The development of the field of digital humanities in the past decades has expanded along at least two clearly identifiable axes. One is a diversification of the practices, theories, approaches, objects of study, and infrastructural contexts (Klein and Gold). The other is an explosion of DH work, once practiced predominantly in the academia of the Northern Hemisphere, all over the world (Fiormonte, Numerico, and Tomasi) that is only beginning to be recognized.

The range of work being done around these two axes, in various disciplinary and theoretical contexts, as well as in varied geographical locations, has uncovered a latent tension between the digital humanities that takes place in the “centers of gravity,” such as the Digital Humanities annual conference and publications like *Digital Humanities Quarterly* and *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* and the digital humanities that is happening outside of such centers (Wernimont). This tension originates in the differences between the centralized and institutional approach to the digital humanities, perhaps best exemplified by the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) and the parallel divergent and distributed practices of digital humanities taking place all over the world and in many fields. These differences can, in turn, be attributed to matters of focus and praxis, to issues of representation (or lack thereof) in the field’s governing bodies and reviewing boards (Dacos), and to disconnections in the available communication channels (Galina). Regardless of whether we take DH centers of gravity to be constituted, following Jacqueline Wernimont, by a canon of social media channels, international conferences, and publications and syllabi, or by the disciplinary threads that have historically been woven into the field, as suggested by Amy Earhart, the expansion of digital humanities to sites and practices outside of these centers has resulted in the repositioning of the field, even when its definitional contours continue to be amorphous.

This shift makes me wonder about the continuing tactical utility of digital humanities as a term or field: a construction that, as Matthew Kirschenbaum argues, makes it a “space of contest” (“Digital Humanities As/Is a Tactical Term”) and one
that “may be harnessed . . . to make a statement, make a change, and otherwise get stuff done” (“What Is ‘Digital Humanities’”). Indeed, as a field seen by its own practitioners as global, interdisciplinary, porous, open, collaborative, adaptable, and always changing, the digital humanities has proven to be attractive to scholars seeking to further support and extend these qualities. By bringing additional disciplinary and local takes to the digital humanities, new and younger scholars are having an effect on the field that can only be viewed as positive. Yet, this increasing variety of approaches presents an additional challenge: making the ends of the spectrum, whether disciplinary or geographical, legible to one another.

The “expanded field” model proposed by Klein and Gold offers an alternative to the field-as-spectrum by highlighting the importance of relationships among key concepts. The relations through which this model operates make it flexible enough to bring into contact many various praxes, but also reveal how certain relationships may not “unfold on an equal plane” due to power-social relations far larger than the field. To counter both the risk of atomization brought about by the many configurations that the convergence of multiple fields and disciplines may take and the unevenness acknowledged by Klein and Gold as well as many others, the digital humanities needs to operate in a new but still tactical direction. It must turn the field’s openness and fluidity—all of its local or specific dimensions—into a function of its institutional global potential.

As I propose, a working strategy to tackle this seemingly contradictory movement between the specific and the interdisciplinary, the local and the global, is the formation of zones of contact among various DH practices. A handful of events and projects have already proposed analogous approaches. Led by Trent Hergenrader, Robert Glick, and others, *Writer Makers: Remixing Digital Humanities and Creative Writing*, for example, sought to bring the fields of digital humanities and creative writing together under the idea of making. The *Global Digital Humanities Symposium* at Michigan State University has provided a forum where leading scholars from East Asia and Africa bring their expertise to the United States. Other initiatives and publications also share a similar ethos. My focus here, however, is aimed at the potential of translation work to create, emphasize, and further shape these zones of contact, particularly, as first articulated by Mary Louise Pratt, those among linguistic–geographic communities. Based on translation work (translation being understood both as movement and as linguistic rendition), these zones of contact are capable of revealing nonobvious relationships between praxes; they also entail a horizontal exchange of referents and nonfixed positions in regard to one another. Fostering parallel relationships among practices and enabling zones of contact, rather than expanding or growing a unitary field, can exert the necessary movement toward a plurality of DH approaches: what I call a DH ecology of knowledges.

The notion of an ecology of knowledges was first articulated by the Portuguese scholars Maria Paula Meneses, Joao Arriscado Nunes, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Focused on the geopolitics of knowledge production as a means of achieving
global social justice, their work seeks to highlight first and foremost the existing parallel between cultural diversity and epistemic diversity. Their proposed “ecology of knowledges” offers a corrective to the monocultural and Eurocentric model of scientific knowledge production. For them, this model of cultural production is the basis of forms of class, ethnic, territorial, racial, or sexual oppression. Although linguistic differences are not incorporated in their model, the dominance of English is a feature of this issue too.

The corrective offered by Meneses, Nunes, and de Sousa Santos relies on an understanding of knowledge production as a social practice, one with the self-reflexive capacity to reshape its motives and engines in consideration of the abundance of existing epistemic models. Their notion of an ecology of knowledges constitutes “an invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges, granting ‘equality of opportunities’ to the different kinds of knowledges” (xx). This characterization of knowledge heterogeneity resonates with many of the discourses advocating for the openness, diversity, and locality of the digital humanities.

Before discussing how the model of an ecology of knowledges can be more fully mapped onto the field of digital humanities, some aspects of the notion deserve closer examination. First and foremost, in an ecology of knowledges, all knowledges are considered incomplete. This incompleteness entails a recognition of the significance and value of the differences among knowledges and their local bases. It also demands a necessary transition away from a monoculture to a global ecology capable of traversing those differences. Critical to the notion of a global ecology of knowledges is the further acknowledgment that the multiple manifestations of the local are the only path to globality. This recognition, in turn, is dependent on the self-reflexive capacity of knowledge production as a social practice to modify its own operations. It follows that a single hegemonic epistemic model is insufficient to account for the range of work produced under other models of knowledge production, thus preventing the recognition and incorporation of other relevant frames of reference. Hetero-referentiality—the incorporation, recognition, and validation of other knowledge models into the (locally) hegemonic one—is in the Portuguese scholars’ view, the foundation for attaining fruitful relationships among a variety of knowledge communities. The model that Meneses, Nunes, and de Sousa Santos propose is therefore capable of enabling the emergence of nonhegemonic knowledges and the syntheses of multiple ones. Ultimately, by enacting the establishment of zones of contact, emerging nonhegemonic knowledges are capable of validating their outputs as parallel to those of the hegemonic model.

The analogy between the ecology of knowledges and the expansion of digital humanities, while imperfect, is useful to explore. The fact that the digital humanities has itself been a field pulling away from singular disciplinary forms of academic work, and has tasked itself with making its practices legible to the many fields it touches, has made it more easily reconfigurable and receptive to the demands constantly being made on it. Several calls to raise the linguistic, geographic, racial,
Gender, and cultural diversity profile of digital humanities have been lodged just in the past few years. Speaking of her work in India, Padmini Ray Murray has controversially articulated how “your DH is not my DH” (personal correspondence with the author). Through his work curating AroundDH, Alex Gil has shown that “a whole world of digital humanities is out there and it does not map neatly to our [U.S.] issues.” Additional punctual conceptualizations of locality can be found in Roopika Risam’s “DH accents.” From a feminist perspective, Tanya Clement has questioned the field’s ideals of interdisciplinarity and collaboration as technologies that can unsituate us from particular visions. Looking to the future, Domenico Fiormonte, Teresa Numerico, and Francesca Tomasi argue that “the true innovation of the next decade of DH appears to be its geographic expansion and the consequent enlargement (and deepening) of the cultural problems afforded by the use of technology from a less Western-centric perspective.”

All of these critical meditations on various aspects of diversity in digital humanities propose more granular perspectives that can allow us to rethink our practice—an inverse process to what Jamie Skye Bianco identified as “the many under the name of one.” Whether they come from a geographical location viewpoint, a sociopolitical one, or an (inter)disciplinary one, these perspectives share the intention of carving out a space for their own work so that it contributes to the general transformation of the field. But acknowledging the presence of these perspectives and the need to engage with them is insufficient. Without the mechanisms to ensure relevant ways for these contributions to be incorporated into the field at large, this work will continue to be lacking from lists of works cited, syllabi, and tables of content, thus hindering the deeper development of digital humanities. Whatever form any new mechanisms may take, they will serve as the indispensable basis for interlinking diverse DH practices with each other, as well as with the already institutionalized version of the broader field. The challenge is to retain the field’s global reach while fostering exchanges with local praxes.

Language diversity is an obvious impediment to the establishment of zones of contact and attaining hetero-referentiality. The well-known dominance of English in the field of digital humanities (or of any other scholarly field), while useful in weaving communicative relations, cannot be the unifying condition of the field’s globality. Or as Rita Raley has pointedly argued, English cannot be “the condition of possibility for the very idea of the global” (emphasis in the original). The role of English as a lingua franca must therefore also be tactical, and along with translation work, the lingua franca status of English is one possible mechanism for forming additional zones of contact. Often thought to be a linguistic issue alone, translation is in fact political: it “presupposes both a non-conformist attitude vis-à-vis the limits of one’s knowledge and practice and the readiness to be surprised and learn with the other’s knowledge and practice” (de Sousa Santos). Translation is thus a tool capable of revealing complementariness among practices and common
(mis)understandings, as well as, crucially, facilitating the recognition and validation of different knowledge models where needed.

Seen in this way, translation is not an end in itself, but a means through which the field and its canon can be diversified. For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on several initiatives in which I have enacted the principles discussed here. The examples are not exhaustive and necessarily evidence the limits of my own networks and linguistic competencies, but it is my hope that they will reveal the benefits of establishing zones of contact.

RedHD in Translation was a “flash” project done during the Day of DH 2014. It consisted of a one-day translation endeavor during which members of the Red de Humanidades Digitales (Network of Digital Humanities) translated articles and blog posts originally published in Spanish into a handful of languages, mostly English but also French and Italian. RedHD in Translation can be seen as an implementation of translation as both a linguistic endeavor and a tactical move, in that the translated articles and blog posts were placed in higher-impact venues and platforms, like the popular Day of DH project, where they would come into contact with other linguistic, geographic, and disciplinary communities. The ultimate impact of RedHD in Translation has yet to be seen, as the translated texts progressively become incorporated (or not) into syllabi and lists of works cited. Regardless, this collective exercise has already contributed to a growing culture in digital humanities that seeks to facilitate encounters with the work of geographically distributed communities.

An ongoing initiative of Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, DH Whisperers, seeks to set up ad hoc linguistic zones of contact. First put into practice at the Digital Humanities 2014 conference, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, DH Whisperers asks conference participants to voluntarily wear badges signaling their willingness to join a community of informal translators and indicating the languages they speak or are able to translate. Although the practice has not been widely implemented, in part due to a persistent lack of presentations in languages other than English, its potential for impact can already be seen in the community’s widespread willingness to take part in it. Even in its limited implementations, DH Whisperers helps underscore how multilingual digital humanities already is—and how it offers a landscape in which complementary, contrasting, and common concerns and approaches must come into contact.

As shown by DH Whisperers, the formation of zones of contact relies on the efforts of the extended community. Examples of this work in high-profile projects and publications have also began to emerge. The newest release of the popular text analysis tool Voyant was made available in eleven languages; the DH+Lib blog continues to publish translated posts; Digital Humanities Quarterly edited special issues in Spanish and French, and an issue in Portuguese is currently being edited. These three examples contribute to the formation of zones of contact as paths to
accessibility, actual linguistic translation, and opening of canonic fora, respectively. Bringing an influx of global practices and knowledges into the United States was the strategy of the editors of the CLIR report, *Building Expertise to Support Digital Scholarship: A Global Perspective*. The work done by Vivian Lewis, Lisa Spiro, Xuemao Wang, and John E. Cawthorne actively created zones of contact in faraway regions of the world by recognizing the wealth of knowledge that is relevant and should be current in the U.S. academy. All of these efforts, each one with its particular agenda, constitute movements toward the fostering of hetero-referentiality, the formation of zones of contact, and the emergence of a DH ecology of knowledges. These instances underscore how the community’s geographic and linguistic diversity has been and continues to be manifested thanks to the work of its own members. Ultimately, in these examples, we see the rich diversity of the field becoming the motive and engine of knowledge production.

In international governing bodies, particularly ADHO, steps have been taken to foster diversity in linguistic terms. In 2016, the annual Digital Humanities conference called for proposals in the alliance’s five official languages (English, German, Italian, French, and Spanish), plus the local one (Polish). Though this strategy seemed promising, the results were disappointing, as the conference committee included in the final program fewer than twenty presentations in languages other than English from the more than three hundred contributions (Thaller). This discouraging response mimics those seen in past conferences (Grandjean). The field’s governing bodies must therefore devise other strategies for fostering zones of contact. These should entail linguistic translation as a matter of course, but they should also seek to put into practice a more conceptual translation that places other aspects of diversity in contact with one another. Greater emphasis on local culture and praxes at the annual conference can translate the uniqueness of the work done in the circulating locations and amplify nonobvious intersections between the various communities that converge there. Digital Humanities 2017, in Montreal, was the first officially bilingual conference in French and English. Holding a bilingual DH conference sets a precedent that now seems impossible to disregard and was even more necessary and advantageous in 2018 when the conference was held in Mexico City, the largest Spanish-speaking city in the world. In addition to language-specific approaches, the opportunities offered to DH practitioners in that setting intersected with the long-standing traditions of digital arts and hacker communities in Latin America, as well as with indigenous cultures, histories of colonialism, and current neoliberal human and economic crises. Analogous connections between digital humanities and local contexts exist, and we should make the most of them at any locale where the conference is held.

Miriam Posner has cogently argued that “DH needs scholarly expertise in critical race theory, feminist and queer theory, and other interrogations of structures of power in order to develop models of the world that have any relevance to people’s lived experience.” A DH ecology of knowledges, based on the formation
of zones of contact like those I propose here, holds the potential to develop one such model. Nonlinguistic translation work opens up the possibility of grasping the common theoretical and practical concerns and how they affect DH work in various contexts, geographical and disciplinary, resulting in a fuller understanding of, for example, why some communities might be (un)enthusiastic about digital cultural production or digital scholarship, or why DH centers or laboratories may or may not flourish in certain institutions due to the responsibilities owed to large student populations, the politicization of academic work, and even the cost of computing equipment often tied to currency exchange rates (Álvarez Sánchez and Peña Pimentel).

As seen from the examples of projects and publications that already foster the formation of zones of contact, the process of creating horizontal platforms, and thus hetero-referentiality, (including, but not limited to publications, face-to-face meetings, and collaborative projects) in digital humanities is underway. These efforts still need to become the rule rather than the exception. Put another way, the field’s openness and fluidity must become a function of its institutional capacity. The formation of zones of contact must take place in and through existing institutional infrastructures, channels, conferences, publications, and governing bodies. A scenario, like the prevailing one, in which individual communities are responsible for making themselves legible to others, rather than being supported by a structure that actively seeks to place communities in contact with each other, risks homogenizing the differences in the field that require the most highlighting. A truly global digital humanities must see a lateral redistribution of its available venues, forums, and audiences—a movement of work that can traverse diverse contexts and help establish a global ecology of knowledges.

NOTES


2. A detailed discussion of the implementation of *DH Whisperers* during Digital Humanities 2014 can be found in Ortega (“Whispering/Translation during DH2014”).

3. *DH Whisperers* has since become the Translation Toolkit. Its main goal is to foster translation as a community praxis in the field. The toolkit is available at http://go-dh.github.io/translation-toolkit/ and a detailed description of the project’s motivations and goals are published in *DH Commons* as Ortega and Gil (“Project Statement”).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Álvarez Sánchez, Adriana, and Miriam Peña Pimentel. “DH for History Students: A Case Study at the Facultad de Filosofía Y Letras (National Autonomous University of


