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Boundary Land: Diversity as a defining feature of the Digital Humanities

It is normally the case that the objects of scientific inquiry inhabit multiple social worlds, since all science requires intersectional work... The management of this diversity cannot be achieved via a simple pluralism or a laissez-faire solution. The fact that the objects originate in , and continue to inhabit, different worlds reflects the fundamental tension of science: how can findings which incorporate radically different meanings become coherent? (Star and Griesemer, 1989:392)

In the Sociology of Science, objects of scientific enquiry that are common to multiple disciplines or communities are known as “boundary objects” (Star and Griesemer, 1989). As Borgman argues, “these are objects that can facilitate communication, but that also highlight differences between groups” (Borgman, 2007: 153). They have “different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation” (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Handled poorly, they promote “boundary work” - the effort to institutionalize difference between fields (Gieryn, 1983; Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 180); handled well, they are “important interfaces enabling communication across communities” (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 180).

The theme of this session is the Digital Humanities as a “Boundary Land” - i.e. a locus in which such objects are common. As O'Donnell argues in his paper, this aspect is one of the defining features of contemporary Digital Humanities and an important cause of its recent rapid growth. As the field grows, DH workshops, panels, and journals see increasing work by practitioners trained in more and more traditionally distinct disciplinary traditions: textual scholars, literary critics, historians, New Media specialists, as well as theologians, computer scientists, archaeologists, Cultural Heritage specialists... and geographers, physicists, biologists, and medical professionals.

It is the contention of the speakers of this panel that interpersonal diversity (i.e. diversity along lines such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, economic region, etc.) is as an important element of this aspect of DH. The Digital Humanities is not only a place where different disciplines work together (and at times at odds to each other): it is also a place where different people work together and at odds in developing our field. In other words, diversity initiatives in the Digital Humanities are important not only because they let more people into our field, they are important because they change the nature of our field as its practice widens.

The papers in this session each approach the issue from a different perspective. In the first paper, O'Donnell looks at the theoretical background to this understanding of diversity as a component of DH as a boundary discipline, grounding his approach in early work on interdisciplinarity and boundary work. In the second paper, Murray Ray and Bordalejo discuss the ways in which efforts to promote diversity within DH can paradoxically undermine its theoretical importance to the field, before turning to different examples of diversity's intellectual importance. In the third paper, del Rio and González-Blanco examine the institutional and social pressures that promote and hinder dialogue among researchers in developing and developed countries and across linguistic and other boundaries before proposing new approaches in Digital Humanities that go beyond linguistic diversity focusing on theories such as Sociology of Culture and Education and other reformulations.

1. All along the Watchtower: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the importance technical, disciplinary, and interpersonal diversity within the Digital Humanities

Daniel Paul O'Donnell (University of Lethbridge)

1.1. The increasing paradisciplinarity of Digital Humanities

Perhaps the defining feature of the Digital Humanities as a discipline is its growth (Terras, 2012). Despite some pushback and counter pushback about the precise valence of the field as a discipline (for some more famous recent examples of this growing genre, see Koh, 2015; Fish, 2012; Marche, 2013; Chun, 2013; Grusin, 2013; Jagoda, 2013; a selection of responses to these specific pieces include, among many others, Risam, 2015; Gil, 2015; Liberman, 2012; O'Donnell, 2012; Pannapacker, 2013), digitally inflected work on Humanities problems and material continues to grow.

As its popularity has grown—and, more importantly, as the potential of networked computation as applied to cultural material and questions has become more broadly apparent - it has begun to incorporate practitioners trained in more and more traditionally distinct disciplinary traditions: textual scholars, literary critics, historians, New Media specialists, as well as theologians, computer scientists, archaeologists, Cultural Heritage specialists... and geographers, physicists, biologists, and medical professionals (see Deegan and McCarty 2012 for a detailed discussion of cross disciplinary collaboration in DH).

This growth is interesting for a variety of reasons: as a demonstration of the continuing relevance of the humanities (Davidson, 2011), as a route to new approaches to traditional disciplines (e.g. Ramsay, 2011; Moretti, 2005), and as a method of improving our ability to answer old questions (e.g. Terras, 2006). It also has been interesting for the way it fed back into computer science and other non-humanities domains, for example, through the development of XML and Unicode (O'Donnell 2010).

Above all, however, this growth is interesting because it reflects the increasingly paradisciplinary nature of the domain and its methods. "Humanities Computing", the designation most commonly used before Blackwell's marketing team proposed "Digital Humanities" as an alternative in 2005 (Kirschenbaum, 2010), was far more traditional in approach: beginning with the original work of Roberto Busa in the 1940s, computation in this older form was used to work with relatively traditional objects and questions within relatively traditional humanities domains. As a glance at the tables of contents of journals from this period demonstrates, literary scholars and historians tended to use their computation to do literary and historical work: build concordances and indices, develop statistics, and, later, capture text; Gallery, Archive, Library, and Museum (GLAM) professionals, for their part, computed metadata and built catalogues; Corpus linguists built corpora; and so on. DH, on the other hand, especially in the course of the last decade, has been marked—perhaps defined (O'Donnell, 2012) - by its inter - and cross - disciplinarity: geographers study British Romantic poets' fascination with the Lake District (Cooper et

al., 2015); museum curators decipher mathematical texts (Netz and Noel, 2008); literary scholars edit maps, compile archives of things, or analyse Cultural Heritage installations (Foy, 2003; Nelson, 2014; O'Donnell et al., 2012; Hobma, 2014).

1.2. Boundary objects and border lines in the sociology of science

In the Sociology of Science, such cross-disciplinary outputs are known as “boundary objects” (Star and Griesemer, 1989). As Borgman argues, “these are objects that can facilitate communication, but that also highlight differences between groups” (Borgman, 2007:153). They have “different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation” (Star and Griesemer, 1989:393). Handled poorly, they promote “boundary work”—the effort to institutionalize difference between fields (Gieryn, 1983; Lamont and Molnár, 2002:180); handled well, they are “important interfaces enabling communication across communities” (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 180).

1.3. The Digital Humanities as Boundaryland

As the Digital Humanities has matured technologically, the question of these Boundary Objects has become an increasingly important, if largely unrecognised, issue among practitioners, users, and critics of DH (Borgman, 2007, chap. 7). As the example of Fish and Liberman (a literary scholar and a computational linguist discussing “distance reading” and “algorithmic criticism”) suggests, unacknowledged disciplinary differences about how such objects are understood can result in users talking past each other (see the debate between Fish 2012; Liberman 2012). And indeed a surprisingly large number of other debates in the field can be understood as involving such boundary constructs: complaints that the Digital Humanities are “undertheorised”, for example; the “hack vs. yack” debate (i.e. about the relative importance of programming vs. cultural aspects of DH; see Nowvskie, 2014) or even “centre and the periphery” (about the definition of DH through western—or sometimes simply Anglo-American—norms; see Galina, 2013; Fiormonte, 2012).

The rest of this paper looks at the place of globalisation and diversity in light of this understanding of DH as a “boundaryland” - a place in which shared research objects or goals take on different meanings depending on the background of the participant. As the paper will show, interpersonal diversity is in this regard as important to the growth of our field as disciplinary diversity. Research objects, questions, and more importantly, solutions, look very different when lack of funds or inadequate technology prevents the proper preservation of your cultural patrimony and makes participation in collaborations next-to-impossible (see Babalola, 2013). Drawing on the author’s experience in establishing and overseeing the first few years of the Special Interest Group, Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, this paper demonstrates the extent to which this openness to difference is in fact an essential feature of both interdisciplinarity and the future growth and development of the Digital Humanities as a discipline that transcends the domains it increasingly incorporates.

1.4. Conclusion

Although the concept of the “Boundary Object” is now most commonly discussed in terms of disciplinary difference, the original work on the concept involved the boundary between “Science and Nonscience” or the management of differences in the way in which professional and amateur ornithologists understood the collection of specimens for a museum (Gieryn, 1983). By failing to understand the extent to which divisions within the boundaries that coincide with broader cultural, historical, economic, or regional differences amplify existing impediments to the incorporation of the full diversity of our community’s experience (Fiormonte, 2012; Galina, 2013; Wernimont, 2013). As Star and Griesemer note:

When participants in the intersecting worlds create representations together, their different commitments and perceptions are resolved into representations—in the sense that a fuzzy image is resolved by a microscope. This resolution does not mean consensus. Rather, representations, or inscriptions, contain at every stage the traces of multiple viewpoints, translations and incomplete battles... By reaching agreements about methods, different participating worlds establish protocols which go beyond mean trading across unjoined world boundaries. They begin to devise a common coin which makes possible new kinds of joint endeavour (1989, 413).

2. If You Think You Know the Answer, You Don't Understand the Question

Bárbara Bordalejo and Padmini Ray Murray

Digital Humanities appears to be an open and welcoming field. Indeed, conversations about diversity have been increasingly visible in the digital humanities community. It has been said that the discipline boasts "...a culture that values collaboration, openness, nonhierarchical relations, and agility" and so "might be an instrument for real resistance or reform (Kirschembaum, 59). Notably, this statement by Kirschembaum is also supported by Burdick et al., who state that "...however heterogeneous, the Digital Humanities is unified by its emphasis on making, connecting, interpreting, and collaborating" (24).

These emphases on unity are necessary and vital to ensure that the ideal of a "global" DH establishes itself as a reality in the future. But the widespread belief that these values are at the core of Digital Humanities as a discipline, and that just by virtue of such values it is open and welcoming to all, may prevent us from seeing that the discipline can also fail to meet these standards. And when we discuss the importance of diversity, we need to understand what it is we are talking about: do we mean simply the inclusion of an ever broader collection of participants? Or do we mean that diversity is in some way a crucial intellectual aspect of what we do?

The emphasis on representation and inclusivity has been a main focus of what we might describe as the initial stages in the opening of the Digital Humanities. From the early emphasis on gender balance in the selection of keynote speakers at the ALC/ALLC conference through the early years of DH, to the more recent work of formal committees within ADHO, such as the Special Interest Group Global Outlook :: Digital Humanities (GO::DH) and the the Multilingual/Multicultural Committee, the focus of work thus far has been primarily on discovering and understanding the obstacles that prevent full access to our community and developing strategies to address those obstacles.

There are two dangers to this approach, how ever well meaning and necessary it is.

The first is, of course, that "diversity" is a boundary-less category. By concentrating on one category, or even a few categories, we, almost inevitably end up ignoring others. We focus on gender, but ignore race; or emphasise language, but ignore social class, professional status, or economic/regional disparity.

Thus, when the editorial board of (<http://journal.frontiersin.org/journal/digital-humanities#editorial-board>) *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* was announced, it became instantly notorious because all the editors were male. What was less debated was the fact that they were, with one exception, white. Or that they all came from the usually dominant (primarily High Income) countries. Likewise, when Scott Weingart started to write about the acceptance rate of women as first author of papers to the DH conference, it had to do (at least in part) with the relative ease of identifying female and male authors.

In reality, as the example of *Frontiers* shows, it can be much more difficult to assess other layers of diversity which are not apparent and, therefore, cannot be easily quantified. Even if we imagine that it might be relatively simple to identify native speakers of English, we would remain ignorant of people whose day to day work is

carried out in a different language from their native one. Moreover, degrees of bilingualism vary greatly from country to country and culture to culture in such way that for scholars who have English as their second language, their proficiency and ease within it, might be significantly different.

The second danger to this approach is that it trivialises the importance of the category it intends to support. If diversity involves no more than simply ensuring that a wider range of people are present at the table, then questions about the relationship of diversity to quality become, if not entirely reasonable, at least not completely beyond understanding. Perhaps it is possible to become too welcoming--or at the very least to believe that we are somehow watering down the quality of our work by allowing too many participants in simply because they belong to the right demographic.

This paper is about both aspects of the place of diversity within the Digital Humanities.

In the first section, Padmini Ray Murray examines how non-Western cultural concepts and intellectual categories might redefine the digital humanities in terms of methodological frameworks. It is particularly significant that the concept and understanding of what DH is varies in accordance to the cultural context in which it is presented. In other words: although there might be a significant conceptual overlap, one researcher's digital humanities is rarely equal to the one of another. Ray Murray's investigations look at how infrastructural and structural ramifications of working in languages other than English; how notions of the archive can be culturally fluid and how critical making as an intervention is altered by local conditions of production and economics in order to demonstrate that the digital humanities must necessarily be informed by these factors in order to be truly diverse.

In the second section, Bárbara Bordalejo looks at intersectionality and the Digital Humanities. She investigates the combination of factors that might hinder the ability of individual researchers to make themselves more widely known within the DH community. As she shows, background, race, culture, gender, language and ability are all factors whose impact we are just beginning to understand. As she argues, however, this diversity does not need to be a problem. On the contrary, it could be (and it should be) taken advantage of in such way that it challenges and enhances both our research and our community.

A final goal of both parts of this paper is to test the words of Domenico Fioromonte (<http://listserv.uleth.ca/pipermail/globaloutlookdh-l/2013-May/000329.html>) about the importance of social capital in the Digital Humanities: "...it's not enough to have good ideas, work in the Northern [h]emisphere and write them in English: you need good sponsors and authoritative venues." Although it is true that this is part of the problem, nothing should prevent current structures to become part of the solution. Opening authoritative venues can only bring enrichment and new understanding to the DH community.

3. Spanish Digital Humanities: the construction of a scientific field

Gimena del Rio Riande (CONICET) and Elena González-Blanco García (LINHD, UNED)

As Pierre Bourdieu (1975, 19) clearly stated forty years ago: "the scientific field is the locus of a competitive struggle, in which the specific issue at stake is the monopoly of scientific authority, defined inseparably as technical capacity and social power." Universities are strategic spaces for the construction of scientific competences and practices in terms of doxa and habitus (Bourdieu, 1979). The agents that are part of these academic spaces acquire there a socially recognised capacity to speak and act in an authorized and authoritative way in scientific matters. This way, these agents can define and legitimate the definitions they propose for their subjects of study. University education is also a vital experience of utmost importance: university socialization can lead to a deep identity redefinition, with the incorporation of new ways of thinking, communicating and acting. Consequently, altogether with the recognized capacity to legitimate, universities provide the social framework to interpret academic disciplines and communicate specific shared knowledge. (Bernstein, 1990:31), makes it clear when he highlights the distribution of power and principles of control that produce different communication principles unevenly distributed. In his theory, different contexts produce different codes that act selectively on the meanings and realizations.

Undoubtedly, Digital Humanities are nowadays part of the North American and European scientific field. A big offer of postgraduate courses, summer schools, Digital Humanities centers and labs, and scientific journals and websites legitimate the field and its discourse. In this sense, *Defining Digital Humanities. A reader* (2013), edited

by Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan and Edward Vanhoutte, can be seen as a text that comes to serve as the last legitimated definition for Digital Humanities. The volume appeared almost ten years after *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (2004), edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth, and aims to collect the authoritative voices in the field. The book focuses just on voices that have defined the Digital Humanities making use of English as lingua franca and it only considers as authoritative voices a very homogenic group that legitimates the field from universities with a shared Anglo-American perspective and a set of common discourses and practices.

This landscape is very different for the Spanish speaking community. On the one side, European Spanish universities have defined Digital Humanities paying little or no attention to Latin America (González-Blanco, 2013; Spence and González-Blanco, 2014; Rojas Castro, 2013); on the other side, very few definitions have been provided in this side of the world (Galina, 2014; Rio Riande, 2014a, 2014b) or there is a preference for working on a non-defined scientific field that could lead to more open and less philological humanities, more interested in the Social Sciences or Digital Media (Piscitelli 2014). Although there may be many external social, cultural and economic issues that divide the Spanish-speaking Digital Humanities field, this work means to unveil the symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) behind these facts and focus on the characteristics of the institutional spaces in which legitimated discourses and socialization occur as a set of historical and social conditions that explain their particular constitution and nature in Spain and some countries that have started regarding Digital Humanities as a possible (non actual) academic discipline. Knowledge and practices as expressed in the university curricula, but also the set of norms, values and social representations that make each space, can not be fully understood without taking into account the very specific historical, intellectual and institutional factors that have operated and operate in its constitution and legitimate in different ways their discourses.

Regarding the aforementioned, some questions arise: are there possibilities of dialogue in Digital Humanities between developed countries and others with unequal access to technology despite using the same language? Who are the agents that can be part of this dialogue? How do they become part of the scientific field? How much of that symbolic violence comes across in this dialogue? How do social, cultural and historical factors shape the knowledge built at university? The work aims to outline some possible answers to these questions at the time it claims for new approaches in Digital Humanities that go beyond linguistic diversity focusing on theories such as Sociology of Culture and Education and other reformulations.

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