Introduction, Cuba Conference: Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age: E/Merging Reading, Writing, and Research Practices

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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, 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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The fourth of the Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) "Birds of a Feather" gatherings took place between December 11 and 14, 2012, and included Cuban academic site visits to the National Library and the Casa de las Américas, one of the most preeminent publishers in Latin America. In addition to exploring opportunities for partnership and collaboration in the Americas through unconference discussions, at the conference, the group shared work centred around the digital scholarly edition through the Birds of a Feather structured presentation and discussion.

Sponsored by the international Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), the annual INKE gathering took place allied with activities of the Canadian Society for Digital Humanities (CSDH/SCHN), THATCamp Caribe EcuRed, Red de Humanidades Digitales (RedHD), as well as the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), and was presented in partnership with the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH). "Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age: E/Merging Reading, Writing, and Research Practices" provided a unique opportunity for scholars from 16 institutions and three continents to envision cross-cultural models for scholarly reading, writing, and research across various digital contexts. A selection of the following articles that were presented at the conference (those in bold) are featured in this issue of *Scholarly Research and Communication*. The articles are drawn from the conference proceedings, but have been edited in response to one another to produce a multiperspectival response to reading, writing, and researching in local, national, and international contexts in a shared digital age.

About INKE

INKE is an interdisciplinary initiative based in the digital humanities that seeks to understand the future of reading through reading's past and to explore the future of the book from the perspective of its history. 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 is led by Siemens, Stan Ruecker (IIT Institute of Design), Lynne Siemens (University of Victoria), Jon Bath (University of Saskatchewan), and Jon Saklofske (Acadia University).

De frente al saber electronico

The conference opened with a plenary address, published here in both Spanish and English, by **Victor Fowler** of Cubarte, Cuba's online arts gateway. "Lectura y tecnología: futuros probables" / "Reading and Technology: Probable Futures" introduces the "living effect" of books, placing hypertext at the center of a new reading practice that lets readers and cultural critics answer the question, "Where do you come from?" Yasmin Silvia Portales Machado shared research on women's blogging culture in Cuba, a culture that, she argued, is not overtly feminist, but still addresses issues of women's substantive equality. Tito Díaz Bravo of the Centro de Innovación y Calidad de la

Educación de la Universidad de Ciencias Informáticas, outlined the importance of Moodle in computer science education in Cuba, with a focus on Cuban-Canadian educational partnerships. Most significantly, as Pablo Rigal of Cubaliteraria argued, the opportunities for international collaboration must be approached with an understanding of local conditions in all partner nations.

Reading and writing communities

Expanding the reach of humanities knowledge in a digital context while engaging knowledge communities in their specific and local contexts has always been at the heart of INKE's research. In this issue of *Scholarly and Research Communication,* **Constance Crompton**, and **Ray Siemens** report on situated reading practices and the meaning that accretes over time to (broadly defined) legible objects, from religious relics to broadsides to manuscripts. Reporting on situated production processes, Tom Abba argues that the digital is a not a market, as publishers would often have it, but a platform. **Sol Gaitán** picks up this thread in a longitudinal study of cross-platform edition production with high school student editors, suggesting that the future of editing might encourage editors to turn to the production of social film.

Engaging national and international reading and writing communities often requires large-scale infrastructure projects supported by collaborative funding models, as Laurie N. Taylor, Margarita Vargas-Betancourt, and Brooke Wooldridge demonstrate with their introduction to the Digital Library of the Caribbean. Reflecting on the careful, contextual planning required for these models, Alex Gil calls for quick-loading plain text versions of digital works. Local contexts extend beyond the digital, as evident in **Corey Slumkoski's** suggestion of institutional partnerships that could revitalize Atlantic Canadian digital history.

Algorithmic reading and new reading environments

We are entering, one might say, the age of reading machines, or at very least an age of computational tools that allow scholars to "read" large corpuses at a single sitting. Scholars may quite easily visualize a large corpus, but, as **Lauren Klein** and **Jacob Eisenstein** argue, visualizations are not a terminal point for scholarship, but instead evoke new questions whose answers require a sound humanist knowledge base. The visual literacy required to decode visualizations must be brought to bear on the questions of interface design. As **Brent Nelson** and his team demonstrate, interface can stand between humanist scholars and their capacity to decode or navigate a text. In addition to visual literacy, humanist knowledge is well served by computational literacy; **Quinn DuPont** argues that computational processes of encryption that ignore encryption's historical roots and reliance on techniques of anagram, acrostic, and other "combinatoric" rhetorics tend to suggest that encryption deforms text, when, instead, encryption can increase textual understanding. **Jon Saklofske** and **Jake Bruce's** visualizations take readers beyond browsing – or indeed reading – by drawing on the visual literacies that help produce meaning in a NewRadial-facilitated edition. Editions and their readers benefit from an expanded tool set, as **Stéfan Sinclair** and **Stan Ruecker** demonstrate. These algorithmic and code-based reading environments push the limits of the codex form. In the future, the digital book may be more like a comprehensive research environment, thus fulfilling the earliest visions of the Web and offering primary texts, glosses, annotations, and secondary scholarship in a unified

environment, as **Malte Rehbein** and **Hans Gabler** outlines. Neil Fraistat suggests, however, that electronic tools for reading are not without pitfalls for those who are hoping to "read at scale" across large corpora.

The articles in this issue share a common goal of creating new knowledge through the reflective production and maintenance of digital research environments and the local, national, and international communities that support them. In keeping with this overarching mandate, **Lynne Siemens** concludes this special issue with a review of the INKE Research Group's process at the end of its current year. Indeed that process is shaped by the fundamental ways that digital technology is altering scholars' and the public's relationship to writing, reading, and the human record itself. The articles here serve as a record of INKE's current direction and of the new ideas contributed by colleagues, collaborators, and partners in our investigation of the evolution of the book form. We hope the selected articles published here will extend the conversation to include the readers of this volume in the discussion of the E/Merging Reading, Writing, and Research Practices of the humanities' future.