Modern Languages and the Digital: The Shape of a Discipline

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Modern Languages and the Digital: The Shape of the Discipline

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Introductory Comments

Claire Taylor and Niamh Thornton:

We decided to use Academic Book Week starting on 9 November 2015 as a perfect opportunity to hold an online discussion under the title 'Modern Languages and the Digital'. We created a blogsite [https://modernlangdigital. wordpress.com/] so that the conversation could be followed throughout the week and left open to anyone to contribute. Then we invited contributors who are engaged in one or all of the following – using digital tools for their research, digital born and online publishing, and/or who research the field of Digital Humanities (DH) – in order to explore how digital technologies are changing the shape of Modern Languages research and publishing. As well as a main title 'Modern Languages and the Digital: The Shape of the Discipline', we posed a series of six questions[1] under the following headings: 1. (Big?) Data and Modern Languages; 2. Modern Languages and Digital Archives; 3. Modern Languages and the Digital as Object of Study; 4. Modern Languages and Digital Ethnography; 5. Users and Interfaces in Modern Languages; 6. Modern Languages Research and Process. Over the course of the week there was a first contributor and two invited respondents to each provocation.

We have lightly edited the content, keeping the question and response style of the blog posts as well as the conversational tone of many of the posts, and collated these as an article for *Modern Languages Open*. This is intended as

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1 The full questions the writers responded to can be found on the project website [https:// modernlangdigital.wordpress.com/].

a snapshot and a means of opening up the conversation in the hope that our discussions will provoke further debate and engagement. As originators and editors we wrote the first response to the main question. We then encouraged our contributors to comment and posted it on the first day. Over the course of the week other contributions and responses came in.

Main Question: Modern Languages and the Digital: The Shape of the Discipline

Claire Taylor and Niamh Thornton:

Undeniably, the impact of the advent of digital technologies on the shape of Modern Language research and publishing has been immense. First, digital technologies have changed the way in which we engage in our research practice right across the full cycle of the research process, from our objects of study, which may no longer be the traditional print book (as was the basis of our conventional, philological training), but instead may now include genres as diverse as the hypermedia novel, twitter poetry, net art, hacktivism, social media, and many more, through to our tools of analysis, which may now include visualisations, big data approaches and so on. Modern Languages has – along with many other humanities disciplines – seen its shape change over the past two decades. This has led us to challenge what it means to describe Modern Languages as a discipline, or, at the very least to re-inscribe its boundaries.

Second, the changes to conventional models of publishing are equally as prominent, with the rise of the e-book, online early journal articles, open access publishing and online-only publishing on the one hand, coupled with the rise of self-publishing that has been afforded by digital technologies and social media in particular on the other, since we now 'publish' on Twitter, blogs, Facebook or other platforms just as often as we do in conventional print outlets. We have had to rethink what it means to 'publish' in Modern Languages because the changes to Modern Languages research are methodological, practical and conceptual. We find ourselves using new tools for analysis, new methods for approaching objects of study; indeed, for some, even the objects of study themselves are new, which require us to reformulate what it means to carry out research and to consider the possible affordances of a plethora of platforms, spaces and tools.

One of the significant impacts that digital technologies have had on our conceptualisation of Modern Languages as a discipline is to make us rethink some of the place-based assumptions underpinning our research practice. If as creators, academics or practitioners we can exist virtually, do place and

space matter? Conversely, geopolitical shifts, uneven access points, legal differentials and cultural particularities demand that we consider how we can become even more fixed and attached to place and space.

Another big impact of these recent changes is the question of how the digital may have made us rethink ourselves as a fundamentally philologically based discipline. In other words, the phenomenal explosion of user-generated content enabled by digital technologies has been a wake-up call for many of us – we can no longer take as read that a common object of study is the canon (be that literary, film, art, etc.), and, moreover, we need to look at practices, as much as texts.

Of course, none of this happened in a vacuum, and, since the rise of cultural studies which took particular hold in Modern Languages in the 1990s, Modern Languages had already been engaged in rethinking itself and its practices. Rather, it's more a case of this all crystallising at the same time: that at the point at which Modern Languages was already in the process of questioning some of its assumptions (philology, study of high literature, the canon, amongst others), the rise of digital technologies has become another disruptive element that demands a reformulated genealogy. These are among the reasons why we felt that this discussion is timely and necessary.

As we look to the future of the discipline(s) there are as many questions as answers. As a consequence of this new landscape with its new tools and practices, do we need to find new nodes where our disciplines reside, that belong within and outside national territories? Do we need to be open to all changes and forget a boundaried sense of what we do? Or are there needs for new frontiers which traverse silos to make connections with those who want to share and exchange ideas and methodology? As adopters of technology, do we need to be more than just end-users and become designers, makers or programmers?

It is certainly the case that Modern Languages has had to (and has to continue to) reconceptualise itself, in the face of immense pressures. Worton's call for Modern Languages as a discipline to articulate a clear and compelling identity, all the while maintaining itself as a trans-disciplinary field (2009, 37), seems to be fundamental, and it is still one that those of us working in Modern Languages have never really answered. This is a huge challenge for us as modern linguists, and one we are still grappling with. If this is the main challenge, then the digital is one set of coordinates within this bigger picture; it's one of the issues (but not the sole issue) that we have to negotiate as we rethink our discipline(s). We have previously contributed to a conversation about our own 'discipline', Hispanic Studies, where we both expressed a desire for disciplinary renovation and interdisciplinary exchanges and we proposed some forms in which we, as journal editors, could make our

contribution at this moment (Fraser and Henseler 2014). Situated as we are in language- and area-specific knowledge and research, we have to ask about the desirability of such an approach in other fields and in the appeal of seeing Modern Languages as one discipline or several inter-related polyphonous disciplines onto which we patch the shifting prefixes (such as, trans-, inter-, intra-, multi-) as the need arises. Do the changes in Modern Languages mean that we all must become DH-MLers? Can this be a thing?

Without a fixed object of study (literature) that the discipline is founded on, yet with the tools to understand other cultural objects and with communication as a fundamental skill, Modern Languages is well placed to tackle the user-oriented end of DH. As researchers capable of reaching across into the unfamiliar and uncomfortable we have the capacity to test the limits of knowledge. Some of these are skills integral to all in the Humanities. But we invite you, as Modern Languages scholars, to look at those with whom you work daily and you will find that we are well used to working across disciplines. Linguistic specialists parsing language usage work with social media researchers side by side with historians of early modern periods. Sometimes, within so-called disciplines, we may not even have a shared second language, or national focus. Yet Modern Languages binds us. We ask what have we have learnt from this that can contribute to a widening of the scope of DH and how can this be mutually beneficial?

Responses to the Main Question

Tori Holmes

As you point out, many of the shifts in all areas and stages of Modern Languages research in response to digital technologies (evidenced in the varied topics you have chosen for this writing sprint!) have mirrored those taking place in other humanities disciplines. I think the point you make about the rise of cultural studies approaches within Modern Languages is also an important one when accounting for the diversification of objects of study.

Where I would like to add a provocation – for the purposes of debate! – is in relation to the connection you suggest between Modern Languages and Digital Humanities as a possible umbrella for these shifts, or the development of a Modern Languages-inflected Digital Humanities, which would have a widening effect. Could all the shifts we are discussing in this writing sprint be embraced under this umbrella? Is Digital Humanities necessarily the most obvious, or the most productive, inter/disciplinary interlocutor for all aspects of a digital Modern Languages?

It is clear that there are many ongoing debates and diverse understand-

ings about what is, and is not, Digital Humanities (see here, for example, and refresh a few times to see the range!: http://whatisdigitalhumanities.com/). Perhaps the more 'plural' understandings of Digital Humanities (see Kathleen Fitzpatrick's article here: http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/debates/text/30), like this writing sprint, could embrace digital ethnography alongside big data, digital archives and digital objects of study, but in other Digital Humanities contexts, there might be less common ground. To keep the metaphor going, the umbrella might not be quite big enough, or there might be other possible umbrellas (e.g. the digital social sciences, for want of a better term?). Perhaps we need to keep a selection of possible umbrellas to hand?

For me, working on digital culture from a base within Modern Languages (and/or 'language-based area studies') gives me freedom. It allows me to develop an in-depth engagement with Brazilian digital culture based on knowledge of the Portuguese language and of Brazilian culture and society. It enables me to explore multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary (not to mention linguistic and geographical) interfaces and interlocutors, and to borrow, adapt and reflect on methodologies from a range of sources. My question, then, to you and to the other contributors and readers, is whether anchoring a digital Modern Languages to Digital Humanities would maintain this freedom (which I see as a strength), or whether it would potentially narrow the lens through which we view engagement with digital technologies in Modern Languages?

Thea Pitman

Just a couple of thoughts in response to Tori's 'provocation' to Claire and Niamh. I'm quite clear that Modern Languages and Digital Humanities do need to talk to each other and that there will be mutual benefit from this dialogue.

I'm also concerned when I read much of what is written in/about Digital Humanities since, despite many gestures to keep the definition open, its praxis seems to demonstrate a rather narrower conception of what it is that my research doesn't quite fit. What I think I'd prefer is that we keep pushing to keep the definition wide enough to fit us all in, whether we're studying the 'avant-garde pyrotechnics' of e-poetry or grassroots activism conducted via social media.

Paul Spence

The recent workshop on the future of Modern Languages Research at the IMLR here in the UK demonstrated that researchers in the field are well aware

of the new challenges and opportunities in a rapidly changing information landscape, but it is also probably safe to say that much of the attention to 'the digital' so far has been near the (traditional) conclusion of the process, in other words, at the moment of publication/dissemination. Modern linguists in fact use digital tools at various points during the cycle of research, but still tend to treat them simply as quicker or more efficient means of performing established tasks within a workflow which is still, in the main, firmly print-based. In addition to rethinking what it means to 'publish' in Modern Languages, this is an opportunity to rethink what it means to do research in Modern Languages – how the new genres which Claire and Niamh refer to alter the information landscape, and require new analytical skills, new research infrastructures and new modes of interpretation. Modern linguists are surely better placed than most to reach out to new publics which are not merely bound by the digital to an anglophone template and to propose new models of knowledge creation which are not 'linguistically mute', to use a phrase employed by Charles Forsdick at the afore-mentioned IMLR event.

There has been considerable debate about linguistic and cultural perspectives on the Digital Humanities in recent years, but much of this has focused on the formal manifestations of the field (its conferences and professional associations), whereas what interests me more is the broader knowledge space 'between Humanities and the Digital' (Svensson and Goldberg 2015) which enables humanists and digital practitioners to set new visions and boundaries. There are many opportunities, I believe, for modern linguists and digital humanists to collaborate here: examining the linguistic assumptions of the new information landscape (how digital models/methods perform new kinds of translation between cultures); exploring how digitally mediated knowledge operates beyond the anglophone world in dynamics of 'core', 'periphery' and 'semiperiphery'; analysing geographical and linguistic inflections on humanities 'data'; mapping (and remapping) the cultural geography of the new architectures of participation which have emerged through digital culture; and experimenting with new 'agile' and 'mobile' pedagogies for the Modern Languages.

Question 1: (Big?) Data and Modern Languages

Kirsty Hooper

The world of data is, at first glance, an unfamiliar one for those of us who make our living from literary and cultural representations. We are trained – and we train our students – to ferret out nuance and connotation, to read between the lines or beyond the page, to find the multiple meanings surging

around a simple word like 'home' or 'nation' or 'language'. And Modern Linguists, like Ginger Rogers, do all this backwards and in high heels – or at least, in multiple linguistic, geographical and cultural contexts.

In the world of data, of course, our tried and tested strategies of interpretation do not wash. Trying to impute nuance, connotation and multiple meanings to a spreadsheet is a pointless task, rather as if your precious data is at the mercy of a translator who understands only one language and doesn't get nuance. A computer will do exactly what you tell it to do, and only when you tell it using the one expression it has been programmed to understand (no stray punctuation and definitely no connotation).

But let's not overestimate the problems. In fact, once you get past the initial encounter (awkward first data?) and see things from the computer's point of view, much about working with data plays to our strengths as Modern Languages researchers. They are programming *languages*, after all, each with its associated social, cultural and pragmatic milieu. You could even say that modern linguist vs XML or SQL or [insert your programming language of choice] is the ultimate intercultural encounter.

In all seriousness, Modern Languages researchers not only have much to gain from data-driven humanities projects, but we also bring a very particular array of skills to the table. We are ideally placed to develop a reflective, intercultural approach to digital/digitised data and the tools that allow it to be captured, stored, curated, shared, analysed and transformed. We need to make our case.

Gathering data – qualitative, quantitative, numerical, categorical, bibliographical, biographical, topographical, you name it – is just the beginning of the process, and if we lack the technical tools to transform it into something else, well, that's what collaboration is for (and that's a Good Thing, by the way). But once the data is gathered and transformed, and ready for meaningful engagement, that's when our expertise comes into play.

As Modern Languages researchers, we can combine our proficiency in representation, its nuances and connotations with our ability to consider the commonalities and differences of engagement with digital/digitised data and tools across cultures and languages. Out on the global web, data-driven projects and tools such as crowdsourcing, community archives, emotional geographies or genealogical databases provide unprecedented opportunities to leverage the digital as a means of stimulating investment and even participation in Modern Languages research by individuals and communities who would never, even for a second, regard themselves as modern linguists. Let's grab them!

Niamh Thornton

You make important points about how linguists are in a good position to become DHers and build bridges between different cultures of knowledge. Data, big or small, can be a word that is often associated with problems of processing and storage that require technical know-how and specialist programmes to deal with it. Do we need to query the word 'data' and consider the forms in which we are already proficient in considering it? If data is simply a collection of facts, why is it such an alienating word for Modern Language specialists?

Claire Taylor

As well as loving the Ginger Rogers metaphor (the first time to my knowledge that us modern linguists have been compared to a glamorous, all-singing, all-dancing movie star), I particularly like what Kirsty has to say here about the advantages for all of us in taking into consideration 'big data' approaches. It certainly is true that our training in close textual analysis does seem, at first glance, at odds with data-driven approaches and the manipulation of spreadsheets. But, as Kirsty says, there is much to be gained, and it's not a case of us leaving our close analysis and nuanced understanding behind. As I read what Kirsty says, I was reminded of some pieces I've read recently on Tim Hitchcock's excellent blog (http://historyonics.blogspot.co.uk/) about big data approaches in the discipline of history. Tim argues that the best uses of big data approaches are when they are complementary to close textual reading, allowing us to do both a 'distant reading' in the context of 127 million words and a close reading, seeing particular case studies in their geographical and social context. Kirsty's arguments seem to chime with what Tim is saying in a different disciplinary context, and I'm sure there is a fruitful dialogue to be had there as Modern Languages continues to make its way in the big data debates.

Kirsty Hooper

Niamh, I absolutely agree about challenging our fear of the term 'data'. As the opening paragraph of my University's research data management policy puts it,

> All researchers produce 'data' in the course of their projects and investi-gations [I like the scare quotes!]. Without research data there is nothing to base research outputs on and more and more the data produced by a project can be seen as a research output in and of itself. All researchers are used to handling research data and disciplines have, over time, developed

best practices in dealing with research data – be that data from a scientific instrument, e-lab notebooks, audio files of participant interviews, text transcripts or images from a gallery (Warwick University 2015).

It is a question of demystifying the concept, that's true, but it's also a question of complicating it right back up again. I said above that there's a seeming conflict between the nuances and connotations of textual interpretation, and the 'spade's a spade' language necessary for turning text into data. What I didn't say, and should have done, is that the process of turning text or other information into 'data' is as complex as any translation, perhaps more so.

Here's a data story: I collected biographical information about a group of several thousand people from the Luso–Hispanic world who settled in Liverpool in the nineteenth century. My people were from more than twenty countries and spoke six or more languages between them. Some were literate, some were not. What they all had in common was that they came to Liverpool and, one day in 1871 or 1881 or 1891 a census enumerator knocked at their door and shoved a census form into their hand. The information they (or a literate friend or neighbour) put on that form was collected, transcribed by a harassed and probably monolingual clerk, and stored in a big book in London. A hundred years later, it was digitised and transcribed again by a harassed and probably bilingual technician in India. And then it was put online and transcribed once again by a harassed and more or less trilingual academic in the UK (me) and put into an Excel spreadsheet. After that, I gave my spreadsheet to a harassed academic technologist fluent in English and several programming languages and asked him to turn it into a database. Which we almost have.

At every point in which the data passed from one form to another, multiple decisions had to be made. Some were at the granular level: how to transcribe an unknown Basque, Filipino or Spanish surname, or whether 'Lisbon, Spain' is a factual error or an insight into somebody's worldview. Others were at the level of ontology: what names, definitions, relations, categories of data will form the building blocks of our new body of knowledge? Manipulating data is, in a very real sense, an exercise in nuance. It requires a solid understanding of the historical, geographical, material and linguistic context in which that data was generated, a clear idea of the contexts in which the data can or might be used, and sustained reflection on each step of the process of turning it into something else. Like Claire, I found Tim Hitchcock's reflections on data and the uses of the past extremely compelling, in particular his argument that digital tools such as 'nominal record linkage, building on a generation of work undertaken by family historians, should allow us to tie up and reconceptualise the stuff of the dead, as lives available to write about' (Hitchcock 2015).

Question 2: Modern Languages and Digital Archives

Kay Chadwick

As a historian of Occupied France, much of my research life has been spent in archives where materials still appear from the stacks in grubby cardboard boxes, whose crammed contents have clearly not been read in years, if ever, if the rusty pins holding the fragile papers together are anything to go by. No part of my work is more exciting than when I engage with an original physical document, a moment when the years between us disappear and the war becomes alive. And I have lost count of the occasions when the delivery to my desk of the 'wrong' archival box has offered a serendipitous page to harvest.

But I'm no Luddite, just in case you think that's where this is going. Indeed, the digital has positively revolutionised my research, in terms of how I work, what I produce and the reach of the outcomes. Simply in practical terms, digitising historical material offers a valuable backup system in case of the loss of the original. But there's rather more to it than that for me. Working on wartime radio, as I do, the digitisation of old wax cylinder recordings or gramophone records held at, for me, a core research archive—the Institut national de l'audiovisuel in Paris—has offered an alternative means of access to originals which previously existed only in delicate formats withheld from use. It has significantly expanded the corpus I can exploit and enabled me to write on resources never previously interrogated. Moreover, it has made it possible for me to hear the voice of the principal broadcaster I study, which is crucial for an analysis of his styles of delivery and the intended impact on his audience. But the opening up of wartime broadcasts in this way also suggested a further step to me: to use digital space to make the broadcasts widely available for both future research enquiry and interested general audiences by creating a new user-friendly historical resource, freely available as a public work. The result is a unique born-digital critical edition of wartime radio broadcasts which brings together a fragmented corpus—transcripts of the digitised recordings and digitised versions of the surviving printed texts of target broadcasts—published as a PDF file. It can be accessed here: ttps://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/modern-languages-and-cultures/liverpoolonline/Philippe_Henriot.pdf.

My edition is, in essence, a digitised version of the original materials which functions as a form of archive in itself. But I don't personally think this makes me an archivist. The edition is its own document, and the content is filtered through the lens of my identity as a historian, not least because of the critical framework which accompanies the broadcasts. The edition is a hybrid which makes no claim to be a pure act of curation. The aural

dimension has not been replicated, while those broadcasts which already existed in print version are not reproduced as facsimiles, but are new, clean versions created using OCR software. Nonetheless, best practice means that I have responsibilities to the original documents and that my 'version' of these had to possess integrity if it were to be reliable. So, whilst I corrected basic inaccuracies (e.g. spelling or punctuation mistakes), or standardised presentation, the edition otherwise alters nothing of the original broadcasts, instead explaining any issues or inconsistencies in footnotes. Issues remain. Future-proofing is a particular concern, and the digital future has to ensure that the digital present remains functional, so that today's PDFs do not become yesterday's 78rpm records. Not that this is enough to dissuade me from my efforts: a second edition of wartime broadcasts is well under way.

Niamh Thornton

I share your love of the physical objects (books, folios, journals, newspapers, clippings, etc.) that you encounter in archives and the serendipitous finds that can arise, when you can get access. Access is not only a matter for things offline, or what internet slang refers to as In Real Life (IRL) – it is also an issue online. It also occurs to me from reading the posts that it seems like a lot of words and concepts, like data in Kirsty's post and archive, in yours, get stretched. Do these shifts count as a resignification of the lexicon of research, and what challenges do they pose? Do they ask us to reconsider the disciplinary parameters?

Kirsty Hooper

Another vote here for dust and serendipity! Another characteristic of the physical archive that never fails to make me think is its historicity – the sense that this box, that record card, those papers are the residue of many different decisions made by many individuals over many years. And I don't just mean strategic decisions about bequests or donations, or affective decisions, such as the 'epistemic anxieties' Ann Stoler explores in *Along the Archival Grain* (Stoler 2009), but also the tiny, material decisions of archival practice – which brand of box, which size of record card, which pen or pencil or filing system. While we can't access this historical residue in the same way when an archive is digitised (although that's not to say it's entirely lost), the digitisation process itself creates a whole new dimension of historicity, through the metadata generated every time somebody interacts with the digitised artefact. The formal, systematic and highly visible nature of metadata is quite unlike the dusty, often fragmented story of a material artefact's creation, storage and

use, but I wonder how useful it might be to consider the two in tandem, or, as Niamh says, to consider the elasticity of words and concepts such as 'archive' or 'data' themselves. What can historians and archive users learn from metadata about decoding the historical residue of an object? What can users of digital archives learn by keeping in mind the stories generated by Carolyn Steedman's 'many dusts' (2001, 157)? And how are these questions complicated when the artefacts and histories have crossed time and space, cultures and languages, to end up in our hands or on our screens?

Emma Cayley

It is over twenty-five years since Bernard Cerquiglini published his exuberant *In Praise of the Variant* (1989), in which he urges us to fall in love with the variance that characterises the medieval literary text. Variance that a modern or uninitiated reader might dismiss as error, unnecessary background noise, confusion, in some way detracting from a hypothesised 'original'. As a philologist by training, and a literary scholar by temperament, my natural instinct might have been to spurn the digital and its gaudy promises of new worlds in favour of the paper-sifting, archive-wading, parchment-venerating of my academic upbringing. However, like Cerquiglini and his vision of the new horizons that would be opened up by digital futures for text editing, I find myself a convert to the fascinating possibilities offered in that imagined future which is now present and accessible to all. In my most recent work, I have been creating an iPad application which aims to make currently inaccessible manuscripts accessible, yet not simply to create an ebook or 'do' a digitisation of these materials. My app has at its core the tenth-century Exeter Book, and samples other manuscripts from Special Collections at Exeter, both English and French; it aims to bring these to a wider audience while also making it possible to use them as a scholar. At the same time, I am completing two 'paper'-critical editions of fifteenth-century French debate poetry. In my mind these two projects are discrete. The 'paper' or the 'online' edition would seem, then, here to be separate entities for distinct audiences: each type of 'edition' with its own advantages and disadvantages. As a medievalist and codicologist, I cannot but value the physical book (I still can't bring myself to use the Kindle kindly bought for me) and all its complex historicity: its users, its abusers, its scribes, copyists, editors, readers. However, the value I attach to these narratives of use, reuse and circulation, adhere equally in the digital archive. My dilemma, and that of the modern linguist with an interest in text editing, is where to go now? We've done paper editions, we've done online editions; scholars continue to produce both with little sign of one medium disappearing or being eclipsed

by the other. Am I curating when I create my digital 'edition'/archive, or am I recovering as much of the 'original' source material as possible? I think both. For me, any type of 'textual' recovery, as the late great Elspeth Kennedy would surely have said, is reception, is therefore the act of an editing and a curating hand and consciousness, whether that is digital, or on paper. The endless possibilities afforded by the digital edition have revolutionised the way we think about medieval texts and their multiple manifestations and variants. However, these vast and complex editions or digital archives risk alienating the 'reader' or 'audience'. How can these be navigated effectively – how can we simply 'read' a text anymore, without simultaneously needing to be aware of its myriad copies, exemplars, editions and, now, digital forms?

Question 3: Modern Languages and the Digital as Object of Study

Claire Taylor

In recent decades, digital technologies have caused us to rethink existing literary and cultural formats, and new platforms have transformed our understanding of what a 'text' is. As modern linguists, most of us were trained in the analysis and research of conventional literary, filmic or cultural genres: despite the varied languages in which we research, we all have, broadly speaking, a common consensus of what, for instance, 'a novel' or 'a film' consists of. We have all been brought up to recognise key genres, understand the rules of those genres and apply the tools of analysis specific to those genres.

But what happens when texts – understood in the broadest sense of 'cultural product' – cease to exist within their neat generic boundaries? When, for instance, a hypermedia 'novel', involving text, audio, still and moving images, and user interaction, may require skills of analysis stemming from visual culture, film studies or computer game studies, as much as literary theory about 'the novel'? It is these new cultural forms that, for many of us, have made us start to think across disciplinary boundaries and learn to negotiate new tools.

But it's not just a case of the new tools that we as modern linguists need to learn when dealing with digital cultural products: it's also about what we as modern linguists can contribute to digital culture studies from *our* perspective. A significant number of scholarly works have already been written on digital culture. Yet those of us who are modern linguists are bound to notice that these works frequently take as their model Anglophone paradigms, and ignore – or, at best, mention in a footnote or in passing – an existing rich cultural, literary and artistic heritage going well beyond the anglophone that informs contemporary digital cultural practice.

Whilst the multiple precursors of contemporary digital practice found in the non-anglophone world are too varied to mention, as examples we could highlight the Brazilian poetic movement of *concretismo* in the 1950s and its influence on contemporary digital literary play. We could also mention *caligramas/caligrammes*, developed both by Vicente Huidobro in a Chilean context and Guillaume Apollinaire in a French context in the 1920s, as precursors to the kinetic poetry we see today – and indeed, Argentinian Ana María Uribe's *Anipoemas* (http://www.vispo.com/uribe/anipoems.html) are a good example of how caligrammesque poems can be animated across the screen. Surrealist games developed in a French context in the 1920s, particularly the *cadavre exquis* involving experimenting with word combinations to spontaneously form sentences, are a precursor informing contemporary collectively generated fiction. Techniques developed through OuLiPo, such as that undertaken by Raymond Queneau in his *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961) involving multiple poetic variations based on the recombination of phrases, inform contemporary combinatory fiction. And the contemporary genre of Twitter poetry – called by some the *twaiku* – has its roots in the Japanese tradition of the haiku, on which it draws in its understanding of the formal restriction to 140 characters as a productive, creative one, leading to the possibility of capturing moments or images with a particular intensity.

In these and many other myriad examples, what we as modern linguists can offer is an enhanced understanding of 'new' digital genres. We can bring to the table a consideration of digital 'innovation' within a much broader context of literary, artistic and cultural innovation in various countries and languages. And we can provide a much-needed reminder that to be digital is not synonymous with being anglophone.

Thea Pitman

I'm primarily interested here in answering the last question: how might new media cultural forms force us to rethink the (implicit) nation-state assumptions that conventionally underpin Modern Languages research? And I would like to respond to this question as a Latin Americanist interested primarily in online cultural production. The most obvious limitations for the circulation of materials online are those of language, not nation-state. For anyone circulating a Spanish-language hypermedia novel or collection of e-poetry online, the potential readership will be anyone else who has adequate internet access and who can read Spanish. And that person who uploads their Spanish-language creative work to the internet may be Peruvian born, resident in Spain, and writing a narrative about Venezuela. While much of this was also true before the advent of the internet, it is clear that this

tendency has increased massively in relation to online cultural production, and this poses a substantial challenge for our traditional tendency to attempt to study materials in discrete 'collections', sorted in the first instance by their generation and circulation within the confines of particular nation-state. Should our hypermedia author or his work be classified as Peruvian, Spanish, or Venezuelan, and does it matter? And scaling up to regional paradigms, why would we want to attempt to study only those materials that are Spanish/Latin American as opposed to those that stem from Spain/the Iberian Peninsula?

The study of new media cultural production thus encourages academics to move out of their tried and tested institutional silos as Mexicanists or Latin Americanists, and this is good. However, there are also good reasons why we might still want to study materials with respect to nation-state, regional or other geopolitical paradigms. Although some cultural production that circulates online deals with universal themes with no obvious reference to offline place, much of this 'new' cultural production is inevitably still dependent on the old geopolitical paradigms for its frame of reference even if those paradigms are being deliberately put under strain in such works. It thus does still make sense to attempt to study things such as 'the Cuban blogosphere', as long as we think through what we actually mean by that.

In terms of a rationale for not entirely ditching a regionalist approach, there is also evidence that Latin American new media cultural producers and critics are frequently concerned with the fact that new media as developed in Europe and Anglo-America has been written in a 'language' that would script them out. Critics have long deplored the fact that the 'architecture' of the internet inevitably encodes (tacit) Anglo-American perspectives and interests (cf. Trejo Delarbre 1999 or Martín Barbero 2000). And even if changing wholesale the architecture of the internet is not a realistic possibility, cultural producers still attempt, in Quixotic fashion, to write anti-hypertexts or 'to "brownify" virtual space, to "spanglishise" the net, and "infect" the linguas francas' (Gómez-Peña 2000, 258–9) as a Latin(o) American postcolonialist response to this situation.

Emanuela Patti

Claire's post raises some crucial questions for the future of Modern Languages: how can we deal with an increasing number of 'cultural products' that do not fall into the traditional categories of textuality? And, how can we, as modern linguists, contribute to digital culture studies from our perspective? We are clearly experiencing a condition of cultural 'in-betweeness' in which the notion of 'boundaries' itself has become problematic. The category of 'cultural products' includes today a wide variety of creative forms ranging

from traditional arts such as literature, cinema, painting, drama to electronic literature, digital cinema, media art. Digital technologies have also transformed traditional arts into new hybrid creative practices – see, for example, the application of new media to literature, theatre, dance, performance art and installation. At the same time, they have given impulse to numerous, often overlapping, forms of digital art such as computer art, multimedia art, net art that use digital technologies as an essential part of their creative process. To what extent should all these practices become the object of study of Modern Languages? And, how does the exploration of these art forms help us make sense of the cultures we are studying?

Modern Languages departments already include experts in various disciplines such as cinema, visual arts, performative arts and music. For many modern linguists, exploring artistic contaminations, including ekphrasis, adaptations and the radical boundaries crossing of avant-garde movements, is an established research practice. However, in some ways reflecting twentieth-century cultural industry and institutions, we have generally approached these creative forms from one disciplinary perspective. Thinking in terms of artistic boundaries has certainly been useful to understand how and why they were pushed. Artistic avant-gardism, for example, has typically been an expression of political radicalism. Transgressing artistic boundaries thus meant challenging the social and cultural values associated with them. Today we are not only exposed to hybrid cultural artefacts, in which the contamination of artistic languages tends to become the norm rather than a form of transgression, but also to different social dynamics involved in the cultural production. These considerations, together with many others including the materiality of new 'cultural products', force us to rethink the notion of 'experimentalism' through which we have traditionally interpreted artistic experiments across the arts. Can we still use it to define practices where artistic hybridity has become the norm? Modern linguists can offer a significant contribution to these and many other questions related to digital culture. From their privileged historical and cultural perspective, they can draw interconnections between the national literary, cinematic and artistic cultures of experimentation and new digital practices. In the conference 'Experimental Narratives: From the Novels to Digital Storytelling', held in London on 26 and 27 February 2015, we reflected precisely on how the notion of literary experimentalism has evolved in different countries. At the same time, the interartistic/intermedial dimension of contemporary cultural practices encourages us to develop new interdisciplinary theories and collaborative research projects in the perspective of an interconnected research culture of the arts. Working towards a theory of interartistic practice is, for example, one of the main objectives of the AHRC-funded research project

Interdisciplinary Italy 1900-2020: interart/intermedia, run by Dr Clodagh Brook (PI), together with Dr Florian Mussgnug (CI) and Dr Giuliana Pieri (CI) and myself (Senior Research Fellow).

Finally, I would like to bring an example of cultural forms being developed at the interface between literary-cultural expression and new media technologies. It is the case of narrative practices extending beyond traditional literary forms. While printed books are still the main outputs of such practices, websites are the place where the 'storyworld' of the novel can find a multimedia representation in the form of extra contents such as visual maps, illustrations, music; interactive sections such as fan fictions; or promotional materials such as book trailers. Through new media, literary fiction can be expanded at a multimodal level, address wider communities and build a collective identity around the stories. Far from electronic literature, we can, rather, inscribe these practices within the broad category of 'transmedia storytelling' (Jenkins 2003; 2006), as they systematically spread the story across multiple media platforms. What these narrative practices especially share with the examples from the entertainment business Jenkins mentioned in *Convergence Culture* (2006), such as *The Matrix* or *The Lord of the Rings*, is the way they engage audiences in the process of storytelling. Contemporary Italian fiction presents a number of significant cases of literary experimentation in this direction. Authors such as Wu Ming, Scrittura Industriale Collettiva (SIC) and Kai Zen have made 'networking' the underpinning principle of their artistic activity – in this respect, see *Networking: The Net as Artwork* (2006) by Tatiana Bazzichelli, the first tentative reconstruction of the history of artistic networking in Italy. Collaborative narrative practices characterise most of these projects at different levels, not only because they are all groups of writers, rather than individual authors, but also because they involve the audience in the co-creation of narratives and counter-narratives of our history, whether these address past events or current affairs. See, for example, one of the early experiments of Wu Ming's transmedia storytelling, the novel *Manituana* (2007) (http://www.manituana.com/), directly inspired by Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* (for a review of the novel in English, see McEwen 2009).

But the best example of Wu Ming's artistic networking is how they build their discourses in their blog, wumingfoundation.com, involving the participation of their readership. Within this perspective, the novels are just a fragment of a wider process of collaborative storytelling between authors and readers, developed through social networks. These cases are particularly interesting for the way they have developed, through new technologies, a certain Italian underground culture into popular culture. This also reveals a strong desire to overcome postmodern fragmentation with a renewed

sense of collective identity. The way they have appropriated the anglophone concept of 'transmedia storytelling' is thus representative of a specific Italian community. Behind the word 'story' we can read in fact a certain cultural identity and worldview that we could not understand without knowing its historical background.

Question 4: Modern Languages and Digital Ethnography

Tori Holmes

In preparing this blog post, I have enjoyed taking a look at two new books relating to the topic of digital ethnography, which I will draw on in my reflections here (and highly recommend to readers!): Christine Hine's *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* and the introduction to Sarah Pink et al.'s *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*.

For many in Modern Languages, moving into ethnography, and studying digital culture through ethnography, is a departure, of some kind, from the methods we were trained in, and how we are accustomed to thinking about texts and their authors. Digital content such as blog posts, tweets, Facebook posts and digital videos (to name just a selection) is mobile, mutable and multipliable. It is also often produced by people whose names do not appear in library catalogues or figure in lists of the literary canon for a particular language or country/region, but it might also be that one chooses to study the social media output of a well-known author, artist or filmmaker, for example.

In deciding to 'follow' digital content, we watch texts in progress as they emerge, circulate and generate responses in a variety of settings, not necessarily only on the internet. Our lens widens beyond the texts to the practices and motivations involved in their production and circulation. We need to find ways of capturing and analysing this material as we go along, but also appropriate and possible ways of interacting and developing relationships with the authors of digital content, being visible to them as well as present with them, in one way or another. This is a central part of studying digital culture, ethnographically. It is a type of engagement that also requires us to think carefully about research ethics at all stages of the research process, from initial approaches to potential participants, to writing up and disseminating our findings.

In making this departure, then, we need to develop an understanding of the origins and principles of ethnography, as well as an awareness of how ethnography itself is being changed and challenged by digital technologies, so that our choices are well informed. We need to think carefully about where these origins and principles converge with ways of working in Modern

Languages, and where they diverge – and how to handle these divergences. As Pink et al. emphasise, this type of disciplinary negotiation and encounter is important and necessary, since 'ethnography is not a very meaningful practice by itself; instead, it is only useful when engaged through a particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary paradigm and used in relation to other practices and ideas within a research process' (2015: 2). Employing (digital) ethnography within Modern Languages, then, offers us an opportunity to think about what Modern Languages, or a modern linguist, is, and does.

The methodological reflexivity and adaptiveness of (digital) ethnography, and the emphasis on documenting and reflecting on choices made in response to the conditions of fieldwork – 'making moves and exploring connections that help to answer strategically significant questions' (Hine 2015, 69) – is a valuable addition to Modern Languages, where we do not always make explicit how we have reached our interpretations of texts. The textual analysis skills we learn in Modern Languages, and the linguistic and cultural skills we acquire to enable us to do this in a language other than our own, are crucial tools when making a departure into digital ethnography and finding ways to do digital ethnography within Modern Languages.

If a departure can be understood as an innovation, we can turn this around and remind ourselves that an innovation is also an alteration of a pre-existing trajectory. Innovating in Modern Languages by adopting digital ethnography as a way of studying digital culture changes how we understand texts and the basis on which we analyse them. It requires us to expand our focus to include not just practices, but also people. It asks us to write research on the basis of the relationships constructed in the process of fieldwork and to reflect on the decisions we have taken. This is not an easy undertaking, and can sometimes be unsettling and messy, but it is always provocative and challenging.

Claire Taylor

I'd like to pick up on a couple of the aspects that Tori highlights – aspects that, as a modern linguist, I have found to be particularly challenging when dealing with digital culture. The first of these is what Tori has very eloquently set out regarding the need to 'follow' digital content, and the fact that we need to pay attention to practices as much as to the 'text' itself. This entails shifts in our understanding of what a 'text' is and how we approach it. We can no longer assume that we have the definitive version of a 'text' in front of us (in the same way that we might have done with, say, a print novel in the past). And as Tori aptly reminds us, we need to find ways of 'capturing and analysing this material as we go along'. I'm not sure we have perfected the tools for either yet: capturing is a painstaking process, which often (and I speak from experi-

ence here) feels like the boring, laborious bit we want to skip in our anxiety to get on and actually engage with the content we're looking at. I certainly know that I'm guilty of speeding through content, enjoying it, rather than making sure I capture that vital page – and there's nothing more frustrating than, having identified a particularly wonderful case study that ticks all the boxes, discovering a week later that the webpage no longer exists, or that the excellent image you were going to use to illustrate your point has now been deleted. I wonder whether others contributing to this Writing Sprint might have some experiences to share here?

The second aspect which I find particularly challenging is that, as Tori says, this type of engagement 'requires us to think carefully about research ethics at all stages of the research process, from initial approaches to potential participants, to writing up and disseminating our findings'. Those of us in Modern Languages – probably still the majority? – who were brought in a literary tradition of study are generally trained to have an understanding of a 'text' as a fixed entity (notwithstanding various editions of a work) and an 'author' as a public figure. And I would hazard a guess that many of us, back in our own doctoral days, would have had virtually no training on, or at best a hazy understanding of, research ethics. But when content creators are human subjects, and, perhaps just as crucially, when our own interventions into the (digital)field site might have unintended consequences, ethical considerations have to be taken into account at every stage of our research process. We can build on the helpful recommendations set down in the AoIR ethics reports (http://aoir.org/ethics/), but might we need to think about how best to adapt or inflect these to our Modern Languages purposes? For instance, are there particular issues that arise when dealing with content creators in other languages and geographical locations that aren't covered by the AoIR guidelines? Might we even need to develop our own Modern Languages digital ethical code of practice?

Thea Pitman

I think digital technologies are crucial in forcing us in Modern Languages and other humanities disciplines to reconsider what the object of study might be. With the advent of social media and other forms of participatory culture our traditional Ivory Tower approach to the study of culture understood as difficult-to-understand cultural products which suitably well-trained academics like us can make sense of and relay to others (probably other academics and a few students) looks more flimsy than it ever did. I have frustrated myself over the last ten years by designing research projects which see me trying to find examples of high-cultural production online, albeit rejigged to dialogue

with their new, high-tech contexts, while at the same time wanting with increased urgency to find a way to study other phenomena that occur using the same technologies but that cannot realistically be shoehorned into the same categories as net.art or hypermedia fiction.

I also think that it is highly appropriate that Modern Languages scholars take this challenge on board and deal with it as a way of overcoming the hang-ups of our own disciplinary foundations. Rather than trying to emulate our colleagues in disciplines such as English literature with their research interests in a still very slowly evolving canon of high cultural production, we need to function as modern linguists who have a healthy interest in all forms of cultural production and the languages/registers that they are written in.

With regard to ethics, I think the increased need to work with ethnographic methodologies in our study of digital content creation can also be very healthy for modern linguists. As we realise we have strayed far enough into social sciences to warrant making applications to our institutions' various ethical approval boards, we should then look back on how we behave when we are dealing with more traditional objects of study. My hunch is that far too many modern linguists still have not woken up to the fact that, while cultural producers who publish their works might be quite resilient people, they are also still people and therefore it is important that we engage with what an ethical research practice might entail, even when we are 'just interviewing an author'.

In general, I have found the AoIR recommendations on ethical decision-making to be extremely helpful, not as a source of clear-cut answers to each and every ethical dilemma I have, but as a document that encourages me to be always alert to the ethical implications of my actions. Again, ethics is not just a (rather onerous) hurdle that we need to get over before we can get started on our projects: what we need is a 'dialogic, case-based, inductive and process approach' (AoIR 2012, 5), and the AoIR are also quite clear about the need for ethical approaches to adapt to be context-specific. This being the case, I'm not sure that we would need a Modern Languages-specific set of ethical recommendations. Perhaps what we really need is to make sure that more Modern Languages colleagues are aware of the AoIR recommendations and that we provide an easy-access synopsis of these that draw out the relevance for research in Modern Languages and provide Modern Languages case studies to illustrate.

Question 5: Users and Interfaces

Niamh Thornton

I want to approach this question with a reflection and, then, draw on recent discussions around dissemination. In my research into the culture of users I have drawn upon thinking around the disruptive potential of technology for artists, (h)activists, amateur creators, and non-state actors. Evidently, this demands that we think of a user as more than an adopter of others' creativity and design and see the capacity for user agency. Additionally, I employ disruption **(**http://souciant.com/2015/11/disruption-as-symptom/) deliberately as a concept that is not always benign, but has potency and salience for much of this discussion. Other theories that have informed my conceptualisation of users are taken from fan studies. This has some overlaps with how we imagine disruption functioning through outliers/loners. Fans are re-mediators (pace Jay David Butler and Richard Grusin 2000), who take a creative piece and reformulate it according to their own reading or re-imagining. Henry Jenkins (http://henryjenkins.org/archives-html)**,** a founding theorist of fan studies, has long fashioned himself an aca-fan and has explored how (fellow) fans become 'poachers who get to keep what they take and use their plundered goods as the foundations for the construction of an alternative cultural community' (1992, 223). Through digital turns and developments, these poachers are now mainstream – some business models are even founded on this premise, and the communities they form are multi-nodal and diverse. In many ways, as diligent obsessives, academics have some of the characteristics of fans operating from a place of specialism eager to communicate to audiences the significance of their insights and research. Thanks to changes in publishing, new modes of communicating and the variety of registers expected across different platforms, audiences are varied, which means that we must be adaptive and polyvalent. These shifts require academics to think of ourselves as users and consumers and, simultaneously, of our readers as users whose consumption is to be measured and understood according to an ever-evolving series of metrics and algorithms. This brings both the language of business and measures normally associated with the sciences into the humanities in ways that we are not always comfortable with, but should be adapted to fit our own needs and aims in ethical ways (https://www.martineve.com/2015/10/26/academiaedus-peer-review-experiments/).

Interfaces are the means through which we disseminate our research and reach a range of users. This can be as varied as using Facebook and Twitter to tell our academic friends and followers about our new outputs, or writing short posts that summarise or distil our reading of a text for a wide audience on a blog, or, an opportunity for building networks and readers

while working through our thinking, as well as a myriad other uses. These interactions take place on a multiplicity of platforms. With this in mind, I want to pose a variety of questions, here. What is the utility of these spaces and their functionality? Do they help enhance research? Is the fact that many of them are created to sell and serve the marketplace mean that they do not fit with the creative process of academic production? How do they challenge (disrupt, even) the idea of the single brilliant mind fluidly producing works of genius, and require us to rethink what it means to write, publish, and even allow ourselves to fail in public? Whether all content should be free and freely available **(**http://www.garyhall.info/journal/2015/10/18/does-academi-aedu-mean-open-access-is-becoming-irrelevant.html), and who has rights to it has been subject of much recent discussion and even lawsuits (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-34572462). In the light of this, how important is where you place your work to you as a user and researcher? Should it be on a 'federated network in which a scholar can maintain and share their work from one profile, on a scholar-governed network, whose direction and purpose serve their own', as Kathleen Fitzpatrick (http://www.plannedobsolescence.net/academia-not-edu/) suggests? Or, are there other models that suit your work better?

Kirsty Hooper

This is very thoughtful and raises important issues around user agency. I especially like your engagement with fan studies and the concept of re-mediation, which, as you say, inherently disrupts the linear flow of knowledge (knowledge transfer?!). Looking at the original question, I was struck by the contrast between the header ('Users and interface') and the text, which switches 'users' for 'readers'. Niamh, you asked elsewhere whether we should be rethinking our core terms, as concepts such as 'data' and 'archive' have become so elastic, and I think I would add 'reader' to that list. A reader of an electronic text doesn't just read – if the platform is right, they can edit, annotate, modify, critique, explain, share, interpret, reinterpret and, as you say, re-mediate. Engaging with an electronic text can, if the platform permits, be a multidimensional, collaborative experience that thanks to the magic of metadata, records its own traces through space and time.

This multivocal, collaborative space is perhaps our most productive means of challenging the persistently linear model of knowledge transfer and its unloved progeny, the 'impact agenda'. Those of us who navigate the muddy waters of commercial interfaces and social media know that these spaces aren't just about disseminating our research, or transferring it to the fortunate few, although many of us certainly do that too (old habits die hard!). They

can be real spaces of engagement, places for exploring, sharing, debating or inviting ideas, and for exposing ourselves to the networks in which knowledge circulates outside the academy. As you say, their value in demystifying the research process and making failure visible is immense. My experience of using Facebook as part of a community history project has been a revelation in this sense. While the original project was a conventional academic study that I planned to disseminate to my lucky audience (!), community engagement has expanded it into a shared space in which diverse forms of knowledge circulate, drawing on multiple archival, linguistic and cultural sources. This collaborative process of reading, writing, sharing and discussion has transformed the way I understand my role as an academic researcher. It meant letting go of 'my' research in ways I still don't fully understand, but it has also turned it into something living, ranging far beyond my individual field of vision.

Tori Holmes

I would like to add to the discussion on terminology by noting that as well as users and readers, the term 'audiences' (plural) also recurs in Niamh's post. Could we throw viewers into the mix too (of images and videos), and even listeners (e.g. of podcasts)? Given the multimedia nature of much digital content, we ought to also remember that as well as texts per se, academics are also involved – or could be involved – in generating audiovisual material as another alternative format for disseminating our ideas. For example, this can include video interviews and research summaries in video format, but also the (co)production of documentary films of various kinds. There is also media work, of course – participation in the media output of others, which is a longer-standing interface for academics.

In all these endeavours, it is worth thinking about two things: (1) skills – what skills do we need and how do we acquire them? There are of course an increasing number of training courses on offer (not to mention handbooks, websites, and so on), to PhD students and to academic staff, on how to use social media. Do they prepare us adequately for this engagement with multiple users and interfaces? What sensitivities do we need to acquire in undertaking such work, and how do we best do this? (2) workload and research assessment/evaluation – how do we manage the time we spend on this type of work, in an age of multiple demands (and make a case for its importance), and how do we ensure that we make it visible alongside our other outputs and activities, in our own profiles and in how these are assessed by others? (This also relates, albeit only indirectly, to the questions Niamh raised in her initial post about appropriate platforms for making available published academic work.)

I liked Kirsty's account of her use of Facebook in her community history project and noted her use of the verb 'circulate'. It brought to mind things I have read on the unpredictability and uncontrollability of digital circulation, whether of academic work or other types of content. This unpredictability can be potentially very positive, but can also be more complicated and problematic. David Beer (2013) has developed work on 'Public geography and the politics of circulation' which might be useful to us in thinking about all of this. To quote the abstract: 'this piece suggests that in order for academic researchers to make the most of the communicative potential of new media, they might need to also work towards a detailed understanding of the politics of data circulations to which their ideas will be exposed. Alongside this, the article suggests that we will need to prepare ourselves as our research takes on a life of its own.' This takes me back to the point on skills and sensitivities I made above. How do we develop this understanding of circulation, and how do we prepare for engaging with its unpredictability? Some of us are already engaged in this process, of course, but it might also be something that we, as modern linguists working with digital technologies, can contribute to our discipline, along with the code of ethics for a digital modern languages suggested by Claire in her response to my post on modern languages and digital ethnography. I look forward to reading your thoughts on this!

Question 6: Modern Languages Research and Process

Daniel Purdy

Does 'collaboration,' the word most commonly used to describe working with others, reveal anxieties inherent to any division of labour? 'Collaboration' opens up problems from the start, given that it means both 'united labour' and 'traitorous cooperation with the enemy.' To what extent is one sharing or abandoning one's own principles through collaboration? Yet to even raise the question of collaboration's connotations requires one to engage in a humanist practice of concentrating on ambivalences, rather than on productive meanings. To ask about what 'collaboration' means may simply be a way to hold up the process of collaboration. Is this query merely a form of epistemological quibbling or does it acknowledge institutional disparities in joint research? Anyone with a dictionary can recognise the ambivalence in 'collaboration,' but just how serious is this concern?

The abundant commentary on the collaboration concentrates on both the ethical and methodological decisions required in setting up digital projects, as well as in interpreting the data they generate. The moral implications of collaboration usually involve making sure that all the participants are

acknowledged appropriately. Humanities scholars like to presume that the natural and social sciences have worked out the conventions of crediting authorship for jointly written articles, however the dynamics and specialisations of digital projects often do not align with what are imagined to be clear-cut protocols. The 'Collaborator's Bill of Rights' may suggest an orderly assignment of roles, but its reliance on Enlightenment universalist categories would lead anyone to doubt their effectiveness: http://mcpress. media-commons.org/offthetracks/part-one-models-for-collaboration-careerpaths-acquiring-institutional-support-and-transformation-in-the-field/a-collaboration/collaborators'-bill-of-rights/.

As for methodology, the first point introduced is that although humanities scholars tend to work alone, they now need to learn collaborative methods of research and institutional evaluation if they are going to participate in digital research. Asymmetrical relationships are almost a requirement in the most innovative digital projects. Collaboration ideally includes very different kinds of partners, so that it does not look like a bunch of professors all discussing the same problem, nor should it follow a corporate IT model whereby a team is assembled of different experts to produce one result. And if the collaboration is meant to be even-handed, then it cannot be structured along a simple service arrangement, whereby data is brought forward from an archive for the humanist to interpret.

The most exciting digital scholarship argues, of course, that we are not faced with a choice between either humanities questions or scientific methods. Ben Schmidt's work on this point is exemplary: http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2012/11/reading-digital-sources-case-study-in.html. Likewise, there are plenty of people arguing against the imperative to work in teams. Presumably, individual scholarship will revive as digital scholarship refines its tools: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/09/10/jointauthorship-digital-humanities-collaboration/. Before we formulate a utopian model of even-handedness in research, we should note that interactions between disciplines rarely operate at the same speed or with a calm sense of parity. Interdisciplinary work inevitably entails appropriating methods and information from other fields so that they can redeployed in unfamiliar contexts. As Ted Underwood states, humanists who require convincing of the virtues of distant reading should not hesitate for too long, lest researchers from outside their discipline start explaining their own field to them (http:// tedunderwood.com/2015/10/03/can-we-date-revolutions-in-the-history-of-literature-and-music/). Collaboration thus can be motivated by a certain urgency to join a discussion that is already well under way.

Paul Spence

Daniel Purdy's response to the question on Modern Language Research and Process opens up some interesting questions about the meaning of 'collaboration' in the humanities. For those of us carrying out research in the digital humanities, collaboration is usually not even an option – the vast range of skillsets required on a typical digital project is beyond the scope of a single person, and in any case such a wide focus would not lead to good research. My experience on digital Modern Languages research projects is that there is a sense of inevitability that roles will (and need to) change, but also concern (much of it justified) about what that will mean to core humanities values and how researchers can learn new skills without diluting existing expertise.

We certainly should not introduce false symmetries, but equally we do need to move beyond over-simplistic dichotomies represented by scholar/technician and research/service role divisions when talking about digital research and recognise new actors and roles in an increasingly dynamic and connected research ecosystem, a point analogous to arguments made for the role of translators in the recent 'Translation as research' manifesto, published by MLO: http://www.modernlanguagesopen.org/index.php/mlo/article/view/80.

Humanists often treat claims about the value of opening up research tools and methods using digital infrastructure with some suspicion, although the picture is far less clear than sometimes thought, as demonstrated by recent research by Smiljana Antonijević in *Amongst Digital Humanists: An Ethnographic Study of Digital Knowledge Production* (forthcoming) which examines 'shifts in research practice, knowledge and legitimacy claims' in some detail and finds a surprising degree of divergence across subfields within the humanities, and across different aspects of the whole research cycle from finding and collecting, through analysing, visualising and interpreting, to publishing and archiving.

The key question, then perhaps, is 'why should we reveal or share our underlying research tools and methods?' One the one hand, inhibitions are imposed by current humanities research culture (which rarely provides academic incentives for collaboration or sharing) whereas on the other, calls for open scholarship often ignore the risks or the costs – the extra resources required to make a research object interpretable or reusable by others. Some research domains have developed models to explore these issues: federated research environments like NINES (Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship) http://www.nines.org/about/ or integrated research frameworks like Papyri.info (http://papyri.info/), which enables collaborative online authorship, is open to anyone but subject to a peer-reviewed framework, and enables open examination of decision trails for approved/published papyrological editions. How might this look in the

Modern Languages, and which subfields within Modern Languages would most benefit? And to repeat a question I asked earlier in the year, 'How useful is the 'Commons' model in thinking about the future of Modern Languages research?' (http://www.paulspence.org/mlr-and-dh/).

In part, the answer to these questions can be found in thinking about the new classes of research object which are emerging from digitally mediated Modern Languages research, in considering what specific skills we need to develop (which may involve interpreting deep or human/machine translated data as much as big data) and in providing a vision for a new scholarly reputation economy which concords more closely with transformations elsewhere in human culture and society, without losing the critical focus which make the humanities a crucial 'part of any vision of a future society' (http://4humanities.org/).

And finally, since we are contributing to this writing sprint during Academic Book Week (http://acbookweek.com/), I'd like to pose some questions about the implications for the relationship between research and publishing. Are the old wrappers for content such as 'book', 'journal article' still valid? Are they enough? If we step back from print-era assumptions and think of publication more abstractly as 'a range of modelling activities that aim to develop and communicate interpretation' (Blanke et al. 2014, 17), how should we define what we wish to model within Modern Languages?

Kathleen Fitzpatrick

As Daniel's response and Paul's comment both indicate, collaboration is hard, and yet absolutely crucial for the future of research in Modern Languages. And by that I mean that collaboration is at the core of *all* research in modern languages, not just the obviously cross-disciplinary team-based work that often takes place in digital form. We are, to varying extents, all always collaborating, and learning to do so in more productive ways can help both the quality of the work we produce and the quality of the experience we have in the process.

Many scholars in Modern Languages resist understanding their work as inherently collaborative, in no small part because that work is assessed and credit for it apportioned individually. I have heard colleagues say in the course of a tenure review that included a co-authored project, 'but we can't tell how much of it she wrote'. There's a pervasive sense, in other words, that, in a collaborative project, one does one's part and should only get credit for that part, which can ever only be a fraction of the work in a solo project. In fact, as nearly anyone involved in a successful collaboration can report, such projects require 100 per cent (if not more) from everyone involved. I have a

couple of co-authored articles on my vita, and of each of them, I would say if asked that each of us wrote the entire thing. Some paragraphs may have been outlined by me, and drafted by her, and revised by me, and polished by her, and some may have happened differently, but none of it was not written by both of us.

Collaboration does not always require full-on co-authorship, but our nervousness about such prospects points the way towards our real uneasiness with collaboration – in the loss of control it implies and the realisation that our ideas and the sentences that result from them won't ever be fully our own. If we're being honest with ourselves, though, we'd have to admit that they have never been fully our own: we have all read and discussed things that have generated the ideas, and we have dozens of influences that affect the sentences. All scholarly writing, in other words, is always subterraneanly collaborative, a conversation carried out across publications and across time. The best collaborations enable us to have that conversation, and benefit from its results, in something closer to real time, throughout the work, building on the multiple strengths that only a team can bring to bear.

What the digital brings to such collaborations, as the question notes, is the ability to surface the conversational processes inherent in them, to make those processes as much a part of the work as are the object of study and the resulting project. Digital tools also enable us to open our collaborations at key moments to a much broader set of publics − not just more scholars, but more readers, more interlocutors, more people who might engage with us and contribute new ways of thinking about our work. This openness will no doubt require us to learn even more about how to collaborate, but, again, we are very likely to find that both our results and our process for realising them improve dramatically as a result.

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