CONCLUSION

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The future of digital editing and publishing

Researchers, students and enthusiasts rely heavily on critical editions to study and better understand a given work, its transmission and mediation (Gabler 2016, xiv). The digital scholarly edition remains central to the intellectual practices of the arts and humanities, and in this time of post-truth, authoritative representations of documentary materials have never been more in need. Ensuring integrity in how different publics engage with social-cultural artefacts must be an essential precondition if the practices of digital editing and publishing are to have any kind of future worth pursuing. Other such preconditions include the incorporation of truly digital paradigms (Sahle 2016), open scholarship (Arbuckle and Siemens 2023), and a respect for those theorists and debates that have brought us to the present, opportune moment (Robinson 2013, 107).

One such theorist is Joris van Zundert, who, in 2016, called on editors and publishers to 'intensify' the field's methodological discourse, to 'implement a form of hypertext that truly represents textual fluidity and text relations in a scholarly viable and computational tractable manner' (2016, 106). A failure to do so, van Zundert warned, would mean that 'we relegate the raison d'être for the digital scholarly edition to that of a mere medium shift, we limit its expressiveness

to that of print text, and we fail to explore the computational potential for digital text representation, analysis and interaction.' Almost a decade later, digital scholarly editing and publishing remain rooted in the cultural and structural logics of print, utilising tools and practices shaped by conditions of scarcity, rather than abundance, of information (Milligan 2019).

Textual scholarship should not abandon its roots, but the field has entered an era in which the lines between edition, archive, and data analysis project should be intentionally blurred. This will present many challenges – critical, ethical and commercial – and the solutions to such challenges will undoubtedly cause great upheaval in the form and structure of editions and the processes through which they are made. But without such upheaval, the future of digital editing and publishing will look far too familiar to its past.

That past has served us well, and no one is suggesting that the baby be wilfully thrown out with the bath water. Critical editing and publishing, digital or otherwise, are labour-intensive activities – that labour is expert and intimate, demanding closeness and attention. The place of such labour – the work of scholarly editors and publishers – is in constant negotiation with increasingly variable (and ephemeral) forms of born-digital expression, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Digital scholarly editing has not yet reckoned with contemporary, digital forms of cultural production and consumption. New theories, methods and practices developed specifically for cultural materials like social media and digital fiction are essential if critical editing is to come to terms with the making of meaning in the twenty-first century (O'Sullivan and Pidd 2023). Nor has the field of digital scholarly editing resolved how and where – *if anywhere at all* – artificial intelligence should be applied in the making of editions (Whittle, O'Sullivan and Pidd 2023). Where digital paradigms are embraced in editing, there is still little consensus on how best this work can be shared and preserved, and indeed, the degree to which digital research outputs (or rather, outputs which are *not print*) are recog-

nised as legitimate scholarship, which at present, will vary depending on local contexts (Burton et al. 2019).

Digital scholarly editing and publishing for the born-digital

Digital editions curate historic documents to make them accessible for scholarly engagement. While digital scholarly editions are key resources for researchers, they remain in design and method oriented towards linear, printed texts. As a result, it is difficult for digital scholarly editions to appropriately represent nonlinear, hypertextual sources such as social media content, or indeed, digital literature.

Building an edition from social media content requires input from colleagues experienced in web archiving, data ethics and rights, as well as a novel set of encoding elements. Such an edition would also require editors to engage with the platform aesthetics and politics of their respective sources. From a technical perspective, social media content is in constant flux, so crafting an edition of content from platforms such as Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) requires stabilising strategies or functions to preserve content as it appeared at one or multiple points in time.

Hypertextuality presents a significant technical challenge to traditional models of representation. Social media content is algorithmically curated and differs between users, meaning that, in most cases, born-digital content is without one singular ideal text (Rasmussen 2016). This is precisely why we need critical social media editions – expert contextualisations of curated posts – but such a process demands the utmost transparency in how and when data was accessed and manipulated. Social media data operates within the economic and ideological tensions that characterise information capitalism; generally, they are 'unarchivable by design', pursuing a 'monopolisation of the public record' (Ben-David 2020).

Digital editions draw from archived materials but also operate as archives (Dillen 2019, 266), and where hypertexts cross in and out and through archives, there are both technical and ideological tensions in how data is used and repurposed, how it is captured, where and how the boundaries between privacy and historicisation are drawn.

Should a critical edition of social media content include interactions with other users, such as responses to posts? Should responses to the responses be included? Hypertextual engagements are not boundless, so while it is theoretically possible to capture an entire network of exchange as part of an edition, it is not technically feasible, and indeed, likely undesirable in the context of a critical edition. But if the hypertextual context – *the conversation* – that surrounds a social media account is not captured, has too much been jettisoned? If, as Marshall McLuhan famously argued, the medium *is* the message, why would anyone exclude user conversations from an edition comprised of *social* media content? Social media platforms are, by their very design, intended to facilitate interaction, so should interaction not be privileged in the archival process?

Archival strategies that attempt to balance privacy with the technical challenges of capturing a wide social network, such as capturing post ID as opposed to content, so that researchers can use their own judgement and research agenda when deciding to 'rehydrate' links as required are more suited to archives rather than editions. The role of an editor is not to capture everything, but to decide what, out of the great glut of information, is essential to a reader who wishes to truly understand the material in question. The hypertexts that editors will encounter on most social media platforms make this an incredibly difficult critical and technical undertaking, and only those editors who truly accept the role of curation – of being ruthlessly selective and subjective – will find a way to something which resembles an edition.

'Digital literature' denotes born-digital creative writing in which the computer plays some essential aesthetic purpose. It is inherently 'algorithmic', rather than merely digitised or remediated:

> ... being produced on a computer is not enough to characterize digital literature. Digital literature uses the affordances of the computer to dynamically render the story. If an e-reader simply displays text in the way a printed book displays text – the only difference being that to advance the text one scrolls rather than turns a page – this is not 'digital literature'. It is printed work digitised for optimal display in a portable computational environment. Digital literature is algorithmic. It changes as the reader engages it (Bouchardon 2016, 3).

Born-digital literary practices suffer from a marked lack of processes and platforms suited to the creation of accessible digital archives and critical editions. Access to legacy computer- and screen-based literary forms is extremely privileged: without the means necessary to travel those few international centres of excellence in media archaeology that actively maintain the legacy systems necessary to experience obsolete works in their original form – for example, the Electronic Literature Lab at Washington State University Vancouver and the Media Archaeology Lab (MAL) at the University of Colorado Boulder – readers must rely on secondary resources and critical accounts of such pieces (see Grigar and Moulthrop 2015).

Such conditions preclude a great many researchers and readers from fully engaging with and appreciating born-digital literature. Despite being relatively emergent as an artistic practice, there are entire generations of digital literature that have already been lost to contemporary audiences. Further to merely archiving obsolete forms of digital literature, edition-making is essential if culturally significant work is to be made accessible – both technically and intellectually – to teachers, learners and public audiences, but as it stands, digital literature seems deprived of such accessibility. Digital literature faces an uncertain future – a future disconnected from its heritage – if this situation is not remedied.

Artificial Intelligence for digital scholarly editing and publishing

There is a balance to be struck between navigating away from the highly exclusive, privileged and often inaccessible theories of print editorial theory, while also understanding that artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are not neutral and unbiased tools that can immediately solve some of the barriers to digital literacy and scholarly editing. Christopher Ohge, both in previous essays (2022) and in his contribution to this volume,[1] argues for a future based on digital creative-critical editing, an approach to editing that advocates for the application of critical editing practices to alternative contexts, communities and aesthetics. The design of data models that centre the experience of the user is an example of creative-critical exercise: it is an iterative and reflexive process that not only pays due respect to traditional modes of editing such as diplomatic transcription and variant collation, but also creates new aesthetic queries that connect multiple narratives of revision. Because they maintain the critical element of editing, Ohge's exhibition of connected authorships inspires 'pan-relational "reflection" and networked discourse' (2022, 91), and is a call to engage with digital technologies in order to attend to new compositions and potentials. Yet, there is also a need for applying caution and intuition to newly advertised tools, if one wants to re-imagine texts without falling into technological determinism. Indeed, it is reasonable to expect that some scholarly editors will simply be ideologically opposed to the use of tools such as generative AI and machine learning in digital scholarly editing (Whittle, O'Sullivan and Pidd 2023).

Scholars such as Katherine Bode and Lauren Goodlad, who founded the *Critical AI* journal in 2023, along with 'The AI Hype Wall of Shame', aim to combat misleading information on AI usage, whether that be AI promoted under 'boosterism', uninformed and unaccountable usage, or 'doomerism', existential and fatalistic usage (Goodlad

1 See Chapter 14, 'Beyond Representation: Some Thoughts on Creative-Critical Digital Editing', Christopher Ohge.

2023). The public images of AI use are anthropomorphic – people tend to associate AI with a human, 'intelligent' mode of thinking. As Goodlad (2023) notes, Alan Turing himself merely set out to imitate human life (the 'imitation game'), not entirely replicate or reproduce human language, intelligence and creativity. Yet, crucially, the anthropomorphisation of AI shows that generative AI lacks impartiality – models are trained on data that is naturally biased and flawed, reflecting the human experience and the pervasive, normative structures in society. The concern for digital scholarly editing is whether the benefits outweigh these ethical concerns, yet its constant hype and use might offer opportunities to critique new technologies and improve data literacy. Improving data literacy is essential, as a lack of AI adoption amongst critical editors may be ideological, but it may also betray a lack of expertise or awareness of the potential that sophisticated digital tools and techniques might hold for one's practice (Whittle, O'Sullivan and Pidd 2023).

If AI is to be used to assist digital edition-making, it must be embedded in a critical approach. The automation offered by AI is often disguised as a radical means of improving productivity and efficiency,[2] yet for editing to be critical it also requires slow and careful curation and attention. Critical digital editions must hold authority, and there can be no authority when materials have been produced or manipulated using models trained on obscure data: say an editor avails of ChatGPT, are they equally guilty of the same breaches to privacy and intellectual property rights that have been levelled at OpenAI? And yet, the many challenges arising from generative AI and, indeed, the rise of digital editions more broadly, present a chance for reconfiguration of print logic, for a blurring of the once hard delineation between editor and user,[3] and for renewed, radical engagement with and input from readers, creators, teachers and learners.

2 See Chapter 13, 'Conviviality and Standards: Open access Publishing After AI', Will Luers.

3 See Chapter 17, 'Seamless Editions: A Future Imaginary of Digital Editions for Learning and Public Engagement', Aodhán Kelly.

AI-assisted editions might encourage a variety of types of expertise to contribute to scholarly editing, especially as AI use must be paired with a (human) curation of authoritative sources, and the outputs and methods made widely accessible and transparent. One area in which AI use requires careful curation and attention is in the digital resources produced for higher education. There are now tools which improve access to, and engagement with, the traditional, complex and often exclusive topics of a student's degree programme, and AI might offer a more immersive way to interpret textual narratives and concepts within digital editions. For instance, Jason Boyd discusses a 'ludic approach' to scholarly editing, with game design as a creative-critical enterprise,[4] and Will Luers acknowledges where AI assistants might produce sensory-rich content and interactive environments.[5] The use of AI raises concerns over originality and creativity, but there may be an opportunity here to reduce some of the 'demands on working memory and attention',[6] and immerse both the editor and user in the critical, editorial experience. There are also recent findings which suggest disabled and neurodivergent students may benefit from AI tools for the purposes of text summarisation, proofreading, and breaking down tasks (Zhao, Cox and Chen 2024), as digital resources such as 'Goblin Tools' propose to offer. However, students want to be more involved in policymaking to form clear guidelines on AI use within institutions (Zhao, Cox and Cai 2024), and only after in-depth conversation with students would the benefits to the disabled community become clear. At the same time, there are questions surrounding intellectual rigour, honesty and transparency if students (or indeed, their teachers) choose to use AI for academic purposes – the issue of the use of AI in higher education and digital scholarly editing is far from being solved.

4 See Chapter 16, 'The Ludic Edition: Playful Futures for Digital Scholarly Editing', Jason Boyd.

5 See Chapter 13, 'Conviviality and Standards: Open access Publishing After AI', Will Luers.

6 See Chapter 12, 'Close and distant reading in explorative editions: distributed cognition and interactive visualisations,' Peter Boot.

One of the solutions for AI use, particularly when it comes to producing editions for those with little knowledge of the text, is to perhaps bring it within a cyclical, iterative process with regular opportunities for learning as the technology evolves. In a survey of researchers and students, Greta Franzini, Melissa Terras and Simon Mahony found that the primary reason for the use of data in digital editions is 'teaching', suggesting that resources in the digital humanities are increasingly intended to be useful pedagogical tools as well as to enable rigorous research. This pedagogical process might also include the chance for learners to be involved in edition-making and provide direct insight into DH development phases – an evaluative process that considers societal implications of AI in the classroom (Conrad and Goodlad 2024) – with the embedding of AI into human-centred DH curricula already under way at some universities (Chun and Elkins 2023). The more these critical DH approaches and AI literacies are proposed, tested and adopted for digital editions, the more communities understand, contribute to and resist harmful aspects of, new technological developments.

Underpinning all the new excitement surrounding AI and its multiple possible applications is the need to concentrate on collaborative, iterative design processes which centre the user community's experience. Methods to produce digital tools for students and/or researchers should be embedded within critical digital humanities – an approach that is 'more reflexive of the way in which computation is no longer merely a tool for thought, but also a disruptive infrastructure, medium, and milieu' (Berry 2023, 126). Within a similar vein, digital scholarly editing might become both a pedagogical and a collaborative enterprise that involves a multiplicity of voices from different disciplines and communities – 'Radical Iterative Editing',[7] and equitable, bottom-up models of editing and publishing[8] which

7 See Chapter 3, 'Digital Scholarly Editing and the Crisis of Knowledge Technology,' Helen Abbott, Michelle Doran, Jennifer Edmond, Rebecca Mitchell and Aengus Ward.

8 See Chapter 10, 'Digital Editing & Publishing in the Twenty-First Century as a

advocate for evolving digital editions that are developed and progressed by a wider group of people.

There is also an increase in crowdsourced editions, translations and texts (see *Beowulf By All,* Abbott, Treharne and Fafinski 2021), which foster spaces for interpretations of text that build on lived experience, as well as *design justice* perspectives (see Costanza-Chock 2020; and the principles of the *Design Justice Network* 2018) which challenge top-down, patriarchal structures of design, maintaining accountability through prioritising 'impact' over 'intention'. AI could only factor into these types of approaches if there are communities thinking reflexively and deliberately about power imbalances in design, potential societal harm in the use of AI, and how the role of the creative-critical human can be amplified within digital scholarly editing.

Minimal computing for digital scholarly editing and publishing

There can be no future for digital scholarly editing without a shift towards more sustainable, reproducible tools and infrastructures. The Text Encoding Initiative editors offer a mature, robust and platform-agnostic schematic for intuitive, lightweight, interoperable text encoding (Cummings 2008; Burnard 2013; Cummings 2023), but encoding, though essential, is only one part of a wider ecosystem – encoded text, on its own, does not make an edition. Digital editions might be described as nontraditional scholarly objects, or NTSOs, a term clarified as meaning 'objects and processes, especially making, publishing, maintaining and preserving' in the two major reports on scholarly publication comprising *Digits*. NTSOs present unique social, intellectual and technical challenges in how they are made, published, maintained and preserved (Burton et al. 2019).

Cooperative for Small-Scale Editions', Juniper Johnson, Serenity Sutherland, Neal Millikan and Ondine Le Blanc.

Christopher Ohge's *Publishing Scholarly Editions* details the myriad technical and pragmatic challenges presented to editors of digital scholarly editions: selecting an appropriate workflow and making choices on what features to encode (2021, 63), overcoming the lack of publishing solutions for digital scholarly editions (2021, 108), and ensuring long-term preservation and discovery of bespoke endeavours (2021, 117–19). Citing two surveys of the field (Almas et al. 2018; Franzini, Terras and Mahony 2019), Ohge concludes that digital scholarly editions suffer from a 'lack of data re-usability, interoperability, licensing, image availability and detailed documentation', that:

> Scholars desire better collaboration, smart workflows, and the integration of text and image data – as well as the easy ability to annotate the text and image data. Curators and technologists seem to want more integration, attention to metadata, and reliable standards. In many ways, IIIF accomplishes all of these, but IIIF is still challenging for institutions to set up and its associated tools (such as Project Mirador) still do not offer the full range of functionality that many editors require. Despite the efforts of many digital practitioners, 'there is still no end-to-end [publishing] solution that meets the myriad needs of scholars, curators, librarians and students', owing to the diverse needs of projects, funding barriers and insufficient tools (2021, 120).

Minimal computing alleviates, even resolves some (admittedly, not all) of these challenges. From a technical perspective, there is nothing new about 'minimal computing'. Rather, it is merely an ideology which advocates for the implementation of digital projects using the least amount of technology possible. Minimal computing is not some radical new framework, but rather, an ethos, maybe even just a reminder to researchers and practitioners, that lightweight digital projects built on uncomplicated, lightweight, open technologies have considerable advantages over feature-rich, but thus less sustainable, platforms.

For example, building a digital scholarly edition with some Text Encoding Initiative (TEI)-compliant XML and designing a simple front end with

some CSS, is preferable to utilising a content management system like Drupal, which can be customised for digital scholarly editions with various modules and plug-ins, because it is far easier to develop, host and maintain the former. Barebones digital projects do not even require expensive, and sometimes even inaccessible, institutional infrastructure, they can be hosted on services like GitHub and preserved in repositories like Zenodo. Certainly, problems of scale emerge when one tries to take a truly barebones approach – the more features a project requires, the less minimal it will inevitably be – but minimal does not mean basic, it means, as basic as is possible while still adhering to the project's purpose. Often, the field of digital scholarly editing and, indeed, the wider digital humanities, becomes too preoccupied with a desire to build the one platform to rule them all, when really, we should be a little less obsessed with computational power, and a little more content with minimalist projects that work and are reproducible by design. Re-usable and interoperable data should be privileged over a project's feature set, and preservability should be privileged over interface:

> No model we see, though, convinces us it can give vast-scale access to all networked scholars around the world other than the simplest model: producing our own scholarship ourselves. To do so, we may just have to displace the reliance on 'user-friendly' mechanisms, and learn how to make our own, imperfect as they may be. In the process of learning how to do so, we may also learn how to leverage institutional and extra-institutional structures for preservation and discovery. But even more importantly, we may yet regain our class consciousness as workers of memory (Gil 2015).

And in the prevailing academic culture, where digital labour and nontraditional scholarly objects are typically undervalued, it makes even more sense to abandon costly, time-consuming and resource-intensive vast-scale approaches. NTSOs suffer in an environment which privileges prestige (Burton et al. 2019). Digital scholarly editing – somewhat like traditional forms of textual scholarship and print editions – is not immune from such dynamics: 'getting credit for digital editing projects is still a challenge in the academic politics

of hiring and promotion' (Ohge 2021, 115). When institutions and cultures fail to recognise, and thus adequately support, the work of critical editors, minimal computing presents a way through which scholars can do the research – do the *work* – that needs to be done in a way that is technically and pragmatically feasible.

Preconditions for a radical future for digital scholarly editing

The aforementioned survey designed to measure the expectations of those who utilise digital editions finds that 'teaching' and 'text analysis' are the foremost uses that respondents would make of the data published in such a resource (Franzini, Terras and Mahony 2019).

The ability to use quantitative techniques to analyse the materials curated materials by an edition is typically not a feature of such projects. Why? It is possible that this is a reflection of what Bode contends is a divide between 'the curatorial and statistical' in the digital humanities, particularly, computational literary studies. Bode argues that digital literary studies is 'hung up on (whether in favour of, or opposed to) individualistic, masculinist modes of statistical criticism' (2019). It would be beyond the scope of this essay to provide evidence in support of Bode's suggestion that the divide between digital scholarly editing and data-driven analytics is gendered, however, one can see how common prejudices may situate the careful, thoughtful craft of editing as something other to the mechanical, scientific work of computer-assisted text analysis. The dissonance between these two disciplinary cultures might be more innocent; they are, after all, borne of separate epistemologies. However, the separation between data that comprises digital editions and data that is analysed using digital techniques might also be a consequence prevailing pre-digital conceptions of what scholarly editing *is* and what scholarly editions should *be* – that is, print based, or at the very most, digitised (i.e. not born-digital) print, framed by print (i.e. bookish) paradigms.

Digital scholarly editing is, essentially, an exercise in close reading, whereas cultural analytics, that is, the statistical analysis of text and other forms of data from the arts and humanities, is all about distant reading. While scholars have (thankfully) moved on from the false dichotomy between close and distant reading, there remains a great many cases (in fact, a majority) of critical undertakings which simply have no use for the statistical, computer-assisted methods of cultural analytics. Digital scholarly editing may well be a domain where natural language processing, machine learning, and AI have little to offer: editing is an intimate endeavour, and often utterly unsuited to the type of contextless analysis one tends to get from distant reading.

But if machine reading is among the great advances of the digital humanities (there are those who argue it is not), then it stands to reason that truly *digital* editions, rather than *digitised* editions, would make use of computational ways of knowing. If the ambition of digital scholarly editions is to make digitised text more accessible and searchable, it seems that a PDF of a printed text, archived and well described in a suitable repository, would be sufficient. If the ambition is to use the digital to transform scholarly editing to a more radical degree, then it would seem that the ways in which critical editions can be read is an obvious opportunity, particularly as scholars across the digital humanities have already developed, adopted and tested a range of methods for doing just that.

The future of digital scholarly editing and publishing should be one in which the curatorial and statistical divide in the digital humanities is harmonised through a reconfiguration of the work of editing so that its products are susceptible to different forms of text mining, data analysis and cultural analytics, as well as the development of libraries that can be easily integrated with schemas such as the TEI. Such a future is possible: 'Data sets and editions can coexist, but only if those from digital and textual editors can find bridges to those approaching digital humanities from other traditions and with other goals' (Earhart 2012, 26).

The application of digital methods for content analysis as part of a holistic approach to digital editing would not diminish the intimacy of the editing process, but rather, supplement it by providing editors and audiences with different perspectives, with the type of quantitative evidence that, for better or for worse, is valued in today's society as either a form of evidence or a point of entry into complex information. Embedding cultural analytics in editions themselves democractises distant reading, as those wishing to apply such methods to the contents of an edition would be able to do so without the need to develop or access specialist expertise or software. And it brings reliability and credibility to data sets. One of the great challenges of distant reading is that methodologies are only as reliable as the data being tested, and in scholarly editions, we find ideal data sets which have been expertly and, more importantly, *transparently* (in that the profile of their curator is visible), compiled.

McGillivray and Tóth (2020)[9] speak to the 'hidden layers of textuality' which can be unlocked by scholarly communities and made accessible to wider audiences. This approach moves towards a new genre of scholarly 'data editions' that make Big Data accessible for those without skills in data mining. In the same vein, an exploration of the hidden layers of AI text generation, underpinning some of the ethical concerns regarding biased training data, hallucinations and a lack of accountability, might encourage its users to remain informed despite any prior training in AI, or lack thereof.

But analytics is only the beginning. What might be achieved through the development of frameworks suited to capturing video games, an essential form of expression in contemporary culture, or with virtual and augmented realities in the context of editions? What might the progression of newer forms of artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI, mean for the future of digital scholarly editing and publishing? Throughout this volume of forward- (and historical-)facing perspectives, it is noteworthy that there are no

9 See Chapter 11, 'The Scholarly Data Edition: Publishing Big Data in the Twenty-First Century', Gábor Mihály Tóth.

references to natural language processing and machine learning, and references to AI are extremely scarce. We claim that natural language processing, machine learning and AI are only the beginning of this new future for digital editing, but here, in a book on that very future, they are absent. This may well confirm the suspicion that the field of digital scholarly editing is content to remain an entirely human craft (Whittle, O'Sullivan and Pidd 2023). However, returning to the *Digit* reports, it might also tell us something about how scholars and practitioners are more concerned with 'the broader social, institutional, and cultural contexts of digital scholarship' than they are with 'objects and processes' (Burton et al. 2019).

Herein lies the greatest barrier to the most prosperous future for this field, the disconnect between the objects and processes and the sociocultural critiques of the contexts in which they reside. This is not another attempt to revive the 'we need more grease under our fingernails' debate (see Ramsay 2013a; 2013b), rather, it is an admission that the digital humanities has spent too long obsessing over the 'bigger picture'. This is partly because stepping back and looking at the bigger picture is where you find the space to grapple with important but broader matters of ontology and ethics. Moving beyond surface-level discussions of 'why?' and 'why not?', to the challenging intellectual work needed to actually connect the objects and processes to the broader social, institutional and cultural contexts of digital scholarship, is the next step towards the future of digital editing and publishing.

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