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<b>Author(s)</b>	O'Sullivan, James
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## RESEARCH

# Introduction: Digital Humanities as Dissonant

James O'Sullivan

University College Cork, IE

[james.osullivan@ucc.ie](mailto:james.osullivan@ucc.ie)

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The Digital Humanities Summer Institute gives students and scholars a chance to broaden their knowledge of the Digital Humanities within a feasible timeframe. The DHSI Colloquium was first founded by Diane Jakacki and Cara Leitch to act as a means of supporting graduates who wanted to be a part of such a gathering. The Colloquium has grown in recent years, to the point where it is now seen as an important part of the field's conference calendar for emerging and established scholars alike, but it remains a non-threatening space in which students, scholars, and practitioners can share their ideas. This issue is testament to that diversity, as well as the strength of the research being presented at the Colloquium. It includes Scott B. Weingart and Nickoal Eichmann-Kalwara, Mary Borgo, William B. Kurtz, and John Barber. "What's Under the Big Tent?: A Study of ADHO Conference Abstracts," which portrays the discipline as one which is dominated by specific groups and practices. Using the Victorian Women Writers Project as a case-study, Mary Borgo treats models for the sustainable growth of TEI-based digital resources. William B. Kurtz details his experiences working on a digital initiative, in this instance, Founders Online: Early Access, and engages with the need for such projects to hold broader public appeal. John Barber's "Radio Nospace: Sound, Radio, Digital Humanities," describes the curation of sound within the context of radio, and how such activity connects to creative digital scholarship. Together, these articles represent the purpose of facilitating a community comprised of divergent interests and perspectives, a community which can often be positively dissonant.

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**Keywords:** DHSI; Digital Humanities Summer Institute; colloquium; colloque

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Le Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) offre une chance aux étudiants et érudits d'étoffer leurs connaissances en humanités numériques pendant un délai réalisable. Diane Jakacki et Cara Leitch ont établi le premier colloque du DHSI pour soutenir des diplômés qui voulaient participer à un tel rassemblement. Ces dernières années, le colloque s'est développé jusqu'au point d'être considéré maintenant comme une conférence importante sur

le calendrier non seulement pour les érudits émergents mais aussi pour les érudits établis dans le domaine. Le colloque continue cependant à être un espace non menaçant où les étudiants, les érudits et les professionnels peuvent échanger leurs idées. Ce numéro est un témoignage de cette diversité et de la qualité de la recherche présentée au colloque. Le numéro inclut l'article « What's Under the Big Tent?: A Study of ADHO Conference Abstracts » par Scott B. Weingart et Nickoal Eichmann-Kalwara, ce qui présente les humanités numériques comme une discipline dominée par des groupes et pratiques spécifiques. En se servant du Victorian Women Writers Project comme étude de cas, Mary Borgo traite des maquettes pour la croissance durable des ressources numériques basées sur la TEI. William B. Kurtz détaille les expériences qu'il a acquises en travaillant sur l'initiative numérique Founders Online: Early Access ainsi que l'importance que de tels projets constituent un facteur attractif pour un plus large public. Dans le texte de John Barber, « Radio Nospace: Sound, Radio, Digital Humanities », il s'agit du traitement de sons radiophoniques et du lien entre cette activité et l'érudition numérique créative. Tous ces articles correspondent au but de faciliter une communauté composée des intérêts et perspectives divergents qui peut souvent être véritablement dissonante.

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**Mots-clés:** Digital Humanities; DHSI Special Issue; Digital Humanities Summer

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Three years ago, Diane Jakacki passed control of the University of Victoria's DHSI Colloquium<sup>1</sup> to Mary Galvin and me. Our task was to continue to develop what Diane, alongside Cara Leitch, had started in 2009. Initially, the Colloquium was intended as a means of giving graduates an opportunity to present their research to the burgeoning community of Digital Humanities scholars. It was an opportunity for students to discuss their research with a large, international, and interdisciplinary audience, and furthermore, it enabled them to take advantage of institutional mechanisms designed to support participation at conferences. At the present phase in the development of the Digital Humanities, there is a marked emphasis on the acquisition of technical skills—emerging and established scholars alike are under intense pressure to develop their expertise in this domain. Here is not the most appropriate venue to discuss the positive and negative consequences of this reality, but it is the reality, one which is largely compelled by the demands of employers,

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the Colloquium, see the event's dedicated website, <http://dhsicolloquium.org>.

fundings, and the broader socio-cultural climates in which our institutes of education reside. Community-driven learning opportunities like the Digital Humanities Summer Institute are vital in such a context, helping us to learn, and further build our community, in a fashion that is suited to the hyper-demands of present-day academia. Truly wonderful is the scholar who can specialise in Medieval Studies while becoming equally adept in French, Python, statistics, and 3D modelling—perhaps I speak for myself, but this isn't most of us. Mastery, of the true kind, comes from a lifetime of repetition, of focusing on that one little thing and questioning it and yourself for decades on end. Hiring committees, promotion boards—they often expect the former, the academic Swiss Army knife<sup>2</sup> capable of achieving excellence in disciplinary discord. Through its broad range of foundational and intensive programs, DHSI gives students and scholars a chance to broaden their knowledge within a feasible timeframe. DHSI does not make masters, but it does allow the curious to recognise the ways in which they might re-imagine their intellectual practice. Mastery can always be pursued in the aftermath of Victoria, but we should also be content to progress with a valuable measure of fluency—one doesn't need to be an adept programmer to interact with computer scientists, a certain level of proficiency is sufficient to enable the conversations that make meaning happen. This fluency, and the vibrant community that emerges out of its exchange, is what DHSI offers—the Colloquium was invented as a means of supporting graduates who wanted to be a part of such a gathering.

In 2012, the Colloquium's leadership agreed that there was sufficient demand to broaden the scope of the event beyond graduate submissions. Concurrently, DHSI continued to attract an increasing number of students, resulting in significant growth for the Colloquium and its audience—it is not unusual for participants to find themselves addressing an auditorium housing several hundred of their peers. This growth has continued in recent years, and as the Colloquium remains an addendum to the course-based pedagogical mission of DHSI, a measure of invention has been required to satisfy the increased volume of submission. In addition to more

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<sup>2</sup> I am of course referencing last year's opening ceremony, wherein instructors are tasked with describing their courses. In-keeping with tradition, offerings are outlined through something of a pun-off.

traditional presentations—though the current cap stands at 10 minutes—submissions are now welcome across a number of high-impact formats, such as lightning talks. In 2014, Mary Galvin initiated the Colloquium's first poster session, which has become increasingly popular amongst participants. At DHSI 2016, we were proud to host a joint session with the concurrent Electronic Literature Organization Conference and Festival, while at DHSI 2017, posters and demonstrations were incorporated from the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing's annual conference. Developing the Colloquium is about continuing to respond to the needs of the community, finding ways to assist scholars and practitioners at various junctures in their careers to disseminate their research, ideas, and projects. A book of abstracts has been circulated since 2015, while a select number of presentations from DHSI 2014 were transformed into the Colloquium's first special issue, published in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*.<sup>3</sup> At the forthcoming gathering, our hope is to incorporate more audio-visual approaches to the capture of contributions. Such has been the growth of the Colloquium that last year saw a number of registrations from scholars not participating in courses. There was also a need to appoint the first Program Assistant, Lindsey Seatter, who has since succeeded Mary Galvin as co-chair. Mary committed much of her time to the development of this event, and, as with many of our field's instigators, our community is all the better for her efforts.

Despite its growth, the ethos of the Colloquium remains consistent: it is a non-threatening space in which students, scholars, and practitioners can share their ideas. To this end, we operate a peer-review policy wherein all reviewers are instructed to offer collegial feedback—constructive criticism is a requirement, not a recommendation. Unlike some other conferences, we have the luxury of accepting submissions if they meet a minimum threshold in terms of scholarly value. Those submissions that are considered to have fallen short of this standard are finessed through reviewer feedback so that they improve to a

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<sup>3</sup> O'Sullivan, James, Mary Galvin, and Diane Jakacki. 2016. DHSI Colloquium 2014 Special Issue, in *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 10.1. Web.

point where they are ready to be presented. I say this is a luxury because all we have to do as organisers and reviewers is to improve and accept submissions—accommodating the rising number of presentations is a task that falls to Daniel Sondheim, Assistant Director of the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab at the University of Victoria, and Ray Siemens, Director of DHSI. Dan, Ray, and the University of Victoria are yet to deny any of the Colloquium's scheduling requirements, and the product of that facilitation is a diverse and inclusive final program.

This issue is testament to that diversity, as well as the strength of the research being presented at the Colloquium. While there are only four papers, they each represent a significant contribution to the field, spanning a range of subjects that includes radio, metadata standards, Victorian women writers, and macro-level explorations of the wider Digital Humanities. One of the peculiarities of our realm's interdisciplinary nature is that community gatherings draw a seemingly discordant group of individuals—is there value in conferences and publications comprised of historians, linguists, programmers, archivists, artists, and statisticians? Is the DH mix simply too broad to have meaning? I was disappointed to see *Literary and Linguistic Computing* become *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* for this very reason—I liked having a journal that was entirely focused on my particular interests, and wasn't overly enthused at the prospect of a publication that would meld an array of research on all kinds of everything. But, if the Digital Humanities are truly meant to be disruptive, then disciplinarity—which has a great many merits—should not be isolated from this process of disruption. In 2014, we stopped clustering Colloquium sessions into themes—the argument Mary advanced was that themes divided audiences, and as we aren't forced to schedule parallel sessions, we should follow in the footsteps of the discipline's pioneers and use the opportunity to encourage dissonance. Dissonance is at the very heart of the Digital Humanities, and we should embrace it, because dissonance is what gave us computational approaches to literary criticism, it is what compelled us to try and think beyond the codex, and most importantly, it is what shows us the failings in our techniques and approaches to scholarship. The Colloquium, and

this special issue,<sup>4</sup> like other journals and gatherings in this field, seeks to embrace dissonance as a valuable means of producing knowledge through the exchange of ideas and expertise that seemingly lack harmony, while simultaneously maintaining the utmost respect for the principles of differing disciplines. Such collaborative principles are what DHSI is founded on, and its Colloquium is merely an opportunity to encourage curiosity, and breed inter- and transdisciplinary creativity.

In this respect, it is perhaps fitting that this issue includes Scott B. Weingart's and Nickoal Eichmann-Kalwara's "What's Under the Big Tent?: A Study of ADHO Conference Abstracts." While one can believe in dissonance, diversity, and interdisciplinarity, the reality does not always reflect the mantra. Quantifying submissions to our field's flagship Digital Humanities conference, Weingart and Eichmann-Kalwara portray the discipline as one which is dominated by specific groups and practices. These findings, they argue, are at odds with anecdotal experiences, and they suggest a number of ways through which we might respond to such failings. Using the *Victorian Women Writers Project* as a case-study, Mary Borgo treats models for the sustainable growth of TEI-based digital resources. Discussing some of the most salient issues in the development of a digital edition—technical barriers, student involvement, ethics—this essay demonstrates the value of the Colloquium through the dissemination of those lessons that have been learned by its author as a consequence of her involvement in this project. William B. Kurtz also details his experiences working on a digital initiative, in this instance, *Founders Online: Early Access*. Kurtz's examination is more specific to large-scale Digital Humanities work, and engages with the need for such projects to hold broader public appeal. John Barber's "Radio Nospace: Sound, Radio, Digital Humanities," is something of a departure from the other contributions, in that it describes the curation of sound within the context of radio, and how such activity connects to creative digital scholarship, reflecting on digital storytelling, sound-based narrative,

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank a number of editors from *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, particularly Daniel O'Donnell, Paul Esau, Vanja Spiric, and Virgil Grandfield for their tireless efforts in bringing this special issue to fruition.



and practice-based research. In isolation, each of these essays offer insight from which interested readers will benefit—together, they represent the purpose of facilitating a community comprised of divergent interests and perspectives.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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