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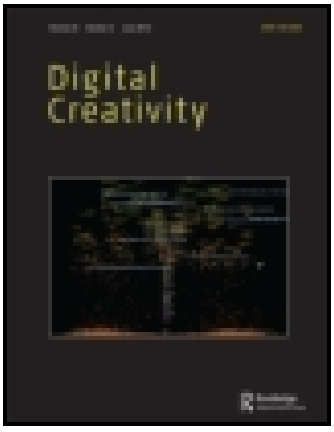


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# Collaboration and Community: Foreword

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# Collaboration and Community: Foreword

**Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola[a], Ernest Edmonds[b,c] and Lone Malmborg[d]**

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The journal *Digital Creativity* was founded in 1989 (as *Intelligent Tutoring Media*, in the spirit of the 1990s). Colin Beardon, to whom this issue is dedicated, was the founding force of the journal and its peer community, serving as editor from Volume 1 (1989) through Volume 18 (2007). Eighteen years is a long period in the field of new media and digital creativity, and as good length of time as any to pay a well-earned personal[1] and communal tribute to Colin.

During his editorship Colin established a very high standard for the content of the journal by managing a strict peer refereed process supported by the editorial advisory board. He developed *Digital Creativity* from being a UK-based journal to become a well-reputed international journal published by one of the strongest scientific publishers in the academic environment.

Colin Beardon himself is an incarnation of the focus of the journal as he has worked in the field between digital technologies, art and design for many years. Originally trained as a classic computer scientist working in the area of artificial intelligence, he started moving into art and applications of digital technology in art during the 1990s. Through his own interests in the field and his own artistic development he inspired the journal to keep improving and keeping its position as the most relevant journal for academics and practitioners in the field spanning between art, design and digital technology. In a review of *Digital Creativity* published in *Leonardo* (Spielmann 2001) it was stated that 'many artists evidently kept the fires of creativity burning by publishing in the journal Digital Creativity'. We are grateful to Colin for having put all his fires of creativity and his huge knowledge of the field into making *Digital Creativity* this very unique journal.

This special issue focuses on collaboration and community to celebrate Colin's passion and participation in the field of digital creativity and other communities, and his spirit of collaboration across disciplines and borders.

Jo Briggs opens the issue by case studies of community-engaged digital production in a particular socio-political context in Northern Ireland. He maps the forms and results of collaboration between artists, academics, funding bodies, other stakeholders and the local community. With healthy scepticism on the actual impact of the digital heritage and storytelling production for communities' cohesion, Briggs' investigation of situated cultural practices creates a larger context of the cultures and politics of collaboration, through which we hope that the readers of this issue examine also all the other articles.

The next three articles study digitally enhanced and/or mediated urban environment as a platform for community and collaboration. After a captivatingly described investigation of public park activities in Asia, Liselott Brunnberg and Alberto Frigo introduce the funfair design metaphor for

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placemaking by mobile devices in urban environments. Yutaro Ohashi, Pihla Meskanen et al. report a study of children's collective media production on the city of Helsinki. The artists' statement by Andy Best-Dunkley and Merja Puustinen questions the power politics of urban architecture. After art historical and socio-political contextualisation of their participatory media art work *RE/F/r.ACE* under development, they return to the same essentials of collaboration and community than Briggs: digital technology itself has very little to do with social cohesion/alienation, while 'the answer is rather embedded into the long tradition of humanism: appreciation of social communities and relationships, and recognising the unique sense of subjectivity in the Other—in strangers and ourselves'. The final technical article by Pujan Ziaie and Helmut Krcmar investigates how this appreciation may be communicated in a design framework for online community reputation systems.

In 2000, Colin wrote:

> the future direction of a technology might be well informed by an appreciation of some of the more fundamental concerns of the artistic world. At a technical level, computers are a product of late modernism … but they are now becoming so complex that the meanings that they produce can no longer be understood within this paradigm … The meanings behind the range of representational systems that have been considered then become a real issue for the future of computing. *(Beardon 2000, p. 358)*

The articles in this special issue of *Digital Creativity* contribute towards the matter that Colin identified. They are therefore important within the field of *Digital Creativity* but also have a far wider implication for the future development of the technologies that they refer to. These future developments will undoubtedly owe a debt to the legacy that Colin Beardon has and is providing.

Finally, Colin, we hope that you enjoy this special issue, dedicated to you. We look forward to good talks about it, over the dinner table, a cup of tea or online using one of the growing number of tools that support collaboration and community exchange.

## Note

[1] In remembrance of creating metadata based on the countless extended footnotes made on *Hamlet* (Shakespeare 2006), when delivering the project HaMLET (Multimedia Learning Environment for Theatre and film) with Colin in the early 1990s, and as a fan of Danielewski's (2000) *House of Leaves*, Mika wants to deliver this lengthy personal footnote of the past: at the time of HaMLET, I worked as an assistant for theatre director Jotaarkka Pennanen, a Finnish pioneer in multimedia and interactive drama, in the Theatre Academy of Finland. There—in my twenties, very greenly indeed—I coordinated the European research project HaMLET. Colin and the University of Brighton, where he was then employed, joined the project with the research and development of the stage design sketching tool Visual Assistant. Colin's multidisciplinary experience, expertise and creativity—and wisdom, which for me signifies the rare and beautiful union of acute intellect and compassion of a living creature towards others of his kind, and the Others—were essential in carrying the project through successfully. I wrote, or rather learned to write, my first academic publications with Colin and have always owned gratitude to him for that fact and the entire process we were involved in after the very first encounters.

Then, and more and more in the following years, I feel that Colin became both my mentor and friend. I didn't make many decisions concerning my projects and formal education in the Media Lab Helsinki of the University of Art and Design (now the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture) in the mid-90s without consulting Colin.

From various occasions in Brighton and Plymouth, where I joined the first dinner at Colin's and his wife Christine's home, in Helsinki and Malmö (and I don't remember where else in Europe), I most distinctly recollect Colin's warm and serene presence and the calm thoughtfulness of a ruminating scholar. He always enjoyed playing the devil's advocate in order to improve upon my thinking. 'Interface' may just be a concept used to falsely place blame on a complex and inseparable part of human-computer systems design. Realistic representation by visualisation software is ineffectual, as it adds cognitively next to nothing to how we already perceive reality. 'Virtual' is, virtually, non-existent by definition—why do we use it in describing online worlds and communities, the actions and relationships of which are real?

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After Colin's 'retirement'—I hear from New Zealand that he is a relentless community activist e.g. in the Artworks Community Theatre and the nature preservation of Waiheke Island—we have not met each other face to face. I frequently miss his and Christine's company, and Colin's views and advice. Despite the current geographical distance and long-term absence, my thoughts have allowed me a sense of Colin's presence: I've always been able to consult his wisdom in imagined dialogues and by reading his writings. I owe you, Colin, as a projection of my mind as well as yourself.

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**Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola** is the founder and director of Crucible Studio, the new media storytelling research group at the Media Lab Helsinki of the Department of Media, Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, where he teaches generative and interactive narratives and participatory drama. As an internationally awarded writer, dramaturge and director, his productions include the web drama 'Daisy's Amazing Discoveries' (1996), moving image installations 'Myths for One' (2002) and 'Alan01' (2008), avatar and game world designs for Fujitsu's 'WorldsAway' (2000) and the dark musical comedy series 'Accidental Lovers' ('Sydän kierroksella', 2006) for television and mobile devices. He's in the editorial advisory board of the *Digital Creativity* journal, a founding member of m-cult, the Finnish association of media culture, and an affiliated member and visiting artist of the Digital Studio for Research in Design, Visualisation and Communication, University of Cambridge, UK. Lumi would not be in the field without Jotaarkka Pennanen and Colin Beardon.

**Ernest Edmonds** is founder of the Creativity and Cognition Studios at the University of Technology, Sydney, where he is Professor of Computation and Creative Media. He is also Professor of Computational Arts at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. Ernest co-founded the ACM Creativity and Cognition conference series and has published widely on human-computer interaction, creativity and art. He co-edited his most recent book with Linda Candy: *Interacting: Art, Research and the Creative Practitioner* (Libri Press). As an artist, he has used computers since 1968 and has exhibited and performed in very many countries, including the UK, USA, Germany, Belgium, Australia and Russia. His work can be seen on the web sites of DAM in Berlin and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**Lone Malmborg** is an Associate Professor of interaction design at IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She is a member the Interaction Design Research group. Before joining ITU, she has developed and headed a study program in interaction design at Malmö University, Arts and Communication, Sweden and has established and headed the research group Creative Environment at the same university. Her main research interests are in areas like interaction design, kinaesthetic interaction, phenomenology, design methodology and design for senior citizens' social interaction. She has been a co-editor of *Digital Creativity* since 1998.