Editorial

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EDITORIAL

MICK GOWAR AND MARK TURIN

As the research in this emerging field now demonstrates, and as the articles in this special issue illustrate, digital humanities offer exciting meeting points between the most advanced contemporary tools of communication and publication and the most anciently-rooted and established scholarly disciplines. This view is in opposition to a misguided notion that is still surprisingly dominant: that there is an inescapable Manichean struggle between technology and the humane; and that the humanities must stand as a shield wall, a bulwark against an ever-encroaching fifth column of bits, bytes, apps, and Android lollipops which, so the argument goes, will otherwise corrupt the very foundations of humane study.

On the contrary, it is our strong belief that a genuine appreciation of current work in the digital humanities, arts and social sciences represents a wholehearted rebuttal of such reductive notions. Furthermore, we have observed the interconnected questions that make up digital humanities scholarship rapidly creating new and increasingly robust interdisciplinary environments of enquiry and engagement – as indicated by the articles by Sebastian Drude, Daan Broeder and Paul Trilsbeek, and Pavel Kats.

We see the digital humanities as creating meeting places where there used to be barriers. It is in such meeting places – the areas where disciplines and cultures connect and explore each other's basic assumptions – that most engage the contributors to this issue. Sometimes the meeting is a new connection between the contemporary and the historical, as in Charles Melville's *Shahnama* project where advanced digital tools are allowing ancient literatures and wisdom to enrich and delight whoever, in whatever culture, can access the web. Or, as Beth Williamson's essay on the digitization of the work of Helen Douglas indicates, the meeting of old and new offers new areas of exploration for the practicing artist.

In the account of the *Casebooks* project by Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley and John Young, and also the article on the Language Landscapes project by Ebany Dohle, Karolina Grzech, Charlotte Hemmings, digital tools are now enabling scholars to consolidate information and understandings and share developing projects with an invested and wider public of producers, supporters and contributors. Sometimes, as with Alan Macfarlane's innovative experiences of self-publishing, the application of digital media to existing material means being able, at last, to more fully represent not only the true variety and richness of his formative experiences as a field researcher and scholar, but also to acknowledge the deep relationships of trust and mutual respect – not least, of course, with his 'sister' in the Himalayas. These approaches are helpfully contextualised by Elyse Graham's survey of the 'unbinding' of the book made possible by digital culture and so vital to Alan Macfarlane's continuing project to re-publish his works and see his scholarship connected to hitherto unexplored audiences in print and online. In a similar way, digital tools can extend the scope of an existing expressive genre, as revealed in Beth Williamson's piece. Sharing practical skills and digital tools can help to empower traditionally marginalized social groups who have been long been denied a voice – as in the work of Alexis Carreiro, described so powerfully in her interview with Mick Gowar. Sometimes it is the special traditions and insights of humanist scholarship that can reveal and at once theorise potentials in the application of existing digital tools and media as shown by Bernard Robin's and Sara McNeil's survey of 'webscapes', in particular how the experiences of viewer and reader can be immeasurably enhanced through such affordances.

The digital humanities are 'coming of age' and have moved on from the early, if rather limited, concept of 'Humanities Computing'. Rather than simply offering faster and more accurate ways to process large batches of data, scholarship in the digital humanities now offer new ways and tools to build connections between types of data and questions that were previously unconnected. The innovations in digital humanities scholarship are as much about social and cultural relations in the academy as they are about the content of the question being pursued. When successful, digital humanities scholarship engenders a recalibration of status relationships within universities, seeing librarians, instructional technologists, GIS specialists and archivists taking leading roles in collaborative projects through which their professionalism and expertise is showcased. Work in the digital humanities enables deeper collaboration around common questions, transcending interdisciplinarity to offer the promise of engaged scholarship that is even trans-disciplinary.

We believe that this selection of articles showcase some of the ways that sharing and dissemination are being created and explored. It is through research interventions and creative explorations in digital publishing that all kinds of work is now being made available to new 'audiences', broadening our conversation to include a wider and more connected community of scholars, authors and artists.

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