The Design of Historical Data Projects: The Comédie Française Registers Project and the Laboratoire Paris XVIII. A hands–on workshop and conversation about creating datasets for historians and developers.

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Abstract

The Comédie Française Registers Project (or "CFRP") and the Laboratoire Paris XVIII (or "LP18") both aim at understanding social and cultural phenomena in Paris in the 18th century by collecting and utilizing data from relevant historical documents, and creating and supporting communities of practice and scholarship around those data using web technologies.

Through an overview of the Comédie Française Registers Project (CFRP), and hands-on engagement with the dataset compiled by that project, participants will gain a shared context for discussion of historical data projects.

On that basis, we will introduce the "Laboratoire Paris XVIII" (LP18), which aims to create a collaborative workspace to support the compilation of datasets about life in 18th-century Paris from primary source materials, and visualizations of those data in time and space.

Participants in the workshop will then engage in a discussion of how the "LP18" project and platform should be designed, in light of the successes of the CFRP project, to maximize its accessibility and utility.

This workshop is aimed at researchers and developers, and presented in French and English.

Description

Part 1: Introduction: The Comédie Française Registers Project

We'll open with a presentation of the Comédie Française Registers Project by two of the project's principal investigators. From the CFRP website:

> From 1680 until 1791, only one theater troupe in Paris was allowed to perform the plays of Molière, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, and every other French-language playwright. This troupe, the Comédie-Française, played the works of these authors over 34,000 times in this period. Remarkably, the troupe kept detailed records of their box office receipts for every single one of those performances. These daily receipt registers, still housed today in the troupe's archives in the heart of Paris, are now available online via the Comédie-Française Registers Project.

The CFRP has created web-based tools to collect and manage ticket receipt data, and to search, analyze and visualize those data to support research and collaboration.

We will demonstrate some examples of how scholars and developers have integrated the CFRP data into research and teaching practice, extended it for specific use cases, connected with other datasets, and contributed their work back to a growing community of practitioners.

- Project overview, history, and results to date: Dr. Jeff Ravel, Professor and Head of History at MIT
- Tools, visualizations, and future work planned: Dr. Sara Harvey, Professor of French Literature at University of Victoria

Part 2: Hands on with CFRP data

We will then move to structured hands-on work with the CFRP dataset, in which participants may try out the various modalities of access to the data, come to grips with the data themselves, ask and answer research questions, and envision new applications.

After an orientation to the CFRP website, tools and applications, participants will select from a several structured,practical activities to be done individually or in pairs. Members of both the CFRP and the LP18 project teams will participate and answer questions. Break

Part 3: Le Laboratoire Paris XVIII

Next, we will introduce the LP18 project, with an overview of the project's goals, context and methods. From the project description:

Labo Paris XVIII, or LP18, and the software it envisions, will be a platform for assembling, sharing and using datasets relevant to life in Paris in the 18th century. These datasets will provide lenses through which to view the "information networks" of the time, and through them, the life of the city and its citizens. By assembling a diversity of archival material, most of it unpublished, LP18 aims to make it possible to search a unique corpus of sources, some printed, others handwritten, and to visualize them on an historical map of the city.

Members of the project team will comment on key aspects of the project.

- Historical context and project overview: Dr. Pascal Bastien
- Geospatial considerations: Dr. Julien Puget
- Environmental Scan: Dr. Benjamin Deruelle

Part 4: Discussion

Following the introduction of the LP18 project, will be a discussion of the fields of research and technology in which these two projects are situated, with the aim of informing how LP18 can be informed by those other efforts, and designed for accessibility and utility.

Presenters will frame key questions to introduce the conversation. Topics may include:

- Practical considerations in collaborative data projects
- Document digitization, ingestion and data extraction
- Intellectual property considerations in historical data projects
- Example projects, datasets, tools and software
- Database and API design
- Using open source software and open standards, production open data
- Communicating across disciplines, languages and time zones

Conclusion

Time will be reserved at the end of the workshop for feedback, thoughts and questions.

Logistics

Target Audience

The target audiences for this workshop are historians and developers. We expect 20 participants in those two groups, with some crossover between them.

Core content

An introduction to an historical data project: CFRP; hands-on practice with CFRP data and tools; discussion on topics of interest; question/answer, feedback. All content will be presented in either French or English, or both; All presenters are bilingual.

All participants should bring a laptop equipped with wifi with the latest Google Chrome, Safari, or Mozilla Firefox web browser installed prior to the workshop. In addition, participants should install the Postman API client before the workshop, and peruse the CFRP website.

Workshop Organizers

Jamie Folsom

Jamie Folsom is the VP for Development at Performant Software Solutions LLC. He collaborates with partners in higher education, developing and deploying web applications and services to support research and instruction. He holds an AB in French from Vassar College and a Master's Degree in Technology in Education from Harvard University. He is from Boston, Massachusetts.

Pascal Bastien

Pascal Bastien is Professor of early modern European history at the Université du Québec in Montreal and Director of the Research Group on the History of Sociability (GRHS). His early research focused on the history of judicial ritual and penal law in 18th-century Paris. Retaining his interest in the Parisian area, he is currently working on the history of urban sociability and the various forms of political mobilization during the Enlightenment.

Jeff Ravel

Jeffrey S. Ravel studies the history of French and European political culture from the mid-seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. He is currently working on a history of French playing cards and political regimes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was a Co-Founder of CÉSAR (http://www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/), a web site devoted to the study of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French theater. Currently he directs the Comédie-Française Registers Project (http://www.cfregisters.org/), a collaborative venture with the Bibiliothèque-musée of the Comédie Française theater troupe and several French and Canadian universities.

Sara Harvey

Sara Harvey is Professor of French studies at the University of Victoria. Her main current research is spread over a variety of projects, all of which are linked by the desire to understand what shapes our worldview and our academic and cultural behaviour when filtered through the history of France's early modern period. More specifically, she tries to build a link between discursive, esthetic, social and political factors that contributed to the emergence of modern culture in the 17th and 18th centuries through the literary forms popular at the time (portraits, riddles, poesy bestiary, literary gallantry), newspapers and plays. She also interested in technological tools and the digital environment, as offering an opportunity for humanities researchers to refine their comprehension of research methods and organizational models for academic teaching and communication.

Benjamin Deruelle

Benjamin Deruelle est agrégé et docteur en histoire de l'université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, et professeur d'histoire moderne à l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Ses travaux portent sur la culture, les représentations et les pratiques guerrières en Europe. Dans cette perspective, il s'intéresse l'impact des transformations sociales, politiques et militaires sur le métier des armes, à la place de la pratique de la guerre dans l'établissement des hiérarchies sociales et des relations de pouvoir, ainsi qu'à la justice militaire et à la régulation de la violence guerrière, entre la fin du xve siècle et le milieu du xviie siècle. Ses recherches s'inscrivent dans une forte dimension interdisciplinaire, comprenant l'application des méthodes mathématiques et informatiques en histoire. Cela l'a conduit à s'intéresser, dans une dimension plus épistémologique, aux apports et aux limites de l'usage de ces méthodes en SHS, aux conséquences de leur utilisation sur les manières de faire de la recherche, ainsi que sur les transformations induites par le numérique dans l'écriture de l'histoire. Il enseigne

toutes ces dimensions à l'université depuis de nombreuses années.

Julien Puget

Julien Puget est docteur en histoire moderne et actuellement boursier postdoctoral Banting (CRSH) à l'UQAM sous la supervision de Pascal Bastien. Ses recherches portent sur les rapports entre fabrique de l'espace urbain et construction de la citoyenneté en ville au XVIIIe siècle. À cet égard, ses travaux s'appuient sur les outils offerts par la cartographie numérique et les géodatabases.