and foremost, but shouldn't our experimental method replace the passive approach of looking at that culture with an active method of "doing something" about it (242)? If, as Dimock makes clear, the production of knowledge needs enabling and infrastructure, as well as enabling infrastructures, shouldn't active (and perhaps activist) scholars look for opportunities to "dream" up human culture and "design experiments to test [its] behavior under altered circumstances" (243)? Such a far-reaching and interdisciplinary project for the humanities, it seems to me, would be truly experimental.

Andrew R. Belton
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Reply:

I couldn't agree more. *Experimental* is not a synonym for *digital*; the two should never simply be equated. While digital mediation is important for broad-based access, it would be a mistake to think that this is the sole arena for experimentation or that a digital platform alone could solve all our problems. As I hope my column in this issue ("Education Populism") has made clear, digital platforms need to be continually updated and field-tested to be sustainable; they need input from the ground up. Only when they support and are supported by other infrastructures can they hope to be more than passing fads, momentary winners or losers in an ephemeral world.

In future issues of *PMLA*, I hope to come up with more examples of such grounded endeavors, flourishing on the level of the department and the university, as well as on other, ad hoc platforms. For now I'd like to mention briefly a new initiative at Bard College, the only experimental humanities program in the country as far as I know. Launched in 2012 as a concentration rather than a major, this program draws its faculty members as well as its students entirely from other departments. Its two core courses—History of Experiment and Introduction to Media—reflect this multidepartmental symbiosis. Finding common ground not in any disciplinary table of contents but in a shared commitment to intellectual breadth and depth, it cultivates a broad understanding of diverse media forms across time, coupled with the fine-grained knowledge that comes from practice. Medieval manuscripts have a place here; so too does radio in Africa. Faculty members in the program are drawn from a range of fields that include literature, computer science, anthropology, history, Africana studies, and languages such as Arabic, Japanese, and Spanish, as well as from various arts programs.

Since there is no experimentation without practice, many of these courses are linked, almost by necessity, to public media outlets: student audio files from the course on Radio Africa, for instance, can be accessed either online, through Human Rights Radio, or through WHDD-FM, Robin Hood Radio, the smallest NPR-affiliated station in America. Team-taught courses, featuring faculty members from at least two departments, meanwhile create a plurality of publics as well as a plurality of mediums within a single course; these include Games at Work (taught by professors from computer science and from film and electronic arts), Geographies of Sound (taught by professors from art history and music), and Technologies of Reading (taught by professors from computer science and from literature).

This collaborative spirit extends to undergraduates, who often join faculty members in fieldwork. The community-oriented Hudson Valley Apples project, growing out of intensive two-week sessions and supported by the Digital History Lab, gathers oral histories, digitizes local collections, and builds public Web sites. Other teams, more museum-oriented, work with the Immersive Media Arts Lab, giving rise to projects such as *Trading Futures*, a three-dimensional, 360-degree video viewed in a hemispheric dome made of corrugated cardboard triangles and binder clips. This piece was recently showcased by the Whitney Museum of American

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Art in an exhibition that ran from 20 October 2016 to 5 February 2017, entitled *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016*.

Given such an array of disciplines, mediums, and venues, it is not surprising that the program aligns itself not with a single body of knowledge but with a shared ethos of team-based improvisation, emphasizing "the relationship between digital methodologies and humanities scholarship"; "collaboration between traditionally disparate disciplines such as Computer Science, Literature, and the Arts"; and "the role of experimentation, often associated with the sciences and the arts, in humanities research." Students enrolled in this concentration have the "option of adding a practice-rich component to their Senior Project" ("About"; *Experimental Humanities*, eh.bard.edu/about/). That "practice-rich" component seems to have galvanized many students, turning them into experts in their self-chosen and self-directed areas of research. Senior projects growing out of such self-directedness include "Police Brutality on Camera," "Computing Language and Thinking," "Twitterature," "Branching Boogaloo: Botanical Adventures in Multi-mediated Morphologies," and "Game and Train: A Targeted Game-Based Mobile Intervention for the Treatment of Incarcerated Psychopathic Offenders."

The jury is still out on this young program at Bard, as it is on *Public Books* and the Kelly Writers House. Together, though, these three bear witness to the vitality and variety of the "experimental," making a team-inspired, practice-rich humanities the animating core of a twenty-first-century education.

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Yale University

Measuring Success in the Humanities

To the Editor:

Gonzalo Aguilar and I were happy to see Wai Chee Dimock's editor's column "Experimental Humanities" (vol. 132, no. 2, Mar. 2017, pp. 241–49). Like her, many of us are reaching for a "refresh" button for our profession, which has, in some dimensions, gone stale. The understandable zeal with which humanists defend against practical and measurable criteria has, over the past few generations, isolated us so effectively that we may have blunted the capacity of art interpretation to interrupt conventional thinking. A noble resistance to measurement according to worldly values can—like the inflexible nobility of tragic heroes—lead to collective calamity. Art lives in the world in order to disturb existing arrangements. And humanists who track the disturbance also have the capacity to project more of it, to imagine and to incite more art. Perhaps this is a moral imperative, since current arrangements can be cruel but seem natural.

The imperative drives Cultural Agents, an initiative that began at Harvard University fifteen years ago, when I started to feel desperate inside an academic culture that bred pessimism as sophistication. Where Adorno's ideological intransigence (against systems that would make us accomplices) and Foucault's discouraging spiral of repression and resistance pervaded the discourse, it was no wonder that disheartened students left the humanities to explore more useful fields. My response, along with that of many other beginners in the public humanities, was to revive a civic humanist tradition. By adding an "experimental" dimension to the humanities, Dimock's column suggests work yet to be done. It is the work of assessing impact.

However broad the definition of the "experimental method" in her reference to Rudolf Carnap (241), measurement and predictability are built into science. How else do we determine the success or failure of interventions? Surely rates of funding, which Dimock cites as evidence of success, matter. But these are perhaps responses to other numbers. It has been difficult for us, as humanists, to overcome a professional allergy to quantifiable evidence of effective interventions, but we can be cured. Therapy

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