Introduction

Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age: Text and Beyond

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The INKE Research Group comprises over 35 researchers (and their research assistants and postdoctoral fellows) at more than 20 universities in Canada, England, the United States, and Ireland, and across 20 partners in the public and private sectors. INKE is a large-scale, long-term, interdisciplinary project to study the future of books and reading, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada as well as contributions from participating universities and partners, and bringing together activities associated with book history and textual scholarship; user experience studies; interface design; and prototyping of digital reading environments.

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Implementing New Knowledge Environment's (INKE's) third "Birds of a Feather" gathering took place in Kyoto on November 18, 2011. Sponsored by the Japanese Association for Digital Humanities, the Digital Humanities Center for Japanese Arts and Cultures at Ritsumeikan University, and the Social Science and Research Council of Canada, *Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age: Text and Beyond* provided a unique opportunity for scholars from 15 institutions and two continents to re-envision the role of the text in the digital age. Digital technology is fundamentally altering the way scholars and the public relate to writing, reading, and the human record itself. The pace of that change has created a gap between core social and cultural practices that depend on stable reading and writing environments and the new kinds of digital artifacts – electronic books being just one type of many – that must sustain those practices now and into the future. The articles in this issue are drawn from the conference proceedings, but have been edited in response to one another to produce an integrated, yet multivocal, perspective on the future of local, national, and international textual cultures in a digital age.

About INKE

More than half of all people living in developed countries make use of computers and the Internet to access textual material and indeed, the next generation of adults already recognizes the electronic medium as their chief source of textual information. Knowledge repositories increasingly favour digital products over the print resources that have been their mainstay for centuries. Those professionals who produce and convey textual information are faced with the challenge of making such information available electronically in ways that meet the standards of quality, content, and functionality that have evolved over half a millennium of print publication. Given the rapid changes in knowledge production and dissemination in the digital realm, INKE seeks to understand what becomes of the human cultural record as it intersects with the computer. The project began in 2004–2005 as Human-Computer Interface and the Electronic Book (HCI-Book), a Strategic Research Cluster supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) shortly thereafter. INKE is directed by Ray Siemens (University of Victoria) and its work in 2012–2013 is led by Siemens, Richard Cunningham (Acadia University), Stan Ruecker (IIT Institute of Design), Lynne Siemens (University of Victoria), Jon Bath (University of Saskatchewan), and Jon Saklofske (Acadia University).

New interfaces for the research environment

Interface design is one of the most pressing issues in the future of the scholarly edition. As **Jon Bath** and **Craig Harkema** argue in "There's More Than One Way to Skin a Book: Experimental Interfaces for Reading Illustrated Books," humanists must historicize printing and publishing practices in order to best understand how commonplace assumptions about reading were shaped by specific political circumstances and particular reading environments. Taking Eric Gill's work at the Golden Cockerel Press as a case study, they show how new reading interfaces can engage the public and private distinctions manifest in texts, permit genre specific reading by drawing out images or texts alone, or enable a pattern recognition across the text at a glance. This combination of distant and close reading practices animates new interface design. As **Stan Ruecker** and his colleagues demonstrate in "The Beginning, the Middle, and the End: New Tools for the Scholarly Edition," and

Brent Nelson stresses with his in-depth analysis on the history and future of tables of contents, "A Short History and Demonstration of the Dynamic Table of Contexts," the digital environment offers new ways of ordering and therefore encountering textual content. Answering the imperative to study the relationship between design, knowledge, and audience, Geoffrey Rockwell and his team survey the analytical frameworks that have shaped some of INKE's work at the University of Alberta in "The Face of Interface: Studying Interface to the Scholarly Corpus and Edition." They argue that the designer must help the user navigate the excess of information that can be generated by computational analiyisis of linguistic, artifactual, and literary corpora. Responding to this scholarly abundance in "Fluid Layering: Reimagining Digital Literary Archives through Dynamic, User-Generated Content," Jon Saklofske suggests that the digital archive should be reconceived as an information commons, one that facilitates critical conversations through multiple access points to archival material. Drawing on the NewRadial interface that he designed for the *William Blake Archive* data set, Saklofske argues that the archive can become a space for productive playful textual scholarship. Digital research environments, from the e-book to the digital archive, invite scholars to design interfaces that meet, and indeed challenge, scholarly reading and research practices.

Engaging online knowledge communities

Interfaces both engage and shape the practices of the research communities they serve. The hurdles of representing a community's scholarly activity back to itself in an informationally rich but visually simple form are manifold; Susan Brown's "From CRUD to CREAM: Imagining a Rich Scholarly Repository Interface" reports on the challenge of representing scholarly practices through a repository interface. Addressing the issue of representing multiple knowledge communities, in "The Social Edition in Social Conditions: Editing the Devonshire Manuscript" Constance Crompton and Ray Siemens explore how social media can facilitate communication across communities. The role of the scholarly editor, they suggest, should shift from a position of sole authority on the text to a facilitator who brings traditional and citizen scholars into collaboration through ongoing editorial conversation. Drawing on the digital edition of the Devonshire Manuscript, they argue that scholars ought to, and can, productively engage with new online knowledge communities represented by Wikipedia and Wikibooks. Picking up on this theme, Christian Vandendorpe's[1] "Wikisource and the Scholarly Book" considers the Wikimedia Foundation's affordances and, in particular, the scholarly potential of Wikisource. The codex form allowed for a particular type of textual circulation, but, Christian Wittern argues, scholars need to harness new models to circulate and collaborate on textual production. In "Toward an Architecture for Active Reading" he explores how scholars might comment on, annotate, translate, and otherwise enhance already encoded texts using Distributed Version Control Systems, or subversion repositories such as `Git`. Situating INKE's research within a community collaboration model, Lynne Siemens' "'Firing on all cylinders': Progress and Transition in INKE's Year 2" reflects on interdisciplinary team research strategies pertinent to Digital Humanities work. Each of these articles engages new platforms and software applications' potential to foster collaborative reading and annotating practices.

Objects, codes, and digital representation

Digital Humanities research environments bring digital objects and their analogue referents together to facilitate new scholarly insight. Digital research environments call scholars to reflect on how to responsibly aggregate and juxtapose digital objects. Troubling the distinction between representation and design, **Harvey Quamen's** "The Limits of Modelling: Data Culture and the Humanities" sketches some of the boundaries of modelling text and producing digital objects. Exploring South East Asian and Islamic art, **Hussein Keshani** shows how visual culture's analysis of space, form, and image can inform our articulation of the relationship between digital and material worlds in his article "Reading Visually: Can Art Historical Reading Approaches go Digital?" **Daniel Paul O'Donnell's** "Move Over: Learning to Read (and Write) with Novel Technology" outlines how technological innovation shapes readers' expectations and comprehension of digital objects and their historical referents. Destabilizing the historical referent itself, **Emile Fromet de Rosnay** demonstrates how the instability inherent in text manifests in the Digital Humanities. Through a visualization of French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's works, he explores commonplace assumptions about how the printed word ought to be looked at, listened to, or read. Drawing readers into a critical analysis of the digitization process, **Takaaki Kaneko** discusses the best methods for representing nineteenth-century Japanese wood blocks in "Digital Archiving Printing Blocks and Establishing Woodblock Bibliography." **Corina Koolen**, **Alex Garnett**, and **Ray Siemens** conclude the issue with an overview of extant digital reading devices, "Electronic Environments for Reading: An Annotated Bibliography of Pertinent Hardware and Software (2011)."

The articles in this issue explore the research foundations relevant to understanding new practices and emerging media, specifically focusing on work in textual and extra-textual method, in itself and via exemplar. The articles share a common goal of creating new knowledge through the reflective production and maintenance of digital research environments and the communities that support them. As always, the discussion continues. Extending the conversation beyond the "Birds of a Feather" gathering in Kyoto, this issue of *Scholarly and Research Communication* furthers INKE's aim, broadly conceived, to "understand the nature of the human record as it intersects with the computer" (Implementing New Knowledge Environments, 2012).

Note

1. INKE Researcher or associate.

Reference

Implementing New Knowledge Environments. (2012). *About*. URL: http://www.inke.ca/projects/about [July 17, 2012].