Digital Transformations
Seeking to reinvent the arts and humanities in a digital age
As forms of cultural production increasingly become digital, the distinctions between image, performance, text, sound and material object are being blurred and reshaped, impinging on our views of such issues as authorship, audience, ownership, identity and authority. These developments offer exciting opportunities to enhance access and creativity, but also raise complex questions of responsibility, identity, privacy and data security.

Work under the AHRC’s ‘Digital Transformations’ theme explores the potential of digital technologies to transform research in the arts and humanities and seeks to ensure that arts and humanities research is at the forefront of tackling crucial issues such as intellectual property, cultural memory and identity, and communication and creativity in a digital age.
Introduction

Research so far has explored these themes:

• **Reimagining and Revisualising Knowledge**
  As the primary objects of humanities research, such as literary texts, historical documents, paintings, and archaeological artefacts, increasingly become available in various digital forms, researchers are analysing, linking and visualising them in innovative ways, and considering what new cultural understandings and perspectives can emerge from such reconfigurations.

• **Remixing Cultural Production and Creativity**
  Digital technologies blur our cultural understandings, fostering the emergence of new forms of creative practice, making and performance which challenge our conceptualisation of artistic and cultural practice and demand rethinking of received ideas in such areas as authenticity, cultural production, ownership, authorship, reading and IP.

• **The Challenges of Big Data**
  Vast ‘born digital’ archives are not confined to the sciences. Humanities researchers are grappling with the analysis and visualisation of archives containing millions of e-mails, while data artists are looking to scientific data sets for inspiration. However, the use of big data methods raises pressing issues of privacy, ethics and individuality. As the rise of quantitative data analytics challenges our ideas of what it is to be human, the theoretical insights and understanding provided by the arts and humanities have increasing significance.

Activity to date includes:

• 18 Research Development Awards made in February 2012
• 9 Networking Awards and 4 Fellowships Awards were made under highlight notice in December 2012.
• 11 Digital Transformations in Community Research Co-production Awards made in July 2013.
• 3 Large Grant Awards made in September 2013.
• 21 Big Data projects made in November 2013.
• 11 Digging into Data proposals with UK teams awarded in January 2013, and a further 9 announced in January 2014.
• 10 Amplification awards made in April 2014.
• Academic Book of the Future Award made June 2014. Call ran in partnership with British Library.
• Centre for Copyright and New Business Models in the Creative Economy funded through RCUK Digital Economy Programme.

Please note that you can engage with the theme in the following ways:

AHRC Website
www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Themes/Digital-Transformations/Pages/Digital-Transformations.aspx

Twitter
#digitrans @AHRCDigiTrans

Tumblr
digitrans.tumblr.com

Netvibes
www.netvibes.com/digitrans
Case studies

**The Digital Panopticon: The Global Impact of London Punishments, 1780-1925**

Professor Barry Godfrey  
*University of Liverpool*

This project develops new and transferable methodologies for understanding and exploiting complex bodies of genealogical, biometric, and criminal justice data. Using sophisticated data-linking methodologies it joins together large data sets (Old Bailey Online: London Lives: and Founders and Survivors) with newly digitised data, to chart the fortunes of all Londoners convicted at the Old Bailey between 1787 and the early 1920s. Convicts sentenced to transportation will be traced through convict records in Australia, as well as London prison registers, and birth, marriage and death certificates. A pan-global prism capable of mapping and analysing their lives collectively and individually will be created.

**Performance in the Recording Studio**

Dr Simon Zagorski-Thomas  
*University of West London*

This network project investigates how the digital revolution has affected musical performance in the recording studio. Techniques such as cut-and-paste editing and auto-tune have changed performers’ approaches to creative practice and to their hypothetical audience. The project used a variety of digital media to capture multiple facets of a staged recording session. The process was filmed and there was a screen capture from the recording software, recorded interviews with the participants and archived files of all recorded takes. Both the raw data and discussion and analysis from a wide range of perspectives are available online in a unique archive.

“Digital Transformations is about seeking to transform the processes and outcomes of arts and humanities research using digital technologies. The theme recognises that we are at an embryonic stage in our understanding of the possibilities of ‘the digital’ for our disciplines, and positively encourages risk taking by researchers. Through supporting the experimental this theme will contribute to the collective advance of knowledge in the arts and humanities.”

PROFESSOR CHARLOTTE WAELEE  
PROFESSOR OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
Know Your Bristol On The Move
Professor Robert Bickers
University of Bristol

Place is fixed, but people move. Bristol’s peoples move through life, across the city and sometimes across the globe. Building on previous AHRC projects and collaborations with Bristol City Council (www.bristol.gov.uk/knowyourplace), this award explores strategies and tools to trace and link the fluid and the fixed. A mobile view of the existing website, a new platform for community digital mapping and two new apps will be created, and a ‘Know Your Bus’ will form a mobile space for digital creation and co-production of research and learning. The project will work with various local communities to create mobile archives and co-develop different portfolios of tools for community research.

Leadership Fellow
Professor Andrew Prescott
Professor of Digital Humanities, King’s College London

Andrew Prescott trained as a medieval historian and was formerly a curator of manuscripts at the British Library in London. He was the principal British Library contact for the Electronic Beowulf project which won the Library Association / Mecklermedia Award for Innovation through Library Technology in 1995.

Andrew has been an advisor to many leading digital humanities projects in Britain and has worked in digital humanities units at the Universities of Sheffield and Glasgow. He was also Librarian and Archivist at the University of Wales Lampeter.

“This theme is about more than the creation of online editions or the digitisation of books, manuscripts or pictures. It is about fostering new methods of scholarly research and discourse which exploit the opportunities offered by digital resources and methods. It is about building different types of scholarly connection, exploring questions that we couldn’t previously investigate, and transforming the way we practice the arts and humanities.”

PROFESSOR ANDREW PRESCOTT CHAIR OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES, KING’S COLLEGE LONDON
AHRC Themes

The AHRC’s Themes provide a funding focus for emerging areas of interest to arts and humanities researchers. In recognising that interdisciplinary and collaborative research often requires particular forms of support to develop its full potential, themed funding calls can be particularly supportive of developmental activity, partnership-based activities and innovative approaches.

The Themes were identified through widespread consultation. This indicated support for a number of research areas that were likely to shape or change aspects of multiple research fields over future years. These areas have been grouped under our four themes:

- Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past
- Digital Transformations in the Arts and Humanities
- Science in Culture
- Translating Cultures

In order to keep academic involvement at the forefront of the refinement of the themes, advisory groups were established for each and the members of these groups, alongside individual Theme Leadership Fellows, assist with the co-ordination and future development of the AHRC themes. Our commitment to the AHRC’s themes was outlined in the Delivery Plan 2011-15 and the AHRC Strategy 2013-2018.