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# Digital Geography and Society

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## Editorial



We would like to extend a welcome to this new open access journal, *Digital Geography and Society*. We welcome to the journal any and all in the humanities and social sciences interested in 'digital' phenomena (taken in their broadest sense) to interrogate the spatial and social concerns created and raised through them. It is tempting in the inaugural editorial of a new journal to declare a manifesto; however, this would be antithetical to the mission we propose for the journal. Instead, the editorial collective offers an invitation – to join a conversation about the extraordinary changes that have been and continue to be wrought across our societies and spaces by, with and through the digital (pace [Ash et al., 2018](#)). It is also tempting, in such an editorial, to attempt to define a 'field' – to attempt to circumscribe whatever 'Digital Geography' (capitalised, of course) might, or should, mean. Again, this would be antithetical to our mission. As the authors of the proposal to create the RGS-IBG 'Digital Geographies Working Group' (now Digital Geographies Research Group) asserted in 2017 (n.p.):

'the digital means that new areas of empirical research, new conceptual tools, new methods and new ways of being scholar are all being developed. The digital can expand geographical thinking and that geographical thinking can, in turn, enrich the emerging and ongoing theorisation of 'the digital'.

Understanding what we might variously mean by 'digital' geography/ies can and should be an opening out, not a closing down.

Journals can arrive from different impetuses. The editorial collective for *Digital Geography and Society* is made up of three scholars towards the beginning of our careers. We have contributed to, but perhaps not 'defined', 'digital geographies' as they currently exist and we are all enthusiastic champions of the broad and diverse possibilities of the research. We were, serendipitously, invited by Elsevier to lead this new open access venture – with the title already in place. In the combination of 'digital geography' and 'society' we see both the promise and the problematic of the ongoing theorisation of 'the digital'. Whilst the terms are capitalised, for the sake of style, we invite you to see the title and the aims and scope of the journal not as authoritative but a creative impetus, a starting point from which to join a conversation. This is certainly the spirit in which our excellent inaugural article by [Casey \(Lynch, 2020\)](#) was received and we are both delighted and excited to share that article with you. We are as an editorial collective, together, committed to our mission to champion the widest and most diverse range of 'digital geographical' research.

In a provocatively ironic 1994 commentary imagining the 50th anniversary of another (well-known) journal, geographer [Steve Pile](#) imagines 'cybergeography' in what is now yesterday's tomorrow of 2017. Closing the fictional blog-like piece, [Pile's \(1994: 1820\)](#) unnamed diarist argues that the (imagined) 'Computational Human Geography' they practice needs to confront some familiar questions: 'whether [it] is – at best –

narrowly technocratic and deeply dehumanising ... [and] how [it] is to be situated within wider power relations, within the particular practices of the technology it uses and specific power/knowledge relations[?]' On the one hand, digital geographies promise insights into a rapidly changing planetary digitisation, with all its attendant politics and crises. On the other hand, digital geographies risk perpetuating the white, masculine, neocolonial gaze, casting judgement from a 'God's eye view' made possible by the very digital supports we seek to investigate. 'The digital', however we might seek to define it, is a 'pharmakon' (as [Stiegler \(2012\)](#) argues) – it has both curative and poisonous potential. This slippery and tricky ambiguity lies at the heart of the multifarious understandings of the perceived benefits and dangers of how 'the digital' both produces and is produced by the way we live our lives. It is precisely this unnerving problematic that impels the pursuit of the journal.

It is our intention to capture in this journal the diversity that shapes current digital geographic scholarship – produced by those who consider themselves 'geographers' and those who do not. From research on 'smart cities' ([Certomà & Rizzi, 2017](#); [Datta, 2015](#); [Kitchin, 2014](#)), building just smart cities ([Mann, Mitchell, Foth, & Anastasiu, 2020](#); [Michalec, Hayes, & Longhurst, 2019](#); [Perng, 2019](#); [Perng & Maalsen, 2020](#)) examinations of cybersecurity issues ([Dwyer & Silomon, 2019](#)) and on to sustainability in and of the digital ([McLean, 2020](#); [Pallett, Chilvers, & Hargreaves, 2019](#)); from investigations of digital food geographies, digital tourism geographies ([Siegel, Tussyadiah, & Scarles, 2019](#)), mobilities ([Dowling, 2018](#); [Yeo & Lin, 2020](#)), Southern digital geographies ([Prasad & Alizadeh, 2020](#); [Rai, 2019](#)) through to queer digital geographies ([Cockayne & Richardson, 2017](#)); from urban ([Luque-Ayala, 2019](#)) and rural digital geographies to issues of access and universal design (or the lack thereof) and the digital's role in producing, mediating, archiving and transmitting culture ([Kinsley, 2016](#); [Withers, 2015](#)); and work which engages with digital infrastructures ([Warf 2020](#); [Luque-Ayala & Marvin, 2020](#); [Alizadeh, Grubestic, & Helderop, 2020](#)) the scope of this journal is expansive. In this inaugural year of the journal, and with unprecedented global events rapidly changing the way we live, we suggest three particular foci in the opening out of the conversation, three problematics that we argue are core to interrogating digital geographies and society: crisis, difference and injustice. We anticipate, but certainly do not proscribe, that *Digital Geography and Society*, in relation to, and extending beyond those foci, will provide a space for publishing material that sits at the intersection of space, place, society and the digital. As such, critical engagements with political, cultural, economic, environmental, social geographies and the digital are welcome. Research focusing on digital geographies continues to grow and we are keen to further debates on the shape of this research area, including as to whether it may emerge as a subdiscipline or be situated as more of a 'digital turn' ([Ash et al., 2018](#)). The implications of whether it is more the former than the latter are interesting in terms of how digital geographic scholarship sits within

geographic work more broadly, and how digital geographic work talks to existing work in media studies.

The journal aims to support multiple ways of doing digital geographic research by embracing a variety of methodologies. Digital geographies are forged by social and cultural processes that demand a range of research approaches, including those using mixed methods. While interested in big data and network analyses, including concerted efforts to situate these (eg Crampton et al., 2013; Mah, 2017) we are also inviting researchers who are doing digital research that involves granular, qualitative approaches, including narrative-driven, creative (Zebracki & Luger, 2019) and event focused work. For example, Bork-Hüffer, Mahlnecht, and Kaufmann's (2020) examination of cyberbullying and offline bullying brings together children's narratives of these experiences in relation to geographic processes, while creative digital geographic scholarship such as that by Osborne, Warner, Jones, and Resch (2019) and Thornton (2020) demonstrates the sorts of fine-grained, imaginative refiguring of big data that are possible when formulating artistic engagements with 'the digital'.

Crisis is a contemporary trope for humanities and social science research and those with an interest in digital geographies are no exception. Whether it is the environmental and ecological crises of the extraction of rare earth minerals to produce the technologies upon which we increasingly rely (Klinger, 2015) and the recycling of e-waste (Tong, Li, Tao, & Cai, 2015), or the ways that employment and labour are being re-worked by and through the digital—not least during the COVID-19 global pandemic (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020)—crisis is a prevalent condition of the digital. Digital geographic research has included work on the environmental implications of our digital lives and the corporate and governance contexts that co-produce the digital. From looking at how the digital is enabling environmental movements (Pickerill, 2003) to the constraints and possibilities of nature 2.0 (Büscher, 2017), the way environments are remade digitally has been a consideration of recent geographic scholarship. More research in this area is warranted, not least because the United Nations Environment Program is now calling for a global digital ecosystem that prioritises public data and transparent sharing of information to achieve more sustainable futures (United Nations Environment Assembly, 2019). The environmental costs of digital technologies are also a key consideration of emerging digital geographic scholarship, including querying assumptions about digital solutions to existing environmental problems.

Questions of justice, democracy and participation are at the forefront of exciting digital geographic scholarship. Remaking or unmaking digital geographies that are problematic and/or reproduce inequalities and oppressions are a core focus of this journal, contributing to conversations around data justice (Dencik, Hintz, & Cable, 2016) and efforts to transform these, within groups such as the Data Justice Lab. As such, we look forward to sharing scholarship that considers the oppressive processes and power relations that produce these injustices and oppressions as well as that which captures narratives of resistance and counter-hegemonic processes. The ethics of digital geographies will be a core concern of this journal, building on conversations led by Amoores (2020) on political dynamics in an age of algorithms, and debates on responsibility and sustainability in data science (Taylor & Purtova, 2019). Constructive possibilities of digital geographies are as important as the damaging and withering forces at play in capitalist systems that perpetuate multiply scaled inequities (McLean, 2020). Considering the language that frames our digital geographic scholarship is important here too. For example, 'data' is a preferred term by legal and sociological scholars (Lupton, 2019) when evaluating what happens to the information that we circulate online, and the surveillance processes that delimit our liberties, while 'digital' is generally favoured by geographic scholars. We can and should ask what the implications of preferences such as these are and how those preferences are shaping emerging work.

The particular research questions that emerge when considering how digital geographies work, and how digital spaces and technologies frequently (re)produce inequities, while also providing avenues of resistance to these processes on multiple scales, shall be a prominent inaugural focus of the journal. Feminist digital geographic work has highlighted the contradictory possibilities of digital spaces, as global expansion of digital

networks enables feminist expression and inhibits gender equity (McLean & Maalsen, 2013). The digital is both a source of sexism and misogyny and an avenue for countering entrenched gender-based bias, in the digital and non-digital. The anonymity that the digital affords can give free reign to aggressive sexism but also enables individuals and groups to name and shame perpetrators in relative safety. The emphasis on intersectional approaches in feminist digital geographies is heartening (Elwood and Leszczynski, 2018) and more empirical work on how this topic area and force of global change is needed. Further, the multiplicity of ways that digital technologies are used, felt, embodied and articulated, offers opportunities for theoretical engagements with queerness, gender, bodies, generational concerns and more (Longhurst, 2017).

Further, and importantly, the journal encourages research by Global South scholars, and of Global South contexts, to decentre Global North perspectives (Ash, 2018; Graham, Straumann, & Hogan, 2015; Zook & Graham, 2018). Digital divides are the subject of a now considerable literature (Graham et al. 2012, Graham 2002, van Dijk 2020, Young 2019) and while we are interested in analysis of the perpetuation of existing digital divides, or data-divides (Cinnamon & Schuurman, 2013) as well as of how new inequities are emerging, we also seek to contribute to efforts that strive to renegotiate some of these asymmetries. Describing and analysing global forces of change as well as their resistances is likely to be a strong theme as the journal grows. The already existing work by Indigenous researchers on Indigenous and colonial knowledges in digital terrains is inspiring and we aim to amplify such contributions. The possibilities of challenging colonial hegemonies that digital spaces provide are noteworthy and we seek to provide a forum for debates on decolonising the digital – as fraught as that proposition may be, given the ambiguity of such a project.

The ambiguous and simultaneously disabling and productive potentials, or pharmaka (pace Stiegler, 2012), of digital geographies in equal measure excites and troubles many of us with an interest in these phenomena. We invite all those who wish to tease out and uncover the realities of our contemporary digital milieus to submit to the journal their inquisitive and rigorously argued research, across, between and within the humanities and social sciences. We look forward to continuing this conversation with you.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In memory of Bernard Stiegler (1952-2020).

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