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ROUNDTABLE

What is Digital Global History Now?

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This Common Room conversation explores the use of digital resources within the realm of global history. In the past quarter-century, digital primary sources for historical research have proliferated. In the 1990s, notable initiatives made substantial collections of sources accessible through CD-ROMs. However, it appeared that only a small fraction would ever be converted into digital format this way.

Nowadays, web-based databases have become an integral part of the daily routine for virtually all professional historians. In fact, most historians are actively engaged in digitisation efforts themselves, often employing smartphones within physical archives. In an *American Historical Review* article in 2016, Lara Putnam argued that 'the digitized turn is one that all historians, however traditional, are enacting, and about which the great majority of us have had nothing to say'. Although Putnam's article was published several years ago, in one of the leading historical journals, the questions she raised about how 'the reach, speed, and granularity of digitised search impact our ability to reconstruct the supranational past' continue to be highly pertinent.[1] Of course, there has been a significant volume of work by digital history specialists, who have done their best, often in high-profile journals, to draw the attention of the wider historical community to both the opportunities and pitfalls of digitisation. In that sense the issue has not been neglected, yet Putnam's point about *the great majority* remains valid. The Covid pandemic 'supercharged' the use of digital sources – albeit today even visits to physical archives tend to involve the large-scale

[1]Lara Putnam, 'The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows they Cast', *The American Historical Review*, 121 (2016), 377–402, quotation at p. 379.

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use of digital photography – probably without an accompanying increase in critical reflection.[2]

These are crucial facts, because the use of digital sources has important implications for the interpretation of the past, which frequently go unrecognised in scholarly literature that draws upon this type of evidence. In a seminal 2013 article, Ian Milligan showed that, once certain Canadian newspapers were digitised, citations of these sources increased dramatically. This had an important impact on Canada's historiography, by privileging a particular set of press material – and in general this occurred without the scholars concerned acknowledging or perhaps themselves appreciating the impact of their practices. Furthermore, Milligan pointed out, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology has a significant error rate.[3] And not all newspapers are equal: the problems increase with cheaper publications aimed at a mass audience, which at any rate tend to be underrepresented in digitised collections. There are technical methods which can be used to address, if not fully solve, these issues.[4] Nevertheless, sensitising scholars to these questions remains a major challenge.

With respect to global history, the prevalence of digitised sources (and AI translation tools) certainly has the potential to widen historians' fields of vision. As Putnam argues, 'transnational approaches among historians did not become commonplace until technology radically reduced the cost of discovering information about people, places, and processes outside the borders of one's prior knowledge'. She points out that it is not only primary sources that are relevant here: 'digitized secondary and tertiary sources allow quick eyeballing of the bigger picture or of doings next door: a sideways glance that can uncover connections or commonalities worth exploring'.[5] There is no agreed definition of 'global history', which has different lineages according to national contexts, and which has even been seen by some as a neo-imperialist 'discourse strategy' for reinforcing Western hegemony.[6] From our own perspective, we are sympathetic to Richard Drayton and David Motadel's insistence that global history is not 'a demand that historians only pay attention to "big" transnational phenomena' but rather a call for 'sensitivity to the historical agents, forces, and factors at scales above and below those of the nation or region'. Moreover, as Cassandra Mark-Thiesen reminds us below, global history involves not only widening coverage, but also incorporating epistemologies from around the world and shifting intellectual ownership. But although Drayton and Motadel are digitisation optimists – calling for an acceleration of the process and the virtual repatriation of former colonial archives – it cannot

[2]Heidi J. S. Tworek, 'Digitized Newspapers and the Hidden Transformation of History', *The American Historical Review*, 129 (2024), 143–7, quotation at p. 144; Ian Milligan, 'We Are All Digital Now: Digital Photography and the Reshaping of Historical Practice', *Canadian Historical Review*, 101 (2020), 602–21.

[3]Ian Milligan, 'Illusionary Order: Online Databases, Optical Character Recognition, and Canadian History, 1997–2010', *Canadian Historical Review*, 94 (2013), 540–69.

[4]Kaspar Beelen, Jon Lawrence, Daniel C. S. Wilson and David Beavan, 'Bias and Representativeness in Digitized Newspaper Collections: Introducing the Environmental Scan', *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 38 (2023), 1–22.

[5]Putnam, 'The Transnational', 383.

[6]Francesca Trivellato, 'The Paradoxes of Global History', *Cromohs: Cyber Review of Modern Historiography* (2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.36253/cromohs-15297; Liu Xincheng, 'The Global View of History in China', *Journal of World History*, 23 (2012), 491–511, quotation at p. 494.

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be assumed that technology will by itself advance the intellectual agenda they favour.[7] For example, Yushu Genga and Rachel Leow have recently shown that, 'In the case of Chinese-language newspapers, their digitization has often aided methodological nationalism by reinforcing the national framing implicit in what counts as a "Chinese" newspaper – a feature that is far from the promise of aiding transnational history.'[8] Digital archives do not inherently promote transnationalism or challenge 'silo'-type national-historical thinking – even though they can assist historians in their efforts to do so.

Hence, this roundtable brings together scholar-practitioners both to discuss their own experiences of digital scholarship in different national contexts and to reflect on and analyse the opportunities and challenges posed by the digital transformation for the practice of global history. The individuals concerned are Cassandra Mark-Thiesen (University of Bayreuth), Haakon A. Ikonomou (University of Copenhagen), Robert Lee (University of Cambridge) and Jessica Parr (Northeastern University). All of them work at universities in the Global North, a fact which, it should be frankly admitted, reflects the biases inherent in our own professional connections as editors. It also reflects the fact that Digital History, like any other discipline, is strongly influenced by its institutional origins, as well as by wider society and politics, and perhaps in particular by the technical outputs and cultural assumptions of Silicon Valley.[9] To adapt Marx: digital historians write their own history, but they do so under conditions transmitted from the past.

To chart how historians may write their own histories then, the contributors address the following key questions, before engaging with, and further developing each other's contributions in the concluding discussion: How has digital history shifted historical practice in general and the development of the field of global history in particular? What are the potential risks posed by the spread of digital methods and how can these be mitigated? What are the opportunities and how can they best be exploited? How can conversations around digital global history best be progressed?

(Richard Toye and Astrid Swenson, January 2025)

Cassandra Mark-Thiesen: If the 'globalisation' of history involves not only achieving wider (geographical) coverage, but also (amongst other things) the incorporation of new knowledge and diverse perspectives from around the world, then there is a need to consider how and if digital technology facilitates this process. As a historian of Africa and the globe, I find it fascinating to consider what changes digital transformation may introduce to these interconnected fields.

For a long time, it seemed that any mention of 'Africa' in connection with 'the digital' had to be followed up by a reference to the digital divide (defined as 'stratifications in the access and use of the Internet').[10] Yes, the research environment in

[7]Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, 13 (2018), 1–21, quotation at p. 13.

[8]Yushu Genga and Rachel Leow, 'The Historian as Transnational Agent: On the Digitization of Sinophone Newspapers', *The American Historical Review*, 129 (2024), 153–8, quotation at p. 153.

[9]David M. Berry, 'Critical Digital Humanities', in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Digital Humanities*, ed. James O'Sullivan (2024), 126–35.

[10]See, for example, Massimo Ragnedda and Glenn W. Muschert, *The Digital Divide: The Internet and Social Inequality in International Perspective* (Florence, KY, 2013).

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many African states leaves significant room for improvement when it comes to information and communication technologies. And, certainly, internet connectivity has been challenging, as well as costly, in many parts of the continent. 'In 2008, only three fibre-optic submarine cables connected the entire continent of Africa to the global internet, two of which landed in North Africa.' However, since about 2010, the landscape of fibre-optic cables, copper wires, cellular towers and satellites has expanded dramatically.[11]

In the meantime, scholars from Africa and Asia have long sought to use digital technological advances to make their voices heard. Still, as it pertains to the field of global history, it was observed in 2016 that contributions from Africa and Asia have remained 'often barely discernible'.[12] Indeed, African historiography itself has been dominated by the voices of outsiders. In 1990, at the dawn of the communications revolution, the Belgian-born historian of Africa Jan Vansina pointed out that the study of Africa was unique in the world in that most scholarship on Africa was produced outside the continent.[13] We can add to this observation that scholarship produced on the continent remains understudied outside Africa.[14]

So what change is possible with the assistance of digital technologies? Digital archives, digital exhibition and collaborations based on digital technology promise to better platform global histories through Africa, in particular depictions of (Global) Africa History constructed by African scholars and other local producers of knowledge. This should matter to all global historians because critical thinking beyond the confines of a Western frame of thought is becoming progressively valued in our increasingly networked and complex (digital?) societies. Hence, it is worth asking what novelties this process may hold for our understanding of the past and, through it, future-making.

As a global historian and historian of Africa, who regularly interacts with colleagues from the African continent, I have noticed that many of them are already participating in the digital realm with the precise goal of reshaping African stories, though scepticism naturally remains. These and other efforts have resulted in a growing number of digital archives and datasets, tags and metadata locally created and curated.[15] Today several countries, from Senegal (Timbuktu Manuscripts Project) to South Africa (South African History Online), to the Congo (Habari RDC) and Egypt (Digital Egypt for Universities), boast large-scale digital humanities projects to preserve and promote

[11]Leah Ngari and Shira Aliza Petrack, 'Internet Infrastructure in Africa', Empower Africa (2020), https://empowerafrica.com/internet-infrastructure-in-africa/ (accessed 12 Aug. 2024)

[12]Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), 8.

[13]Jan M. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, 1990), 240.

[14]Pierre Boilley and Ibrahima Thioub, 'Pour une histoire africaine de la complexité', in *Écrire l'histoire de l'Afrique autrement*, ed. Pascale Barthelemy, Charles Tshimanga and Séverine Awengo (Paris, 2004): 23–45.

[15]Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, 'Clio-Guide: Afrika', in *Clio Guide – Ein Handbuch zu digitalen Ressourcen für die Geschichtswissenschaften*, ed. Sivlia Daniel, Wilfried Enderle, Rüdiger Hohls, Thomas Meyer, Jens Prellwitz, Claudia Prinz, Annette Schuhmann, Silke Schwandt, 3rd ed. (Berlin 2023), https://doi.org/10.60693/4fg8–8398, https://guides.clio-online.de/sites/default/files/clio/guides/2023/d50_mark-thiesen_afrika_2023_web.pdf; for a list of digital resources for Africa, see Cassandra Mark-Thiesen and Luisa Schneider, 'Clio-Guide-Linkliste: Afrika', *ibid*.

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history (and oral traditions), languages, literature, archaeology and other forms of cultural heritage.

The DH-project 'African Oral Narratives' is an example of a cross-border open access digital library containing oral and life histories, folklore and songs from Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa.[16] Connected with these efforts, the very unsexy task of research data management, often seen as the bane of many scientists' existence, can be used to empower scientists and communities. This is because the recirculation of research data should ideally lead to its enhancement – a layering or 'globalising' of terms and concepts – as they are disseminated to communities in various parts of the world who may share a history but have differing opinions on how to interpret it, precisely with the intention of gaining these new insights. Can and will these initiatives unlock new aspects of our human past? To what extent can they reconfigure the image of Africa? Or are they simply shouting into the void, so to speak? For now, all who are concerned with such matters are called on to participate in shaping this digital knowledge landscape.

Meanwhile, the pace at which digital technologies are transforming our research landscape continues. There are positive outcomes. For example, new AI tools are breaking down language barriers so that peoples from the Global South are gaining unprecedented access to historical materials with which to interpret the global past. Hosted at the Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg Frankfurt Main, the impressive Germany Colonial Photography Archives was launched some years ago. However, for many individuals and institutions in places like Namibia to Cameroon it remained a challenge to access the critical contextual information, for example that scribblied on the sides and backs of these images, essential to making sense of such photographic material since they were typically written in German.

This shift in accessibility is remarkable. Similarly, any historian who, like me, has in the past conducted the painstaking work of transcribing handwritten documents from the nineteenth century or earlier can only rub their eyes in amazement at what can be achieved with a program like 'Transkribus' in under a minute. In a recent exercise I transcribed letters from the colony of Liberia in the 1830s, for fun mind you! At the same time, I agree with many others that we need to remain cautious of what gets lost because of these new shortcuts and efficiencies in terms of social and intellectual engagement and contextual understanding. We need to build up similar reflexes when we are presented with glossy datasets. The allure of big data, with its air of completeness, should not blind us to asking important questions about the human hand in the creation of these databases.

What lies ahead for global historiography? I often ponder, for example, whether digital tools may usher in a new visual turn. Will digital methodologies such as computer vision and semantic annotation encourage more global historians to analyse non-textual primary sources in the future?

In 2018, I initiated a digitisation project with partners at the Liberia Broadcasting System. We have been working to preserve (and remediate) public television content from the period of 1980–91, leaving us with close to 200 hours of digitised content thus

[16]'African Oral Narratives: Life Histories, Interviews, Folklore and Song from Sub-Saharan Africa', https://aodl.org/oralnarratives (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

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far. But analysing (audio)-visual primary sources is not necessarily a straightforward task. Nor should this be the case for any primary source. Adding to the complexity of what is already considered to be 'overly' subjective material, digital tools are creating multiple pathways to break down, reconstruct and then separately analyse these materials (into visual, audio, subtitles (text), and even unanticipated concepts).

This boom in technology (with a growing number of digital archives to match) does not free us from a reality where many historians still perceive text as more objective or knowable than other forms of media (e.g. photography) when it comes to historical analysis, though this may be affected by future shifts in training. Finally, it is important to note that, as it stands, it is typically left up to individual researchers to establish an ethical framework when conducting projects like these. FAIR and CARE principles provide a useful starting point when considering data-sharing, stewardship and ownership.[17] But we also need more forums to debate best practices.

Richard Toye: If I may briefly jump in here, may I say that the Liberian TV project sounds amazing. Though scholars have rightly highlighted the biases surrounding digitised newspapers – that people tend to cite them just because they are easily accessible – this has in a sense always been an issue with press sources. When I was a graduate student in the 1990s, the London *Times* was over-cited just because it happened to have a printed index. But when it comes to the broadcast era, we still overcite newspapers, just because they are easy to consult and search. There are now tools that will increasingly make it easy to search broadcast material at scale, though at the moment these sources are almost a kind of 'historical dark matter'. On the AI language tools I might throw in a note of caution, as there's the risk that people may decide that they don't need to learn languages anymore! Nevertheless, it's true that these tools have become extremely good, even for somewhat niche applications like the translation of Swiss-German.

Haakon A. Ikonomou: I am a historian of international organisations and global and regional governance in the twentieth century, with a particular interest in the League of Nations in the interwar period, and Atlantic and International Cooperation in the post-war decades. Based on my personal experience of research, collaboration and publications in these fields, I would like to highlight one change in our global historical practice prompted by digital history, one prospect for my field and one potential danger.

First, it has become much easier to create partnerships and infrastructure, and to receive funding for interdisciplinary digital projects. For the last three years, I headed the digital history project 'Visual League' (2020–23).[18] What we created was a digital prosopographical research tool, where one can search, generate metadata and statistical visualisation, and create curated prosopographical databases for one's own research use, of *all employees of the League of Nations Secretariat.* One can combine freely the variables of institutional placement, position, paygrade, nationality, gender and timeframe of the League's existence. We were lucky to be able to harness and further develop

[17]Global Indigenous Data Alliance, CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance, https://www.gida-global.org/care (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[18]Haakon A. Ikonomou, Yuan Chen, Obaida Hanteer and Jonas Tilsted, 'Visualizing the League of Nations Secretariat – a Digital Research Tool', Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2023, https://visualeague-researchtool.com (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

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the work done within the LONSEA-project,[19] headed by Madeleine Herren (with the project based at Heidelberg University) and take advantage of the full digitalisation of the League of Nations archives under the so-called LONTAD-project,[20] conducted by the United Nations Library & Archives Geneva.[21]

Indeed, the 'Visual League' project was created in partnership with the United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, alongside the Gerda Henkel Foundation, my MA-students in history at the Saxo Institute of the University of Copenhagen, and interns coming from the Computer Science Department, under the umbrella of the Independent Research Fund Denmark (IRFD) project 'Laying the Foundations: The League of Nations and International Law, 1919 to 1945'.[22] It was fluid, it was cheap, and it involved researchers from different disciplines, students (as part of their research-based courses) and archives as institutional partners.

It used to be cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive to create such a digital research tool. Such tools would be anchored at one institution, with heavy investments in infrastructure and workforce; and once a project was over, whatever was created would first be used, and then gather dust as a testament to the digital aesthetics of that time. The nimbleness of digital infrastructure makes for fads and blind-alleys, but also creates the possibility for projects to combine and connect software, competences and resources on an *à la carte*-basis.

In some ways digital history still requires heavy investments in infrastructure and manpower, particularly if there is an element of *digitisation* involved, but easily accessible, often free, software, standardised coding languages and operating systems, cheap storage of data, and an increasing possibility to update, expand or change your digital output make for more flexible and hopefully more enduring products.

Second, our current digital state opens the possibility of linking projects with a limited geographical, institutional or other range together to create interlinked research tools or projects with a global scope. What is happening in the field of history of international organisations is a rapid digitalisation of archives, with great accessibility, and the launching of a plethora of new digital projects looking to make use of them. Personally, I am much invested in the prospects of digital prosopography as a way of *opening the black box* of international administrations, and enabling us to write new social, cultural and institutional histories of IOs *from within*.

In a global history perspective, this is significant in two interconnected ways. (1) Looking at the everyday practices of international officials allows us to connect institutional histories, personal connections and increasingly globalising governance fields. Taking the bureaucratic work seriously, in short, makes it easier to trace the mundane global connections of IOs. (2) It allows us to map the globalisation (or lack thereof) of the international staff itself, getting a more nuanced appreciating of geographical,

[19]Madeleine Herren et. al., 'LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine', Heidelberg/Basel, 2010–2017, www.lonsea.org (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[20]United Nations library & archives Geneva, 'LONTAD: Total Digital Access to the League of Nations Archives', https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lontad (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[21]Madeleine Herren, Christiane Sibille and Christoph Meigen (eds.), *Searching the Globe through the Lenses of the League of Nations: Database*, http://www.lonsea.de (accessed 10 Dec. 2023).

[22]'Laying the Foundations: The League of Nations and International Law, 1919 to 1945', https://internationallaw.ku.dk (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

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gendered, racial or ideological biases baked into various types of global governance from within the institutions.[23]

With this in mind, I have created my own digital projects, databases, etc., for the League Secretariat, and am currently developing similar datasets for NATO and the OEEC.[24] Others are doing similar projects on other IOs, whether it is UNESCO, the European Union, ASEAN, the ILO, or the African Union. Recently, we gathered several of these exciting projects, in the online symposium 'Digital Approaches to the History of European & International Cooperation', to discuss the potentials and pitfalls of collaborating across organisations, geographies and typical timeframes.[25]

Building on my point above, about flexible, reusable, updatable projects, I see great potential in the possibility of what one could call digital *meta-projects* of a larger scale, which can connect, systematise and mutually enhance digital projects, tools and resources.[26] Imagine, for instance, such a *meta-project* where one could connect prosopographies of employees across international organisations, opening the possibility to write truly global (social, institutional, diplomatic, etc.) histories of international administrations in the twentieth century. Building on such *meta-projects*, future research projects would have the possibility both to document macro-patterns in developments across time/space and to connect these to refined studies of actors and agency.

As a final point, however, I am concerned by two challenges within the digital landscape of IO history and the history of global governance. The flipside of my optimism expressed above on the prospect of *meta-projects* is my apprehension due to the institutional compartmentalisation of digital accessibility created by such major institutions like the United Nations and, for instance, NATO. This is partly a problem of unequal accessibility, which has always been the case for archives, but there are also problems of rigid digital architectures being built *around each institution*, creating – so to speak – digital islands. Here, I think the solution might be a close dialogue between the archives themselves, across institutions, but also a dialogue with and openness towards projects that cut across geographical and institutional boundaries.[27]

[23]See for instance the digital work of Martin Grandjean, https://www.martingrandjean.ch/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025). For publications pursuing a global perspective on the League of Nations, cf. Madeleine Herren and Maya Okuda (eds.), *Networking the International System: Global Histories of International Organizations* (New York, 2014); Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley (eds.), *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations* (Abingdon, 2018). For a global biographical inroad, see Haakon A. Ikonomou, 'Wilsonian Moments: Thanassis Aghnides between Empire and Nation State', in *Global Biographies: Lived History as Method*, ed. Laura Almagor, Haakon A. Ikonomou and Gunvor Simonsen (Manchester, 2022).

[24]'Autonomy and Expertise in International Administrations, 1940s-1970s', https://saxoinstitute.ku.dk/research/history/autonomy-and-expertise-in-international-administrations-1940s-1970s/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[25]'Digital Approaches to the History of European and International Cooperation: An Online Symposium', https://cemes.ku.dk/activities/2024/digital-approaches-to-the-history-of-european-international-cooperation/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[26]A project on the national level, with traits of a *meta-project*, which connects also multiple international and global corpuses, is the 'Documents Diplomatiques Suisse (DODIS)', https://www.dodis.ch/en (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[27]There are, in particular, regional attempts to counter this, such as the project 'Archives Portal Europe', which allows you to find, browse and discover information on archives about Europe held by thousands of

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A related concern is that of a *double inequity.*[28] There is already the inequity of the unequal definitional power of monied and well-organised institutional archives versus other kinds of sources to the past. With digitisation of archives, this topography becomes even more uneven, and what we need to consider, seriously, is that digitalisation *creates access*, but of a certain kind, which simultaneously leaves behind a vast landscape of analogue sources. And I think that in a field such as mine, where we not only deal with the *construction or implementation* of, say, global health governance or global economic governance, but also the *reception, repercussions and resistance to* those same historical processes, this double inequity could risk making our field *less truly global*, rather than the opposite. Here, an active alliance between historians, archives, funding-bodies and historical actors to responsibly *create, store and make available* digital sources missed by the institutional mastodons – whether it be from the perceived peripheries, the minorities, the marginalised or the forgotten – is a major and crucial task.

Robert Lee: I study the colonisation of North America; specifically, how Indigenous territories became the United States. This is part of the much bigger story of European imperialism that transformed the globe in the last 500 years, but it is only in recent decades that historians have started treating it that way in a sustained fashion. As recently as 2007, Americanists were debating if 'a massive extension of the colonial perspective into the national era' was overdue.[29] By 2024, the answer was clear, with a forum in the same journal declaring that the United States is 'a settler colonial project masquerading as a postcolonial polity'.[30] Today no one seriously doubts that the United States has practised a brand of settler colonialism since its inception. The key questions have become what, if anything, made that brand distinctive, how it operated and what its legacies are today.

Digital methods can play a critical role in answering those questions, and not just for the area that became the United States. This is especially true for understanding how colonial extraction worked in settler societies, where land and resource redistribution was so fundamental, but is often hazily understood. Settler state archives contain voluminous evidence about these kinds of activities but tend to separate documentation of land-taking and subsequent redistribution and use. Geographic information systems offer one avenue to reconstruct those links and to open up state archives to reveal 'hard histories' of exploitation that knit together past and present.[31]

My work has been exploring this possibility over the past few years by developing collaborative, GIS-driven multimedia projects that reveal ties between Native dispossession and the funding of US higher education. 'Misplaced Trust' (2024) is the latest

cultural heritage institutions from more than thirty countries, https://www.archivesportaleurope.net/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[28]For a thoughtful summary of some of these concerns in the scholarship, see Simone Lässig, 'Digital History', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 47 (2021), 5–35.

[29]Jack P. Greene, 'Colonial History and National History: Reflections on a Continuing Problem', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 64 (2007), 249.

[30]Vanessa M. Holden and Michael John Witgen, 'The End of Early America?', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 81 (2024), 39.

[31]See, for instance, 'Hard Histories at Hopkins', https://hardhistory.jhu.edu/ (accessed 20 Mar. 2024).

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contribution, and builds on 'Land-Grab Universities' [LGU] (2020),[32] which mapped how the Morrill Act of 1862 turned expropriated lands into endowments for land-grant universities across the United States.[33] This latest instalment reconstructed how a subset of US land-grant universities continue to earn billions of dollars from federal grants of Indigenous territory, and sketches connections between colonialism and climate change in the American West. It illustrates not only the potential for using digital methods to investigate colonial resource redistribution, but also the conditions that make this kind of research possible and exportable.

Here is a brief recap of the story 'Misplaced Trust' tells. In the nineteenth century, the United States violently took land from hundreds of Native nations. The federal government then funnelled a portion of the spoils to newly formed US states to help fund fledgling public institutions, like state universities, through laws known as state enabling acts. Eventually, some of those states found that they could make more money for their beneficiary institutions by leasing the land than by selling it, and that they could really cash in by permitting oil drilling, fracking, mining, logging, and more. Today, profits from natural resource extraction on state trust lands generate billions of dollars for land-grant universities. Few of the benefits skimmed from the exploitation of these stolen lands make their way to dispossessed Indigenous nations, while imposing the costs of climate change on everyone.

The insight behind the research was a realisation that the digitisation of land records – by various state land offices and departments of natural resources – had created opportunities to link sites of dispossession in the nineteenth century to fossil fuel extraction happening today on trust lands assigned to land-grant universities. Those records could be mapped *en masse*, locating millions of acres used for these purposes, scattered over half a continent, and spatially cross-referenced to datasets of Native land cessions to reveal a world of connections otherwise left invisible. Tracked and measured, these routes of wealth transfer could turn an abstract sense that the United States has benefited from Native dispossession into a concrete story following a specific thread in that process.

This kind of digital analysis by geographic layering is not novel. It has been the promise of GIS since the 1960s. But the approach has been remarkably underutilised by historians as a research strategy. In this case, the result provided a window onto the making of what Lorenzo Veracini has called the 'settler colonial present' in the United States.[34]

This approach is exportable to other settler societies, but only under the right conditions. Finding comparable records pertaining to land redistribution is probably the least difficult part. What made a project like 'Misplaced Trust' possible was the

[32]Robert Lee, 'Morrill Act of 1862 Indigenous Land Parcels Database', *High Country News*, Mar. 2020, https://www.landgrabu.org (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[33]Tristan Ahtone, Robert Lee, Amanda Tachine, An Garagiola, Audrianna Goodwin, Maria Parazo Rose and Clayton Aldern, 'Misplaced Trust', *Grist*, 7 Feb., 2024, https://grist.org/project/indigenous/land-grant-universities-indigenous-lands-fossil-fuels/ (accessed 20 Mar. 2024); Robert Lee, Tristan Ahtone, Margaret Pearce, Kalen Goodluck, Geoff McGhee, Cody Leff, Katherine Lanpher and Taryn Salinas, 'Land-Grab Universities', *High Country News*, Mar. 2020, https://www.landgrabu.org/ (accessed 20 Mar. 2024).

[34]Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (New York, 2015).

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existence of publicly available digitised records, which are by no means a given. The team working on the project did not create this data. It collated them from multiple sources and integrated them with other public datasets.

That raises yet another issue about the potential for replicating this approach. Even with the benefit of being able to locate datasets, the project took approximately eighteen months. And the only reason it was accomplished that quickly is because there was a large team working on it, with the full support of the Indigenous Affairs Desk at Grist, the publisher, as well as external funding from the Pulitzer Center, the Data-Driven Reporting Project, and the Bay & Paul Foundation. This team involved me as a digital historian, but also journalists, data visualisation experts, a cartographer, and several other contributing authors, all of whom brought different skills and knowledge to the project. Put another way, this is not the kind of work that can efficiently be accomplished on one's own, which puts it at odds with the dominant model for historical scholarship, where a lone author toils in solitude.

Nor, for that matter, is 'Misplaced Trust' typical as a scholarly output. Like 'Land-Grab Universities', it was a hybrid – a combination of original academic research, investigative reporting and data visualisation – released in a long-form journalism format that is free to republish. This is a relatively new model for writing original history, and it is yet to be seen how it will register for academic promotion (a problem familiar to digital historians), but it is gaining traction. For instance, *The Conversation*, an outlet known for enabling scholars to package their work for popular consumption, recently started formally pairing academics with investigative journalists based 'on the premise that deep academic expertise and investigative journalists' narrative and reporting chops are an underutilised recipe for potent, impactful stories'.[35]

Whether that will prove the case for 'Misplaced Trust' remains to be seen, but if its predecessor can be taken as an indicator, it at least has a decent chance to add to both scholarly and popular discourse. What is clear, I hope, is that collaborative academic journalism and digital humanities are a natural match that can leverage GIS tools to add new depth to our understanding of the history of resource redistribution under settler colonial regimes.

Jessica M. Parr: I am a historian of the Early Modern Atlantic World, as well as a digital humanist and archivist. I have been working on Global Digital Histories since joining the project team for 'The Programming Historian', a prize-winning and multilingual digital humanities journal, in 2017. Much of my work has involved building community and interdisciplinary partnerships across Europe, South America and, more recently, in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most recently, I have been a co-Principal Investigator on The African Building Heritage Project, a geospatial database of 3D buildings, with partners in African scholarly communities where digital humanities is sometimes (though not always) an emerging field. And part of that work entails

[35] Sophie Culpepper, 'Journalism with a PhD: The Conversation is Pairing up Academics with Reporters for Big Investigations', NiemanLab, 15 Aug. 2023, https://www.niemanlab.org/2023/08/journalism-with-a-phd-the-conversation-is-pairing-up-academics-with-reporters-for-big-investigations/ (accessed 22 Mar. 2024).

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trust-building in communities with little reason to trust Western academics and institutions, due to a history of theft of their cultural heritage.[36]

The African Building Heritage is new interdisciplinary and transatlantic project with a goal of documenting historically significant buildings in sub-Saharan Africa. It was launched in 2023 with a $50,000 (USD) seed grant from Northeastern University, Boston. The project uses a Leica BLK360 scanner to produce 3D LiDAR models of the selected buildings, which are georeferenced and connected to an ESRI ArcGIS hub. We are in the process of adding an automated laser-driven drone that can be programmed for more precise scanning of taller structures, though that will require that members of the Boston-based team receive the FAA drone pilot licence in accordance with Northeastern University policy, as well as ensuring compliance with any local drone licensing requirements and regulations in Benin or other countries where we work. In addition to the models, the digital archive also includes oral histories of local cultural heritage experts and extensive photographic documentation of the buildings and their environs. Buildings are selected jointly by the Northeastern team and a local partner.

The prototype began with fieldwork in Porto Novo, Benin, with scans of five sites: Homme Museum (the former Royal Palace of Porto Novo), The Great Mosque, a series of smaller family Voodoo temples recently restored by the Ouodad Foundation, the Zangbeto Temple and the campus of L'Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA), which is the local partner. Scans of the buildings, the interviews, and the initial georeferencing of the buildings and their neighbourhoods took place over four days.[37] The EPA team was led by its Director, Franck Kolman Ogou, who also facilitated the necessary introductions and permits for the scanning.

Upon returning to the United States, the NU team began to build the database in ESRI's ArcGIS web, with assistance from Sophie Leggett (BA, Environmental Sciences), a co-op education student who did not travel to Benin but worked with Sanaie-Movahed during in the spring 2024 term. The 3D models of the buildings will include some animated flythroughs using Sketchfab, and eventually Virtual Reality (VR) simulations that are being developed by Northeastern Teaching Assistant Professor Mark Sivak and an undergraduate student (to be hired in the coming month). In addition to the VR simulations, the LiDAR scans can be used to reverse engineer blueprints of the buildings (where blueprints no longer exist), which, when paired with preservation studies by local cultural heritage authorities, provides important documentation for developing strategies to repair and preserve the physical buildings.

The digital objects (models, animations, and so forth) are hosted separately in scalable S3 Amazon Web Services (AWS) data buckets with a CloudFront security wrapper. The media that is shared via the archive is shared by some automatically generated project-specific URLs that link to individual assets that connect through CloudFront into the AWS S3 bucket. The data bucket can grow automatically according to need,

[36]Barnaby Phillips, *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes* (2022); Alice Proctor, *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums and Why We Need to Talk About It* (2021).

[37]The Northeastern University team consists of co-PIs Jessica Parr (History), H. Killion Mokwete (Architecture) and Patricia Davis (Communications), and Bahare Sanaie Movahed (GIS and Remote Sensing Specialist), Mark Sivak (Art and Design), and students Halima Haruna (PhD, History), Gavin Gershman (BA, Architecture) and Sophie Leggett (Environmental Sciences).

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and because ASW is a global network of servers, connected local buckets can 'speak' to each other across the network.

Robert Chavez, the Digital Infrastructure Developer who is part of the Northeastern Digital Scholarship Group, has currently deployed buckets on the eastern coast of the United States, and one in Cape Town, South Africa, as the AWS server closest to Benin. The pair of buckets means that when the Team is working in Benin, the data compiled from fieldwork does not have to negotiate delays of transmitting large digital assets across the Atlantic. While processed to more manageable sizes from connection to the ArcGIS hub, some of the raw LiDAR files from scanning buildings can approach 70 gigabytes.

As the project grows, Benin-based researchers will be able to upload and automatically transmit research data to the Boston-based part of the team for processing and inclusion in the database. When the project expands to other countries, it will be possible to add new buckets in other parts of Africa as necessary to support ease of data upload, preservation and sharing in new locations. While it is possible to manage the digital assets with a virtual server, the AWS S3/CloudFront pairing has been determined to be the more economical and secure solution.

Development of the hub meant attention to accessibility features, such as colour palette and typography, and the need for support of rich media in a multilingual environment.[38] I worked with a Digital Archives Seminar class to design a user-testing questionnaire to be distributed initially to a set of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic with the first public release of the interface. There are plans to develop additional user-testing instruments for community partners and other audiences as the project progresses, and the user-testing surveys will need to be created in close partnership with collaborators to ensure due attention to local culture sensibilities and expectations. Because a considerable portion of the Global South accesses the internet via tablets and phones, future releases will require us to consider the accessibility of the project through those devices.

Killion, Bahare and I returned to Porto Novo in June 2024 to expand local relationships, improve georeferencing for the neighbourhoods the project documents to produce more accurate basemaps in lieu of uniform street-level mapping, and for archival research. We planned to create LiDAR scans of material culture associated with the buildings, but the owner of the private collection changed this mind and retracted permission, probably because of previous poor behaviour from another group. We recorded a djembe-making demonstration and drum circle with a family of Beninois drum-makers as part of a holistic approach to documenting the buildings and their use, rather than as mere structures.

Once the output from that trip is processed and added to the prototype, the collaborators will seek funding for additional fieldwork in Cameron, Togo, Nigeria, Angola and Uganda. We have hired a short-term and part-time postdoc to assist in writing grants over the summer of 2024 and into early fall. We have already co-authored a grant with Franck Ogou for African-based institutions, to be applied to further

[38]On multilingual digital humanities practices, see Lorella Viola and Paul Spence (eds), *Multilingual Digital Humanities* (New York, 2023); Adam Crymble and Maria José Afanador Llach, 'The Globally Unequal Promise of Digital Tools for History: UK and Colombia Case Study', in *Teaching History for the Contemporary World*, ed. Adele Nye (New York, 2021), 85–98.

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development of our work in Benin. Dr Ogou has submitted the grant as Principal Investigator.

Although Northeastern provides the infrastructure and some of the labour for building the prototype, the expectation is that the African-based collaborators and community partners will be the owners of the data. The long-term project goals are to create sustainable US–African partnerships where suitable equipment and training are local to the communities being documented. The Northeastern team will primarily serve as technical partners and collaborators. The project also hopes to produce sufficient data to document the historical significance of the buildings at a level that will support the African cultural heritage collaborators in their endeavours to seek preservation funding from sources such as UNESCO to repair physical structures of the buildings that are at risk of collapse due to environmental factors, financial constraints and a need for new research into historic preservation methodologies. In the meantime, the digital simulations will serve as education and access tools for promoting African building heritage.

One of the critical parts of a collaborative partnership with the Global South is to ensure that the Western collaborators do not become digital colonisers. By this, I mean that the partners are the primary determinants of what buildings are scanned, as well as the primary owners of the data, rather than the decisions being made by us. Decisions on who can use this data (especially beyond its inclusion in the archive and the field logs and Instagram) and in what ways (i.e. research, commercial, etc.) will necessarily be made by our African collaborators and colleagues, rather than us, and will probably vary from one collaborator to the next.[39] It will also entail engaging with discussions around reparative data, and endeavouring to avoid harmful, outdated descriptions common in Western museum and library cataloguing practices.[40] Since the Project is a multilingual environment, it will necessarily have to engage with this discussion in languages beyond English, and with attention to local colloquialisms.

And finally, the project does adhere to local permit requirements, and there are additional privacy considerations. Because the scanning, drones and other equipment have significant surveillance implications, the work on this project requires ongoing considerations for data privacy, and what those look like in African contexts.[41] It will be particularly important to be mindful to avoid, or at least to minimise, imaging local bystanders without their consent, and to investigate means to try to remove or at least obscure people who are inadvertently photographed or imaged.

[39]See, for example, the forum 'Who Owns Black Data?', convened by Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD) in April 2024: https://wobd.blackbeyonddata.org/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[40]Lina Dencik, Arne Hintz, Joanna Redden and Emilio Trere, 'Exploring Data Justice: Conceptions, Applications and Directions', *Information, Communication, and Society*, 22 (2019), 873–81.

[41]Graham Greenleaf and Bertil Cottier, 'International and Regional Commitments in African Data Privacy Laws: A Comparative Analysis', *Computer Law and Security Review*, 44 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2021.105638. See also this data story on current data privacy laws in Africa: 'Mapping the Progress (and Delays) for Data Protection in Africa', Data Protection Africa, 14 Nov. 2023, https://dataprotection.africa/data-protection-in-africa-progress/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

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Discussion

Cassandra Mark-Thiesen: Reading your contributions makes me ponder on another set of concerns, namely, not just the possibility but also the need for global historians to engage with digital society. To begin with, global historians centred themselves in current debates about globalisation and its effects on society, albeit often framed in terms of a one-sided convergence theory which has been thoroughly criticised elsewhere. In the current moment of global uncertainty and national fragmentation, exacerbated by a flattened digital knowledge landscape characterised by deep fakes and other subversive elements, could we call it a matter of disciplinary confidence (or urgency) to start from the premise that we still have something important to contribute?

Astrid Swenson: I very much hope so, Cassandra! While there is considerable public and professional debate about the appropriate use of historical analogies at the moment, nuanced historical perspectives on the anxieties created by rapid technological, social and political change beyond national frameworks appear crucial. Also, traditional disciplinary skills like source criticism seem more relevant to society at large than ever, as is the attention to the diversity of human expression that can come with the study of different periods and contexts from around the world. The question then indeed seems how digital technologies can help to decentre how and by whom these diverse expressions get preserved.

Jessica M. Parr: For us, particularly since we have African scholars as part of the team, the need to decentre is an ongoing conversation. One of the driving questions is 'what's in it for them?', meaning both the institutional partners in Africa (including their own experts) and community members and stakeholders we encounter. Decisions about what is scanned, digitised, preserved, etc., are driven entirely by either cultural heritage experts in Africa (none of whom are Westerners, at present), and/or by local community leaders. And a big part of the shared goal is that we help support technology training and development of infrastructure, with the idea that our role will gradually decrease. But Cassandra Mark-Thiesen raises a crucial point about 'confidence', and it is something that we need to remind ourselves about. Right now, we have some things of value to add, but that may well not always be the case; but yes, global historians absolutely do need to engage with the digital society.

Richard Toye: We might say that the issues we have been discussing are not computer problems; they are people problems.

Haakon A. Ikonomou: Allow me to interject briefly on the points made by Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, which I found highly stimulating. I think her points from the perspective of global African history speak to a broader point, which I observe as a challenge, in the already existing chasm between those of us who write global *international* history, if you will, from the perspective of international organisations, and those who are specialists in specific geographical areas and expand in a global direction.

The division between global history and – widely conceived – historical area studies is an old one, which in some respects has been lessened by new web-based working methods, collaborative research in more globalised teams and digital tools.[42] Yet, it seems to me that there is a persistent *digital* disconnect

[42]For a pertinent discussion of some of these challenges, see Drayton and Motadel 'Discussion'. A good example of how to overcome this challenge, would be the research project 'Imperial Expansion and

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between the resources, archives and tools used and created by the two groups of historians.

Astrid Swenson: You are absolutely right, Haakon: it is an old divide, which still thrives despite more globalised teams and digital tools (for the divide is perhaps caused as much by differences in perspective and disciplinary identity than by technical issues). Interestingly it also applies to the writing of the history of digital history itself. Although multiple points of origins are often mentioned, more detailed histories tend to be institutionally or nationally framed.[43] A truly global history of the development of digital history that connects different scales and investigates how digitalisation changed global dynamics of the practice(s) of history remains to be written. Back to your larger point, however: what can be done to overcome the *digital* disconnect, do you think?

Haakon A. Ikonomou: There is no magic solution to this, but I think the notion of 'meta-projects' is applicable here – meta-projects that consciously cut across disciplinary borders is hugely important, although difficult to get funding for.

I think a sustained contact between traditional historical fields to discuss future avenues of digital cooperation is crucial. This requires venues or networks that are geared towards this. In my own field, I could mention the *New Diplomatic History* network as one such venue, where historians broadly interested in diplomacy meet across geographies, temporal divides and methodological and disciplinary boundaries – this creates an openness to think, share and create projects and publish across traditional divides, as for instance with the forum on prosopographies and diplomacy.[44]

Robert Lee: Something leaped out at me as I read these dispatches from global digital history today. Despite coming from different topical areas and employing different methods and sources, they all embrace a collaborative practice that remains outside the norm in non-digital history. Before reading, I would have called it something like the 'lab model' of historical scholarship, in which various collectives within or beyond universities join forces to tackle projects. After reading, perhaps 'partner model' is more appropriate. Cassandra Mark-Thiesen describes starting a project with 'partners' in Liberia. Haakon Ikonomou delves into 'a partnership' with the UN Library & Archives. Some version of the word 'partner' appears nearly a dozen times in Jessica Parr's account of the early work of the innovative African Building Heritage Project. I managed to omit the word despite actually writing entirely about a partnership developed with a news outlet.

Intercultural Diplomacy: Treaty-Making in Southeast Asia, c.1750–1920′, which has a large digital component, based primarily at the Linnaeus University in Sweden: 'Historical Treaties of Southeast Asia: A Research Programme in Global Diplomatic History', https://sea-treaties.org (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

[43]For a relatively early example of a 'national' history see for instance Gerben Zaagsma, 'On Digital History', *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review*, 128 (2013). Broader overviews, such as C. Annemieke Romein et al., 'State of the Field: Digital History', *History* 105 (2020), 291–312, or Hannu Salmi, *What is Digital History?* (Cambridge, 2020) mention diverse origins (largely in the global North) and formulate the desideratum for more in-depth histories of divergences and convergences in the development of digital history.

[44]'New Diplomatic History: Investigating Diplomacy as an Extension of Social Interests, Forces, and Environments', https://newdiplomatichistory.org/prosopographies/ (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

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This does not have to be the model for digital history. For example, in the past eight years, Stanford University Press has published sixteen digital monographs and edited collections,[45] the vast majority single authored. These works bring digital tools to bear on the production and dissemination of work that otherwise echoes traditional scholarly publishing. Some are prize-winning; some have proved successful in the classroom, for me at least; some, like *A World Made by Travel* could easily be classified as global digital history.[46] Yet the partnership model reads here like the new normal among a group of scholars whose closest affiliation is an overt association with the world of global digital history. I'm not saying it shouldn't be, but it prompts me to wonder if it's a under-interrogated catch-all for a suite of emerging practices. To what extent, if any, are partnership models distinctive, in terms of the challenges and opportunities they offer, as a mode of production in global digital history vs digital history more generally? What differentiates partnership models deployed under the umbrella of global digital history? What can those differences tell us about our shifting priorities, objectives and commitments? We get lots of glimpses in these contributions, but is it worthwhile trying to systematically sort through them in the future 'forums to debate best practices' Cassandra Mark-Thiesen calls for at the end of her remarks?

Jessica M. Parr: The terms 'partner', or 'collaborative practices' are actually quite common among digital humanities scholars, and have been for some time both in the literature (including essays in some of the Debates in DH series by the University of Minnesota Press and handbooks on digital public history, digital storytelling, etc. in volumes published by De Gruyter, Routledge, and elsewhere) as well as in panels and roundtables at conferences. So, while the specifics of individual projects can certainly still have many of the problems that CMT identifies (particularly regarding the presumption of being *the* experts in the room), it is not an under-integrated catch-all in any respect. DH labs certainly *do* exist within institutions, and those can look a bit different depending on local culture. I am a member of my home institution's DH lab, though it is more of an interdisciplinary affiliation of faculty who participate in working groups, occasionally share tools and expertise and collaborate, rather than a physical lab space. I doubt many of us who work on these highly collaborative and community-engaged projects would conceive of ourselves as a lab model.

Conclusion

Astrid Swenson and Richard Toye: In conclusion, the above conversation has cast helpful light on what global historians can offer the digital and what they can gain from it. There is a tension between the homogenisation of methods and the need to sustain diversity of approaches in response to specific local (or 'glocal') conditions. But by showing awareness of contextual, cultural and time-bound meanings, global historians can highlight the importance of incorporating diverse linguistic usages and perspectives, including those from areas far removed from contemporary centres of (digital) knowledge production.

[45]Stanford University Press, 'Publishing Digital Scholarship', 2024, https://www.sup.org/digital.

[46]Giovanna Ceserani, *A World Made by Travel: The Digital Grand Tour* (Stanford, 2024), DOI 10.21627/2024wmt, https://aworldmadebytravel.org (accessed 27 Feb. 2025).

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The field of Digital Humanities (DH) has often been criticised from the Left – the discipline is alleged to be complicit with capitalism and the rise of the 'Neoliberal University'. DH strategy documents often play into neoliberal themes of utilitarian wealth-maximisation, incessant technological modernisation, and the application of market theory to higher education.[47] Matthew Hannah portrays this type of anti-DH critique as misleading, on the grounds that, although DH is in fact complicit with neoliberalism, so are the 'traditional' humanities, which have 'historically collaborated with the state to shore up capitalist ideologies rather than oppose them'.[48] It is not necessary to accept Hannah's explicitly Marxist reasoning to accept that a hard distinction between digital and traditional/conventional history/humanities is unsustainable – even if some scholars regard themselves as 'digital' ones and others do not. Over the last several decades, computers have revolutionised the working practices of virtually all historians. Short of some kind of extreme analogue-survivalist experiment, it is impossible to write history today without some form of engagement with digital tools. Whilst the practices of those who conceive of themselves as digital scholars have received a great deal of attention, those of 'non-digital' scholars who are now dependent on computers have largely evaded scrutiny. The rise of AI and Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT makes this question more urgent.

Indeed, in respect of this Roundtable, it is notable that we tried and failed to recruit discussants who (like ourselves) did not consider themselves to be experts on the technical side of digital history. This may be explained by their modesty and unwillingness to stray out of their perceived professional lanes, but the refrain we repeatedly heard was 'But I'm not a digital expert.' In fact, virtually all historians have built up some form of (largely unacknowledged) digital expertise, and, in addition to the experience of dedicated specialists, it was exactly the perspective of so-called non-experts that we wanted to capture. There remains a challenge in persuading many 'traditional' historians to take the realities of their actual day-to-day practice seriously.

What is to be done? One possibility is for more historians to follow the route taken by Martin Dusinberre in his seminal book *Mooring the Global Archive*. He integrates autobiography into the story of his researches into the history of a Japanese steamer, showing how contingency, such as the availability of new sources, tip-offs from colleagues and lucky Google searches, impacted his findings.[49] Yet it is not realistic to expect that all historians will 'show their workings' in this fashion – and after all, it is not easy to relate the process of searching digital sources in a compelling way, even though the task might be methodologically important. But whatever the precise technique, there is wisdom in Ryan Nolan's recent call to use 'advanced technologies […] not as accelerants to quicker publication or faster analysis as ends in themselves, pushing us towards the edge of overwhelming information flows, but as tools to foster the deliberation, reflection, and depth

[47]Morag Munro, 'The Complicity of Digital Technologies in the Marketisation of UK Higher Education: Exploring the Implications of a Critical Discourse Analysis of Thirteen National Digital Teaching and Learning Strategies', *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 15 (2018), 1–20.

[48]Matthew N. Hannah, 'Toward a Political Economy of Digital Humanities', in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2023*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis, 2023), 4.

[49]Martin Dusinberre, *Mooring the Global Archive: A Japanese Ship and its Migrant Histories* (Cambridge, 2023).

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inherent in slow scholarship and the richness of what rigorous qualitative research has to offer'.[50]

Our own final reflection is that the challenges faced in the digital age are in many ways extensions of those found in analogue history, particularly concerning the creation and curation of primary sources and the ethical issues related to access and ownership. The contributors to this Common Room have emphasised the need for critical examination of these processes, warning that digital tools could reproduce or even worsen existing inequalities. However, they also acknowledge the potential of digital tools to offer new ways to address these challenges, provided there is the scientific and political will to do so.

[50]Ryan Nolan, '"Can't Help Myself": On Generative AI, the Performance of Qualitative Research and Slow Scholarship', *Qualitative Research* (2025), OnlineFirst, 6 Jan. 2025, https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241308696.

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