

# Dimensions of Digital History Collaborations

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As a subfield of the wider digital humanities, digital history is concerned with the incorporation of digital methods in historical research practices. Digital history thus aims to do historical research using methods, concepts, or tools from other disciplines, making it a form of *methodological interdisciplinarity* (Klein 2014). However, how this interdisciplinarity affects the practices of historians, on the methodological and the epistemological levels, remains underexplored. The PhD research presented in this paper aims to address this question by investigating the interdisciplinary interactions in which historians take part. In this paper, we will focus on digital history as collaboration with, among others, the computer science discipline.

In order to look into such interactions, this PhD research will employ Galison's concept of *trading zones*, described as "*an arena in which radically different activities could be locally, but not globally, coordinated*" (Galison 1996, p. 119). To model the different types of trading zones, we use three dimensions based on research by Berry (1997; 2005) and Collins et al. (2007):

1. Contact & Participation, i.e., how the two groups meet.
2. Cultural Maintenance (from homogeneous to heterogeneous), i.e., how the two groups define themselves and to what extent they aim to maintain their identity. On this scale, more homogeneous means the two groups become more alike to form a single group, while more heterogeneous means the two groups remain two distinct groups.
3. Coercion (from collaborative to coercive), i.e., what the power relations in the trading zone are. On this scale, more collaborative means the two groups are both acting out of free will, while more coercive means one group is imposing practices upon the other.

The concept of trading zones has been used before to describe the wider digital humanities field. (McCarty 2005) argues that humanities computing should rather be seen as a third space, neither belonging to one group nor the other, rendering it no longer a trading zone. However, in the terminology of Collins et al. (2007), this would constitute a collaborative-homogeneous trading zone, termed an *inter-language*. Svensson (2011; 2012a; 2012b) suggests digital humanities is a collaborative-heterogeneous, termed *fractioned*, trading zone; a meeting place of two groups. Klein (2014) also describes digital humanities as a fractioned trading zone, and, like Svensson, emphasises that this may lead to a shared language, or jargon, between the different communities. Hunter (2014), without employing the concept of trading zones, describes digital humanities as a bridge or translation between two cultures, which we can describe as a collaborative-heterogeneous trading zone, termed *interactional expertise*. Rieder and Röhle (2012) use the concept to argue however that not the language

should be central, but the interactions on the level of methodology, where not the terminology but the method itself is negotiated. In contrast to these authors, Mounier (2015) contends that there is a coercive political dimension underlying the field, which in the terminology of Collins et al. would suggest that digital humanities constitutes a coercive-heterogeneous, termed *enforced*, trading zone. This is not to say that this is how digital humanities will always be, but Mounier argues this should be better understood before we can move further and perhaps diffuse new digital methods into the wider humanities.

However, what is striking about these discussions of digital humanities as trading zones is that very little research into the specific *local* practices was done, with the exception of Hunter (2014) who does not actually employ the concept of trading zones. Instead, Digital humanities is discussed as a generalizable global phenomenon, in contrast with the original use of the concept by Galison as described above.

This PhD research investigates local manifestations of trading zones in digital history using the three dimensions described above. The analysis is based on interviews with and observations of practitioners of digital history, i.e., historians, computer scientists, and other collaborators, focusing on the diverse aspects of interdisciplinary collaboration, such as incentives for collaboration, organization of discussions, and epistemological positions.

This paper will present preliminary findings of interviews held for this PhD research. We will present a preliminary taxonomy of collaborations on the Contact & Participation dimension, and describe multiple digital history interactions on the Cultural Maintenance and Coercion dimensions. With these results, we aim to gain a better understanding of how digital history works as an interdisciplinary interaction, and how this impacts the practices of the involved groups and individuals.

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