



Roberto Busa, S. J., and the Emergence of Humanities Computing: The Priest and the Punched Cards

Steven E. Jones

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It's the founding myth of humanities computing and digital humanities: In 1949, the Italian Jesuit scholar, Roberto Busa, S.J., persuaded IBM to offer technical and financial support for the mechanized creation of a massive lemmatized concordance to the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Using Busa's own papers, recently accessioned in Milan, as well as IBM archives and other sources, Jones illuminates this DH origin story. He examines relationships between the layers of hardware, software, human agents, culture, and history, and answers the question of how specific technologies afford and even constrain cultural practices, including in this case the academic research agendas of humanities computing and, later, digital humanities.

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