



Afterword

QUINN DOMBROWSKI 

COLLECTION:
DIGITAL MODERN
LANGUAGES SECTION
LAUNCH ISSUE

**ARTICLES – DIGITAL
MODERN LANGUAGES**



ABSTRACT

Modern languages and digital humanities – broadly defined – share a kind of kinship. Scholars in both fields face questions that traditional literary scholars of English would never have to answer. There always has to be some explanation for why one studies another language, or draws upon tools and methods that are more than incidentally digital. Much as advocates for modern languages and digital humanities speak to their benefits, neither offers its practitioners an easy path. Still, we tell ourselves that the struggle is worth it, because these paths take us to places we could not imagine if we limited ourselves to the analog and the Anglophone.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Dombrowski, Q 2021
Afterword. *Modern Languages
Open*, 2021(1): 27 pp. 1–2.
DOI: [https://doi.org/10.3828/
mlo.v0i0.413](https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.413)

Modern languages and digital humanities—broadly defined—have a kind of kinship. Scholars in both fields face questions that traditional literary scholars of English would never have to answer. There always has to be some explanation for why one studies another language, or draws upon tools and methods that are more than incidentally digital. Much as advocates for Modern Languages and Digital Humanities speak to their benefits, neither offers its practitioners an easy path. Still, we tell ourselves that the struggle is worth it, because these paths take us to places we could not imagine if we limited ourselves to the analogue and the Anglophone.

The work in this inaugural issue of the MLO section on Digital Modern Languages gives us a glimpse of the potential of bringing together modern languages and the digital. While there are other creative approaches to language learning, digital media offer a compelling avenue that resonates with many students. The ubiquitous use of social media today reveals significant new social, cultural, and linguistic phenomena that would otherwise be invisible to anyone but participants in localized subcultures. Digital corpora are an essential prerequisite for many avenues of digitally oriented research, but big content vendors have financial incentives to invest disproportionately in English-language corpora to which they can sell access worldwide at a significant profit. While the landscape of tools, infrastructure, and pedagogical materials is not nearly so profit driven, the Anglophone assumptions woven into the fabric of the Digital Humanities landscape can serve as impediments to digital and computational scholarship in other languages. From courses to multilingual content aggregators, from parallel translations to balanced corpora of national literatures, from specialized DIY infrastructure to building with large EU-funded initiatives, these articles demonstrate the creativity, dedication, and resilience of practitioners at the intersection of Modern Languages and Digital Humanities. There are few easy answers for scholars who want to undertake this kind of work, but each of the projects described here makes the path a little bit more walkable for the next person who follows it. Each one can serve as a model and a source of light.

We are only just beginning to see the impact as efforts to centre non-English languages become more visible in Anglophone Digital Humanities, carving out a space for work that challenges assumptions about how language functions and what tools we need to work with it computationally. It is my hope and expectation that the scholarship in this issue represents not just a passing state-of-the-field in 2021, but the scaffolding for a larger transnational effort, informed by Modern Languages, to ensure that language is no longer taken for granted or treated as shorthand for ‘English’ within the interdisciplinary realm of Digital Humanities.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Dombrowski, Q 2021
Afterword. *Modern Languages Open*, 2021(1): 27 pp. 1–2.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.413>

Published: 17 December 2021

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