

antae

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SOURCE Image: Odilon Redon, ‘Spirit of the Forest’ (1890)

<<http://www.wikiart.org/en/odilon-redon/spirit-of-the-forest-1890>> [accessed 28 November 2014]

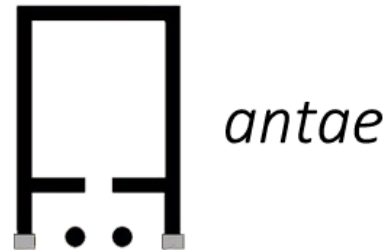
Editorial

Christine Caruana, Elsa Fiott

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antae is an international refereed postgraduate journal aimed at exploring current issues and debates within English Studies, with a particular interest in literature, criticism and their various contemporary interfaces. Set up in 2013 by postgraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Malta, it welcomes submissions situated across the interdisciplinary spaces provided by diverse forms and expressions within narrative, poetry, theatre, literary theory, cultural criticism, media studies, digital cultures, philosophy and language studies. Creative writing is also accepted.

Editorial

Christine Caruana, Elsa Fiott

University of Malta

Odilon Redon's charcoal drawing, 'Spirit of the Forest', might not strike readers of this journal as a straightforwardly apt image for an issue with a digital theme. Its tones and subject seem to run directly in contrast to the prevalent impression of anything digital. The use of Redon's piece in this context could even be interpreted as a statement against the usual connotations surrounding the digital, and it hints at the discontent the contemporary individual might feel towards the digital age. The impact of digitisation on contemporary life is often the subject of critical condemnation; consider, for example, Jean Baudrillard's bleak rendition of how the virtual age has 'murdered' reality (*The Perfect Crime*, 1995).

Nigel Baldacchino's paper, 'Relative Authenticity: Abstraction and the Digital Domain', posits one example of how the digital footprint can be considered as the partial locus for some of our contemporary anxieties. Baldacchino's paper argues that the digital domain amplifies the implications that 'abstraction'—the process by which some features of an entity are imposed onto another entity—has on the notion of authenticity.

In one sense, Redon's drawing *can*, in fact, be considered to be an appropriate image for the digital. The antlers protruding from the figure's skull serve as a reminder of the case of the Irish Elk, which had become extinct because its antlers had grown too large for its head to support. If the elk's antlers can be compared to the human use of technology as a prosthetic aid, the case of the Irish Elk reads like a morality play in which the digital is featured as an Icarian ambition. And yet, how convincing is this one-sided understanding of the use of advanced technology and our contemporary immersion in the digital? Pamela Baldacchino's paper offers an antidote to this approach and draws our attention to the beneficial uses of the digital, especially when encompassed within an aesthetic framework. In 'Trespassing the Boundaries of Flesh: Exploring Wounded Embodiment through Artistic Practice', P. Baldacchino contends that the ill patient, who is at odds with his own embodiment as a consequence of the illness by which he is afflicted, can be aided through the therapeutic benefits of artistic digital media in order to re-establish the patient's sense of agency.

The work presented in this issue is not only linked by an interest in the digital, but, more importantly, by the questioning of definitions and dichotomies that a sensitive and critical approach to the digital necessitates. Clara Chetcuti's paper, 'Enc0d1ng Poetry', is no exception. Chetcuti probes the definitional boundaries of literariness and *electronic-ness* through her discussion of poetry in code and its constitutive elements. By juxtaposing E. E.

Cummings and Brian Kim Stefans, Chetcuti investigates the ‘codework’ inherent to poetry. On the other hand, Giuliana Fenech’s paper, ‘From Audiences to Publics: Convergence Culture and the Harry Potter Phenomenon’, is less concerned with how definitions collapse into one another, but focuses more concretely on how the boundary between the creation of a cultural product and its consumption has become more malleable through digital platforms. Using the Harry Potter series as a case study, Fenech argues that digital media has enabled audiences to become active participants in their own culture, to the extent that the cultural product is designed to accommodate the digitally-enabled agency of its public.

But there remains, of course, much more to be said for the digital as well as for Redon’s enigmatic drawing. The papers already mentioned feature a detailed and critical analysis of the ‘human’ as it *uses* ‘digital’ technology, but what more could be said about the conceptual relationship between the human and the digital? Redon’s skeletal figure begs us to delve into the essence of things and, by extension, to question whether we can still speak of such essences. Indeed, how does the definition of *technê* affect the definition of the human who makes use of it? Is ‘the digital condition’ as multifarious and possibly aporetic as the (post)human condition? These questions offer a glimpse into the thought-provoking terrain covered in *antae*’s interview with Stefan Herbrechter, in which his incisive take on the posthuman is brought to bear on the digital, and vice-versa.