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TOWARDS THE MAELSTROM

THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN ACTION

THEMATIC SECTION

Editorial to TOWARDS THE MAELSTROM: The Digital Humanities in Action

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Guest Editors

Before explaining what digital humanities is or is not, its 2.0 Manifesto asserts that we are dealing not with “a unified field but an array of convergent practices” (Schnapp *et al.* 2008). It is this idea of a non-unified field coming together through common practices and objectives that is at the center of this thematic section. We embraced the image of the maelstrom, a potent whirlpool usually created by opposing currents, to emphasize and discuss how digital humanities incorporates the differences and the *difference* as part of its own condition.

Digital humanities combines critical thinking, characteristic of the humanities, with technology and computational techniques to create new objects of study or shed new light on already well-known research topics. It includes not only the use of digital and electronic resources in the humanities but also the analysis of their use and their impact on our daily lives and scholarship. Digital humanities has an ever-new, visionary, and experimental character as well as a proud miscellaneous background, which turns it into an appealing course and, at the same time, a feared curse in Academia. Digital humanities brings together different currents of thought, multiple areas of study and a myriad of points of view that, in the end, converge into an always-flowing whirlpool of people, topics, and projects, otherwise referred to as the “Big Tent”.

The “Big Tent” of digital humanities refers precisely to this miscellaneous and occasionally all-encompassing character of the field, embracing different areas, tools, and methods, making it challenging to define it as a consistent field of studies. It is, however, through this diversity that digital humanities becomes a reality, accommodating what Willard McCarthy (2003) called “methodological commons”. In a similar manner, Matthew Kirschenbaum (2012) asserts that

“digital humanities is more akin to a common methodological outlook than an investment in any one specific set of texts or even technologies” (4).

It is exactly through this sometimes-contrasting nature and that miscellaneous background that digital humanities comes together, working as a powerful whirlpool that embraces the disparities to become relevant and makes the exciting risks of failing worth taking. Indeed, digital humanities leads us to the maelstrom. Yes, a maelstrom in the sense that it combines the sometimes-apparent opposite drives of different areas, scholars, and practitioners, defying the long-established views traditionally associated with humanities scholarship to, instead, suggest a values-oriented approach based on collaboration, experimentation, openness, diversity, and sustainability. Such are the values embraced by the Digital Laboratory, the hub at the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS) for the Digital Humanities, where we run our research, and which is the background for the work published in this thematic issue.

As highlighted by Matthew Kirschenbaum, English Departments pioneered in digital humanities. Among the conditions that made these departments more open to the development of the field, the author points out how, after numeric data, texts are more manageable for computers to process and how computers have been associated with composition since they became more accessible. Of course, the relationship between English Studies and digital humanities goes beyond the mere practicality of textual input. In this thematic section we hope to stimulate critical reflections on the contributions of digital humanities to Anglo-American studies and its distinct character within the field.

In the first article that opens this section, “Navigating Travel Writing and Digital Humanities: The ‘Anglophone Travellers in Portugal’ Project and its Visual Narratives” by Maria Beatriz Rodrigues and Maria Zulmira Castanheira, we realize the importance of understanding the English-speaking culture from its outer edges to its center as well as its impact in Portugal with the help of data visualization techniques. Joel Faustino and Joana Pinela, in the article entitled “Visions of Utopia: Gauging The State of Utopian Thought through Data Analysis”, bring to light the very important question and quest of digital humanities regarding the reusability and reconstruction of data, addressing territorial, gender, and global symmetries. Closing this section, the article “Their Cup of Tea: Emotions and Drinking in Victorian Era Literature” by Raquel Souza, Lile Kobaliani and Felipe Ferreira emphasizes the importance of distant reading to the creation of new objects of study as well as the impact of an interdisciplinary approach to well-known tropes in the humanities such as Victorian literary

works. Z. Cansu Rendeci's review of Lorella Viola's 2023 book *The Humanities in the Digital: Beyond Critical Digital Humanities* emphasizes the up-to-dateness of some of the issues discussed previously, reflecting the current condition of digital humanities. Taking advantage of the opportune time of this issue, which coincided with the 1st CETAPS Meeting on Digital Humanities, this thematic section concludes with a dossier of the event, celebrating its importance and preserving the important discussions held throughout the meeting.

It is with great pleasure that this thematic section seizes the fact that digital humanities is not a unified field of studies, embracing different themes and perspectives which come together in and through their opposing forces, just like in a maelstrom. This section also reflects the ever-new and somewhat avant-garde character of the field showcasing articles by mainly junior researchers. Focusing on its diversity, this section might also work as an introduction to digital humanities and its relation to Anglo-American studies. It is our hope that reading this issue will become such a transformative experience as it was editing it.

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Luciano Moreira was born in Porto in 1982. He received his PhD in Digital Media from the University of Porto in 2021. He studied at the University of Coimbra, where he got his degree in Psychology in 2005, and at the University of Porto, where he got his MSc in Psychology, in 2012. He is a researcher at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, an integrated member of CETAPS and a collaborator of CIQUP.

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