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▼ 8 [“25. The Differences between Digital Humanities and Digital History | Stephen Robertson” in “Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016” on Manifold](#)

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Stephen Robertson's article, "The Differences between Digital Humanities and Digital History," focused on exactly what the title specifies; the important differences between digital humanities and the specificity of the digital in digital history. This article really does an amazing job discussing the historiography in the creation of the digital humanities field, as well as the ways in which digital humanities has been utilized within the history discipline. It was necessary for Robertson to dig into this historiography within his analysis because his argument is built out of this historiography, calling for a recognition in the necessity of building more disciplinary terms and explanations into historian's engagement with digital humanities to help our discipline

understand digital engagements and the importance of their capabilities in pushing our research forward.

The organization of Robertson's article is centred around this argument. Robertson begins with laying out the historiography around digital humanities, historian's use of digital capabilities and tools, and the general attitude of the history discipline in digital tools for history analysis/research. He then grounds his argument as his thesis (pretty obvious to put your argument into the thesis, right?), discussing that there needs to be more emphasis on specific methods and questions of our discipline in our work of digital humanities in order to promote larger understandings and accessibility of these tools within our discipline. Robertson then discusses the popular methods of historical engagement with digital humanities, like mapping, web searching, and text analysis. These conversations used digital history projects and research as the evidence for these trends, and also discussions how these projects demonstrate the digital-history trends, as well as the limitations in them because of the necessity of further disciplinary conversations around digital humanities.

At first, I understood the argument being made by Robertson, but was a little skeptical in what it would mean to focus more disciplinary in a subject matter that is essential **because** of its interdisciplinary leanings. But, Robertson did a really great job providing background and examples of projects, and what possibilities could exist for digital history if we cultivate more conversations and comprehension around the themes and questions that can be furthered in our research with the use of these digital capabilities. It was a very fun read!

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In the case of archival collections, search can remove information from the context of the institution that structured the collection; it can, in Tim Hitchcock's words, de-center institutions in favor of individuals ("Digital Searching"). But search is also a limited method. Search

struggles to deal with what lies outside a set of results. In returning only the terms one enters, a search filters out any alternative hypotheses. For historians, this poses particular challenges, as the language and ways of organizing knowledge in the past often differ significantly from contemporary terms and patterns of thought.

This is super interesting, thinking about the way that search aids in helping access sources from the ways that they were archived in institutions, but is also limiting because search only brings you what you searched. Are there methods in bypassing these limitations but also still find sources in easier methods than their archival organization?

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Historians have also used web maps that display historical data as part of their analysis of those sources. The interactive, iterative features of digital maps make them research tools, a means of discovering as well as displaying knowledge. Not only are mapped sources placed in their geographic contexts, but selections of those sources can be mapped, different layers of sources can be juxtaposed, and the scale can be zoomed from the level of individual buildings out to neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Viewing these maps can reveal spatial patterns not evident from reading the texts, relationships that facilitate comparisons and prompt questions. The answers to those questions are not on the maps, but in the sources from which they are derived

This is really interesting to think about in terms of tracing records and the spatial dimension of the creation and dissemination of records/historical material.

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your audience is those for who you design a project, not those who can find it (see chapter 32, “Public, First”)

EXACTLY. Sorry, this is not really an annotation, but more of highlighting-this-to-remember-this-for-later.

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Like electronic editions and other TEI projects, digitized archives such as Valley of the Shadow, the project that Thomas helped lead, or my own Digital Harlem, for that matter, were designed to meet the needs and interests of the scholars who created them.⁸ As David Parry notes, placing them online made them publicly available, but did not expand the scope of their audience (“Be Online or Be Irrelevant”). They remained accessible, relevant, and useful primarily to those scholars and their colleagues—and to the incidental audiences of genealogists, who search historical databases for individuals, and readers seeking copies of literary texts.⁹ As Sheila Brennan reminds us in her contribution to this collection, your audience is those for who you design a project, not those who can find it (see chapter 32, “Public, First”).

This is supremely interesting to me in thinking about my own work, and potentially what I might create as a final project. Despite the fact that digital archives make documents and materials accessible, they are usually designed in such a way that only truly makes this information accessible to other scholars and those in academia. There is definitely a difference in making something digitally accessible vs. creating a digital source that also extends its accessibility outside of the source and public in which it was created.

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Moving forward, we would be better served by reimagining digital humanities not as single all-encompassing tent but as a house with many rooms, different spaces for disciplines that are not silos but entry points and conduits to central spaces where those from different disciplines working with particular tools and media can gather

There is part of me that sees the value in thinking like this, still carrying a sense of DH being an umbrella, but having different spaces in which it is engaged in, but I wonder what might be lost if we emphasize these specialized spaces? What DH engagements or processes might we not be aware of in Digital History if we focus on internal development? Like I said, I still agree with the notion, but it makes me curious..

[digital humanities vs. digital](#)
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To be clear, disciplinary difference in digital humanities is not a binary, in which approaches are the preserve of particular disciplines and entirely absent from others. Rather, difference is a spectrum of emphasis, with varying degrees of interest in methods, tools, and values. Looking for projects that do not fit the differences I identify

is not the test of the argument; rather, the key is establishing which projects are exceptions and which are exemplars.

This completely answered my question I posed in my last annotation!

[digital humanities vs. digital history](#)

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The task of the digital humanities, as a trans-curricular practice, is to bring these practitioners into communication with each other, and to cultivate a discourse that captures the shared praxis of bringing technologies of representation, computation, and communication to bear on the work of interpretation that defines the humanities.

Damn, that is the best description of digital humanities that I have ever seen! And it completely makes sense: digital humanities is broad because it is more about the application of digital capacities to the academic discipline and research you are partaking, necessitating collaboration across disciplines.