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# THIS IS FINE

## A NOTE FROM YOUR EDITOR

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Spencer D. C. Keralis



Figure 1: the first two panels of KC Green’s comic “On Fire.” (Fair Use)

I don’t think any reasonable person would dismiss the idea that the past few years have been traumatic. The list of personal and collective traumas we have suffered - and continue to suffer - is not brief: the *ongoing* psychic, political, and physical violence of the Trump presidency and its aftermath; the *ongoing* healthcare crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant disruptions to our work and home lives; the willful resistance to vaccinations and simple contagion mitigation strategies like masking and social distancing that puts the immune compromised and disabled at increasing risk of infection and death; the *ongoing* and ever increasing violence against people of color, and especially against Black people, migrants, and transgender women of color perpetrated by citizens and police alike; the *ongoing* climate crisis and the increasing likelihood that world leaders, industry and, if we’re honest, the rest of us, are not going to do a goddamned thing while the world burns; and - perhaps most trivial in this list of horrors, but deeply personal to many of us - the culture of anti-intellectualism and disdain for expertise that, coupled with an already catastrophic academic job market, can make living a life of the mind feel like a dangerous choice. It’s no wonder that the first two panels of KC Green’s *Gunshow* comic, “The pills are working,” or “On Fire,” rapidly became a meme. First



published in January of 2013 in response to the author's struggles "with myself — with getting my anti-depressants and stuff right," the meme has become emblematic of how we struggle to keep our shit together while things are falling apart around us (Plante 2016). The disruptions of the pandemic are one of the reasons this Proceedings is wildly, unconscionably late. It's a reason, but not an excuse, and I do apologize to the contributors for the delay.

*Digital Frontiers 2019: Tear Down the Walls* took place September 26-28, 2019, just a few months before the world shut down in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Traveling to Austin for the conference was the last time many of us attended a professional gathering in person for several years, for some of us it may be the *last* time we attended a professional gathering. But even before the pandemic struck, DF's leadership knew that this would be our last conference under the Digital Frontiers brand. Hosting in person events had become increasingly unsustainable. Our commitment to keeping the conference low cost to enable student, independent, and early career scholars to participate meant that we had to rely increasingly on host institutions and external sponsors to fund the events, and that simply wasn't working out. DF has always been a labor of love created by a very few people, and while many have expressed their appreciation for the benefit they received, very few individuals actively contributed to the behind the scenes labor of making the events what they were. And by 2019 we weren't certain what was next, but we knew that Digital Frontiers as an in-person event was finished.

While the pandemic meant the end for Digital Frontiers, it did not mean that the community, especially that core group of collaborators - y'all know who you are - stood still. In the spirit of minimal computing and rapid response prototyping that has animated the best digital scholarship in recent years, we recognized the need for conferences to quickly move online and provide models of engagement that mimic, if not replace, the sociality and community of the in-person event. We organized the *Flyover Comics Symposium* to fill the gap left by the cancellation of comics studies conferences that were unable to pivot to online. This was followed by *Realizing Resistance Episode II: Uncharted Galaxies* in 2021, and *DH+BH: An Interdisciplinary Conference on Digital Humanities and Book History* in 2022.

We learned to use Zoom instead of conference rooms, and Slack and Discord replaced the hallways, pubs, and park benches where folks could gather between sessions to chat and kick back. I still see new posts popping up in the RRII Slack channel more than a year after the conference. Virtual happy hours with comics and *Star Wars* themed cosplay replaced receptions, and nobody had to travel, pay out of pocket for food or hotels, navigate campus parking, or deal with inaccessible conference spaces. And we were joined by students, scholars, librarians, and technologists from all over the world who wouldn't have been able to make the trip to Austin, or Dallas, or Houston. Some participated asynchronously, and some stayed up til the wee hours in their time zone to join the conversations. We've come to believe that the only ethical, affordable, sustainable, and accessible way to gather now is online, and I for one don't plan to organize another in-person event if I can possibly avoid it.

Digital Frontiers is now a thing of the past. The windows are shuttered and there are tumbleweeds on mainstreet. But the community that emerged from those gatherings is alive and well despite the tumult of the past few years, and in the face of the tumult we'll no doubt continue to confront. For 9 years Digital Frontiers brought together “the makers and users of digital resources for humanities research, teaching, and scholarly communication,” and the proceedings collected here are a fitting epitaph for that vision, and that truly is fine.

In addition to the proceedings, this issue also features provocative new work by video game scholar Joshua Jackson, a model for digital outreach by scholar librarian J. J. Pionke, and a book review by rare books librarian Cait Coker - work that adumbrates the future of this journal as a project of the new Digital Cultural Studies Cooperative, even as the proceedings reflect its brief past under Digital Frontiers. As John Martin and I write elsewhere, “*Unbound* is, and perhaps always will be, a work in progress,” but the evolving nature of the journal “will reflect the diversity of our community, and allow for growth and evolution over time as we learn and strive together” (Keralis and Martin, 2023).

## Works Cited

Green, KC. “On Fire” or “The pills are working.” *Gunshow*. January 9, 2013.

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