

IN THIS ISSUE

Digital history has been a focus of our journal on many occasions since its inception, whether with regard to the history of computerisation itself, or in terms of theory, methodology and applications in the form of approaches that now go by the name of ›digital humanities‹ or specifically ›digital history‹. These two research perspectives need not necessarily be linked, but they can be very complementary in that knowledge about earlier phases of computerisation enriches our reflections today on phenomena of a digital society and of digital history. Both levels are therefore reflected in the present issue.

Michael Homberg explores the beginnings of electronic matchmaking, which date back to the 1950s – long before the age of the internet. The experiments conducted with the supercomputer as an ›electronic cupid‹, initially for fun, but soon commercially as well, have occasioned a number of bizarre and unlikely incidents. For historians today, however, they have an additional, analytical significance: Technology-aided matchmaking with its widely discussed pros and cons brought experiences with computers and algorithms into the everyday lives of countless individuals, even if they were not yet able to operate these ›electronic brains‹ themselves.

Things have changed. It has long been standard practice for people to carry out the bulk of all private and professional tasks from their home computers, and archival and source-based contemporary history research benefit from this as well. Nevertheless, historical scholarship is still more reliant than other disciplines on a combination of digital and analogue practices, not least because most of the source material is not available digitally, nor will it become so in the foreseeable future. But a lot has happened in the archives, too, with digital access being expanded at a formidable pace and numerous sources already emerging digitally in the first place – requiring new methodological and theoretical approaches. To strengthen the conversation between archives and contemporary history research, *Frank M. Bischoff* and *Kiran Klaus Patel* have mapped out a debate for the ›Sources‹ section in this issue that takes stock of the current situation and identifies desiderata for further groundwork in the field of digital source studies and digital hermeneutics. This can of course be only preliminary, and should also be understood as food for thought for future contributions.

The coronavirus pandemic, the subject that has dominated in recent months and cannot be entirely avoided here either, has undoubtedly given the digitalisation of communication among scholars and of the research itself a further push. It has also underscored just how many social and academic practices have long been organised digitally already – something that is now proving advantageous. And so Jürgen Kocka's thesis sounds plausible: ›If we try to look at the bigger picture and take a long-term perspective, it is evident that the crisis acts above all as an engine of acceleration. It intensifies and accelerates processes that have long been underway. At least in certain areas.‹¹

1 Jürgen Kocka, Motor der Beschleunigung, in: *Tagesspiegel*, 17 May 2020, p. 5.

This is certainly no straightforward story of progress or success. Direct social interaction unmediated by technology in libraries and other loci of the knowledge society is at risk of falling by the wayside. More than ever, the enormous dependencies on such things as a stable power supply and internet connection are clear. But this is nothing new either, and historians may generally be more cautious than some sociologists who have been quick to proclaim ›a world-historical watershed‹.² Perhaps of greater interest than this kind of somewhat offhand *Zeitdiagnose*, are ideas such as the public history approach of setting out specifically to document experiences of the current pandemic in order to create the foundations for its subsequent historicisation. This can in turn create or strengthen opportunities for cooperation between historians, archives and museums.³

For the rest, and with all due sensitivity to contemporary phenomena, historians would do well to continue to follow their own research rhythms and pursue multiple research interests in order to avoid a narrow, monothematic focus. In this spirit, the present issue again covers a broad spectrum: from the social science ›lessons‹ of the American saturation bombing campaigns in the Second World War (*Sophia Dafinger*) and West Germany's dealings with the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s (*Felix A. Jiménez Botta*) to the astonishingly long history of tax-deductible foreign corruption on the part of West German companies (*Hartmut Berghoff*). The essay section is devoted to two fundamental science policy questions, neither of which is limited to contemporary history: How is the trend towards quantitative performance indicators (like external funding quotas) impacting historical scholarship in intended and unintended ways (*Constantin Goshler*)? What is the origin of the now so popular term ›diversity‹, how has its meaning changed over time, and what are the blind spots of this amalgam of biological and sociocultural elements (*Georg Toepfer*)? Finally, *Monika Dommann* and *Henning Tümmers* look at works by Sigfried Giedion and Robert Jay Lifton in the ›Literature Revisited‹ section. There is much still to be learned from Giedion's book *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948) in particular, in form and content alike. While Giedion could not have anticipated the digital age, his genealogy of mechanisation and automation hones our critical awareness of the present as well.

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(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)

2 ›Verwundbarkeit macht solidarisch‹, in: *Tagesspiegel*, 21 April 2020, p. 19 (interview with Heinz Bude).

3 <<https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de>>; <<https://covidmemory.lu>>; and Katharina Rustler, Museen sammeln zu Corona: Der Ausnahmezustand als Erinnerung, in: *Standard*, 21 April 2020.