

Editorial

Nature in Virtual Worlds

The intersection of technology, ecology, and human experience – manifesting in virtual spaces, analytical tools, and digital platforms – has catalyzed the emergence of the Digital Environmental Humanities (DEH). This rapidly evolving field responds to the escalating environmental crisis by critically examining the pivotal role digital technologies play in shaping our conceptualizations of Nature and generating new environmental narratives. This special issue of [sic] Journal is dedicated to exploring this dynamic convergence, offering a platform for pioneering research that challenges and reconfigures conventional methodologies and historical narratives.

The methodological framework of this special issue is built upon the synthesis of two dynamic and highly compatible disciplines. The first is Digital Humanities (DH, also called iHumanities, IT humanities, eHumanities), a multidisciplinary field that enhances traditional humanities research through the application of digital analyses, big-data projects, visualizations, social networking, communication technologies, and digital storage practices (Kuzman Šlogar and Žugić Borić). The second is Environmental Humanities (EH, also coined as ecohumanities, landscape humanities, nature-humanities, ecological humanities), an interdisciplinary academic field that connects fundamental questions of Nature, environment, landscape, and Earth with diverse humanities methodologies.

This thematic part of the issue presents six papers and one book review, showcasing the methodological and transdisciplinary approaches to the DEH field. The contributions are structured to explore how digital artifacts, virtual environments, and communication networks mediate our relationship with the non-human world. The issue opens with Olfa Gandouz's paper, an ecofeminist perspective on Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), analyzing the correlation between women and nature and arguing for the preservation of both against patriarchal and industrial degradation. Following this, Marijeta Bradić's work shifts focus to climate fiction, specifically exploring ecocritical discourses about space. The paper examines the tension between

the early emphasis of ecocriticism on the local ecosystem and the necessity to embrace the global scale of the climate crisis, an imperative driven by new digital technologies.

The next two papers engage with digital games. Lidija Stojanović and Kristina Dimovska provide a DEH analysis of the Finnish horror videogame *Pools*. Their research employs the concept of the 'negative presence' of nature – the visible absence of nature and humanity – to explain how the game leverages this void to generate an unshakeable sense of fear within its labyrinthine digital environment. The subsequent article by Marilyn Mannino engages with the *Dark Souls* video game series, focusing on issues of ruins, medievalism, and depression as they relate to human avatars who forget their purpose within a decaying digital world.

The subsequent piece by Burcu Nimet Dumlu critically examines how digital ecologies in games and VR are often constrained by Joseph Campbell's heroic arc. Moving to social networks, an article by Mohammad Fikri Haikal, Diva Katherina Eka Putri, Zhafira Dwi Hapsari Sugiarto, Muhammad Raymizzaad Noor, Aditya Fahmi Nurwahid, and Tatak Setiadi presents a critical-social constructivist analysis of the Indonesian activist collective, Pandawara Group, through their Instagram Reels. The issue concludes with a book review of Lisa Messeri's *In the Land of the Unreal* by Nika Burcar.

The papers within this issue illuminate the two principal challenges facing DEH: methodological innovation and transdisciplinary integration. The former is linked to new theoretical and methodological issues such as: developing mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative big-data analysis of digital traces (e.g., social media reactions) with qualitative deep-reading of narrative content in games and films; or, pioneering new forms of ecomedia analysis that specifically track the materiality of digital infrastructure (e.g., energy consumption of virtual environments) alongside their representational content. The latter is crucial for new knowledge formation and the critical study of heritage, as digital artifacts and environments become fundamentally charged with social meaning. This shift compels a critical re-evaluation of established dimensions of heritage – including identity, the historical record, cultural diversity, and aesthetic value – in the light of the digital turn.

This special issue represents a small, yet significant, step toward consolidating and developing the

Digital Environmental Humanities within Croatia, Southeast Europe, and the broader European academic landscape.

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Works Cited

Kuzman Šlogar, Koraljka, and Anamarija Žugić Borić, eds. Digital Humanities & Heritage. Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku/Sveučilište u Zadru/DARIAH-EU, 2024.



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