



## Digital Historical Geography: Representation, Archive, and Access

*Dedicated to the memory of Aaron Schwartz, 1981-2013*

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Depending on your experiences with digital scholarship lately, you are probably opening this issue of *Historical Geography* with some combination of curiosity, dread, and delight. As this very gesture may be requiring an adjustment of your personal definition of *opening the issue*, you may also be wondering what other definitional transformation is imminent, and if that transformation will be an imposition or a gift. As guest editor, my job is to deliver it as gift, through collaboration with authors, editors, and publisher. Hopefully, we have done our job.

The reasons that a journal might want to shift to an all-digital format are well-known in terms of their financial and dissemination benefits. Digital publication reduces the financial costs for both publisher and subscriber, the physical burden of limited shelf space, and the environmental travesty of wasted paper. If the digital publication is also open access, there are further potential benefits. Available directly to any individual with an Internet browser and fluency in the language of publication, digital scholarship in open access receives wider dissemination than print scholarship, crossing both international borders as well as the borders between academics and non-academics.

There are also clear benefits for the field of geography. As the twenty-first century gathers momentum, geography is seeing a surge in the very kind of research that would greatly benefit from all-digital publication, including such research areas as geohumanities, digital humanities, historical GIS, web-based mapping, and new ontological structures in geodatabase design. This surge has been particularly prevalent in the United States, where new grant lines for digital research in geographical subfields can be found at the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Council of Learned Societies, as well as in funding programs at the state and institutional levels. In 2007, the Association of American Geographers launched a major initiative on geohumanities, inspired by a symposium at the University of Virginia and subsequently defined in two edited volumes published by Routledge

in 2011.<sup>1</sup> In both volumes, digital practices in historical geography figure prominently. At the 2012 meetings of the AAG, there were seven sessions devoted to geohumanities, as well as individual papers in digital humanities, multimedia, and creative methodologies, and a full day of special sessions at the New York Public Library on the topic of digital archives, geospatial data and imagery, and geographical research.<sup>2</sup>

Although these increasing opportunities for funding and conferences have improved awareness and understanding of digital scholarship, perceptions of its scholarly legitimacy remain in transition, and options for presentation of digital scholarship in a peer-reviewed space continue to be lacking. We have of course witnessed publishers' transitions to online journal publication through paid subscription, bringing with it potential benefits such as the return of color figures inserted in the article itself, rather than marginalized to the end of the volume as special plates. The format of these journals, however, continues to follow the logic of print: what was once a series of articles on paper pages, designed to relax and animate the eye and brain of the reader through a particular chemistry of typeface, margin, and line spacing, is now a list by title of posted PDF's or HTML links. And although videos, interviews, and interactive maps may have been central to an author's methods, analysis, or findings, these elements largely continue to be omitted, despite the fact that the PDF file structure can support the incorporation of such elements into the text flow. The non-textual is demoted to the status of figure, screenshot, or link, foreshortening the representation of the work through partial explanation and presentation. Were that the conditions be altered to accommodate the expression of such cross-modal or cross-media approaches to research, without leaving the peer-reviewed environment, both the scholarship and its readership would finally find their ground.

There have been some exceptions here and there. For example, the all-digital and peer reviewed *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* launched in 2002 with open access, PDF publication of all content, and is now publishing its web interface in five languages. In 2011, the editors at ACME began a thoughtful exploration of "alternative presentation formats" with an article based in poetry and audio, and in the same year, *Progress in Human Geography* also published an article with associated sound.<sup>3</sup> In 2005, the *Journal of Maps* built a digital home for peer-reviewed, open access publication of research presented primarily in cartographic format. And in 2007, *aether: the journal of media geography* also created a home for peer-reviewed, open access digital journal publishing in PDF format; in its recent issues, the editors have published articles making extensive use of embedded video clips.<sup>4</sup>

Outside of geography, the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture has taken the innovation potential of all-digital to new heights with their journal *Vectors*, [link: <http://vectorsjournal.org>] and the release of their open access, multi-platform, digital authoring and publishing tool *Scalar* [link: <http://scalar.usc.edu/>]. *Vectors* supports the peer-reviewed publication of multimedia-based research; in lieu of articles, the journal presents research as collaborative projects between authors and designers in a dynamic environment and with publicly available peer response.

To these innovators, we seek to add our voice. Lacking the funding levels of an Alliance for Networking Visual Culture, we nonetheless set out to discover what can be accomplished with nothing more elaborate than a commitment to making space for scholars devoted to blending textual and non-textual modes of doing historical geography. What are the possibilities, on a shoestring?

For this all-digital issue, we showcase scholarship in historical geography that will thrive if expressed in an all-digital, online format. It is not a special issue on historical GIS, the serving of large data sets, or digital interfaces for archival collections; each of these lines of inquiry are being defined with elegance by others, here and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Instead, we focus on three authors

whose research is characterized by the use of non-textual tools to structure either the research inquiry itself or the communication of that research to the reader. These authors blend archive, fieldwork, and written word with video, photography, and printed and animated maps, not only to uncover, analyze, and reveal geographical patterns, but as well to explain and present their findings to us. In so doing, they demonstrate tangible answers to contemporary questions of what a geohumanities practice rooted in multimedia looks like,<sup>6</sup> and push the boundaries of what practicing historical geography in a digital environment can be.

In the opening article, Michael Kahan takes us to the City of Philadelphia to examine the geographies of prostitution as revealed by the archive of city administration during the Progressive Era. Kahan uncovers these geographies by scrutinizing the content of a Vice Commission official report, detective reports, and an extensive arrest register, mapping the locational content of these close readings with GIS, and then transferring that information to an interactive, Flash-based cartographic framework in order to explore different transects of the data and story. Informing these textual and visual readings with both quantitative and qualitative measures, his analyses uncover the ways in which the spatial patterns of Philadelphia's commercial sex market between 1912-1918 were produced by the racial, ethnic, and sexual identity politics of the time, the economic geographies of neighborhoods and markets, and the women's individual economic decisions and actions.

In the second article, Laurel Smith moves us to Oaxaca, Mexico, and an analysis of the video *Women of Equal Worth*. Smith explores the history of Indigenous video production as a means to document women's stories of the Indigenous coffee economy and then represent those stories to other Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous outsiders. Along the way, she examines video as a tool of empowerment, a tool for teaching, and a device for structuring and producing archives. Grounding her analysis in scholarship on the connections between the archive and the history and localities of science, and the ways in which archives structure and produce scientific knowledge, she argues that Indigenous video's dual role as archiver and archived has constituted its own postcolonial scientific practice in Mexico.

Smith and her collaborators at Ojo de Agua take advantage of the forum of digital publication to present the complete video of *Women of Equal Worth*, so we can read both video and video interpretation together. In addition, Smith presents us with two complete manuscripts, one in English and one in Spanish, thereby inviting readerships that might otherwise never read her work, including the communities discussed and analyzed in the work itself.

In the third and final article in this series, Esther Jacobson-Tepfer and James Meacham also make use of digital publication's possibilities by offering two alternative modes of reading. In this case, the two modes are not two languages, but two media: text and audio. They invite us either to read their article and view the maps and photographs as they are presented in the printed piece, or alternatively, to listen to the article while viewing maps and photographs in timed sequencing with the audio. In so doing, they capitalize on the ability of the digital arena to support explanations of the ways in which maps were analyzed and fieldwork conducted. Guided by Jacobson-Tepfer's voice, we are encouraged to spend time looking directly at the landscape while she tells us the way in which the landscape figured into their place name investigation.

Through this blend of maps, photographs, and words, Jacobson-Tepfer and Meacham present their research into the place names of the Mongolian Altai, conducted in order to access dimensions of the historical landscape previously hidden to them. They explain how what began as a utilitarian place name investigation as a means to locate archaeological sites became an education into the places and experiences of the peoples using, visiting, colonizing, or residing in the Altai region.

In the articles, each author extends the representational limitations of his or her particular field by fusing several technologies to present field and archival work in a particular way. Each also raises interesting questions regarding archive and access, including the relationship between archive, memory, and the construction of knowledge; the locations of archives in the world; and the ways in which archives connect to both authors and readers.

Kahan re-archives portions of an otherwise obscure and inaccessible archive built by the City of Philadelphia, by mapping the archive in an online environment. Walking us through the findings in the map, Kahan simultaenously teaches us to read the archive as well as read the spatial patterns of the animation. Guided on how to read the changing social and spatial patterns of prostitution over time, we can then re-explore the archive on our own. Smith's project also widens access to an archive, a video built to serve the needs of Indigenous archiving. By presenting a parallel, Spanish translation of her article in a digitally accessible environment, Smith expands the academic archive outside its usual walls of academic journal permissions and English language. Like Kahan, she teaches us how to be informed viewers and readers of that archive by guiding us with her analyses and conclusions. So, too, do Jacobson-Tepfer and Meacham widen access to a place name archive normally inaccessible to outsiders, that of the Mongolian Altai, by re-representing that archive in digital form here.

Beyond these common explorations of archival possibilities, these scholars inhabit separate realms of historical geography. Their work crosses time periods, geographical locations, theoretical approaches, methodologies, and geographic traditions. What is held in common is a willingness to discover the possibilities for historical geography in digital publication. With their willingness and yours, we present this inaugural digital issue.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michael Dear, et al., (eds.), *GeoHumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), and Stephen Daniels, et al., (eds.), *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> "Working digitally with historical maps," February 25, 2012, New York Public Library. Co-organized by Humphrey Southall, Matt Knutzen, and Merrick Lex Berman.

<sup>3</sup> *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* (2011) 10; Anja Kanngeser, "A Sonic Geography of Voice," *Progress in Human Geography* (2012) 36: 336-353.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *aether* 6 (2010) [http://geogdata.csun.edu/~aether/volume\\_06.html](http://geogdata.csun.edu/~aether/volume_06.html).

<sup>5</sup> Anne Knowles, (ed.), "Emerging Trends in Historical GIS" special issue, *Historical Geography* 33 (2005), [http://www.historical-geography.net/volume\\_33.htm](http://www.historical-geography.net/volume_33.htm); Marguerite Madden, Chiao-Ying

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(Jill) Chou, and Andrea Presotto, (eds.), “Geovisualization and Analysis of Dynamic Phenomena” special issue, *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information* 2 (2013) [http://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijgi/special\\_issues/dynamic-phenomena](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijgi/special_issues/dynamic-phenomena); and “Cartographic Archives” special issue, *Archivaria* 13 (1981) <http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/issue/view/372/showToc>

<sup>6</sup> David J. Bodenhamer, “The Potential of Spatial Humanities,” in David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor Harris, (eds.), *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 14-30; John Corrigan, “Qualitative GIS and Emergent Semantics,” *Ibid.*, 76-88.