

# Digital humanities 2.0

I could not agree more with Geoffrey Crossick that the arts and humanities are “way behind” the sciences in the open access debate (“Digital age of opportunity for the monograph”, News 16 January).

Nevertheless, a lot has changed in the humanities. In fact, e-scholarship emerged from the vision of intellectuals such as Michael Hart, founder of Project Gutenberg (1971), the first producer of free e-books, which paved the way for e-readers and e-books, and Robert Darnton, the historian who since 1999 has been advocating the production of scholarly books on the internet. Darnton envisaged an electronic book project that would subject manuscripts to the same scholarly critique as work submitted to traditional publishers. Crucially, these works could also be designed to take advantage of the flexibility of the electronic medium. Darnton’s proposal has been realised in the form of Gutenberg-e, a collaborative project of Columbia University Press and the American Historical Association.

One could also argue that the emerging field of digital humanities is an expansion of the traditional scope of the humanities. There is no doubt that the future of research in the arts and humanities – as a monograph or as dissertation/thesis – is digital, and that this is beneficial on several accounts: helping to reach and engage a wider public and to exploit the aforementioned flexibility by combining text with images, video, animation, 3D modelling and such. The main US database of dissertations takes and distributes theses in PDF format, and is converting existing paper documents to PDF. Abstracts can be searched, and whole documents can be downloaded from its internet site.

The pressure is on for the UK (and for the rest of Europe) to catch up. This semester at the University of Dundee I am pioneering an e-dissertation for art and media undergraduates. Where better to start than with the humanities scholars of tomorrow?

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