Dan Brown's novel with the electronic version of it? Is a tablet not a great embodiment of the "small is beautiful" principle when it allows me to carry a whole library in a 20×30 cm device? Are those miraculous prosthetic limbs of nowadays not "appropriate" for a given PWD, just because they come from the latest technology? Is having defeated tuberculosis inappropriate?

Common sense suggests that, between technophilia and technophobia, one should find a golden middle. Nothing could be truer than that. But this middle should not be measured with a ruler: it should be a dynamic entity that may change its exact location and size, depending on each single case. The humanities could be exactly the added value that identify and describe these specific locations. Back to my different interpretation of the concept of "appropriate technologies" (on which, I repeat, I shall return more extensively), perhaps I can mention here that I see that concept *exactly* as a successful attempt to find a few of those many golden middles we need. I totally agree with Steven Jones when he says that, far, from being technophobes, the supporters of appropriate technologies "were pro-technology, as long as it was appropriate technology. It is sometimes forgotten that some counterculturalists were avid technophiles who mixed do-it-yourself pragmatism with radical optimism and shared a vision of technology's utopian potential for building a new kind of community" (Jones 2006: 181). This is the type of counterculture that brought straight into the creation of "open source" principles in software and

operating systems, which is *the* appropriate technology by definition in the IT environment, despite whatever any Apple fanatic will tell you.

In life, the turning point between adult and senile age is not an anagraphic one, but occurs at the very moment when the enthusiasm for learning and exploring is replaced by the illusion of having found “the truth” in the already-learned and the already-explored. This is why some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world (King’s College, Harvard University, MIT...) have embraced excellent research and teaching programs in Digital Humanities: they are consciously refusing to “get old”.

The point in Numanities is not to accept new technologies in principle (we shall see this in the next point), but rather to give proper, careful scrutiny to them: scientific criticism, when needed, should be grounded and motivated by scientific, not nostalgic, claims. The reflections should be produced in a socially-contextualized manner, not out of individual urges or frustrations.

2.5 Be Ethically-Minded, Sustainable, Oriented Towards Quality and Dignity of Life

In the words of Gandhi first and Schumacher later, progress is implemented through *appropriate technologies*. “Progress” is not necessarily represented by every single thing that is newer, bigger, faster: a critical (therefore, intimately humanistic) view seeks progress in what is tailored for the real needs and demands of a given community (indeed: what is “appropriate”, and that—as we have learned—may also mean existing, local, slow technologies).

Humanities have the theoretical skills to offer a constructive and critical view on these matters: Numanities would like to re-establish this interest and additionally cultivate operative and concrete tools not to let those skills be wasted in purely abstract, distant-from-reality formulations.

To formulate the question in a catchy manner, the point about progress is *not* about going forwards or backwards. The point is to go *towards*. Towards the people, towards the society, towards the environment, towards life.

If we take, as example, Daniel Raphael’s recent Theory of Human Motivation (Raphael 2015), we understand why it is necessary to talk about *both* quality and dignity of life. “Dignity” is a concept that expresses an intrinsic right to be (a) valued and (b) treated ethically. Raphael discusses three basic values, as foundations of human motivation: quality of life, growth and equality. Quality of life does not presuppose “equality” (it does not oppose it either, of course), dignity of life does. Quality of life pursues growth for a “liveable society”, dignity of life pursues it for a “just society”. Quality of life wants citizens to be treated well, dignity of life wants them to be treated ethically: the member of a given ethnic minority who is wealthy beyond his/her basic needs and is properly educated and assisted by the state, is a subject who receives quality of life; but if, in the

meanwhile, s/he is still discriminated against for belonging to that ethnic group, then s/he is not given “dignity of life”. Still continuing with Raphael, I see quality of life more overlapping with “material sustainability” and dignity of life with “social sustainability”. Finally, quality of life produces “well-being”, while dignity of life produces “values”.

The concept of appropriate technology (AT)—sometime known also as “intermediate technology”, particularly via Ernst “Fritz” Schumacher’s work (of whom we shall soon talk about)—originates from Gandhi’s struggle for Indian independence, when he developed the idea of economic “self-reliance” (in Hindi “Swadeshi”), that is the advocacy of small and local technologies by which Indian villages could reject economic colonialism from Britain. Embodied by the famous image (and flag symbol) of the spinning wheel, swadeshi produced the khadi movement in the 1920s, that is the local production of clothes as a form of civil disobedience, eventually causing the collapse of the British monopoly on textiles.

Starting from the 1950s, the German economist Ernst Schumacher, inspired by these ideas of Gandhi, brought the concept of AT to a more systematic level, particularly via his famous book *Small is Beautiful* (1973). What emerges from Schumacher’s work, and that kind of became the three pillars of the whole theory, is the following three characteristics of AT:

1. AT’s have to be **sustainable**: that is, environmentally sound and “economic” in the literary sense of the word. Not by coincidence, the concept of AT, which nowadays is certainly less fashionable than in the 1970s, has been partly replaced by “sustainable development”: they are not the same things, but plenty of what sustainable development theories advocate were originally promoted by AT theories.
2. AT’s have to be **appropriate** to a given context. Contexts are of an ethical, cultural, social, economic, environmental and political type. Obviously, a technology that is appropriate for a given context, is not necessarily so for another, however some generally-applicable rules exist: community input, affordability, reparability and maintainability are certainly four universally “appropriate” properties for a technology
3. AT’s have to be **small** where possible (or, as I prefer to say, “direct”). Of the three pillars, this is the one that is most often misunderstood, since “small” is naturally perceived as unambitious, unpretentious, modest. On the contrary, the main idea is to place more power at the basis of an economic process, at the grassroots, and to make sure that the technology is in the hands of the users. In that sense, I prefer the word “direct”, in the same sense that one would employ in speaking about “direct democracy”. Also, the idea of appropriateness itself implies proportion and context-dependence. Technologies can therefore be also “big”, if the context requires it:

The question of scale might be put in another way: what is needed in all these matters is to discriminate, to get things sorted out. For every activity there is a certain appropriate scale,

and the more active and intimate the activity, the smaller the number of People that can take part, the greater is the number of such relationship arrangements that need to be established. Take teaching: one listens to all sorts of extraordinary debates about the superiority of the teaching machine over some other forms of teaching. Well, let us discriminate: what are we trying to teach? It then becomes immediately apparent that certain things can only be taught in a very intimate circle, whereas other things can obviously be taught en masse, via the air, via television, via teaching machines, and so on.

What scale is appropriate? It depends on what we are trying to do. The question of scale is extremely crucial today, in political, social and economic affairs just as in almost everything else. What, for instance, is the appropriate size of a city? And also, one might ask, what is the appropriate size of a country? Now these are serious and difficult questions. It is not possible to programme a computer and get the answer. (Schumacher 1973: 50)

Still during the 1970s, another important AT scholar, the Austrian designer Papanek (1971), added another piece to the theory by emphasizing the concept of “design”, and specifying that the design of an AT has to always keep in mind two goals: the “real world” and the “human scale”, both often overlooked in the diverse economic processes. As the definition of “real world” is probably quite obvious, the following quote from Papanek’s book may perhaps better clarify what he meant by “human scale”:

The whole concept of human scale has gone awry, not only with homes but in most other areas as well. One would expect a system motivated only by self-interest and private profit-making at least to spend some care in constructing its shopping places. This is not so. ‘Stroget’ a ‘walking street’ of shops in downtown Copenhagen, is constructed for leisurely strolling and impulse buying. Two segments of it, Frederiksberggade and Mygade, are together approximately 400 feet long and contain more than 180 shops.

In a contemporary American shopping centre, this same distance of 400 feet will frequently separate the entrances of two stores: the supermarket and, say, the drugstore. The intervening space consists of empty windows, bereft of displays, monotonous and uninteresting. Usually neither landscaping nor wind-breaks are provided. Mercilessly, the hot sun beats down on the four acres of concrete in the summer; wind-whipped snow piles up in car-high drifts throughout the winter. Small wonder that, after finishing their shopping at the supermarket, people will walk back to their automobiles and drive to the drugstore. There is nothing in the environment that prompts going for a stroll; it has been designed for the moving car alone. Most shopping plazas in the United States consist of a thin line of stores arranged along three sides of a huge square, the centre of which is a parking lot. The large open side fronts on a super-highway. This may make shopping ‘efficient’ but it also makes it something less than satisfying. (Papanek 1971: 258–259)

As—predictably—the main point of this manifesto entry is to make an economic concept “function” within the abstract level of an academic-scientific context like humanities, it shall be also important to mention Audrey Faulkner’s and Maurice Albertson’s distinction between hard and soft AT’s (1986). While hard technologies are grounded in the natural sciences, scientific techniques, and improve upon tangible structures, soft technologies concern the needs and values of a community, and are grounded on social structures, interactive processes and motivation techniques. My conviction is that an area of academic/scientific investigation can be configured for society in form of soft AT. I also believe it is a good idea in general, because—unless some obscure research has escaped my scrutiny—there have been

no previous attempts to bring the concept of AT into the realm of academia *as such*. I get a quasi-direct confirmation to my assumption by reading the very interesting meta-analysis provided in Bauer and Brown (2014: 347–349), which, on a sample of 53 papers about AT's, considers the recurrence of “indicators of appropriateness”, that is, items/concepts/strategies employed in the assessment of an AT. There are altogether 47 indicators found, ranging from very recurrent (“Community input” pops up in 51 papers out of 53, “Affordability” in 36, etc.) to very occasional ones (e.g., “low energy”, “reliability” and others, which are mentioned in only 2 papers each). Now, these data are not necessarily significant in relation to the amount of mentions they get in the sample's articles. What is more interesting is the (47) indicators that *are present*, and those that are not. And, among those that are not there, there is every single indicator (research, scholarship, academic input, etc.) that we may relate to an academic activity.

Therefore: how may this newly-proposed connection work?

When we think about both Schumacher's and Papanek's points, we can immediately connect with the “Keep it R.E.A.L.” principle that I have suggested in point 3 of the manifesto. Conclusions are very similar, if not identical: the humanistic scholarship that is unattached to reality, abstract, indirect, pretentious, dispersive and unfeasible is clearly an inappropriate technology for academic research. Its unsustainability, uncontrolled “size” and independence from the (social, ethical, cultural, etc.) context, is exactly at the basis of the crisis, which is nothing other than an increased, pathological distance from the “real world” and the “human scale”.

Most interesting of all, as far as our purposes are concerned, is Wicklein 1998 and 2004, which contain a 7-point classification of the so-called “Criteria to judge the appropriateness of technology”, which I again would like to connect (sometimes literally, sometimes metaphorically—but not less significantly) with our program of reform for humanities. These are (all quotes are from Wicklein 2004):

1. **Systems-Independence**, related to “the ability of the technological device to stand alone, to do the job with few or no other supporting facilities or devices to aid in its function”. In other words, we cannot evaluate a technology by the final product only, but we need to take into account all the supporting materials and equipment necessary for its full operation. Those have to be already in place. When it comes to humanities, the ability to exist as a stand-alone technology is a specific requirement of the more general concept of sustainability. A form of research that is fully operative “in place” is one that is not dispersive at both the methodological and theoretical level. If, for instance, a philosophical investigation on the origins of life reaches a point in which science is denied its function as “support material”, and, say, religion takes that function (through creationism, intelligent design, or else), then we witness a similar situation as the product that cannot be operative “in place”, but needs equipment from somewhere else. Just like those gadgets that are very fine as long as they work, but then as soon as a single, small piece starts malfunctioning, you need to send the whole thing to a technical support service on the other side of the planet.

2. **Image of Modernity.** This is less trivial than it may read at first glimpse. An “image of modernity” is not a marketing strategy of making something sound “new” (as Humanities themselves). “There is an innate desire within most of humankind to feel important and be perceived as worthwhile. It follows, therefore, that an image of being modern is important to the success of any technology. People must believe that a technological device brings with it a degree of sophistication which can elevate the user’s social status as well as meet a basic human need”. And: “All people have dignity and must believe that their dignity will remain intact even if they are poor or living in an underdeveloped area. Therefore, the designers of appropriate technology must incorporate an image of modernity into whatever device they develop if it is going to meet with acceptance by the people who can benefit from it the most”. This is an important concept that gives the question of “novelty” and “modernity” a whole new twist that now relates directly with dignity and values. If we want “new” humanities is also because, as we have repeated several times already, we want to restore dignity to them.
3. **Individual Technology versus Collective Technology.** This criterion is related to the societal/cultural context in which a given technology will be established. “Some cultures advocate a strong commitment to the group process where the good of the whole is held in higher esteem than individual accomplishments. Other cultures place a high priority on individual responsibility and accomplishment. These factors should be considered in detail when designing appropriate technology because they will contribute to the success or failure of any given device or strategy. If a given cultural group has a strong allegiance to the community or region then the technology may be more system dependent, where the overall group could take a greater responsibility for the operation of a larger system”.
The application of this criterion to the humanities is quite self-evident, and should serve as a reminder to both scholars and institutions. Particularly the latter, in recent times, have become perhaps too exclusively obsessed with “collective technologies” in academic activities, forgetting—in fact failing—to create conditions wherein single scholars/teachers can make “a difference” by their individual skills and ideas. In point 2 of the manifesto, I mentioned this problem in relation to institutional restrictions in teaching programs.
4. **Cost of Technology.** That of course means “affordability”, and we cannot but make another plea for forms of humanistic scholarship that are understandable in their concreteness and real world/human scale engagement. However, provocative this may sound, metaphysical, hardcore-postmodernist research has, in effect, a scientifically “costly” and unworthy quality-price balance.
5. **Risk Factor.** This refers to the degree of success and failure that the development of any technology (and produced result) carries with it. “Because of the nature of the device and the location in which it will be implemented the risk factor for the success of appropriate technologies [...] is of major concern and should be considered an important criteria for development”. There are two

types of risk that one must consider: internal and external. The former relates to how a technology will fit the local production system; the latter concerns whatever supportive system(s) may be required to have the technology properly operating. Of course, “although the risk factor must be taken into consideration when developing appropriate technology it would be economically and politically unhealthy to try to remove all risks. Some risks are healthy to the growth and development of locally implemented appropriate technology”.

A totally safe form of humanistic scholarship is not worthwhile being pursued. Keeping in mind the terminology of the Boston Consulting Group, it can be safely said that humanities have offered their best to the history of knowledge when they tackled some delicate “question marks” or insisted in promoting ethically-significant “dogs” (as opposed to the safer “cash cows” or “stars”). The aim is certainly to make humanities system-independent (as we have seen in point 1 of this list), but that does not mean a full removal of the risks. At the same time, an eye should be kept also on the “cost” of the enterprise, so the element of rationality is also called into question. “Rational risks”, to my mind, is a good (appropriate) way of calling this process.

6. **Evolutionary Capacity of Technology.** This consists of “the ability of the appropriate technology to continue to develop and expand beyond its originally intended function. [...] If the appropriate device is static (i.e., performs one function and cannot be altered) then although it may provide for a basic need at the present time it will be a relatively short lived solution to a much larger problem. Wherever and whenever possible it is preferred that the appropriate technology allow for (i.e., have design characteristics) a continuation of development. That is, to have the capability to expand and be reconfigured to accomplish a higher volume of work and/or more sophisticated production processes”.

This is a very important point that, like the third one on this list, calls for a plea not only to the community of scholars, but also to their affiliated institutions. And it calls again for a reflection on “time” (as already discussed in the second entry of the manifesto), and for the BCG Matrix jargon. More and more institutions, indeed, seem only to be content with investments of the “cash cows” type (and when I say investment, I do not only mean financial ones). Plenty of actions (say, a degree program, a research project, a development strategy...) are launched with enormous time pressure that allows only for one option: immediate success. When that is not achieved, the action is erased, and replaced with another one—with a significant loss of time, energy and—again—financial resources. The new action has indeed its own costs, learning curves, management problems, and so forth: it does not just *continue* from where the previous action had failed.

To take a significant example, in the universities I work or worked for, I witnessed more than one degree program killed after one year or two, because of a lack of students. Those programs had required important investments in terms of working hours, human resources and money, but they were not given the chance of a slow (or even false) start. The order was to close them, and one is always left

wondering if the costs of starting a new program from scratch are really inferior to the losses of that old program's unsuccessful first year. In particular, that attitude shows a narrow-minded analysis of a problem which clearly has many variables at play: the program fails, therefore it is a bad program. What about bad timing, bad advertising, bad development, bad finalization...? And what if the program is simply not a cash cow, but an investment that will grow slowly and is doomed to become very solid?

There is a reason why a classic time frame for an activity's development is (or used to be) five years. I am aware I have introduced too many puns and acronyms in this book already (and still have more to display), but if another one is allowed, I would exactly use the word F.R.A.M.E.:

- F (the first year) is for **Fail**. New ideas need to have the chance to fail at the beginning. It is a basic right for anything new. If my young son learns to ride a bicycle without training wheels, he has an absolute right to fall, and nothing is more useful than falling, at this stage.
- R (the second year) is for **Repair**. With the right for failure comes also the duty to repair. At this stage, the action is under analysis and assessment: it has to prove that it has understood the initial mistakes, and can react to and fix them. It is a crucial moment in development. My son, now, puts a particular effort in understanding what, in his pedaling, was wrong and how he can improve. The academic institution has to be present in the action, and evaluate if the repairing stage is proceeding seriously and efficiently. If not, there are the conditions to erase the action.
- A (the third year) is for **Achieve**. If the “repair” stage was conducted properly, the third year will be the year when one can reap the fruits. Now, my son can stand on the bicycle and pedal correctly. If, on the contrary, there is no “achievement”, the institution has again the right to erase the action. As we can see, even in a 5-year plan development, there is no need to wait 5 years if the conditions are not ideal. The important point is not to invalidate an action after a first initial failure. Depending on the development of events, an institution can intervene in the second or the third year. Not later, and most of all, not earlier.
- M (the fourth year) is for **Maintain**. To achieve success is already difficult, but to maintain it is even more complicated. The fourth year is a maturity test: keeping up with the example of the degree program, the success in the students' enrollment is as bound to circumstantial variables as the failure. If the program had failed because, say, it was “a bad year” (whatever that means: financial crisis, temporary unfashionableness of a given topic, etc.), it may also have succeeded for the same, but opposite, reasons (a “good year” of financial boom, fashionableness of a given topic, etc.). Back to the boy learning how to cycle, this is the time for him to show that he can now ride continuously, for a longer period, and so forth.
- E (the fifth year) is for **Expand**. Now, finally, we can apply the “Evolutionary Capacity of the Technology”. Now it is the time for the action “to develop and expand beyond its originally intended function”. Now the boy can ride bigger

bicycles, on different grounds, different weather conditions, he can even participate in some race or competition...

7. **Single-Purpose and Multi-Purpose Technology.** Not only should technologies be able to expand (see point 6). The possibility that they can be used in more than one application must be also considered. A technological device may be conceived with multiple purposes. The key-word, here, is eclecticism, and certainly one is reminded of the need to establish credible levels of inter- multi-cross- and transdisciplinarity for the humanities. Also, the idea that research can serve as “open source” for more research is an important aspect (Fig. 2.2) for a summary of the main characteristics of appropriate technologies.

I make no mystery of the fact that I consider this point of the manifesto a most crucial one, perhaps the most important of the whole project. On the occasion of the first International Congress of Numanities (Kaunas 2–7 June 2014), I delivered a kind of introductory lecture to let my colleagues know the main programmatic features of this new concept we were proposing. By no coincidence, I took a decision that the main focus had to be appropriate technologies. A few months later, I was invited to Seattle by the Semiotic Society of America, I insisted on the same points.

Of course, Numanities as such have to go a long, long way before assuming a defined and recognizable identity: in one of my case studies, later in this book, I quoted one of my favorite Italian songwriters, Sergio Caputo, who said that “songs

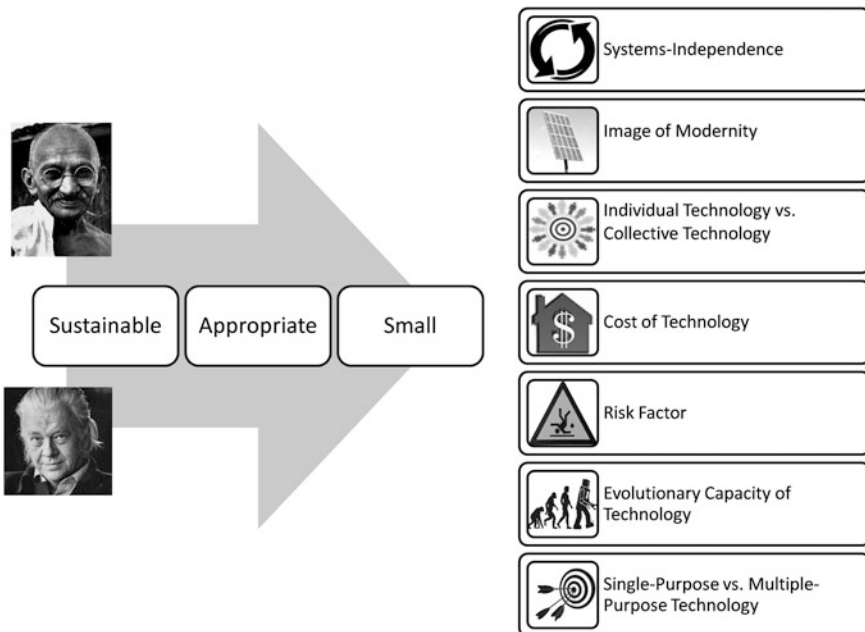


Fig. 2.2 Characteristics and criteria of an appropriate technology

are like boxers”. That is: they need to be hit several times, and in public, before they take their final shape. I think the same applies to a new academic discipline (or platform/forum, as Numanities intend to be). Even so, however, while I am ready to cope with the fact that other points of this manifesto may be subject to redefinition, second thoughts, or at least may not be applicable all the time (e.g., the idea of re-establishing a dialogue with institutions may end up in a failure; one may not need to engage in full interdisciplinarity every single time, etc.), I do not seem to be able to make any sense out of this whole enterprise if we do not take a firm and durable stand on the fact that humanities need to pursue and produce quality and dignity of life. Without that, they are closer to self-indulgence than to science—and too bad if someone gets irritated by this statement.

Anyway, given also its tones, non-academic passages and rather peculiar example of appropriate technology, I decided to write here the full transcript of the key-note I gave in Seattle (which, unlike the one given on Kaunas, had less of a stress on the more institutional aspects—which are anyway disseminated throughout the present monograph—and perhaps a bit more light tones):

Dear friends, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

About 10 months ago, when we opened the International Semiotics Institute in Kaunas University of Technology, we launched a “research concept” called Numanities—as in New Humanities. The goal is to establish an interdisciplinary platform that would mostly investigate the position of humanities in nowadays society, its potentials, its challenges and its relation with technologies. It is possible that some of you have read either some of the short articles I published here and there on the subject. And it is also possible that you may be already aware of some of the comments received by this new paradigm, so far. Humanists often have a reputation for being slightly technophobic, and indeed a recurrent type of remark on these articles was that Numanities were a sort of uncritical celebration of technologies and a wish for humanities to become totally devoted to them, much to the detriment of what was perceived as their “real” identity.

Now, it is not my wish to be polemical with these interpretations, but I honestly have the feeling that they must have come from colleagues who either did not really read those documents, or they did not really understand them.

In the paradigm of Numanities, in fact, this question is dealt with very carefully, and it was made loud and clear that the way we need to envision the relationship between humanities and technologies is for the former to “monitor” and “assess” the latter, and make sure that they are always compatible with quality and dignity of life.

However, there is a serious chance that I was not particularly clear in “defining” technologies, and in particular this relationship, and that—at the end of the day—corresponds to the final goal of Numanities: that is, to discuss the actual position of humanities within contemporary society.

So I decided to clarify these aims on this occasion, and for this reason I came here to talk about... my middle age crisis.

Seriously!

I turned 40 just a couple of months ago, but I had signs of this crisis already last summer. Except that it had a rather unusual manifestation on me. I had heard that what normally happens is that one wishes to “be younger”, so they start to do, say and most of all wear things that are more appropriate for someone half their age. On the contrary, what happened to me was a vital urge to be and look “adult”. I’ll spare you the details of this process, which involves several different steps and actions, but you can certainly imagine that, on occasions, I must have looked a bit pathetic, particularly to my wife, who started looking at me with a mix of amusement and compassion.

Then again, in that case I have at least two theories. One theory is that we are all a bit unprepared for to changes, particularly those that occur to people we know well. We have a certain image of them, and we were always comfortable with it: how dare they mess up our equilibrium? I guess you know what I mean: for instance, when we meet friends or relatives that we haven’t met for years, they always expect to see that “version of ourselves” that used to exist back then, but obviously doesn’t exist anymore. So we get to hear things like “I don’t recognize you anymore”, “what happened to you?” and the likes, as if “to be yourself” means to get stuck in one specific space-time point.

The other theory, a more chauvinistic one, is that my wife, like all women, take only Brad Pitt seriously. Or a few other men of that sort. When the first wrinkles appear, normal men like me get old. Brad Pitt instead, becomes even more sexy. When the normal man dresses more elegantly, he’s not himself anymore. Brad Pitt becomes even more sexy. And so on.

Anyway, let’s go back to business.

Fortunately, during this process of “becoming adult”, a few interesting things happened as well. For instance, I became very attracted by traditional shaving, the one you do with a steel safety razor, shaving soap and a brush. Then, since I’m crazy, I also bought myself the alum block to fix little haemorrhages and even some of those aftershaves that old-time barbershops used to have: you can still find them on the internet and they have an exquisite perfume.

In sum: a radical, fanatic full immersion. Perhaps my wife is right. Perhaps even Brad Pitt would look ridiculous in similar conditions. Or then again, maybe he will look even more sexy, with this “real man” accessory.

Let me explain.

All my life, since when I started shaving, I had irritation problems to my skin, both with disposable and electric razors (although the latter were admittedly better, but then—on the other hand—the quality of their shaving was worse). The legend, massively fuelled by advertising, was (and is) that traditional razors are much worse: not only do they irritate our skin more, but they also regularly cut it and make it bleed. The blade goes straight on the skin, they do not have an ergonomic shape, they use an “old technology” (see? We are getting to the point!), and this technology was overcome by more recent research... for more than 20 years, all this pressure kept me very far from classic shaving: I was convinced that, if I tried that, my face would have soon looked like I was shaved by Sweeney Todd.

Therefore: I first tried the disposable razors and, after a few years, I turned to the electric one.

Then comes the middle age crisis: I end up reading some stuff about classic shaving (there are even blogs and forums on the net), and one of the recurrent comments is that the alleged “danger” of this practice is a total myth. On the contrary: these forums claim that it is all these special blades, super-blades, triple-blades, filters, soothing material, and all the fancy stuff in the new razors to make things worse. First because of the variety itself, which is actually distressful for the skin, rather than helpful, and second because the main irritating factors are the actual leftovers of the shave (small fragments of hair and cream) that remain stuck on the blades and are difficult to remove: this is not a problem in classic blades, which can be easily and totally cleaned, while it is an issue in disposable razors (which is why we cannot use them many times).

*I find this information rather convincing, but still there is the other problem: haemorrhages. The terror of traditional razors is celebrated by dozens of books and movies: how to forget that sequence in the movie *The Wall* when the character Pink shaves himself to total baldness and in the process he bleeds like rain?*

However, even in that case, the material I read offers reasonable explanations: the point, apparently, is simply the know-how. One has to learn how to shave: you need a light but firm handling of the razor, you have to shave with short movements, you have to incline the razor to about 45 degrees from the skin, you have to learn the beard “map” of your face, which is different from person to person (the beard doesn’t grow in one direction only), and so forth. My goodness! Too much work! This kind of things is normally enough for me to lose motivation: at this point, I am very close to sticking to my good (old?) electric razor.

But what about my middle age crisis? Come on, I have to give it a try. So: I buy all these classic products for classic shaving, and I start.

And of course it’s a total disaster! If I had shaved with a cactus I would be bleeding less. Thankfully I bought also the alum block: that one, at least, works very well (by the way, how come they nearly don’t sell it anymore?).

Also the irritation problem is not really solved: my neck has the traditional purple colour that it has always had every morning for the last 20 years.

Last but not least, it takes me four times as long to finish, as compared to electric shaving.

However, I don’t give up. Time passes, I start “taking the measures” of my face, I learn the right movements, I am less intimidated, and the use of the alum block is reduced every day, up to disappearing completely. I am not bleeding anymore!

Irritation, too, almost disappears, and is far less than any of the methods I used before. Plus, my shaving is perfect: every day my skin feels like my son’s bottom... totally smooth and soft! Beforehand, no matter how hard I would try, there would always be a couple of spots that I could use to light a match, if you know what I mean.

Finally, thanks to my fanaticism, I also smell great, in a very classy, classic and cosy way.

The only trouble left is that I haven't improved with time: I still need some 20 min to complete my shaving, as opposed to the 5 circa of my "electric" past.

By now, after almost a year, I totally master the practice, and it is a very pleasant activity that I perform in total accordance with my middle age crisis: it feels nice, adult and, yes, it feels "manly". I still don't feel like Brad Pitt, but then again mother nature didn't help there. In fact, there is a lot of talking, these days, about the crisis of masculinity and manliness. It has been something going on for a few years now. You must have noticed, for instance, how many men's magazines are being published nowadays, GQ, Men's health, Men's fitness, etc. And they are all of the same, repeating, boring type: how to work out, how to do business, how to win a woman. That, my friends, is really pathetic.

Now. Shall we get to humanities and technologies, finally? Of course we were always talking about them, and I am sure that some of you have already understood my point.

While approaching classic shaving, indeed, I understood perfectly the reason why modern society has demonized it, through the production and the promotion of other, supposedly advanced, technologies. The fact is: classic shaving is less irritating, less harmful and much more effective than more recent practices.

However:

- 1. It has a learning curve. You've got to learn to shave properly. The improvement of your results will not occur by switching from one technology to a more advanced one. And it will not occur by buying more products, that soothe here, facilitate there, nourish this, enrich that. The improvement will occur with the same object, and by investing time and knowledge, not money.*
- 2. Classic shaving is ecologically sustainable. It doesn't consume electric energy and it has only one small part to change every now and then. That part, the blade, is made with metal only, and it comes with a small paper packaging. There is no plastic involved and no chemical substances of any sort. In fact, you can even buy a tool for sharpening the blades, so that they can last much longer. That, too, is not possible with disposable razors.*
- 3. Classic shaving is also economically sustainable. The expenses for purchase and maintenance are far inferior to more recent methods. I bought an excellent safety razor (suggested by most forums), for only 40 euros: it is a Merkur 34C and it is German—which alone is a good thing, when it comes to technologies! A package of five excellent blades (which last more than a month), costs less than a euro. For an excellent electric razor, I need well over 100 euros; the energy I consume for shaving is more than one euro per month, and let's not even start with changing pieces, when you need them. As you know, they cost so much, that they make you want to buy a new razor altogether. Disposable razors, on the other hand, are even more expensive, particularly those new fancy ones that come straight from Sci-fi movies. Apart from this, the economic advantage of safety razors is also in their eternity. Unless I lose it somewhere, my Merkur will last forever, and I can also hand it to my son, providing it with an additional affective value that other products will never have.*

4. *Finally, classic shaving requires time. To shave becomes a specific occupation, with its own identity: a significant amount of our time (20 min in my case) has to be devoted to—to what? Well, to ourselves, to our own care. It may be nice to return to the 5 min of electric shaving, yet even this “waste of time” has become for me meaningful, and I shall soon explain why... although you may have guessed it already.*

So: knowledge, ecology, economy, time. Four undisputable pillars in the life of a person and his/her community. Four pillars that modern society (particularly in its most extremely capitalistic incarnation) wants to manage on our behalf, instead of us. Knowledge is more and more produced in a superficial way, particularly the knowledge of daily life. It is important that we don't know too much, so that it becomes possible to “create new needs”: one way is to increment the speed of life, not giving us time to understand whether a given object is or not suitable, appropriate for us. There is no time to understand that, because in the meanwhile there is already an “update” or an “upgrade” available on the market.

Plus, knowledge is the noblest form of “property”. We do not really own anything until we know it well. To take just one example, as long as we buy a smartphone with 100 different functions, of which we understand and use only 10, we don't really own it: it still belongs to the company that sold it to us, and that company will soon sell us the newest version, with 120 functions, of which we will use only 11, losing even more property of the item.

Then: sobriety and sustainability, both ecological and economical, are enemies of profit and commodification (at least of “quick and easy profit”): things must be soon broken, changed, improved, in order to generate profit. A sober/sustainable item is good for me and for the environment, not for those who want to sell me a product I don't need.

Finally, time. If there is one thing that is still worth more than money, that is time. The moment we can afford 20 min instead of 5 for taking care of ourselves, is literally a moment of richness. Someone, somewhere, wants to take that time away from us, so that we can use it for their purposes. If we can spend 5 min to shave and then we use the remaining 15 for a shower, or for a book or to play with our children, then we still own that time. But if we need those extra 15 min to go to a shop (perhaps to buy a new disposable razor), then that time is lost forever, it doesn't belong to us anymore. To retake possession of time, as much time as we can, means literally to live longer. In football there is a distinction between the “length of the game” (which is notoriously 90 min) and the “effective time”, which is calculated by subtracting all the breaks in the game from the overall length: fouls, substitutions, celebration after goals, etc. It is normally believed that you had a lively game when the effective timing was at least 60 min: it means that a lot of playing was made. Under that threshold, it means that too much time was wasted. There we go: we always calculate our life by length, how long we lived: 80 years? 90 years? But we do not consider the “effective timing” of our life, which, on the contrary, would really tell us how much we lived.

Most of all, however, these four pillars correspond, with great precision, to the concept of “appropriate technology”, which, in its most accurate definition, was formulated in the 1970s by the economist Ernst Schumacher, in his groundbreaking book Small Is Beautiful, but which—as a principle—was mostly one of Gandhi’s ideas for the economic and psychological independence of the Indian people. Nowadays, “sustainable development” has become a more fashionable expression to describe more or less the same basic ideas, but I prefer to keep the original formulation, so that it remains clear that I am still talking about technologies, and not against them. In Schumacher’s formulation, an appropriate technology has to be environmentally sustainable, socially appropriate, and must be animated primarily by three values: health, beauty and permanence. This is what those four pillars are about: an appropriate technology responds to my needs and my wishes, not the ones artificially created by someone else. It is a bit funny how so many communities, Lithuania included, see “progress” as a dichotomy between innovation versus conservation. We have the innovators and the conservatives. But progress is not about going forwards or backwards. Progress is about going towards.

Now you can see where I place humanities in society, and where I would envision a paradigm like Numanities. The humanities have always had this role of thermometer of our quality and dignity of life: as a matter of fact, they were chiefly responsible for creating quality and dignity. Arts, culture, philosophy, ethics... these are the fields that go towards us, as individuals and as community. Humanities have a place for both forwards and backwards, as long as they go towards.

Humanities have a specific obligation not to be technophobic: on the contrary they have to constantly interact with technologies, because they are the only approach to knowledge that can actually critically monitor technologies, and make sure that the appropriate ones are welcome, while the inappropriate ones get smashed and thrown back to the face of the lousy business people who want to decide in our place.

It is a question of knowledge, ecology, economy and time.

Thank you for your attention.

To conclude, I have employed several catchy expressions in this chapter: I spoke about progress that should go “towards”, rather than backwards or forwards, I spoke about knowledge, ecology, economy and time, and so forth. However, as catchy as they all are (and I like them to be), I really do not mean these expressions in a rhetorical, slogan-like, sense. That progress can and should not be assessed as a straight (diachronic) line is something that I have tried to prove in various ways. But let me still mention another example, my favorite one (also because it has a happy ending): public washrooms.

Roughly speaking, since the concern for hygiene made it clear that simple fabric towels could not be used, restrooms in public places have offered their customers four different ways to dry their hands: paper towels, fabric towels in a roller, warm air dryers and, much more recently (the first one having appeared in UK in 2006), the so-called airblades (those with an air jet speed of over 600 km/h that look like

they could disintegrate your hands at any moment). Achieved a decent (although not equal) hygiene level for all of them, the main concern around these technologies became of course their environmental impact. Old and new technologies have been used, here, alone or combined: a paper napkin, for example, can be taken from a simple box or from an infrared dispenser. Now: does anyone know which of these technologies has the lowest environmental impact, all considered?⁸ Was it better to use more recent strategies or rely on the good old ones? Is it better to waste paper or energy for warm air? Is it worse to use chemical products to wash fabric towels that will be reused, or to dispose paper, albeit recycled one? But, most of all, was “progress”, in the development of these technologies, going in a straight line (be it in the forwards or backwards direction)? Was there any “towards” progress at all?

The answer, documented in an MIT study (fully available online at <http://msl.mit.edu/publications/HandDryingLCA-Report.pdf>), shows exactly how progress is a bumpy, curvy and twisting road. Summing all the six parameters of the LCA (see footnote 8), the worst thing we can do to the planet, when drying our hands in a public restroom, is to use paper towels (36 impact points altogether). Warm air dryers are just a trifle better (35), but certainly in no significant manner (no real progress shown). Things timidly improve if we use recycled paper towels—as opposed to virgin ones (29), or—even better—if we use a fabric towel roller (24). Significant progress in the warm air drying technology occurred in the 1990s when the Japanese Xlerator shortened the drying time from the customary (and unbearable, particularly in summer) one-or-more minute of the standard dryers into ca. 15 seconds (the total impact now was brought down to 19). But it was only when Dyson airblades appeared (particularly plastic ones, as opposed to aluminium ones, which score higher in water consumption) that a minimal environmental impact was reached. A plastic airblade scores only 1 in each of the six LCA parameters, totalizing a very low 6. In other words, progress had to renounce the backwards or forwards modes, in order to find its way “towards” us. It is nice that this particular example displays a success story: the most recent technology ended up being the best one, in both environmental impact and quality of life, since airblades dry our hands in only 10 seconds. But of course we are exposed daily to thousands of technologies that—in their development—worsened our quality and dignity of life, while deceiving us with promises of cheaper prices or higher luxury. Millions of technological stories, at the present state of things, do not stand out for their brilliance: some brought more problems than solutions (e.g., SUV cars), some ended up being used the wrong (and/or evil) way (e.g., Zyklon B), some were just very, very stupid ideas (like the short-lived motor powered roller skates, which

⁸The scientific method of analysing the environmental impact of a product is called Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and includes six parameters of evaluation: the global warming potential, the human health, the ecosystem quality, the cumulative energy demand, the water consumption and the land occupation. A scale from 1 to 7 (from the lowest to the highest impact) is assigned to each parameter. This way, different products or technologies which have the same purpose can be directly compared and assessed, taking into account every single step of their production, and related impact.

caused hundreds of accidents), and finally some are so shamefully uncivilized that one should not even address any other question in relation to their use and simply remove them asap (e.g., intensive farming).

As we said, progress is a bumpy, curvy and twisting road, and will always be so. What we need to do is making it “our” road—a road where twists, curves and bumps are not obstacles, but charming features that improve the landscape.

2.6 Promote Values That Other Fields of Knowledge Are Not Capable of Formulating

This point of the manifesto is, by all means, not intended as a manifestation of superiority, but—on the contrary—it is a claim for nurturing identities in the most appropriate way. If natural sciences study and create what makes life *possible*, humanities study and create what makes life *worthwhile*. Creativity, beauty, quality of life, dignity of life, empathy, tolerance, culture, reflection... this is what humanities do best, and what humanities are mostly for. In a very appropriate pick of words, the *Heart of the Matter* report affirms that humanities are “the keeper of the republic” (Broadhead et al. 2013: 9).

If society and institutions have become reluctant to understand the importance of these values, then humanities need to find new ways (or ‘well-temper’ the old ones) to convey the message. It cannot be only society’s fault: yes, events went in such a direction that humanities were deprived of many of their legitimate rights, but it is also true that humanities themselves became too self-confident and self-indulgent towards their traditional centrality in society. Such an attitude, besides being wrong in general, was particularly wrong in relation to the critical and self-critical nature of humanist thinking, which should have been the *first* to reject any inclination towards dogmatism.

Maturity is shown in moments of difficulty: these are hard times for the humanities, thus this is the right moment to show strength, resilience, adulthood and adaptation skills, keeping in mind that in evolutionism “adaptation” is not surrendering, but rather the highest form of physical and mental development of an organism.

Moreover, this is hardly the first time that humanities, or any other field, are undergoing a crisis of any sort. Natural sciences, because of their wonderful work-in-progress constitution, have faced dozens of epochal changes, where a radical rethinking of their paradigm and actions was needed: it cannot have been easy to believe for centuries that Earth was a still body at the very center of the universe and then suddenly face the Galilean revolution; or to believe in the uniqueness of human beings and then suddenly face the Darwinian revolution. However, the humanities, too, can take a look at their own past and find comfort in how effectively they managed to overcome their own crises: the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, from patronage to entrepreneurship in arts, etc.,

not forgetting that the above-mentioned crises in natural sciences had a huge impact on humanities too.

In the introductive part of this book, we mentioned that the crisis of humanities involves also their identity as producers and *promoters* of knowledge. Indeed, part of the enormous heritage that humanities have delivered to the world consists also in constantly stressing the importance of knowledge and culture. They did not just provide material to acquire them: they were also the main PR of them. That is nowadays more important than ever, as the need for knowledge and culture has become increasingly marginal in modern society (and that, among other things, is at the basis of a large number of problems in the world, starting from the various manifestations and typologies of prejudice and intolerance—all direct offspring of ignorance).

Somewhere along the way, humanities lost part of their ability to convey a convincing image of “knowledge and culture”. Students are growing uninterested, even hostile, to them: they find them impractical, not responsive to their needs: once again, it may be society’s fault, but to complain and not move a finger about it is not going to help. Whether the solution is to change attitudes or to fight concretely and restore the old status quo, that role *must be* recovered.

We have already mentioned (in point 3 of this manifesto) Dilthey’s definition of the humanities as an “understanding” process (as complementary to natural sciences’ inclination to “explaining”): that is already a founding element of uniqueness for the humanities. However, in order to deepen the issue, Nussbaum’s treatise (2010: 33–34) is an excellent framework to understand what specifically makes (or could make) the humanities an added value for knowledge production. Nussbaum emphasizes seven specific abilities:

1. The ability to think well about political issues affecting the nation, to examine, reflect, argue, and debate, deferring to neither tradition nor authority.
2. The ability to recognize fellow citizens as people with equal rights, even though they may be different in race, religion, gender or sexuality: to look at them with respect, as ends, not just as tools to be manipulated for one’s own profit.
3. The ability to have concern for the lives of others, to grasp what policies of many types mean for the opportunities and experiences of one’s fellow citizens, of many types, and for people outside one’s own nation.
4. The ability to imagine well a variety of complex issues affecting the story of a human life as it unfolds: to think about childhood, adolescence, family relationships, illness, death and much more in a way informed by an understanding of a wide range of human stories, not just by aggregate data.
5. The ability to judge political leaders critically, but with an informed and realistic sense of the possibilities available to them.
6. The ability to think about the good of the nation as a whole, not just that of one’s own local group.

7. The ability to see one's own nation, in turn, as a part of a complicated world order in which issues of many kinds require intelligent transnational deliberation for their resolution.

In principle, one could simply subscribe to these seven points without even bothering to comment on them: they *are*, indeed, an exhaustive description of what the humanities can do (*better than, more than, or sometimes instead of*) other fields of knowledge. At the same time, as we have seen in point 1 of the manifesto, it is one of Numanities' aims to act as a wider discussion forum for different approaches and strategies to reform and reevaluate the humanities. Perhaps, thus, in the light of these different paradigms, some remarks to Nussbaum's list are possible:

- (1a) *The ability to think well about political issues affecting the nation, to examine, reflect, argue, and debate, deferring to neither tradition nor authority.* There is hardly anything to say about this point, except that Numanities are *particularly* interested in this cultural challenge to aprioristic "tradition" and "authority". In the previous points of the manifesto, I had the opportunity to emphasize (and possibly dismiss) the apparent paradox of Numanities: defending integrity, excellence and solid preparation in the humanities on the one hand, and criticizing technophobia, "pastness" (we shall see this word defined by Fredric Jameson in point 7 of the manifesto) and tradition for tradition's sake attitudes on the other. Please, let me repeat: there is no paradox here. The humanities should claim their authority and authoritativeness on the basis—as correctly pointed out by Nussbaum—of their ability to "examine", "reflect", "argue" and "debate". Quite simply, that can equally praise or challenge tradition, technology, the past, the future, the present... it merely depends on the cases. The humanistic catalogue of skills is *exactly* meant to discern and discuss critically.
- (2a) *The ability to recognize fellow citizens as people with equal rights, even though they may be different in race, religion, gender or sexuality: to look at them with respect, as ends, not just as tools to be manipulated for one's own profit.* We again can generally agree, here, but a remark must be made on how natural sciences can bring important added values to this vision. For instance, the humanities—in most of their incarnation, including Nussbaum's⁹—tend far too often to exclude the "non-human" from their global ethical project of equality, respect and personhood, on the basis of outdated notions/perceptions that are not anymore in step with what science reveals as some states, governments and institutions are beginning to acknowledge. It is—I repeat—one of the great assets brought by the post-humanistic approach that we have highlighted in point 1 of the manifesto. If it is true that the humanities have the right predisposition to develop

⁹Although, it must be said, she displays remarkable competence on De Waal's studies on sympathy and compassion, definitely placing herself on a different level than the usual anthropocentric-speciesist cosmology developed by most humanists.

empathy, tolerance and understanding, it is also true that they applied (and assigned) these qualities only to and within humankind, not infrequently explaining this standpoint with emphatic statements of human superiority (“unlike animals, we are endowed with passion/culture/sensibility...”), that are at the same time a contradiction to those very qualities they should develop, and are a display of ethological/zoological ignorance.

- (3a) *The ability to have concern for the lives of others, to grasp what policies of many types mean for the opportunities and experiences of one’s fellow citizens, of many types, and for people outside one’s own nation.* In this early stage of Numanities’ development, we should again generally agree, provided the point made above, and provided the sensation that it was mostly the humanists themselves who chose a romantic-nationalist-individualist path (as I have emphasized already, and shall do so again in the next point of this manifesto), perhaps deviating from the discourse appeared and progressively developed in the period between 15th and 18th centuries. Once again, one may detect an apparent paradox, here, in a treatise, like the present one, which shows cultural sympathies for *both* the Renaissance’s idea of humanism, and the post-humanistic approach that so much criticizes it. I can only reiterate on Nussbaum’s first emphasized quality of the humanities: if the humanities can examine, reflect, argue and debate, they can also avoid generalizing and treating topics monolithically. The humanism of the Renaissance is not so much an emancipation of human beings from nature, as it is from God and superstition.
- (4a) *The ability to imagine well a variety of complex issues affecting the story of a human life as it unfolds: to think about childhood, adolescence, family relationships, illness, death and much more in a way informed by an understanding of a wide range of human stories, not just by aggregate data.* Once again, while we generally agree on this, we cannot help noticing that “data aggregation” has been a favorite occupation among plenty of humanists, who—contradicting the first of Nussbaum’s agenda points—treated tradition as authority, and generated numerous forms of data aggregation for aggregation’s sake that, on balance, were not enormously valuable for the understanding of “complex issues affecting the story of a human life”. I am not suggesting the removal, from the humanities’ universe, of obsessed philologists who can devote their entire life to dig the world’s archives in search of every single handwritten private letter of some dramatically-marginal erudite of the 16th century: however, I envision a very difficult collocation of such works in the development of Numanities, or at least a very hard time in understanding how on earth these kind of enterprises will help us understand and improve our society, if not in the general assumption that it contributes to expanding our knowledge (an assumption that, in an attempt to raise the bar of expectations towards humanities, should not be considered enough anymore).
- (5a) *The ability to judge political leaders critically, but with an informed and realistic sense of the possibilities available to them.* We generally agree, but

we still suspect that “realism” has ceased to be the forte of the humanities, which instead should activate a serious process of self-assessment, in order to reacquire it. I remind the readers of the previous points of the manifesto, and to the next one too, for a more thorough discussion on these aspects. It is my absolute conviction that the loss of realism is one of the main causes of the humanities’ crisis.

- (6a) *The ability to think about the good of the nation as a whole, not just that of one’s own local group.* We generally agree, but we are not entirely sure about the choice of the concept of “nation” as the unit of measurement for an enlarged community. In fact, one may even see the same danger emphasized in the third entry of this list of comments: the problem of the current romantic-nationalist-individualist path chosen by the humanities may have something to do with this identification of the nation with “the great picture”. While we all agree on the importance to “act locally”, the “think globally” part of Greenpeace’s celebrated motto may need to be more extended than the territory of a single country, and moreover involve not just “human people” but the whole ecosystem. Most of the world’s problems that carry a local impact have global causes and global explanations. The Numanities’ nation is the planet (emphasis on “planet”, as opposed to “world”—as I said, we do not want only people in it).
- (7a) *The ability to see one’s own nation, in turn, as a part of a complicated world order in which issues of many kinds require intelligent transnational deliberation for their resolution.* This final point is certainly more accommodating than the previous one, as it finally sees “the nation” as an intermediate point of social awareness, and not as its goal.

These, at least these, are the added values that a humanistic approach brings to the process of creating knowledge in a community. The idea of “humanities as added value” (we shall see it later) is the main epistemological pillar of Numanities. With a common and committed effort, we need to convey the message that the humanities still display concretely irreplaceable components to this process. In fact, it is not like such components have disappeared: they are merely less visible and—fatally—less appreciated institutionally. But, for instance, if the majority of a state leadership still consists of people with a humanistic background (as the collective “4Humanities” has underlined—see the introduction to this monograph), it can only mean that this “added value” is still operative and effective.

Finally, as a complement to Nussbaum’s reflections, I shall take the liberty to suggest a possible program of “values” for the Numanities. How, in other words, we would intend to be an added value, in the current social and academic context. This formulation, in 8 points, has been a symbolic statement of purposes for the International Semiotics Institute since January 2014. As we interpret these eight values as something “we want to be proud of”, we decided to elaborate them around the acronym (yet another one, I know!) of “PEACOCKS”, the proud animals by definition.

The peacocks of Numanities are:

- P is for PASSION: humanists often distinguish themselves for a high degree of commitment and engagement. Doing things with love and enthusiasm is the first important step for excellence.
- E is for ETHICS: the humanities, as Nussbaum and others repeatedly remark and as I have specified also in this manifesto, seek to promote values of dignity and quality of life: tolerance, peace, equality, empathy, democracy, emancipation, etc.
- A is for APPLICATION: whatever we think or write, we should always try to apply it to the real world. If we cannot afford to reach a stage of concreteness from wherever we start our research work, then we should seriously question its validity.
- C is for CREATIVITY: traditionally that has tended to be the distinctive feature of the humanities. We need to keep and reinforce that: creativity means believing in and promoting imagination, art, ideas and vision.
- O is for OPENNESS: the humanities should develop more and more into an open-source and open-platform entity, devoted to diversity, inclusiveness and transparency. Openness is where the repeatedly-mentioned ability to “examine, reflect, argue and debate” finds its natural element.
- C is for CURIOSITY: a scholar is not a scholar if s/he is not driven by a genuine desire to look around, learn and understand. The humanities possess a natural inclination for exploration, but—in comparison to the natural sciences—they may have partly lost the value of open-minded, first-hand curiosity, increasingly replaced by a more speculative and mediated type.
- K is for KNOWLEDGE: that means information, communication, culture... Needless to say, this is what research is all about. The warning, here, is to never forget that, at the end of whatever scholarly enterprise, we should *produce* knowledge, not just question it.
- S is for SUSTAINABILITY: it stands for ecology, appropriate technologies, sobriety, non-invasiveness and “economy” in its truest sense. In the case of humanities, sustainability means two things: first—indeed—a plea to always pay attention to the impact of our research on society (making sure that such an impact is a positive and useful one); second, once again, it is a challenge to metaphysicalism and its tendency to cosmic (and therefore anti-economic) speculations (Fig. 2.3).

Playing with words, humanities will return to being an added value when they manage to add value to our society. We all secretly think that we do that already, and that the world would not survive without us, but the fact is, it is surviving alright. It is getting uglier, but it is surviving. Also—although I will make myself a few enemies here—we may want to admit that some of our work is not creating value at all, even though we like to think that it does. An important step to overcome the crisis is to emancipate ourselves from this self-indulgent conviction that nothing of what we do is questionable, while—more and more often—it actually is.

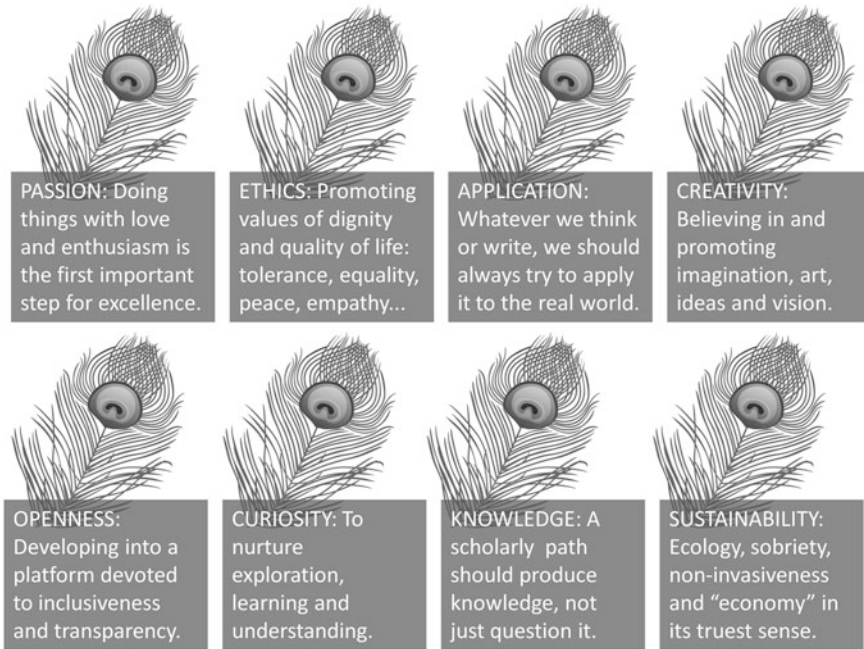


Fig. 2.3 Eight values (P.E.A.C.O.C.K.S.) pursued by Humanities

2.7 Strive for the Excellence of the Humanities

As we have seen before, Diana Sheets suggested that humanities have to restore “rigorous standards of academic excellence”, and of course how can one disagree with this, generally speaking? In the current crisis of the humanities, these standards are more seriously threatened than ever. Changes in society aside, *this* is one of the prominent factors that are giving humanities a bad reputation: the *noise* of mediocre research has increased in volume, and therefore it is more and more difficult for institutions to spot excellence: the hyper-bureaucratic, time-consuming and annoying funding processes are certainly something to change radically and possibly abolish, in an ideal world (see point 2 of this manifesto).

However: have we ever thought that perhaps it is also *our* fault that things are so difficult and controlled? Have we considered that perhaps some (or many) of us are really not properly competent and prepared? What is our reply to *the system*, besides the refrain “Humanities are humanities, and therefore cannot be ignored” (which is a rather literal equivalent of “traditions are traditions”)? How do we prove to the institutions that this or that research plan is really groundbreaking, or this or that heritage really needs to be preserved and studied in the particular manner we intend to?

Maybe, in the “good old days”, humanists did not need to produce such evidence: the necessity of philosophical speculation, heritage preservation or else, was simply self-evident. Yes, but in the good old days there were not so many humanists struggling for one single piece of cake, simply because it was *more difficult* to be a humanist. Perhaps *all* good humanists had a prominent place in society, but only a few were good enough to access the club. Nowadays, the proportion between humanists and the available resources is totally unbalanced: humanists have increased to a ridiculous number, and resources, to make things worse, were in turn cut down. There is no doubt that they were reduced in unfair quantities, and that institutions have instead reinforced their support to openly profitable fields (without too much investigation of the scientific-cultural significance of each specific project), but it would be wrong to assume that this happened only because of the wild capitalistic mentality currently dominating in the world.

Modern societies have taken a sad, yet important decision: they have decided that culture, arts and philosophy are not endlessly sustainable: in fact, they are just sustainable in small amounts. Humanities were definitely caught by surprise by this decision: they understand that it is a wrong one, but they have not been able to produce valid counterarguments, besides those that tautologically run in circles, nor did they manage to adapt to the new picture (save some exceptions).

To take a firm stand against mediocrity, humanists need also to resist engaging in self-indulgent, narcissistic and—once more—unempirical and abusively-speculative forms of scholarship. One of my favorite examples in the category is post-modernism (or, rather, the degeneration of it that developed in academic circles between late 1980s and early 2000s). By now, post-modernism, at least part of it, is no longer untouchable, and that is certainly great news for anybody who is looking forward to a rebirth of humanities that would consistently reduce the whole package of skeptic-hypersubjective-relativistic-antiscientific *clichés* that have been practiced in the last few years. Lyotardian premises of the “depends-how-you-define-it” type, proved to be exceptionally powerful weapons against any attempt to develop a discussion in the forward mode. The request to define something that the post-modernist has already decided s/he will not accept as objective, demands a step backwards in the discussion; then, some time is spent on fighting over the possibility of actually defining that concept; then another tricky concept is found, and another step back is required. And so on, until the theorem of “infinite regress”, which postulates that one can go back to point 0 from basically any point, is once again proved (point 0 being of course the impossibility to have anything remotely close to “truth” and “objective reality”).

What is wrong (that is, far from “rigorous standards of excellence”) in post-modernism can be summarized in at least the following points:

1. The paradigmatic post-modernist attack on (the possibility of achieving) value-free objectivity in scientific inquiry is probably the most discussed aspect, and has been wisely counter-argued by many authors. Their main message is well summarized by the anthropologist D’Andrade (1995), who states that such an impossibility is definitely not a good reason for an anthropologist (and, of

course, by extension, any other scientist) to renounce having objectivity as an ideal, and to get as close as possible to it. Objectivity, D'Andrade points out, is not *dehumanizing* nor is objectivity impossible: "Science works not because it produces unbiased accounts but because its accounts are objective enough to be proved or disproved no matter what anyone wants to be true" (D'Andrade 1995: 404). Quite simply, if we can accept some notions as "objective" (the fact that we breathe oxygen, to begin with), then we know that objectivity is not unachievable, and the various difficulties of achieving it in various (admittedly, very many) areas of knowledge should not be taken as excuse to trivialize the problem with a dismissive generalization.

2. Various forms of relativism and syncretism in post-modernist thought, and particularly the merging of different "spheres" of life (political, cultural, economic, etc.) into one single whole, are one of the main points in Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), which (especially if we consider that the seeds of his critique date back to an article he wrote in 1984) constitutes one of the earliest, most consistent and systematic critiques of post-modernism. Jameson argues against post-modernist generalizations by stating that in fact the modernist framework of analysis of those "spheres" is/was perfectly efficient, and that on the contrary the big "melting-pot" is no less than the result of capitalistic forms of colonization of the cultural discourse (Jameson 1991: 35–38). To make an example that will be employed later in one of my case-studies, the relevance of this point is particularly tangible in music, as it has resulted in several different statements concerning the claimed fallacy of genre categorizations ("there are only two types of music: good music, and bad music"—attributed to a few musicians), musicological interpretations (how many times have we witnessed the proud arrogance of a composer labeling as silly all attempts at analyzing his/her compositions?), and so forth.
3. Also, the role of the economy ("late capitalism") shall not be disregarded. If it is true, and I believe it is, that there is a connection between capitalistic marketing strategies and post-modernism, then one can only agree with Susan Sontag: "In my view, what's called postmodernism—that is, the making everything equivalent—is the perfect ideology for consumerist capitalism. It is an idea of accumulation, of preparing people for their shopping expeditions. These are not critical ideas" (<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.901/12.1chan.txt>).
4. The simplification and relativization (which postmodernists often sell as *extreme problematicity*) of the cultural discourse in post-modernism leads to a natural trivialization of the concepts. It is what Christopher Norris defines "a high point of sophisticated ingenuity masquerading as straightforward commonsense wisdom" (Norris 1990: 5). "Trivialization", needless to say, is one of worst enemies of excellence.
5. By consequence, we witness a progressive loss of integrity and identity, in both scientific inquiry and art-making. A huge cry from the festival of creativity that modernism represented:

[...] in the dialectical leap from quantity to quality, the explosion of modern literature into a host of distinct private styles and mannerisms has been followed by a linguistic fragmentation of social life itself to the point where the norm itself is eclipsed: reduced to a neutral and reified media speech (far enough from the Utopian aspirations of the inventors of Esperanto or Basic English), which itself then becomes but one more idiolect among many. Modernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes. (Jameson 1991: 18)

The result is once again translated with the words impoverishment and trivialization, when not even loss of focus, as the following example, about parody, shows:

In this situation parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs. (Jameson 1991: 18)

6. A most worrying context where pastiche is manifested relates to a wider context that Jameson calls "crisis in historicity", and which has a specific application in arts:

Nostalgia does not strike one as an altogether satisfactory word for such fascination (particularly when one thinks of the pain of a properly modernist nostalgia with a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval), yet it directs our attention to what is a culturally far more generalized manifestation of the process in commercial art and taste, namely the so-called nostalgia film (or what the French call *la mode rétro*). Nostalgia films restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the generation [...] Faced with these ultimate objects—our social, historical, and existential present, and the past as "referent"—the incompatibility of a postmodernist "nostalgia" art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent. The contradiction propels this mode, however, into complex and interesting new formal inventiveness; it being understood that the nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned "representation" of historical content, but instead approached the "past" through stylistic connotation, conveying "pastness" by the glossy qualities of the image, and "1930s-ness" or "1950s-ness" by the attributes of fashion. (Jameson 1991: 18–19)

I shall discuss this aspect in my first case-study (authenticity in music), but in this context it is important to add how influential the post-modernist "pastness" is in most creative industries.

7. Finally, how not to mention Alan Sokal and his spectacular intellectual joke, which said a lot, not only about the poor editorial board of the journal *Social Text*, but also about the entire post-modernist movement? Sokal was crucial in reinforcing the suspicion, from the part of many detractors, that at least some of post-modernist language is closer to bla-bla than to valuable philosophical reflection. Here is a passage from Sokal's irresistible parody:

[natural scientists] cling to the dogma imposed by the long post-Enlightenment hegemony over the Western intellectual outlook, which can be summarized briefly as follows: that

there exists an external world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed of humanity as a whole; that these properties are encoded in “eternal” physical laws; and that human beings can obtain reliable, albeit imperfect and tentative, knowledge of these laws by hewing to the “objective” procedures and epistemological strictures prescribed by the (so-called) scientific method. (Sokal 1996: 217)

As Sokal himself explains in the article published right after his parody (1996b), his concern over the “spread of subjectivist thinking is both intellectual and political”:

Intellectually, the problem with such doctrines is that they are false (when not simply meaningless). There is a real world; its properties are not merely social constructions; facts and evidence do matter [...] And yet, much contemporary academic theorizing consists precisely of attempts to blur these obvious truths—the utter absurdity of it all being concealed through obscure and pretentious language. [...] Incomprehensibility becomes a virtue; allusions, metaphors and puns substitute for evidence and logic. [...]

Politically, I’m angered because most (though not all) of this silliness is emanating from the self-proclaimed Left. We’re witnessing here a profound historical volte-face. For most of the past two centuries, the Left has been identified with science and against obscurantism [...] The recent turn of many “progressive” or “leftist” academic humanists and social scientists toward one or another form of epistemic relativism betrays this worthy heritage and undermines the already fragile prospects for progressive social critique. Theorizing about “the social construction of reality” won’t help us find an effective treatment for AIDS or devise strategies for preventing global warming. (Sokal 1996b: 62–63)

Thorough analyses of the contradictions (or at least weak points) of post-modernism, as provided by those mentioned and by other scholars, does not correspond (unfortunately but predictably) to an immediate transformation in the cultural and moral values (or attitudes towards them) of the scientific and the everyday discourse. Particularly the latter (because of its size, primarily, but also because of an obviously scarcer circulation of *this type* of information) requires a longer historical process of cultural assimilation. My claim, in a nutshell, is that the influence of post-modernist ideas, and most of all *attitude*, have produced a general and diffused impoverishment/banalization of the humanist discourse and an increasing cultural laziness in our interaction with humanistic matters and topics.

In actual fact, I prefer to call it past-modernism, with an *a*. And not only (but also) in relation to Jameson’s remarks on “pastness”. Rather than being “post”, many post-modernists seem to be mainly preoccupied with the idea that nothing can be invented anymore, and that we live in an age where illusions and media dominate. And while believing this, they practically decided to give up any form of artistic or scientific innovation, devoting themselves to the not-so-fine-anymore arts of collage, quotationism, aprioristic skepticism and relativism, syncretism, applied Derridanism, Lyotardism, Lacanism and Baudrillardism, and active metaism. Everything is meta-something, refers to something else and misses (in the majority of the cases) referring to itself, to have an identity, if not in a very narcissistic sense. And everything is so “aggressively inarticulate”: there is an American slam poet I am a big fan of, his name is Taylor Mali, and he writes poetry of very different varieties, including some with humorous and sarcastic contents. I would like to

transcribe a whole poem of his (performances of it can be easily found on YouTube, or similar platforms):

In case you hadn't noticed,
 it has somehow become uncool
 to sound like you know what you're talking about?
 Or believe strongly in what you're saying?
 Invisible question marks and parenthetical (you know?)"s
 have been attaching themselves to the ends of our sentences?
 Even when those sentences aren't, like, questions? You know?
 Declarative sentences—so—called
 because they used to, like, DECLARE things to be true, okay,
 as opposed to other things that are, like, totally, you know, not—
 have been infected by a totally hip
 and tragically cool interrogative tone? You know?
 Like, don't think I'm uncool just because I've noticed this;
 this is just like the word on the street, you know?
 It's like what I've heard?
 I have nothing personally invested in my own opinions, okay?
 I'm just inviting you to join me in my uncertainty?
 What has happened to our conviction?
 Where are the limbs out on which we once walked?
 Have they been, like, chopped down
 with the rest of the rain forest?
 Or do we have, like, nothing to say?
 Has society become so, like, totally...
 I mean absolutely... You know?
 That we've just gotten to the point where it's just, like...
 whatever!
 And so actually our disarticulation... ness
 is just a clever sort of... thing
 to disguise the fact that we've become
 the most aggressively inarticulate generation
 to come along since...
 you know, a long, long time ago!

I entreat you, I implore you, I exhort you,
 I challenge you: To speak with conviction.
 To say what you believe in a manner that bespeaks
 the determination with which you believe it.
 Because contrary to the wisdom of the bumper sticker,
 it is not enough these days to simply question authority.
 You have to speak with it, too.
 (Mali 2002: 37–38)¹⁰

“Aggressively inarticulate” is, by far, the best definition for the post-modernist *attitude* that I have ever heard. And when we couple this with the reflections we already made in the previous points of this manifesto (point 5 in particular) it becomes difficult not to agree with MacDonald (2014), however controversial she may be as political commentator, when she identifies “narcissism” and “obsession for victimhood” as two of the characteristic academic traits of our time. Plus, that narcissism is an “epidemic”—as Twenge and Campbell 2009 describes it (in fact, possibly, it is the most widespread pathology of this century)—seems to me quite evident and self-explanatory.

There is no point here, neither an intention on my part, in making a celebration of modernism and positivism, instead, but one cannot help noticing that the modernist attitude had a genuine strive for innovation, integrity and creativity, with a clear orientation towards society, rather than ego. And when we say “creativity”, we mean creativity *from scratch*, not from a pre-existing model. It is significant that modernist exhibitions were abundant with words like “universal”, “structure”, and others that recall solidity and construction. Positivism has most certainly failed in its blindly naïve faith in progress, but a critical assessment of its exaggerations should not be translated into a *tout court* condemnation of its intentions and attitude.

To the *homo postmodernus*, on the contrary, integrity and progress are frightening: the category of truth is (not totally unjustly, by the way, but that is obviously not the point) rejected, so s/he prefers to decompose, deconstruct and take a piece from here and a piece from there. So the sexy words for today’s exhibitions and installations are “fragments”, “drops”, “moments” and so forth. This inarticulation turns to “aggressive” when it becomes clear that it is mostly a subtle marketing strategy to expose the ego: the *you know-sort of-I mean’s* mocked by Mali are a cunning excuse to redirect the attention to one’s self with the old trick of the false modesty (or, indeed, victimhood). “Look how fragile I am”, “look how fragmentary a work I made”, “look how insecurely I behave”. Look, look, look. I, I, I. For some contents and some excellence, please come back some other time.

¹⁰I would like to thank Taylor Mali for granting the permission to transcribe his full poem in this book.

Of course, post-modernism was and remains just an example: many are the cases and the forms of scholarship that have transformed the humanities from an academic point of arrival into a point of departure.

Peirce used to say that “Doubt is an art that must be acquired with great difficulty”. What we have now, in the humanities, is a loud majority of professional doubters who have made critical thought a repetitive, meaningless, narcissistic cliché.

The fear is: if academic research could be compared to photography, the humanities of nowadays would probably be a selfie.

Long before complaining about the inequality of resources, the hyper-bureaucracy and in general “the system”, we humanists should work hard and seriously to restore excellence in our research. The hope is that projects and ideas like Numanities (and the many others that exist, starting from the ones I mentioned in point 1 of the manifesto) give a small but significant contribution in this direction.

2.8 Conclusions

It may be a good idea, before presenting some final reflection on this manifesto for Numanities, to summarize all what we have discussed so far. In most cases, I approached the various problems in a way that in Italy we call “ad ampio respiro” (something like “with a deep breath”), that is, extensively, and not sparing on digressions and incidental comments. Let us do the exact opposite, here, also to have a handier memorandum of our main points.

1. The humanities are currently facing a complex crisis that involves their impact on, and role within, society; their popularity among students and scholars; and their identity as producers and promoters of knowledge.
2. The modern western world and its economical policies have been identified as the strongest cause of such a crisis, not only *creating* the conditions for, but in fact encouraging it.
3. However, a self-critical assessment of the situation is called for. Our primary fault as humanists was that of stubbornly thinking that the world’s changes could never really affect us, as—we felt—our identity was sacred.
4. The analysis of the crisis can be categorized in six main groups of approach:
 - The “*facts and figures*” approach, suggesting that the evidence of a decrease (occasionally, loss) of interest towards the humanities is documented in various quantitative ways: the drop of humanistic degrees at universities, the cut of enrollments in humanities, the restructuring of humanistic faculties (often in the direction of joining social sciences); the dramatic drop of institutional funding towards humanistic research.
 - The “*value of the humanities*” approach, suggesting that humanities should be supported “in principle” for their capacity to create “knowledge, skills, and understanding [needed] to thrive in a twenty-first-century democracy”

- (Broadhead et al. 2013: 10); innovativeness, competitiveness and strength (ibid.: 11); and “leadership in an interconnected world” (ibid.: 12).
- The “*humanities need to recover strength*” approach, suggesting that while humanists keep themselves busy with “identity politics, social struggle and gender warfare” (Sheets 2013), they miss completely the great classics of arts and literature, which are challenging and demanding, missing the opportunity to understand their cultural heritage, and to engage in serious reading and critical thinking.
 - The “*humanities are not really science*” approach, suggesting that the humanities should be studied for personal pleasure and education, and kept outside the constrictions of academic contexts.
 - The “*hyper-bureaucracy is destroying humanities*” approach, suggesting that the current overload of managerial, administrative and bureaucratic tasks for academic personnel is seriously endangering their ability to operate efficiently, and to make a personal difference via their initiatives, creativity and experience.
 - The “*humanities versus technology*” approach, suggesting that technology is the “great enemy” of the humanities, and a spiritual “personal self-transformation” should be the solution.
5. The main strengths of humanities are the ability to: promote critical thinking and analytical reasoning; provide knowledge and understanding of democracy and social justice; develop leadership, cultural and ethical values.
 6. The main problems of humanities are the lack economic relevance; the socio-institutional perception of them as “impractical” and unemployable; the fact that they do not match with technological development.
 7. The resulting crisis consists mainly in the absence (or radical reduction) of funding from institutions; a decrease in student numbers a decrease in interest; a loss of centrality in society.
 8. A Numanities (New Humanities) project should consider all these aspects, with self-critical assessment on the first line. The goal is to unify the various fields, approaches and also potentials of the humanities in the context, dynamics and problems of current societies, and in an attempt to overcome the above-described crisis.
 9. Discussing Numanities in terms of an “umbrella-concept” means also that there is no *specific* scientific content in it: that particularly means that the many existing new fields and research trends that are addressing the same problems (post-humanism, transhumanism, transformational humanities, etc.) are not *competitors* of Numanities, but rather possible ways to them.
 10. Numanities intend to pursue a mission summarized in a seven-point manifesto.
 11. First: *Rethink the position of humanities in modern society*. Regardless of the importance that they may acquire in present or future scenarios, it is crucial that humanities have a recognizable and authoritative role in research and everyday practices. To recover dignity, humanities must rethink their position and role at all levels, from the choice of research topics to the selection of the right

platform to showcase them; from the approach to writing a project application, to the whole way they *read* and *interpret* the world.

12. Second: *Reestablish the dialogue between humanities and institutions, at various levels.* Humanities should make an effort to learn the “rules of the game” of modern society. Rather than basking in self-pity for being marginalized by institutions, humanists should face the current difficulties by doing what they do best: reflect, analyze and look forward. Institutions are granting less and less funds to humanities, because they sense a lack of concreteness and profitability of the field, while humanists think that, if their research was concrete and profitable, it would simply not be humanistic. Both sides are wrong: the concept of “intellectual” has somehow split into two separate categories that do not communicate with (and in fact despite) each other: an anti-establishment “bohemian outcast” on the one hand, and the business-oriented “manager” of knowledge on the other (the latter usually working, or at least cooperating as advisor/referee, for funding institutions). What got lost in the process is the “architect” of knowledge: the intellectual who combines the vision with the engineering, the abstract with the concrete. The necessity to *learn* the “rules of the game” must be however counterbalanced by the equally-crucial necessity to *rewrite* such rules. Scholars, not just within the humanities, should take a clear stand against the overload of bureaucratic tasks.
13. Third: *Learn (or, once again, re-learn) the noble art of empirical and applied approaches.* Humanities are not able to “speak to the world” with the language of constructiveness and concreteness. Most great humanists of the past, in all fields, had the gift of connecting great visions with great actions, or—in the most forward-thinking cases—they *set the bases* for their vision to become *real* eventually. The crisis of the humanities may be also due to those many humanists who got stuck somewhere between a romantic myth and a post-modern disillusionment with their ability to actually be *rational and concrete*.
14. Fourth: *Remind humanist scholars and the rest of the world that humanities have always taken progressive stands within societies, not Luddite ones.* Humanists have been for centuries the people who *looked forward*, who were able to predict mid- and long-term orientations in history (at various levels: creative, ethical, sociological...) by means of a form of reasoning that derives from a deep understanding of the mechanisms and actions of a society, both at small and large scales. Several humanists are now becoming *uncritical scholars of the past*, and occupy the scholarly niches of traditions, folklore and philology, with an exclusive interest in memory, conservation and identity. The crucial contact with *values* is occasionally endangered: failing to keep up-to-date with a society that is clearly not placing humanities at the center of attention, may resolve into pub-like reminiscences of the past, rather than a proper study of it. The bound with reality is lost and the “unknown” makes us fearful and lazy. The point in Humanities is not to accept new technologies in principle, but rather to give a proper, careful scrutiny of them.

15. Fifth: *More specifically, in the current context of economic, political and ecological struggles, to be progressive should mean to be ethically-minded, sustainable, quality of life-oriented and dignity of life-based.* In the words of Gandhi first and Schumacher later, progress is implemented through *appropriate technologies*. “Progress” is not necessarily represented by every single thing that is newer, bigger, faster: a critical (therefore, intimately humanistic) view seeks progress in what is tailored for the real needs and demands of a given community. Humanities have the theoretical skills to offer a constructive and critical view on these matters: Numanities would like to reestablish this interest and additionally cultivate operative and concrete tools so that those skills are not wasted in purely abstract, distant-from-reality formulations.
16. Sixth: *Promote, with pride and determination, those values that the other fields of knowledge are simply not capable of formulating.* If natural sciences study and create what makes life *possible*, humanities study and create what makes life *worthwhile*. Creativity, beauty, quality of life, dignity of life, empathy, tolerance, culture, reflection... this is what humanities do best, and what humanities are mostly for. If society and institutions have become reluctant to understand the importance of these values, then humanities need to find new ways to convey the message. The crisis of humanities involves also their identity as producers and *promoters* of knowledge. Indeed, part of the enormous heritage that humanities have delivered to the world consists also in constantly stressing the importance of knowledge and culture. They did not just provide material to acquire them: they were also the main PR of them. That is nowadays more important than ever, as the need for knowledge and culture has become increasingly marginal in modern society.
17. Seventh: *Strive for the excellence of humanities.* The humanities have to restore rigorous standards of academic excellence. Changes in society aside, *this* is one of the prominent factors that are giving humanities a bad reputation: the *noise* of mediocre research has increased in volume, and therefore it is more and more difficult for institutions to spot excellence (see Fig. 2.4 for a recapitulation of the manifesto).

In the light of these premises and reflections, it is now possible to identify the areas of inquiry that Numanities, in their functions and comprehensive approach, seek to cover. The following list should also be understood as a statement of purposes for this entire book series. These, in other words, will be the topics/areas we intend to represent (see Fig. 2.5 for a summary in bullet points).

In no particular order:

- (a) **Traditional fields of humanities**—as long as their research paths are focused on issues of current concern (e.g., art research that addresses questions of the redefinition of art in the light of modern technologies). This statement may easily be misinterpreted as disrespectful to the history of the humanities, so it may be useful to reiterate that we are not talking about what deserves or not to be part of humanistic research nowadays. It is rather what *Numanities* (with an

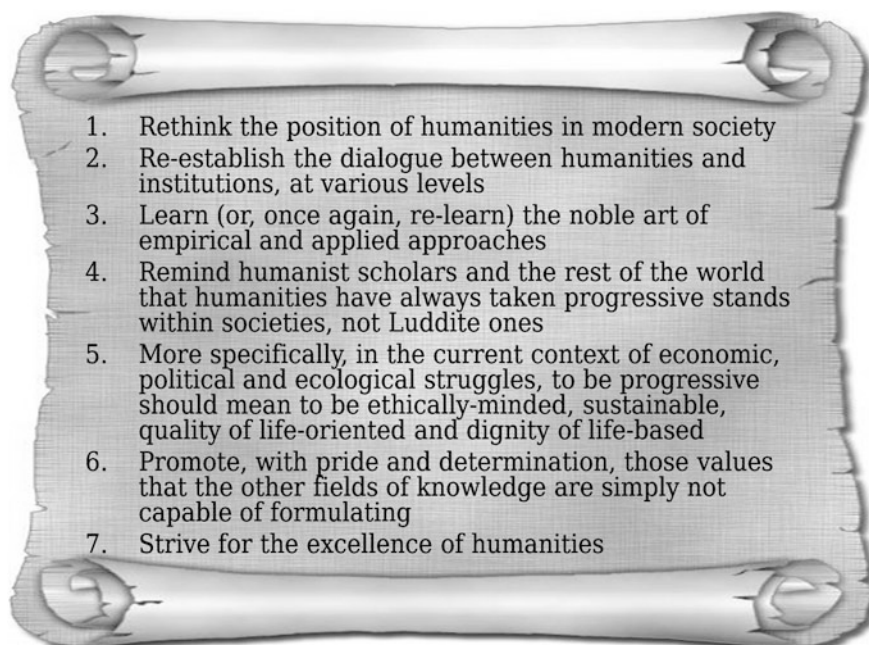


Fig. 2.4 The manifesto of Humanities in seven points

Traditional fields of humanities whose research paths are focused on issues of current concern

New fields of humanities emerged to meet the demands of societal changes

Multi- /Inter- /Cross- / Trans-disciplinary dialogues between humanities and social and/or natural sciences

Humanities “in disguise”, that is, those fields (currently belonging to other spheres), that remain rooted in a humanistic vision of the world

Forms of investigations and reflections, in which the humanities monitor and critically assess their scientific status and social condition

Forms of research animated by creative and innovative humanities-based approaches

Applied humanities

Fig. 2.5 Topics and areas covered by Humanities

N) would like to pursue and host. There is a threshold, perhaps a thin one, above which a “classic” form of humanistic research is pertinent to the Numanities’ platform, and below which it is not. The determination of such a threshold lies in the relevance of a piece of given research (even one about ancient events or characters) within the context of current needs and problems in society. Whenever these are addressed in an appropriate and tangible manner, a humanistic inquiry is also a numanistic one. “Appropriate and tangible”, to be clear, means that explanations such as “this research is relevant in principle” or “this research is relevant because it increases our knowledge on that particular topic”, alone, are not enough to pass the threshold. What it is proposed here is *not* the removal, from the humanities’ universe, of—say—an obsessed Italian philologist who can devote his/her entire life to digging the world’s archives in search of every single document of Lodovico Castelvetro’s and Annibale Caro’s heated debate over one of the latter’s poems in the 16th century: what is instead being said is that it is very difficult to place such works into the development of Numanities, or at least we have a very hard time in understanding how on earth this kind of enterprises will help us understand and improve our society. And—to make matters more cynical—it may be even more difficult to convince a funding institution to support this kind of research.

- (b) **New fields** have recently emerged to meet the demands of societal changes (e.g., digital humanities). On the other hand, to keep up with the same example, if Castelvetro’s and Caro’s polemic is “rejuvenated” within—let us say—a project of digitalization of 16th century documents, in order to make them available to a larger group of readers and accessible to disadvantaged social categories (for instance, a blind person can have a software reading these letters), then we are into a totally different ballgame—one that Numanities look forward to encouraging and developing. Now we are talking about a project of so-called e-inclusion that is not only of very current concern, but also a priority for many state funding institutions.

More generally speaking, there should be not such a thing as “frozen” academic research. Historical, cultural, technological, anthropological circumstances change, and the humanist should be the first one to notice. We cannot demand to keep on working on the very same things, in the very same way and on the very same conditions. Mediation and even compromise has to happen at some level, and on some variables of the whole setting. If the philologist does not want to “bargain” on his/her passion for Castelvetro’s and Caro’s *tenzone*, then s/he should at least find *a way* to make this passion useful to the society.

- (c) **Multi-/Inter-/Cross-/Transdisciplinary dialogues** between humanities and social and/or natural sciences (namely: fields where disciplinary combinations and interactions were crucial in updating and upgrading existing research paradigms—e.g., multimodal studies). Interdisciplinarity, crossdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity have become rather abused terms, particularly in the humanities. For two reasons: first and foremost, because they are trivialized by research practices that have nothing in common with

any of the four methodological procedures; and second because they are by now employed as synonyms, while they represent four tangibly-distinguished strategies (with “inter” and “multi” being the most recurrent prefixes, and therefore the more easily confused approaches). The humanist adores sounding modern and relevant by calling his/her research “interdisciplinary”: most of the times, however, what we witness is far from any real synergy across, and therefore challenge to, disciplinary boundaries, but rather an ordinary reiteration of an existing convergence between two fields that have been cooperating for ages, already. It is time to state clearly that there is no “multi-inter-cross-trans-” achievement in, say, a literary theorist who needs some concept from political sciences to analyze the work of Pablo Neruda. Concepts, words and definitions are not unlike the art of cooking. The moment you add one ingredient after another, in the illusion that *the more you put, the better it tastes*, is the moment when you are killing a dish. The dialogue/confrontation among fields of knowledge is a serious activity that cannot be oversimplified with a simple “exchange of information” between two fields that are anyway inclined to act thus.

In other words, Humanities intend to encourage (1) *real, consistent and challenging* dialogues between the humanities and other fields; and (2) a proper distinction, and consequent appropriate choice of methodological strategies. A multidisciplinary piece of research is not an interdisciplinary one, which is not a transdisciplinary one, etc. Just as a reminder: **crossdisciplinarity** consists of one discipline approaching a research problem from the perspective of another discipline; **multidisciplinarity** consists of the cooperation among different disciplines, each drawing on their intradisciplinary knowledge; **interdisciplinarity** consists of an organic integration/synthesis of theories and methodologies from different disciplines; and finally **transdisciplinarity** consists of the creation of a new disciplinary unit, as generated by the coherent junction of different disciplines.

- (d) **Humanities “in disguise”**, that is, those fields (currently belonging to other spheres, particularly social sciences), whose “spirit”, attitude and methodologies remain rooted in a humanistic vision of the world (e.g., soft power theories, future studies, etc.). An element of pride, admittedly, is hinted here. Generalizing a bit, the recent history of the humanities displayed a peculiar form of diaspora. On the one hand, some research areas remained anchored to the humanities, in terms of both identity and social-institutional perception, becoming the main “victims” of the crisis. On the other hand, other areas managed to “migrate” towards more prosperous shores (social sciences, mainly, but not only), often surviving the crisis, or even, in the luckiest cases, reinforcing their position within academia. The migration process was so strong, that many of these areas disappeared from the humanistic galaxy and reappeared in another.

The irritation, and perhaps the jealousy, of the former group towards the latter is very apparent through writings, conferences and the likes: the “victims” accuse the “migrants” of betraying their identity, losing integrity, and calling the same things with different, more appealing, names (Nelson-Gaonkar 1996: 28–29, describe for instance how the rise of the “trendy” cultural studies have angered at least the communities of anthropologists and literary scholars).

The suggestion, here, is to make sure that fields deriving from humanities, or humanistic in practice (whether or not willing to admit it) get involved in the numanistic discussion as, so to speak, “full members” of the community. To take but one example, as a semiotician I was always a bit disappointed to see that a discipline that is so clearly embedded in signification, codes and sign processes such as future studies had successfully managed to avoid any official connection with semiotics, with the tragic exception of a study program in “Semiotics and Future Studies” arranged by the George Fox Evangelical Seminary, and advertised for “leaders adept at seeing signs of Jesus’ work in the world—leaders who can proactively guide the church into the future of this era of uncertainty and change” (<http://www.georgefox.edu/seminary/programs/dmin/sfs/>). It was therefore a very pleasant surprise, on the occasion of the first International Congress of Numanities organized by the International Semiotics Institute in 2014, to receive the submission for a whole session in Future Studies directed by Osmo Kuusi (Aalto University, Helsinki) and Toni Ahlqvist (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland). Dialogues of this type, too, are possible.

- (e) **Meta-humanities**, that is, forms of investigations and reflections, in which the humanities (or any of their affiliated disciplines), monitor and critically assess their status, paradigms, scientific and social condition, impact, and so forth. It is necessary, perhaps even obvious, that a significant role in this forum is played by thorough discussions on the state of the art of the humanities and on the possible next moves. The whole Numanities project, for one, is primarily a meta-humanistic enterprise, at least in its foundations. However, this necessity should not be mistaken for an “emergency action” in times of crisis. Just as a more balanced diet is not only a temporary solution to some health problem, but should also remain as a lifestyle, a wise habit of self-analysis should accompany humanists not only in difficult times, but also—perhaps mostly—when these times are overcome. Once again, the need for more humility and less narcissism comes to mind, here.
- (f) Forms of research animated by **creative and innovative humanities-based methodological approaches** (for instance, the increasing trend of adopting artistic methods in natural sciences). In other words: forms of research where the humanities play the role of the “added value”. During Stanford University’s 2011 BiblioTech conference on “Human Experience”, Damon Horowitz, director of engineering at Google, famously delivered a talk entitled “Why you should quit your technology job and get a Ph.D. in the humanities”:

In our Internet-enabled era, it is easy for technologists to parlay creative power into societal power: We build systems that ease the transactions of everyday life, and earn social validation that we are “making the world a better place.” Within a few years I had achieved more worldly success than previous generations could have imagined. [...]

But there was a problem. Over time, it became increasingly hard to ignore the fact that the artificial intelligence systems I was building were not actually that intelligent. They could perform well on specific tasks; but they were unable to function when anything changed in their environment. I realized that, while I had set out in AI to build a better thinker, all I had really done was to create a bunch of clever toys—toys that were certainly not up to the task of being our intellectual surrogates. [...]

I wanted to better understand what it was about how we were defining intelligence that was leading us astray [...] and, slowly, I realized that the questions I was asking were philosophical questions—about the nature of thought, the structure of language, the grounds of meaning.

[...] Thus, about a decade ago, I quit my technology job to get a Ph.D. in philosophy. And that was one of the best decisions I ever made.

[...] As I learned about those things, I realized just how limited my technologist view of thought and language was. I learned how the quantifiable, individualistic, a historical—that is, computational—view I had of cognition failed to account for whole expanses of cognitive experience [...] Most striking, I learned that there were historical precedents for exactly the sort of logical oversimplifications that characterized my AI work. Indeed, there were even precedents for my motivation in embarking on such work in the first place. [...] In learning the limits of my technologist worldview, I didn’t just get a few handy ideas about how to build better AI systems. My studies opened up a new outlook on the world. I would unapologetically characterize it as a personal intellectual transformation: a renewed appreciation for the elements of life that are not scientifically understood or technologically engineered.

In other words: I became a humanist.

And having a more humanistic sensibility has made me a much better technologist than I was before. (Horowitz 2011)

While in point 6 of the manifesto I possibly showed a less optimistic side of the story, claiming that the humanities have to return to “add value” to society, in order to be “added values” (implying, thus, that they have mostly mislaid that skill), passionate endorsements like Horowitz’s talk, show hope and confidence for the immediate future, and—what is particularly significant—acknowledgement from the holders of “societal power”.

Another example on the same line, but in a totally different context comes from zoomusicology, a field I have been dealing with quite extensively in the past (see, for instance, Martinelli 2002 and 2009): it is the case of the Senegalese percussionist Arona N’Daye Rose, who enjoyed a certain popularity and gratitude among marine biologists for having decoded an apparently incomprehensible recording of cachalots (who notoriously communicate by means of short clicking sounds) for the benefit of the scholars André and Kamminga (2000). What seemed to be an absolute mess of clicks for the two scientists, was simply an inventive, yet orderly, rhythmic sequence for Rose, who, taking a musician’s stand, found it very easy to detect how many cachalots were vocalizing in the recording.

Finally, later on in this book, as we will discuss the development of Numanities within the International Semiotics Institute, I will also mention a couple of successful research projects implemented by one of the institute's researchers, Mindaugas Gapševičius, which are exactly centered around the difference that arts can make within natural sciences.

Making a difference and adding value are two tasks that the humanities can perform very competently, if they accept putting themselves at stake and embracing the changing world critically but without prejudice.

- (g) **Applied humanities.** This point is self-explanatory: we need more and more situations in which the humanities are able to go beyond the academic territory and put their research into effect in everyday life and matters. It is quite interesting that the most popular online source of information, Wikipedia, in a specific entry called "Outline of the Humanities", considers only three areas for "applied humanities":

Applied arts such as fashion design, graphic design, industrial design, interior design

Health humanities—application of humanities disciplines to discourse about, expression of, and/or the promotion of the dimensions of human health and well being.

Medical humanities—is an interdisciplinary field of medicine which includes the humanities and their application to medical education and practice.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_the_humanities)

Can this really be the end of the story? Well, to begin with, Wikipedia seems to have forgotten the most obvious forms of applied humanities: journalism, creative writing and anything related to cultural heritage and conservation (libraries, museums, exhibitions...). Those, along with the listed "applied arts", are the classics of the category, so to speak. But there is more. In recent years, several humanities programs with an applied orientation, particularly in philosophy and history, have been established in various institutions. Degrees in applied humanities can be pursued in many universities: Californian institutions seem to have a particular inclination for them (Claremont, Brandman, Davis...), but programs can be found everywhere in the world, from Carlow Institute of Technology, Ireland, to the University of Canberra, Australia. Plus: places like Georgia State University have programs in applied philosophy; Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh and the University of California at Santa Barbara offer degrees in applied history; Brown University, Rhode Island, has a program in public humanities, etc.

These programs are not only forming journalists or graphic designers: they are creating new professional figures that reflect the importance of engagement with the wider community at local, national and international level. They prepare students to become creators, protectors, and advocates of art and cultures with far-reaching impacts on more than one level. Applied historians, for instance, work in seeking

clues to contemporary problems in the records of earlier generations coping with similar problems. Such figures can enter governments, consulting firms or again academia. Applied humanists, with learning outcomes dedicated to modern technologies and communications, can work in digital media, digital marketing and the likes. In sum: there is a whole world, outside universities, where humanist professional profiles are useful and desirable (not to mention the acknowledgment of them as something that can “make a difference”, as we saw in the previous point, through the words of Damon Horowitz): it may only be my personal impression—so I may be very wrong here, but it seems to me that before the crisis humanists tended to consider extra-academic jobs as second-rate ones, while during the crisis they failed to see them as a possible solution to it. The area of “applied humanities”, to my mind, must be (1) ennobled a bit, particularly in its intellectual value (again, it is only my impression, but the feeling is that the main reason why humanists look down to these jobs is because they secretly think that those who do them, do them because they are not smart enough to be academics); and (2) better understood and analyzed, particularly in its recent developments that brought the creation of new professional figures.

Discussions of this kind, too, are welcome in the Numanities.

In the light of all this, keeping in mind the analysis of the humanities’ crisis, our 7-point manifesto of intents, and the attempt to place the Numanities’ project into concrete areas of inquiry, I would like to conclude this part with the definition of three pillars for Numanities:

1. The **Epistemology** of Numanities goes through a basic form of validation: making a difference, being an added value. Numanities promote forms of research where the humanities are not only precious in the economy of a whole project, but can add something unique that other fields are not capable of delivering.
2. The **Methodology** of Numanities is embedded into a true interaction with other fields, particularly the natural sciences and technologies. Depending on the case, humanities can embark into multi-, cross-, trans- or interdisciplinary enterprises (and they know the difference between them).
3. The **Impact** of Numanities is measured on their capacity to work for/from/through/in society. They cannot be an end in themselves. For this reason they have to be R.E.A.L.: reasonable, empirical, applicable and logical.

The time has come for us to prove how excellent, determined, sustainable, appropriate and concrete humanities are capable of being. We will need good ideas, which is fine, because humanities are about ideas; we will need to learn the new languages of modern society, which is still fine, because the study of languages is a field of humanities; and we will need to be rational, humble and practical, which is the only down-side, as these qualities *used to be* typical of the humanities, but we lost a bit contact with them.

Arts and Humanities in Progress

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