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Digital Humanities and the Free Software and Open Source Movements

Not much has changed in the past hundred years in the way traditional scholarly history is researched and written. Digital Humanities offer historians and other humanities scholars an improved ability to find, explore, and present sources and research, and develop collaboration among fellow scholars, thereby creating more complete scholarship. Not only can technology be used to create humanities scholarship, but the very way that technology itself is created and distributed can be emulated by the humanities research process. Two philosophies of software development are the free-software and open-source movements, wherein the underlying code of applications is freely accessible without cost or restriction. Our modern lifestyle exists because of free-software and open-source ideals and the software built within that framework. The humanities can, and should, learn from this community ethos. One open-source mantra states that the more people look at the code the quicker problems will be recognized and fixed. History, for example, is the effect of many people's choices; it's absurd to think that one person can accurately interpret and analyze the past by oneself.

Digital Humanities present German scholars an opportunity to create research from multiple authors and disciplines in order to provide more accurate and available knowledge. Following Digital Humanities and free-software and open-source principles, my dissertation, *Nazi Tunnels: Underground Factory Dispersal Projects and Forced Labor Camps at Porta-Westfalica*, uses crowdsourcing software to let students transcribe and translate primary sources,

and a website and online archive present my writing and sources for review and critique, and make the sources available to anyone.

But what is the issue in the first place? The humanities are in trouble. Enrollment is down; and funding is down. All this apparently for the past 38 years, as one anecdotal excerpt from a 1978 article in *College English* surmises.

“Recently several of my teaching colleagues and I were lamenting the economic plight of the humanities. We rehearsed all the conventional gripes, agreeing among ourselves that a society that ignores or condescends to the humanities is not one deserving of respect. This negative proposition satisfied at least partially our own sense of keen intelligence and high worthiness. We attacked, in turn, the robust funding of the sciences, while avoiding, of course, any suggestion that we were Luddites. Technology is not necessarily evil, we gravely and wisely concurred, but in the hands of inhumane men and women it usually becomes an instrument for evil. Vietnam was our easy example; industrial pollution our trump card.

“Three cheers, in other words, for the study of history, ethics, Greek (or at least two semesters of conversational German), and all the ennobling arts. We turned Ruskin on his tender head by reasoning that a well-formed sculpture produces a well-formed mind. And one of us had something pontifical to say about quality being more important than quantity. We cleverly attacked the consumer society and its faulty rationale, even though we had just come from a department meeting in which we all voted for better advertising of our humanities courses.”¹

There exists a great difference between the hard sciences and the humanities. Once the bedrock of an enlightened education, the humanities have taken a back seat to the fast paced and glamorous STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math). In what could be classified as the technical revolution in the past century, hard sciences have proven a more lucrative educational endeavor. Is technology—electronics, scientific advancements, computers, etc.—the reason for the hard sciences rise to its high esteemed and highly funded position in higher education? Can technology be the answer for the plight of the humanities?

¹ Postlewait, Thomas, ‘Saving the Humanities-Or, a Call for Triple Speak’, *College English*, 40 (1978), 390–96.

As is common with new technology, there exists some apprehension in the humanities about using and accepting new media, digital tools, and computer aid. One key factor in overcoming this apprehension is to remember that computers are only tools to do the bidding of what the human mind can conceive. True they can calculate, render and sort much, much quicker than the average human brain, but that should only be cause for rejoice in that our minds are now free to contemplate the more lofty, theoretical aspects of our studies (after, of course, we figure out how to work the #@%&! thing). And therein, actually, lies the heart of the issue. One must make a cost benefit analysis of the technology in order to ascertain if the time and effort it takes to learn the new technology will be a net benefit, or just lost time.

As professions within a society learn to deal with new technologies and new media as they evolve one question that always seems to arise when new technologies are presented is; how will this new media improve the productivity and quality of work and provide new understanding to the profession? For example, one might ask how new media has, and can, change the way historians do history. Do computers change the way historians understand history, or do they just make it easier to type, disseminate, and collaborate research—things historians already do? What new methods and new understandings have come about because of the computer and the Internet?

The invention and use of the telescope changed how we as humans look at the sky. Similarly, the microscope changed how humans understand the body and physical world around us. Less obvious, is how technology and new media affect fields in the humanities. What do computers and digitization provide to historical research? Does it enhance or provide a different experience, or way to research that wasn't there before? How can new technology expand our understanding of history, literature, language, religion, philosophy, etc.?

Some historians, such as David Staley, argue that history can and should be told through other mediums besides linear sequential text. Just as the vibrations of sound are altered depending on what medium they travel through (air, water, wood, etc.), the result of putting history through different media would produce a different way of understanding that history.² Most historians, insists Staley, use computers "to laterally transfer textual culture from paper to screen." This, he says, is like using a car only to park. Computers are often simply used as expensive typewriters, and the web as fancy paper. In order to better utilize new technologies and new mediums in historical research, they should change the way we think of history by providing a different way to look at the past.

Technologies like the Internet and the World Wide Web provide another layer to historical research. Before computers and the Internet, a historian wrote an article or book, which was then usually only encountered by a small number of other scholars and students. In a general sense, the historian's work was not widely disseminated, and depending on the topic, not widely read. Those who did read the work then perhaps commented on the author's use of resources, methodology and such in the form of another article or book. "Public" scholarly discourse took a long time, often as long as it takes to publish in journals and books. All the while the author held the resources and dictated the analysis. With the Internet, the World Wide Web and software applications, the discussions can occur much more quickly and relevantly, and resources and information have the opportunity to move into the hands of the user. With new technologies historians can present their views, but they can much more easily present the archive, the primary sources, and the tools they used to arrive at their arguments. Technology presents a new

² David J Staley, *Computers, Visualization, and History: How New Technology Will Transform Our Understanding of the Past*, History, humanities, and new technology (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 21.

layer of interactivity that was not available before, or at least that was not available to as large an audience. One prime example is found in “The Valley of the Shadow” research project and website created by the Virginia Center for Digital History at the University of Virginia. The project was initially designed to be a traditional book, but it was soon discovered that the narrative of the history of two towns could best be told through the medium of a website. With help from IBM, Edward Ayers and others at the VCDH were able to create a project they described as “a research library in a box, enabling students at places without a large archive to do the same kind of research as a professional historian.”³ “The Valley of the Shadow” website shows how technology opens up a new layer of interaction to historical data. As the project evolved, resources were made available on the Web, and students, historians, and anybody with Internet access was able to, and continues to be able to, utilize and analyze the archives contained on the site.

Architects, for example, use computers not only to show pictures of their buildings as a two-dimensional blue print, but to design and create three-dimensions and multiple levels of abstraction for understanding and developing a building.⁴ Architects use the technology of the computer to enhance and understand their plans in new and different ways. Contemporary historical scholarship, in linear sequential text, is like an architect only working in paper and pencil. An architect uses many mediums and many technologies to enhance his understanding and increase the value of his work. Likewise, humanities work can benefit from additional mediums rather than relying on the written word.

³ Virginia Center for Digital History University of Virginia, “The Valley of the Shadow: The Story Behind the Valley Project,” <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/usingvalley/valleystory.html>.

⁴ Staley, *Computers, Visualization, and History*, 4.

Images or diagrams can represent data, history, and information in different and sometimes better ways than just words. Better than just a solitary diagram or plain text, is the combination of mediums, the one explaining and expounding the other.⁵ There is no analysis when only a diagram is presented, and analysis is what the historian uses many, many words for. Images and diagrams enhance the analysis and provide information in much quicker and in more succinct ways.⁶ The old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words is applicable to historical research. "Where writing emphasizes sequence, unidimensionality, and linear chains," argues Staley, "visualization enables simultaneity, structure, and association."⁷ In viewing a diagram or image, the observer is able to comprehend multiple scenarios, time frames, and associations. With text, each explanation must be taken in one section at a time. Visuals, as it were, allow the observer to process multiple paragraphs in one glance.

With modern applications, most notably Google Earth, practically anybody can virtually fly around the globe and look at nearly any spot on earth to the level of cars on the street. Only in the past 40 years or so was all but a small fraction of the world viewable as an aerial map, and until more recently has that information been available to the general public. Online maps and desktop applications can now provide stunning detail of the whole globe to anyone with access to a computer. Such technology has greatly changed the field of geography and cartography, not to mention making it easier for anyone to get from place to place. Can the humanities be in a similar position of change? Have historians only been looking at bits and pieces of the past? Can the programs and applications available now help historians virtually fly over and look at any point in the past in greater detail?

⁵ Staley, *Computers, Visualization, and History*, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

So what is “Digital Humanities”? Digital Humanities seems to be the response to our professions self-reflective use of new technologies and media. Since 2009, a group of these Digital Humanists have attempted to write about what they do on one specific day of the year, in an attempt to accumulate a broad array of activities that depict what this emerging field looks like. Called the “Day of DH”, each participant is encouraged to add a blog post or short write up of what they did that day and include their definition of what it means to do “digital humanities” research.

Day of DH results for 2009-2014⁸

2009: 21 definitions

2010: 75 definitions

2011: 177 definitions

2012: 248 definitions

2013: 278 definitions

2014: 522 definitions

⁸ 2009-2011:

http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/taporwiki/index.php/How_do_you_define_Humanities_Computing/_/Digital_Humanities%3F

2012: <http://dayofdh2012.artsrn.ualberta.ca/dh/>

2013: <http://dayofdh2013.matrix.msu.edu/>

Definitions range from:

“Application of computer-based methods for the Humanities. Though, on some occasions, I prefer "Humanities Computing" to make clearer that these applications often have to be developed and that a lot of basic research is required. What I do not like about the term "DH" is that it implies that there is digital humanities as opposed to non-digital humanities. But there is not. In the future, computer-based methods will be naturally used by any scholar. It is not like experimental vs. theoretical physics.” - Malte Rehbein, University of Wuerzburg, Germany

to:

“Who the hell knows....I certainly don't” - Ethan Watrall, Michigan State University

Just looking in JSTOR alone, (August 2014) there are 426 results for “Digital Humanities.” The earliest articles appear in 1984, with the bulk of the articles coming after 2000 (395 of the 426).

"digital humanities" Search

[Start Over](#)

Showing 1–10 of 426

Sort: [Relevance](#) [Newest](#) [Oldest](#) 10 25 50 100

Your Selection clear

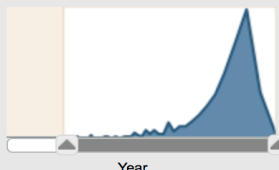
Year of Publication
 1963 - 2014

ACCESS i

All Content
 Only Content I Can Access

YEAR OF PUBLICATION

Items



Year

426 Items

From 1963 To 2014 Clear Apply

CONTENT TYPE i

Comments on Visual Fine Art Produced by Digital Computers Journal
 Frank J. Malina
Leonardo, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer, 1971), pp. 263-265 ▶▶

An Introduction to the SSSP Digital Synthesizer Journal
 William Buxton, E. A. Fogels, Guy Fedorkow, Lawrence Sasaki, K. C. Smith
Computer Music Journal, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec., 1978), pp. 28-38 ▶▶

Saving the Humanities-Or, a Call for Triple Speak Journal
 Thomas Postlewait
College English, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1978), pp. 390-396 ▶▶

Teaching Computer Literacy to Humanities and Social Science Students Journal
 Robert S. Tannenbaum, B. J. Rahn
Academe, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Sep. - Oct., 1984), pp. 19-23 ▶▶

Computer Applications in the Humanities Journal
 Joseph Raben
Science, New Series, Vol. 228, No. 4698 (Apr. 26, 1985), pp. 434-438 ▶▶

Toward Digital Man? Journal
 Victor Scardigli, Caryn Bensmida
Design Issues, Vol. 4, No. 1/2, Designing the Immaterial Society (1988), pp. 152-167 ▶▶

An Interdisciplinary Bibliography for Computers and the Journal

When determining which course of action is best for dealing with new information, technology and media, it is often helpful to look to other societies or organizations that have dealt with similar circumstances. The social sciences and hard sciences of academia have often been posited as examples of how the humanities should proceed. I suggest we go a step further and apply the characteristics used in the organization of the tool itself that each of these fields attempt to use. In essence, digital humanities research tries to leverage the computer as a tool for doing, understanding, and presenting research. Instead of looking at how other groups have used these tools, I propose we look at how the tools themselves were created, and suggest that some of the organizations used in creating these tools provide one way of moving the humanities into the digital age.

Looking at some ways in which computer software was created and the ethos and communities that have evolved around its creation can provide a road map and inspiration for the humanities as we plot its course through new technology and new media. Being an historian, a bit of computer software history sets the stage and environment from which to learn.

In the early days of software programming, there was no distinction between producers and users. Because computers were so rare, the users were the producers in terms of software. With such a limited number of computer programmers, there existed among the businesses and organizations that used these computers an open mindset about the software that was created. It took many, many hours to create the first generation computer programs. In the 1950s software was written in machine code, binary or decimal code, by hand.⁹ Every time a program was written, it was done from scratch. It cost a lot of money and people hours to program this way, causing some to worry if it was even worth the price. Every company who owned a computer

had to build each new program from scratch. In the late 1950s, businesses like IBM began collaborating their programming efforts by creating parts of code that could be reused by their internal programmers and eventually other businesses.¹⁰ Sharing programs saved lots of money and programming time, and lead to an ethos of collaboration and information sharing in an environment where software was continually playing catch-up to the hardware, and where every computer had to have custom built software. It was as if each book had to create a new and unique alphabet in order to create the ideas of the author. In this environment sharing computer code was vital to the progression of computers.

One current form of software development, heavily influenced by the academic culture in which it developed, is seen in the free-software movement. Richard Stallman, an original creator and major proponent (one could even say prophet) of the free-software movement, began working on software programs at a specialized lab at MIT in the late 1960s. Even though the lab was funded by contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense, and arguably because of the nature of the funder, the atmosphere in which he worked promoted the freedom of information. Not only were programs freely shared, but also access to computers and personal accounts were open to all users. Information in this setting was thought to be a basic human right, such as the freedom of speech. He took this ideology with him when the lab at MIT was closed, and incorporated the basic information rights in a computer operating system. The Free Software Foundation, which Stallman founded, is meant to provide freely (as in unrestricted) accessible software as a matter of social, ethical responsibility. It is, for these proponents, as inalienable a

⁹ Martin Campbell-Kelly, *From Airline Reservations to Sonic the Hedgehog: A History of the Software Industry*, History of computing (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 32.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

right to have the source code of programs as it is for freedom of speech. The free-software movement was greatly influenced by the culture of the university's open access to information.

Another influential social movement was the anti-war culture of the 60s and 70s. It is argued, most notably by John Markoff, that the sixties counter-culture, anti-war, and free society movements had the most dramatic affect on the computer and software industry.¹¹ Personal computers were quite a novelty in the late 1970s, and like their mainframe predecessors, it was felt that any information on improving or using these instruments should be freely shared. Disks containing software were shared with friends and at computer clubs. Many personal computer companies, including Apple, were founded with the idea of bringing technology, and therefore, power and knowledge into the hands of the individual. In *What the Dormouse Said*, John Markoff argues that many of the foundational supporters of personal computers and computer software were influenced by the counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s, by Mao Zedong and his ideas of the lower-class, peasant people overcoming a central and oppressive government, and by a plethora of get-rich-quick and self-help programs that swept the San Francisco Bay area during the time. These entrepreneurs saw themselves as the "cultural outlaws in the west" who were changing the attitude of the computer. No longer were computers to be an expensive, business only machine, but they were to be the way an individual could improve mind and circumstance.¹²

As programmers became more prevalent and personal computers more common, though, the software industry was influenced by the capitalist, consumer culture. Software companies began to protect their code and the ethos changed from one of collaboration and information sharing to one of collecting profit and information sheltering.

¹¹ John Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005).

¹² *Ibid.*, 242.

The Internet and the World Wide Web was also created in an environment of collaboration. The builders of the ARPANET (which evolved into the Internet) and software developers "adopt[ed] a new paradigm for managing the evolution of the system [which they were using]: rather than centralize design authority in a small group of network managers, they deliberately created a system that allowed any user with the requisite skill and interest to propose a new feature."¹³ As programming and computers became more prevalent, non-technical users were able to contribute in a similar manner. The success of the Internet was due to the flexibility of its users to shape it to meet their needs, rather than users using the product given to them. Such a system of production was not the norm. It posed a new form of creating technology. A comparable analogy of this unique production model would be if the users of automobiles were also the ones to decide, design, and implement changes in the vehicles production. This flexibility also sustained the project through changing ownership, rapidly developing technology, and continually changing ideals and goals. The end result of the Internet, as a communications medium, was not inherent but came as the result of a "series of social choices."¹⁴

So what would a humanities environment look like if patterned after the free-software/open-source movements and the environment that sustained those who built the Internet? What are the characteristics of such an endeavor? To varying degrees, both software movements insist that once software is obtained (either purchased or given without cost), software users should have unrestricted access to the fundamental parts, or code, that make up

¹³ Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet*, Inside technology (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 5.

¹⁴ Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet*, Inside technology (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 6. The relative newness of the personal computer and software industry also lends itself to interesting peculiarities. There is no other culture of object creation (like painting, architecture, carpentry, etc.) where a great majority of the original creators are still alive. Many of the men

that software, and be allowed to change and disseminate the software further without any restrictions. It is the way that software is created by those who belong to these movements that provide the basis for which to construct a different way of doing humanities scholarship. Additionally, the open and collaborative nature of the creation of the Internet provides insight on how to view the collaborative efforts of scholars and any interested individual.

What is particularly relevant to our purpose is how these movements have influenced how the software has been created, disseminated, and utilized. Humanities research is typically concerned with the creation and dissemination of research. Presentation of scholarly humanities research in the past, and present, is a non-issue: the only options are to have the written word in journal or book formats. Where humanities research can benefit the most dramatically and most easily from technology is how knowledge is disseminated and presented. One can already see the benefits of computer software, the Internet, and the World Wide Web without changing anything else about the humanities profession. Writing and submitting articles and books is easier on computers than typewriters. Online repositories such as JSTOR make journal articles available nearly anytime and any place. But is there more that technology has to offer? Are these programs and creation models the telescopes, microscopes and Google Earth of the humanities?

A correlation of free software/ open-source characteristics and humanities counterpoints might look like this:

and women who created the first software programs and the first personal computers are still alive.

FLOSS	HUMANITIES
Free/open software	Free/open scholarship
Access to code	Access to research
Change code	Add/edit research
Disseminate software further	Disseminate scholarship further
Collaborative creation of software/Internet	Collaborative creation of scholarship
Software (finished product)	Scholarship (finished product)
Code (what makes up software)	Research (what makes up scholarship)

The remainder of this article will focus on just the collaborative aspects of FLOSS and humanities comparison as applied to researching and writing my dissertation. I feel the greatest benefit of computers and the World Wide Web is the ability to allow collaboration among individuals separated by great distances and by time (speaking in days and months, not decades and millennia). With the evolution of technologies and new media, academic historians are faced with an awesome opportunity to use modern technology to better understand the past. As historians seek to create models of past realities in forms of words, they must also look at other mediums that shed new light, provide new insights, provide more information, and most importantly, make new connections. Perhaps the most important benefit of the computer and associated technologies is the ability for a much greater audience to interact and collaborate on resources. One of the practical applications of the open-source and free-software movements is that many eyes will be able to quickly and more accurately fix problems in the code. Similarly, one of the driving factors in the creation of the Internet was the ability of any person, regardless

of education level or professional certification to apply their knowledge to the configuration and improvement of the network. If these principles are applied to historical sources, one might be able to see a more accurate past, or at least more levels and narratives describing the past.

Mining during the nineteenth century left large, open mines in the Wittekindsberg and Jakobsberg hills that are situated on opposite banks of the Weser River from one another, near Minden, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Virtually unused throughout the early twentieth century, the mines found use again in the final years of World War II. Beginning in 1942, concerted efforts were made by the German government to protect the increasingly targeted aircraft industry by relocating factories to physically separate locations, and in some cases into underground facilities. Forced laborers from nearby concentration camps supplied the labor to convert existing mines into factories or carve new workspaces from the cold, unforgiving stone. One such project was located in the unused mines in Porta Westfalica's hills, with labor supplied mainly by the inmates from the Neuengamme Concentration Camp near Hamburg and POWs from Russia and Poland. Such projects actualized Nazi desires to eradicate anybody they felt undeserving of life.

My dissertation looks at the underground dispersal project at Porta Westfalica through three distinct lenses. First, a historic narrative will describe the use of forced labor to convert existing and newly excavated mines and tunnel systems in Wittekindsberg and Jakobsberg in Porta Westfalica, and their use in 1944-45 as underground dispersal locations for German factories. Second, the history of these projects is brought into the present day by discussing the issues surrounding memory and appropriate ways to deal with the physical remains of the tunnel systems and their attached concentration camp heritage. Third, the bounds of digital humanities work and the role of digital tools in historical research are explored using this topic as a scaffold.

One way in which the World Wide Web increases collaboration is through websites created by interested individuals. The website *World War II Today: Follow the War as it Happened* (<http://ww2today.com>) provides a way to share history in the form of personal histories that would not otherwise find an audience. As website creator and editor Martin Cherrett describes, “Web sites provide an excellent opportunity to present history in a new way, providing for the inclusion of a much greater volume of original or primary source material than would be possible in a conventional book, including many more photographic records than could be economically included in a book.”¹⁵ There exist a great number of websites dedicated to the history and memorialization of specific combat groups, each focusing on the stories and experiences of their members. A September 2014 Google search resulted in over 35 websites just for American bomber groups. Each site contains an archive of experiences. Such websites as mentioned above are great examples of how new media and the ethos of sharing resources fits with the ideals of dissemination efforts in humanities research. Multiple benefits come from having this information open on websites. First, the information itself is much easier to find due to the nature of search engines that index and retrieve results for every available webpage on the Internet. Second, many narratives that otherwise would not be shared are available to the public. Small group efforts to collect information are combined into a great resource when shared online.

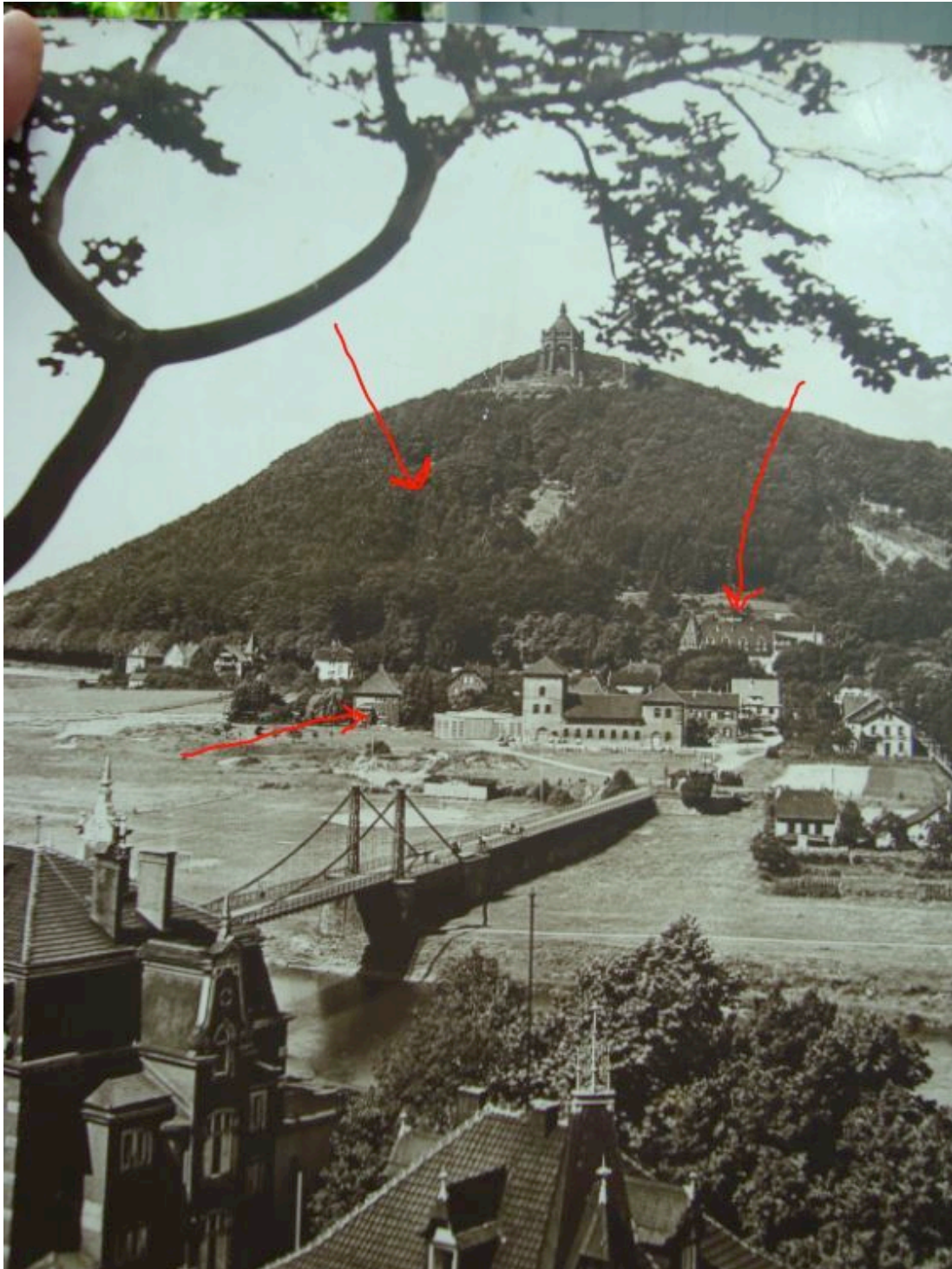
Comparing the number of websites to books about underground projects shows how the information about a given historical topic can be made available in greater numbers. Whereas 14 books were found on different underground projects, there were over 25 websites dedicated to underground projects.

¹⁵ <http://ww2today.com/faq>

Shortly after writing my dissertation prospectus I created a website to correspond with the dissertation. The purpose of the website is to enable the dissemination, collaboration and presentation of the research and resources surrounding my topic. In the past three years the website has received over 50 comments relating to my topic. Two specific conversations have proven to be most advantageous. After a month long research trip to Germany in the Summer 2013, I posted about the different archives and cities I visited, and the many resources I found. I received a comment from an American who was traveling to Germany soon to visit the location where his mother was interned as a forced laborer at the camps in Porta Westfalica. He requested information about the city and places to go. I gave him the information for contacts I had gathered and a number of a group I had only found after my return from the trip. The group was the KZ-Gedenk- und Dokumentationsstätte Porta Westfalica. Their group, formed in 2009 by the city of Porta Westfalica, is tasked with gathering memories and documents regarding the concentration camps located in Porta Westfalica. While I was unable to visit with this group during my visit, I was able to help someone make the connection and he was able to get more information about where his mother had been imprisoned. In return he gave me the name and contact information for the director of the group. Since then I have been able to communicate with the group and inform them of my progress on the dissertation. As a result of our communication, I have been invited to present my research at a commemorative celebration of the end of World War II in May 2015.

A second conversation via comments on the website was with a gentleman who lived in Porta Westfalica during this time as a young boy. After connecting via the website we were able to share emails about books and primary sources pertaining to the subject. One resource was a rare book dealer who has a copy of an English intelligence booklet detailing the projects at Porta

Westfalica. He also shared this photo with arrows locating his house, one of the entrances to the underground factory and the Kaiserhof Hotel behind which the inmates were encamped.



Collaboration and discussion happen on many history forums. Forums are a particular type of website where interactive discourse is the purpose. Usually, such websites require potential contributors to create an account and be logged in to participate in conversations. This discourages ill-intended individuals who wish to deface or promote content for monetary purposes. Forums typically have boards that are broad categories of discussion. Within the boards, users will create topics where a discussion can exist. Normally, a topic will begin with a user asking a particular question about some event, person or place. Other users can see these topics and post their response. The responses and the original question are shown in sequence so as to preserve the conversation as it took place.



Axis History Forum

This is an apolitical forum for discussions on the Axis nations and related topics hosted by Marcus Wendel's [Axis History Factbook](#) in cooperation with Michael Miller's [Axis Biographical Research](#), Christoph Awender's [WW2 day by day](#) and Christian Ankerstjerne's [Panzerworld](#).

Advanced search

Like 1.1k

Board index
FAQ Register Login

If you found the forum useful please consider **supporting us**. You can also support us by buying books through the **AHF Bookstore**.

It is currently 29 Aug 2014, 22:41

View unanswered posts • View active topics

ABOUT THE SITE & FORUM	TOPICS	POSTS	LAST POST
Comments & Announcement about AHF Comments about the site and forum as well as announcements about them.	1770	17910	Re: How do I insert a photo for D-Day re-enactment ? by Patton42 26 Aug 2014, 14:33
Axis History Factbook - Corrections & Additions Corrections and additions to the material posted on the Axis History Factbook .	941	3159	Re: Panzergruppe/Panzerarmee Afrika updates by Urmel 20 Jul 2014, 20:47

AXIS HISTORY	TOPICS	POSTS	LAST POST
Life in the Third Reich & Weimar Republic Discussions on every day life in the Weimar Republic, pre-anschluss Austria, Third Reich and the occupied territories. Hosted by Vikki.	1965	19684	Re: Drop of University Students during the Third Reich by phylo_roading Yesterday, 22:21
Propaganda, Culture & Architecture Discussions on the propaganda, architecture and culture in the Third Reich.	1982	25709	Erwin Kluckhohn by von thoma Today, 02:55
Music of the Reich Discussions on the music in the Third Reich. Hosted by Ivan Ž.	679	4716	Re: Musikalisch-literarischer Monatsbericht by Ivan Ž. 23 Aug 2014, 08:37
Women in the Reich Discussions on the role played by and situation of women in the Third Reich not covered in the other sections.	674	9945	Re: Female Auxiliary Photographs by ignacioosacar 24 Aug 2014, 17:13

The above example shows two sections, “About the site & forum” and “Axis History”, with a number of boards, “Comments & Announcements about AHF”, “Axis History Factbook - Corrections & Additions”, “Life in the Third Reich & Weimar Republic”, “Propaganda, Culture, & Architecture”, “Music of the Reich”, and “Women in the Reich” as examples. Within these boards are hundreds and thousands of topics containing thousands of posts by users. Much of the content is historically accurate, linked to scholarship done by professional historians.

At one point, I went looking for information about my dissertation topic on one forum and found a link to a paper I had written years before as a Masters student. The paper was listed as a good resource for some particular aspect of German history. It was quite fulfilling to see research that I had completed for a course requirement and my own intellectual improvement to be of benefit to others. Such would never have happened if I had not made the paper available on my own website first, and if the forum did not exist for like minded individuals to discuss.

Zotero¹⁶ provides an easy way to collaborate sources. Zotero is both a software program and a website. While browsing the user can save records in the Zotero library. These records can contain bibliographical information and notes made by the user. The user then has the option to share this collection of sources online and form open or closed groups. Open groups allow any other Zotero user to add to the bibliography. Closed groups allow only approved users the privilege to add records, and both options allow the library or collection to be publicly viewable or not. As is seen in the screenshot below, a Zotero group has been created to collaborate and organize resources available for my dissertation project.

¹⁶ Disclaimer that I worked for CHNM from 2006 until 2014 where Zotero was/is developed.

The screenshot shows the Zotero web interface. At the top, the Zotero logo is on the left, and 'Log In · Register' and 'Upgrade Storage' buttons are on the right. Below the logo is a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Groups', 'People', 'Documentation', 'Forums', and 'Get Involved'. A search bar is located to the right of the menu. The main content area shows a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Groups > Nazi Tunnels > Library > Porta Westfalica'. On the left side, there is a 'Library' section with 'Porta Westfalica' and 'Trash' options, and a 'Tags' section with several tags like '978384421389...', 'Der unterird...', 'Jochen Bergm...', 'Porta Westfa...', 'PortaWestfal...', 'Rüstungswerk...', 'Untergrundbi...', 'Untertage-Pr...', and 'ZweiterWeltk...'. The main area displays a table of documents with columns for 'Title', 'Creator', and 'Date Modified'. The table contains 10 entries, all dated 2/14/2014.

Title	Creator	Date Modified
A final reckoning: a Hannover family's life and death in the...	Herskovits-Gutmann	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
Anus mundi : fünf Jahre Auschwitz	Kielar	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
Außenlager Porta Westfalica : KZ Neuengamme ; Schülerwettbew...	Hartmann	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
Außenlager Porta Westfalica ~ Momentaufnahmen auf ddahlke.de		2/14/2014 12:41 PM
Auswanderung vorläufig nicht möglich: die Geschichte der Fam...	Herskovits-Gutmann	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
"Das Leben ist schön!": Überlebensstrategien eines Häftlings...	Bleton et al.	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
Dänischer Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus: Ein Zei...	Kielar	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
Der Arbeitseinsatz von KZ-Häftlingen und die Perspektive der...	Fröbe	2/14/2014 12:33 PM
Der unterirdische Krieg an der Porta Westfalica	Bergmann	2/14/2014 12:33 PM

Another tool of collaboration to be used for the dissertation is that of crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing, a portmanteau of “outsourcing to the crowd,” is the act of using a large number of individuals to complete a common task. Crowdsourcing will be used to translate and transcribe primary sources. After working with faculty in the German Language Department at George Mason University, I will develop a series of lesson plans that encourage students learning the German language to use primary sources for exercises in translating. It is hoped that the novelty of assisting an ongoing research project, along with the novelty of working with Nazi government documents, will not only enable students to gain a better understanding of the German language, but will also expose them to issues regarding German history and the history of World War II.

Technology is an ever-increasing part of everyday life. The need to be technically savvy has long been seen as a prerequisite to a sound education. Many educators have seen the benefit of learning to use, and even program computers for humanities and social science students. In a

1984 article in *Academe* entitled “Teaching Computer Literacy to Humanities and Social Science Students”, Robert Tannenbaum and B.J. Rahn conclude that “Finally, and most important, they must acquire some practical, hands-on skill in a programming language and knowledge of available software packages in order to perform a variety of useful tasks on this new electronic maid-of-all-work. Just as they study their own natural language to be able to read and write, so they must learn about computer software so that they can perform the basic tasks expected of every educated person in the modern world.”¹⁷ If such a need was not fully appreciated in 1984, it should certainly be accepted in 2014.

Digital humanities work requires some change, though, in what is viewed as scholarly work, and the role of collaboration in that work. Basically, the discussions are about who gets the credit and how much. As Bethany Nowviskie, currently Directory of Scholar’s Lab at the University of Virginia writes:

“...Credit for knowledge production is not zero-sum. Such self-questioning counters a mind-set in the humanities that penalizes work done in collaboration—as if by listing many names on a project or publication, its authors diminish the amount of credit available to be claimed by each of them. Evaluative questioning of this sort, if undertaken on an institutional scale and supported by our established systems of academic reward, may instead lead to clear demonstrations of the generative (and not reductive) nature of collaboration. Collective generation of new knowledge and the engagement, across disciplinary and professional boundaries, of new knowledge communities only widen the field of play for any single scholar.”¹⁸

As noted by Dr. Nowviskie, it is not the fact that multiple people collaborate on a project that seems to be the issue for giving credit. Many humanities researchers have collaborated on

¹⁷ Tannenbaum, Robert S., and B. J. Rahn, ‘Teaching Computer Literacy to Humanities and Social Science Students’, *Academe*, 70 (1984), 19–23 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/40249131>>

¹⁸ Nowviskie, Bethany. “Where Credit Is Due: Preconditions for the Evaluation of Collaborative Digital Scholarship.” *Profession*, January 1, 2011, 169–81. Disclaimer, I currently work at the Scholar’s Lab.

projects for decades, even though that is not the norm. The problem is that, in the humanities fields, the prevailing mindset remains that credit must be divided among the collaborators.

Christopher Kelty, in looking at the cultural significance of the free-software movement, notes, "the problem of stabilizing collective knowledge has moved from being an inherent feature of science to being a problem that needs our attention. The reorientation of knowledge and power and the proliferation of hybrid commercial-academic entities in an era of massive dependence on scientific knowledge and information leads to a question about the stabilization of that knowledge."¹⁹ Along with our new media and technology, there is a massive influx of knowledge available. Kelty brings up the issue that there is no controlling or governing body to categorize, dictate, or otherwise control our collective knowledge or give it approval, disapproval, credence, to verify or disprove, to accept or deny, and whether or not such a body should, or even can, exist. As Francis Bacon Sr. said, knowledge is power. The Internet (the World Wide Web and all technologies that use the network) literally spews forth a never-ending stream of ever changing and growing body of information.

The problem is how to channel the information to gain knowledge and power. Modern rise in information begs an answer to the question: What are the structures that will arise to control the information? The idea²⁰ of Free Software (the "inherent" ability to view the construction of software) is radical and revolutionary. It changes the paradigm of commerce, and alters perception about private and public works. It challenges the value and legality of copyright laws. If information is inherently free, then restricting access to that information is tantamount to slavery.

¹⁹ Christopher M Kelty, *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*, Experimental futures (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 301.

Randall Stross, in his book about the Internet search giant Google, points out that the credo “information wants to be free” is opposed by the thought that “information is too valuable to be free.”²¹ Such an opposing view to free information hangs upon the belief that information is static. In reality, though, information breeds information. When people have free access to information they, in turn, produce more information. Free and unrestricted information creates more information.

²⁰ Or ideology or philosophy or religion... Richard Stallman seems to be on a crusade or religion-like mission with the free-software movement.

²¹ Randall E Stross, *Planet Google: One Company's Audacious Plan to Organize Everything We Know*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 21.