# Multimedia

## Review Editor's Note

In the 1960s, the term *multimedia* was coined to describe works combining visual imagery with sound and text. Three decades later, it acquired a more specific and enduring meaning, referring to works produced initially on CD-ROM and then on the World Wide Web. The first multimedia reviews in *JSAH*, starting with the September 2005 issue, primarily examined films, in line with the earlier usage of the term. In five short years, however, the scope of *JSAH* multimedia reviews grew to include software tools, podcasts, social media applications, and databases. What remained constant was the assumption that multimedia reviews were distinguished from other reviews in this journal according to the substrate or medium of the work being reviewed: book reviews examined works on paper (whether physical or virtual), and multimedia reviews were concerned with works on screens. If this principle aligned nicely with the materialist leaning in media studies over the past two decades, it excluded more operative or interpretive uses of the term *multimedia*. With Theodora Vardouli's review of Roberto Bottazzi's book

*Digital Architecture beyond Computers*, we introduce a new thread to the discussion of multimedia in *JSAH*, one in which the term no longer refers strictly to a work's medium but encompasses also its subject matter, working method, conceptual framework, and formal organization.

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Roberto Bottazzi
### Digital Architecture beyond Computers: Fragments of a Cultural History of Computational Design
London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018, 256 pp., 21 b/w illus. $88 (cloth), ISBN 9781474258135

In his afterword to Roberto Bottazzi's new contribution to a growing body of scholarship on the histories and genealogies of digital practices in architecture, Frédéric Migayrou identifies a historiographic conundrum. "How to elaborate the limits of a critical history of digital architecture," Migayrou asks, "where the limits have not yet been established or well defined?" (207).[1] In other words, how does one simultaneously construct and critique a field? One possible response to Migayrou's challenge is offered by the Canadian Centre for Architecture's Archaeology of the Digital research project (begun in 2013). In what the CCA calls "a *Tristram Shandy* of the digital," the absence of limits and definitions encourages proliferation and digression, which are to be embraced as positive qualities rather than domesticated through taxonomic delimitation.[2] In *Digital Architecture*

*beyond Computers*, Bottazzi offers a different response. While scholarship on digital architecture has so far focused largely on uses of commercial or custom computer programs in contexts of architectural production, Bottazzi invites us to see computers not as closed technological instruments but as the most current manifestation of modes of thought and cultural practices that go back centuries.[3] Using an abundant collection of historic examples, Bottazzi traces theoretical tropes and practices that have informed contemporary computer applications for architecture and prefigured their uses. This refreshing approach brings to mind the Instruments research project of the Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative, which seeks to identify the technical preconditions of contemporary thought and praxis, as well as media theorist Bernhard Siegert's notion of cultural techniques, which "highlight the operations or sequences of operations that historically and logically precede the media concepts generated by them."[4]

Bottazzi's method is boldly interpretive, a fact reflected in the book's organization. For the titles of its eight chapters, Bottazzi borrows common computer-related technical terms—database, morphing, networks, parametrics, pixel, random, scanning, and voxels and maxels—which he places at the nexus of cultural meanings and material practices. The book's chapters form a set of discrete topics organized into two larger themes: descriptions of form (addressed in "Morphing," "Pixel," "Scanning," and "Voxels and