

INTRODUCTION

The Multimodal Issue

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Introduction to the multimodal scholarship issue of *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies*. The issue brings together two short films, a research comic, an audio essay, a video essay, and an exhibition article. The six works in the issue come from a variety of disciplines and fields of research including visual anthropology, science and technology studies, socio-gerontechnology, literary studies, library science, audiovisual anthropology, and games studies. Together, they exemplify the exciting range of possibilities for scholarship in different mediums and modalities.

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This multimodal issue of *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* is an exploration, in practice, of what it takes to publish scholarly outputs beyond the conventional format of the textual journal article. With the growing interest on the part of researchers to publish scholarship in different modalities and inspired by the work of innovative journals such as *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*, *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, and MIT Press's *Leonardo*, we wanted to understand the extent to which we could support different kinds of knowledge production within the context and constraints of an academic journal.¹

In 2023, we circulated a format-based call for proposals that invited submissions on any topic, from any discipline, as long as the work was not primarily textual. Seeking variety in the type of output and trying to be realistic about what we could support with our technical infrastructure and small journal team, we invited full submissions for a select number of proposals and collaborated closely with contributors to bring their works to fruition. In the end, this issue comprises six works, some of which combine text, image, audio, and video. The others are primarily video or audio framed by accompanying textual content like abstracts, subtitles, etc.

The issue includes two short films, a research comic, an audio essay, a video essay, and an exhibition article. Federico De Musso's film, "Transabelles: Moving Bees at Night," documents the nocturnal practice of bee transhumance in the High Pyrenees, following a beekeeper and two helpers as they move bee hives into the mountains to escape the lowlands' heat and drought, conditions that threaten honey production and are exacerbated by climate change. The film's quiet, dark style is intentionally defamiliarizing, intended, as De Musso states in the abstract, "to reproduce the alienation of both bee geographic displacement and night labour for humans" and "transfer the estrangement effect to the audience." Pankaj Sekhsaria's film, "The Spinning Experience: Hand Spinning as Pedagogy, Experiential Learning, and Physical Output," weaves together video footage of a three-day hand spinning workshop at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and testimonials from the workshop's students and instructor reflecting on the experiential learning process and the contemporary relevance of hand-driven technologies. Sekhsaria remarks that while the *charkha* (the spinning wheel) carries much symbolic importance in India, not very many people have seen it or worked with it, and the video medium allows viewers to see the object and the process of spinning the yarn and to reflect on the value of this technological skill in modern society.

¹ This is not the first time we have published multimodal scholarship. See, for example, "[Talking with My Daughter About Archives: Métis Researchers and Genealogy](#)" in our "Indigenous Knowledges" special issue and "[Working Knowledge: Catalogers and the Stories They Tell](#)" in our "Metadata as Knowledge" special issue, both of which incorporate audio clips. However, this issue is our first dedicated to multimodal scholarship and thinking through its affordances and challenges.

"Many Forms of 'Good Ageing': Noticing Alignments and Frictions in Digital Innovation Initiatives," by Carla Greubel, Hanna Stalenhoef, Susan van Hees, Ellen Moors, Daniel López Gómez, and Alexander Peine, uses the form of the research comic to present findings from ethnographic fieldwork in three health and social care innovation initiatives in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. It examines how digital health tools intended to promote "good ageing" align with intended users' perceptions of good ageing. Combining drawings, field notes, and researcher reflections, the comic demonstrates how conflicting ideas about good ageing, which differ across geographical and cultural contexts, affect users' interactions with digital health tools. The comic's visual representation of the users engaging with and discussing the tools lends an intimacy and immediacy to their experiences, emphasizing the contributors' statement in the abstract that their work "highlights the importance and value of geographical, cultural, and affective closeness to the everyday lives of those for and with whom these technologies are designed."

Christie Hurrell, Kathryn Holland, Karen Bourrier, and Jessica Khuu's "Podcasting Feminism: The Multimodality of Women's Writing and Literary-Historical Studies" discusses the creation of *Orlando: A Podcast on Women's Writing*, using the medium of an audio essay to ruminate on the process of translating written work to an oral/audio medium and the aptness of this approach for engaging with women's writing, which itself has a long tradition of orality. Austin Anderson's video essay, "Fear of Black Europe: Race in Medieval and Early Modern Video Games," analyzes how the myth of an all-white European past persists in video games set in medieval and early modern Europe under the guise of historical accuracy and argues that video games should include more diverse sets of characters to better reflect the diversity of Europe in the medieval and early modern periods. The contributors for "Podcasting Feminism" and "Fear of Black Europe" both incorporate content from their source material directly in their essays, leveraging audio and video mediums to seamlessly and dynamically integrate podcast and gameplay clips to illustrate or support their points.

Finally, A. M. Alpin and Amanda Belantara's exhibition article, "Revisiting Ranganathan: The Making of *Rule N° 5*," outlines the critical context, research, and artistic collaborations involved in producing *Rule N° 5: The Library Is a Growing Organism*, a physical exhibition in the main library at New York University that explores the ongoing significance of S. R. Ranganathan's fifth law of library science, "a library is a growing organism." The article combines sound compositions created for the six audiovisual installations, design sketches showing the evolution of the collaborators' creative ideas, photographs of the final artworks installed in the exhibition, and videos of users interacting with those artworks with methodological description and critical commentary, surfacing the critical ideas underpinning the artistic work.

Overall, the six works in this issue come from a variety of disciplines and fields of research including visual anthropology, science and technology studies, socio-gerontechnology, literary studies, library science, audio-visual anthropology, and games studies. They are not thematically connected but together exemplify the exciting range of possibilities for scholarship in different mediums and modalities.

Producing this issue compelled us to rethink and make adjustments to the journal's established practices for submission management, review, editing, and production. At the submission stage, we had to consider: What formats and resolution should contributors submit files in? For accessibility, should we include a transcript, closed captions, or both? What would be the best approach for citation and attribution in non-textual works? What level of production value, considering contributors' different access to equipment and levels of technical fluency, should we require? How would we handle the submission and management of large multimedia files?

This last question was of particular significance, logically and conceptually, both for this issue and for *KULA* more broadly because the technical infrastructure for journal publishing can accommodate multimodal scholarship only imperfectly at this point. For example, the maximum upload file size on our publishing platform is about 100 MB. No doubt this limitation exists for good reasons related to data storage capacity and cost, but logically, for us, it means finding a workaround for sharing and hosting files outside of the journal system. Media files can be externally hosted on YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud, or another platform and then embedded in HTML galleys. However, ensuring long-term access to that content is then the contributor's responsibility, and, depending on the platform, it still may not be guaranteed. Conceptually—and existentially—external hosting requires us to think about what we mean when we say we are publishing something: If the journal is not really the repository for the content but serves mainly as a proxy, pointing outward to where the content exists elsewhere, disconnected and decontextualized from the journal environment, does that really "count" as publishing in the way we are used to thinking about it? Or does it signal a decline in the importance of journals as the containers of scholarship and compel us to rethink their function in scholarly communication? These are open questions. However, publishing is a largely practical endeavour that demands a decision; in this case, we elected—thanks to the support and expertise of our systems colleagues—to host larger media files on a local server here at the University of Victoria Libraries. This approach allowed us to more smoothly integrate and ensure the long-term preservation of content that could not be hosted through the journal platform.

For peer review, we had to decide what peer review model we would use and find reviewers who would be comfortable with and willing to engage with both the subject matter and the technical and formal elements of the submissions. While we have traditionally used a double-anonymous peer review model, we anticipated at the outset of this process that anonymizing multimodal submissions would be challenging (in some cases, impossible) and decided on single-anonymous review for this issue, which happily turned out to be a minor and seamless adjustment to our regular workflow. But we then also had to articulate our conceptual and technical expectations for multimodal scholarship in order to provide appropriate reviewer guidelines for the submissions. Should each work present an argument? Considering our readership, could the work stand on its own, or did it require more contextualization? How integral was the use of the chosen medium? We asked reviewers to comment on submissions' overall themes or arguments, level of context, clarity, contribution to scholarship, methodology or critical framework, suitability for a multidisciplinary audience, structure and composition, design and production, and level of accessibility. Finally, perhaps most importantly for our purposes in this issue, we asked them to reflect on the choice of medium and whether the scholarship was enhanced by being presented in multimodal form: Did the submission do something that could not have been done—or would have been done with less impact—in a conventional textual article? This question is, for us, fundamental for multimodal scholarship, and we believe that all the contributions in this issue exemplify how the use of non-textual mediums can allow scholars to share knowledge, make arguments, and incorporate evidence in ways that would not be possible in a conventional textual article.

We also had to think, post-review, about the extent of the revisions we could reasonably ask of contributors, recognizing that revising audio, video, and graphic scholarship can be complicated and laborious. How many times, for example, should we expect contributors to do pickups (re-recordings to correct mistakes or mispronunciations)? Practically, how would the editing process work? Since we typically work with Microsoft Word documents, we have become used to being able to provide edits and comments in text, a direct intervention that allows us to have an ongoing dialogue with contributors within the submission itself. However, we could not take this approach for audio and video works. Instead, unable to use comment functions or track changes, we had to provide contributors with an external list of queries and edits with corresponding time codes, which, when we received the revised version, we cross-referenced to make sure all the changes had been incorporated. In contrast to the relative ease of providing edits in track changes that authors can just accept, changes for the works in this issue had to be communicated to and then carried out by the contributors, prolonging the process with extra rounds of edits and revisions back and forth. Editing is always an iterative process, but this experience has motivated us to think about ways to streamline the editing process for non-text-based scholarship.

Finally, at the production stage, we had to decide what galley formats to publish these works in. Ordinarily, we publish articles in PDF, XML, and HTML formats. However, working with multimodal scholarship invites us to think about the ubiquity of particular formats in journal publishing, namely the PDF. While we rely on HTML galleys for rendering audio and video content, all the contributions in this issue also have PDF galleys for indexing purposes. Although it is not arduous to supply them, we cannot reliably embed media files in PDFs. As a result, we simply link to media files in PDFs, which makes them feel superfluous for audio and video content. And yet, while the PDF is not optimal for audio and video content and presents challenges when it comes to accessibility, it may be preferable for other reasons, such as for use with reference management tools like Zotero. It also offers advantages for layout and design that we experimented with in the PDF version of "Revisiting Ranganathan: The Making of *Rule N° 5*," which was beautifully designed by our colleague Artie Goshulak in a magazine-style layout rather than a conventional scholarly article layout to present the artistic components of the exhibition with greater visual impact.

Indeed, this issue prompted us to think not only about the technical requirements for these works but also about the user experience—that is, how and where readers might want to engage with content like an exhibition article or graphic scholarship. In "Many Forms of 'Good Ageing,'" the contributors' choice of the comic as a medium for sharing their research was a conscious effort to make their work accessible to a broader audience, and we thought that some readers (like some of the participants in the digital health innovation initiatives represented in the comic) might prefer to access the comic on a tablet or e-reader. So for this specific work we produced EPUBs instead of HTML and XML galleys (neither of which seem like an optimal format for presenting a research comic), as is our usual practice.² Publishing different works in different galley formats, according to what we and the contributors think best suits the work, is another form of experimentation for us in this issue that we will continue to think about going forward.

² Another exciting first: This research comic is also the first work we have published in multiple languages, ensuring that it is accessible to all the field sites where the contributors conducted their research.

On that forward-looking note, I will conclude by reflecting on one of the questions that has underpinned our work on this issue: Why publish multimodal scholarship in a journal? We are not raising the question here of *why* multimodal scholarship, the value of which we think is well established, if not entirely recognized in academic systems of credit, but *why* multimodal scholarship in a *journal*? Why disseminate complete, often very polished works of scholarship, on a different platform, subject to the limitations of the journal publishing environment? The necessity of publishing in peer-reviewed journals for tenure and promotion aside, what do journals have to offer when it comes to multimodal scholarship?

One advantage is that indexing journals and assigning digital object identifiers (DOIs) to journal content maximizes discoverability of that content. An advantage to library-published journals in particular, as noted above, is that they are supported by library staff expertise and library infrastructure for hosting and long-term preservation of content. But, from a somewhat idealistic perspective, we also think that another reason to publish multimodal scholarship in journals is to benefit from an established system of peer and editorial review. Although the peer review system is under stress, and our models for peer review and editorial review must adapt to accommodate multimodal scholarship, we do believe fundamentally in the ideal of review—not for the sake of gatekeeping but in the spirit of strengthening scholarship, regardless of modality, through constructive critical feedback. That is not to say that other mechanisms for this kind of critical exchange do not exist; many scholars engage in practices like open review for their work, which serve the same function outside the context of a journal. But for us as a journal, the systems of peer and editorial review we have in place are at the core of the vision we see taking shape for multimodal scholarship in *KULA*, and some of our work in the near future will be developing more comprehensive contributor and reviewer guidelines to facilitate the incorporation of such work in the journal. We hope that this issue encourages other journals to consider more multimodal content. For us here at *KULA*, we will continue to explore actively how best to support and enrich the evolving forms of scholarly production.

Thank you to our contributors in the issue, who have trusted us with their work and been endlessly open and gracious in response to our feedback on both its content and form. It has been a long and sometimes uncertain process, and we are grateful for your patience and collaborative spirits. Thank you as well to all the peer reviewers for this issue, who gamely took up the call for this experiment and provided engaged, thoughtful, and constructive feedback that not only strengthened these contributions but informed our thinking on future directions for the journal. Finally, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the members of our internal advisory team at the University of Victoria Libraries, all exceptionally busy people who generously gave their time and insight to help us plan for this issue, review proposals, and make editorial decisions. Special thanks to Artie Goshulak for their phenomenal design work on “Revisiting Ranganathan: The Making of Rule N° 5,” and thank you to the entire advisory team—John Durno, Lisa Goddard, Artie, Matt Huculak, and Dean Seeman—for sharing your time and expertise and just generally being good sports throughout it all.

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