

Remembering Stéfan Sinclair

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Abstract

An obituary and remembrance of Stéfan Sinclair, one of the founding editorial team for Digital Humanities Quarterly.

Remembering Stéfan Sinclair

With great sadness and affection, the DHQ team remembers Stéfan Sinclair, who passed away on August 6, 2020 after a long illness. Stéfan was a treasured colleague and friend, and his many contributions to the digital humanities community include key tools like Voyant and BonPatron, infrastructure like TAPoR, long-time professional service to the Association for Computers and the Humanities and the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, and good ideas that were never realized, such as a journal devoted to critical tool reviews. A full obituary can be found at the CSDH-SCHN site.

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Figure 1. Stéfan at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute, University of Victoria, 2010. © 2010 Syd Bauman, available via CC BY-SA 4.0

Stéfan was a member of DHQ's founding editorial team in 2005, and remained an energetic, thoughtful, and generous contributor to the journal until his death. A review of the journal's early development discussions shows him by turns supportive, enthusiastic, engaged, ingenious, diplomatic, and deeply hands-on with things as varied as setting up a wiki space, planning out a DHQ blog, providing useful advice on server arrangements, and advising on journal indexing services. He was passionate about multilingualism and encouraged us to be ambitious even long before we had the capacity to act on his ideas. And he was deeply supportive of early career scholars, and eager to engage new voices in DHQ activities. His deeply collaborative scholarship is evident in his various DHQ publications, all of them co-authored: "Introducing DREaM (Distant Reading Early Modernity)"; "Visualizing Theatrical Text: From Watching the Script to the Simulated Environment for Theatre (SET)"; "Designing Data Mining Droplets: New Interface Objects for the Humanities Scholar"; "Tremendous Mechanical Labor: Father Busa's Algorithm"; and "Anatomy of Tools", forthcoming in the DHQ special issue on Tools Criticism.

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On the whimsical side, Stéfan was a key contributor to DHQ's April Fool's Day prank in 2014, in which we substituted Voyant word cloud visualizations for the text of all DHQ articles, and posted an announcement that "DHQ will no longer publish scholarly articles in verbal form. Instead, articles will be processed through Voyant Tools and summarized as a set of visualizations which will be published as a surrogate for the article." Characteristically, he also anticipated the need to support serious use of DHQ, even on April 1, and devised a clever way to stage the joke and also offer access to the full article text so that no one was inconvenienced by our foolishness.

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Figure 2. Stéfan's tweet on April 1, 2014

Responses from the digital humanities community were satisfyingly irate, and then appreciative. And the experiment also showed how well and how sociably Stéfan had built Voyant: it was wonderfully simple to retrieve the word clouds from the Voyant API and embed them in the DHQ interface.

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We will remember Stéfan with deep fondness in all of our future work on DHQ.

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Works Cited