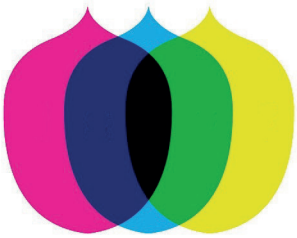


INDEPENDENT SOCIAL
RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Platform Humanities

Digital Technologies and Social Research

Bulletin 27

Edited by Dr Lars Cornelissen

ISRF bulletin
Issue 27

Platform Humanities

Digital Technologies and Social Research

First published May 2023

62 Bayswater Road
W2 3PS, London

See the online ISRF Bulletin (www.isrf.org/bulletin) for more articles by ISRF Fellows and associates, including earlier versions of some of the pieces included in this print issue.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Dr Lars Cornelissen

ISRF Academic Editor

In late September 2022, the ISRF and its sister foundation, the Athens-based Research Centre for the Humanities (RCH), co-hosted a conference in the Greek capital. The conference was themed around **The Digital Condition and Humanities Knowledge**, a deliberately broad topic intended to create room for the specific type of interdisciplinary encounter both the ISRF and the RCH prioritise: the type that is not so much staged but happened upon, less curated than allowed to occur organically. In this, the conference was a resounding success!

This issue of the ISRF Bulletin comes out of that conference and brings together a number of the papers presented there. It is not a record of conference proceedings, however. The articles collected here are revisited, reworked, and refined versions of those originally presented in Athens in September. Like the conference, this issue broadly addresses itself to the intersections between digital technology and the humanities. Each of the contributions asks how digital tools and platforms have impacted their field of study or been woven into their research or teaching.

The contribution that opens this issue is a reflective piece by former ISRF Fellow Hanne Cottyn and her co-authors Lina Cortés, Santiago Martínez, María Santos, Nancy Bonilla, Rodolfo Hernández, Carlos Cuellar, and Crisálida Bermúdez. They discuss their efforts to co-produce an interactive and democratic digital platform on which to collect, present, and preserve old and new knowledge about the Colombian *páramos* (highlands). Hosted at http://paramunos.com, this platform is at once an archive and a means of publicly and democratically contesting the way the *páramos* and the communities living there are represented and understood more widely. An examplary instance of inclusive co-production in the digital humanities, Paramunos is sure to inspire many such platforms in future.

Costas Gousis also explores the democratic potential of digital tools in his contribution. Drawing on his PhD research on immigrant activism in Greece as it related to the 2008 financial crisis, Gousis focusses on two case studies in which digital platforms offered activists not only a means of facilitating internal deliberation but also a way of reaching out across borders and forge international relations of solidarity with other activists and movements. In both instances, digital technologies proved invaluable tools in the arsenal of democratic activism from below.

In her contribution, former ISRF Fellow Athena Hadji reflects on the way she was forced to move her teaching online amidst the first Covid-19 lockdowns in early 2020. This was made all the more complex by the fact that the course she was teaching was Greek Sculpture—a course normally structured around museum visits, not videoconferencing interfaces. Though initially forced to improvise, Hadji soon found that this new situation could act as a prompt for her to rethink not only her pedagogy but also her broader understanding of the way we experience sculpture. The piece ends with a lovingly rendered homage to her students, some of whom also kindly joined us in Athens.

The fourth contribution takes us from the classroom back into the archive. Styliani Lepida reflects systematically on the impact digital technologies have had both on her own research area of Ottoman History and on historiography more generally. As she observes, the discipline of history, more or less by its very essence, is resistant to change. As a result, the advent of digital technologies and their impact on research practices, archival standards, methodological precepts, and data processing has enjoyed a mixed reception. For Lepida, resistance to new technologies and methods smacks of 'scientific elitism' and stands in the way of the discipline's more ambitious vocation: to build, foster, and spread knowledge of our shared past.

The issue closes with a contribution by Io Chaviara, Danae Karydaki, Michalis Kastanidis, and Regina Mantanika, who reflect on an ongoing study of the cultural history of Eleusina. A city just outside of Athens that was a prominent religious site in the classical era and that became an industrial hub in the twentieth century before deindustrialisation hit

in the 1990s, Eleusina is a fascinating case study in palimpsestic history. Central to the authors' approach to this history is OpenEleusis, a digital platform that aims to map the cultural history and living memory of the city. Bringing together archival material, artworks, oral history narratives, and a documentary film, OpenEleusis is another example of democratically oriented, inclusive, and truly interdisciplinary use of digital tools.

Though this issue draws on the 2022 Athens conference, it is also intended to look ahead at the ISRF's next conference, to be held in Bologna, Italy, at the start of November 2023 (see http://isrf.org/events/conference). Focussed on **Climate Crisis, Global Capitalism, and Higher Education**, at this conference we will pick up some of the threads outlined in Athens, including the status and structure of humanities knowledge in a world on fire.

THE DIGITAL CONDITION AND HUMANITIES KNOWLEDGE

An Introduction

Professor Christopher Newfield
ISRF Director of Research

When the talks that became this Bulletin's papers were delivered in Athens in September 2022, 'the digital condition' had not yet been absorbed by the appearance of ChatGPT and the declaration of the 'Age of AI'. These papers embody themes that will be part of any effective response to—and use of—machine learning and related technologies. The papers focus on the co-creation of community histories across great variations of culture, techniques, and experiences. They recount the use of digital technologies to form classroom communities during the pandemic, create alliances among endangered migrants, and distribute archives overlooked in standard national histories. The practices described in this issue can help head off the dystopian potentials of so-called generative AI—discrimination, disinformation, the concealment or fabrication of personal experiences and collective histories—and may help put machine learning to use in making the historical and cultural records more accurate, equitable, and complete.

We assumed, in designing the conference, that we needed to articulate humanities knowledge in a way that would allow it to confront, understand, and co-create the digital condition. And yet the terms *humanities* and *knowledge* don't often go together. The humanities fields encompass a vast portion of the history of human expression and creation—really a history of miracles when you compare it to the destruction, killing, mayhem, plunder, and domination in which humans are often engaged, and even in acknowledgement that the

humanities have done their part in helping that destruction. But this amazing outpouring of creativity in all times and places doesn't explain why we'd use the word *knowledge* for it, as opposed to familiar words like art or literature, or, in the mode of art criticism or literary criticism, established terms like judgment, discernment, or the traditional task of 'enlarging our appreciation of what counts as important'.[1] There's a great deal of concern among humanists today about overstepping our role in developing aesthetic experience and judgment by moving into knowledge, even as the humanities has also engaged directly and comprehensively with our other term, the digital, by producing an abundance of knowledge about it. Let me try to say something simple about this ambivalence contained within our title.

One core function of human consciousness is *abstraction*, a movement away from concrete particulars towards features or signs that can be generalised. This is usually associated with mathematics and with science more generally, as launched in early European modernity by Francis 'Bacon's experimental method of isolating natural phenomena in controlled settings where they could be subject to instrumental analysis and rational inquiry'. One scholar has noted,

> The means and forces of abstraction appear to have undergone an uneven process of intensification across human history but reached new heights [at least in Europe] in the 'long sixteenth century' (c.1450–1640), manifested in the rise of print technology in communications, the scientific method for inquiry, double-entry bookkeeping in accountancy, perspective in painting and rationalized cartography in interpreting space, to name but a few.[2]

It might seem at first that this passage equates the powers of abstraction with accounting and scientific method, and yet abstraction is equally tied here to writing and to art. One can imagine a history of world thought in which the liberal arts and sciences interacted continuously and approached problems together—one in which the

1. Elisa Tamarkin, 'Critical Enough', *American Literary History* 34, no. 1 (2022): 342–353.
2. Timothy Erik Ström, 'Capital and Cybernetics', *New Left Review* 135 (June 23, 2022): 26.

old trivium subjects of grammar, logic, and rhetoric worked side by side with mathematics and what later became the natural sciences. This would have been a world of epistemic *parity* among diverse methods, and a title like ours, 'the digital condition and humanities knowledge', would connote longstanding cooperation rather than strain.

But we have had strain instead, and conflict and an epistemic hierarchy that threatens the vitality and social circulation of humanities knowledge. To take one recent example, a recent National Science Foundation guideline for research on cell structure reads, 'Research proposals are encouraged that use multidisciplinary physical, chemical, mathematical and computational approaches to provide novel techniques and integrative insight into fundamental cellular functions. … Proposals that rely heavily on descriptive approaches are given lower priority'. The biologist citing this passage goes on to object, 'virtually all biological research is primarily descriptive'. '[N]one of the solid research that led to the revolution in cell biology … would have met the standards of the current NSF'.[3] Our standard hierarchy of evidence—computation at the top, description (and interpretation) below, understand humanities knowledge as an epistemically inferior discourse, even as it undermines the humanities-based process like description that enable science. The hierarchy is wrong, and yet it guides funding decisions and research topic selection. It intimidates many people, and many academics, out of using humanities methods to understand and change their world. The hierarchy is alien to the ideal of interdisciplinarity that helped create the ISRF.

Untold volumes have been written to explain how we got to this incorrect and untenable place. I'll mention three factors that stand out. One is war and colonisation—technology supports conquest, while art and writing don't have that direct instrumental power. Words are not actually missiles. A second is several centuries of rising living standards that have been wholly attributed to science and technology. C.P. Snow's famous 'two cultures' lecture in 1959 codified science as the better future and literature as the past, casting the humanities looking

3. KLG, 'Scientific Research and the Unforeseen World: Why Basic Research Is Essential', *Naked Capitalism* (blog), August 19, 2022, online at https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2022/08/scientific-research-and-the-unforeseen-world-why-basic-research-is-essential.html.

backwards, resisting progress, and prone to fruitless quarrels. Snow was specifically praising science's track record of reducing poverty and hunger, for which he wrongly gave art and humanistic and social study no credit. This view remains common today, entrenched by the enormous wealth that technology platforms have created for their owners.

A third force in relegating the humanities fields to marginal status is one the conference took up: the rise of digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Over the past fifty years, these have become embedded in material infrastructures whose vastness and complexity is almost impossible to comprehend. They perform the essential functions in every sphere of the economy and the state, from business logistics and social advertising to criminal justice and migration surveillance. Networks of computational devices operate modern militaries and constitute the global financial system. Finance and the ICT industries have steadily fed each other's growth for decades, while entertainment blurs into digital marketing which in turn overlaps with military intelligence in the collection of unfathomable quantities of personal data around the world. The 'global information infrastructure' as Al Gore liked to call it can lead to the '"colonization of everyday life by information processing," drawing more grounded practices into the circuits of cyber-capital'.[4] Those grounded practices of everyday life are of course the material of the humanities. They seem at risk of being defined by digital systems over which they have little control, and to be more dependent on unaccountable powers than ever before.

Oddly enough, I don't feel overpowered by the situation I've just described, and the Athens conference reinforced that feeling. Everything that I have just written is the result of analyses in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. It is one drop in the ocean of commentary on the current conjuncture of digital technology with finance and economics, and also migration, democracy, archival historical research, archaeology, urban planning, close reading, deindustrialisation, anti-colonial knowledge production, the critique of AI claims, and the many other things we spoke about at the

4. Ström, 'Capital and Cybernetics', 34.

conference. We use powerful humanities tools that we sometimes take for granted. We produce detailed accounts of the past to understand the present. We judge the powers of abstraction by their effects on the concrete. We in the humanities contest, critique, and redesign global systems according to their local impacts. The humanities, very much including my home discipline of literary criticism, bind massive material infrastructures to subjectivity, to the inner world that each of us inhabits every minute of our lives. The humanities emerge from and express human agency, including the agency of intellectual and social movements as they study and judge the digital condition, accept and reject various aspects of it, and work to dismantle or reconstruct it according to our collective sense of human possibility and need.

The conference was scheduled before the pandemic for 2020, and its original title was 'Culture and Memory'. It was going to consider among other things the Greek Revolution of 1821 on its 200th anniversary. That revolution against Ottoman rule is an example of this problem I've noted: attempts to lead self-determined immediate lives that are interrupted by the greater masters of abstraction, in that case empires of east and west. Whatever their philosophical limits and multiple ups and downs, the Greek revolution expressed powers of resistance and, as importantly, reconstruction that have been drawn on many times since, including during heroic perseverance in the face of the 'troika's' austerity cram-downs in the 2010s.[5] I associate Greece with the genius of the local, and it remains an example of endurance and inventiveness for Europe and beyond. If social and cultural research can draw on that spirit, cultural and social research is going to be fine.

5. The 'troika' was the joint authority deciding policy towards Greece's debt, composed of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For a front-row Greek perspective, see Yanis Varoufakis, *Adults in the Room: My Battle with the European and American Deep Establishment* (New York 2017: Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

PARAMUNOS

A Digital Strategy for Knowledge Co-creation about the Colombian Páramos

Hanne Cottyn, Lina Cortés, Santiago Martínez, María Santos, Nancy Bonilla, Rodolfo Hernández, Carlos Cuellar, and Crisálida Bermúdez

In the face of planetary-wide environmental crises, scholars, practitioners and activists alike have been observing how conventional conservation schemes tend to underrepresent rural communities' concerns and diverse forms of knowledge.[1] By seeking to protect nature by separating it from humans, conventional conservation schemes tend to exclude or simplify other (e.g. indigenous, peasant) modes and practices of relating to nature.[2] Efforts towards environmental justice and 'convivial' conservation require a more inclusive dialogue across disciplines and forms of knowledge.[3] In

1. W. San Martín, 'Unequal Knowledge: Justice, Colonialism, and Expertise in Global Environmental Research', *Global Environment,* 14, no. 2 (2021): 423–430.
2. S. Doyon and I. Vacarro, 'Présentation : repenser la conservation de la nature. Vers une anthropologie de l'engagement environnemental ?', *Anthropologie et Sociétés,* 43, no. 3 (2019): 9–29.
3. B. Büscher and R. Fletcher, 'Towards Convivial Conservation', *Conservation and Society,* 7, no. 3 (2019), 283.

Colombia, this challenge is felt acutely in the 'páramos', the moorlands situated in the highest zones of the northern Andes, above the permanent forest line and below the snowline. The word 'páramo' was imported by the first European colonizers from the Iberian peninsula where it refers to barren plains. Historically, far from a scientifically sanctioned term, páramo was a common signifier for uncivilized and unproductive areas, a treeless wasteland. In more recent times, this notion has started to shift. In Colombia—a country that contains a considerable portion of the world's páramo areas—páramo became known as an 'ecosystem' of 'strategic' importance.[4] Scientific research and (inter)national environmental policies underscore the páramos' vital role in capturing CO2 and providing drinking water to urban areas.

Because of this strategic value, the páramos have become subject to new legislation, defining them in terms of exclusionary, state-controlled conservation areas.[5] However, as the notion of the páramo as a strategic ecosystem gained hegemony, other versions of páramo that exceed its framing as '(to-be-protected) nature' tend to be sidelined, and at times discredited. This friction merges in particular in relation to how campesinos (rural working class communities) have been putting into practice and protecting the páramo, as one campesino told us, not as 'nature' but as home. The páramos have indeed been inhabited for centuries by campesino communities for whom these high and challenging environments have offered refuge from armed conflict and a deeply unequal agrarian system. Campesinos have been denouncing new páramo regulations as restrictive top-down impositions that risk displacing them and stripping them of their livelihoods in the name of nature conservation. As one female campesina leader expresses, 'before, the war removed us [from the páramo], now the Law of the Páramo does'.[6]

4. D.C. Murillo-Martín, 'De marginales a estratégicos: representación y gestión estatal de los páramos en Colombia (1959-2022)', *Encrucijadas*, 22, no. 1 (2022), https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/encrucijadas/article/view/90201; G. Márquez Calle, *Ecosistemas Estratégicos y otros Estudios de Ecología Ambiental* (Bogotá 1996: Fondo FEN).

5. P. Ungar, 'Assembling an ecosystem: The making of state páramos in Colombia', *Conservation and Society*, 19, no. 2 (2021): 119, https://doi.org/10.4103/cs.cs_19_103.

6. Interview by Collective Almanaques Agroecológicos, Localidad 20 de Sumapaz, 2017.

Figure 1: Campesino life in the páramo of Sumapaz. Credit: Hanne Cottyn, 2019.

Over the last years, they have responded through political actions, research initiatives, and artistic performance to reject the perception that the protection of the páramos requires 'empty' landscapes. Inspired by their own daily activities and historical memory, these initiatives seek to demonstrate how campesino practices can contribute to fostering and reimagining convivial páramos.

This article interrogates the role of digital spaces and practices in the articulation of convivial páramo futures through the conceptual and practical trajectory of the online platform *Paramunos* (see paramunos.com). The platform is the outcome of a longer, ongoing collaboration that brings together researchers, teachers, designers, farmers, activists, artists, and community leaders from Bogotá and the surrounding páramos of Sumapaz and Chingaza, and that has resulted in the publication of 'agroecological' almanacs, art festivals, workshops, research papers, a music album, and a documentary. This collaborative digital space is also nurtured by a conceptual interrogation of the discursive and material production and contestation of the páramo, in dialogue with debates in historical political ecology and

political ontology.[7] Informed by the collaborative challenges and technological opportunities that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, Paramunos unfolded as a digital space and strategy for the consultation, creation, exchange, and dissemination of knowledge and experiences about, by, and for the páramos, which is why the *paramuno* adjective became the platform's name. In what follows, we chart the methodological, epistemological, and technological considerations that guided the development of this digital, co-creational strategy. We close by weighing up the potential and the limits of this concrete tool to facilitate more inclusive knowledge production and exchange around rural life in the páramo, and the resonance it generates within a wider field of environmental digital humanities.

Designing a virtual páramo knowledge exchange

Paramunos.com materialises from a convergence of different research and pedagogic agendas. In the first place, this platform builds on the organisational potential of the rural communities of Sumapaz and Chingaza, the rural mountainous regions situated respectively south-east and north-east of the city of Bogotá. School teachers, artists (musicians, poets, etc.), and community leaders—roles often performed by one and the same person—are protagonists in communal knowledge production and transmission, and have been experimenting with new media in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, the platform constitutes an extension of the innovative community work done by the research and art collective Almanaques Agroecológicos, led by Bogotá-based geographer and historian Lina Cortés Gutierrez.[8] To date, the collective has published

7. M. Blaser, 'The threat of the yrmo: The political ontology of a sustainable hunting program', *American Anthropologist*, 111, no. 1 (2009): 10–20, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2009.01073.x; M. Blaser, 'Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe: Toward a Conversation on Political Ontology', *Current Anthropology*, 54, no. 5 (2013): 547–568, https://doi.org/10.1086/672270; B. Duarte-Abadía and R. Boelens, 'Disputes over territorial boundaries and diverging valuation languages: the Santurban hydrosocial highlands territory in Colombia', *Water International*, 41, no. 1 (2016): 15–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2016.1117271; M. de la Cadena and M. Blaser, *A world of many worlds* (Durham, NC 2018: Duke University Press).

8. L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez, 'Almanaque Agroecológico: Una herramienta

seven almanacs, six of which are dedicated to 'rural Bogotá', the rural *localidades* (districts) and *veredas* (villages) that administratively belong to Colombia's capital.[9] Following the typical format of an almanac, each publication is developed around the district's agrarian and civil calendar, while also integrating contributions about social and environmental aspects of the region by academics as well as community members, life stories, hand-drawn maps, local knowledge about plants and traditions, poetry, and culinary recipes. Thirdly, the platform was realised in the context of an interdisciplinary research project led by the University of York in collaboration with researchers from the Colombian biodiversity research centre Instituto Humboldt.[10] From the synergy between these different initiatives emerged a collaboration around the shared interest in addressing current tensions around the protection of the páramos by providing greater insight into the historical, environmental, and cultural dynamics of rural life in the páramos. Since the early 2000s, natural and social sciences research on páramos has expanded enormously.[11] But also outside academic

de apropiación cultural para la reconstrucción histórica del paisaje a través de la memoria en cinco (5) ecosistemas de alta montaña en Colombia', in: A. Perafán Cabrera and J.E. Elías Caro (eds.), *Conflictos ambientales en ecosistemas estratégicos : América Latina y el Caribe, siglos XIX-XXI*: 25–34 (Cali 2017: Programa Editorial Universidad del Valle).

9. L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez, *Almanaque agroecológico Los Verjones: Cultivos y saberes campesinos que alimentan la tradición de Bogotá* (Bogotá 2011: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá); L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez, *Almanaque agroecológico Usme: Despensa rural de Bogotá* (Bogotá 2011: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá); L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez, *Almanaque Agroecológico de Pasquilla: Región ecoestratégica y agropecuaria de Bogotá* (Bogotá 2013: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá); L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez and L.C. Matiz Guerra, *Almanaque agroecológico Arrayanes Curubital: Recuerdos vivos: Agua de páramo, fuente de vida* (Bogotá 2015: Jardín Botánico José Celestino Mutis); L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez, *Almanaque agroecológico Nazareth. El páramo de Sumapaz: paisajes de relatos campesinos en tiempos de paz* (Bogotá 2016: ARFO Impresores y Editores Ltda); L.M. Cortés Gutiérrez, *Almanaque agroecológico Gran Sumapaz: imagen de un paisaje sin tierra* (Bogotá 2019: Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte).

10. The research project 'Integrating ecological and cultural histories to inform sustainable and equitable futures for the Colombian páramos' was coordinated by the University of York and executed in collaboration with several UK and Colombian institutions. The project is part of the bilateral Colombian-UK programme ColombiaBio and financed by Natural Environmental Research Council (NERC) of the UK through the Newton Fund.

11. M. Diazgranados, 'Una mirada biológica a los páramos circundantes

circles, Sumapaz and Chingaza have witnessed a proliferation of new research, productive, social, and artistic initiatives led by locals or organisations based or operating in páramo communities. Yet existing resources, knowledge, and projects suffer from material fragmentation across public institutions, personal archives, and social networks, and from asymmetries between academic and other forms of knowledge production.

In a response to this fragmentation and asymmetry, we started to envision a space that can facilitate and promote a more horizontal dialogue among these diverse páramo knowledges and practices. Constrained as well as inspired by the methodological implications of collaborating in times of lockdowns and videocalls, we envisaged this space as a virtual and interactive environment. Rather than a classic project website that collects and disseminates all output of concluded research, Paramunos was designed as an interactive space to generate greater democratic participation of páramo communities within processes of scientific and cultural knowledge production about the Colombian páramos. The process of translating this conceptual space into a concrete, user-friendly tool was led by the Colombian design network RIZOMA. This was coordinated as a co-creational process to design a technically feasible user experience that was relevant to our shared agenda and in line with the needs and expectations of the platform's target audience. A detailed stakeholder analysis was followed by online surveys and one-on-one interviews with actors in the protection of, and knowledge production about, the páramo. This resulted in an outline of three user profiles, representing the target groups the platform expected to attract and interact with—'campesinos of the páramo', 'catalysts', and 'visitors'.

From the start, the design process was oriented towards a prioritisation of páramo communities, among whom we distinguished 'inspiring women leaders', 'enthusiast farmers' and 'active youth' as profiles with an outspoken interest in engaging with the envisioned platform. Additionally, these local campesinos all shared a strong dedication to artistic practice—in particular music and poetry—as a form of

a la Sabana de Bogotá', in: E. Guhl Nimtz, *Los Páramos Circundantes a La Sabana de Bogotá. Edición Conmemorativa* (Bogotá 2015: Jardín Botánico de Bogotá), 175–205.

situated páramo knowledge production and transmission within their communities. With 'catalysts' we tried to capture the work of activists, agroecological entrepreneurs, and engaged teachers and researchers operating in páramo communities. They saw in the platform a concrete tool to strengthen, interweave, and extend community networks. A last, less prioritised group were the urban 'visitors' for whom the platform could provide a guide towards respectful relations with the páramos and away from mass tourism.

Aided by chat groups, Zoom calls, and online whiteboard tools, this stakeholder consultation materialised in the proposal for an accessible, co-creational space. A space for knowledge co-creation that strengthens the visibility and recognition of rural Andean communities as 'guardians' of the páramo and their history, and that promotes processes of change towards convivial páramos. This objective translated into a kind of living library that allows users not only to consult but also to actively contribute music, research, testimonies, poetry, cooking recipes, and photography, amongst other content. The platform also integrates a timeline to provide context about historical processes that have shaped rural life in the páramo, and a calendar where all kind of events can be announced. The need for an accessible space in a region marked by weak communication infrastructures translated into a low-key website available at https://paramunos.com/ and supported by an internet bot. The virtual assistant Paramuno, with

Figure 2: A visualisation of the co-creational design of Paramunos. Credit: RIZOMA, Colombia.

which you interact via WhatsApp, allows users with no (or no stable) internet connection—which paradoxically includes the rural inhabitants of Colombia's capital—to participate equally in the co-creation of the platform.

Navigating and co-creating the páramo beyond the limits of conventional conservation

Paramunos' innovative character is not just in its openness to a wide range of different contents and its accessibility tailored to the needs and technological limitations of rural communities. The crux is in the way its conceptual and visual design propagates the páramo's 'pluriversal' character;[12] a páramo in which many páramos fit. In that sense, Paramunos anticipates an unsettling effect on hegemonic, univocal framings of the páramo. This pluriversal character is exposed through the notion of care as a practice that exceeds conventional definitions of nature conservation. By reframing the protection of the páramo in terms of 'practices of care' the platform seeks to defy the limits of conservation's underlying dualisms, of nature versus society, human versus non-human worlds, expert versus 'traditional' knowledge. Through this notion of care, Paramunos provides a space for co-creation that recognises and strengthens rural communities as producers of vital knowledge, without disputing the scientific insights accumulated over recent decades regarding páramos.

Paramunos operationalises the concept of care by distinguishing several forms of what we have called 'practices of care in the páramo'. Páramo communities demonstrate on a daily basis how artistic expressions, communal forms of organisation, culinary traditions, and the transmission of life stories and legends all play a vital role in caring for páramo life. Through a back-and-forth matchmaking process between this expanded notion of care and a first set of materials produced or gathered by each of the involved initiatives, we formulated six clusters of practices of care. Next to a more conventional understanding of protecting the páramo in terms of agroecology, water, or biodiversity, we also included food sovereignty, art, and

12. A. Escobar, *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds* (Durham, NC 2018: Duke University Press).

decolonial pedagogies—captured by the Latin-American notion of *re-existencia*.[13]

These six clusters hold the platform together, they form the spine and bring some order in the expanding 'library' of knowledge and experiences. Any content uploaded to the library is assigned to one of these practices. Additionally, each text, image or other material uploaded to the library is coded by tagging relevant actors (including public institutions, animals, farmers, etc.), spaces (specific páramo areas, villages or landscape elements) and temporalities (processes of migration, conflict, national history, etc.). By way of a conceptual experiment and provocation, Paramunos also provides a tag that evokes the 'pluriverse' ways in which the páramo is put into practice, identifying the páramo as a protected space, as an everyday space, as a living space, as a contested space.

Each cluster of practices of care can be navigated through a circular 'map of relations' that hint at the complexity of the páramos and their relation with their (human and non-human) inhabitants and visitors. Each circle comprises all tags assigned to the materials within this cluster. By selecting one tag, a range of possible relations with other actors, spaces, etc. are revealed, allowing the user to discover at times unexpected interconnections, linking a song about the Andean bear with scientific species distribution maps, or pictures from historical archives documenting the construction of large-scale water infrastructures in the páramo with a recent blog post about community initiatives to protect water sources. Placing photography, music compositions, and scientific output next to each other, Paramunos does not seek to replace one notion of the páramo with another, equally limited notion, but to expose, enable, and interrogate their interconnections.

The navigation of this consciously structured yet open(-to-surprises) design is supported and enriched by the visual artwork of Paramunos. Through several rounds of consultation and feedback sessions with

13. A. Albán Achinte, 'Pedagogías de la reexistencia: Artistas indígenas y colombianos', in: C. Walsh (ed.), *Pedagogías decoloniales: Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir*, volume 1: 443–468 (Quito 2013: Ediciones Abya-Yala).

Figure 3: Navigating of the Water Defence cluster in Paramunos. Credit: paramunos.com.

focus groups, a suggestive visual style was developed. It integrates elements that have become classic páramo tropes such as the *frailejón*, the Andean bear, potatoes, or the campesino hat, but equally includes disappeared or mythical beings such as the otter or water nymphs. Balancing between representing the páramo without reproducing stereotypical or authoritative images, the visualisations hinge on the characteristic fog that tends to shroud life in the páramo in a tinge of mystery.

Digitalising the environmental humanities, pluralising páramo futures

More than only an expression of the current tensions, gaps, and opportunities in hegemonic conservation agendas, this project aspires to re-imagine and co-produce a new agenda. Contemporary environmental concerns about the páramo, while legitimate and urgent, risk reducing páramos to a singular legitimate definition of what these landscapes can and should be. In a response, Paramunos proposes a co-creational digital strategy to pluralise the páramo, to envision multiple possible futures for the páramos. This strategy is not simply about representation, but importantly about fostering recognition and participation of particular ways of understanding and

interacting with the páramo; ways that tend to be marginalised within contemporary conservation knowledge production.

Of course, digital tools are not a panacea. As versatile as they may be, digital spaces can counter but may also perpetuate and even increase the exclusion from participation for subaltern groups in processes of knowledge production. Especially in the case of Paramunos, its appropriation and interrogation among local communities requires a dynamic interaction with offline spaces. Art festivals, school workshops, a CD and documentary project, public debates with diverse stakeholders, and agroecological fairs have been providing creative and productive contexts to facilitate that interaction. These offline spaces are themselves vital spaces of knowledge production, and have contributed to the integration of new materials in the platform. Moreover, they are exemplary for the kind of (seemingly) unlikely connections the Paramunos platform wants to highlight—a CD that recounts historical peasant struggles and raises awareness about the conservation of the Andean bear, an arts festival that integrates astronomy workshops, etc. Schoolteachers have emerged as a key

Figure 4: Ritual during the 4th Campesino Festival - Páramo Memory, páramo of Sumapaz. Credit: Felipe Ottalora, 2023.

ally in this process of dissemination, articulation, and interconnection. By appropriating the platform as a creative pedagogical tool in the classroom and envisioning it as a kind of research incubator, they are taking the platform beyond its anticipated potential.

By allowing users of the platform to discover unexpected connections, but most of all, by allowing all users to submit content through the website or WhatsApp, Paramunos is more than a repository of research results but becomes eventually a strategy for new research. In that sense, it embodies new developments at the intersection of Environmental Humanities and Digital Humanities, or what is emerging as 'digital environmental humanities.' As Finne Arne Jørgensen notes, 'the idea of nature is becoming very hard to separate from the digital tools and media we use to observe, interpret, and manage it'.[14] Paramunos suggests, and responds to, pressing challenges that unite these fields by seeking the re-politicisation and inclusion of diverse and dynamic nature-society relations and related knowledge systems in ecological knowledge production and conservation practices. It draws on digital user experience designs to address and transcend the reproduction of problematic dichotomies between the human and non-human world. While accumulating multiple sources and formats of information, rather than intending to complement, correct, or refine our understanding of what the páramo is or should be, it aims at destabilising that understanding. By inviting platform users to navigate, exchange ideas, and contribute to multiple possible definitions of páramo, it produces a crack, a gap through which to imagine multiple legitimate futures for the páramo. In other words, Paramunos pushes to open possibilities instead of—what science generally aims for—closing them.

14. F.A. Jørgensen, 'The Armchair Traveler's Guide to Digital Environmental Humanities', *Environmental Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2014): 95–112, 109, doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3614944.

MIGRANT STRUGGLES, DIGITAL TOOLS AND KNOWLEDGE FROM BELOW

Evidence from Greece

Dr Costas Gousis

Focusing on specific migrant struggles in Greece in the early 2010s, this article explores uses of digital tools and interactions among online and offline forms of activism. Building on the concept of 'infrastructure of dissent,' which Alan Sears defines as 'the means through which activists develop political communities capable of learning, communicating and mobilizing together',[1] this article aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of what we could identify as digital infrastructures of dissent. Of course, focusing on the emancipatory aspects of digital technologies does not mean that we should underestimate their important role in the intensification of surveillance and securitization.

1. A. Sears, *The Next New Left: A History of the Future* (Halifax and Winnipeg, Canada 2014: Fernwood Publishing), 2.

In fact, a growing body of literature explores these contradictory implications of the digital condition for migration research. Lilie Chouliaraki and Myria Georgiou provide some very useful definitions to explain the ways that digital technologies shape the experiences and meanings of migration. First, they relate the concept of digital border to the 'wider orientation of migration governance today towards a holistic, biopolitical and digitised, management of human cross-border mobility.'[2] Secondly, the digital border is related to the symbolic border, meaning with that the control the public narratives of migration on digital news platforms or, in other words, media imaginaries (stories, images, social media posts) excluding, silencing, and dehumanising migrants across European public spheres. And finally, the researchers highlight the digital border as a 'dialectical space of struggle' since digital infrastructures can also empower migrants and enable self-expression, care, solidarity, protection, and acts of resistance.[3]

In this article, I am precisely concerned with this last dimension, the intersections between the digital condition and migrant struggles. My main hypothesis is that during the 2010s a minority of Greece's immigrant population engaged in collective struggles and used digital tools in various innovative and impactful ways. Chouliaraki and Georgiou take their case studies from the 2015 European migration so-called refugee 'crisis'. While 2015 was perhaps the biggest migration event of the twenty-first century in the West, at least until today, I bring attention to the period between 2011 and 2013. In what follows I delve into two cases, namely the emblematic 2011 hunger strike and the immigrant farmworkers' uprising in Manolada in 2013.

The article draws on the interviews I conducted with two immigrant activists in Athens during the summer of 2019.[4] The findings presented

2. L. Chouliaraki and M. Georgiou, 'The digital border: Mobility beyond territorial and symbolic divides', *European Journal of Communication*, 34, no. 6 (2019), 594.

3. L. Chouliaraki and M. Georgiou, *The Digital Border: Migration, Technology, Power* (New York 2022: New York University Press), 35.

4. My PhD research included 14 life history interviews with immigrant activists and 6 open-ended semi-structured interviews with lawyers. Before the interviews, participants were given an information leaflet about the research and were asked to sign a consent form. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and were audio-recorded. They were also given the opportunity to

here are part of my PhD research on immigrant activism in Greece related to the 2008 financial crisis, its specificities in the Greek case, and its impact on the immigrant communities.

The emblematic 2011 hunger strike

Between 2009 and 2011, there were numerous cases of hunger strikes organised by groups of immigrants on the Aegean Islands and the Greek mainland in detention centres, working places, and public spaces.[5] These hunger strikes should be seen as part of transnational immigrant protests in which, as Pellander and Horsti suggest, 'those in powerless positions create a certain sovereignty: the power to do something within the often very limited opportunities that they have'.[6] Within this framework, the six-week hunger strike conducted by 300 immigrant workers from Maghreb at the beginning of 2011 was the biggest hunger strike conducted by immigrants in the country's history. Almost all of them were male workers from Maghreb who were living on the island of Crete. Most of them were undocumented and their main demand was the regularization of all migrants who live in Greece. The most active among them were members of the Cretan Forum of Immigrants, the Immigrant Center and the Maghreb Arabi Association. The hunger strikers decided to stage their protest in Athens and Thessaloniki, the capital and the second largest city in Greece, respectively. A mass hunger strike conducted by undocumented immigrants in the midst of crisis was immediately considered an existential threat to the government, which was already being challenged by mass anti-austerity movements after the first Greek bailout.

As a result, the immediate governmental and media response was a well-orchestrated anti-immigrant campaign aptly described by the

choose the interview locations and all reasonable efforts were made to make them feel comfortable to speak. 12 out of 14 immigrant participants chose to waive the right to anonymity, while 2 of them preferred to remain anonymous.

5. For more information, see Infomobile, available at: http://infomobile.w2eu.net/files/2011/03/Press-Release-27th-November-2010.pdf

6. S. Pellander and K. Horsti, 'Visibility in mediated borderscapes: The hunger strike of asylum seekers as an embodiment of border violence', *Political Geography* 66 (2017): 1–10, 6.

hunger strikers as '44 days of psychological war'.[7] Digital news and other online platforms reproduced the mainstream narrative presenting the hunger strikers as a threat to national security and their struggle as a plot of dark forces working against the country. It goes without saying that every single moment during these 44 days and nights of struggle was unique and exceptional. In this article, I can only highlight certain aspects related on the role of digital tools as part of the struggle.

In this context, the website of the hunger strike (https://hungerstrike300.espivblogs.net/) provided an important point of reference to the actual claims and voices of the hunger strikers and played a crucial role in the international solidarity movement. In his message to the hunger strikers, published in this website, Étienne Balibar placed special emphasis on the international aspect, noting that the solidarity movement must take form not only at a local scale, but at the continental level.[8] In fact, counter-information digital platforms, like this website, Indymedia, etc., proved really useful in creating and sustaining an inter-continental solidarity network. Suffice to say that solidarity messages were sent to the hunger strikers by the sans-papiers in Saints Denis,[9] the Guatemalan immigrants in Barcelona,[10] the feminists of Chiapas,[11] and many other groups, trade unions, etc. More importantly, digital platforms were used to coordinate worldwide solidarity action days, including what they described as 'Electronic

7. Press Conference, '44 days of psychological war', clandestina. Migration and Struggle in Greece, 9 March 2011, available at: https://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com/2011/03/09/44-days-of-psychological-war/.
8. É. Balibar, 'Μήνυμα του Etienne Balibar [Message of solidarity from Étienne Balibar]', hunger strike 300, 16 February 2011, available at: https://hungerstrike300.espivblogs.net/2011/02/16/%ce%bc%ce%ae%ce%bd%cf%85%ce%bc%ce%b1-%cf%84%ce%bf%cf%85-etienne-balibar/.
9. Sans-Papiers, 'Solidarité avec les migrants en grève de la faim à Athènes', hunger strike 300, 14 February 2011, available at: https://hungerstrike300.espivblogs.net/2011/02/18/solidarite-avec-les-migrants-en-greve-de-la-faim-a-athenes/.
10. Message of solidarity, 'Associació d'Amistat amb el Poble de Guatemala', clandestina. Migration and Struggle in Greece, 29 January 2011, available at: https://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com/2011/02/06/associacio-d%e2%80%99amistat-amb-el-poble-de-guatemala/.
11. Brigada Feminista por la Autonomía, 'Solidarity from Chiapas', clandestina. Migration and Struggle in Greece, 27 January 2011. Available at: https://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com/2011/01/29/solidarity-from-chiapas/.

Civil Disobedience against the Greek State', a form of participatory hacktivism that managed to overload the servers of Greek State webpages, making them dysfunctional and useless for some time.[12] In my interview with one of the hunger strikers, he noted the impact of these transnational acts of solidarity on their morale. Commenting on the role of digital tools in their struggle, he also emphasised that they used an online communication platform for their daily assemblies which were held in Arabic. This platform made it possible for the 250 hunger strikers who were in Athens and the 50 of them who were in Thessaloniki to create a common online space of collective empowerment and deliberation. The hunger striker I interviewed was born in Western Sahara and his early political formation took place in the context of the ongoing struggle of Sahrawi people for independence, freedom, and justice. He highlighted that social media provided him and many other hunger strikers with the opportunity to maintain links with the activists in their country of origin. As he added, through social media he followed, and was inspired by, the Arab Spring which took place in parallel with their hunger strike.

The Case of Manolada

Manolada became known as one of the leading examples of immigrant farmworkers standing up for their rights in Greece. Manolada is a small village in the Peloponnese Region of Greece. From a population of around 21,000 residents at the municipal level in 2011, more than 3,500 were immigrants, mainly working in the farms of the broader area.[13] Over the last few decades, the cultivation of strawberries has rapidly expanded in Manolada, with the fruit becoming known as the 'red gold'. Following the global paradigm of intensive agriculture, the cultivation methods in the area are based on overexploiting immigrant labour, transforming Manolada into a *de facto* special economic

12. For more information in different languages check out the call at: http://hungerstrike300.espivblogs.net/2011/02/27/solidarity-is-our-wepon-abroad/.

13. Hellenic Statistical Authority, 'Demographical Data 2011. Table B09: Permanent population per nationality group. Municipalities', available at: https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SAM03/2011.

zone.[14]

On 17 April 2013, this small village became an international scandal when armed guards opened fire on more than 150 workers from Bangladesh who were striking to demand their unpaid wages. More than thirty workers were transferred to nearby hospitals, some severely injured. As B. Bhandar and D. Bhandar commented on the Manolada case: 'It testifies to the increasingly hegemonic anti-immigrant policies of austerity-stricken European nations, while also reflecting modes of violence endemic to historically entrenched, racially stratified labour markets.'[15] The case was later brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) by 42 Bangladeshi workers (*Chowdury and others v. Greece*). On 30 March 2017, the ECHR delivered its judgement, finding that the farmworkers' situation had become one of forced labor under Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights.[16] Consequently, the court found that Greece had failed in its obligations to prevent human trafficking, protect the victims, conduct an effective investigation into the offences committed, and punish those responsible for the trafficking.[17]

My interview with Morshed Chowdury, one of the injured workers in the shootings[18] and lead applicant in the ECHR case, sheds light on their working and living conditions. Chowdury was born in a small village in rural Bangladesh in 1982 and arrived in Athens in 2008. As he commented on the working and living conditions in Manolada, it was 'worse than prison' and they could not even buy a phone card to

14. Ο. Karioti, 'Οι Μανωλάδες γίνονται ΑΟΖ [When the Manolada cases become SEZ]', *Levga* 5 (2012): 7–12.

15. B. Bhandar and D. Bhandar, 'Cultures of Dispossession: Rights, Status and Identities', *darkmatter Journal* 14 (2016), available at: http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2016/05/16/cultures-of-dispossession/.

16. Article 4 § 2 European Convention on Human Rights, *Prohibition of slavery and forced labour: No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour*, available at: https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf

17. European Court of Human Rights, 'Chowdury and Others v Greece, Application No. 21884/15', *European Data Base of Asylum Law* (2017), available at: https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/ecthr-chowdury-and-others-v-greece-application-no-2188415-30-march-2017.

18. Chowdury was seriously wounded on his leg, arm, chest and head. He stayed in hospital for around two weeks.

contact their families and friends back home. The workers were living in makeshift tents of cardboard boxes and nylon without running water and toilets. They were also living under the constant supervision of armed guards who deprived them of communicating with the world outside the workers' camp.

These conditions have been described as 'the spatial politics of the agricultural labour process', 'a form of housing segregation and a form of seclusion where the workers are effectively "trapped" without technically lacking the right to spatial liberty.'[19] What is particularly interesting for this article is the fact that digital exclusion appears to be a constitutive aspect of seclusion, central to managing the labour market and workforce in areas of intensive agriculture. At the same time, it is important that the system of seclusion, involving digital exclusion, was not enough to prevent the uprising of thousands of immigrant farmworkers in the area after the shootings, who were supported by class-oriented trade unions, immigrant associations, antiracist initiatives etc. all over Greece and abroad.

Immigrant farmworkers used digital platforms to raise awareness of forced labour and human trafficking, share their stories, and build alliances with Bangladeshi and other communities in other European countries. A particularly interesting point that arose during my interview with Morshed Chowdury was the role of the boycott campaign. This campaign was not initiated by any political party, trade union, or immigrant association. It started as an international social media campaign when the hashtags #manolada and #bloodstrawberries went viral, as did the message 'Next time you want to buy strawberries from Manolada, Greece, just think that they are covered with the blood of immigrant workers'.[20] The campaign, which rapidly spread far beyond the usual reach of the solidarity movement, led several supermarkets in Greece to refuse to sell strawberries from Manolada,

19. D. Perrotta and D. Sacchetto, 'Migrant Farmworkers in Southern Italy: Ghettoes, Caporalato and Collective Action', *Workers of the World* 1, no. 5, (2014): 75–98, available at: https://www.academia.edu/24659222/Migrant_Farmworkers_in_Southern_Italy_Ghettoes_caporalato_and_collective_action_Workers_of_the_World_2014_.

20. Enrique, 'Blood strawberries from Nea Manolada, Greece', Migrant Tales (2013), available at: https://www.migranttales.net/blood-strawberries-from-nea-manolada-greece/.

and had a serious impact on strawberry exports. The boycott campaign had an equally serious impact on the immigrant farmworkers' morale. As Chowdury expressed it in our interview: 'A shiver runs up our spine every time we hear about the boycott'.

To sum up, both case studies strengthen the hypothesis that digital technologies (the internet, mobile phones, social media, etc.) can prove to be very useful for migrants to facilitate and engage in contentious politics forming a new mosaic of online and offline repertoires. These findings are indicative of what Dorismilda Flores-Márquez described as 'the expansion of communication possibilities that digital media implies, in terms of materialities, access, scope, visibility, interaction and interconnection.'[21] I would like to conclude this article with some final ethical and methodological considerations on the implications of the digital condition for critical migration studies.

Goethe used to say: 'What is hardest of all? That which seems most simple: to see with your eyes what is before your eyes.' Digital research is already difficult since a screen is in front of our eyes for countless hours with countless tabs open. And it becomes even more difficult when we try to move from screens to actors and experiences. A critical approach to migration studies requires challenging symbolic borders, and the linguistic misrepresentations of migrants as statistical numbers and flows. Or in other words, it requires engaging in a practice of counter-storytelling capable of seeing through the eyes of the other. Of course, challenging symbolic, categorical, and linguistic borders is never a matter of neutral technical training. It is a matter of empathy and the application of methodologies that can represent migrants as social, political, and historical actors. And this, partly, explains why neoliberal and authoritarian regimes attack the humanities and social sciences, which provide these methodologies.

Finally, it is important to draw a line of demarcation between research and stalking when we collect online data. For example, when we review the digital profile of our interviewees, we might have access to publications on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other digital

21. D. Flores-Márquez, 'Two countries fit within my heart: Transnational digital activism and political subjectivity in mexican migrants'. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 3.

platforms. Even if these publications are of a public nature, it is important to think carefully what should be included in our research, taking under careful consideration ethical concerns related to the legal, emotional, financial, and social vulnerabilities to which migrants may be exposed, especially migrant activists who might also be under official scrutiny. Their safety, wellbeing, and eligibility for services should be our first and only priority.[22]

22. K. M. Blee and T. Vining, 'Risks and ethics of social movement research in a changing political climate', *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 30 (2010): 43–71.

LESSONS LEARNT

Challenges and New Ways to Experience the Physical in the Digital Classroom

Dr Athena Hadji

A monologue to introduce the topic

'Am I then a digital humanist? Not according to some. Coding is an alien concept to me. However, I have been using Moodle since the beginning of my post-Ph.D. teaching career; I often resort to google images, when my own archive is not sufficient; I increasingly read e-books more than printed matter for academic purposes—I still enjoy the physicality of a book for leisure reading; I employ multimedia, consult databases, and have created a considerable digital photographic archive from museums and sites which I utilize in my lectures.' I have been pondering the above while writing this piece. I belong to a generation of humans who were old enough to witness and benefit from the dissemination of the Worldwide Web. At the same time, I am on occasion bewildered by my students' attachment to their digital devices.

Introduction

A shift in teaching that was already underway became visible, measurable, and irreversible because of and during the successive lockdowns imposed by the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Most, if not all teaching, at all levels, around the globe, switched to digital platforms.

In higher education, the precious real time between Professor and student in the physical classroom was substituted by (yet another) screen-to-screen interaction.[1]

The present contribution focuses on my insight from teaching Ancient Greek Sculpture via Zoom from mid-semester Spring 2020, when the first lockdown was imposed in Greece, to Spring 2021. The shift was abrupt and techniques were devised gradually, with a fair amount of improvisation, in order to adapt a museum- and site- based hands-on focused art history course to the digital experience, relying heavily by necessity on the use of (digital) images and verbal descriptions of visual qualities.[2]

At times, teaching a Humanities course digitally felt like broadcasting: a screen-friendly dress code was established; gestures were reduced to shrugs and facial expressions with an occasional movement of the hands close to the face (since only a small portion of the upper body is visible by Zoom session participants); essentially, the third dimension both of the subject matter (ancient sculpture) and the living subjects (Professor and students) was eliminated. The multisensory experience that is studying sculpture as a three-dimensional entity engaging one's own physicality in a dialogue with the physicality of the sculptures was transformed into a primarily audiovisual endeavour. Among many necessary modifications, in order to compensate for materialities lost, one that I found of particular usefulness was the introduction of the literary dimension: Greek sculpture has inspired a plethora of poets, both Greek and otherwise, through time, from antiquity to the twenty-first century CE, and I employed poetry not as a substitute for the museum experience but as a powerful means of engaging the senses in a radically different, albeit equally effective manner. I have incorporated the texts in the museum experience and, since Fall 2021, when we were able to return to a physical classroom and museum-based course, the texts have become an integral and indispensable part of the course curriculum.

1. For a brief history of digital teaching, see B. Carter, *Digital Humanities: Current Perspectives, Practices and Research* (Bingley 2013: Emerald Publishing), chapter 3.
2. For a detailed syllabus of the course, see here: https://cyathens.org/course/ancient-greek-sculpture/

A timeline

I am a Faculty Member at a study-abroad programme here in Athens, College Year in Athens, one of the most popular study-abroad programmes around for US-American students. Expectations are high by those students who decide to cross the pond and join the programme and the first lockdown coincided with the middle of the semester, right after or right before their midterm exam. In Spring semester 2020, the course was taught by a colleague who was planning to retire anyway. After the literally overnight switch from the physical classroom to the digital one, she decided to retire early and I was called in to replace her until the end of the semester as an emergency plan. I am of course familiar with the subject matter but it so happened that this first digital form of the class did not simply entail real-time digital transmission of knowledge. As the US border closed abruptly, our students had to return home immediately and we had to resort to making videos of each class and uploading them for students to view in their own time, due to the inconvenient time difference between the two continents (as well as different time zones within the USA). We then devised various ways, such as quizzes, games, etc. to ensure the students followed up on the content and pace of the class in a remote asynchronous education model. This semester ended amidst a lot of insecurity for everybody, with a take-home exam and the physical aspect of education obliterated.

In Fall 2020, things began to look up. The semester started in early September with a few determined students, who, despite all, traveled to Greece, with museums and sites re-opened, and with an eagerness to engage with each other. In early November 2020, the second lockdown meant that we were now confined at home, museums were of course closed indefinitely, and class was conducted via Zoom again, this time in synchronous video-conferencing sessions with the aid of PowerPoint image-and-text presentations, videos, and links to websites. Spring 2021 was taught exclusively online, except for one memorable visit to the Athenian Agora towards the end of the semester, when archaeological sites, but not museums, finally opened. Syllabi were constantly updated to conform to changing circumstances, as were teaching style and methodology.

Teaching sculpture

Sculpture is about space. In fact, the first lesson every student of Ancient Greek Sculpture learns is how the Greek sculptors progressed from rigidity and frontality in the seventh century BCE to the conquest of space in late-fourth century BCE monumental sculpture.

Anthropomorphic sculpture, that is the sculpture that resembles the human form, is naturally and automatically juxtaposed to one's own scale when encountered in the physical realm. This physical multisensory approach (with the exception of touch, a taboo for art museums) is one I advocate in my classes which are primarily conducted in the museum. The impossibility of being in the museum during lockdowns meant that I had to come up with a different methodological apparatus, in order a. to engage the students and keep them engaged for 1 hr and 35 min. of Zoom sessions twice a week, and b. to ensure a pedagogically effective and successful outcome for the course.

Thus, I focused on the senses that I could use, especially ones that were prioritised in visual as well as auditory transmission. I emphasised the auditory, utilising a student evaluation of the first videos recorded during the half-semester of the first lockdown, who wrote that they found my voice soothing. In turbulent circumstances, away from home and uncertain about the outcome of the pandemic in the pre-vaccines era, I indeed noticed that my online presence had a calming effect on my students, being a structured, scheduled time segment in an otherwise chaotic time sequence. Also, although our cameras were on, the visual element was not foremost, contrary to the content and premise of an art history course, since the image analysis was not good. In addition, only a tiny part of a human being is visible on a Zoom video call, even as that image is distorted. And as far as body language is concerned, apart from facial expressions, nothing is communicated in this fundamental way of communication. Dress code was another adjustment that had to be made, namely I followed the basic rule for pandemic chic on Zoom video calls: a basic black turtleneck.

The physical aspect, which was missing, was substituted in three ways: First, by a new type of assignment I came up with: since all we were

allowed to do was more or less walk within a small radius, each student was assigned to discover, photograph, and present in (digital) class sculptures they encountered. The task was completed successfully, and the range was impressive: from sculptures in the nearby metro stations, to the sculpture garden that is the First Cemetery of Athens, as well as interpretations of Greek sculptures in Athenian street art and architecture (such as a well-known street art piece that resembles a centaur by artist Krah, or the famous neoclassical caryatids on Assomaton St. in downtown Athens, immortalised by the lens of none other than Henri Cartier Bresson).[3]

Second, another aspect that was explored, connected with the auditory and its impressive priority, was the introduction to class of text, more specifically poetry of a wide range of times and places, that was inspired by and directly referred to Greek sculpture, according to the particular theme we explored every day. Poets ranged from Rainer Maria Rilke to Greek Nobel laureate George Seferis.[4] The poem was presented to the students on a PowerPoint slide and I, or one of the students, also read it aloud.

Last but most definitely not least, instead of research papers, the students were invited to be creative with their term project assignments: wonderful pieces of work emerged, academically robust, and delightfully creative: poems; collages; short stories; the diary of a Kore statue; a dialogue between the ancient Caryatids and the aforementioned Assomaton St. ones; a hilarious comic strip about the groundbreaking sculptures from the Temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus (see figures 1, 2, 3 at the end of this article). Text was again prioritised—as was the auditory. The students presented their work, recited their poems, read their short stories and an atmosphere of reverence was created. Humour was abundant and much craved for.

The digital condition thus became part of the human condition, returning us to the fundaments of being collectively human: class

3. https://streetartcities.com/markers/15798 and https://www.greece-highdefinition.com/blog/2021/4/14/the-secrets-and-legends-hidden-in-the-house-with-the-caryatids-of-psyrri respectively.

4. Examples can be read here: https://poets.org/poem/archaic-torso-apollo; https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51457/mythistorema

as consolation, comfort, and camaraderie; knowledge as relief and escape from a grim reality; a community that was built around our shared appreciation of sculptural forms; and a re-invention of how to teach and learn one of the most contested categories of art ever created.

In lieu of a conclusion

The issue at stake is ultimately alternative ways of adapting to a rapidly changing teaching environment as a negotiation between traditional forms of knowledge transfer in the Humanities and new avenues of thought that involve sharing rather than transmitting. A considerable amount of time has passed since the end of Covid-19-related lockdowns and restrictions came to an end. I continue to teach Greek Sculpture, among other subjects, and the three 'alternatives' discussed above have now become staples in my syllabi. Every semester, sculpture students walk the walk, delve into creative ways of presenting their research, and engage their senses in the appreciation of poetry as a learning tool.

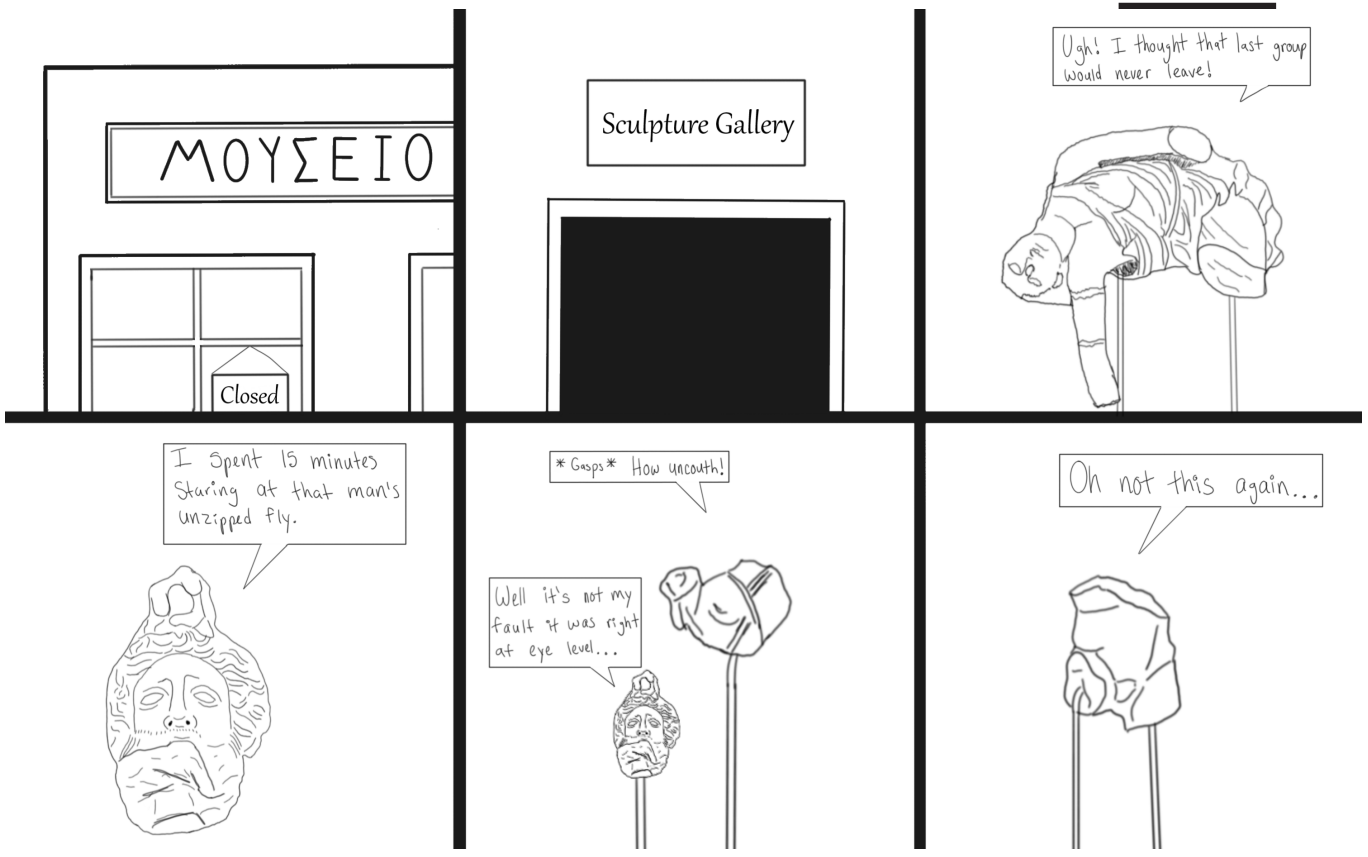
Let's immerse ourselves in experiential learning for a minute or so. Imagine you are stranded at home, in the middle of a horrible pandemic—not so hard, right? Then, relax, imagine a soothing voice reciting, and feel the words of the poem that follows:

> Cold, smooth wings of metal seem to stretch outward from a living torso. Her breath is a sharp wind which smells faintly of mint, and her eye-less stare is felt from every angle. Nike stands in the North, her image rendered both familiar and alien by the sharp angles of the metal arranged in a whisper of her classical shape. She has known many forms, but this is one of her favorites. Victory will stand eternal, yet ever-changing, just as this vessel exemplifies. Most of the gods are gone now—the famous Parthenos long lost, Zeus of Olympia all but dust—but Victory is universal, unmistakable. And yet she is also unpredictable: just when you think she's on your side, she deserts you again. Nike shifts to a new vessel, far away: this one is

simple, gentle yet powerful. She hangs on a wall like a kiss on a forehead, gold glittering in the evening sun streaming through an open window. The mere presence of her consciousness seems to bring warmth and color into the room, filling the luxury apartment with life as Nike exhales into this freshly blessed space. It is because of her nature—some would call it fickle—and not her power that she has preserved her relevance in this everchanging, shifting world. This piece of her demonstrates it well, she believes, which is why she visits it so frequently. Her essence is so clear here, yet so unexpected. She melts away at each end, just the way her allegiance will always be fluid, her resolve forever impermanent. She still belongs in the world because she shapes it: every winner on the field of battle has known her wreath. Every empire that swallows up the last has been guided by her lanterns. Each toppled, crooked king has stumbled because she made it so. As the sun begins to set Nike takes her leave, once more returning to the place she has so long now favored. Her dress of stone flutters around her ankles as she settles back in, feathers twitching, whispering in the growing darkness. This is her most powerful visage, not because of the size of her wings or the cut of her figure, but because of its history. The worlds that have risen and fallen around this statue, the eyes that have gazed upon her in this form over thousands of years. Much like Victory herself, this image has changed immensely over the eons. She has been reshaped, moved, been shattered and put back together. But through all of it, still she stands. She takes a breath and steps back into position: here she stands, at the bow of the great ship of Victory, to make and remake the world for eons to come.[5]

Rainer Maria Rilke's poem Archaic Torso of Apollo mandates: 'You must change your life'. And change we did.

5. 'Victory Through the Ages', Chase La Plante, Fall Semester 2021, reproduced with permission of the author.



Images credit, Gwyn Stith, Fall Semester 2020, reproduced with permission of the author

I'll stop complaining when you put my head back on my body!
Why were you made to look so sad anyways? You're supposed to be one of the good guys.
Ladies and gentlemen: the real reason behind Priam famous sad face!
Don't be like that, you know we were made in the 4th Century; times were changing, and so were perspectives.
I don't know what you're talking about. This is a face which embodies the sorrow, fear, and agony of an entire city.
Yeah, I mean, look at me! I'm totally winning this fight, even though I'm an Amazon.

Pshaw! You're not winning! I'm about to kick your a**, just you wait and see!
Well, the Peloponnesian Wars made them start questioning what "Greek" actually meant.
Come on man, give it up, we're losing. It's been centuries now, just accept it.
Yeah, seems like they finally started to question who the "bad guys" really were in this story.
Why were perceptions changing, though? I thought it was all about Greeks vs. Others?
Guys, the night guard is coming! Freeze!
No, pediment!

DIGITALITY IN (OTTOMAN) HISTORY

Some Thoughts on Research Mindset

Dr Styliani Lepida

Fear nullifies memory,
and knowledge without courage avails nothing
[Φόβος μνήμην εκπλήσσει,
τέχνη δε άνευ άλκης ουδέν ωφελεί]
–Thucydides[1]

The ever-evolving field of Digital Humanities, a field that is representative of the much-desired ideal of interdisciplinarity, has set the variable of "the digital" as one of the absolute conditions for a scientific re-evaluation of the once classical and theoretical humanities.

But even apart from that, it is a fact that the digital condition is now firmly embedded in most aspects of the Humanities, even when they do not fall under the Digital Humanities umbrella.

1. Thucydides, *Historiae* [Θουκιδίδη, Ιστορίαι], 2.87.4.

This article addresses the field of Ottoman History, aiming to identify the space belonging to digitality (or digitalism), to capture the current state of the field, to seek new perspectives, and to express concerns, focusing mainly on the relationship between historical research and digitality.

Digitality and Historical Archives

In recent years, the coexistence and collaboration of digital sciences and humanities, made possible by new technological conditions and prompted by emerging academic needs, seems to have been achieved to some extent and keeps bearing fruit.

In the context of this digital age, Ottoman History gradually began to exploit and integrate some of the benefits of digital technology and acquire part of the digital know-how required to cover new research needs. In doing so it gradually entered a digital environment, or what we may call "digitality". This, at least, is what historians have been striving to do, increasingly intensively in recent years, as they seek to embed digital technologies in various aspects of their discipline and especially in the heart of their science, that is, historical research.

One could say that the contribution of digital technology to the research process in the field of History, and in this case of Ottoman History, is decisive in all three of its main stages: in the identification and extraction of archival material, in the processing of archival data, and finally in their dissemination first to the scientific community and then to a wider public.

At the same time, the use of digital technology raises issues in terms of its purpose and limits, the place it occupies in the research process, the researcher's own position in relation to it, and, most importantly, the scientific mindset and methodology that it appears to represent.

This convergence between historical records and digital technology has facilitated and enhanced the research process (especially when it comes to archives or even archive catalogues organised on an online basis). It has allowed the individual researcher to have in their

possession digital copies that enhance analysis and processing and, in some cases, even facilitate remote research.

In the case of the Ottoman archives, the necessity of digitising historical records, raised as an imperative in previous decades, began to be seriously considered only at the dawn of the 21st century. Indicative here is the case of Ottoman Archives of the State Archives of the Presidency of Turkey (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, formerly the archive of the Prime Minister's Office), the largest archival base for research on Ottoman history, the gradual digitisation of which greatly paved the way for Ottomanists throughout the world.[2]

As far as Greece is concerned, remarkable efforts have been made in recent years, based on both state and non-state initiatives, to preserve and digitise existing Ottoman archives.[3] However, an online portal

2. For more information on the Ottoman Archives of the State Archives of the Presidency of Turkey (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi), based in Istanbul, one may visit the relevant website: https://www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr. As for the main Ottoman Archives located in Ankara, equipped with digital facilities, see: The Republic Archives (Cumhuriyet Arşivi), https://www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr/, the Tapu ve Kadastro Archive (Tapu ve Kadastro Arşivi), https://www.tkgm.gov.tr/ or the Turkish Historical Society Archive (Türk Tarih Kurumu Arşivi) https://kutuphane.ttk.gov.tr/. One example beyond Turkey is the Aga Khan Library in London, equipped with research material on Islamic studies, in which a digitised Ottoman collection is included: https://www.agakhanlibrary.digital/ottoman-collection. For digital Ottoman archives and collections, see: https://libguides.ku.edu.tr/ottomanstudies/archives-digitalcollections, https://www.digitalottomanstudies.com/archive, https://www.digitalottomanstudies.com/manuscript-collections, https://www.digitalottomanstudies.com/map-collections.

3. On digital collections of the Greek State Archives, one may visit the website: http://arxeiomnimon.gak.gr/index.html. Some of the local state archives also contain Ottoman documents. In some cases, Ottoman documents, although they exist in the physical archive, are not available in digital form. In addition to the state archives, one can visit the following websites that host other efforts of digitised Ottoman archives, such as that of the Ottoman documents of Andros: http://androsdocs.ims.forth.gr/. For more information on the research project entitled as "The Island of Andros under Ottoman Rule", concerning the study and digitisation of Ottoman documents of the Andros Island, see: https://www.ims.forth.gr/en/project/view?id=8. See also the interesting effort to create a refugee digital historical archive made by the Society of Historical Research "Lycia", https://lycia.gr/en/3706-2/ or the Digital Library

focused solely on the preservation and availability of the Ottoman archives as well as the framework that would support such an initiative is still absent. Fragmentation of Ottoman historical records is a well-known issue that remains unresolved, as a multitude of records, both public and private (such as personal collections, monastic archives) as well as other types of historical evidence, remain far from any contact with digital technology and are exposed to the decay of time, poor maintenance conditions, or even at time mistreatment, but mostly away from their natural beneficiary, the researcher.[4]

The digitisation of historical documents, which undoubtedly brought about a huge change in the way archival research is conducted, marked the beginning of a new era, making once hard to access archives accessible under certain conditions, while simultaneously fulfilling multiple purposes both for the research process and for the researcher. What has been left in limbo, however, are the next steps, such as that of creating integrated and functional online archives.[5]

As exciting as it is when a researcher comes into contact with the physical or digital version of their archival material located in a sheltered archive, this encounter is usually accompanied by various dysfunctions or constraints, such as limited access to the material, limited research time, time-consuming procedures determining access to archives, the fragile condition of documents themselves (when these are available for study), and other similar issues, which rather make research more difficult than easier.

---

of the Greek Communities of Constantinople "Anthemousa", http://anthemion.phs.uoa.gr/index.php/en/. Both of these Greek digital archives do not consist purely of Ottoman archival material, however they contain some Ottoman documents as well.

4. Concerning the types of Ottoman archival material in Greece and its path before digitization, see: Ευαγγελία Μπαλτά, «Οθωμανικά αρχεία στην Ελλάδα: προοπτικές έρευνας», Μνήμων 12 (1989): 241-252 [Evangelia Balta, "Ottoman archives in Greece: research perspectives," *Mnemon* 12 (1989)], https://doi.org/10.12681/mnimon.440. On the evolution of Ottoman Studies in Greece and the Greek Ottomanists' research mentality, see: Marinos Sariyannis, Eleni Gara, and Phokion Kotzageorgis, "Ottoman studies in Greece: a reflective gaze," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique moderne et contemporain* 5 (2021), http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/957.

5. Aleksandra Fostikov and Neven Isailovic, "Digital Humanities or Digital versus Humanities," *Pregled NCD* 24 (2014): 19–23.

Although it has been achieved to some extent, the availability of historical records on the Internet is still promoted rather cautiously, as there are many cases where historical documents, in this case Ottoman ones, are either completely missing from the online archives or are selectively and fragmentarily available from the respective digital collection.

Organisation, Processing, and Dissemination of Research Data

As far as the organisation, study, and processing of archival material is concerned, the role of digital media is equally decisive. Archival data entry in online or non-online digital databases gives the researcher access to organised data entry, complex search methods, and different uses of their archival material in less time and with greater accuracy, especially when these databases are constantly updated. In addition, interactive databases favour collaboration and facilitate group research, as they allow data processing by more than one user in parallel and remote interaction with each other.

At the stage where a researcher is asked to process their archival data, the application of digital technology, although not yet fully exploited by historians, can contribute in a particularly innovative way, as it allow them to identify options, pose complex research questions, analyse specific issues, and attempt new interpretive approaches that often extend the research in diverse directions.

Especially in recent years, scholars of Ottoman History have mostly focused on the organisation, visualisation, and dissemination of archival and research data. A quick glance suggests that digital applications that have consistently attracted the interest of Ottoman historical research are such technologies as databases, mapping, 3D visualisation, and text processing. For example, through the widespread use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which provide not only the possibility of categorisation and visualisation but also the possibility of spatial, topographical, and social analysis of data, which may come from a combination of different types of archival sources (maps, registers, etc.), one can study a variety of topics such as networks of movement of people and goods, the evolution and dispersion of

agricultural crops, or the spread and extent of landholdings in the Ottoman periphery, as well as many other themes such as population, habitation, taxation, hydrographic networks, various institutions, and so on.[6] 3D technology is also used to depict and reconstruct historical aspects of the Ottoman historical landscape (for example, the urban or rural landscape, the architectural evolution of buildings, etc.). More recently, the digital dimension, further enhanced by the use of Artificial Intelligence, has been extended to other fields of the research process such as text processing or Optical Character Recognition methods (for instance identifying and transcribing Ottoman writing through specific sources).[7]

---

6. Some indicative references to digital-based studies on Ottoman History: Antonis Hadjikyriacou, "Çevre Tarihi, İktisat Tarihi ve Coğrafi Bilgi Sistemleri: Kıbrıs'ın 1572 Yılı Mufassal Defterinin Analizi," [Environmental history, Economic history, and Geographic Information Systems: An analysis of the 1572 Cyprus detailed fiscal survey], *Toplumsal Tarih* 312 (December 2019): 44-49; Antonis Hadjikyriacou, Evangelos Papadias, Christoforos Vradis, and Christos Chalkias, "Combining historical maps and censuses of Cyprus from the sixteenth to the twentieth century: A geospatial approach," *8th International Symposium of the International Cartographic Association on the History of Cartography* (21-21 April 2020), https://www.proc-int-cartogr-assoc.net/3/7/2021/ica-proc-3-7-2021.pdf; Ahmet Yaşar, "1766 Tarihli Bir Hamam Defterine Göre İstanbul Vakıf Hamamları," [Istanbul Waqf Hammams according to a Hammam Survey Dated 1766], *Vakıflar Dergisi* 53 (June 2020): 67-99; Daniel Ohanian, Z. Mehmet Başkurt, and M. Erdem Kabadayı, "An Historical Geographic Information System For Ottoman Studies: The C. 1907 Ottoman Census and Armenian Settlement in Istanbul," *Turcica* 51 (2020): 255-283; Jilian Ma, Akın Sefer, and M. Erdem Kabadayı, "Geolocating Ottoman Settlements: The Use of Historical Maps for Digital Humanities," *8th International Symposium of the International Cartographic Association on the History of Cartography* (21-21 April 2020); M. Erdem Kabadayı, Piet Gerrits, and Grigor Boykov, "Geospatial mapping of a 16th century transport corridor for Southeast Europe," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 37/3 (2022): 788-812; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2022.102672. This bibliography has been shortened for the purposes of printing. For a more expansive indicative bibliography, see the digital version of the present article at: https://www.isrf.org/2023/04/21/digitality-in-ottoman-history-some-thoughts-on-research-mindset/.

7. For example, see: "HTR Applications for Ottoman Turkish in Transkribus" by Süphan Kırmızıaltın and David J. Wrisley. See also a commercial application that is currently under construction, "osmanlica.com" (https://www.digitalottomanstudies.com/post/ottoman-turkish-and-ai-applications-the-example-of-osmanlica-com).

As regards the promotion of research findings or the dissemination of research results, this process is facilitated through their posting in digital environments (websites which promote academic collaboration, electronic journals, online platforms, websites of institutions and funding bodies, etc.), online meetings, podcasts, and various other digital means through which a researcher can get immediate feedback on their work.[8] In particular, in terms of digital Ottoman history and the use of alternative digital media methods for conducting research and extracting and disseminating knowledge (e.g. crowdsourcing), we are still at the beginning, but the steps being taken are very fast.[9]

Criticism, Reflection and Revision Points of View

Digitality in historical research is accompanied at the same time both by new perspectives and points of criticism or concern, which have been raised from time to time even by researchers themselves.[10] These considerations focus on several points such as the nature of digital culture but also the researcher's position towards the digital medium. Other concerns include the speed with which historical evidence is entered and dispersed into the public sphere, the copyright of digital properties, the limits and jurisdiction of digital media and their users, the potential distortion of historical archival data by their uncritical or simplistic visualisation, the distance of the researcher from contact with the original, even insufficiency of digital literacy on the part of researchers, in our case historians.

8. For example: the "Digital Ottoman Studies website", created by Fatma Aladağ and supervised by Yunus Uğur, https://www.digitalottomanstudies.com/, the "Open Ottoman" created by Amy Singer, https://epublications.marquette.edu/ottoman/ or the "Ottoman History Podcast", https://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/p/about-us.html.

9. A recent attempt—probably the first one—to utilize the crowdsourcing method in Ottoman studies, which is still ongoing, is that of "The Ottoman Turkish Crowdsourcing Project" carried out by Süphan Kırmızıaltın, https://digitalorientalist.com/2021/11/05/crowdsourcing-for-ottoman-studies-zooniverse/.

10. Chris Gratien, Michael Polczynski, and Nir Shafir, "Digital Frontiers of Ottoman Studies," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1/1-2 (2014): 37-51.

This last point, i.e. the unfamiliarity of historians with the use of specialised digital applications, entails its own risks as it possibly traps a researcher in a static situation in terms of the scientific means they use. However, so far it has led, if only out of necessity, to the path of interdisciplinarity, which is, after all, the main objective of modern science. In this case, the gap becomes an occasion for convergence and cooperation between various scientific disciplines, as a result of which more and more frequent steps are taken in the direction of the holistic approach of scientific research not only in History but in every scientific discipline.

Beyond the practical issues of digitality, what is also troubling is its very identity. Does the penetration of the digital condition in almost all aspects of historical research bring with it a substantial change to research mentality and methodology?

A characteristic point of criticism surrounding the role of digitality in History is that the gains made by manipulating the archival material may be achieved to the detriment of its analysis and interpretation. The process of researching and organising archival material and presenting it is better, easier, and faster today, but is this all at the expense of interpretation, analysis, and synthesis? In short, are the humanities, like History, gradually losing their structural features just to gain ground in practical matters? Are the Humanities undergoing an identity crisis through digitality?

It is this sense of ease that often alienates a "classical" historian, who is accustomed to the painstaking search and fascinating obstacles that used to surrounded their practice and that to some extent still surround it, who has learned to focus on the interpretation of historical concepts and issues and not so much on their visualisation, who has accepted the lonely and standardised path of a researcher and finds it difficult to accept alternative approaches to research methodology, data processing, and knowledge in general. As a result, they often face this presumed digital "Janus" with a sense of confusion or even suspicion–although Ottomanists to a lesser extent–that contrasts the meaning of the term "classic", as a means of defense or to give a sense of reliability, conventionality, and timelessness to the non-digital and

sometimes even to juxtapose it as an allusion or demonisation against anything new and therefore unknown.

The distance from new technologies, the sight of what is unknown but inevitable that constantly surrounds the science of History (and the Humanities as a whole) has provided the ground for an informal discussion on issues raised by digitality, such as whether the Digital Humanities is a discipline or just a way to fill the gap in computer-based research methods in the Humanities, whether digitality is here to stay or not, and why a historian must be the bearer of many other skills beyond their basic—that is to say classical—training. This last question can lead to an especially fatal dilemma, one that pitches "classical" research against research that is more comfortable using more modern techniques, including those built around digital technologies. History, and especially Ottoman history, is particularly prone to this dilemma, which is probably a false one.[11]

What historians should perhaps ask themselves is whether digitality is an end in itself or a means?

There are undoubtedly many questions surrounding the digital condition. Some of these will be answered as this field evolves, some may remain unanswered, and some may not need to be answered.[12] For now, it is certain that digital technology provides tools and possibilities that at least a large portion of historians, especially younger ones, find attractive and useful. It remains to be seen whether fears that the nature of digital media will affect the analytical work of historians will be confirmed or turn into mere phobias.

Digitality, precisely because of its many faces, seems to have arisen naturally—at least in Ottoman History—as a product of the evolution of the science of History itself and of historians themselves. The narration of History acquires a digital identity on the basis of continuous conciliation and seems to speak the language of the time, and this

11. Fostikov and Isailovic, "Digital Humanities or Digital versus Humanities," 21–22; Alexandra Fostikov and Nenad Milenovic, "Problems regarding the application of Internet in the Historical Research," *Pregled* 5 (2004): 67-73.
12. Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, "Humanities Computing and Digital Humanities," *South Atlantic Review* 73/4 (2008), 50-66.

is perhaps unprecedented. Whether History joined Digital Science, or Digital Science entered the discipline of History, seems at the moment to be a matter of rather secondary importance.[13] Digitality has arguably replaced older methods of research and possibly part of the research mindset. What is difficult to replace, however, is the spirit and personality of each historian, transferred both to practical and theoretical and intellectual issues of a piece of research, and it is the one that colours and differentiates each of its stages.

Concluding, I would suggest that historical research should—not so much out of a need to uncritically comply with the technological imperatives of the Digital Age, but more out of a debt to itself and its people—constantly update and upgrade its methodology, preserve its precious raw material, i.e. the archival sources, and limit scientific elitism by turning the archives into an open and functional field of research and knowledge, so as to finally make sustainable the very science of History.

13. Amy Singer, "Creating a Digital Ottoman Platform (DOP)," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 2/2 (November 2015): 451-456.

OpenEleusis

Crafting Digitalised Representations of Eleusina's Industrial Culture

Io Chaviara, Danae Karydaki, Michalis Kastanidis, and Regina Mantanika

Βάρδα φουρνέλο! [Alert, explosion!]

Very often, we heard this phrase from the loudspeakers in the middle of the day while hanging around as children in the neighbourhood (?). In the hearing of it, we had to get indoors as it signalled extractions

Figure 1: Raw bauxite ore is prepared for shipping at Eleusis pier, c.1948. Image in public domain.

were about to take place in the nearby mountain [quarry]... If you walk around the area, even nowadays, and you take a closer look at the terraces in some houses, you can still observe the added layer from the dust that, over the years, became cement. (From a discussion with people from the local association of people from the island of Symi, February 2023.)

Sometimes you could see outside the window of the house, and it was as if it was snowing [the dust from the explosions]. (From a discussion with people from the local association of refugees from Asia Minor, October 2022.)

Eleusina is a city on the outskirts of Athens that hosts various industrial activities. It is a place where various transitions have taken and still take place: from rural to industrial societies; from "native" to refugee towns; from neighbourhoods inhabited by workers to areas where workers merely commute. Compared to the other towns of the region, Eleusina stands out as it captures a double symbolic character: a "contemporary" centre of industrial development and, at the same time, a region of special archaeological interest. This double symbolism shapes the particular space and time of Eleusina and is reflected in the daily life of the people who live, work, or transit the city.

Although Eleusina is internationally acclaimed for its ancient past, being the site of the Eleusinian mysteries during antiquity, its largely neglected modern history that is intertwined with the gradual industrialisation of the area from the late nineteenth century onwards is very intriguing. From small-scale industries for soap and wine production that were established in 1875 and 1900, respectively, to the creation of the defense industry PYRKAL and the cement industry TITAN in the early twentieth century and the coming of the greatest steel industry, oil refineries, and shipyards in the post-war period, Eleusina became one of the most rapidly industrialised regions in Greece. And this development could not but also affect the population of Eleusina; internal migrants from the islands and other places came to Eleusina to find a job, while refugees from Minor Asia and Pontus were also placed in Eleusina. For the best part of the twentieth century, almost every family in the area had a member working in an industrial environment.

A second radical change comes with the shutting down or relocation of the factories in the 1990s as well as with the transformation of the working conditions in the twenty-first century, when employees no longer needed to live in Eleusina and could either commute from Athens or work remotely.

Who are the people of Eleusina?

Workers, individuals of different social groups and origins, who have been—and still are—part of the industrial reality and economy of the city (employees, petty traders, small-scale artisans, traditional craftsmen and craftswomen, etc.).

How do we reach out to them?

Through the various ethno-local associations[1] that are very active in the Eleusina community we are looking for stories around the daily life of those working and living in the industries. Our hypothesis, from the field research conducted so far, is that the existence of so many associations in a small area is the result of the migrant mobility that composes the industrial landscape of the region. More than 10 associations continue to be active until today and play an important role in the life of Eleusina. To name just a few, there are Associations of Epirus, the island of Corfu, the island of Crete, Asia Minor (refugees), Pontus (refugees), the island of Symi, the island of Chios, the Dodecanese islands, Thessaly, and the Peloponnesians of Eleusina.

In 1955, the "Elaiourgiki—Central Cooperative Union of Olive Oil Producers of Greece" was founded in Eleusina. *Many people arrived*

1. These are associations composed of internal migrants from different places in Greece who during the twentieth century came to Eleusina to work in local industries. For instance, immigrants from Crete formed the Cretan Association of Eleusina where they meet, organise balls, share their traditional food, etc. They are called 'ethno-local' associations because they brought something of their ethnic identity to Eleusina and they are still, one century later, very attached to this identity.

in the 1960s in Eleusina from the region of Rethymno in Crete… The one brought the other and most of them found a job in Elaiourgiki… (From a discussion with people from the local association of Cretans in Eleusina, April 2023)

For some of us our grandparents and for others our parents arrived in Eleusina from the island of Symi, looking for work in the industry. As they knew how to swim, and they were not afraid of the sea, they all worked in the port area. Many industries were using parts of the port area and this is where people from Symi were working. (From a discussion with people from the local association of people from the island of Symi, February 2023.)

OpenEleusis, work in progress

OpenEleusis is a cross-disciplinary collaboration among researchers from anthropology, history, visual arts, and information science for community-based research in Eleusina. It seeks to map the industrial culture and memory of the city as represented by locals, workers, and school students in order to produce a digital blueprint touching upon three interconnected aspects: a) a publicly accessible searchable database with archival and audiovisual material, including oral testimonies, that will be returned to the community and will serve future researchers through the tools of digital humanities; b) stop-motion animation

Figure 2. Image provided by the authors.

Figure 3. Image provided by the authors.

documentaries produced by school students through oral history tools; c) an ethnographic documentary film focusing on stories of Eleusina's industrial landscape.

OpenEleusis attempts a multisensory representation of what we conceive as the industrial culture of Eleusina. We approach this latter element as the result of interaction between people, physical spaces, and non-material elements. We aim to represent this interaction through words, images, sounds, feelings, smells, tastes, and symbols.

I still remember how we used to play in the steel mill sewage, when we were kids. (30-year-old resident of Eleusina, March 2023.)

After a long walk in the area covering the old defense industry of Pyrkal; our team together with two locals ended up harvesting wild asparagus. They are growing as part of the dense vegetation surrounding what has remained from the buildings, the memories and the inflammable and explosive material[2] *of an abandoned munitions industry*. (Field trip to Pyrkal, March 2023).

2. A major operation of decontamination of explosive materials is about to take place in the area covering the old Pyrkal industry.

Figures 5 and 6. Images provided by the authors.

Crafting methodologies: Community-based research, a multilevel challenge

The principal aim of our project, as well as its greatest challenge, is to craft digitised representations of Eleusina's industrial culture that would respect the community. We seek, in other words, to trace, listen to, and shape the mosaic of different stories of the people and the places of Eleusina.

We also seek to map, collect, organise, digitise, and create entries and tags for the database for any material related to Eleusina's industrial culture, from archives retrieved from industries, institutions, unions, collectives, associations, as well as individuals. Such material includes pictures, letters, diaries, administrative documents, maps, press cuttings, and pre-produced audiovisual material, as well as oral testimonies.

In the ethnographic research, we are focusing on a micro-scale through participatory observation, in-depth biographical interviews, and focus groups. As mentioned above, the oral testimonies that will emerge from the ethnographic research will be included in the

publicly accessible digital archive of our project, also serving as a tool to preserve the memory of the community.

Central to our project is the making of an ethnographic film. Archival and ethnographic research will inform and will be informed by documentary cinema. The latter constitutes a research tool in its own right as well as an artistic product. The aim of the documentary film is to capture the experience of our coming together with the people of the city and to record the different stories—past and present—of Eleusina by focusing on different aspects of the industrial, labour, feminist, immigration, and urban history of the city.

Beyond our research, we seek to engage with the Eleusina community in two more ways. Firstly, we will offer oral history seminars to the locals, so as to familiarise them with the tools of oral history in case they wish to form an oral history group and explore the recent history of their city, especially from the perspective of industrial culture. Secondly, we will organise a summer school for children 8-14 years old in the public library of Eleusina. There, students will be trained in oral history and stop-motion animation techniques so that they can create stop-motion animation documentaries themselves in which Eleusina's stories will be represented through the locals' narrations.

Figure 6. Translation: Building no. 7a, workers 70, explosives 1200 kg, Pyrites 2500. Image provided by the authors.

The challenge of working together with the community and returning to the community

Our work aims at being returned to the community, which is one of the biggest challenges so far. The digital archive will be

publicly available and accessible. The documentary film aims at disseminating the stories of Eleusina to the world also through digital means. The students' stop-motion documentaries are purposed to narrate the stories of Eleusina through the eyes of the younger generation.

We do not claim, of course, that this process comes with no limitations. An inevitable challenge that emerges from the synergies of social sciences, humanities, and visual arts with information science requires a methodological adaptation that produces new ways of thinking about representation, designing analytical categories, and, last but not least, reflecting on transdisciplinarity.

Yet, our intention is to include the community as much as we can and craft these different stories of the industrial culture of Eleusina in such a participatory way so as to leave its legacy in the cultural capital of the city. That way, our purpose is to allow the community to combine the retention of control over their material with provision for its long-term preservation. Finally, the novel interaction between the community and the digital representation of their stories can be the object of a follow-up study regarding the intervention of digital representation in memory construction.

This issue features:

Crisálida Bermúdez
Nancy Bonilla
Io Chaviara
Lina Cortés
Hanne Cottyn
Carlos Cuellar
Costas Gousis
Athena Hadji
Rodolfo Hernández
Danae Karydaki
Michalis Kastanidis
Styliani Lepida
Regina Mantanika
Santiago Martínez
María Santos