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

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*The Implementing New Knowledge Environments (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.*

The Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) research team gathered with colleagues and collaborators in September of 2013 for the fifth INKE Birds of a Feather conference: “Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age New York: E/Merging Reading, Writing, and Research Practices.” The two-day gathering held at the New York University (NYU) Humanities Initiative in Cooper Square, was marked by lively scholarship and engaging conversation on the future of the book. The group’s collective investigations on topics ranging from interface design to collaboration to modelling and prototyping was sponsored by the NYU Humanities Initiative, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

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## 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. The rhetoric, reach, and reading practices of textual studies professionals, defined broadly, have all changed with the advent of computing. Close and distant reading habits – facilitated by personal and high-performance computing (and everything in between) – and the human notions that pass through computational devices are at the heart of INKE's inquiries into the best ways to preserve the quality, authority, and functionality of the human record in electronic form. The INKE project grew out of Human-Computer Interface and the Electronic Book (HCI-Book), a Strategic Research Cluster supported by SSHRC. Ray Siemens (University of Victoria) directs INKE, and Siemens, Stan Ruecker (Illinois Institute of Technology Institute of Design), Lynne Siemens (University of Victoria), Jon Bath (University of Saskatchewan), and Jon Saklofske (Acadia University) lead its work.

## Old media/new media

The 2013 Birds of a Feather gathering opened with a plenary by Lisa Gitelman of NYU. Gitelman considered the page as an interface convention, with a particular focus on the ways that the page metaphor is misleading. She traced the page's digital transformation, touching on the unturnable microfilm pages of the imagined, though never produced, Memex machine and Project Intrex as well as the unturnable pages of an Adobe PDF. The PDF, she argues, was not designed with interface in mind but rather as a labour-saving device "made up of ground up fax machines, messengers, and secretaries." Bob Stein of the Institute for the Future of the Book maintained Gitelman's approach to understanding reading practices through affordances past, likening the current state of e-text to the first decades of the printed book. Drawing on his social reading platform, Social Book, Stein discussed how to best extend the always-already social reading process into an online environment by creating community: enabling readers to invite one another to share a text, comment on it, and collaborate on interpretations.

At the plenary on the second morning of the conference, Susan Brown echoed Lisa Gitelman's concerns about interface. She argued that builders must consider interface throughout the tool-building process, not just as an afterthought or add-on. She noted that editing is so central to scholarship, so thoroughly *naturalized*, that it is not even included in John Unsworth's list of scholarly primitives. The central position of editing in scholarship dictates that editing interfaces are too important to be left to industry. Furthermore, design work that provides non-digital humanists with interfaces for contributing expertise to digital scholarship needs to count as humanities research. Susan Brown and her Canadian Research Writing Collaboratory team's design work, for example, is complemented by her collaboration with **Stan Ruecker**, the final plenary speaker and leader of INKE's Interface Design team. The current design challenge for Stan Ruecker's students is how to represent designers' movement through a workflow, mapping the flexibility, iteration, motivation, and learning that cannot be captured by a Gantt chart. The combination of Gitelman's exploration of a specific media history, Stein's commitment to textual communities, Brown's attestation to the importance of conscientious humanities design, and Ruecker's focus on design pragmatics provided an ideal base for the Birds of a Feather gathering, a conversation the participants continually referenced and returned to throughout the two-day meeting.

## Collaborative textuality

Whether through crowd-sourced editing or peer-to-peer community building, INKE has always been engaged in maximizing knowledge production through collaboration. Several of the papers at the New York gathering presented cutting edge work on collaborative textuality and social knowledge creation. Some of the issues explored included best practices for collaborative work, digital pedagogy, and online community building.

Collaboration is one of the much-touted tenets (and, we would argue, benefits) of the digital humanities. **Alyssa Arbuckle**, **Nina Belojevic**, and **Matthew Hiebert's** bibliography, "Social Knowledge Creation and the Humanities," traces the history of social knowledge creation, offering a record of the state of the field. **Lynne Siemens'** article turns an eye on INKE itself, offering insights into interdisciplinary collaboration best practices arising from INKE's midterm year. Successful collaboration, however, is certainly not limited to scholars. In an article that also considers methodological best practice, **Élika Ortega** examines the Argentinian literary and journalistic blog *Orsai* in the light of its readers' commenting habits. Although working with a separate data set – student blogs – **Ethna D. Lay** also traces readers' commenting habits, in this case students and their online writing become the texts under analysis. In "Crowdsourcing Literary Theory" Adam Hammond shares his experience with undergraduates encoding free indirect discourse in Text Encoding Analysis (TEI) in order to develop an in-class hypotheses on how it works in practice. Moving from students to scholars, Nina Belojevic and Jentery Sayers expand Bob Stein's articulation of social reading processes in "Prototyping Personas for Open, Networked Peer Review," introducing their tool, which allows scholars to signal, verify, and enact different roles within the editing process: editor, reviewer, or author. Offering reflections on cultural memory institutions (e.g., libraries and museums), newer commercial resource discovery tools (e.g., search engines), and the general public as the audiences for digital text, Constance Crompton considers the various types of metadata that could improve data discoverability, retrieval, and transfer within the context of Iter Community's online social platform. Finally, Daniel Powell addresses how to draw collaborators and resources together in "The Renaissance English Knowledgebase/Renaissance English Knowledge Network (REKn): Networking Early Modern Scholarly Resources, v2.0."

## Digital and material interfaces and traces

Interfaces are as central to knowledge transfer as collaboration and modelling. Familiar visual vocabularies combined with innovative human-centred design can offer new insights and facilitate novel readings. To reiterate issues raised in the plenary talks without delving too deeply into a screen essentialism, the visual point of contact in digital work is vastly significant for interpretation and knowledge creation. During the gathering, many presenters shared their thoughts on the design and functionality of current digital projects.

Drawing on Jerome McGann, **Jon Saklofske** demonstrates what NewRadial's interface reveals about the social life of journal articles and monographs. Ashley Reed, who leads the pioneering digital humanities project of the William Blake Archive, considers extending the social life of the archive's texts through eBooks. The media for expressing humanities ideas and disseminating knowledge, however, can and does extend beyond

the coded and eBook forms. **Matthew Wizinsky** and Ernesto Peña in their separate articles demonstrate this by exploring how non-traditional media (ferrous ink and glass, respectively) allow for new lines of argument. Moving beyond traditional notions of text altogether, **Milena Radzikowska**, **Piotr Michura**, **Stan Ruecker**, **Gerry Derksen**, and **Teresa Dobson** offer tools to capture subjective visual information from a corpus of images. The variety and scope of these papers, some offered here in article form, exemplify the many ways “Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age” can be interpreted.

But what of the model that underlines textual representation? The purpose of text, and thus textual models, changes across time and cultures. As **Yin Liu** points out in “Ways of Reading, Models for Text, and the Usefulness of Dead People,” a better understanding of textual models past will help unbind us from current models. Exploring the question of privacy, in this case not of the dead but of the living, John Hunter invites us to consider what it means to be read through our textual traces. **Quinn Dupont** lifts the hood on digital text by juxtaposing Friedrich Kittler’s insistence that writing is inscription with the argument that the advent of personal computers has created an age of cryptography, in which computer and other codes stand between humans and text.

“Research Foundations for Understanding Books and Reading in the Digital Age” was a rich event, with various practitioners coming together to discuss the many forms, contexts, practices, and traditions surrounding electronic text. The articles in this issue of *Scholarly and Research Communication* have grown from the papers previously discussed. We invite all those who engage with the challenges of reading, designing, producing, and conveying textual information in electronic form to join us in considering the questions raised here in this record of INKE’s 2013 Birds of a Feather gathering.