

# By Way of Another Editorial on Fusions in the Digital and Public Humanities

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**Summary** 1 Kickstarting an Open-Ended Debate at International Level. – 2 Five More Contributions to the Topic of 'Fusions'.

## 1 Kickstarting an Open-Ended Debate at International Level<sup>1</sup>

This second issue of *magazén* closes the inaugural volume 2020 and thematically follows high on the heels of the first one, as they are both connected to the topic of 'fusions', a term which in our intentions functions as a picklock to investigate recent developments in the wider field of digital and public humanities. Earlier this year, we invited scholars to ponder how this definition could be useful to interpret the field's attempt in the past few years to create a canon or, at least, a set of criteria for its own inception as an academic discipline. Through an international call for papers we thus wanted to open a platform that would allow theoretical debates, methodological reflec-

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction paper was mutually agreed on by the authors who acted as curators of *magazén*'s inaugural volume 2020, divided in two issues, with the help of the journal's editorial board.

tions, as well as the examination of particular case studies ranging from textual scholarship, history and art history to cultural heritage studies and archaeology. Our conviction is that digital and public humanities are still informed by ongoing mergers, interrelations, interpenetrations, interdependencies, and cross-contaminations that shape their very research processes and approaches. The response to our call for abstracts – which we issued twice, in March and then again in July 2020 – was astounding with over sixty proposals from all over the world and from scholars at different levels of their careers, spanning from PhD candidates to senior researchers and full professors. Given this high figure and the subsequent necessity to thoroughly peer review the selected articles we resolved to split the proposals in two yearly volumes, hence in 2021 we will pursue the topic of ‘fusions’ even further, though with a slightly different take. For the present volume we inaugurated a particularly strict selection process, in order to present our scholarly audience with papers of the best possible standard, such as to strengthen and legitimise this novel and interdisciplinary field towards the wider – and sometimes quite sceptical – domain of the humanities. For this purpose, our editorial board arranged a preliminary selection on the basis of the submitted abstracts, in order to ask for full papers only to those prospective authors that we deemed interesting for the aims of this year’s topic. All submitted papers then underwent the scrutiny of a double blind peer review process with two expert scholars for each contribution. For the sake of statistics, out of approximately thirty proposals we considered upon our call for abstracts, eight were immediately rejected, while eighteen papers were eventually submitted by the scheduled deadline and only ten made it into the final volume. It was indeed a tough selection process that involved reviewers from major universities and research centres of international renown, thus it should speak for the high quality of the published papers that just a third of the initial proposals were eventually taken into consideration.

While this issue may close *magazén*’s first volume, the inaugural work for this journal is not yet over. As a matter of fact, considering the two adjectives our very research field comprises – digital and public – we are committed to develop a dedicated web version of the journal, which will allow for better categorisation and searchability of the final papers. Furthermore, we will attempt to exploit, for scholarly reasons, all possibilities offered by digital publishing that render a different presentation logic and reading experience, such as plain vertical scrolling, the insertion of various media and hyperlinks, as well as interrelated tagging. Hence, the provision of general categories and subdomains becomes paramount, not just to organise the papers of our journal, but rather to discern them from the perspective of a methodological structure for the entire field of digital and public humanities that conceptually focuses on contact points, similar-

ities, and interconnections among the various disciplines it is comprised of. As already mentioned in the introduction to the first issue of this volume, we thought of five relevant dimensions that form the basis of our categorisation system. Specifically they refer to: 1) the kind of materials observed or employed, which will be divided among monuments, documents, sound, movement, works of art or born digital artefacts; 2) the media of representation, since it may influence the content reception, be they image data, textual data, audio-visual data, 3D data or else; 3) the applied methods of research, which comprise modelling, epistemology, collection, processing, visualisation, analysis, hermeneutics; 4) the modes of sharing, thus focusing on the public aspect of the research, which may employ various forms of publication, participation, communication, preservation, or afterlife; and 5) actors, factors and agents of the chosen field, since they really constitute the analysed domain by determining its boundaries and behavioural patterns, hence one will highlight features referring to society, institutions, communities, technology, and the environment discourse. This structure consisting of five domains and their subcategories has an analytical purpose, of course, and may be revised in the future according to the advancement of the field itself or because of radical technological change, but so far we believe it is suitable in order to enshrine and subdivide the various aspects that hold relevance to our research domain. We hope future readers of our hypertext version will appreciate this set of transversal domains that we would like to address with due awareness, in order to contribute to establishing digital and public humanities as a coherent field inside academia. If we succeed in this task, even though only in part, it would be our greatest pleasure given that it is inscribed in our founding principles that we need to create a basis for the collaborative development of durable, reusable, shared resources for research and learning in the field of digital and public humanities. In a way, our aim is really just to set up an open, international, and interdisciplinary platform, as if we were to provide a nice venue and furnishing for our proverbial *magazén*, the public house where at the time of the Venetian Republic everyone was invited to share, talk, bargain, harangue, and exchange ideas, experiences and objects.

## 2 Five More Contributions to the Topic of ‘Fusions’

Following on the lines of the first issue, the authors chosen for this second venture start from a historical overview to unfold the interrelations and connected dynamics which occurred in various subdomains of the digital and public humanities. Hence, the first three contributions tackle the concept of ‘fusions’ analysing the gradual convergence of different fields at a methodological level, while the

last two papers are dedicated to two intriguing case studies that examine the liminality between cultural production and consumption with regard to museum display in the digital environment.

To begin with the first contribution, Barbara Heinisch enquires on the meanings of what is now referred to as 'citizen humanities', that is, the public participation in scholarly research, and their connections to the digital and public humanities. Illustrated by a citizen linguistics project, she argues that the mutual influence on academic practices is reflected in novel ways of knowledge co-production, shared authority, and societal transformation.

In the second paper, Chris Beausang takes up the challenging task to retrace the history of computational literary criticism by dividing it into three main epochs, analysing the turning points and characterising each one in their connections to traditional literary criticism.

In the third contribution of this issue, Enrica Salvatori underlines the intrinsic and long-established relationship between historians and information technology, presenting current Italian projects in the digital humanities derived from national conferences of the Italian Association for Public History (AIPH) and the Association of Humanistic Informatics and Digital Culture (AIUCD).

Coming to the conclusive case studies of this issue, Trilce Navarrete and Elena Villaespesa analyse the online fruition on Wikipedia of more than one hundred paintings from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, arguing that digital cultural consumption can open and foster new ways of utilizing and experiencing art collections outside the traditional art context, and that this new form of digital consumption is reflected in the strategy which is increasingly adopted also by other important museums.

In the closing paper, Kathryn Simpson and Lois Burke present the understudied topic of 'children's writings', which always struggled to gain a place in traditional literature as well as in the museum space. They engage in a fruitful discussion on how to use digital tools to display the agency of these writings, convincingly arguing that presenting children's collections digitally can be useful in order to create a space for experimentation and exchange between institutions, objects and visitors.

Finally, we must again express our most sincere acknowledgment to the many scholars involved in this venture in various roles and with different capacities: the numerous colleagues and friends at the Department of Humanities engaged in the establishment of our research centre; the external experts of our advisory board for their trust and consideration; all contributors, peer reviewers and members of the editorial board for their strong commitment and smooth collaboration; the team of our publisher, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, directed by Massimiliano Vianello, for the tireless job necessary to deliver both issues of volume 2020 with perfect timing. Let us hope 2021

will bring about better times for all of us, though we will certainly keep on working on another volume of *magazén* in a field of growing relevance for the humanities, particularly in a period of social distancing and limited movement.

