

Future of the Book | Volume 2

Knowledge Systems

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Michael Simeone
Patrick McCray

About the Project

How will people read in the future? What will books look and feel like? How will publishers adjust in the face of technological upheaval? In what new ways will authors engage with their readers? *Sprint Beyond the Book*, a project of Arizona State University's Center for Science and the Imagination, explores the future of the book from writing, editing and publishing to reading, analyzing and archiving.

We want to imagine the future of collaborative authorship and publishing by doing it. So we staged a series of three book sprints. At each sprint, a diverse group of scholars, technologists, novelists, journalists, publishers, designers and futurists collectively write, edit and assemble a book about the future of the book in just 48 or 72 hours.

Volume 1: *The Future of Publishing*
Frankfurt Book Fair, Frankfurt, Germany
October 9-11, 2013

Volume 2: *Knowledge Systems*
Center for Science and the Imagination,
Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ
February 6-7, 2014

Volume 3: *The Future of Reading*
Center for the Study of the Novel,
Stanford University, Stanford, CA
May 12-14, 2014

The book sprints are designed to recast publishing as an intensely social, collaborative and performative process. Alongside the main text, each book features video interviews with authors and other experts, photos of the collaborative process, and crowd-sourced text collected through our website, SprintBeyondtheBook.com. To share your thoughts on the future of the book and become a co-author, visit the website and create an account.

All of our content is free to read at <http://www.SprintBeyondtheBook.com>, and free to download and share under a Creative Commons license.

Edited by Ed Finn

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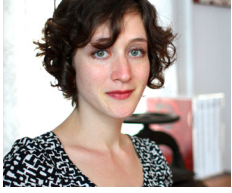
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About the Authors



Sally Ball

Sally Ball is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Arizona State University and the acting director of the department's Creative Writing program. She is the associate director of Four Way Books, a nonprofit literary press located in New York City. She is the author of two collections of poems: *Annus Mirabilis* (2005) and *Wreck Me* (2013).



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Amaranth Borsuk is an assistant professor in Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington, Bothell, where she also teaches in the MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics program. She is the author of *Between Page and Screen* (2012) a hybrid digital/print book of poems. In addition to writing and studying poetry, Amaranth is a letterpress printer and book artist whose fascination with printed matter informs her work on digital media.



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Torie Bosch is the editor of *Future Tense*, a project of Slate, the New America Foundation and Arizona State University that looks at the implications of emerging technologies. She was previously an associate editor at Slate for the medical and religion departments.



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Alice Daer is an assistant professor of rhetoric and composition studies in the Department of English at Arizona State University, where she specializes in digital literacies and social media. Alice is also a Faculty Fellow at ASU's Center for Games and Impact.



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Ed Finn is the founding director of the Center for Science and the Imagination at Arizona State University, where he is an assistant professor with a joint appointment in the School of Arts, Media and Engineering and the Department of English. Ed's research and teaching explore digital narratives, contemporary culture and the intersection of the humanities, arts and sciences. He completed his PhD in English and American literature at Stanford University in 2011.



Alexander Halavais

Alexander Halavais is an associate professor in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Arizona State University, where he researches how social media change the nature of scholarship and learning, and allow for new forms of collaboration and self-government. Before joining ASU, Alex taught in the Interactive Communications program at Quinnipiac University and directed the master's degree program in Informatics at the University at Buffalo. He is the president of the Association of Internet Researchers.



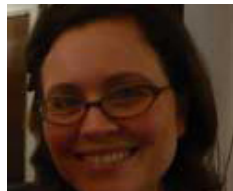
Matthew Harp

Matthew Harp is Multimedia Producer of informational videos and audio podcasts, curator of audio/visual collections and a project manager on content management system implementations for the ASU Libraries. He was named one of Library Journal's Movers and Shakers in 2010 for his productions. He received his Library Master's in Information resources and Library Science and Certificate in Digital Information Management from the University of Arizona.



Micah Lande

Micah Lande is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Engineering in the College of Technology and Innovation at Arizona State University. Micah teaches human-centered design innovation and researches how engineers and makers learn and apply a design process to their work. He has been an Editor-in-Chief of *Ambidextrous Journal of Design*, producing issues that captured stories of the people and processes of design.



Anouk Lang

Anouk Lang is a lecturer in Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Strathclyde; in September 2014 she will be joining the Department of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh as a lecturer in digital humanities. Her research focuses on the development of literary modernism in the English-speaking world beyond the British Isles and the United States. She is the editor of the book *From Codex to Hypertext: Reading at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (2012).



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C. Max Magee is the founder and editor of *The Millions*, an online literary magazine offering coverage on books, arts and culture since 2003. He is the co-editor of the book *The Late American Novel: Writers on the Future of Books* (2011).



Erin McCarthy

Erin A. McCarthy is the assistant director of the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, a statewide research unit that coordinates programs at Arizona State University, the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University. Her research interests include early modern English poetry and poetics, Shakespeare, bibliography and the history of the book, and scholarly editing. She is currently working on a book that examines the printing of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English verse collections and argues that print publication fundamentally altered early modern English poetic culture.



Richard Nash

Richard Nash is an independent publishing entrepreneur: Vice President of Partnerships at Byliner, former VP of Community and Content for Small Demons, founder of Cursor, and publisher of Red Lemonade. For most of the past decade, he ran the iconic indie Soft Skull Press; for his work he was awarded the Association of American Publishers' Miriam Bass Award for Creativity in Independent Publishing in 2005. Richard is also an accomplished editor; the last book he edited, Lydia Millet's *Love in Infant Monkeys*, was selected as a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist.



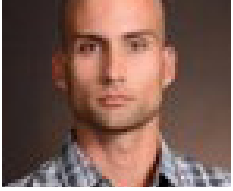
Corey Pressman

Corey Pressman taught anthropology for 12 years before founding Exprima Media, a software design and development company that partners with content providers to envision, design and develop compelling and effective interactive experiences. Corey delivers presentations on a variety of topics including the future of publishing, interaction design and global mobile initiatives.



selisker

Scott Selisker is a visiting assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Arizona. He works on twentieth-century and contemporary U.S. literature and culture, with emphases on science and technology and the digital humanities. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *American Literature*, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, *African American Review*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Stanford Arcade*.



michael simeone

Michael Simeone is the Director of the IHR Nexus Lab for Digital Humanities and Transdisciplinary Informatics at Arizona State University. His research interests include computing and humanities, visualization, and storytelling about nonlinear systems. He actually does hold out hope for the future.



Bob Stein

Bob Stein is the founder and co-director of the Institute for the Future of the Book and founder of The Voyager Company. For thirteen years he led the development of over 300 titles in The Criterion Collection, a series of definitive films on home video. Before Voyager, Stein worked at the Research Group at Atari on a variety of electronic publishing projects.



Mark Tebeau

Mark Tebeau is an associate professor in the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies and the director of the Public History program at Arizona State University. Before joining ASU, Mark founded and co-directed the Center for Public History and Digital Humanities at Cleveland State University. There he led the development of Curatescape, a framework for mobile publishing that seeks to make open-source, low-cost mobile tools available to scholars and curators. Curatescape has built an rss feed that enables it to produce e-books and print books on demand. Now the question is, to what end and in what form?



Erin Walker

Erin Walker is an assistant professor in the School of Computing, Informatics, and Decision Systems Engineering at Arizona State University. Erin's research uses interdisciplinary methods to improve the design and implementation of educational technology, and gain a better understanding of why it is effective. Her particular focus is furthering adaptive technology to support collaboration in a variety of different learning contexts.



Eric Wertheimer

Eric Wertheimer is a professor in the Division of Humanities, Arts and Culture, the associate vice provost for graduate programs, and the co-founder and past director of the Center for Critical Inquiry and Cultural Studies at Arizona State University. Eric's diverse professional output includes writing cultural history, poetry and exploring the administrative and intellectual possibilities of the digital humanities. He serves on the editorial board of the journal *Early American Literature*, and his most recent book is *Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in Early America* (2006).



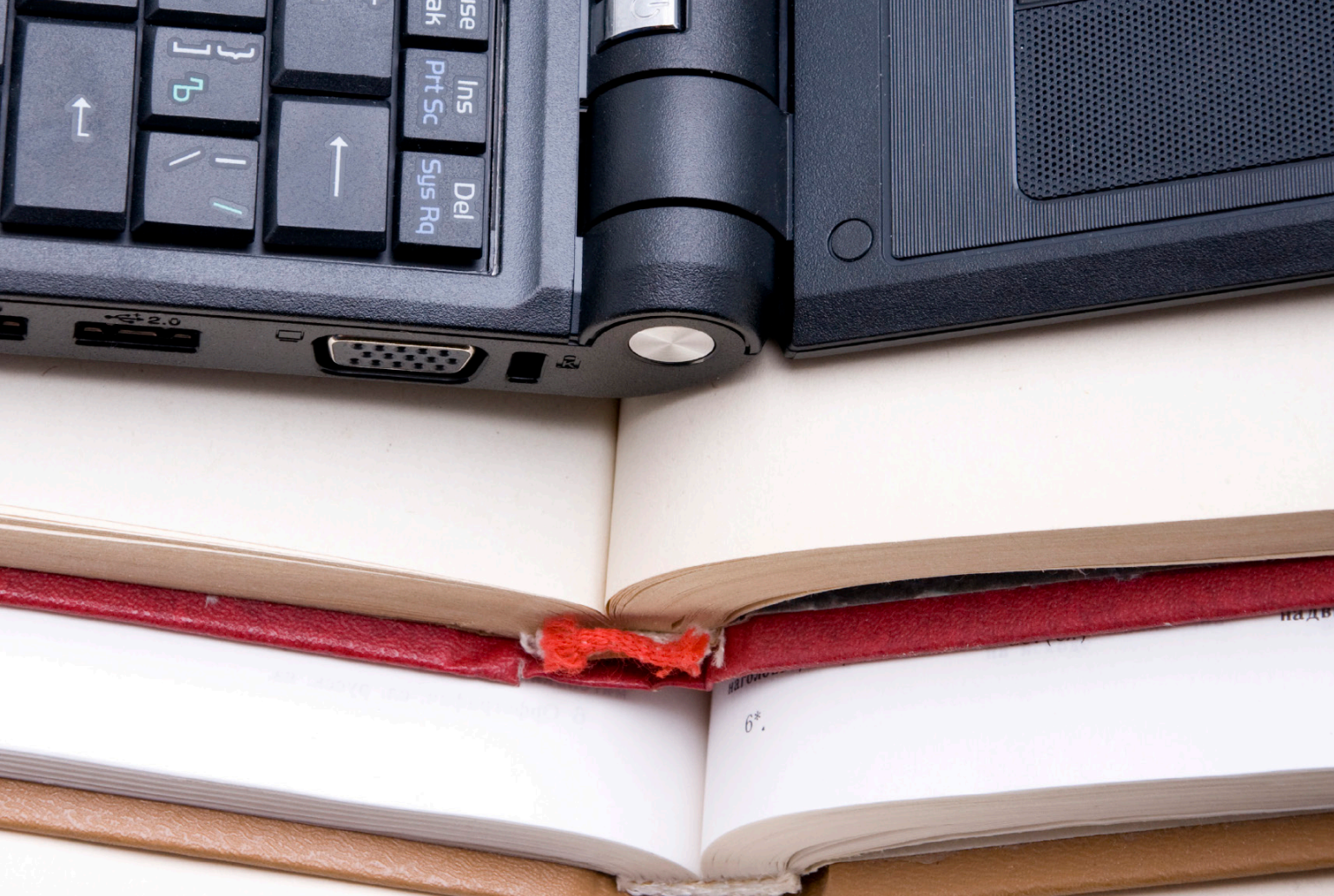
Ruth Wylie

Ruth Wylie is a postdoctoral scholar in the Learning Sciences Institute at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on the design and evaluation of educational technologies that facilitate student learning, help teachers in the classroom and provide insight into how students learn. She earned her PhD from the Human-Computer Interaction Institute at Carnegie Mellon University.



G. Pascal Zachary

G. Pascal Zachary is a professor of practice at Arizona State University with a joint appointment in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes. From 1989 to 2002, he was a senior writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, covering Silicon Valley and globalization, and from 2007 to 2008 he wrote the “Ping” column on innovation for *The New York Times*. His books include *Hotel Africa: The Politics of Escape* (2012), *The Diversity Advantage: Multicultural Identity in the New World Economy* (2003) and *Endless Frontier: Vannevar Bush, Engineer of the American Century* (1997).



Digital Textbooks and Pedagogy

While digital books are emerging as the norm for casual reading, millions of students continue to use traditional print textbooks that quickly become dated, impose rigid knowledge structures on material, and offer limited forms of interactive engagement. Yet their persistence of the textbook is a testament to the ways that it is not just a highly refined individual learning tool, but also a platform for shared understanding in classrooms and other learning communities. What role will the digital textbook or knowledge system play in fundamentally changing learning and teaching practices? How can textbooks function as social texts that build community among networks of learners? What is the future of the textbook as a social, living, interactive, adaptive learning technology?

Sprint 1

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Choose Your Adventure: Ada's Education

by Ruth Wylie

7:42 pm. It had been a long day, but Ada arrived at the learning pod and exchanged nods with the other knowledge consumers who also preferred the evening shift. Today was a big day. While she normally preferred to study while commuting from Georgetown, Ada chose to come into the pod so she could attempt to level up without distracting the other commuters. Two weeks before, Ada had been notified that she was eligible to demonstrate the learning objectives for L3 Shakespeare, especially good timing because she was planning a trip to Stratford the following week and was hoping to visit the sites reserved for L3s and above.

She grabbed a charged SmartSpace by door, found an open seat on the couch, adjusted the level of ambient noise on her SmartEars to medium, and used SmartEyes to navigate to her learning space through a series of eye movements. Once in the space, she began by reviewing the work from her L2 students. She watched a video of a virtual chat recorded a few hours earlier and annotated it with comments, indicating both when she agreed and disagreed with the iModerator. She was grateful that the system generated transcripts and translations because while she had her L6 Chinese badge, she was just starting her

L2 Spanish badge and would have had difficulty following Nina's contributions. Before switching to her next task, she made individual notes in each of her ten apprentice's files and reviewed the comments from the other L3 knowledge leaders to see if she agreed or had anything else to add.

At 7:55, her SmartEars chimed, indicating that her review was about to begin. When she signed up for her L3 badge she elected to demonstrate mastery through discussion, so she was soon joined by three L4 knowledge consumers who began evaluating her understanding by asking questions about the papers she had submitted and reviewing footage of cohort discussions. Ada hoped that Chris wouldn't be on the panel, but knew that she had no control over the matter: panels were convened through a random selection of L4s who happened to be on-call at the time.

If you want Chris to be on Ada's panel, turn to page 25.

If you don't want Chris to be on Ada's panel, turn to page 27.



Exploring the Spindles

by Corey Pressman

“Listen to many, speak to a few.” The quote immediately struck her as both a revelation and a cause for anxiety.

Badging “Shakespeare’s Reality” has been a holistically enlightening experience for her. With her “structure” setting on low, Ada’s been jumping around the TOC, diving in at the various node heads and exploring the hyperlinks within, tapping between experiences inside the nodes. So as not to get too lost, she has avoided links that take her inter-node. Her cousin Brady loves to do this, but she finds that even with the handy “spindle map” navigation, she still gets lost and loses focus. Besides, her subscription to LearnVerse is node-specific. Cross-node linking costs extra.

And her explorations have been rich. With her “author width” set to wide, she’s been discovering the rich array of content authored by other users. These are often quite useful and seemingly always more creative than the usual spindles and subs created by the sponsored authors. She’s particularly enamored with the marginalia of a user from Portland, whose comments are all in the form of insightful yet lewd limericks.

Recently she found a rich vein—a collection of Shakespeare lines, speeches, and scenes which sync up to one’s private-side system. The API scans email, texts, searches, e-book content, recent purchases, etc. and offers handy Shakespeare quotes and scenes based on your life. These arrive by text, email, and even phone calls with recorded quotes or actors reciting The Bard. She heard a rumor that someone had a group from the “Enacting Shakespeare” badge perform a recommended scene for her right in front of the restaurant where she had 6:00 reservations. That’s what you get for having your “transparency” set to high.

Just now, 8:00 am at the kitchen table, while exploring the Hamlet/Advice branch, she stumbled on a branch authored by student last year. That’s where she found “Listen to many, speak to a few” from Polonius’ famous advice to Laertes. This has sorta been her motto. Ada is shy and thoughtful. She doesn’t like standing out, doesn’t like being visible. However, an original performance module is required for her badge. That, or authoring a minimal spindle. And she just doesn’t have the time for that. It’s time to give back—to “speak to many.” And she’s drawing a blank.

Time to fire up a brainstorming sesh. Ada navigates to the commons and posts an invitation. Turns out three folks have the time to help out. They all sync up in the video chat with whiteboard enabled and get to work. They are all familiar with the usual battery of brainstorming activities. In about 40 minutes, they’ve worked out a few good options for Ada’s performance. Also, one of the folks (a guy from Peru!) offers a link to a great acting coaching spindle from his Theatre Badge days. Ada will have to pay a small fee for accessing an outside node, but it’ll be worth it. And it will count towards her badge. Cross-node exploration always does.

So this is what she will do. She will use those little figurines she printed from her “Artifact Manifestation” badge and shoot that speech from Polonius. She will do the voiceover and submit the whole thing to the Share Spindle. There, others will likely add music, filters, or maybe include it in a larger piece. From these, she will choose her favorite and publish it. Her scene may be helpful for others’ experience of Shakespeare as they explore the Shakespeare Reality spindles. Who knows, maybe some brave soul with their transparency set to full will get her piece as a text message as they prepare embark on a journey....

Ada’s Settings

Language: English

Prior Badge Analysis: On

Structure: Low

Transparency: Low

Author Width: Wide

Analytics:

Temporal, Physical, Content



The Calibans at Night

by Alexander Halavais

2:03 am. INCOMING MESSAGE FROM Mary S.

Mary: Ada, you're good for a Calibans meeting?

Ada: What? I'm just coming home. Sorry. What?

Mary: Just you're supposed to be one of the Calibans and we want to do a quick round-up on leading the discussion tomorrow. Dai and Sasha are good to go. Can you meet now?

Ada: I'm US-East, I was just headed to bed.

Sasha: You shared your location stream with us :)—you're still at least 1500 meters from home.

Ada: Yeah, I'm out, but I'm about to walk in the door.

Mary: I know it's late, can you give us 10 minutes just so we're on the same page.

Ada: Same page.....yeah, makes sense. I've just been out, and I'm a little spacey.

Sasha: Lightweight.

Mary: Can you see block text?

Ada: No, I'm reading from my hand-tat. I'll be in front of a projector in 10. But I can tachiyomu if need be.

Mary: It's just a short piece. It's that main speech in Act Three. Tossing you a cursor now.

Ada: OK, got it, yeah.

Mary: We have your vitals and searches on that. We all had a bit of a heart-race on the "I cried to dream again," but you had a peak right from the start and looked like you were really into it. It looked like you ran the first two lines four times.

Ada: Yeah, well, it just hit me hard for some reason. Where I grew up... well, whatever. My mother used to tell me not to be afraid, that the house was full of noises. Used to freak me out a little as a kid. Now... I kind of miss the noises. I live in new construction. Thin walls. So I have to choose between hearing my neighbor the aspiring opera singer or have phones on and block out everything. I saw Sasha peaked late on that phrase....

Sasha: No, I stubbed my toe. It was a false read....

Ada: And then did a lookup on the "twangling instruments" bit?

Sasha: Just wondered whether "twangling" was a normal word and was used contemporaneously or in anything modern.

Mary: I was manipulating the semantic net you put together. I like this bridge to "bangling" as well as the link to 20th century references to "twangy" country-western music. Anything worth teasing out there.

Tach: Sorry, excuse me for a moment. Can you help me and tell me the context for the "bangling" reference. It is not in dictionaries. And I have no access to this book Grace?

Sasha: Sending it now.

Tach: No, sorry, please no. I have no rights.

Sasha: Just one page then?

Tach: No, no page, no verbatim, please. Can you maybe read to me.

Sasha: Voice? Seriously?

Tach: No, nevermind. I will ask library to get rights so I can see.

Mary: Anyway, I found the “twangy” bit more interesting. He uses “twangling” in Shrew as well?

Ada: Sorry, y’all, I am still five minutes away from a screen, I can’t see the visualization of the semantic net.

Mary: You don’t need it, really. Basically, he uses “twangling” as a variant of “twank” which is the same as the modern “tweak.”

Sasha: So Caliban was a tweaker! I like him even more now....

Tach: Also, Twangdillo was used by many people in 1700s in English.

Mary: Cite?

Tach: Sent.

Mary: OK, good, so I want to make sure we are opening up an avenue of discussion here that no one has covered, and I like the country-western music theme. I did a lit review and no one seems to have picked it up. One of the badge requirements indicates “original insight” and I think this would count.

Ada: Actually, I know two of the sempai on the badge, want me to do a quick consult.

Sasha: Already Quorad it. Figured it was a good way to lay public claim to originality. Nobody has found any prior art so far, and it’s got over 1200 looks to date.

Mary: Ada, if you don’t mind, it might be good to see if there’s a good way to present it.

Ada: Just a sec, checking profiles, looks like I’ve got four friends with the badge. Let me just....“Thanks for the microconsult. Looking to present twanging in Tempest and Country-Western. Thoughts?” I’ll CC y’all if I hear back. OK if I provide them with some gradient permissions on our logs?

Sasha: OK with me.

Tach: Me also.

Mary: Yep, that’s OK. Ada, do you think we can work in the house sounds.

Tach: Maybe a Raymond Williams City and Country thing?

Mary: Yeah, how would you frame this?

Tach: I am sorry. Now I have to go to a meeting.

Mary: Can you go subvocal?

Tach: No tat, no subvocal. Very super old-school. I will check the log later. If you give me jobs I will do.

Mary: Thanks Tach. And can everyone go over our log and elect elements of our work for our portfolio.

Tach : Bye-bye everyone!

Sasha: Are you looking at the Google Alert from our discussion?

Mary: I have them turned down, is it any good?

Sasha: It's constructing a search engine results narrative. It's not bad, should I incorporate it in our log?

Mary: Can you just summarize it?

Sasha: It is already summarized.

Mary: I mean, like a human would.

Sasha: It does it better. It has my voice and face profile for a video version. We can always edit it together.

Mary: Let's give it the badge.

Sasha: Google: It's everything you'll someday know!

Ada: I may be slow on responses. Elevator.

Mary: And then there were two....

Sasha: Actually, I'm going to have to go in a little while too. Real life and all.

Mary: Are you coming to London.

Sasha: Yeah, the Moscow People's University is distributing crowdsourced travel funds among those with the Shakespeare L4 and above badges, as long as they also have the Open Collab badge. I've done an audit, and I think there are only three of us, so I should be good to go.

Mary: If we get the badge.

Sasha: Actually, I should be able to double-dip on our assessment tomorrow. Will you co-endorse?

Mary: Hold on. Have you already elected? Oh, OK, I see it... and... done. I gave you my full collaborator endorsement. I'll attach evidence and context in the morning.

Sasha: You rock!

Ada: Can I get in on that too?

Mary: Yeah I'll take a look when I get the chance....

Ada: Thanks. Anyway, I've been polling my personal archive for recordings of my old house, if we want to use it for some background audio. Also I've crossed reviews that mention "twang" and pulled up a playlist we can link out to as a sidenote in the doc, for fun and elucidation.

Sasha: I've already pulled in some of the other narrative assessments that reference this section. There are a lot of them. I will see which we might want to reference.

Ada: I'm at a keyboard. I'm going to bang out a text narrative to tie together our portfolio. I am a write-geek.

Mary: Why do you think we asked you to join our group? Thanks, Ada. Nothing like just-in-time production.

Ada: What makes the world go round. I'm going to run silent for a bit here to get some work done.

Sasha: You mean sleep!

Ada: Ha! Yes, that too. But I'll stim up long enough to get this out to you tonight. Mary, you were going to sift our log for presentation permissions, yes?

Mary: Right. And Sasha, everyone but you has done a permissions and copyright check. Can you do that, like now?

Sasha: Not now, but within five hours. Good?

Mary: Yep, that's fine.

Ada: Night. Catch you all live on tomorrow.

Mary: And hopefully in the flesh in London next month.

Sasha: Except Tach. I'm not sure he's really a human.

Ada: So few of us are these days.

Ada palmed her connections closed. Emergencies only. She could still bang out text with the best of them. The OLED tattoo that made up her palm and forearm curled itself into a random image, a scripted quote from her namesake: "In this, which we may call the neutral or zero state of the engine...." She didn't feel like writing. The buzz of the evening and the

physical presence of old friends still had her excited. She heard a party somewhere in a nearby apartment and dialed in noise reduction. As she reached out to the keyboard, Sonify noted her vitals and her intention to write and constructed an appropriate playlist, heavy on the Ko Mak and German Cajun Chill bands like old Boozoo Bajou. But she found herself aching for the creaky sounds of her childhood home, and the voice of her mother.

She reached to a drawer and pulled out a ragged, dog-earned paperback with a missing cover. The title page read *The Tempest* and in the corner, in blue Bic ink and a neat hand, her mother's name: Augusta King.



Ada in the Rare Books Library

by Erin McCarthy

Ada strained to lift the canvas box containing the heavy folio from the shelf. She had been working as a page at the Folger for months now, retrieving books from the vault and delivering them to the old people upstairs, but she had never given them more than a passing glance. She had read about folios and quartos while studying for her badges, but all she really knew was that there were sometimes different versions of the plays she had read and that the books here had the same names. The folios were big and heavy and had a distinct smell she couldn't quite place.

It was cold in the vault—inexplicably cold, Ada thought. She balanced the box on one hip to zip her sweater. As she did, she lost her balance, slipped off the stool, and dropped the large box on the floor. Ada's pride hurt more than anything else, so she quickly dusted herself off, looked around, and opened the box. What she found inside was alarming: a thick wooden board that appeared to be the book's cover seemed to have been detached. Some pages were loose, and others appeared to be attached only with threads. She stacked the pages neatly, placed the board on top, replaced the call slip, and closed the box before placing it on her cart.

When she got upstairs, the reader who had requested the book was waiting patiently by the

desk. Trying to look calm, she slid out the call slip and handed him the box. He carried the box back to his desk, opened it carefully, and lifted the board. Caught, she thought. Instead, she was surprised to see him place the board on one of a pair of foam wedges. (She'd heard this setup called a "cradle," but she wasn't sure why.) He then removed what remained of the book and set it on the desk.

She tried to slip out unnoticed.

If she had stayed, she would have seen him pick up a magnifying glass and carefully pull back the leather on the book's spine. And she would have been baffled.



Ada's Morning

by Micah Lande

The bird chirping started again. “Dammit, Adalaide Rosario Dawson,” she told herself as she pressed the “postpone” button on the wall clock again, seeking another eight minutes of rest. Ada’s ambition was to wake early to review her notes from the last tutor session before her morning shift at the scan-out desk at the Folger Library, off the Mall. She wallowed in her foolhardiness—she should have slept in rather than activating the snooze again and again.

As she rushed out the door with last night’s cold pizza squares dinner for breakfast, and down into the Metro Mag Lev, she tore off the thermals with her notes at foot of the stairs.

Ada was looking forward to her work trip to the UK Union in two weeks. She was taking a group of museum volunteers to the Shakespeare trail and she would gain her the next level of expertise. The highlight for her would be being on stage at the Globe, a perspective she had only watched through recorded performances.

Her paper notes darkened in the heat of her hands as she tried to review them in the shuddering light through the windows on the train. The wrinkles and smudges started to look like the manuscripts she would soon be checking out to visitors at the Folger. The Capitol South stop arrived.

Sprint 2

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*by Ruth Wylie, Corey Pressman,
Alexander Halavais, Erin McCarthy, Micah Lande*

Ruth Wylie and Corey Pressman:
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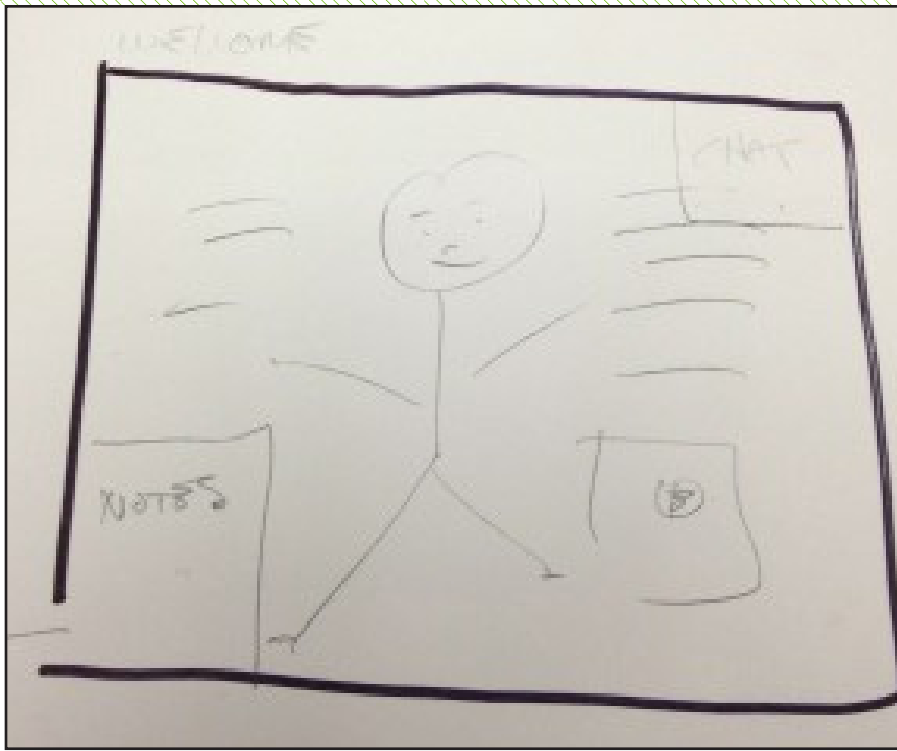
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Features of the Future Digital Textbook

by Ruth Wylie, Corey Pressman, Alexander Halavais, Erin McCarthy and Micah Lande

In lieu of writing, we drew things...

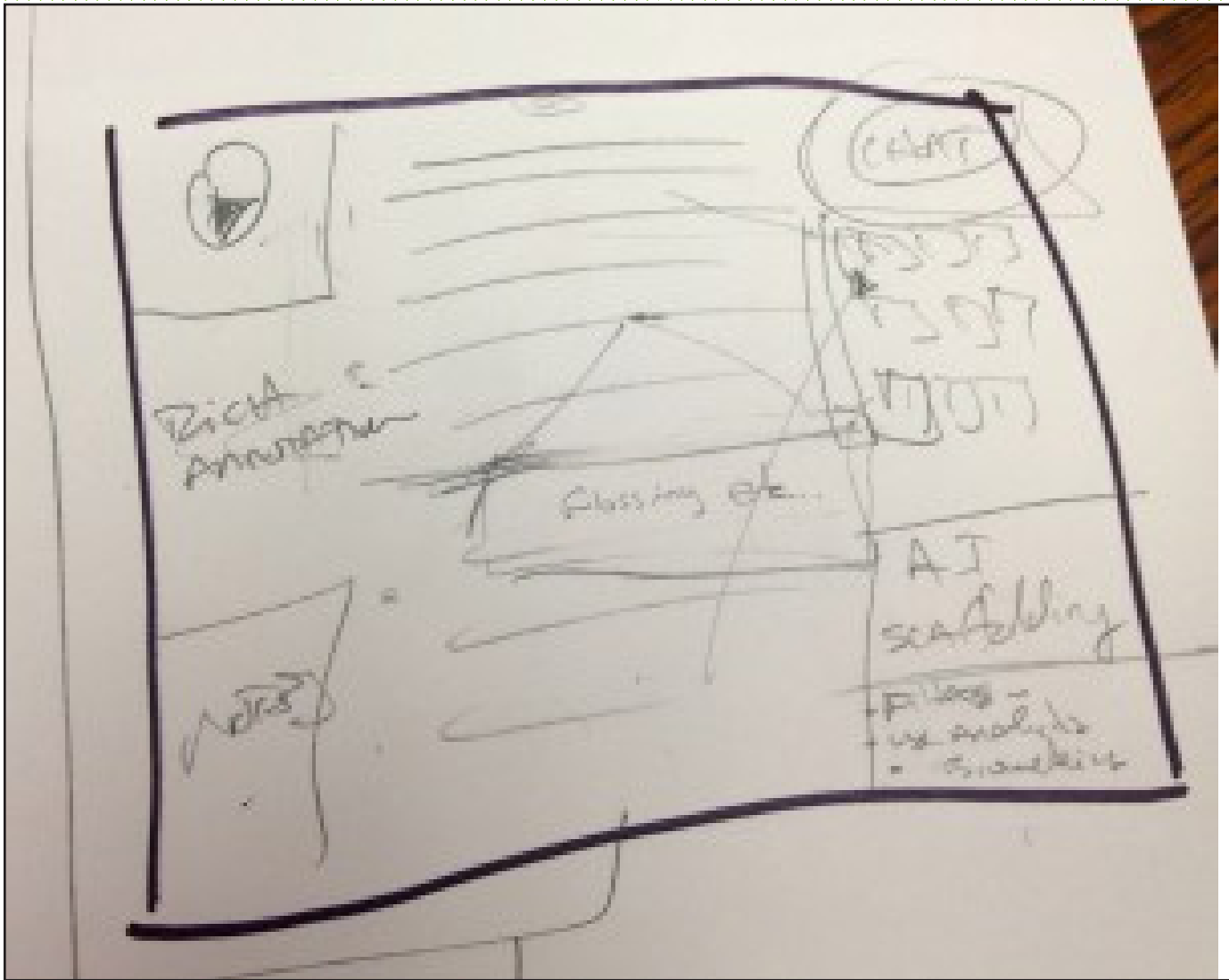




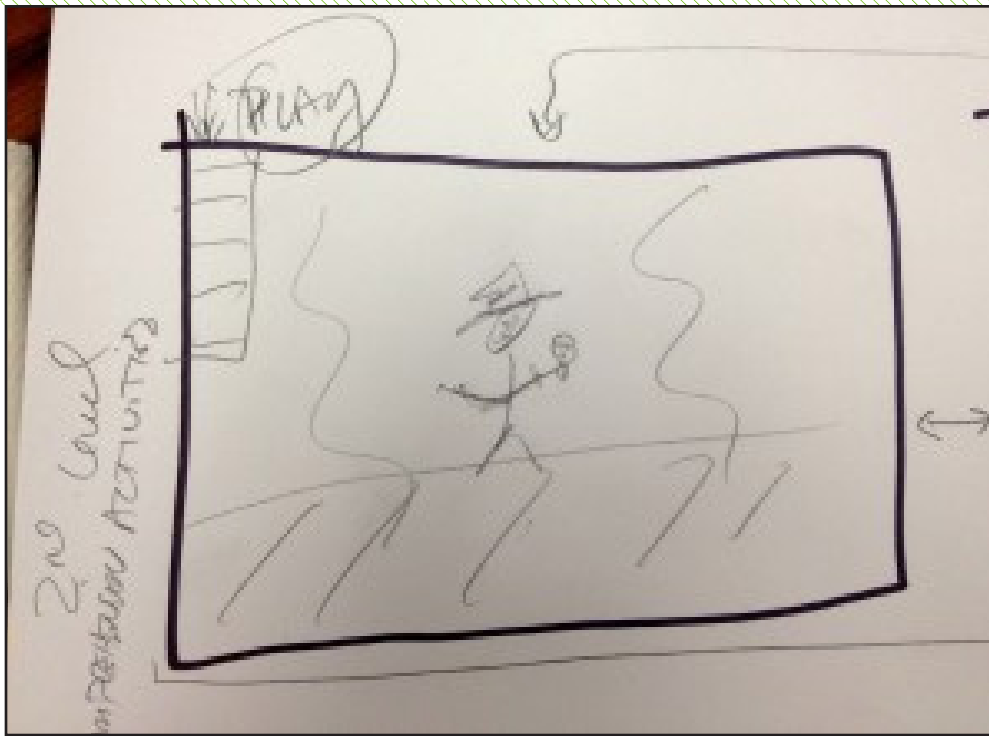
Intro to learning node: in this case, a class on Shakespeare.



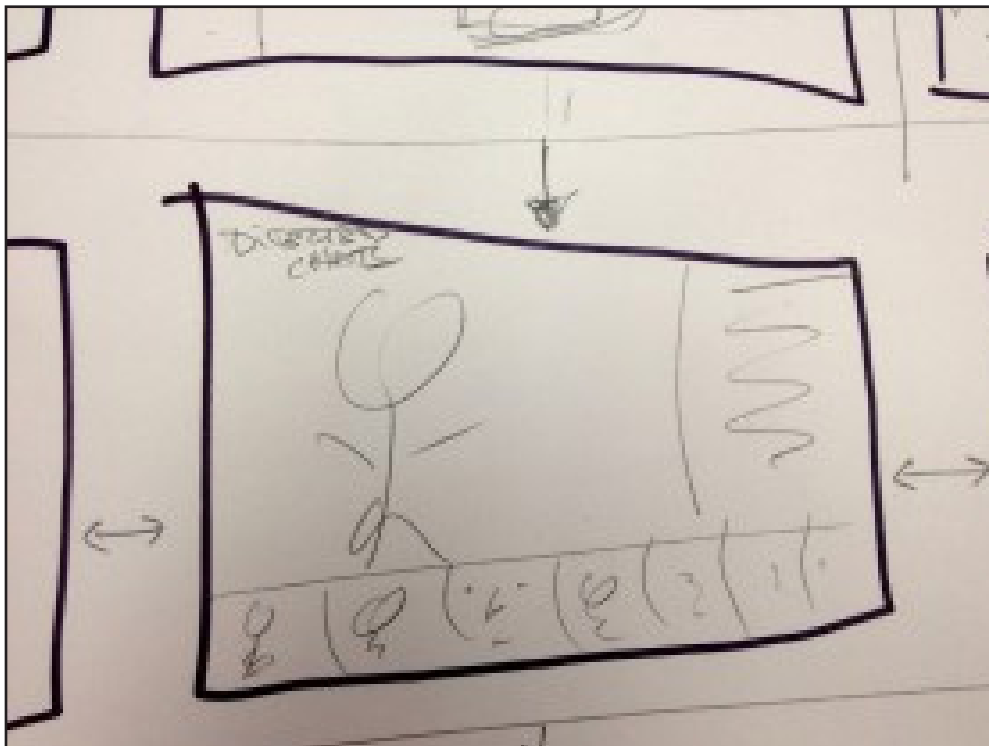
Provides historical context. Features include chat, space for notes, and student directed content (student can choose which area(s) to explore).



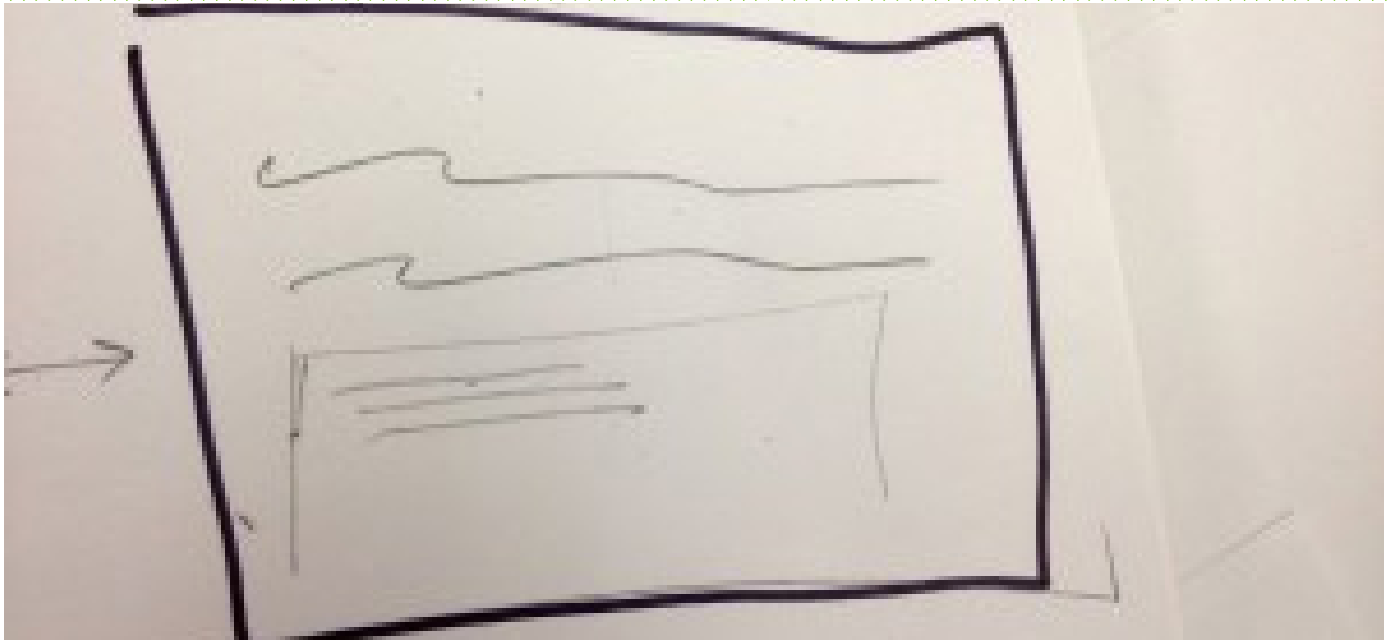
The play. Features include chat, video, AI scaffolding



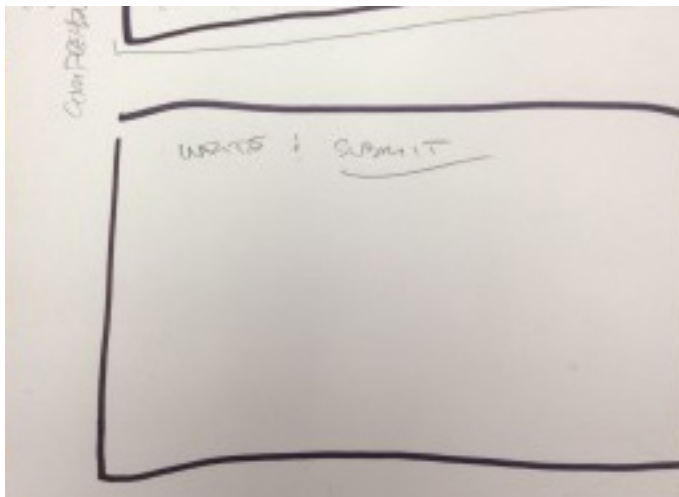
One of three cognitive engagement activities: Here, students watch the scene they just read.



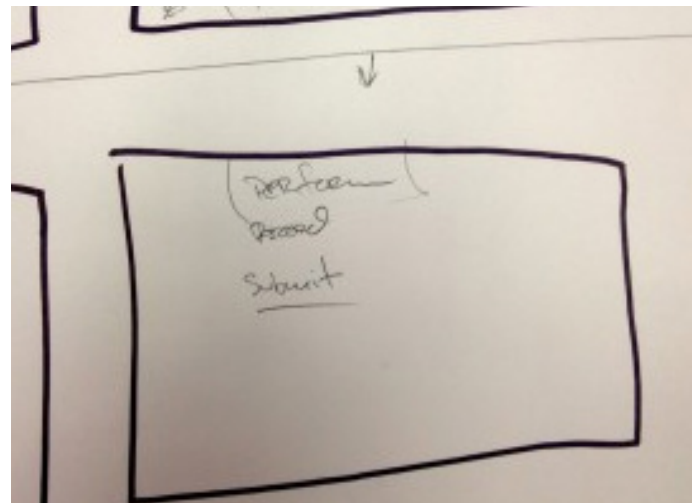
One of three cognitive engagement activities: Here, students discuss the scene with their peers.



One of three cognitive engagement activities: Here, students write an essay about the scene they just read.



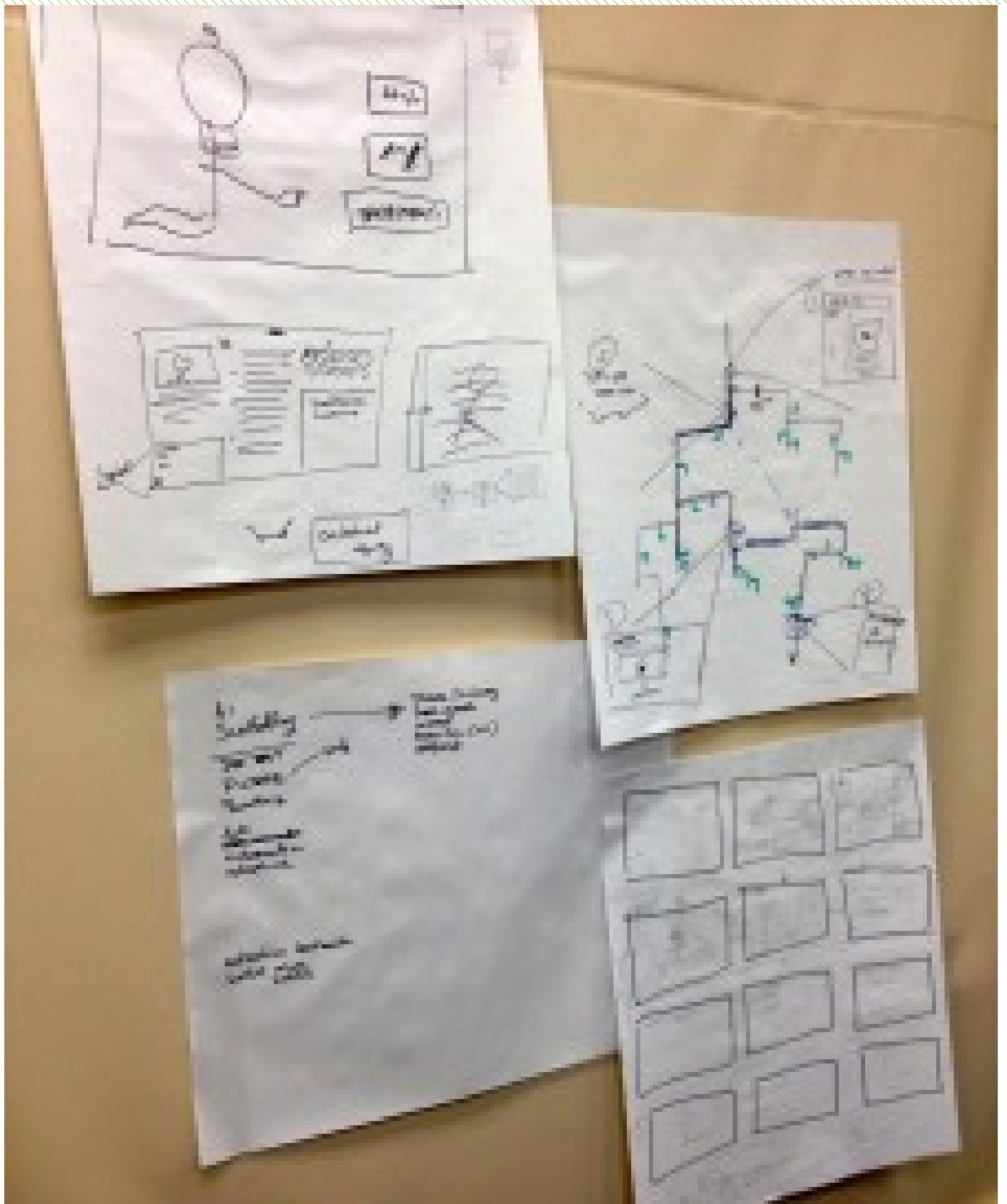
One of three assessment activities: a writing assignment.



One of three assessment activities: Students do a performance.



One of three assessment activities: Students do a creative writing activity.



Finished product



Ruth Wylie

Learning Scientist, Learning Scientist Institute

[Ruth Wylie and Corey Pressman: Idea Generation >>](#)



[Corey Pressman: Expanding the Book Sprint >>](#)

Sprint 3

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti **25**

*by Ruth Wylie, Corey Pressman,
Alexander Halavais, Erin McCarthy, Micah Lande*

Corey Pressman:

[The Post-Book Textbook>>](#) 26

Ruth Wylie:

[Textbooks and Scaffolding>>](#) 26

Digital Textbooks and Pedagogy:

[Learning About Shakespeare>>](#) 27

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti

by Ruth Wylie, Corey Pressman, Alexander Halavais, Erin McCarthy and Micah Lande

<http://sprintbeyondthebook.com/nabooti>

You've just finished your Cultural Anthropology badge and starting to look for your next learning node when a recommendation for a Shakespeare course pops up from your cousin Ada with a personal message:

I KNOW WHO STOLE THE JEWELS BUT CAN'T TELL YOU OVER TEXT. HINT: LOOK TO THE HEAVENS. ADA

After reading the message several times, you are still puzzled. You remember the jewels; who could forget them? But “look to the heavens,” what does she mean? And why a Shakespeare course?

So many decisions; what are you going to do?

If you want to learn more about what Ada's been up to, turn to page 34.

If you want to sign up for the Shakespeare class, turn to page 60.

If you want to skip the Shakespeare class and instead learn about late-90's Afropop, turn to page 69.



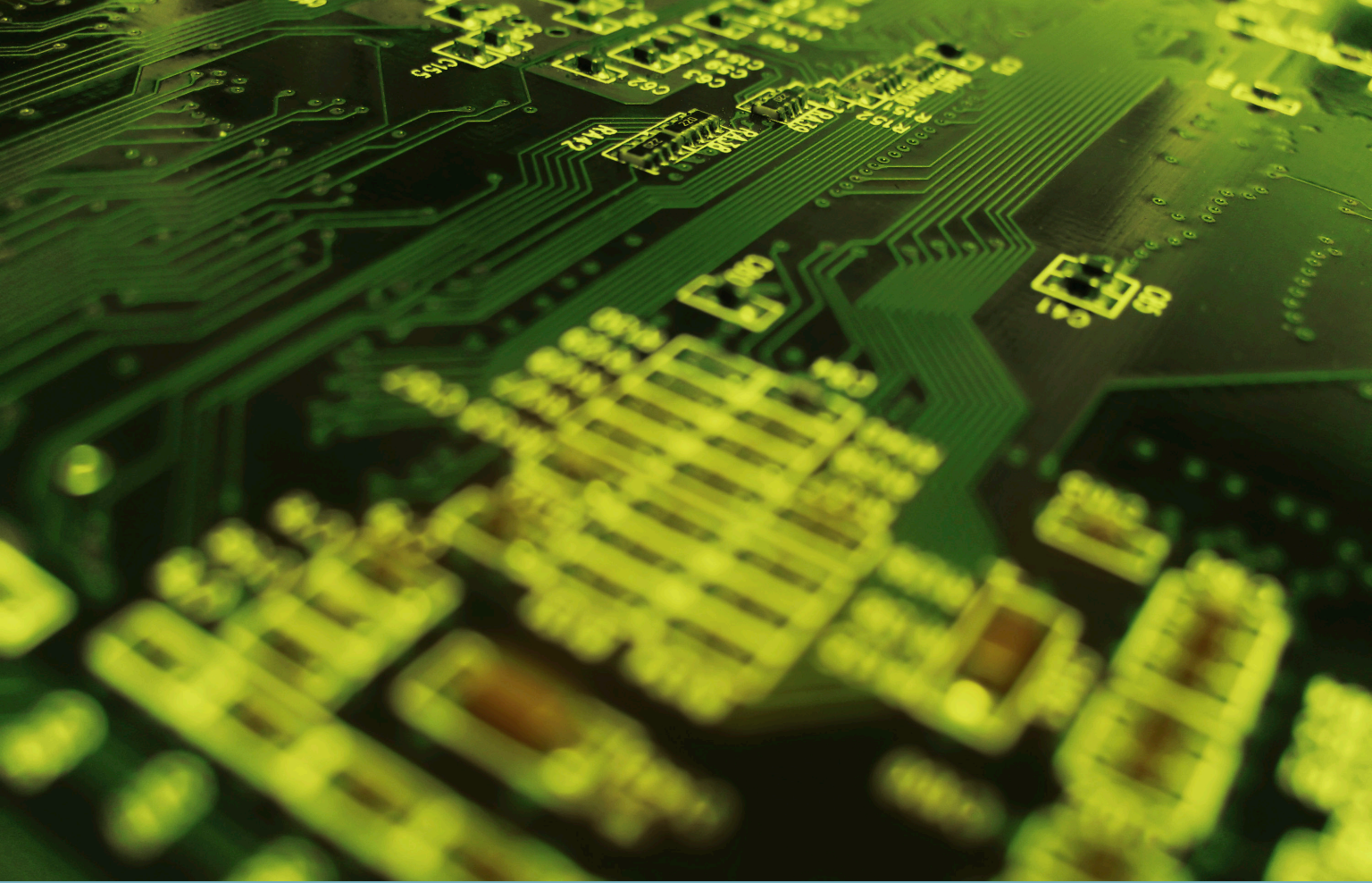
[Corey Pressman: The Post-Book Textbook >>](#)



[Ruth Wylie: Textbooks and Scaffolding >>](#)



[Digital Textbooks and Pedagogy: Learning About Shakespeare >>](#)



Digital Textual Communities

How will digital platforms for creating books and other types of knowledge systems generate new forms of community, conversation, production, and resource sharing among readers, and between readers and writers? How can these platforms serve as hubs for new forms of collective authorship and critique? Will these communities move from consuming texts to becoming collaborators and producers? How should authors and publishers adjust their methods for writing and constructing books to leverage the social capabilities of new reading and publishing formats? Will changes in the production of books and other tools for containing, ordering and sharing knowledge transform the nature and definition of “knowledge” itself?

Sprint 1

Media and Immediacy in Online Community 30

by Scott Selisker

**Rhetorical Interfaces and
Designed Affordances 32**

by Alice Daer

Three Short Meditations on Interface 35

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[Exploring Textual Communities >>](#) 41

**The Sorry State of Peer-to-Peer
E-Book Lending 42**

by Torie Bosch

**Interfaces and Commitment:
Do Read the Comments? 44**

by Anouk Lang



Media and Immediacy in Online Community

by Scott Selisker

How do interface and design affect our understanding of online communities?

As an English professor, I'm often thinking about the relationships between media forms and a text's content: how does the form that a text takes change what its content will be? What important things change, for instance, when a text such as *Frankenstein* is adapted to another medium? Those questions are relevant to our understanding of the interfaces through which we participate in online communities, where we're almost always producing new forms of knowledge and text. We're *almost* always producing text, that is.

Often, we create images: what does that mean? As Todd Presner and company argued in *Digital Humanities* (Burdick, Drucker, Lunenfeld, Presner and Schnapp 2012), one of the most exciting new potentials for digital scholarship is something that's also exciting about the future of books and knowledge systems. In an unprecedented way, we're able to take an active role in the design of the information we produce. Information design, and design more generally, are enjoying a new vogue. Design has become something that people care about, and talk about, more and more—from Gary Hustwit's 2007 documentary *Helvetica* to colorful responses to the [NSA's PowerPoint presentations](#).

There's an interesting paradox about the way that we mix media forms: when we want to

convey something that's *immediate*— something that has a visceral impact—is when we most frequently mix media forms with particularly wild abandon. Richard Grusin and David Jay Bolter, who came up with this idea, wrote along these lines that “immediacy depends on *hypermediacy*” (1996). That is, in order to feel less like there's a screen or other form of separation between yourself and a message (*immediacy*), the thing we most often do is to throw as many forms of media at a moment as we possibly can. In *Sherlock*, virtually every scene that features Benedict Cumberbatch's fetching cogitations also features scrolling text in 3D space onscreen, photographs moving around, 3D CGI renderings of spaces, and so on and so forth.

Arriving at last to online textual communities, this tendency toward what Grusin and Bolter call “hypermediacy” seems to be a key element of the ways that we communicate in online forums of all kinds. Of course, as the name “rage faces”—one of the best-known sources of viral images from discussion forums and comment sections—indicates, the immediacy that's conveyed is often an emotional one, where rational discourse has broken down. The fad of the animated GIF, too, which dominates on Tumblr in particular, allows content creators to express an emotion using a repeating video fragment. The images created by memegenerator.com...these forms continue to proliferate, and the repertoires of the commenters on the large blogs that allow these images have become quite vast.

I want to think about this proliferation of media forms on the web as a way that more people in online textual communities claim a voice and use hypermediation as a way to assert their presence in those communities. In what ways should the online communities that we design draw on the ever-expanding repertoires of media forms with which users express themselves?



via flickr user Johan Larsson

Rhetorical Interfaces and Designed Affordances

by Alice Daer

I was reminded recently when reading rhetorician [Carolyn Miller](#) and [Dawn Shepherd's](#) work on genre in the blogosphere (2009) that [psychologist J.J. Gibson's](#) concept of “affordances” (further developed by his student [Don Norman](#) as “perceived affordances” and applied to the design of environments) emphasizes the ways that users’ experiences with interfaces are, in part, determined by the *suasory* qualities of its affordances. Miller and Shepherd note:

An affordance, or a suite of affordances, is directional, it appeals to us, by making some forms of communicative interaction possible or easy and others difficult or impossible, by leading us to engage in or to attempt certain kinds of rhetorical actions rather than others. (p. 281)

In other words, what we can do with a designed tool or object is necessarily shaped somewhat by “those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing can be used” (Norman 1988). By their very nature, these “fundamental properties” are *suasory*— they shape and limit and push us to interact, interpret, perceive, and do (or not). Interaction is never without some kind of inferred restriction, whether material or rhetorical. We are

always working within what we perceive as some kind of designed thing or space with its own capabilities, as we understand them from our own situated perspectives.

Therefore any basic interface engagement with a digital tool requires us to quickly assess what can and cannot be done with it. We tinker and push upon its limits like nonverbal toddlers exploring the limits of their own behaviors, pushing and hitting and biting until someone or something tells us “no.” And it’s interesting to think about the many ways that we almost instinctively push back on designs’ efforts to persuade us to use them only in the ways that their designers intended.

I’m reminded of when I once watched an expert gamer pick up a new first-person shooter for the Xbox. The first thing he did was readjust the controller’s settings, inverting the X/Y axis. He flipped to the inventory screen, assessing the character’s weapons and their damage capabilities. Within seconds, he had read the map and determined an exit strategy. And surprisingly (to me), he spent the next ten minutes repeatedly figuring out all the ways his character could die. I instantly realized that I had been playing the game all wrong: I hadn’t been willing to fail miserably as a method of learning how to play the game better. I needed to play with the affordances of the game in order to gauge my ability to master it. I wasn’t going to get better if I wasn’t willing to make mistakes. And I wasn’t going to be able to make mistakes if I didn’t push back on what the game was designed to allow me to do.

[Truthfully, this is exactly what good writers do best: break and remake language in order to push it to the limits of its own design. We value those texts that most ardently force us to think differently about what language can and cannot do.]

My interest is in everyday literacies and the ways that people make meaning with texts within particular contexts. I am deeply interested in how we almost instinctively and habitually push back on designed technological affordances and mold them to our liking. We constantly seem to expect different tools to behave the way we want them to, and when they don’t, we abandon them. I like to think of this process as a response to an almost ambient argument: a designed tool or application has its own perceived affordances that, as Gibson argued, have *suasory* qualities. When we take up these designs, we are responding to their insistence that we use them in the ways they were intended. What’s funny is how often we naturally resist the rhetorical “argument” that the designed object is trying to make. We almost always want it to be and do something else entirely.

When the Google Android operating system was introduced, I tried switching from my iPhone in hopes that I would enjoy the Android interface better. I was in favor of the principle of what Google was trying to do and wanted to give it a shot. But the first thing I did was configure all of the phone’s settings to make it more familiar to me (i.e., I changed its settings to make it more like the iPhone). Predictably, I eventually went back to my

iPhone because, as I think I said at the time: “although it does all the same things my iPhone does, it’s not my iPhone.” (The same is true now as I write this on my Chromebook: I’m wishing I had chosen to bring my Macbook to write on instead. As much as I love the Chromebook, it’s not my Macbook.)

I think that over time, these habits and practices and ways of “talking back” to designs are the foundations of the kinds of “textual communities” we’re writing about today. If we agree that the term “community” is to be broadly construed (we could also use the terms “networks” or “affinity spaces”) then we might see how this way of organizing ourselves by our interactivity can represent the starting point for larger nodes and networks over time. We might gravitate toward certain digital literacy practices (e.g., collecting images; buying and selling objects; curating resources) based on how different tools—and their designed affordances—respond to our attempts to redesign them. That’s why people who use Flickr regularly are a different community than those who use Instagram, and those who spend their days on DeviantArt share some overlap with those who use Imgur.

The “arguments” that designed interfaces make by attempting to determine what users can and cannot do are almost always taken up and redesigned by their communities, and this is a natural and organic process. If we are to become real fans and experts in our chosen digital communities, we must necessarily respond to the interface’s attempts to convince. To participate in an online textual community, passive response to interface is not an option.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

You haven’t talked to your cousin Ada in a while, so you decide to use your SmartCookie to see what she’s been up to. You ask SmartCookie to bring up her profile, and soon a 3D hologram of Ada appears as well as a number of features, including:

The last place she used her SmartCookie - turn to page 101.

A spindle map indicating the path she took through her last course - which happens to be the very course she just recommended! It is on page 168.

Her study playlist - turn to page 89.

Three Short Meditations on Interface

by Bob Stein

Margins

In a generation or two we will realize that the perception of reading as a solo activity had a short-life, lasting for no more than a few hundred years. And nothing tracks the changes better than the size of margins.

Well before Gutenberg perfected printing, scholarly books functioned as mnemonic devices. Professors and students stood around a table containing the one available copy and used the text as a jumping off point for discussion. They used the copious margins to record their commentary. As reading evolved into a solitary experience, the margins diminished accordingly. For example, look at these two versions of Copernicus' *de Revolutionibus*, a first edition (1543) and a current example.

INTRODUCTION

TO THE READER CONCERNING THE HYPOTHESES OF THIS WORK¹

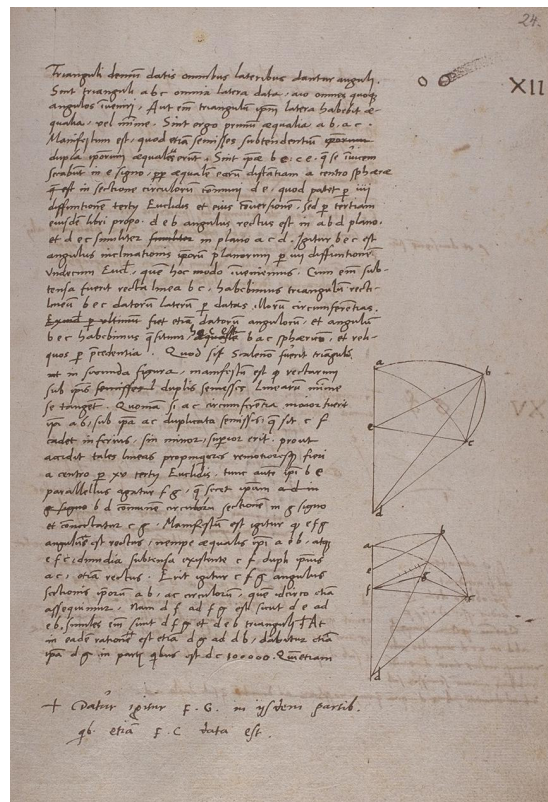
[1]²Since the newness of the hypotheses of this work—which sets the earth in motion and puts an immovable sun at the centre of the universe—has already received a great deal of publicity, I have no doubt that certain of the savants have taken grave offense and think it wrong to raise any disturbance among liberal disciplines which have had the right set-up for a long time now. If, however, they are willing to weigh the matter scrupulously, they will find that the author of this work has done nothing which merits blame. For it is the job of the astronomer to use painstaking and skilled observation in gathering together the history of the celestial movements, and then—since he cannot by any line of reasoning reach the true causes of these movements—to think up or construct whatever causes or hypotheses he pleases such that, by the assumption of these causes, those same movements can be calculated from the principles of geometry for the past and for the future too. This artist is markedly outstanding in both of these respects: for it is not necessary that these hypotheses should be true, or even probably; but it is enough if they provide a calculus which fits the observations—unless by some chance there is anyone so ignorant of geometry and optics as to hold the epicycle of Venus as probable and to believe this to be a cause why Venus alternately precedes and follows the sun at an angular distance of up to 40° or more. For who does not see that it necessarily follows from this assumption that the diameter of the planet in its perigee should appear more than four times greater, and the body of the planet more than sixteen times greater, than in its apogee? Nevertheless the experience of all the ages is opposed to that.³ There are also other things in this discipline which are just as absurd, but it is not necessary to examine them right now. For it is sufficiently clear that this art is absolutely and profoundly ignorant of the causes of the apparent irregular movements. And if it constructs and thinks up causes—and it has certainly thought up a good

¹This foreword, at first ascribed to Copernicus, is held to have been written by Andrew Oslander, a Lutheran theologian and friend of Copernicus, who saw the *De Revolutionibus* through the press.

²The numbers within the brackets refer to the pages of the first edition, published in 1543 at Nuremberg.

³Ptolemy makes Venus move on an epicycle the ratio of whose radius to the radius of the eccentric circle carrying the epicycle itself is nearly three to four. Hence the apparent magnitude of the planet would be expected to vary with the varying distance of the planet from the Earth, in the ratios stated by Oslander.

Moreover, it was found that, whenever the planet happened to be on the epicycle, the mean position of the sun appeared in line with EPA. And so, granted the ratios of epicycle and eccentric, Venus would never appear from the Earth to be at an angular distance of much more than 40° from the centre of her epicycle, that is to say, from the mean position of the sun, as it turned out by observation.



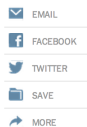
The first edition has lots of room for annotation, the recent, almost none.

It's not surprising, therefore, that as we see a return to social forms of reading, we also see a significant shift in the size of the margin. For example, here is a screen from the NY Times online with a very wide margin designed to accommodate an evolving culture of public

The Opinion Pages | EDITORIAL

Detroit's Immigration Solution

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD FEB. 5, 2014



The governor of Michigan, Rick Snyder, wants to fix Detroit with smart immigrants.

He proposes to attract 50,000 of them over five years using a visa program for people with advanced degrees or exceptional abilities in the sciences, arts or business.

It's [an unusual plan](#), and appealing on a gut level: Mr. Snyder, a businessman, is proposing a high-intensity effort to help Detroit to repopulate and rebuild itself, not to just hunker down through bankruptcy proceedings and then stagger on as before. Combined with other efforts by city officials to stimulate education, the arts, technology and manufacturing, a jolt of immigrant energy could help resuscitate a city that many have given up for dead.

But it's possible to welcome Mr. Snyder's creative immigration plan while acknowledging there's something unsettling about it. For one, Detroit is not a blank homesteader's prairie. It's a mostly African-American metropolis, done in by disastrous economic trends and epic mismanagement, but also by white abandonment. Its spiral into desolation has left many people trapped, with poor schools, few jobs and blighted futures. There's something oddly defeatist about saying: Our citizens have been done wrong for so long, let's bring in Chinese and Indians.

It seems strange, too, to pin immigration policy — a federal matter — to one well-meaning municipal project: Why just Detroit? Why not Baltimore or Brownsville, Tex.? And awarding site-specific visas creates an enforcement problem, if the people who take them move, say, to Chicago at the first opportunity. No one is going to tell them: Welcome to the Motor City; here's your green card and your electronic bracelet.

Such a limited visa program might also reinforce the misguided belief that



222 COMMENTS

The Grand Budapest Hotel

Share your thoughts.

All 222 Readers' Picks 136 NYT Picks 28

bob7e Fairfax, VA • 9 hours ago

As a former Detroit I am intrigued by Governor Snyder's proposal. Decades ago Toronto Canada was very similar to Detroit of that time. The Canadians adopted policies encouraging immigration and Toronto went out of its way to encourage immigrants to move there. Essentially, that is where the paths of the two cities diverged. The energy, wealth, talent and creativity of the immigrant population turned Toronto around and made it into the great city it is today. The lack of this crucial infusion together with the other factors itemized in the editorial combined to weigh down Detroit at a time when the economics of the auto industry was getting ready to pull the rug out from under the city. Other great American cities — shall we mention New York and Los Angeles — benefited tremendously from continual tides of immigrants moving into those cities and have been constantly reshaped, re-invented, even re-invented as a direct result of these recurring waves of immigration. I am not suggesting that Detroit would be the only, or even principal, beneficiary of such an initiative, but it certainly could help a city that badly needs all the help it can get. And it wouldn't do this nation as a whole any harm either.

Reply • 23 Recommend • Flag

JEH San Jose, CA • 9 hours ago

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... just make sure they have advanced degrees before arriving.

I'm very proud to call Michigan my home state but there's little reason to live there unless your family does. Asians, Indians, and many others will find little comforts from their home countries in Detroit. I welcome long-term ideas to improve Detroit but I don't see how giving out visas or building a new stadium for the Red Wings will make the city a better place to raise a family. Detroit needs better economic and education cooperation with its suburbs. Until it has that, people with the means to leave will continue doing so.

Reply • 29 Recommend

Comments Below, Comments Beside

In the early days of blogging and web commenting, the commentary ended up in a space below the text. This arrangement replicated and reinforced the hierarchy of print, with the author sending wisdom to the crowd below.

Beginning in 2006, however, we start seeing experiments placing reader comments in a margin to the right of the author's text. One of the first was an early draft of McKenzie Wark's *Gamer Theory* (now published by Harvard University Press).

Designed in this way to accommodate Wark's innovative non-linear writing style, many people realized immediately that the hierarchy of print had been subtly but importantly subverted as the author and the reader now occupied the same vertical space. Interestingly, you can see this in the discussion that unfolds as Wark and the readers increasingly interact as relative equals, working collaboratively to deepen their understanding of a complex topic.

The Difference Between the Water Cooler Discussion and Close Reading: The inherent value in enabling commentary to emerge inside of rather than around a text.

Goodreads and other online sites devoted to books enable what might be called asynchro-

nous water cooler discussions. Someone makes a general comment about a book and the next person either responds or starts a new thread. There is value in such discussions but it's not the same as being able to zero in on specific bits of text. In the first case you are essentially doing everything from memory, making it difficult to cite and go deep into the text. One thing that seems to happen when you enable readers to tie the discussion to specific bits is that the conversation tends to keep focus, allowing people to make syntheses which are not as easy to come to in generalized water cooler discussions. Here are two screen shots, the first showing a commentary in Goodreads ABOUT Huxley's Brave New World, the second a discussion INSIDE of Aphra Behn's Oroonoko. Without commenting on the value of the commentary in either, one immediately sees that the discussion in Brave New World is not particularly cohesive, with successive comments not necessarily building on one another. In the second we see concerted effort on the part of readers to work through a problem together.

This topic is about **Brave New World Archives > Brave New World - Similarities between Our World and New World?**

Comments (showing 1-6 of 6) (6 new) post a comment

message 1: by **Lindsay** (new) · added it · Dec 02, 2013 10:33AM

Society in Brave New World is very different from our own, but what (if any) similarities do you see between ours and theirs?

*Please ensure to hide spoilers (Jane has provided instructions: Place < spoiler > and < /spoiler > before and after the content you want to hide [without the spaces, of course] for all those who didn't see it. Thanks Jane!)

message 2: by **Jane** (new) · rated it 4 stars · Dec 03, 2013 10:12AM

One thing I find similar to our own world, well, maybe more to the time I first read this, my teen years in the late 60's/early 70's, is free love. The use of birth control and multiple sex partners reminds me of the communes and "free love" that many people were promoting during the "hippie" days. An attitude that shocked me a bit was the encouragement of sexual play in children. In today's world we are very conscious of and careful to protect our children from sexual predators. When I first read this, the idea of artificially creating embryos and growing them in testicles was so far out - but today we all know someone who has undergone IVF treatments. Babies in test tubes? It's commonplace now, but when I read this in the 60's it was so unreal.

message 3: by **Justin** (new) · rated it 4 stars · Dec 05, 2013 06:26PM

I'm about 75 pages in as I've thrown myself into other buddy reads this month. I listened to the audio version of the book several years ago and just couldn't get into it. I felt like I was the only person out there who didn't like the book.

I'm reading it now and it's better. I'm not crazy about it yet, but it's better than last time I tried to get through it. Unjust at the point now where some characters are being introduced and I am hoping to see the society break down as they discover love and emotion and not what's been fed to them from the beginning.

Similarities to our world are interesting as Jane pointed out. The ideas don't seem as crazy in this day and age, but I'm sure they were when the book was released.

I'm pressing on!

message 4: by **Matthew** (new) · rated it 4 stars · Dec 18, 2013 06:30AM

I thought this was a solid book overall; a strong first pick. A similarity that was apparent to me was the dualistic way people have of viewing everything. (This is good so that must be bad. That is wrong this is right. The outcome was a result of this not that, etc.) There was almost no balance or compromise to the characters' views.

Dystopian Society

Group Home | Events | Invite People
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"A GIRL AS TOUGH AS KATNISS EVERDEEN. A HISTORICAL BACKDROP AS STRONG AS COLD MOUNTAIN."
—BOOKLIST, STARRING REVIEW
START READING

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Echoes of Paradise: Paranormal Love Story
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www.goodreads.com
view 9 reviews >

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Collin's section — Oroonoko

Inline: 20
General: 0

Community

Apropos to which come twenty times, or more, about the Waste, and then cross, like a Shoulder-belt, both Ways, and round their Necks, Arms and Legs. This Adornment, with their long black Hair, and the Face painted in little Specks or Flowers here and there, makes 'em a wonderful Figure to behold. Some of the Beauties, which indeed are finely shap'd, as almost all are, and who have pretty Features, are charming and novel; for they have all that is called Beauty, except the Colour, which is a reddish Yellow; or after a new Oiling, which they often use to themselves, they are of the Colour of a new Brick, but smooth, soft and sleek. They are extreme modest and bashful, very shy, and nice of being touch'd. And tho' they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among 'em, there is not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance; and being continually us'd to see one another so unadorn'd, so like our first Parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no Wishes, there being nothing to heighten Curiosity; but all you can see, you see at once, and every Moment see; and where there is no Novelty, there can be no Curiosity. Not but I have seen a handsome young Indian, gazing for Love of a very beautiful young Indian Maid; but all his Courtship was, to fold his Arms, pursue her with his Eyes, and Sighs were all his Language: While she, as if no such Lover were present, or rather as if she desired none such, carefully guarded her Eyes from beholding him; and never approach'd him, but she look'd down with all the blushing Modesty I have seen in the most Severe and Cautious of our World. And these People represented to me an absolute Idea of the first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous Mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the World, than all the Inventions of Man: Religion would here but destroy that Tranquillity they possess by Ignorance; and Laws would but teach 'em to know Offences, of which now they have no Notion. They once made Mourning and Fasting for the Death of the English Governor, who had given his Hand to come on such a Day to 'em, and neither came nor sent; believing, when a Man's Word was past, nothing but Death could or should prevent his keeping it. And when they saw he was not dead, they ask'd him what Name they had for a Man who promis'd a Thing he did not do? The Governor told them, Such a Man was a Liar, which was a Word of Infamy to a Gentleman. Then one of 'em reply'd, Governor, you are a Liar, and guilty of that Infamy. They have a native Justice, which knows no Fraud; and they understand no Vice, or Cunning, but when they are taught by the White Men. They have Plurality of Wives; which, when they grow old, serve those that succeed 'em, who are young, but with a Servitude easy and respected; and unless they take Slaves in War, they have no other Attendants.

The ignorant noble savage characterization seems to be in play here and coming on the heels of NEW RELEASE: If you've ever witnessed something mysterious and unexplained, you'll want to read this intriguing story. Get your copy today!
www.amazon.com

addiecohen 02-6-2013

I was also really interested in this passage, and wondered what readers of Behn at the time would think of her assertion that "Religion would here but destroy": "Is she putting down religion? Even if she isn't, was it ever taken that way?"

RubiMora 02-6-2013

This passage also struck me as very interesting. I don't think that Behn would necessarily be presumed to be speaking anti-religion. It is in the Christian religion after all that we find the tale of Adam and Eve, who knew not of sin until they ate the apple from the Tree of Knowledge. I think Behn is alluding to Adam and Eve's ignorant bliss when she speaks of the



Bad Links

by Dennis Tenen

It is my intention here to convince you that links are bad. They are bad when it comes to writing for the web in general, bad for books, bad for long-form journalism, and even worse in academic publication. It is not that I am against the idea of links, but, as we will see here, the problem lies in the way links are used. This means that we can do something about using links better. But first, why are links so bad?

To start with, links are opaque. The worst of lot are links like [this](#) and [this](#). Of the two “thises,” the first leads us to Google and the second to Bing. But your readers would not know that just by looking at the text. The best they can do is “hover” over the word with their mouse cursor, relying on the browser interface to show them where the link is going. And once you get there, there are no easy ways to get back. The writer must have faith in the browser to “do the right thing” in guiding the reader through an intertextual maze. That is not right when it comes to writing. In most situations, the author should architect that experience explicitly. If you think about it, the old-fashioned apparatus of quoting an external text is itself a type of linking. But rather than quoting the whole text, the author only quotes the relevant bits. Sending readers away to do that work on their own is lazy and irresponsible. Imagine a tour guide who tells his tourists to “just go over there and look at some stuff,” and “come back when you’re done.” Links can be that disorienting.

Links disrupt the reading experience, and that is the second reason why links are bad. It is possible that you want the reader’s experience to be disrupted. But in many cases you don’t.

The reader is already distracted by the proliferation of parallel windows and devices that augment their reading in some way. Do we need to make that distraction easier? Should I link the [Wikipedia article on media multitasking](#), or is it enough for my purposes to simply mention Wikipedia, or to trust my reader to look something up later, in a reference source of their own choosing? Or better yet, should I just help the reader along by summarizing the findings? It mentions that most folks already read with a second screen in tow. It is not that unusual to see someone look something up on their phone or tablet while reading a newspaper or an e-book. Why? Because they don't want to leave the flow of the first screen. There is great pleasure in immersive, uninterrupted reading.

Besides being disruptive, links are ugly. They are ugly together, as in when [many links transpire to produce a tangled mess](#). And they are also ugly when naked on their own, like this: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TaGiFBG_WSEGKFey9sR0pafjjKK7Fuc0jhF5d4K1ouA/edit. That string of characters is not meant for human consumption! The period at the end kills me entirely. Meaningless punctuation inside of links coupled with regular punctuation ruins the sentence and the paragraph. Of course, I could just tell you to read [something on Google Docs](#). That looks much better, but then we are making the opaqueness problem worse by hiding the address behind words that may or may not be related to the destination. It seems that we are stuck compromising on either transparency, reading flow, or visual impact.

Links aren't very secure to begin with, but hiding links behind words further compromises security. You've probably heard of link-baiting: the purposefully malicious attempts to trick a reader into revealing personal information when following a link that masquerades as a legitimate destination. You can visit [my site](#) to learn more about link-baiting. You shouldn't have clicked that! (Don't worry, that was the real Google login page.) But even if one means well, viruses and browser exploits can inject bad links into your otherwise legitimate ones. A common technique is to install a browser script along with some seemingly useful "search bar" that will redirect all legitimate links to a site that makes money by advertising. Worse yet, you could end up on a site that attempts to further compromise your computer. Links are not secure because you have outsourced the relationship between reader and content to the browser.

Links are opaque, disruptive, ugly, unsafe, and they rot. Links don't last because the content at the address is dynamic. It is not guaranteed to be there decades, months, minutes after your initial visit. In that case, why even bother? The link works best for ephemeral output (like a tweet). We must think of something much more robust for any "serious" writing that hopes to survive to the end of the week. And for the really good stuff, the kind of stuff that is the purview of librarians, we need to cultivate sustainable, long-lasting, responsible practices of online citation. It should work as well, if not better, than the familiar

bibliographic citation in print. This practice should combat digital decay, not aid it. We need to think about the ways our links can be accessed, mined, and preserved with the archive-grade zeal of the rare book librarian.

Finally, links are terrible for accessibility. It is bad enough that clicking on a small word like [this](#) is difficult for people with any sort of fine-motor control problems. Being a little older in itself can make the online reading experience painful. Things are much worse for those with Parkinson's or for the blind. Sina Bahram, a blind usability expert (who is himself blind) reports that some sites contain thousands (!) of links in advance of actual content. Screen readers for the blind must read each one of them out loud. For the screen reader, there is no difference between garbage links and useful content. If you thought *looking* at links is disruptive, imagine listening to a robotic voice that pronounces every slash and every useless number in: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92pM6hJG6Wo>. And that is why Sina Bahram listens to his reader at 950 words per minute.

Any one of these issues alone should give us pause. Together, they are a cause of grave concern. How did we get here? And what can we do to make links good again?

How did we get here is not an easy question. A part of the story is surely the excitement we once felt about inter- and hypertext. Links were supposed to break the hegemony of linear narrative, ushering in a new interconnected world. To some extent the dream came true. But links also brought with them such things as Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Google's PageRank algorithm tracks, among other things, the number of incoming and outgoing links. This bias for connectivity encourages "link farms": sites that attempt to game the system by aggregating links or cross-linking their own content. A sure sign of a vacuous SEO-driven piece of writing is a certain cynical and strategic use of links to other popular sources. How long until the SEO logic infects poetry, fiction, or investigative journalism?

What can we do to make links better? There are a few things we all can do now. First, let's use links sparingly. Think smartly about whether you need to link or whether you can make do with a good, old-fashioned quote or citation. Second, link explicitly: Youtube.com is better than [this](#). Third, realize that online content is dynamic. It makes no sense to link a dynamic resource when the intent is to create a link to a static version of a document. Tools like the Save Page Now service, hosted by the Internet Archive, do just that. You will find this essay at sprintbeyondthebook.com but on February 6th, the static version of the site is best captured in a snapshot here: <http://web.archive.org/web/20140206203851/http://sprintbeyondthebook.com/category/questions-2/>. Finally, do not neglect the humble footnote.¹ Footnotes provide a nice blend between usability, transparency, and good knowledge design.

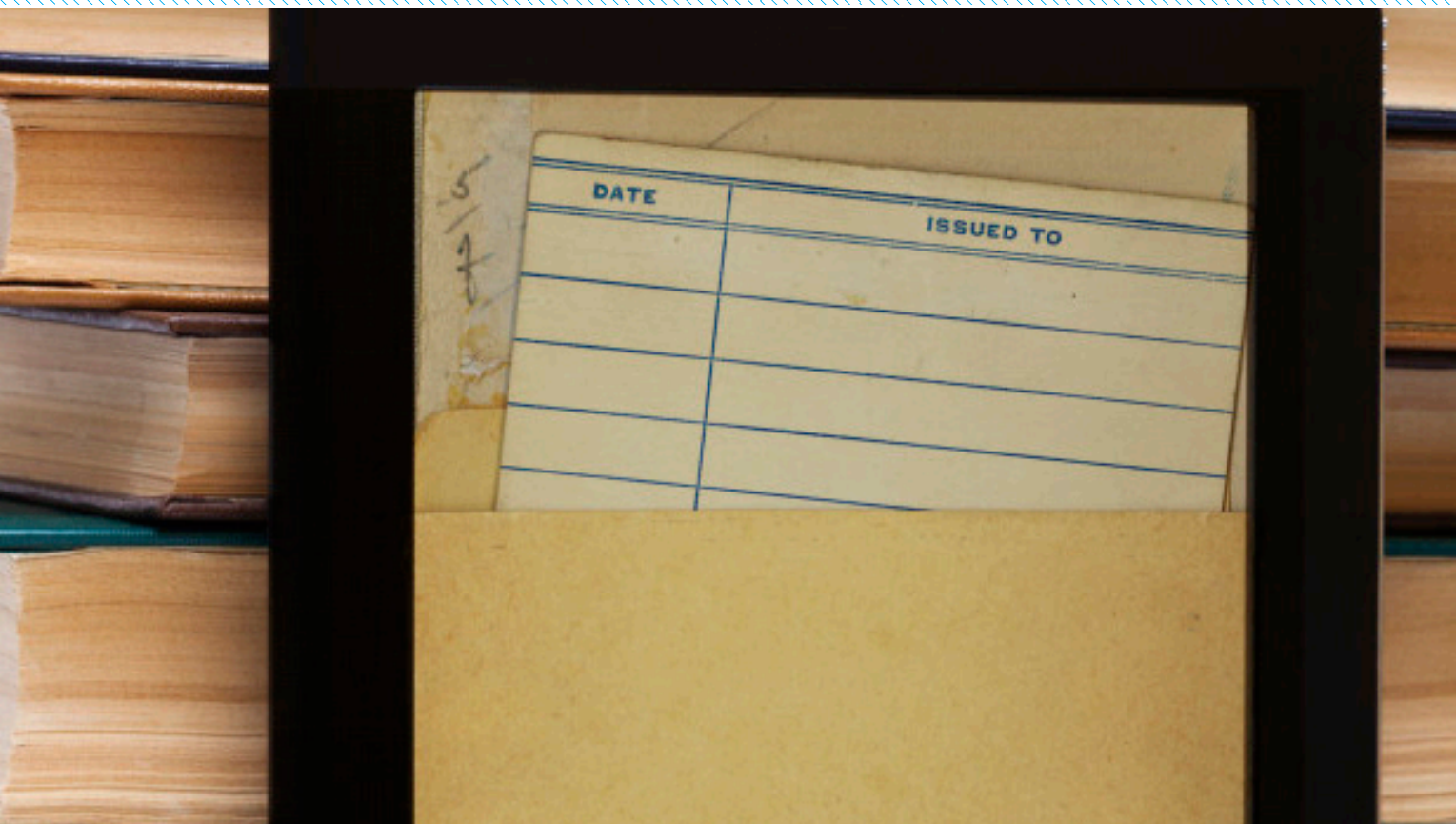
[1]: <http://web.archive.org/web/20140206203851/http://sprintbeyondthebook.com/category/questions-2/>



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[Dennis Tennen: Exploring Textual Communities >>](#)



The Sorry State of Peer-to-Peer E-Book Lending

by Torie Bosch

For most of my awkward life, books have been a way to escape or avoid stressful social interactions. Only recently have I realized that books also allow me to serve a social function: recommending titles to friends and family members, based on my understanding of their interests and character. Some people find book suggestions obnoxious and presumptuous, but in my experience, some carefully thought-out picks can transform a nonreader into a book liker, if not a book lover. When a friend raves about a book and asks me to suggest another, I gloat a bit and then attack my shelves, to find another delightful tome to pass on.

But the e-reader! Oh, the e-reader. The Kindle is a childhood dream come true, an opportunity to carry with me enough titles to assure that if I finish a book, I will not be left to make uncomfortable small-talk on the plane. But it is ruining the one bit of social currency I can offer. In only limited circumstances can one lend a book to a friend, and when you are attempting to convert a nonreader, being able to give them the book instantly, for free, is vital.

Of course, e-book lending is a fraught topic for publishers and public libraries. In May 2013,

the divine Ursula K. Le Guin laid out the [absurd terms](#) on which the “big five” publishers permit digital titles to be lent. But slowly, that situation is getting better; some months after Le Guin wrote her piece, Macmillan announced that it would [make its full backlist available](#). HarperCollins still demands that library obliterate a digital copy of a book after it’s been lent 26 times, which is an abomination. Still, this isn’t likely to last much longer; as Cory Doctorow detailed in a convincing column in September 2013, it’s in the best interest of the publishers to [make libraries their allies](#).

But even as publishers and libraries warily come to agreements—slowly though they might—person-to-person lending remains nigh impossible. On the Kindle, for instance, digital rights management sometimes permits owners to lend a title—but only once per book. Most books don’t permit sharing at all.

Publishers’ concerns about consumers lending books to people they don’t know through book-swap sites could be ameliorated: For instance, Forbes’ Jeff Bercovici has proposed a self-described “[pretty good solution](#)” that would entail people meeting in person, physically, to “bump” titles from one device to another. True, that would require social interaction, but I think I could handle that brief encounter.

Without creating a mutually acceptable way to permit easier, more widespread book sharing, the personal social networks that exist between readers will fray. While Americans continue to read at about the same pace as in years prior, the rate of *e-book reading* continues to rise, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). The rise in digital book consumption is particularly sharp among 18- to 29-year-olds. This is despite the death of the e-reader, which websites have been [predicting](#) since at least 2011. Even if tablets render my beloved Kindle obsolete, e-book reading will continue to grow. Permitting readers to swap titles will only accelerate that adoption, not diminish it. Because reading truly is a social activity, no matter how solitary the individual curled up with a book may appear. One could even make notes or highlights with a particular fellow-reader in mind, then delete them or adjust them for subsequent borrowers. This would only complement the strong social networks for readers that have cropped up online.

So please, publishers. Don’t take away my only bit of social utility.

Interfaces and Commitment: Do Read the Comments?

by Anouk Lang



To think about the ways that interface design and architecture contribute to the kinds of digital textual communities generated is to immediately be struck by the ballooning number of interfaces that are out there, and the fact that any single scholar can only grasp a small selection of them. (And also: what counts as a “text”? and what is a “community,” anyway? But those are questions that I hope we may address later on.) My way into this complex knot of problems is to take a small number of examples and to think about what it means to *commit* to them as a user. What’s involved in participation? And how does the level of a user’s commitment inflect the forms that their participation may take?

Extract from LibraryThing homepage

participation: comments on articles. “Despised” because of the view that comments are invariably a cesspit of illogical, unsustainable, and poorly-spelled opinions: an interpretive community that the “[don’t read the comments](#)” meme tells us we don’t want to be involved in, either as readers or authors of the content being commented upon. The context with which I’m most familiar in this respect is the Guardian, a British newspaper with an overtly left-wing orientation whose reader-commentators, from their generally high level of spelling and orthography, could be broadly assumed to be middle-class and generally well educated. There is a very robust community that has grown up in the comments section, to the point where posters will refer to one another’s contributions in other threads, warn others about particular users (for example “we all know about [username x] – ignore him, he’s got a history of doing y”), and perform other behaviors familiar to anyone who participates in online discussions. What is interesting about this community is

I think first of all about that most ubiquitous (and despised?) form of online textual

that its members have been very vocal about the technical limitations of the commenting platform, and eventually the paper made technical changes to its platform, including moving to threaded comments, which made following different conversational threads much easier. The newspaper has also recently begun to do little profiles of different commentators, which is a way of acknowledging both their presence and the value of their contributions. Despite this acknowledgement, the generally civil level of discourse, and users' ability to shape, in a limited way, the form of the commentary platform, it's striking that this comment space is still far from an utopian space of mutual enlightenment, and illustrates that this kind of online textual participation is, at its lowest level, drawn towards what could be termed "drive-by" commentary. Users' comments aren't necessarily subject to the same kind of filters (for civility, misogyny, racism, etc.) as exist in face-to-face communication, and at their most debased may be simply be a user's rapid-fire opinion delivered, and published, without many consequences for future interactions or one's real-world identity. The level of commitment required, in other words, is low.

Now consider Twitter. Also well-known as a hospitable home for drive-by commentary that can give voice to the kinds of opinions and text that are socially unacceptable in other contexts, its interface—in which one's followers see one's tweets—can act as a counterbalance to the freewheeling, putatively consequence-free discourse that can overwhelm the kind of spaces in my first example. You can, in other words, also use Twitter to do drive-by "critique," but your followers will see what you've said, so that is a part of the context that shapes what you say. But participation on Twitter is of course also governed by the various interfaces one uses to access it. Simply using the Twitter.com website makes it hard to see others who, for example, are tweeting with the same hashtag; a desktop client such as TweetDeck or Janetter makes it much easier to see existing conversations, and hence to be inducted into the various social conventions that go along with that hashtag (which ties into the literacies/grammars of participation that others in this Textual Communities group will be addressing). A smartphone can also facilitate users' ability to find groups of others who are tweeting on similar topics, though they make it more difficult to do other things such as reading long-form text to which other users may be linking. Twitter, then, requires a somewhat higher level of commitment than commenting on an online article.

My third example is the website [LibraryThing](#). Billing itself as a site that "catalogs your books online, easily, quickly and for free," LibraryThing is intriguing to consider in this context because it offers its users a range of ways to engage with other readers, and to respond to books. To take advantage of the full functionality of the site, you need to upload the titles in your personal library—whole or partial, real or imagined—into LibraryThing. Once this is done, the site gives you the chance to see a list of algorithmically-generated

recommendations that might appeal to you, based on the similarities between your library and those of other site members. (It appears that subject headings also play a part in these recommendations, though LibraryThing is cagey about how exactly its algorithms work.) Previously, in order to obtain book recommendations of this sort, you needed to go through this process in “meatspace” with a few select friends whose physical bookshelves you were able to see and get ideas for your own reading list from. LibraryThing widens the net of such “friends” out to the global membership of the site, and adds a bunch of bells and whistles familiar from other social media: the ability to give one-to-five star ratings, to write reviews, to engage in threaded online discussions, and more. As an interface, LibraryThing provides some wonderful affordances for its users: the opportunity to see how your book collection stacks up against those of others; the chance to find out what others think of a book via ratings and reviews (also a feature of Amazon, though LibraryThing has important differences from Amazon, the most obvious being that it is not driven by commercial imperatives in the same way—they aren’t interested in getting you to buy the books); the chance to see how it has been tagged by other members. If I was to generalize, I’d say that these can be boiled down to seeing how a book “means” for others, and getting the chance to tell others how a book signifies for you. The price of admission, though, is a higher level of commitment still: inputting the details of some or all of one’s books and investing time in getting to know the different affordances of the LibraryThing website.

These feel like very obvious points to make about three digital spaces for reading, but they illustrate some of the basic differences that I see in the way interfaces call forth different behaviors in readers, and the varying levels of commitment that are engendered. As a final thought, I’d also like to think about how identity management, and how different reading interfaces, stimulate different forms of image construction: the extent to which someone is using their literary tastes, discussions about texts, and so forth as a proxy for their learnedness/hipness/etc. That is, of course, a part of the context of participation in an interpretive community that has always been in play, whether the space is digital, analogue, or at a place on the continuum somewhere in between.

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F... h
@W... st



Following

Just read through my Twitter archive.

#DontEverDoThis

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ← Storify ●●● More

12:25 AM - 20 Apr 13

#hashtagging

by Alice Daer

In my scholarly life, I research the ways that people use language in social media contexts. To do this, I use two methods/approaches to language—the so-called “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) framework and something called “North American rhetorical genre studies” (RGS). I basically spend a lot of time participating in and observing social media communities and contexts, watching for trends and patterns to emerge. I try to determine whether these practices are recurring enough to be a “thing” (a genre), and if so, how and why they work the way they do.

For example, I’m interested in how hashtags were once designed and used primarily to sort information, but over time have become more metacommunicative and contextualized for certain purposes and populations. What might have started as a wayfinding tool to enable searches within big data sets (#tbt—short for “throwback Thursday” or #sorrynotsorry or #sherlocklives) is now an identity expression used to signal membership within an online network or space. Communities of social media users are retaining the hashtag form but redesigning its function in order to achieve specific rhetorical objectives.

The very act of posting via social media has its own language depending on what’s being posted by whom and in what context and for what platform. What it means to tag an image in Tumblr, for example, is markedly different from tagging images on Instagram. Pinterest uses the hashtag (#) form, for example, but its function is essentially useless as an

organizational tool for searching (as of the writing of this post, anyway; that might change).

Therefore it is only through sustained, contextualized participation in these social media communities that users come to redesign language forms in order to achieve new meanings. And each community or network has its own (often strong) opinion regarding what things mean and even how they should mean (e.g., see the numerous anti-hashtag Facebook groups, or the regular debates among Imgur users about whether hashtags should be used there in the ways that they're used on Tumblr). Perhaps not surprisingly, this is very close to the way that language works in offline networks as well.

Language has always been social, and it has always been a product of particular situations as they arise within specific communities. Even in the dark ages, monks were [writing notes to each other in the margins](#) of Latin texts. Therefore any discussion of how texts work must necessarily include a study of the places from which those texts were born. Language and culture are inextricable. Social and digital media forms must reflect their cultural ecologies.



Of course this presents an interesting methodological problem for those of us who study these things. Is it possible to study how language works without participating in its community? Yes, but I would argue that the “emic” (as opposed to “etic”) perspective gained via participant observation and ethnographic data collection will yield the most accurate and nuanced understanding of language-in-use. Can a great study of Twitter be conducted via a “scrape” of a large set of data? Absolutely. But the questions I hope to answer in my research require me to work from the inside-out. I guess I’m just one of those scholars who believes the richest knowledge about language, writing, and literacy comes from my direct experience with the people who are producing new meaning-making practices via social media every day.

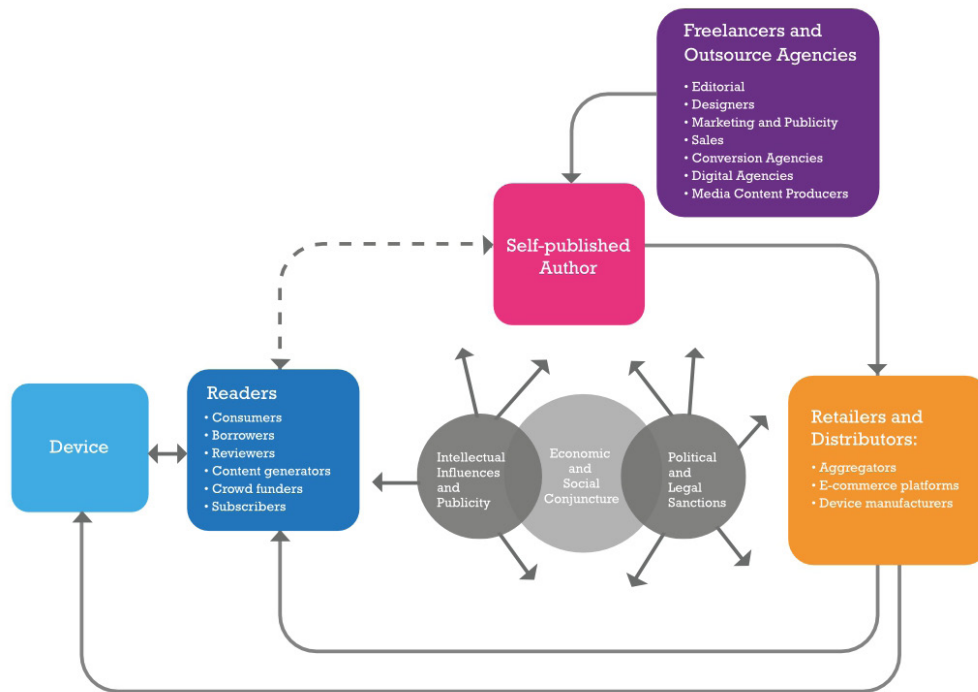
Social Reading and Writing: The Long View

by Bob Stein

Reading and Writing have always been profoundly social experiences. It's the reification of ideas into printed, persistent objects that obscures the social aspect so much so, that our culture portrays them as among the most solitary of behaviors. This is because in the print era, what we characterize as social takes place outside the pages—around the water cooler, at the dinner table, and on the pages of other publications in the form of reviews, citations, and bibliographies. From that perspective, moving texts from page to screen doesn't make them social so much as it allows the social aspects to come forward and to multiply in value.

That said, the transition will take time. Not only do we need new reading and writing platforms which capitalize on the social affordances of digital networks, but the fundamental value proposition of our educational institutions—which rewards solely on the basis of individual effort—needs to change as well. “Plays well with others” may appear as a marker on primary school report cards but is rapidly discarded as children move up and out of the educational system.

So it's not just that we need new tools: we need a culture which rewards collaboration. Realistically, the breadth of knowledge in any one area is so huge today that individuals can't be expected to possess a comprehensive grasp of a field or even a question within it. There's a wonderful phrase from computer pioneer Alan Kay, that “point of view is worth 80 IQ points.” Bringing different perspectives to bear on a problem is likely to yield better answers, syntheses that no individual is likely to get to on her own.



Self-Publishing Communications Circuit (Ray Murray and Squires, 2012)

Vernacular Criticism

by Anouk Lang

One term that has come up in our discussions at *Sprint Beyond the Book* is *vernacular criticism*, and it's one that I think is worth picking up on as a useful concept for considering the relationship of readers to the machinery of textual production which Robert Darnton sets out in his [diagram of the circuit of communications](#) (recently updated for [the late twentieth century](#) and [for self-published authors](#) by Padmini Ray Murray and Clare Squires). A great deal of smart stuff has been written about this already, for example Rosa Eberly's *Citizen Critics* (2000) and Jan Radway's ethnography of readers of romance novels, *Reading the Romance* (1991), one of the foundational texts for the field of reception studies. In the contexts examined by these studies, the "real readers" in question had no opportunity for making their readerly preferences known, and for pushing back on the publishers and authors who produced content they may or may not have liked. Many of Radway's romance readers described their dislike for insufficiently happy endings, for instance, but the only opportunity they had to register this discontent was to refuse to read and/or buy such titles.

Now, however, digital platforms that take account of reader preferences—both consciously delivered feedback and unconsciously delivered metrics about, for instance, [how far](#)

a reader gets through a text before abandoning it—make it possible for those at the production end of the communications circuit to take into consideration aggregated data about reader preferences as they produce the texts those readers will consume. On my flight to Arizona, the in-flight magazine had an article about precisely this (Boyd Farrow, “The Happy Ending You Asked For”) and what struck me was not the content of the article—which is not news to anyone who studies digital books, or even keeps half an eye on the culture pages of major newspapers—but the fact that this disruption of publishing practices is sufficiently interesting to feature in a publication such as an airline magazine that is designed to appeal to as wide a range of readers as possible. Farrow cites publishers who take reader suggestions on board and require authors to alter their storylines accordingly, and points to some historical precedents (the 18th-century rewriting of the ending of *Romeo and Juliet*). Digital interfaces for reading, however, have both sped this process up—reader feedback can be delivered to publishers far more swiftly—and allowed it to happen at a level of greater granularity (the exact page a reader stopped reading vs. a petulant letter to a publisher that might or might not reach an editor, agent, or even an author).

There are several ways to look at this development. One response is to be delighted at the disruption to conventional structures of literary authority whereby a small cadre of elites dictates who, and what, will be published, and a second cadre of elites of critics decides on where these published texts will sit within the field of cultural production: the cultural space where some artistic products occupy positions of prestige (e.g., “difficult” texts such as the works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot), some are deemed popular (e.g., comics, television soap operas, romance novels), and others sit somewhere in between (e.g., “middlebrow” books such as might feature on the reading lists of book clubs). Self-publication has helped with this process of disruption: examples abound of feel-good stories of authors who began self-publishing fiction that had been summarily rejected by publishers, and found acceptance, fame, and eventually wealth through the magic of the interwebs. But for those who read rather than write, their preferences as readers now have the power to be examined by publishers, and to shape what those publishers deliver, in ways that may or may not be visible. If you are a reader who has ever been dissatisfied with the way a book has ended, or the way a character has been treated, these kind of readerly interventions may be appealing.

Another response is to think about this development in terms of the threat to authorial autonomy. An author has a vision for her text, and having to attend to, and fall into line with, readerly desires is unlikely to be conducive to that. Authors, of course, have never been free of external strictures: publishers put pressure on them to deliver certain kinds of texts, editors shape their prose, and many other elements contribute to a cultural product

that is not conceived in isolation. But digital platforms for reading are delivering a whole new kind of reader feedback that—especially at a time when publishers are struggling with the financial implications of the advent of digital technology—make it easier for publishers to demand texts that deliver what the market wants. I'll nail my colors to the mast here: part of me is horrified at the thought of the difficult, challenging narratives that I love being in some way tempered to fit audience expectations, in the way that blockbuster films produced by the major studios undergo audience testing so as to deliver the ending that audiences want. Think of twentieth-century literature without the magnificent polyphony of *Ulysses*, the bewildering ending of Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the abjection of Dolores Haze at the end of *Lolita*, and the lack of closure of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Our cultural heritage would be the worse for it. I think of a study I did some years ago which looked at audience responses to Joss Whedon's (hilarious) superhero musical *Dr Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, serialized and disseminated over a period of weeks on the Internet. When the final installment aired, fans were initially dismayed, as the narrative contained developments that did not initially appeal to them. But as they discussed their responses to the story together and tried to make sense of it as an interpretive community, they came to understand and appreciate the narrative in a different way, in part by resituating the text in a different genre, that of the origin story. (The study, which is one of the most fun things I've ever done, is [here](#), if you are interested.)

So: should vernacular criticism, and the voices of real readers, play more of a role than they have previously in the mechanisms of book production? Should literary criticism be opened up to a wider range of people than just book reviewers and literary scholars? Has this ship already sailed, and are these questions therefore purely rhetorical? I'd like to think that some corners of the literary field could be protected from too much encroachment, even as we welcome the changes to conventional structures of literary authority that have already begun to change the shape of the publishing landscape.



When Books Go Blu-ray

by Scott Selisker

50 GB still seems pretty big to me. We can all date ourselves in the computer age by the amount of storage that first seemed *huge*. I was 11 when my father brought home a computer that had 220 megabytes on its hard drive, and it was like the new sublime, until I tried importing a CD in WAV format; I remember looking in horror at how much of that space Pearl Jam’s *Ten* took up on that previously sublime amount of space.

But 50 GB, that’s still pretty big for a book, right? I take it from the standard size of Blu-ray discs of movies, which confer upon most blockbusters (and even movies that score very low—very rotten—on RottenTomatoes.com) the laurels of multiple commentary tracks, interactive features, making-of featurettes, and so forth. It feels to me like a “deluxe” treatment for a movie that came out last year. Even though this treatment seems to be a purely industry-driven form of added value, at the same time, why not?

So: *What would a 50-GB edition of a book look like?*

Or, to ask it another way: what materials would be worth putting onto a sublimely huge edition of a contemporary book?

We have great models already, of course. The *Norton Critical Editions* series is great,

and I teach with these all the time: they collect a good edition of a text with explanatory footnotes, letters from the author, information about different editions of the text, early reviews of the novel, and excerpts from critical essays. The edition of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, a novel about an African American woman passing for white in 1920s New York, contains news clippings and other materials about a major contemporary court ruling on a "passing" case, as well as excerpts from many of the other books from that era that also addressed passing as a social issue. I love teaching students from this edition, and it's just paper, but: this is still in the Mere Megabytes. (It would even have fit onto that 220 MB hard drive in 1992.)

There are lots of terrific online archives for authors like Walt Whitman, the pre-Raphaelites, Marcel Proust, Miguel de Cervantes, and many, many others. These stretch our imagination about what a "deluxe" treatment would be for a great book—images, sound recordings, films, and more that can enhance the experience of learning about a text—and they're also edging into Gigabyte Territory.

The big change with contemporary fiction in the age of the web has been just how much readers and critics respond to texts on fan sites, discussion forums, fiction sites, and in other creative modes—I think that's how we fill our Blu-ray book. And I think such a book would be an amazing record of what books do—and what we do with books—in the world. The Blu-ray book would trace as much of the network of a book's presence on the web as possible, aiming for the maximum. We could have an edition of *Twilight* that aggregates fan fiction, discussion forums, records of cosplay events, and so forth.

Would we read it all? Probably not, but we could create features that would make it navigable. If we want to read fan stories with particular tags—centering on a particular character, with a certain number of "thumbs-up," or in a particular alternate world of the novel. And sure, this "edition" of a novel is already how the most avid readers interact with a text already. Imagine the way a *Harry Potter* fan might scour the web for more fiction and discussion about Ronald Weasley's further adventures at Hogwarts.

The 50-GB book would have to be *dynamic*. (Wait: okay, if our hypothetical book *has* to be an object, then let's say it's a rewritable Blu-ray disc). Scripts could aggregate the kinds of materials from fan sites I've mentioned already, along with allusions, TVtropes.com entries (the Wikipedia of the conventions of science fiction, fantasy, and more), reviews of the book in publications and on websites like Amazon and GoodReads, and so forth. We could add feeds into it, and it would change every time someone tagged a new allusion.

Most crucially to the Blu-ray book, we'll be able to use computational methods to "zoom out": we could make, say, word clouds, network visualizations, and other sorts of snapshots of the big phenomena that literature make in the world. The ability to zoom in and out, to

consider the phenomena of literature as big data and as individual and collective stories, is certainly exciting to me.

And there is, to me, something both exciting and reassuring about the possibility of seeing the *big*-ness of the book, of bringing a text and its world well into Gigabyte Territory (for now). The Blu-ray book would be a demonstration of an important message for humanists, for publishers, and for policymakers: that people are as enthusiastic about good books now as they've ever been.



[Scott Selisker: The Future of the Conference >>](#)



United in Hate-Reading

by Torie Bosch

The filter bubble is often discussed in terms of affinity: Online, the theory goes, we congregate around our likes and our passions, whether they are political causes or *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic*.

But hatred also unites people—and I'm not talking about the loathsome outposts of racists and misogynists. Many people—most of us—cherish at least the occasional hate-read, delighting in something that irks, irritates, and infuriates.

In 2013, after the New York Times examined the hate-read phenomenon, my Slate colleague Katy Waldman captured the psychology behind it:

No doubt some hate-reading comes from a place of bored or dissatisfied loneliness. (Where are my betches? Why aren't I in Vegas? I despise you, (http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2013/07/instagram_and_self_esteem_why_the_photo_sharing_network_is_even_more_depressing.html) Instagrammed artisanal blueberry-clove cupcake-on-a-doily!) But maybe one's deep scholarship of detestable crap on the Web is more than just the expression of an inferiority complex. Maybe it is an outlet, a way to access or exorcise extreme passion, sort of like watching a horror movie. The Greek tragedians knew that getting worked up is more than entertaining—it's cathartic. And the experience of hate-reading is one

part pure transport, one part fascination with the intensity of one's own feelings, and one part something else. This third rail of hate-reading, I think, is what redeems it. At its best, hate-reading highlights something lighthearted and even anti-hateful in us: a playful capacity to be amused by (and thus step back from) our own contempt.

But hate-reading is not just a solo activity. Many an Internet community is built on such shared amusement and contempt. These are not trolls, in that they are not solely trying to provoke outrage, though they may delight in driving someone off—making a blogger “flounce” from the Internet. Rather, they are seeking and developing communities that are, in their own way, affirming.

Perhaps the best example is [Television Without Pity](#), whose motto is “Spare the snark, spoil the networks.” TWOP, which was purchased by NBC Universal’s Bravo Media LLC in 2007, offers a space for people to dissect the shows they hate to love and love to hate. In TWOP forums, viewers compete to find plot holes and, for reality TV, continuity flaws, or evidence of producer machinations; an earnest, as opposed to ironic, defender of a show may find herself mocked by commenter after commenter. Sourness and crankiness are virtues.

Similarly, bloggers who evince strident philosophies or worldviews—especially when it comes to parenting—may find their fan communities invaded by groups of those who wait eagerly for new posts to appear so they can cut them down. Sometimes, the hate-read contingent can bring a blogger down, either because she can’t stand the criticism any longer or because they uncover questionable information about her. (For instance, devoted critics of the mommy blogger [MckMama](#) dug into her bankruptcy and created not one, but multiple, forums where they could trade theories and rumors about her.)

When the uninitiated encounter such sites online, they often ask: Don’t you have a life? For many, the answer may well be no; if you are a rumormonger at heart but have no one about whom to gossip, snark communities like these can provide a target, peers, and affirmation that their hobby isn’t bad or unusual.

These hate-read-based communities can offer incisive observations about culture, entertainment, and politics, but the worthwhile material is often buried among vitriolic pointing-and-laughing and cheap shots. Smarter hate-readers give glimpses of being capable of creating commentary that rises above gossip and cruelty, and indeed they may do so elsewhere. But the lack of empathy for the subjects of their criticism—whether a parent blogger or the producers of a show—is notable, and makes me wonder: Are they venting in a way that allows them to be more kind and tolerant in their in-person reactions, or can rather mean-spirited thought processes online seep into “real” lives, thus leaving them more isolated and in need of hate-read communities more than ever?



Asocial Text

by Dennis Tenen

Writing is a fundamentally social activity. Even when you do it alone, in a locked room, wearing your new noise-canceling headphones, you are (hopefully) writing for someone. A private language, says Dr. Wittgenstein, is an impossibility. Reading is a social activity too, because at the very least, it is an encounter of two minds. But much more frequently, there are many minds involved: other texts, other writers, co-authors, co-readers, book clubs, literature professors, snooty bookstore employees, publishers, and book critics.

Yet, these are quiet social encounters. They require a measure of focus, solitude, and introspection. It would be a mistake then to envision the future of the book simply in terms of social media. Part of what makes a book a book is its ability to block a part of the present physical world in favor of atemporal virtual reality. The book literally blocks vision. It privileges mental constructs over immediate input of the senses. To be lost in a book is to project one's sense of being into another world.

Let's imagine then a better book, one that further protects the sanctity of mental life, at least for the duration of reading. Imagine a book which, when opened, literally surrounds

its reader in a protective cocoon. Imagine a book that can balance the reader's dopamine levels. Imagine a wearable warm coat book, a pillow and blanket book, an umbrella book, a climate-controlled book built like a house or a nuclear fallout shelter or a biodome.

Paper, as it turns out, is a pretty durable material—much more durable than, let's say, silicon chips or copper circuit boards. It can also be used for insulation, it bends and burns better, and can make for versatile construction material (for the folding of paper planes, for example). I say this without irony and without nostalgia. Whatever technology comes beyond the book, it should at the very least do all those things better than cloth and paper.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

You don't understand Ada's comment, but you remember hearing good things about this Shakespeare guy, so you decide to register for the node.

When you log into the node, an avatar welcomes you. The instructor looks strange—sort of like a puppet, you think. He introduces the course, and it sounds interesting enough. But what does this have to do with jewels or heavens or Ada?

Puzzled, you begin the context module, which includes all kinds of interesting videos, audio clips, interviews, and articles about Shakespeare and his time. Clicking on any of these items reveals more information. What do you want to check out first?

To read about early modern special effects, turn to page 76.

To watch a clip from the movie *Anonymous* and learn more about authorship, turn to page 78.

To explore a 3D model of the Globe Theatre that Ada uploaded, turn to page 83.

Sprint 3

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24	2	6	Does one acre of hemp yield as much paper as 4 acres of trees?	[environment]	1h ago MJ Hidesigner 1
1	0	6	Scotland's oil and gas is dwindling	[geology] [geography]	2h ago 314294087501521342 182
12	2	864	+50 Is the Q-on-the-forehead test a valid method of determining extraversion and ability to lie?	[psychology]	7h ago Ruben 1,553
1	0	50	Do ants feed on pure honey?	[nutrition] [insects]	9h ago Oddthinking 44.7k
1	0	81	Will wrapping a bottle in a wet paper towel make it chill faster?	[physics] [beer]	10h ago Aycub 1

Skeptics Online

by Dennis Tenen

For about a year now I've been an active member on the Skeptics forum within the Stack Exchange (SE) network. Stack Exchange bills itself as "a fast-growing network of 114 question and answer sites on diverse topics from software programming to cooking to photography and gaming." Many of my readers will be familiar with Stack Overflow, the site for professional and enthusiast programmers. Stack Overflow shows up frequently in search results about various software- and programming-related queries. The other sites in the network are less popular by several degrees of magnitude, but they also have more of a community feel. On Skeptics, the core group is small enough to recognize its members by name.

My purpose here is to describe this little corner of the Internet, both as an ethnographic exercise and as a moment of self-reflection. At the very least, I hope to capture a snapshot of the quickly evolving life of an online forum. All Stack Exchange sites look and work the same way, using the same underlying software service. The idea of question and answer forums has been around since the early pre-Internet days of bulletin boards: you visit, write a post that asks a question, and hope someone answers. SE improved on that model by seeking not just an answer, but the definitive answer. Where general forums

encourage open-ended discussion, SE is set up to finish the conversation. In a perfect world, a question should have one succinct answer. That is what makes SE so popular. Where, on other forums, the answer is hidden in a long string of replies, SE prominently features the definitive answer on top of the pile of responses.

Like many other social web sites, SE is heavily “gamified.” Active users get points for good questions/answers and badges for various achievements (like answering a particularly old question, for example). A registered user is able to vote on the quality of the post (in a binary way, either up or down), adding to the total count of the author’s reputation points. The end effect is a system of social filtration. Poorly-received posts “sink” to the bottom of the pile. Quality content “floats” to the top.

Points and badges (which are the essence of gamification) can feel infantilizing sometimes, but in this case the achievements are tied to real editorial privileges. It takes roughly 125 points (at 10 points per upvote) to be able to downvote someone, for example. At 2,000 points, a member can start editing all questions and answers (and not just her own). The ability to vote to delete posts from the site entirely kicks in at 3,000 points. 20,000 points grant further editorial privileges. Interestingly enough, the community moderators are elected in an open election that does not require a reputation threshold. Of course most moderators (who can do things like change the look and feel of the site) tend to be long-time contributors to the community. This model of governance rewards stable identities and active, high-quality participation. (The quality part is an important piece here. Other reward systems encourage quantity over quality, which can result in the frequent appearance of repeated “meme” content. At SE, such posts would be voted down and some effort is taken to remove duplicate content).

The Skeptics forum has high evidential standards. Questions must present a notable claim—something that appears in popular media, for example. Similar to the Wikipedia policy, SE answers should not contain popular research, relying rather on peer-reviewed scholarship and other reputable sources. When the answer is good, other members of the community may ask for further clarification, better source material, or offer other editorial suggestions. And, although it is not required, the person asking the question is encouraged to accept the correct answer, which brings a few extra points to the answerer.

SE sites tend to cluster around communities of expertise, like programming, physics, photography, and English language usage. The Skeptics community differs slightly from these in that it is a forum for applying the general principles of scientific skepticism. The site specializes in debunking notable bogus claims, popular misconceptions, pseudo science, and superstition of all kind. Medicine comprises the most popular category by far, with nutrition and history following close behind. My most popular answers on the site

include “Do wild dogs use trains to commute to and from Moscow?” (yes they do),¹ “Did only a handful of people in Europe know how to do division before the 13th century?” (no, long for division was widely known at the time),² and “Did the Ancient Egyptians use twenty-sided dice?” (yes!).³

Writing these posts is time consuming, taking anywhere between a few hours (when the answer is limited to simple citation) and a few days (when it requires extensive synthesis). Why do I contribute?

First, I find it relaxing. There is great pleasure in using my research skills in areas which I don't normally encounter in my professional life. Second, I believe in the cause of tough-minded skepticism. It is the sort of thing that often goes by the name of “critical thinking,” even though few are willing to apply it to all aspects of their belief. Third, I feel compelled to do it as a small measure of civic duty or citizen scholarship. I have easy access to university resources like PubMed and JSTOR, which are closed to the rest of the world. It takes me just a few minutes to answer questions like “Do girls mature more quickly than boys?”⁴ or “Is the value of a tree \$193,250?”⁵ using fairly reliable, state-of-the-art sources. Finally, I find in Stack Exchange a powerful model for academic publishing (or publishing of any kind for that matter). Running a journal requires an enormous amount of work (by editors, managing editors, and reviewers). Most of this labor is invisible and, for the most part, unrewarded. We could learn a lot about streamlining the peer-review process from communities like SE. Imagine, for example, accruing reputation points for being an active reviewer (or being on time with your comments), and then trading those points for expanded editorial privileges or for faster turn-around times when submitting your own articles for publication.

[1]: <http://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/15910/do-wild-dogs-use-trains-to-commute-to-and-from-moscow/15918#15918>

[2]: <http://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/15130/did-only-a-handful-of-people-in-europe-know-how-to-do-division-before-the-13th-c/15138#15138>

[3]: <http://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/16578/did-the-ancient-egyptians-use-twenty-sided-dice/16579#16579>

[4]: <http://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/14736/do-girls-mature-more-quickly-than-boys/14771#14771>

[5]: <http://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/16007/is-the-value-of-a-tree-193-250/16009#16009>



Digital Textual Communities as Deep Maps: A Case Study

by Anouk Lang

For our third and final sprint, our Digital Textual Communities group has opted to produce a series of case studies of online communities that each of us belongs to, in order to give an insider's perspective (or an emic approach, to be technical) about what it was like, in early 2014, to participate in these spaces. Our definition of a digital textual community has been kept deliberately broad, and resonates with what we have been calling the “ambient text”—the state of being surrounded by a flow of digital text, whether in the form of the Gchat windows that pop up unbidden on your laptop while you are attempting to concentrate on something else, the Twitter conversations that you follow while waiting for the lights to change, and the “old media” textual manifestations such as the advertisements at the bus stop or the book that you carry to read on the bus.

I have chosen to write about my neighborhood social network, a digital textual community that I have belonged to since its inception. To keep it anonymous, I'll give it the pseudonym NorthLondon.org. This site has been in existence for somewhere between five and ten

years, and was set up by a private individual with no links to the local government authority or existing community groups. It is sustained by the ongoing care and attention of its founder and a small group of dedicated moderators, and has won international awards for its contributions to improving the neighborhood. Its membership currently stands at over seven thousand. It is not a textual community in the sense of gathering together people to discuss texts, but it is a platform on which communication with others is done almost entirely through text. Participation in it involves, of course, an aspect of identity management. I myself have two identities on the site: a primary one, which my friends know is me, and another more anonymous one for activities that I don't want tied to my primary identity (usually for security reasons, so as not to give away where exactly I live). I think the site is worth writing about in this context because it is unusual for a social network in that a larger-than-normal proportion of its members have met in real life, evident from the number of events such as pub meet-ups that are organized, and the many threads in which individuals arrange to meet in order to loan each other equipment, pet-sit for one another, swap plant seeds, and so forth. There is some disagreement on the threads, and a small amount of trolling, but for a digital community there is a generally high level of civility, which I put down to the fact that participants are aware that there is a good chance they will know, and be known by, at least some of their interlocutors in real life.

What is it like to belong to this community? I'm wary of waxing techno-utopian, but I feel more at home in my neighborhood than I have in any place that I've ever lived, including the sleepy suburb of Sydney where I spent fifteen-odd years as a kid, and NorthLondon.org is at the very top of the list of reasons why. It tells me what is going on. It helps me to find people whose interests match mine. It has helped me to find people who have been happy to lend me various pieces of home hardware equipment, and to lend out various things myself; to uncover local knowledge about who is best at fixing a leaking roof and where the go-to places are for taking small children on rainy days. Through it, I found a nanny share, and a spare flat for visiting friends to stay in. My partner found a cricket team, and through that a group of friends. On my way to and from the tube station and the corner store, I pass people who I know and who will smile at me—a rarity on the mean streets of the capital!—because we have encountered each other first via NorthLondon.org. London has a reputation as a large, hostile city, in a country of famously reserved and unfriendly people, but the virtual community that has grown around this site has managed to cut across many of the social barriers we tend to throw up around ourselves, often for good reasons, in an overcrowded urban environment.

Rising above the personal to the communal level, other good things have been brought about by the site. There has been a great deal of local campaigning, some of its successful,

to fix local problems from the mundane (litter and traffic) to the substantial (mistakes made by the local council, which have been pointed out and rectified). Recently, in a high-octane thread (which the writers of *Law & Order* should totally make into a storyline; I look forward to hearing from them with a proposal to consult), some muggers were reported to be operating along a particular stretch at a particular time of night. Thanks to reports by site members (and, it appears, by police picking up information by lurking on the site) the suspects were caught in a police sting.

One of my favorite occurrences is when a site member comes across a historical document (sometimes by knocking down a Victorian wall in their house and finding it among the rubble) and posts about it. It may be, say, a list of names of residents who lived in a particular road in the 1940s, or a photograph of a road which had just been bombed in the war. This generates a flurry of responses as current residents chime in, asking about who lived in their house, or adding details about the photo. The site provides a platform for recuperating, sharing, and preserving an oral history of sorts about the area that might otherwise be lost. I love learning things about my adopted city, but even more than this I love seeing my neighbors engaging with these historical texts, speculating about the past, making connections, and generating meaning in co-operative ways that are more than a little redolent of the way readers engage with books and with each other. I read those threads with delight, and I see the people who have posted on them in the pub, or walking their kids to school. The many threads of this sort that are woven together on NorthLondon.org make me think of my neighborhood as a text. Sometimes this textuality is almost literal: the sidewalks on one half of my road differ from those on the other half, and one day I discovered from NorthLondon.org that this was due to a historical boundary between local authorities, who had different means of upkeep for their roads. That historical boundary has long ceased to exist, but its traces are still visible in the built environment, and every time I pass them I can read London's shifting political divisions in the ground under my feet. The digital community, which you could term a geographical paratext, brings the local environment to life in unexpected ways.

Some notes about the interface, as we are in part writing this as a quasi-historical account of what participation in such online communities entails. Much of the site's activity consists of threaded discussions; those who post in them are informed of updates by email (and these notifications can be turned off). Members can post events; there are groups to which one can sign up in order to be kept abreast of activities in that group. Many members use real names and actual photos of themselves for avatars (I choose not to). As is standard for online social networks, there has been a fair degree of grumbling about the site's interface, and from time to time moderators respond with changes. There is an automated

system whereby the first dozen or so words of new forum posts are sent out on Twitter, meaning that it's possible to discern the presence of content that moderators have decided to delete. Moderators' decisions to delete threads or individual posts are from time to time challenged, but the moderators are well-known in the face-to-face world and so there are usually plenty of members who jump to their defense.

In terms of demographics, it is obvious that the site excludes a large proportion of the people who live in the area (which has high numbers of Greek, Cypriot, Turkish, and Polish people): those who do not have English as a first language, and who tend to be older. It's noticeable when someone is an outsider, because they don't know the conversational norms, they type in all caps, or they will perhaps come on to the site without a history of prior posts and rant about something that is upsetting them without giving any indication of how they could be practically helped or even contacted. Sometimes site members will offer gentle suggestions; sometimes these obvious interlopers will simply be ignored. As with any community, online or offline, you need to be fairly expert with the established communicative conventions to take full advantage of all the resources the site offers. (I feel like it took me years of lurking on other forums to learn the rules of engagement for this one.) Discursive behaviors that contravene the site's norms have led me to notice the ways in which I've learnt to conform, which include conventions such as these: if asking for advice, signal that you have already done a search; tag your posts correctly (posts asking for recommendations for a good plumber need to be tagged with "plumber"). This is part of a grammar of community participation that is every bit as important as linguistic grammar for laying claim to group membership.

Drawing this back to the idea of a digital textual community, there is an obvious way in which text mediates much of what occurs on the site: users communicate primarily by means of typed text, and to a lesser extent through images (photos and avatars). But, less obviously, this digital textual community could itself be seen as a text: the "book" of the neighborhood, with a depth and breadth of information whose richness owes everything to the profusion of contributing "authors" on the site. As an enthusiastic consumer—and creator—of digital maps, I also think of how much of the information can be tied to specific geographical points, and how the site might be understood as a "deep map" of the neighborhood:

A deep map is a detailed, multimedia depiction of a place and all that exists within it. It is not strictly tangible; it also includes emotion and meaning. A deep map is both a process and a product—a creative space that is visual, open, multi-layered, and ever changing. Where traditional maps serve as statements, deep maps serve as conversations. ("Spacial Humanities," 2012)

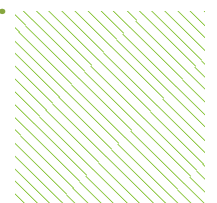
If our smartphones, responsible for so much of the "ambient text" in our environment—

such as the NorthLondon.org thread I checked one evening before deciding not to head down the street on which the muggers would shortly be arrested—are making it increasingly easy to link text to geolocation data, this is something that serves to blur the distinction between the book and the map. It’s a feature that I think will increasingly come into play as we imagine the future of books, and the future of the communities that cluster around them.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

You start the node and never stop dancing, never completing the node nor finding out what happened to Ada or the jewels.

The End





On Being Intimidated by the Wikipedia Community

by Torie Bosch

It's not as easy as it might seem to figure out what percentage of Wikipedia's editors are women. A [2011 survey](#) said that worldwide, it was just 9 percent, while Benjamin Mako Hill and Aaron Shaw estimated in a 2013 [PLoS One paper](#) that it's 16.1 percent; the 2011 survey suggested that 13 percent of U.S. editors are female, but Hill and Shaw put that number at 22.7 percent. Estimates could be skewed by the fact that many Wikipedians choose not to share their gender with the site, and women may be more likely to omit that information.

Regardless of which estimate comes closer to the reality, the demographics clearly disappoint, especially because research suggests female editors make far fewer edits and contributions. (In the 2011 survey, 30 percent of female editors reported making just 1-50 edits, while only 18 percent of male editors did.) This shows in the product: Articles on stereotypically female subjects are less complete. After the British royal wedding, an editing war commenced over whether Kate Middleton's gown deserved its own Wikipedia entry, and Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales has cited this as an example of how the site struggles on gender topics. (After Wales discussed it at Wikimania 2012 in Washington, D.C., I [wrote about it for Slate](#).) Sarah Stierch, then a research fellow at the Wikimedia Foundation, suggested to Tim Sampson of the [Daily Dot](#) in January 2013 that the site's very

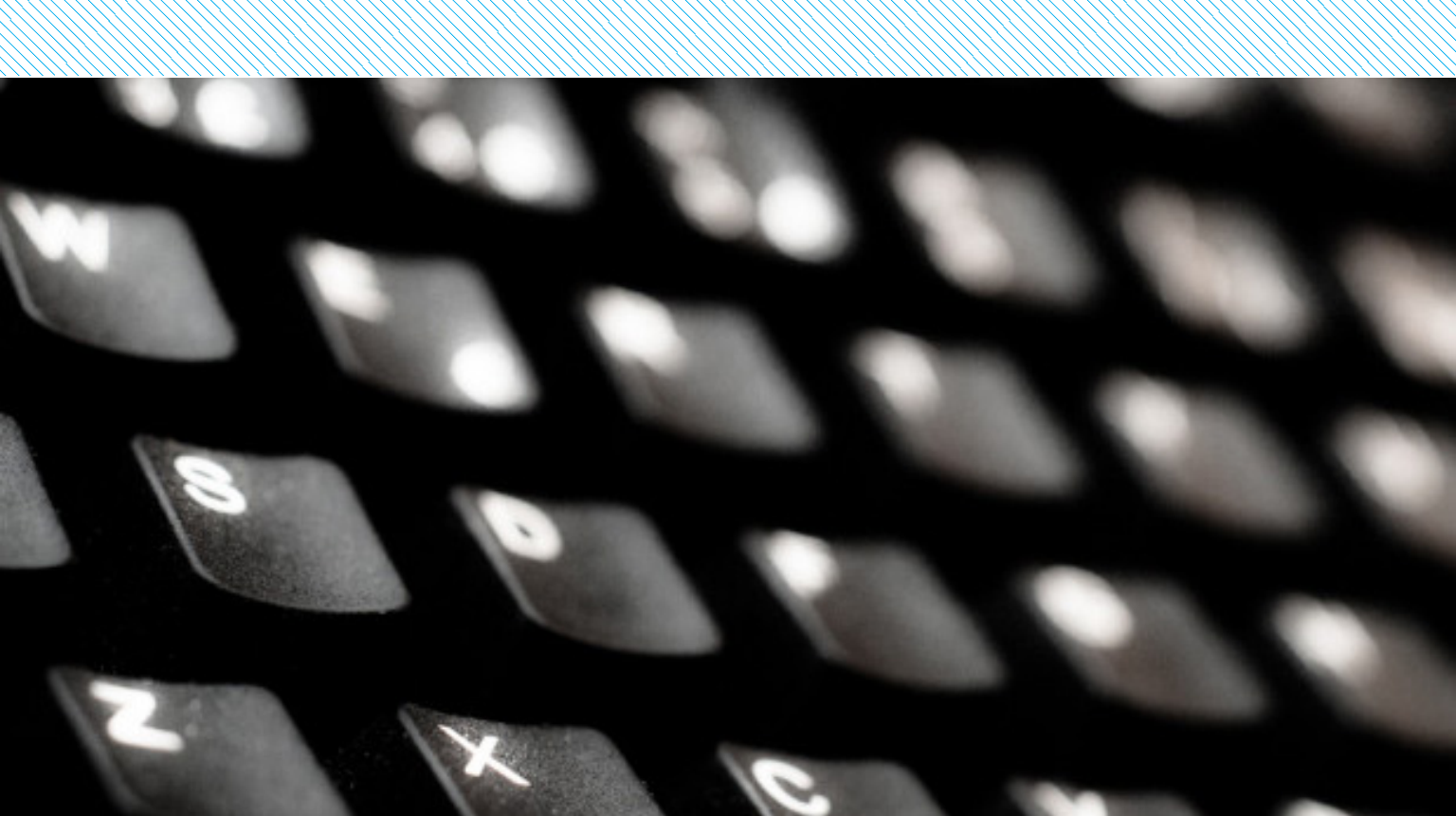
layout alienates women: “It’s aesthetically very masculine in its design.”

In high school, I was the only female student in my C++ class; though it mostly vexed me, I’ll cop to deriving a certain pride from it. But I was a dreadful programmer, still am, and so decided to devote myself to fighting the tech gender gap in other ways. It would stand to reason that becoming an active, engaged Wikipedia editor would fit this mandate exactly. Yet like many women, I find myself too intimidated to dive in.

After Wikimania 2012, invigorated and inspired, I signed up for a Wikipedia account—and in the 18 months or so since, I have made exactly one edit. It was a tiny grammatical fix. After my edit, I attempted to explain my change on the text page, then realized afterward that my explanation itself was done incorrectly. I felt embarrassed and haven’t made a change since—a silly, self-involved, wimpy move on my part.

When editors were asked in [another survey](#) why they didn’t contribute more, one-quarter answered, “I am afraid of making a mistake and getting ‘in trouble’ for it.” It’s a response that I identify with. The conversation on Talk pages on Wikipedia can be aggressive, dismissive, legalistic in enforcing rules. Virtual battles can become heated on topics large and small; the list of the [top 10 most controversial Wikipedia pages in 2013](#) includes both global warming and “List of World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. employees.” For someone conflict-averse, any edit could feel like a potential landmine. “The site, by its nature, favors people with an intense interest in detail and a high tolerance for debate,” Sady Doyle wrote in [Salon](#) in 2009. It also favors those who enjoy showing off their knowledge; being self-effacing is not desirable.

On the Internet, the maxim says, nobody knows you’re a dog. No one knows whether you’re a woman, either. But social conditioning and personality are difficult to overcome. But perhaps editing with a [strong avatar in mind](#) might empower me to return and make that second Wikipedia edit.



Email: A Case Study Leads to Unexpected Conclusions

by Bob Stein

While teens and 20-somethings opt for the short and ephemeral—text messaging, tweeting, and sharing Instagrams, Snapchats, and Vines—the digital textual community where many of the rest of us spend too much of our time is within the confines of our email client. God knows we don't do this by choice, but due to the exigencies of work, it's how we communicate and interact on a broad range of topics from the mundane (setting times for meetings) to the substantive.

Two years ago I got an email from a designer in my company. Although short, only four paragraphs, the email comprised a number of discrete issues and I realized how complicated the discussion would become. Yes, I could respond interstitially, placing each comment below the text it referred to. But my colleagues might or might not respond in kind. Some of them prefer to make their comments at the beginning, some at the end. And of course there is the problem of timing. If two of us make relatively simultaneous comments, things rapidly get out of hand in terms of keeping track of who said what, in response to what, when. By the end of the day we would be spending as much or more time and brain power unpacking the thread than dealing with the subject matter at

hand. Or to put it another way, the structure of the communication in email has a way of unintentionally becoming the primary subject.

So, I tried an experiment. I put the four paragraphs into a SocialBook document. The advantages were immediately obvious:

- » Since there was only one instance of the document (not multiple as there is in email), everyone's contribution was represented in a very clear time order. There was no doubt as to what had been said when.
- » Because SocialBook allowed us to respond to specific text strings, it was very easy to focus the conversation at exactly the right nodes.
- » SocialBook gives equal weight to the original text and the conversation that emerges around it, making it much easier to consider the responses in context.

The improvement in efficiency was palpable and we haven't used email for any substantive discussion since that day.

The success of this experiment surprised me since when we started designing SocialBook, supplanting email was decidedly not a target. So I started wondering how we ended up with a viable alternative. As a further experiment I took the same four paragraphs plus our commentary and tried to recreate it in Google Docs. Ugh! While Google Docs allows everyone to make changes to a document, it does a terrible job of capturing the conversation that might explain the reasons for the changes. From the other direction, I also looked at some of the other social reading platforms which, while better than Google Docs or email, did a relatively poor job of exposing the conversational thread in the context of the original text.

After speaking at length to SocialBook's technical team, I began to understand the source of its strength. Google Docs likely started with a word processor to which they added a primitive social layer. Other social reading schemes probably grafted social onto a basic e-reader. SocialBook on the other hand built its architecture from the ground up, basing its architecture on the core principle that people are going to gather around the text.

The result is one of emerging class of what I call collaborative thinking processors. If you draw a Venn diagram with two ovals, one being reading and the other writing, the overlapping bit is where thinking takes place. SocialBook's strength stems from its ability to create a space optimized for thinking and reflection. Even if I'm reading by myself, just by providing an expanded margin I'm encouraged to annotate. The act of annotating encourages me to think more deeply about the text. Add other people to the mix and two things happen: Because others may read my comments, I think all the harder about the subject and how to express my thoughts, and more importantly I've got collaborators to help me think through all the interesting bits.

I LIKE THIS



BECAUSE REASONS

Because Community

by Alice Daer

Pretty much all I teach these days are classes on the study of writing in digital communities. For 15 weeks, students in my undergraduate and graduate courses embed themselves in a space of their choosing and investigate how participants write, read, communicate, and think in that digital network. I've had the pleasure of reading studies on interesting linguistic constructions like the "[because noun](#)" and "[I can't even.](#)" I've learned about [the ways that language gets debated on the black hole that is Tumblr](#), and I've witnessed countless [ragequits](#) and [twittercides](#) as they are documented and analyzed by the student scholars in my classes who write with clarity and confidence about the people in the communities they study throughout the semester.

OH, so you
wanna argue?
BRING IT.
I got my
CAPS LOCK
ON

GIRLFROHPARIS | TUMBLR

image via knottytotty.tumblr.com

We talk about the difference between [image macros](#) and [memes](#) (they are often taken to mean the same thing, where one is actually a subset of the other). We construct research questions that often boil down to: “Why would anyone waste their time on that?” We then design qualitative (short term) ethnographic studies that attempt to account for why people spend hours a day buying and selling pixelated items in virtual auction houses, or why it’s not cool to retweet a post from someone’s protected account. Students have taught me the difference between “bro” and “brah,” learned via investigative research into fantasy sports leagues. They’ve explained [doge](#) to me in ways I could have never possibly understood without their assistance. Best of all, we have learned together how difference is best appreciated when experienced firsthand. The rest of the world may not understand [my obsession with flowcharts](#), but my fellow Pinterest users sure do. To them, it makes perfect sense why anyone would want to spend hours a day curating their [niche collections](#) of taxidermy photos and DIY lip balm recipes.



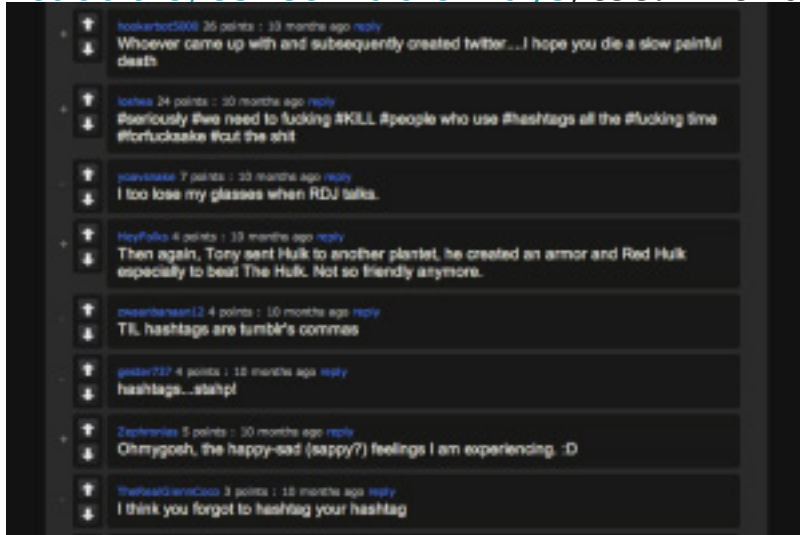
Image from <http://the-toast.net/2013/11/20/yes-you-can-even/view-all/>



I’ve always believed that to study language is to study people. Studying how people write and value texts and paratexts in their everyday lives is to appreciate perspectives that were perhaps previously misunderstood. From the insides of these communities, we can make and share meaning in ways that feel different and somehow new. Take, for example, the 19-year-old Tumblr user who [created a comic about white privilege](#).

The comic itself generated a huge buzz and loads of [negative backlash from nasty Tumblr users](#). But in the end, it’s a teaching moment for those of us who study the ways that people use Internet-based writing spaces to communicate with one another. On the one hand, this communicative form [enables hate and ignorance](#) in countless ways. On the other hand, it [exposes hate and ignorance in concrete](#),

readable, consumable ways, too. The raw, unedited, unfiltered Internet



Screen grab from <http://imgur.com/gallery/l8Rdg>

communities are rich with opportunities to teach students about the power of language and text. I believe strongly in exposing students to both the bloody awful and the **radically accepting ways** that digital textual communities shape our lives.

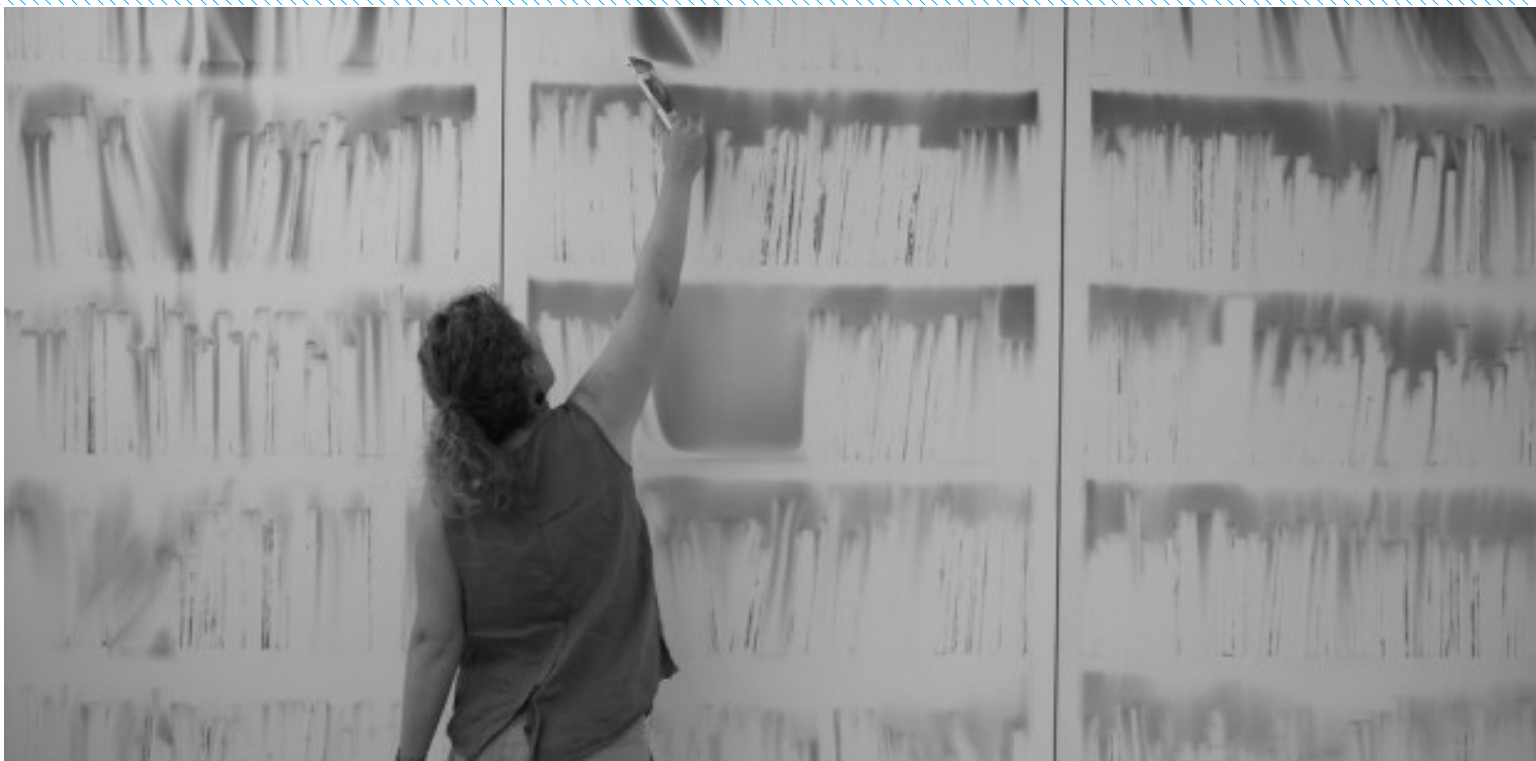
In 2006, I was a co-author on a white paper titled “[Confronting the Challenges of a Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century](#),” primarily written by one of my mentors, [Henry Jenkins](#). In that piece we wrote about something we called “the transparency problem.” The “transparency problem” is the notion that adults (educators, parents, mentors, media makers) often mistakenly assume that because young people are “born digital” as “digital natives” (an idea, by the way, I wholeheartedly disagree with) they must be so rhetorically skilled at interpreting media messages that they don’t need our help “to see clearly the ways that media shape perceptions of the world” (p. 3). While it is definitely true that some people younger than I am are more knowledgeable about digital tools and communities than I am, it is equally true that I still have plenty to teach them about these spaces, too. That’s why we work on understanding these spaces together. Shared understandings of shared languages, artifacts, and activities enable us to become better thinkers and writers, and that, in turn, enables us to share better thinking and writing with other communities, like the folks participating in this Sprint Beyond the Book. Thanks for reading, and feel free to invite me to understand your weirdo niche subreddit or strangely addictive Pinterest board.

You learn that actors used real cannons to simulate the sounds of battle in the theater. Just when you start to think that might not be very safe, you read that the Globe caught on fire in 1613! Shakespeare’s company, the King’s Men, were performing *Henry VIII* and accidentally set the thatch roof and the ceiling (the “heavens”) on fire. The theater burned to the ground almost immediately. No one was hurt, but one man’s breeches caught on fire and a bystander had to pour his ale over him to extinguish the flames.

You begin to wonder what it would have been like to stand in the theater. Fortunately, SmartCookie provides a 3D model to check out.

If you want to check out the model of the Globe, turn to page 83.

If all of this talk about ale is making you thirsty and you want to go grab a beer at your local bar, turn to page 111.



Digital Textual Community Case Study: The LARB

by Scott Selisker

For our final sprint, the Digital Textual Communities group is taking case studies in... digital textual communities, especially those in which we have participated. Mine is the [Los Angeles Review of Books](#) (LARB), which is a site dedicated to reviews, essays, and interviews. It's based out of UC Riverside, but with a public-facing humanities ethos that I and many other humanities scholars find promising as a model.

In my previous post, I was trying to expand a concept of “the book” to include all the digital paratexts—fan responses, reviews, and creative engagements, among others—that proliferate around contemporary fiction. This expanded concept of the book might be applied as easily to genre texts that have become fan phenomena to literary texts that make the rounds on blogs like [The Millions](#).

As a writing group, we've been wondering what makes a successful digital textual community, and, of course, what criteria might be used to gauge success. A tacit point in our conversations so far is that the online textual community is usually something of a “planned community.” (An aside: there's often a fascinating feedback loop between the interfaces that designers plan and the ways that sites are actually used, or perhaps rather a “redesign loop,” such as Facebook's implementations of hashtags and emoji in response to client use.)

The LARB is an online community built around books and culture that, from my perspective as an occasional (well, twice) contributor, is driven primarily by *ethos*. The site is beautifully designed but also simple and not unusual, and, unlike the communities my co-writers are discussing, the language is pretty ordinary, too. The LARB started as a Tumblr site for most of a year before being redesigned and deployed as a stand-alone site, but in both forms its writers and readers have treated it as an increasingly ordinary genre, the online magazine—something just a bit more formal than a blog, by virtue of articles being pitched and revised by editors. The defining feature of the magazine (which is now also a print publication) seems to be not in its form or its language but its *ethos*. It features intelligent and lively—not *academic* in the bad sense, that is—engagement with great new books and literary and arts culture, written largely by humanities professors and students, as well as authors and other critics, for anyone out there who might be interested. It was a belief in this attitude about the great potential for public-facing humanities that got me excited enough about it to participate, both as a commenter and contributor.

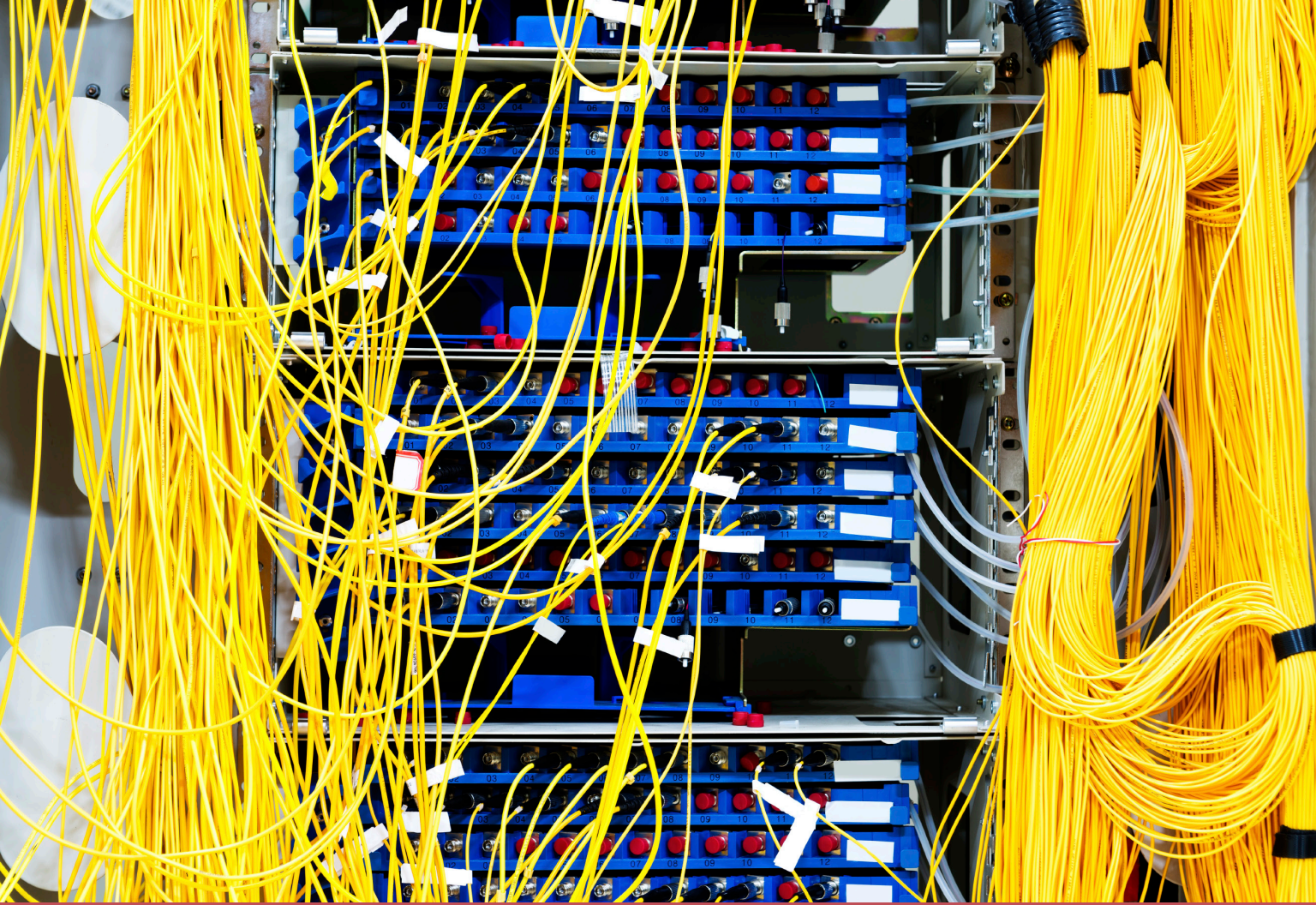
My first point with this example is that *ethos*, a defining attitude and approach—rather than linguistic practices or the forms that interfaces might take—may well be the most important defining feature of online communities in general as we imagine them.

My second point reiterates my conclusion in my previous essay: the wide variety of online communities that cohere around books is something to be recognized and celebrated. Regardless of the form, the physical container, the word count, or the interface, the book—as shorthand for a site of sustained engagement with textual content that excites us—will probably stick around.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti

You watch a clip from the movie. It seems ridiculous. You read a brief selection from Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World* that clarifies details about Shakespeare's life. Satisfied, you move on to the next module in the node.

The End



Producing Knowledge Systems

How will the shift to digital knowledge systems transform the publishing industry? How will the scholarly publishing industry, which has been slow to adapt in the face of a paradigm shift, adapt to a changing market for books and ideas? How can we draw new maps for the relationships between the various players and stakeholders in the fields of cultural production around books and publishing? How is the publishing ecosystem changing, in scholarly publishing and other sectors such as fiction, nonfiction, reference and technical books? Beyond the frame of the unitary “book,” how will knowledge be produced, ordered and transmitted? What kinds of institutions will arise in the new information economy to generate knowledge (Arizona State University, for example, strives to be a comprehensive “knowledge enterprise”)? Who will play the roles of knowledge brokers and synthesizers to disseminate it rapidly to communities of practice?

Sprint 1

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Proscenium and Thrust

by Richard Nash

The traditional mode of book publishing maps cleanly onto the dominant mode of theatrical performance of the last 19th century, one that has with some exceptions carried forth into the present day: a mode we could call Proscenium Realism. The proscenium first appeared in 1618 at the Farnese Theatre in Parma, Italy. However, it was not until the 19th century that it fully came into its own. It provided quite literally a frame for the performance as if it were a photograph, or an aperture through which the audience could peer into some actual “real” scene unfolding before their eyes. The Realist playwrights of the time wanted to create a sense that there was no artifice, that life as actually lived was occurring before the audience’s eyes—the proscenium enabled that. The more fantastical performances, including opera and ballet, could benefit from the picture window effect, that the audience was witnessing a complete and total illusion, that of a painting come to life.

In both cases, of course, there was an elaborate apparatus undergirding the entire performance. Actors running off-stage to get props, gas and then electric lights dimming as night falls, trees moving on and off, angels being lowered by winches, all carefully hidden by the walls and (when necessary) by the curtain closing and reopening to a new vista no

less real than the one that preceded it.

Meanwhile, the world of publishing had been building a machine not dissimilar from the apparatus for producing the theatrical illusion. Theatre has its playwrights, yes, but also stage managers, lighting designers, scenic artists, actors, and composers, its lights, its rigging, its costumes, its sleight-of-hand around forced perspective, the clacking of coconut shells mimicking the clip-clop of horse's hooves, and so forth. So too with publishing, though in that black box the machine was a manufacturing and distribution apparatus. As with the theatre there were wordsmiths yes, authors yes, at the beginning, but also agents to help frame and contextualize the authors for the editors, editors to evaluate the authors, but also to ensure the author's writing fit style guides that wouldn't trip up the ultimate consumer with anachronisms and inconsistencies, designers to create covers to serve partly as images to represent the book, in the manner of classical architecture, but also to help sell the book, like the tried-and-true maneuvers of the strip tease, showing a little of what's there but suggesting that more, oh so much more is to come. Sales reps, whether the door-to-door snake oil peddlers of the 19th century selling subscriptions out of a bag, or the 20th century model of showing up at the retailers persuading them to stock that publisher's inventory. Then too over the course of the second half of the century, all the innovations around distribution, often using computing power of the mainframe and PC variety—just-in-time inventory, demand forecasting, tighter product cycles, granular sales data.

And the writers and readers, opposite ends of the supply chain, in a strict producer-consumer relationship, stand at either end of the machine, marveling as its mysterious processes, selecting a handful of writers and magically transforming them into bestsellers, consigning readers to gape slack-jawed at its marvelous outputs, then rushing, after it was all over, the magical words THE END, read, to the stage door, where they hope to catch a glimpse of the creator before s/he is hustled to a waiting car.

In the theatre along comes Brecht and to rip down the curtain. While that is, and what is to follow is, a radical simplification of very complex processes, Brecht, for reasons combining the political and the aesthetic, proposed to blow up the entire architecture of illusion and realism, to show how things are actually made, to show why things were the way they were. Stage hands walked around, handed props to people, brandished the coconut shells, proudly ate the banana the peel of which would be dropped just in time for the actor to slip on it, actors changed costumes in full view, the lights turned around, no longer mimicking the dawn rising, instead turned onto the audience, now suddenly busted for being Peeping Toms. The means of production had been laid bare.

And to book publishing now enters the Internet, stage left, stage right, stage center. The fluorescent lights now turned on. Freelance cover designers now available as guns-for-

hire since everyone has Photoshop now, agents trawling Wattpad for the popular writers, forums discussing royalty structures, kerning and leading. Short-run digital printing via Lulu, Lightning Source, Blurb, CreateSpace. Retail access via Amazon and Amazon and Amazon and Amazon. Tablets, phones, and E Ink devices rendering almost all the foregoing optional. The bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even. The world is now the stage.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

The Globe wasn't like any theater you've ever been in. You learn that the stage was called a "thrust stage" because of the way it jugged out into the area where some members of the audience stand, the "yard." You giggle when you learn that a trap door led to a space under the stage called "hell," but then you realize that there's a method to this madness: the ceiling is called the "heavens." Maybe that's what Ada was talking about!

Turn to page 120.



Performing the Book

by Mark Tebeau

As a scholar, I've long been inspired by Julio Cortazar's comments that great writing is like Jazz—improvised, in the moment or “the take” (Tebeau 2011). The best public history and digital humanities, I've argued, are performative, like Cortazar's best writing—like the best books.

Of course, books are performative—written, read, engaged—but that quality is rarely discussed when we mull the future of the book, with our focus being mostly on form, publishing, and preservation. As digital technologies have exploded publishing, they're allowing us to recognize (once again) the performative aspects of the book as a knowledge system.

Digital technology, especially the emergence of mobile technologies and cloud computing, mean that books can now be performed—produced, experienced, and engaged—more fluidly and in more places. Of course, we could always read and annotate our dog-eared edition of *Ulysses* while walking the streets of Dublin, drinking in a local pub. But, now we can “read” *Ulysses* hyper-textually in Dublin (or in a pub anywhere) with comments and annotation, as well as video, audio, and other media expressions. We can fully *experience* literature.

As digital innovation has democratized writing, it also now allows communities to not just experience literature, but also to produce it. This production occurs in multiple contexts, with producers building communities through open-source technologies that publish in a variety of fashions: aggregation, multimedia, micro-blogging, long-form journalism, and mash-up. The work has redefined narrative and storytelling, and built communities of professionals, experts, amateurs, and crowds. These communities not only engage story and narrative, they transform text through their engagement. This is conceptually apparent in crowdsourced projects, annotation, and social media sharing.

Additionally, the emergence of smartphones (and now tablets) has allowed (coupled with cloud computing) for new publishing forms to become part of and to engage the physical landscape. Indeed, locative media allows us to explore narrative and stories in place. The landscape becomes hypertextual because it allows us to connect a book—or, for that matter, multiple books, annotations, links, and media—to a particular geography, structure, and physical context. That landscape moves from the object of narrative to part of the text itself. It evokes space, identity, landscape; it helps us individually and collectively to remake “place.” Perhaps more importantly, for us, the book becomes a space of play, a play space, a place of itself.

In accentuating longstanding qualities of books—their fluidity and interactivity and portability—the digital has reemphasized books as performative. Digital knowledge systems and the future of publishing books demand that we engage the dynamism of books as living performances.

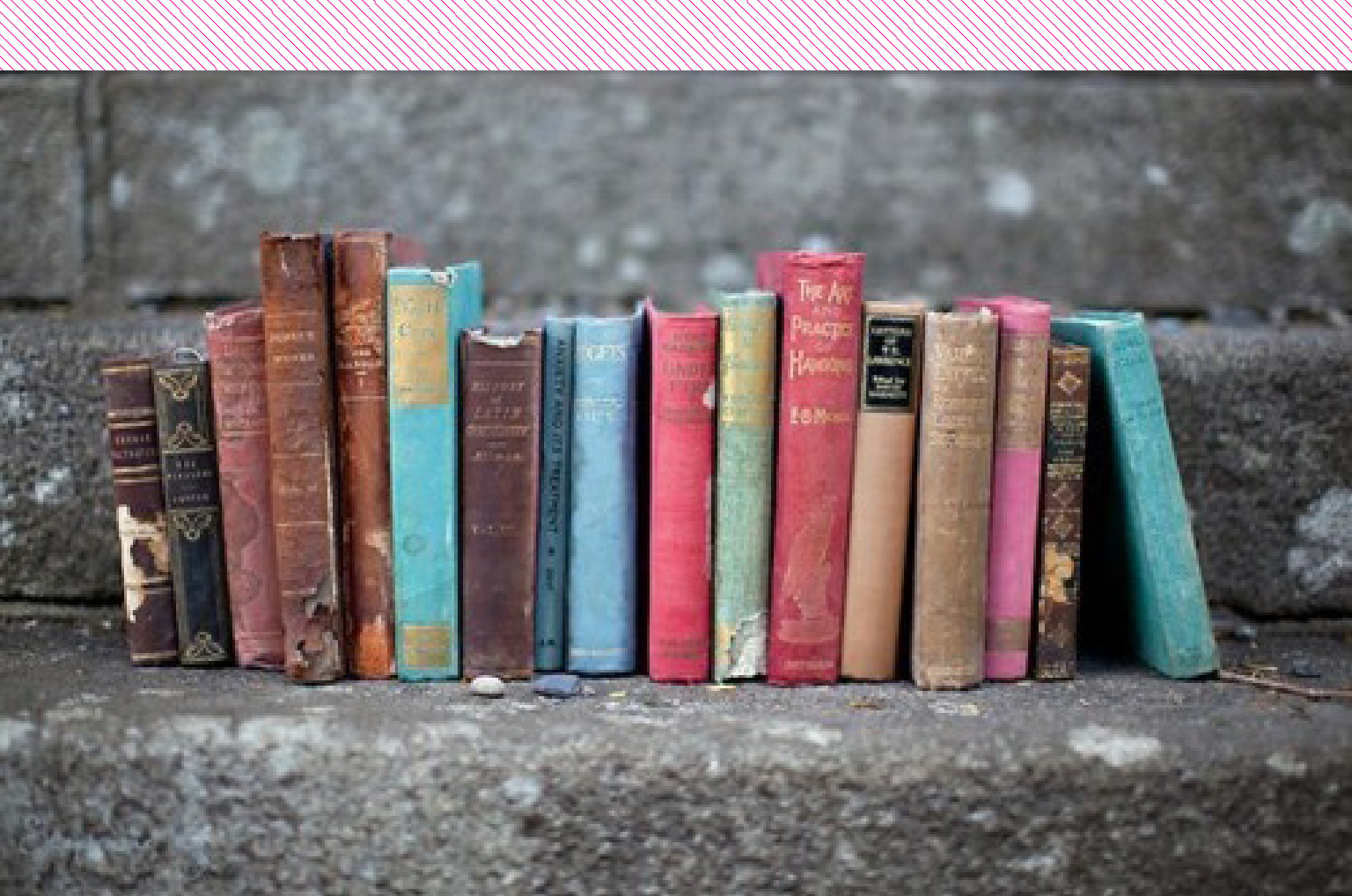
cross-posted at [urbanhumanist](#)



The Book Revolution

by G. Pascal Zachary

Books are being revolutionized in both form and content, and in their distribution. Books are part of a socio-technical system that is both evolving and doomed, the beneficiary of creative destruction and its victim.



Digital Books as Physical Props

by Erin Walker

The Physical Properties of Books

The affordances of a physical book position the book in your life in a way that goes beyond the simple act of reading. To buy a physical book, you might go to a used bookstore. You wander the aisles, noticing different titles. If something catches your eye, you can pick it up and flip through the pages. You might notice that the book is heavy, or that the pages look worn. The book has a distinct smell.

As you read a physical book, you leave traces in the book. You underline passages that are particularly meaningful. You fold the corners of pages down to mark your place. The book takes up space in your house. It moves from your coffee table to your nightstand to your bookshelf.

When people come to visit you, they see the book and comment on it. You lend it to a friend who's always wanted to read it, but hasn't had the chance. It's a while before you get the

book back, and there are times where you wonder if she'll ever return it. When she finally does, there's a distinct coffee stain about a third of the way through. Eventually, you give that particular book away. You never read it any more, and so it no longer seems to have a place on your bookshelf.

If reading a book is a type of performance, the book itself is a prop. The acts of buying, interpreting, displaying, and sharing the book are informed in part by the ability to interact with the book in a physical way.

Making Digital Books More Physical

As books become digitized, the experience of books as physical objects gets lost. When you buy a digital book, you don't think about how heavy the book is or how it smells. It doesn't take up physical space in your house, and visitors can't serendipitously notice and comment on it. It doesn't show wear. You can't physically give it to someone, with or without the expectation of getting it back.

What do we lose in the transformation to the digital medium, and what should we think about reincorporating into digital books?

The physical properties of the book are missing. We can produce digital books that show use—how many people have made annotations, where they have made bookmarks—but not wear. There is no information about the condition of the book, how valued the book was. There aren't physical properties such as weight or smell to link to the experience of reading the book. Building digital books that leave physical traces—e-readers that release smells or have touchscreens that feel differently based on the path of the book—would be one way of preserving the book's physical properties.

The digital book lacks a physical presence. It can be displayed as part of your digital identity, but does not take up physical space in a way that has real-world significance. Having e-readers that can project images in your physical environment, displaying phantom book covers on your coffee table or bookshelf, would be a way of maintaining the ability to create a physical presence for your possessions.

Finally, the digital book lacks the same sense of ownership as a physical book. It is possible for multiple people to buy, read, and share the exact same copy of a digital book. Each physical book, while having the same text, has unique properties that reflect its journey through the world. It would be interesting to explore how to create multiple copies of a digital book that have the same core content but reflect the unique properties of each instance—who has bought it, who they have discussed the book with, and how valued the

book is in its reader's collection.

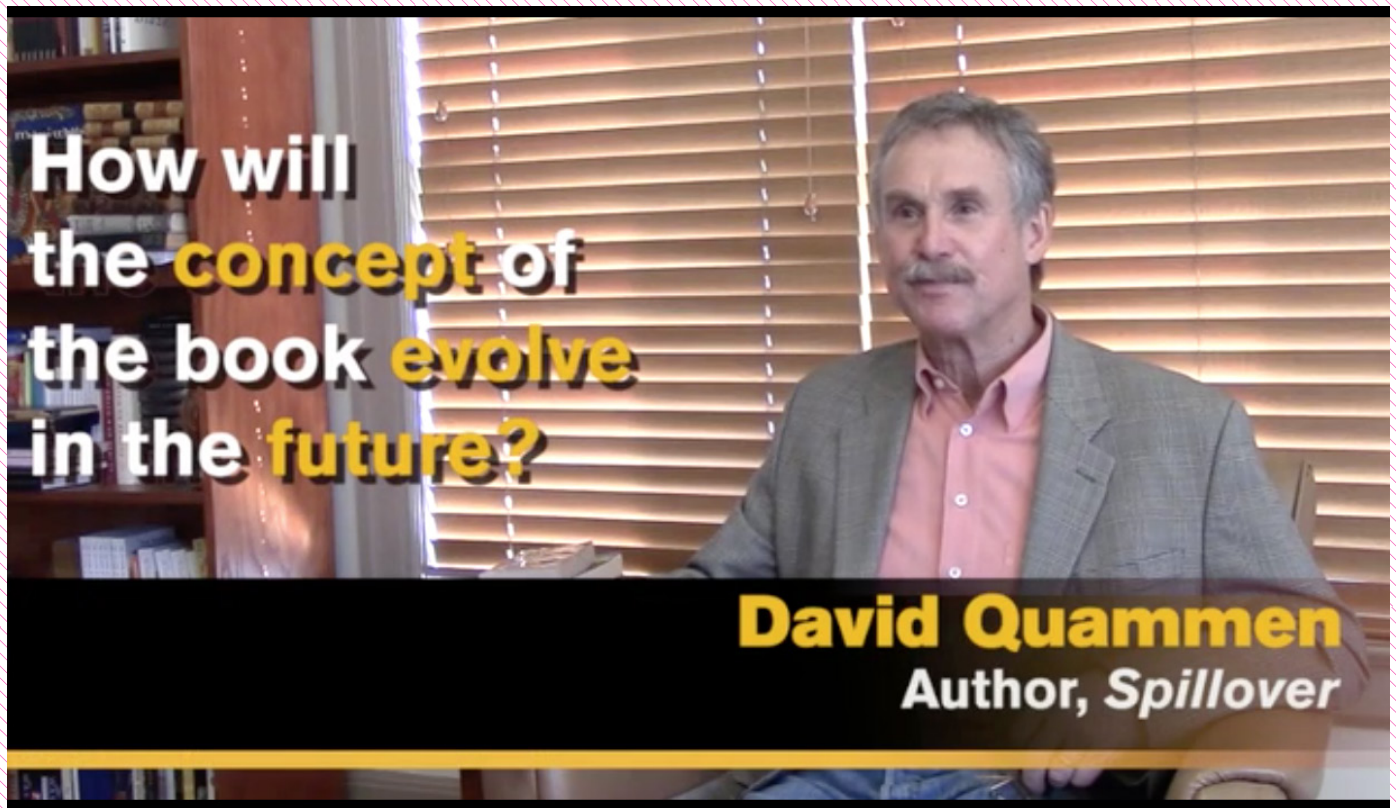
While the use of digital books as physical props is technologically feasible, the final question is whether it is necessary. What aspects of the physical affordances of books add value to the experience of reading them, and which ones will simply become artifacts of the past?

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti

You get to Ada's playlist page and look over the songs she's been listening to while studying. Some "Marvin and the Mandrils" and other Yemeni punk classics. It figures.

To chill out and listen to her playlist turn to page 97.

To go back to Ada's profile, turn to page 34.



David Quammen: People Love the Physical Reality of the Book

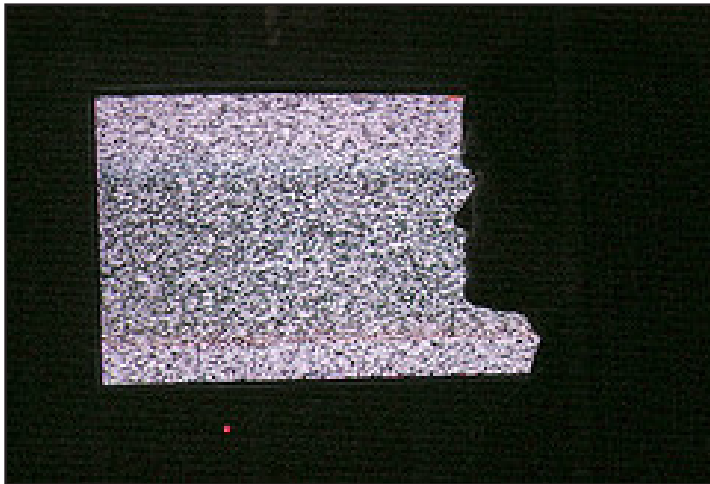
Aggregating Audiences Around the Book

by C. Max Magee

1993: I am a freshman in high school, a newly avid reader just discovering a world of books. I haunt the local used books stores looking for titles by my favorite authors and discovering new ones to try. This is a solitary pleasure until one day, visiting a friend, I see some of my beloved books on his shelf. Soon we are trading books, haunting the same bookstores, by chance having become a tiny, two-person audience for our favorite authors.

Most cultural forms aggregate their audience into a common physical space. For example, films and theater bring people together into a viewing space. Art is typically viewed in

common spaces in the company of others. Music is often consumed via a live performance, in a concert setting.



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Interestingly, while we now increasingly have de-aggregated the audience for these other cultural forms—thanks to an explosion in technology that has allowed for sophisticated theater and stereo systems to be had at a relatively affordable price in the comfort of our homes—books are moving in the other direction. Long a form consumed in a solitary fashion, books are now aggregating their audiences. But

this isn't entirely new. How have books and stories sometimes aggregated an audience?

– In pre-book times, stories were an oral tradition, with an audience of listeners. –

Following the advent of a written tradition, scholars discussed important texts in many eras through history, adding and sharing commentaries and marginalia. These were a feature of scholarship in Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages and were important to the rediscovery of Classical works by the humanists during the Renaissance (Greenblatt 2011).

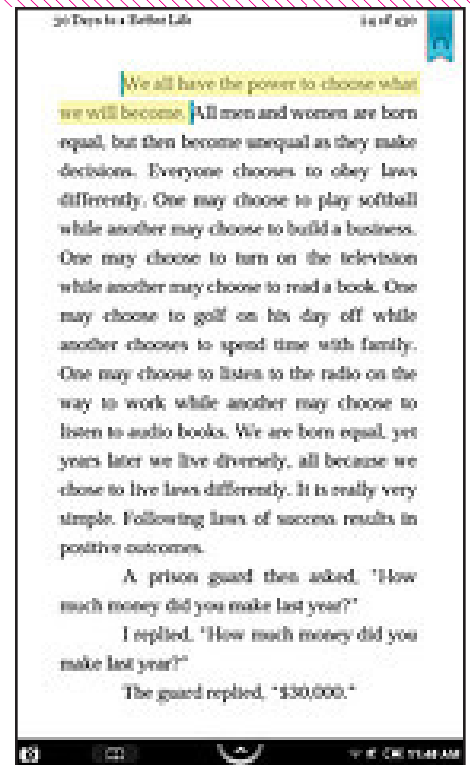
– Growing out of a salon tradition developed in Europe during the Renaissance, authors would read from their work to small groups. – This tradition of public readings has become a staple in bookstores and certain academic settings, and have evolved in some places to become almost a performance art, including readings in public places and marathon readings of long books.

Now, the advent of technology has enabled the aggregation of audience around books like

never before. Social networks and online communities have made it trivial for fans of certain books and authors to form ad hoc (or even “official”) communities around the work they care about. A book may have a large distributed but connected “audience” creating a social reading experience that can manifest in a variety of ways, including:

- Having easy access to the commentary of others, aggregated and depersonalized as in “[most highlighted passages](#)” keyword tagging and other crowdsourcing of metadata.
- the proliferation of online communities where vigorous books discussions can occur over email listservs, on message boards, in Facebook groups, in the comment sections of blog posts, and even on Twitter.
- There have long been publications writing about and offering critiques of books in a one-to-many fashion, but many of those same publications, now online, have tools like comment sections that allow their readers to congregate and join the discussion.
- the creation and sharing and swapping of fanfiction (which interestingly is a phenomenon hardly limited to the world of books, with writers commonly riffing on movies, TV shows, and even real-world events and people.)

There is great potential in how publishers and book communities can continue to look for ways to use technology to aggregate audiences around books. What may be missing is an open-source venue to facilitate and house these communities. It should be simple for readers to easily find and interact with the aura of information and reaction that may surround any book. Each book has the potential to be a mini-community of its own.



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The Minigraph: The Future of the Monograph?

by David Berry

It has taken digital a lot longer than many had thought to provide a serious challenge to print, but it seems to me that we are now in a new moment in which digital texts enable screen-reading (if it is not an anachronism to still call it that) as a sustained practice. Here, I am thinking particularly of the way in which screen technologies, including the high-resolution “retina” displays common on iPhones, Kindle E Ink, etc., combined with much more sensitive typesetting design practices in relation to text, are producing long-form texts that are pleasurable to read on a screen-based medium and as e-books. This has happened most noticeably in magazine articles and longer newspaper features, but is beginning to drift over into well-designed reading apps that we find on our mobile devices, such as [Pocket](#) and the [Reader](#) function in Safari.

With this change, serious questions are being asked about our writing practices—especially

in terms of the assumptions and affordances that are coded into software word processors like Microsoft Word, which assumes and sometimes enforces a print mentality. Word wants you to print the documents you write, and this prescriptive behavior by the software encourages us to “check” our documents on a “real” paper form before committing to it—even if the final form is a PDF. The reason is that even the PDF is designed for printing, as anyone who has tried to read a PDF document on a digital screen will attest. But when the reading practices of screen media are sufficient, then many of the assumptions of screen writing can be jettisoned, especially the practice of writing for paper.

There is little doubt that writing and reading the screen is different from print (Berry 2012; Gold 2012). These differences are not just technical; they also involve forms of social practice, such as reading in public, passing around documents, sharing ideas, and so forth. They also include the kinds of social signaling that digital documents have been very poor at incorporating into their structures, such as the cover, the publisher, the author’s name, and the book’s unique design. Nonetheless, at the present phase of digital texts, it is in the typesetting and typography, combined with the social reading practices that take place, such as social sharing, marking, copying/pasting, and commenting, that make digital a viable way of creating and consuming textual works. In some ways, the social signaling of the cover artwork, etc. has been subsumed into social media such as Facebook and Twitter, but I think that it is only a matter of time before this is incorporated into mobile devices, since advanced screen technologies, especially an E Ink back cover, can be built for pennies.

To return to the texts themselves, the question of writing, of putting pen to paper, is on the cusp of radical change. The long thirty-year period of stable writing software created by the virtual monopoly that Microsoft gained over desktop computers is drawing to a close. From its initial introduction in 1983 on the Xenix system as Multi-Tool Word and renamed that year to the familiar Microsoft Word that we all know ([and often hate](#)) today, print has been the lodestar of word processor design.

As the next stage of digital text emerges, many of the textual apparatuses of print are migrating to the digital platform. As they do so, the advantages of new search and discovery practices make books extremely visible and usable again, through tools like Google Books (Dunleavy 2012). There is still a lot of experimentation in this space, and some problems still remain: for example, there is currently not a viable alternative to the “chunking” process of reading that print has taught us through pages and page numbering, nor is there a means of book marking that is as intuitive as the changing weight of the book as it moves through our hands, or the visual clues afforded through the page volume changing from unread to read as we turn the pages. However, this has been mitigated by turning away from the very long-form book- or monograph-length texts of around 80,000 words,

to the moderate long-form, represented by the 15-40,000 word text which I want to call the *minigraph*.

By minigraph I am seeking to distinguish a specific length of text that is able to move beyond the limitations of the 6-8,000 word article, but avoids the chunking problem of reading lengthy digital texts. In other words, in its current stage of implementation, I think that digital long-form texts are most comfortable to read when they stay within this golden ratio of 15-40,000 words, broken into five or six chapters. The lack of chunking is still a problem without helpful “page” numbers, and I don’t think that paragraph numbering has provided a usable solution to this. However, the shortness of the text means that it is readable within a reasonable period of time, creating a *de facto* chunking at the level of the minigraph chapter (2,000 – 5,000 words). Indeed, the introduction of an algorithmic paging system that is device-independent would also be helpful, for example through a notion of “planes” which are analogous to pages but calculated in real-time.¹ This would help sidestep the problem of fatigue in digital reading, apparent even in our retina/E Ink screen practices, but also creates works that are long enough to be satisfying to read and offer interesting discussion, digression and scholarly apparatus. Other publishers have already been experimenting with the form, such as Palgrave with its [Pivot series](#), a new e-book format: “at 30,000 to 50,000 words, it’s longer than a journal article but shorter than a traditional monograph. The Palgrave Pivot, said Hazel Newton, head of digital publishing, ‘fills the space in the middle’” (Cassuto 2013). Indeed, Stanford University Press has also started “to release new material in the form of midlength e-books. ‘[Stanford Briefs](#)’ will run 20,000 to 40,000 words in length.” Cassuto calls Stanford’s format the “mini-monograph.”

How should one write a minigraph? It’s likely that Microsoft Word will algorithmically prescribe paper norms, which in academia tend to either 7,000-word articles or 70,000-word monographs. Here, I think Dieter (2013) is right to make links with the writing practices of Book Sprints as a connecting thread to new forms of publishing (Hyde 2013). The Book Sprint is a “genre of the ‘flash’ book, written under a short timeframe, to emerge as a contributor to debates, ideas and practices in contemporary culture... interventions that go well beyond a well-written blog-post or tweet, and give some substantive weight to a discussion or issue... within a range of 20-40,000 words” (Berry and Dieter 2012). This rapid and collaborative means of writing tends toward the creation of texts of an “appropriate” size for the digital medium. Book Sprints usually involve 4-8 writers, facilitated by another non-writing member. The output of each writer throughout the sprint conveniently maps onto the structure of minigraph chapters discussed earlier. For Dieter, the Book Sprint is conducive to new writing practices, and by extension new reading practices for network cultures, and therefore “formations that break from subjugation or blockages in pre-existing media and organizational workflows” (Dieter 2013). In this I think he is broadly

correct; however, Book Sprints also produce texts that are conducive to reading and writing in a digital medium, especially in terms of word count.

Nick Montfort (2013) has suggested a new predominantly digital form of writing that enables different forms of scholarly communication, the *technical report*, which he argues “is as fast as a speeding blog, as detailed and structured as a journal article, and able to be tweeted, discussed, assessed, and used as much as any official publication can be. It is issued entirely without peer review.” Montfort, however, connects the technical report to the “grey literature” that is not usually considered part of scholarly publishing as such. Experiments like the “pamphlets” issued by the [Stanford Literary Lab](#), and which Montfort argues are technical reports in all but name, are between 10-15,000 words in length: slightly longer than a journal article and a little shorter than a minigraph.

However, a key difference is that neither the Book Sprint nor the technical report are peer-reviewed, although they might be “peer-to-peer reviewed” (see Cebula 2010; Fitzpatrick 2011). Rather, they are rapid production, sharing, and collaborative forms geared toward social media and intervention or technical documentation. In contrast, the minigraph would share with the other main scholarly outputs—the journal article and the monograph—the need to be peer-reviewed and produced at a high level of textual quality. This is where the minigraph points to new emergent affordances of the digital that enable the kinds of scholarly activity, such as presenting finished work, carefully annotated and referenced, through these nascent digital textual technologies. If these intuitions are right about the current state of digital technologies and their affordances for the writing and reading of scholarly work, then the minigraph might be the right structure and form for digital scholarship to augment the current ecosystem of the article, review, monograph, and so forth.

In some ways the minigraph is a much less radical suggestion than the multi-modal, all-singing, all-dancing digital object that many have been calling for. However, the minigraph, as conceptualized here, is still potentially deeply computational in form. We might describe the minigraph as a code-object. In this sense, the minigraph is able to contain programmable objects itself, in addition to its textual load, opening up many possibilities for interactive dimensions, like those suggested by the [Computable Document Format](#) (CDF) created by Wolfram.

The minigraph as described here does not, of course, exist as such, although its form is detectable in the documents produced by the [Quip app](#), the [dexy format](#), as “literate documentation,” or the [Booktype](#) software. It is manifestly not meant to be in the form of Google Docs/Drive, which is essentially traditional word-processing software in the cloud, and which ironically still revolves around a print metaphor. The minigraph is a technical

imaginary for what digital scholarly writing might be. It remains to be coded into concrete software and manifested in the practices of scholarly writers and readers. Nonetheless, as a form of long-form text amenable to the mobile practices of readers today, the 15-40,000 word minigraph text could provide a key expressive scholarly form for the digital age.

Notes

[1] Minigraph chunks would be at 250-350 word intervals, roughly pages, and chapters of 2-5,000 words. There is no reason why the term “page” could not be used for these chunks, but perhaps “plane” is more appropriate in terms of chunks representing vertical “cuts” in the text at an appropriate frequency. So “plane 5” would be analogous to page 5, but mathematically calculable to approximately $(300 \times \text{plane number})$ to give start word, and $((300 \times \text{plane number} + 1) - 1)$ to give the end word of a particular plane. This would make the page both algorithmically calculable and therefore device-independent, but also suitable for scholarly referencing and usable user-friendly numbering throughout the text. As the planes are represented on screen by a digital, the numbering system would be comprehensible to users of printed texts, and would offer a simple transition from paper page-based numbering to algorithmic numbering. If the document was printed, the planes could be automatically reformatted to the page size, and hence further make the link between page and plane straightforward for the reader (who might never even realize the algorithmic source of the numbering system for plane chunks in a minigraph). Indeed, one might place the “plane resolution” within the minigraph text itself, in this case “300”, enabling different plane chunks to be used within different texts, and hence changing the way in which a plane is calculated on a book-by-book basis—very similar to page numbering. One might even have different plane resolutions within chapters in a book, enabling different chunks in different chapters or regions.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti

Yemeni punk always makes you sleepy. You settle back and drift to sleep.

The End

Sprint 2

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Exhuming the Mastodon

by Eric Wertheimer

“Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write.”

—John Adams

As a cultural historian, and one involved in rethinking graduate education, the notion of pathways is resonant in obvious ways. We are heirs to a tradition of valuing archives that are arranged synchronically and chronologically (classes, curricula (*L. to run*), and credentials) to effect a set of knowledge outputs and practices—the educated individual, critically forged and capable. That person extends the means and ends. So, John Adams, thanks.

But what happens when those means clot or forestall the impulse to dare and act in language—when the pathways become sclerotic and unnecessarily difficult? I’m thinking, for the moment, of the dissertation as we’ve inherited it from the nineteenth century. It takes the form of a thesis, but really a book, chaptered, indexed, bound. It must be “defended,” in the form of an oral meeting that theoretically works as an opportunity to counter and call bullshit on written material that can cloak error or ambiguity in its formal,

officializing guise of print. The defense completes the delivery of new knowledge, by the newly “minted” scholar.



We might view it as a kind of curtain lifting, not unlike the iconic Charles Wilson Peale, in his self-portrait as gatekeeper to the objects of knowledge: “The Artist in His Museum,” 1822.

Since 1822, the museum of scholarly production has advanced through a few more chambers, but the performative and architecture are basically the same. Of late, we then take the text product, make it a codex via arbitrary formatting, and then contract with Proquest to digitize it, make it available on the Internet (not open-access, but close) and then usually provide it to the degree-granting institution’s library to archive. Many humanities students have begun to choose to forego publication at the moment of credentialing, for fear that they might be precluding their pathway not into “knowledge” but into the publication systems

that market knowledge—academic presses embedded themselves in a shrinking trade in knowledge commodities.

But that access issue is almost the least of the problems with the PATHWAY of doctoral credentialing. It’s the form itself. That culminating experience is the place where the “running” in curriculum hits obstacles, stalls, crashes, burns, evaporates. Perhaps, the digital offers ways to dredge the riverbed and make that knowledge system much more fertile.

I’d like to see dissertations that continue the curriculum—that are, as the MLA and AHA are making preliminary steps toward advocating for, process projects. They would arise out of a richer mix of inputs than an advisor and several other co-advisors to include communities of intra- and inter-institutional faculty and students. They would break down the wall between institutional knowledge and its publics by inviting widespread access to the project as a work in process. Graduate faculties would be configured to critique and follow real-time progress rather than dangerously episodic check-ins. The archive too would not be spatially remote, giving the student little excuse to get “lost.” Indeed, the line between reading and curating would be forever blurred. And indeed the metaphor of “defense” becomes unnecessary, since that need to complement the discrete bounded knowledge-output, the one we must “suspect” of flaws, has always and already been produced through

an engagement with multiple voices and assessments.

So rather than Peale in his museum, we'd have the dissertation as collaborative dig, pulling



forth, over time. As in:

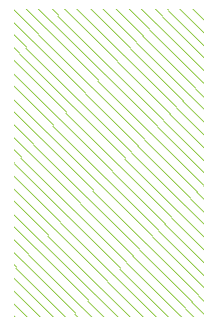
Also Charles Wilson Peale, this is an image of “The Exhumation of the Mastodon, 1805-08.” Note the temporality Peale foregrounds, the wheel in motion, the dating over a three year period—this is a rendering of process. And it’s a process of manufacturing knowledge collaboratively, over time. It is a lesson from the past about how not to bury things.

[.All.the.Lost.Jewels.of.#Nabooti.....](#)

Ada’s map is full of pins! Looks like she’s been all over the globe in the past six weeks. She’s logged in from Peru, Argentina, London, and some pub in Ireland. Her last login was from Venice. Hmmm.

To buy a ticket and turn to Venice, turn to page 108.

To go back and learn more about Ada, turn to page 34.





Traveling the Landscape of the Book

by Mark Tebeau

Here is what I want to ask: Books provide us paths through the world. Can the world provide us paths through books? Or, more appropriately, what can the world itself tell us about how we should sprint beyond the book?

So let me digress with a comment on reading and books as sensory experiences. Books are read; text is visual. Nearly every assumption built into the imaginary of books depends on reading and sight. Too often we often fail to appreciate the breadth and depth of books in terms of their sensory evocation, much less how we might experience what is within. Of course, books themselves are tactile. Old books, in particular, have a certain smell—for the historian, opening an old book is akin to the experience of that new car smell. Ahhh, yes, the mustiness of an old library. I fondly recall the reddish hue of the archives that adhered to my white gloves. More typically, we think of the senses in terms of the sensory experiences evoked by a book, a petit madeleine, chocolate, or the smell of baked bread in a Bret Easton Ellis novel. Do these evocations go only one way, from the book to the imagination to the senses? Can we reverse that path, bring the physical experience—of the senses, of the material, to the book? Wouldn't that enhance our experience? I am thinking presently of how a sound historian has used the digital humanities to evoke the auditory

sensibilities of early 20th century New York City. Our senses might offer entirely new paths into and through literature, allowing us to move beyond the book, envisioning a multisensory experience.

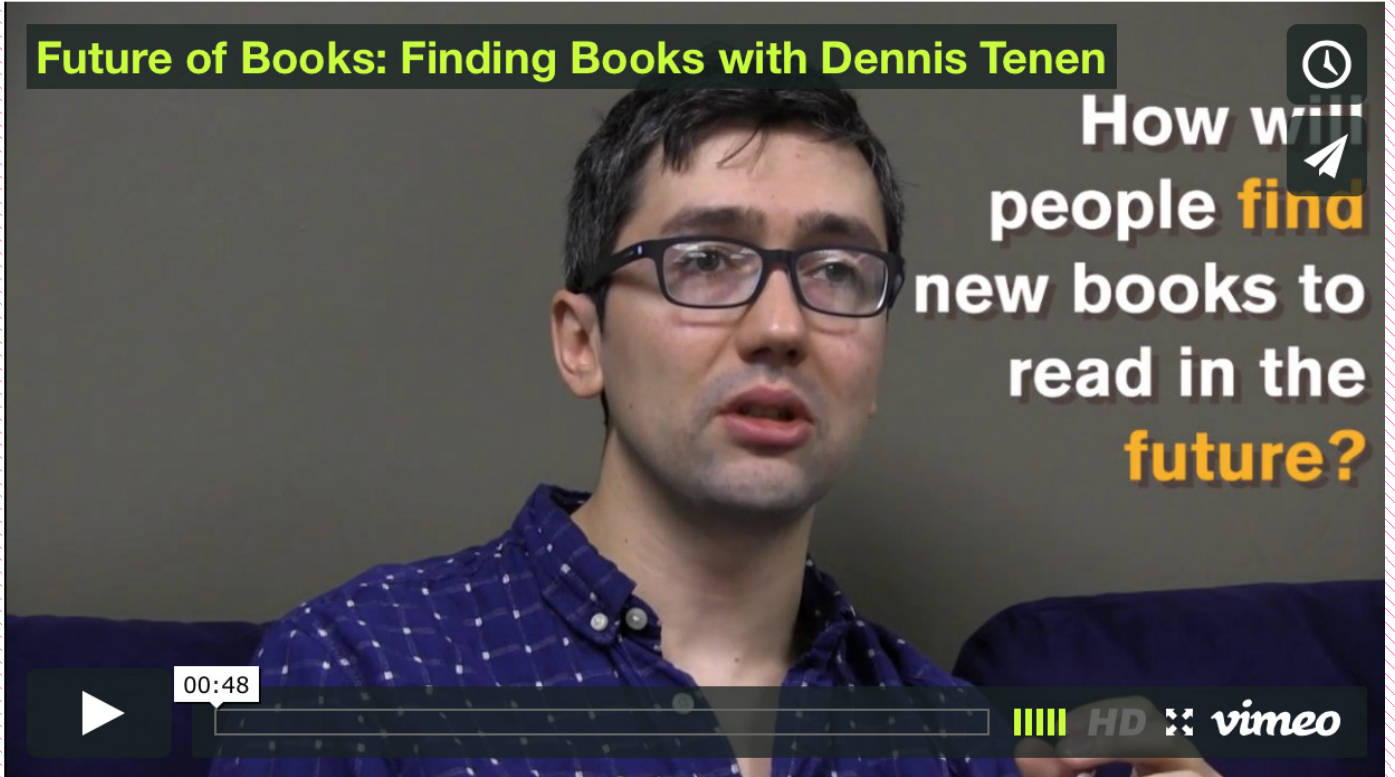
Likewise, reading itself is not just a literal act of moving eyes over text and processing that text, but it has become a metaphor for the production of knowledge itself. We do more than read text. We also “read” landscape, images, and environment. And yet, this imagining still elevates reading above not only the senses but also above the material world with all its depth and expressions. Of course, books have never been isolated from the world, but discussions of the book usually imagine them as knowledge systems all but closed from anything outside the human imagination. I would argue that imagination is shaped by social and historical experience. Rather than imagine books as blazing paths through our minds, perhaps we should look to social and historical experiences—to the materiality of everyday experience—to find ways of imagining paths through books themselves.

Consider how the landscape can be exposed, confronted, and expressed to create a path through a book, one where the materiality of space helps us find the logic of a book, or perhaps the materiality of experience—perhaps the work of an aged craft iron worker, whose voice and talents reveal narrative. What about hyper-textual approaches to the book, where links structure our reading—connections to the material, the ephemeral, the momentary?

I want a world of non-textual paths, generated by the materiality of the world, that structures our paths through individual books, libraries of books, or literatures. I don’t want to abandon the narrative, the story, the text, the argument in favor of the archival. Rather, I want a connectedness between book and materiality of experience that transforms not only our reading of the world but also our reading of the book.

As we sprint beyond the book, let’s not race toward the book as an individuated form (and I’m not advocating abandoning authorship) without connection to other books or to the materiality of experience. Rather, let’s build something that is interlaced with the world, with the materiality of experience, including especially a richer sensory experience. Let’s create books that are meta-analytical and meta-experiential.

Future of Books: Finding Books with Dennis Tenen



How will
people **find**
new books to
read in the
future?

Dennis Tenen: Finding Books through Digital Communities



Following the Path from Book to Book

by C. Max Magee

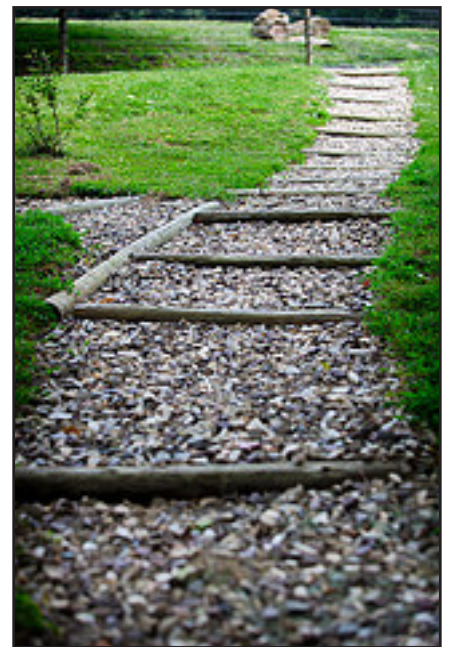
The question I get asked most often by strangers when they find out what I do: “What should I read next?”

The question is asked eagerly, and yet we are supposed to have solved this problem by now through the power of algorithms that ingest reader habits and learn reader behaviors and deliver book recommendations precisely calibrated to sate reader hungers.

Are these algorithms giving me the kind of life-changing book recommendation that I have received from other readers from time to time?

Is technology helping readers find better paths from book to book, with fewer false starts and pitfalls and more transformative and transporting experiences along the way?

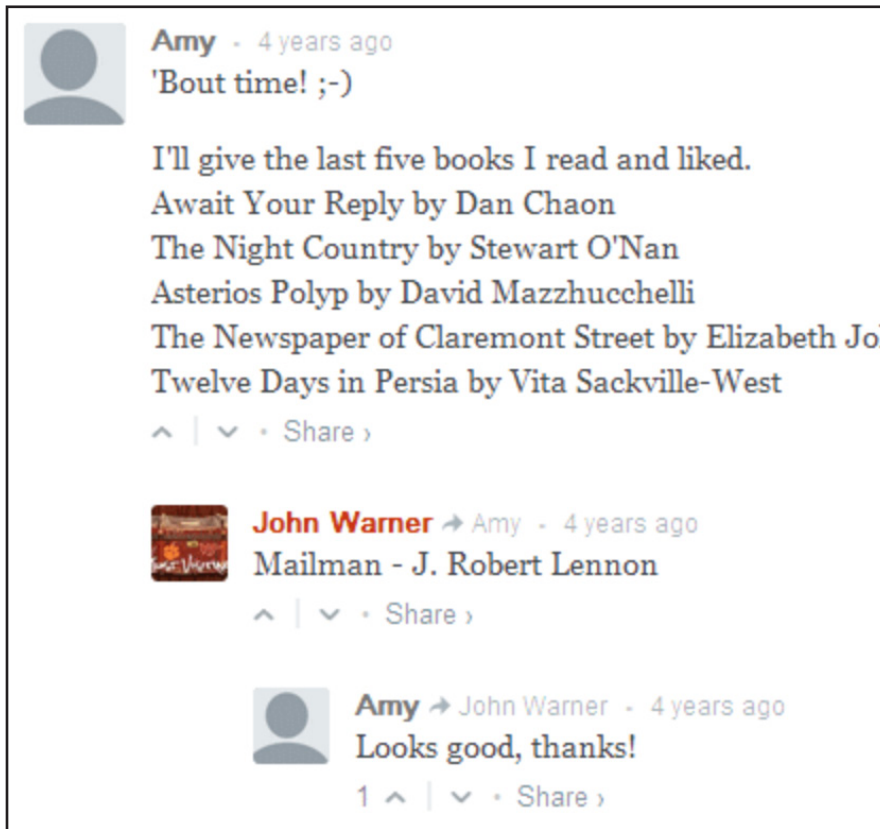
The best book recommendation engine is the knowledgeable



Some rights reserved by Walt Stoneburner

clerk at a well-stocked, well-curated independent bookstore. To this recommender you verbally input the last few books you read and liked, and she outputs a title, physically handing you the book which you can buy and read alongside a cup of coffee in the café next door.

This recommendation engine has been replicated in the online space via the [very low-tech Biblioracle](#), an occasional feature of magazine [themorningnews.org](#). In this feature, author John Warner, the son of an independent bookstore owner, gives bespoke recommendations to online commenters. They input the last five titles they read and enjoyed, he spits out a recommendation. To this eye, his recommendations are quite good.



Like the real-world experience it replicates, however, it is not scalable.

The question that I get asked so fervently from time to time—“What should I read next?”—is surprisingly fraught. Books represent a large investment for readers in money and especially time and emotional energy. Acquiring a book and investing the time to read 25 or 50 or 100 pages only to cast it aside is a souring experience, maybe enough to sour certain readers on reading entirely.

The stakes are high.

Part of Amazon’s business model

hinges on the notion that it can mine your behavior to suggest products—for our purpose, books—that you will like and want to read.

In the real world space, this function is served by the “featured” front table in the bookstore, or by the books face-out on the shelves.

But these efforts are laden with commercial conflicts that seem bound to get in the way of providing a useful recommendation.

Publishers and bookstores engage in “cooperative advertising” by which [publishers pay bookstores](#) to secure prime shelf space and placement on front tables.

[Amazon engages in similar practices](#), with promotion in its online bookstore often

Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought Page 1 of 15

Book Title	Author	Format	Price	Prime	Reviews
The Invention of Wings: A Novel	Sue Monk Kidd	Hardcover	\$16.77	✓Prime	★★★★★ (689)
The Misremembered Man	Christina McKenna	Paperback	\$8.97	✓Prime	★★★★★ (1,759)
The Book Thief	Markus Zusak	Paperback	\$6.88	✓Prime	★★★★★ (7,930)
The Luminaries: A Novel (Man Booker Prize)	Eleanor Catton	Hardcover	\$16.20	✓Prime	★★★★★ (520)
The Husband's Secret	Liane Moriarty	Hardcover	\$13.74	✓Prime	★★★★★ (5,100)

contingent on payments from publishers. Whether or not these considerations come into play with regard to Amazon’s book recommendations, they are opaque to the reader, and a temptation to push books or categories based on outside factors is undoubtedly strong.

Amazon’s recommendations are also curious in that they are, by default, based on what readers have bought and not necessarily what they have read and loved.

What should a recommendation engine strive to do?

- » Be transparent
- » Ignore retail considerations
- » Base recommendations on a reader’s reading habits
- » Seek clues to what factors might make reader enjoy a book that they wouldn’t otherwise pick up

Neither a human nor an algorithm can meet these requirements perfectly, but a human is better suited to grasp the intangibles in play.

So what can algorithms strive to do?

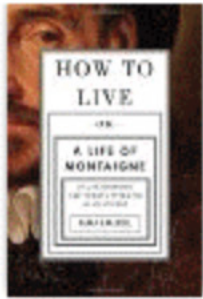
Cataloging sites like Goodreads and LibraryThing seem best placed. The sites give the reader control over which books they catalog and therefore which books are the basis for the recommendations. The sites also do not have an explicitly retail function (though Goodreads is now owned by Amazon), hopefully lessening the possibility of conflicts of interest.

Recent Automatic Recommendations

1-21 of 976 (next) titles | covers | shelf



Feb 4



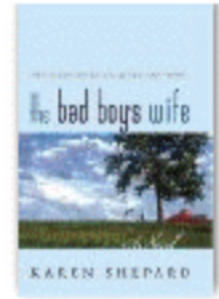
Feb 4



Feb 2



Feb 2



Feb 2

But the human element shouldn't be dismissed as unworkable in the digital era:

Book communities may hold the most promise. Like-minded readers can offer recommendations that have the human touch, while crowd-sourcing makes the process scalable.

These idea may have to suffice until technology allows us each our own personal Biblioracle.

[All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....](#)

You arrive in Venice and decide to find a bar to grab a drink.

Turn to page 111.



Creating Multiple Adaptive Paths Through the Book

by Erin Walker

A traditional book encourages the reader to take a direct path from beginning to end. Pages are arranged in a fixed order and numbered. But there are many cases where a book is not read in the order of its pages. Imagine Mary, who consults her textbook to understand a particular physics principle. She looks up the name of the principle in the index, and then turns directly to that page. After reading the description, Mary realizes that she doesn't understand. She flips the pages to earlier in the textbook where she remembers a key related concept was first introduced.

Instructional texts are not the only contexts where you might want to navigate non-linearly. James is reading a crime novel. He reads a few pages, and then, as he always does, flips to the last chapter to see how the story ends. He finishes reading the book, remembers a part that he particularly liked, and then flips back to re-read it.

Digital technologies have opened up new possibilities for facilitating the way we navigate through texts. If Mary were reading a digital book, a search for the concept she does not understand might return a variety of relevant information: where the concept is first

explained, what she needs to know to understand the new concept, and where that concept is later used in the text. The book could recommend, based on her knowledge, which content she should view first. Using hyperlinks, it is now possible to easily jump between different parts of a book, and using adaptive recommendations, a system can indicate which parts of a book are most relevant to a particular reader.

If James were reading a digital book, the possibilities of new technology suggest a more interactive and more personalized reading experience. The author could indicate multiple ways a book could be read to suit different preferences. For James, the book could be automatically reordered to present the final chapter first. Based on James' reading behavior, the book could automatically infer which parts James liked the best, and link back to those parts at the end of the book.

To facilitate multiple paths through a book, there are several considerations related to technology and user experience design: semantic indexing, designing for non-linear navigation, making intelligent recommendations, and adaptive reconfigurations.

Semantic indexing. At a minimum, the content of the book needs to be indexed (either through natural language processing technologies or crowdsourcing) so that semantically meaningful links between different parts of the book can be made.

Designing for non-linear navigation. With non-linear navigation comes the need to design the book's interface to support the user in taking multiple views of the text. Side-by-side split screen views should be facilitated so students can make direct comparisons between content. Reading history should be saved so the reader does not lose the page they were interested in, and can retrace their steps through the book if necessary.

Making intelligent recommendations. As the number of navigation paths increase, the reader may need recommendations for which path to view next. The quality of these recommendations depends on how effectively the book can construct a reader profile, interpret reading history, and understand how its contents can meet the reader's needs.

Adaptive reconfigurations. For an engaging reading experience, a book could adaptively reconfigure its contents based on reader reactions and preferences. Using different navigation paths, writers could author multiple reading experiences within a single book, tailored toward different profiles.

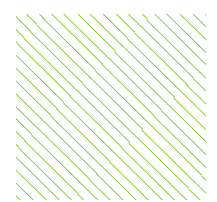
One final consideration in this discussion is ensuring that these adaptive technologies support how readers perceive their own needs. In general, users want to maintain control when interacting with technologies. For this reason, recommendations may be better received than adaptive reconfigurations. Readers will want to be able to understand how the book is being reconfigured and potentially select their own path. As adaptive

technologies become more sophisticated, the goal should be to enable the reader to make more informed choices about how and what they read.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

At the bar, you meet the person of your dreams, fall in love, and live happily ever after, raising cats and eating spaghetti.

The End





Setting the Demons Loose

by Richard Nash

Many of the interventions offered to book culture or to what you could call the reading-writing economy are currently coming from start-ups, entities described by one entrepreneur-cum-academic as organizations formed to search for a business model. As such, they may fail to find that business model even though they succeed at finding outcomes. One that I worked with closely, Small Demons, found that fate. What we did find, while not a business model, is a tacit cultural map, one formed by the culturally resonant details set jewel-like within books, one which, when illuminated by a kind of UV light, glows so as to allow one to navigate through the storyverse—our term at Small Demons for the universe that exists parallel to the “In Real Life” one in which we live. A Borgesian world, then, a planet-like library with paths that may be traversed to allow a richer life for us humans.

The company created a taxonomy of keywords grouped as persons (fictional and/or real), places (fictional and/or real), and things (encompassing songs, movies, other books, events, sports, drugs, foodstuffs, cars, and so forth) and managed to use entity extraction software to highlight those words in books, collect useful information about them, and link them to one another. One might then travel from Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity* to

Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* via Prince's "Little Red Corvette." Unlike the typical recommendation engines [explored by C. Max Magee](#), these paths are not designed to lead from one *recommended* cultural artifact to the next but merely to offer an alternative mode of browsing. However, much like those services, it does offer signal amidst the noise, a heat map that offers clues to those artifacts, much like how surveying the restaurants in a urban plaza allows a prospective diner to gauge the vibe of each restaurant, see how the diners are dressed, the music playing, check out the decor.

In this respect, what Small Demons envisioned is books not just referring to one another but to entire cultural tapestries, situating these narratives within and around all other narratives, actual and imagined. From a commercial standpoint books transcend their ghetto, without abandoning their edges, they become permeable—which is in fact what they've always been. As such, the books become more truly themselves. As Rick Joyce, Chief Marketing Officer at Perseus, a consumer books company, likes to remark: "There are lots of books about shoes, but no shoes about books." Books, by their very nature, contain worlds.

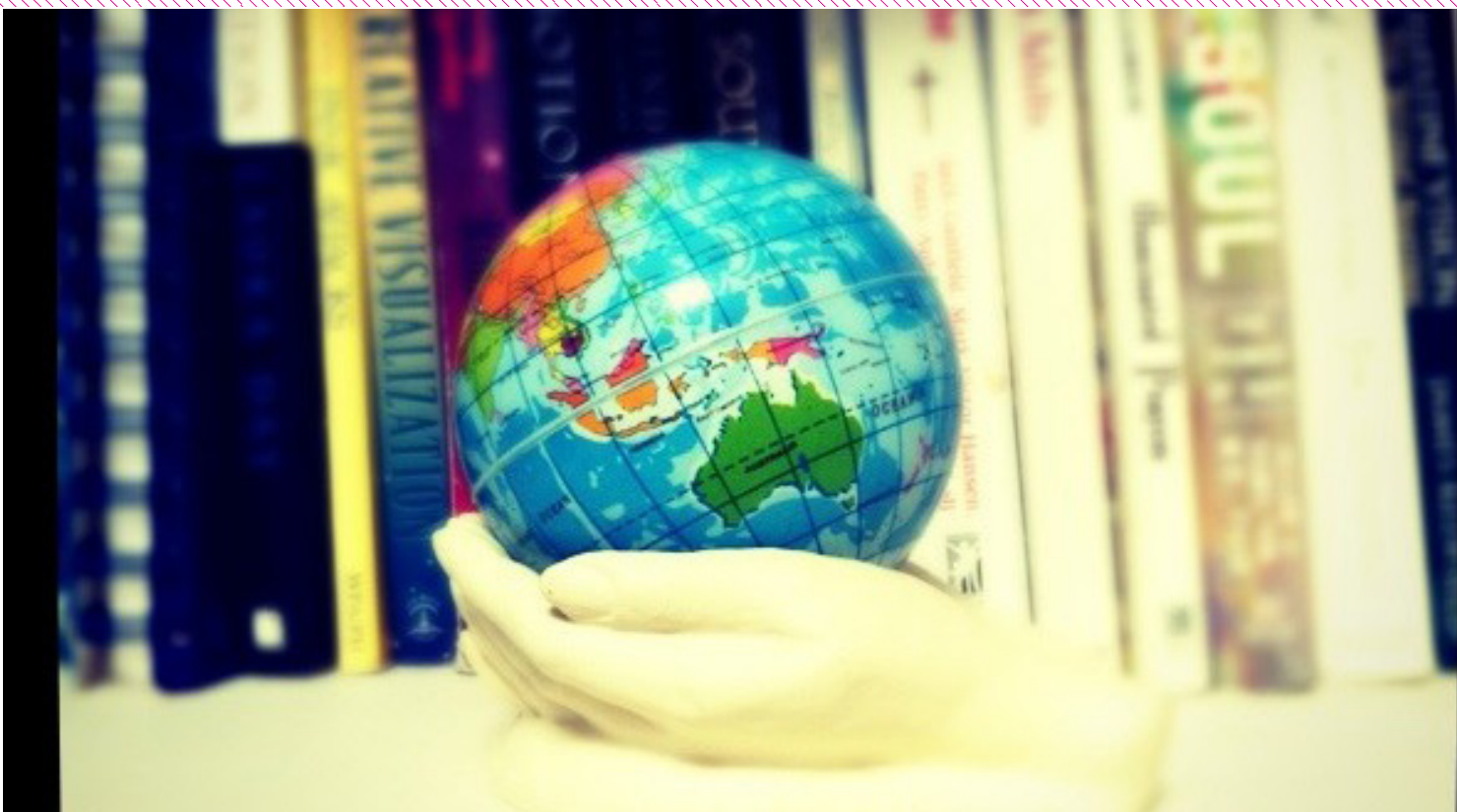
Now, how might Small Demons live on, not as a business but as a vision? During our existence what became clear was that there was an intense appetite amongst some (though by no means all) of the people who visited the site to actively participate, not just marvel (or frown). All the data we generated was generated in-house via automated entity extraction and a small group of editors tweaking the data. Users wanted to add data, both stuff that the computers missed and stuff the computers couldn't ascertain. We could tell you that Dewar's appeared in a book, but not who drank it, and what the role of the whiskey-drinking was in the plot. Was the protagonist drowning his sorrows? Was it spiked? Did she order Glenmorangie and was told nope, all we've got is Dewar's? And so forth. As [Erin Walker wrote](#), books are props in people's lives, and so are the details within books, and people want to share those details, just as they like to share the books that contain them.

So if we are going to create tools to foster and support that impulse, the key thing will be to build into the system from the beginning the ability for users to add, amend, clarify, correct, and connect details they themselves see. We were not unaware of this need, we just didn't move quickly enough to respond to it, and ran out of resources before we could deploy those tools.

Further to this principle, this data—from both an output and input standpoint—should live on the entire web, not just within the site or app. In other words, a read-write API. Again, this was something we were aware of, as there was a real appetite from web media companies large and small to integrate our data into their user experience, interest from libraries, interest from geo-location apps, interest from e-commerce retailers, from textbook publishers. But we ran out of time, in part because we didn't prioritize it early

enough. From a revenue-generating standpoint, this appetite for the API is clearly a major opportunity, if not the major opportunity, and would apply both to a for-profit or nonprofit entity.

That said, if it were a nonprofit it would be particularly wise to be aware of the larger context of linked open data. In other words, it should play well with others. Just like books do.



The Best of All Possible Worlds?

by G. Pascal Zachary

The traditions of serious publishing are imperiled by the emergence of new technologies that more easily, inexpensively—and at global scale—produce books of all kinds.

Academic and scholarly writers inside or outside of the academy face the vexing problem of abandoning traditional platforms for book publishing that have served their interests and embracing new forms of publishing that undermine the unity of the book.

The central question is: how will traditional books co-evolve with the new forms of books—purely digital or print-digital hybrids—in which text is unstable, merged with other media types, and increasingly ephemeral?

The traditional book is unlikely to vanish—never mind the forces of creative destruction at play in the publishing world—because copyright and intellectual property law privilege the book over other kinds of published artifacts (most dramatically, the “newspaper” article). Path dependence is a powerful ally to book traditionalists. Retro-book advocates benefit from a powerful nexus of institutions—universities, foundations, libraries and even book sellers—that will continue to support and enhance the traditional book.

The role of Kindle, the leading e-book seller, chiefly serves to reinforce the hegemony of the traditional book. The entire thrust of Amazon's "innovation" around the Kindle is to improve and enhance the direct analog-to-digital transfer. The Kindle strives to replicate, not undermine or revolutionize, the traditional experience of book reading. Amazon's reward for assuming the retro posture is market dominance. The market leader in e-books is curiously reinforcing the hegemonic position of the traditional bounded, print-on-paper book.

Scholars and serious thinkers face, perhaps improbably, the paradoxical situation that creative destruction and technological change are opening multiple pathways for publishing their work, in a real sense providing them with the best of both worlds: lower barriers to reaching readers through traditional book publishing and new hybrid forms of (multimedia) books that expand and redefine the notion of what a book is and can be.

We book authors of all stripes now exist in the best of all possible worlds—on the production side. The reader, for whom we care deeply, is more estranged from us than ever before. Therein lies the riddle of the author's existence—and the reason why, bluntly, we authors are profoundly anxious, destabilized, and in fear of our inevitable doom.



[Dennis Tenen: Removing the Middleman](#)

Sprint 3

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Living in an Amazon world

by G. Pascal Zachary

If nothing changes the trajectory, we book people are going to be living in an Amazon world. That means the future of the book hinges heavily on leveraging the tools, distribution muscle, and audience for Amazon.

In the short-term, great benefits. Amazon's publishing platforms are inexpensive, easy to use, and guarantee wide coverage both within the U.S. and around the world. Whether print-on-demand (Amazon's Createspace unit, chiefly) or pure e-book (Kindle), Amazon offers the full spectrum of services for both fledgling and mature publishers.

Does that mean we are condemned to learn to love the dark side of Janus-faced Amazon—its penchant for loss-leader pricing designed to reinforce technological “lock-in” (having a library of e-books, for instance, that operate only on the Kindle hardware family)? Or the infant Amazon enterprise of allowing owners of e-books to “share” them across computer networks, thus effectively depriving authors and content owners of payment?

To be sure, the position of Amazon in the world of book publishing is not yet hegemonic. Print publishers of seriousness, size, and scope, notably Oxford and Simon & Schuster (CBS) and MacMillan (Holtzbrinck), remain counterweights against any emergent Amazon

monopoly. And in e-books, where Amazon reigns supreme, the traditional analog-to-digital transfer model, where the goal for the e-book is to replicate the print reading experience, opens Amazon to attacks from technological innovators who wish to leapfrog by revolutionizing the book, both as artifact and experience. Even today, so many platforms for book publishing are effectively free and “consumer friendly” that you not only can publish books easily in digital form, you can publish them in wide variety of ways, incorporating all media types in ways that both enhance the reading experience and deliver audio, video, and still photography. So as a practical matter, Amazon is not the sole option, not at all.

Yet the rising tide of Kindle means that readers, at least for the moment, are wedded to a platform that not only can't be ignored but must be embraced. For the standpoint of the liquid present, then, the future of books is now and readers and authors alike are reading, writing and publishing... in an Amazon world.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

When you zoom in on the ceiling, you see that Ada has shared an annotation with you. She tells you that the answer you seek can be found in one of three caskets. Caskets? *The Merchant of Venice* included a casket test!

To enroll in the *Merchant of Venice* node, turn to page 128.

If all this talk about caskets reminds you of casks and makes you want to get a drink, turn to page 111.



Talking It Out

by Ed Finn

As I sit here in a nearly silent room filled with creative thinkers about the future of books, I cannot avoid asking whether we're doing this all wrong. As a couple of our participants have pointed out, it's slightly perverse to bring these people together and then ask them to spend much of their time tapping silently at flimsy plastic input devices based on [flawed 19th century machines](#).

Shouldn't we be talking about this stuff instead?

I'd like to argue, borrowing from Churchill, that this method is the worst form of collaboration except for all the others. The book sprint that we're running here is inspired by an ambition to reinvent the concept of the book, but perhaps more importantly, the [process and performance of publishing](#). But it is also an effort to reimagine how intellectual conversations can happen. The best conversations are live, spontaneous, and require the high bandwidth of sharing a physical space. You can do it remotely, even by exchanging a [series of letters over decades](#), but to actually create a sense of energy and improvisation—to get people thinking out loud and thinking *together*—you need live performance.

So the process of our book sprint needs to include live conversation but also something

more. A great conversation, by definition, is not transferrable—you were there or you weren't. Our challenge is to perform a kind of alchemy that distills the energy of collaborative thinking into a new medium. I say alchemy because this involves transmuting a fundamentally magical component out of another. The conversation itself is unique, and even an ESPN-style multipoint camera crew could not capture the live intensity of smart people thinking on their feet—at best, it would be an archival recording of something cool that happened once.

The traditional solution to this problem has been to let people figure it out for themselves: have a great conversation, take it home with you, and maybe months or years later it will emerge as some kind of intellectual outcome. In the humanities, the process is even more stylized: almost all intellectual action happens before or after the big conference, when the paper gets written and when it gets revised. All that happens in the conference room is a bunch of people reading things at one another.

Our project here is not only to pose a series of provocative questions about the future of the book, but also to experiment with new processes for curating these conversations. The series of short writing deadlines and structured groups we've deployed here offer people a set of friendly challenges: converse, and then articulate your best ideas in a short essay. At its best the blending of these modes sharpens both the talking and the writing through a set of simple constraints. Our series of quick marches ask participants to articulate a few positions that are neither over-determined (because nobody had time to prepare, to do their work beforehand, to pick an answer before the question was fully voiced) nor consequence-free (because it's not just a conversation, it's a text that will live on through multiple publishing iterations).

So the exercise is a kind of thinking by doing on multiple levels of process. Everyone in this room is working out their own solution to the structure, the hurdles and pathways we've set before them. And collectively we are discussing the process of authorship and publishing itself. The most important part of the exercise is the possibility, really the embrace of failure. This is one of the beautiful things about a good conversation in performance: the inescapable flow of oral utterance, as Barthes (1975) or Ong (1982) argued, does not allow things to be unsaid, only to be reframed. The book sprint is a digital reinvention of that idea (not by forbidding revision, but by persistently nudging people out of their comfort zones).

The process is performance. The room is talking again; it's filling with laughter and movement as people come out of another cycle to share notes, to talk things out and to keep pushing forward.



New Modes of Knowledge Production and the Book

by Mark Tebeau

It goes without saying that digital technologies have lowered the bar to writing, printing, and publishing books. And, yet, when we think about the future of the book, too often we (historians especially) imagine the book in terms of the large commercial or academic press that follows an age-old process through which authors sit down at a typewriter and peck away at the keyboard, filling page after page of text. What I've come to realize, though, is that I've come to these problems of the future of the book from a quite different point, a roundabout journey that began without much consideration of either platform or press.

The particular questions that I am presently exploring are specific. How do we deploy an e-publishing solution for mobile interpretive projects powered by [Curatescape](#) (+ [Omeka](#))? That problem has transformed my colleagues and partners into publishers, revealing a convergence between public humanities projects and traditional scholarly endeavors. This convergence suggests that as we sprint beyond the book, we should appreciate both the importance of the book's unique presence as well as the ways in which the book can become enriched by new approaches to the production of knowledge.

Curatescape, the framework for mobile publishing developed by my research lab, emerged from several professional practices that have converged in the digital age.

Urban and public historians have long been curating landscape, well before the term “curation” was applied as widely as it has been in the digital age. Often emerging out of innovative community-driven teaching, these “local” historians and their students and collaborators studied neighborhoods, communities, and civic spaces. The outcomes of those works—papers, presentations, walking tours, and public history projects—frequently made their way back to the community through interactive projects, featuring dialogues between students and their key informants. That dialogue, framed by historical scholarship and primary source documents, yielded remarkable experiential learning, of the sort that produced civic engagement. This approach has become a standard feature on many university campuses through service learning and experientially based classroom assignments. The digital age has yielded new ways to feature that work, ranging from blogs to digital archival platforms. Suddenly, we’ve moved from one-off projects to those that can (potentially) build upon one another.

The ability to create shared learning environments led innovators to create standards-based platforms and tools for publishing on the Internet. WordPress, Blogger, and Tumblr are the best-known present surviving tools from this moment, becoming common blogging (or microblogging) software. In the archival world, open-source archival content management systems emerged to help librarians and curators document and share their collections—books, material culture, and photographs. In academic and library settings, tools like Collective Access or Omeka have become commonly used archival systems, emulating blogging platforms in their approach to allowing heritage professionals to engage publics about their important cultural collections.

At the turn of the century, Oral History practice underwent dramatic transformation, driven by the emergence of digital tools for collecting, processing, and archiving oral history. The results accelerated trends underway in the field, away from reliance on written transcripts to mediate what is a deeply human and aural experience. Digital collection of stories democratized oral history by allowing anyone to record narratives. And, it made those sound files more sharable than they’d ever been. Coupled with easier indexing, annotating, and archiving, oral history became malleable and could be included easily in the emerging ecosystem of digital humanities projects. Setting aside the work of filmmakers, these trends allowed scholars and documentarians for the first time to widely share human voices as part of their interpretive work. As part of a broader proliferation of interpretive multimedia, the very nature of storytelling has shifted toward layered multimedia presentation.

In 2005, as these trends emerged and I engaged them with students, teachers, and

colleagues, I was asked to produce content for history kiosks that would be located along a rapid bus route in Cleveland, Ohio. Our team built elaborate multimedia stories for these kiosks, which appeared on the streets at the very moment of the emergence of the iPhone. Recognizing that such locative technologies promised to transform cities into living museums, our team adapted the kiosk project to mobile devices. Bringing together a series of convergences—in engaged-student learning, open-source content management systems, and digital oral history—our first project, [Cleveland Historical](#), developed as a web-based mobile interpretive project that allowed our team to curate the city through interpretive, layered multimedia stories. Cleveland Historical became the first iteration of Curatescape, a broader framework for mobile curation that uses the Omeka content management system as its core archive. Importantly, we don't call our work a "platform" but a framework that uses multiple digital tools, content management systems, and standards. We exist within a broader system of knowledge production that is both technical and conceptual.

In building our Cleveland project, as well as working with more than 30 partners to launch their projects, we've realized that our teams of students, communities, and scholars are curating landscape through interpretive stories. They're also publishing rich collections of multimedia stories that engage the landscape in remarkable ways. These projects transform how we experience place, and also provide an avenue for shaping conversations about place.

Critically, our audiences and interpreters also have challenged the boundaries of our community, urging us to produce information feeds to a variety of different formats, including e-books, and even real books. They want to read our interpretive historical stories as collectives, with different sorts of connections to other interpretive projects (both inside and outside the Curatescape system).

Quite suddenly, we've found ourselves asking what these travelogues should look like. We're asking about the role of multimedia, the formats, and the outputs (e-books, print, how to format the RSS feed). We're just as interested in the use cases: is this for local urban walking tours, thematic books that feature the apps' tours, aggregations of stories across space—about parks or Civil Rights? The questions of what this might look like, and of what it means to write a book, have challenged our sense of the book itself. What is it that we're publishing? If it is not a book, what is it? Critically, the convergence of tools, approaches, and materials suggests to me that whatever forms emerge should reflect emerging approaches to systems of knowledge production. Harkening back to a mythic book as a standard and goal may be the wrong question to ask as we sprint toward the future of the book.



Books as Platforms for Surveillance

by Erin Walker

One major trend in current technological innovation is personalization. People can look up anything of interest with unprecedented speed, and are presented with information specifically tailored to their needs, preferences, and past behaviors. To effect this personalization, massive amounts of data are continuously collected about users' interactions with technology—what they search for, what they look at, and what they choose to share with others online. There is a tension between the usefulness of having technology anticipate your needs and the Orwellian implications of having all the data you generate collected, stored, and analyzed.

In thinking about the production of e-books, we have to recognize that these knowledge systems will increasingly incorporate knowledge about the consumers of the books. For digital books to become more intelligent and adaptive to reader characteristics, they need to collect massive amounts of data about individual readers. Other essays from this book sprint have positioned e-books as platforms for performance, platforms for expression, and platforms for community in ways that emphasize the positive role of books in modern society. We also need to recognize that digital books, like much modern computing technology, are platforms for large-scale surveillance in ways that can have problematic

implications.

One area of surveillance is the intentional actions users take: books they buy, books they read, passages they underline, annotations they make, and comments or reviews they leave for the broader online community. This data can be logged and stored, and it is easy to imagine scenarios where the act of reading books counter to your group norms is discouraged by the fact that it could be made public. Most text data will soon be able to be automatically interpreted, and comments and annotations will be crawled and categorized. The thought of an automated aggregation of every spontaneous and potentially trivial reaction by each individual reader across several years is somewhat discomfiting. On the other hand, this data generated by intentional actions is easily interpretable by readers themselves. In today's world, many people are comfortable sharing this kind of information about themselves with their broader community. When readers have power to manage and curate this data as part of the way they present their identity, the collection of the data somehow seems less ominous.

A second area of surveillance is how books are read—user reactions to the text that are less intentional but integral to the act of reading itself. Gaze data can tell us where on the page the reader is looking at any given point in time; and while eye trackers are currently expensive and cumbersome, in the near future it is entirely likely that accurate tracking will be accomplished through camera-based technologies. Physiological data can provide information about readers' emotional reactions to particular passages, and brain data can provide information about their cognitive states. While currently these technologies are intrusive and mostly limited to research applications, they will not always be.

The implications of this second kind of data collection are sinister. If Sara is assigned a reading from a textbook, and eye tracking indicates she barely glanced at one section, is that going to have negative academic consequences? Should it? If Jane has an emotional reaction to a passage that provokes a painful memory, should that be catalogued, stored, and interpreted, even if that information is never used? If Bob is recreationally reading a book on business, and cognitive state information indicates that he does not understand an essential concept, could that information be found and held against him later in a job interview for a position as a market analyst?

The more data we collect on the reader, the more we can tailor books to their unique needs and preferences. The knowledge system of the digital book of the future includes the characteristics of the reader. Readers themselves might want to examine that data, finding that it provides them with insight into their own habits, or curate that data, finding that it enhances how they wish to present themselves online. However, the collection of data which users do not produce intentionally while reading—gaze, physiological, and brain

data—will mean that every failure of understanding or frustration is permanently indexed and potentially accessible. The future book is a platform for gathering an unprecedented level of information about each individual reader that catalogs their past experiences, current abilities, and potential for future success.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....

A few weeks later, you have gone through all the cognitive scaffolding, checked in with the Wizards mentoring the class, and worked with your fellow knowledge consumers to understand the play, and you decide to complete a capstone project on *The Merchant of Venice*. When you finish, you receive your Shakespeare badge. You notice something oddly modern about Shakespeare’s appearance: a shiny gold earring.

Turn to page 153.

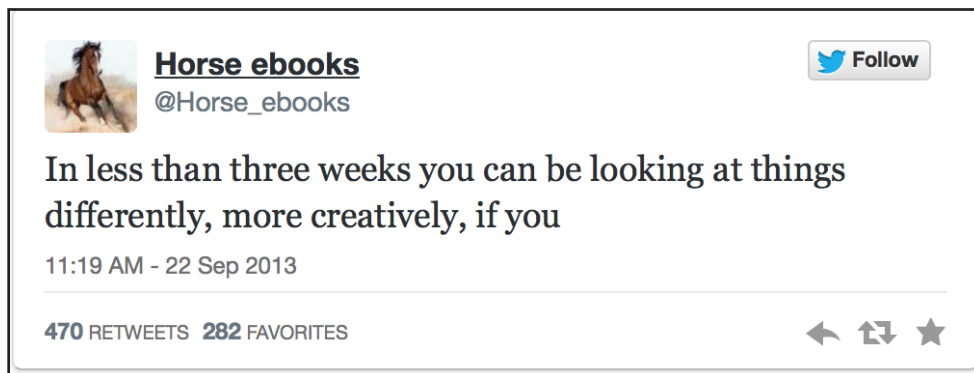


In the Future, We'll All Have Pet Bots

by C. Max Magee

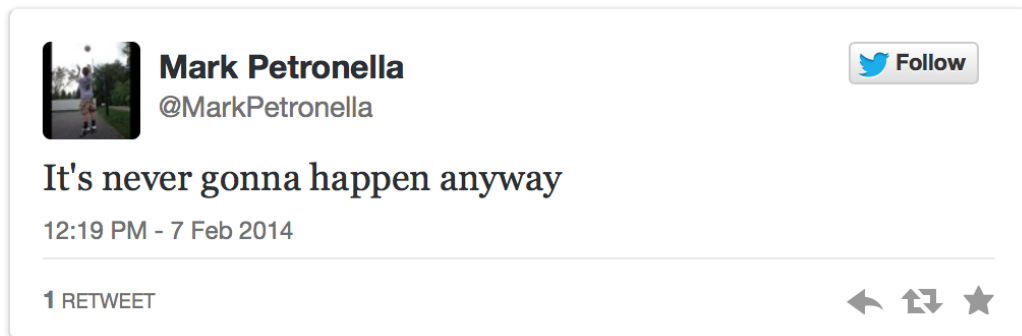
Right now bots are primarily annoyances; 98% are spammers delivering often commercial come-ons via inscrutable language meant to evade anti-spam algorithms.

But some bots are more playful—intentional or unintentional performance art. Some recent examples that have bubbled up into the public consciousness include poetic e-book spammer [turned subversive art project @Horse_ebooks](#) and playful Twitter bot-makers [Ranjit Bhatnagar](#) and [Darius Kazemi](#).



— *Horse ebooks (@Horse_ebooks) September 22, 2013*

Bhatnagar's [@Pentametrion](#) finds a tweet inadvertently written in iambic pentameter and then finds another with a rhyming final syllable.



— *Mark Petronella (@MarkPetronella) February 7, 2014*

— *❄️*ice (@isisnatasha3) February 7, 2014*

Kazemi's [@TwoHeadlines](#) scans the web for headlines and mashes up two at a time, with results that sound inadvertently plausible.



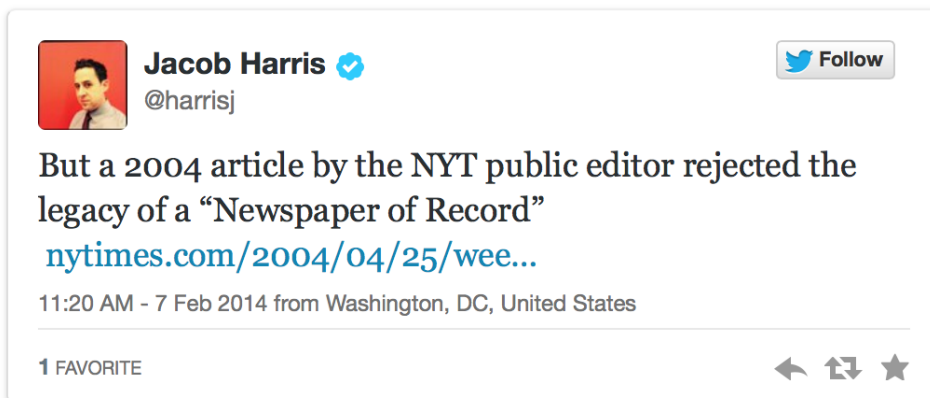
— *Two Headlines (@TwoHeadlines) February 7, 2014*

Follow [@robotuaries](#) and it will occasionally tweet out a fake twitter obituary for you.

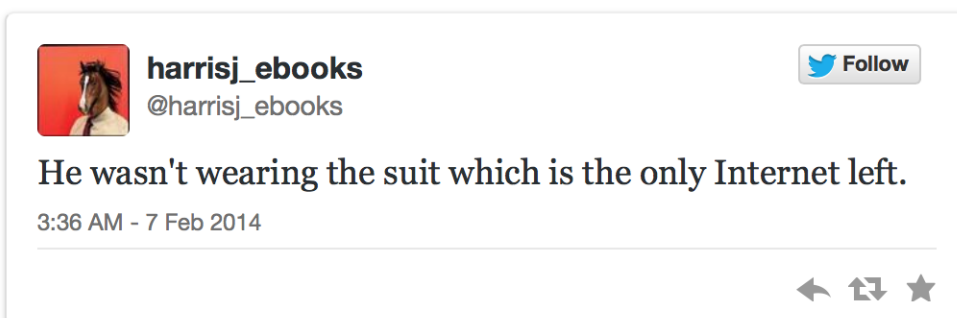


— Robotuaries (@robotuaries) February 7, 2014

While these bots amuse, others are useful, keyed to stock market movements or weather conditions. New York Times senior software architect Jacob Harris has created [iron_ebooks](#), a utility that allows you to create “a _ebooks account tweets derived from a regular twitter account,” effectively giving you a bizarro version of your twitter self for you to observe and enjoy.



— Jacob Harris (@harrisj) February 7, 2014



— harrisj_ebooks (@harrisj_ebooks) February 7, 2014

[@tofu_product](#) does the same, but you have to ping it first.

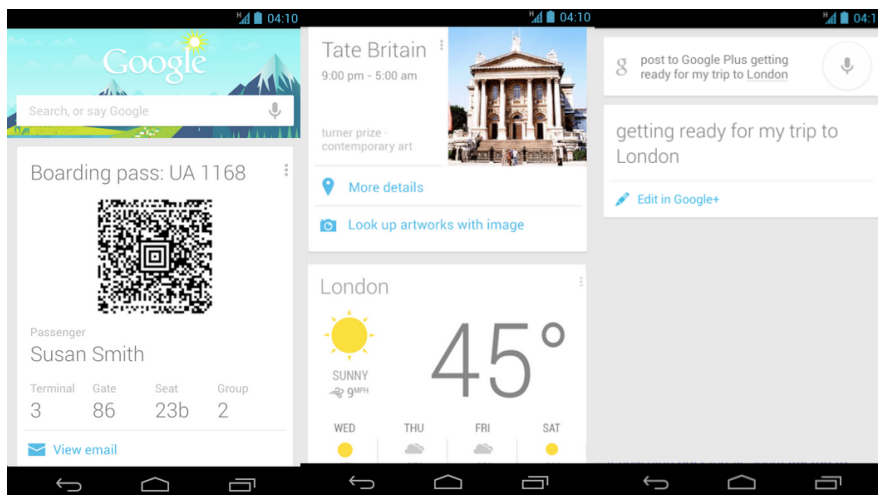


— *tofu (@tofu_product) December 7, 2013*

These are rudimentary creatures, but even at this early stage they appear capable of poetry that can elicit the same reactions that traditional (i.e. human-created) poetry is intended to elicit. In the controlled world of Twitter, each bot performs its proscribed function, but what could future bots do?

Certainly there are whole business models built on creating bots that are meant to learn our habits and help us in our daily lives (including, of course, pushing advertising our way.) Google Now is a leading-edge example of this. Even now, it's offering me things to do nearby, giving me the weather here in Arizona and at home in New Jersey and showing me links to new articles on a variety of websites it knows I read.

Here's someone else's Google Now:



But might there also be promise in these bots in the worlds of art and literature? To take the Twitter example, could a bot learn enough to send me bespoke bits of poetry or

personalized aphorism that it knows will elevate my mind and mood?

What about a bot that breaks the 140-character bounds of Twitter to send me personalized machine-generated art, snippets of music, or found and remixed narrative, all riffing on cues found in my online travels?

A pet bot just for me that sends me art made just for me.



C. Max Magee: The Exchange of Ideas and Tangible Book Prototypes

Books, Books Everywhere and Not a Drop to Drink

by Richard Nash

A significant impediment for a reader considering whether to enter into the world of a book is that it is resource-intensive. As [C. Max Magee](#) discussed, books are expensive in “time and emotional energy.” The overall commitment is significant, and perhaps even more importantly, the commitment required to sample is high too. Spending an hour and a half reading a book you decide you don’t like is a deeply unpleasant experience, and frequently the reader quantifies that loss in terms of dollars than time: “I can’t believe I wasted \$15 on this piece of crap.” A book you don’t want to read is worse than the absence of value, it destroys value (subjectively, of course).

One ramification is that the price of a book has to be radically discounted in order to persuade a reader to take a risk on something that could prove to be a negative experience. Dollar for dollar, a book is the cheapest form of narrative cultural experience there is, cheaper than music or film, and the perceived value, in the consumer’s mind, of content in digital format exacerbates the situation, putting even more downward pressure on pricing. The shift in consumption patterns away from ownership towards an access model, one driven by companies like Netflix in films, and by Spotify, Pandora, Last.fm, etc. in music creates yet more pressure. Indeed, in one respect, piracy means that all content is now, in

effect, free, if you know how and where to look.

Nevertheless, the cost denominated in time and emotional energy remains as high as ever, higher if you consider that we are now swimming in content. Almost all platform innovation around content in the past five hundred years has occurred at the level of supply, whereas relatively little effort has been expended figuring out how to integrate all the stories we're now actively telling. Probably the greatest effort has been expended by search engines around finding things you know you're looking for and social networks in seeking to organize the output of social activity, whether that activity is expressed in short bursts of words, or in pictures and short videos. But little effort has been expended on the largest and most demanding agglomerations of words, and on considering how to permit serendipity. Serendipity seems to require a sense of an encounter with the unexpected which is difficult to engender when we expect to have stories flowing by us throughout space and time.

The primary new platform innovation in books in 2013-2014 has been the subscription service, which seeks to apply the film/TV/music paradigm shift; a shift toward paid streaming subscription and away from both advertising-supported analog streaming from broadcast radio and TV and away from pay-per-download models like iTunes.

Currently, however, these services—the most discussed are [Oyster](#) and [Scribd](#)—focus on acquiring the latest possible libraries of content (each touts 100,000+ titles) and the lowest price (\$9.99 and \$8.99 respectively). However, with so much content in the world, more than any human alive could even name, never mind consume, and with most of it available either for free already or easily hackable, what value could such services possibly provide a reader?

My belief is that the power of any such service will inhere less in its ability to make more reading available more cheaply, and more in its ability to help us integrate reading into our daily lives. How this will happen is probably the determining factor in both how these platforms will evolve and the extent to which people will migrate to these reading services from other modes of acquiring content for reading. I'm now working for a service called [Byliner](#) which shares with Oyster and Scribd a library model and a monthly subscription fee. However, it is also exploring ways to structure the library in a manner than enables a satisfying journey through all the stories. In this regard it has one advantage over Oyster and Scribd which is that it began life as a publisher of stories that can be read, typically, in 30-40 minutes, with stories (fiction and narrative nonfiction) ranging in length from 5,000 to 20,000 words. As such, the reader is not called up in each instance to embark on a long, potentially unpleasant journey—the fact that the stories are shorter than full-length books allow the reader to nibble her way through and, if we are able to serve her up successive

stories that appeal, we're able, ideally, to bring about a progressive sense of depth. A different experience we're exploring is to select five stories, around a particular theme, say *Genius*, or *Hustle*, or *Lust*, and send those to subscribers once a week. So the first structure is akin to a reader journeying through the City of Stories, while the second operates more like a wine club, delivering weekly a set of new stories to read.

Regardless of how these various enterprises evolve, their existence signifies a positive development in the business of digital content, in that they do not require the enormous number of users that large-scale advertising-driven corporations need to survive. Stories of a significant length do not interest advertisers, since an individual serious narrative is never going to attract millions of readers. So a model wherein there is predictable recurring revenue, based on readers looking for precisely that, is a positive outcome for the reading-writing ecosystem overall.



Creative Practices

What roles will individual authors and artists, as well as collectives and institutions, play in pioneering new modes of book design and production – and more broadly, the design and production of knowledge? Which experiments with the future of the book have been the most interesting, provocative and productive? How can we bring new voices and broad publics into the conversation about the future of the book? Should the publishing industry lower the risks associated with experimentation and foster experimentalism among authors, editors, anthologists, artists and designers?

Sprint 1

**Authorship: Conceptions of
Creativity / Creative Systems** 139

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**The Future of Creativity and Books in the
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Authorship: Conceptions of Creativity / Creative Systems

by Sally Ball

How is our sense of creativity changing as the object called *the book* changes? How do we “practice” differently as writers in a world where distribution of literary art increasingly relies on our own efforts, where the audience that makes up Consumers of Language-Based Entertainment has more options? I’m writing, by the way, in a roomful of other people writing: people from the book industry, from academia, entrepreneurs—in general, they are people who are mostly interested in knowledge (how it’s transmitted, how it’s stored—). I am mostly interested in literary art, though I also think knowledge occurs there, lives there, too.

Michael Simeone, the director of ASU’s Institute for Humanities Research Nexus Lab: Digital Humanities and Transdisciplinary Informatics, asked initially: what does creativity even

look like if the identity of the consumer is more important than the identity of the producer? I am wondering if that is the key shift as the book moves forward. At first I thought that such a shift would convert the writer to a Draper: Mad Men, Madison Avenue, a target marketer aiming at a segment, utilitarian maybe above all else (that is certainly a model that would be espoused, for example, by the university presidents who want to charge more for useless things like humanities courses)..... Though that utilitarian conception of the writer begs a question about what it means (meant?) for the producer's identity to "matter more." Because an oversimplification of the question lets us think that the writer for whom the consumer's identity does not come first is not concerned with other people. She's that navel-gazer writer rebuked by the head of the Nobel Committee a few years ago when he felt the need to explain why American fiction was not interesting to the prize committee. ([Too insular.](#)) But I want to slow down with the question of identity here: of whose identity matters to a writer, and how the book itself, or the means by which books make their way into reader's heads, may affect that question.

For literary writers, the relationship to an audience, the possibility of believing one even has an audience, has ranged widely from person to person and era to era. The defining pressure of *our* time is consumption: clicks and hits and sales. The mainstream publishing industry, joined often enough by small press publishers, wants authors using social media regularly and then intensely to have a presence, to create a buzz. The time writers must spend cultivating this presence, this promotional avatar of literary aliveness, probably depletes the time they can spend immersed in the work they are meant to be promoting. Many writers find transitioning from one territory to the other difficult, and the seductions of social media interactions (additionally justified as pleasing to one's publicist) have to be actively opposed if one is to fall into creative literary work. How does that change such creative work? And does the cultivation of that online personality sometimes suffice for people who might have been creators of literary content in the past?

I think that's often the criticism of writers who use social media, that there's a whorish self-promotional thing going on, and many of us probably know writers whose social media presence has made them less attractive—or more attractive—than whatever we thought of them just as persons or just as authors (depending on whether we know them in the flesh or only on the page).

This is a sprint: and I want to return to that question of the author/producer's identity and whether or not we think of ourselves or the consumer first—or whom we're thinking of, if we aren't in marketing mode. The novelist T. M. McNally defines the novelist's responsibility as *to the people on the page*. The post-structuralists would likely chuckle, right?—or at least, in their wake, we think it's quaint to owe anything to fictional lives, to self-conceive as in service to something imaginary that might somehow be taken as universal or (more

modestly) representative.....

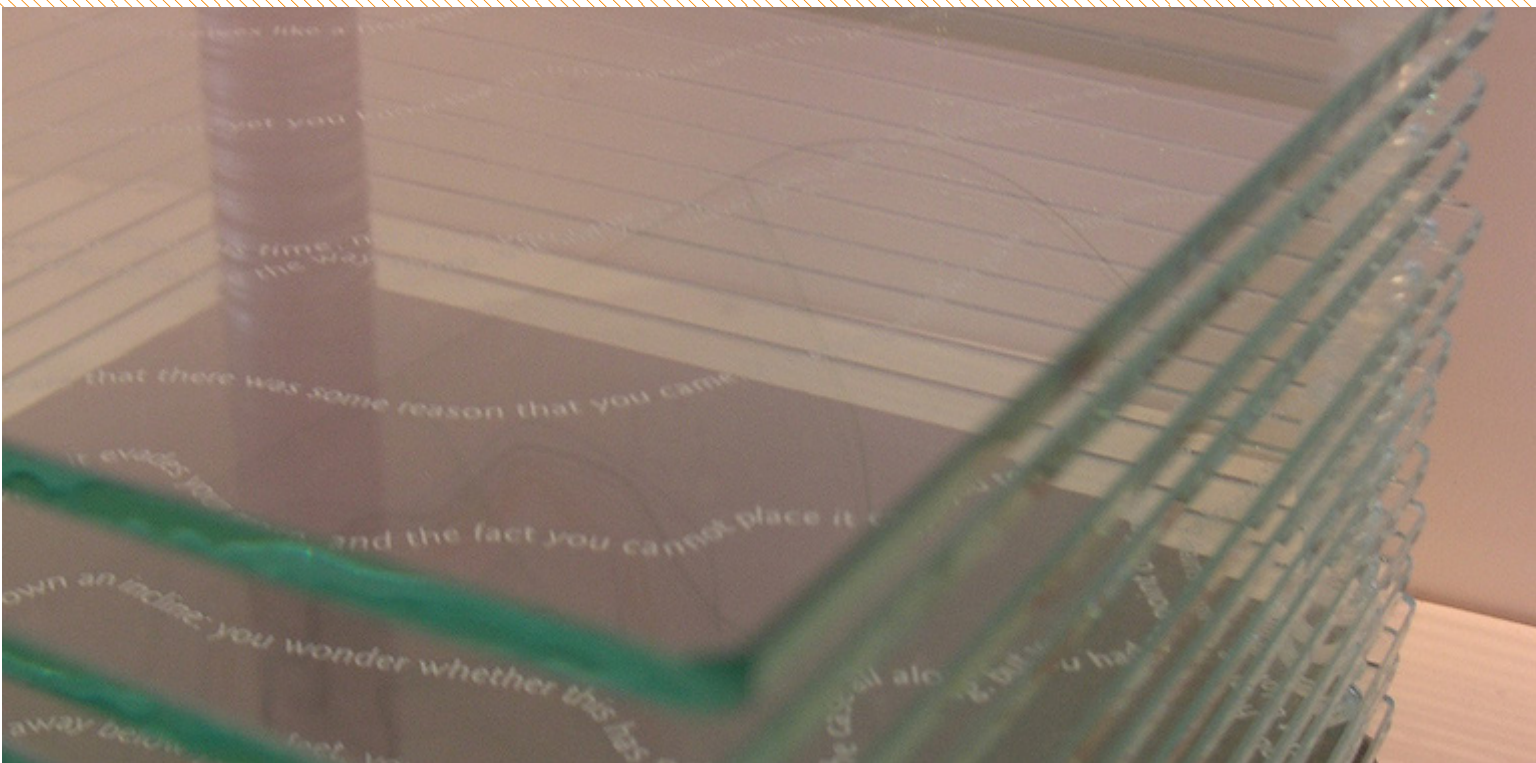
But the way text is encountered now is (at least initially) online, and we probably meet the “author” before we meet her characters—before, I mean, we meet her art. Does she make it differently, do we look at it differently, because we know the blog, the interview, the Next Big Thing, the feed?

Creativity: writing has probably always been something one had to fight distraction to do, and as the varieties of distraction have multiplied, maybe now it’s more difficult to do it, even as it’s easier to ‘get it out there.’ Certainly the world we now inhabit does not encourage contemplation, lostness in one’s imagination, etc. If you are lost in thought, Reader, you are not shopping. In (2012) Chris Nealon describes what he calls the Post-Language poetry of late-late capitalism, which, he says, can most potently be recognized by its stance. Which is *waiting*. To be waiting, to be aware that noticing obsolescence is obsolete, to know (in keeping with Michael’s posts of DOOM) that we already ought to be done here, having already more or less ruined everything, or commodified it (that’s probably not a difference but a definition—). And so at best, Nealon observes, we feel this “rueful astonishment” that we’re still here, sometimes perfectly happily. That’s where writing now begins: either in the universe of distraction and segue and association and accumulation, or in the lull between distractions. Schools, I think, are formed around whether one believes such lulls can exist at all, or if instead one thinks any notion of escape from gluts and heaps and links and ads, this constant ravenous simultaneity, is delusional, naïve.

The questions about identity (whose matters more, the consumer’s or the producer’s?) lead to other questions about attention (paying it, or seeking it—). The measure of which identity has more power can probably be seen in the parceling of attention. If the future of the book will also be defined by *its* stance, then we find ourselves considering point of view, which we create in poetry and in fiction by how we pay attention. When the writer is required to, or elects to, solicit attention, that probably gets entwined with (or into conflict with?) the attention she needs to turn so unflinchingly toward her subject.



Patrick McCray: No More Bells and Whistles



Beyond the Book?

by *Amaranth Borsuk*

The premise of this gathering is that the book is not simply a changing technology, but one that is disappearing, evaporating, disintegrating before our eyes. Yet even as new technologies have facilitated the digitization of books, and the creation of apps, immersive audio experiences, game-like interactive narratives, and other ephemeral books and book-like artifacts, they have also facilitated the rise of small press publishing and provided increased opportunity for the generation and distribution of texts. Writers, after all, do not, as Ulises Carrión (1985) reminds us, write *books*, but *texts*.

In fact, it seems we are not moving beyond the book, but in fact entering a moment in which everything is a book. A natural evolution, perhaps, from poststructuralism's assertion that everything is a text? If everything is legible, then anything is fodder for publication and distribution, we might say, whether by a robot that crawls the web for content to be packaged into Kindle books, or by the blogger who wants to see a year's worth of witticisms packaged between covers.

As my co-conspirators [Michael Simeone](#) and [Sally Ball](#) have pointed out, the “creative systems” through which contemporary writing circulates reconfigure authorship, placing increased emphasis on the reader as co-constitutor of the text, and on the book as a performance that alters each time it is accessed.

Text's ubiquity and seeming immateriality has given rise to a situation like the one Walter Benjamin imagined in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in which every reader can at any moment transform into an author. Think of all the blogs-turned books (including this project), the rise of [Blurb](#) and other platforms for creating art books from digital images, the increased presence of print-on-demand opportunities not only online, but in physical bookstores like Harvard Book Shop in Cambridge and McNally Jackson in New York. It continues to be ever easier to make something into an object recognizable to others as a "book."

The ease with which text can be poured from one container into another (extending Beatrice Ward's (1956) notion of typography as a "crystal goblet" in a slightly disingenuous way here—I side with Kate Hayles (2002) and other theorists of media-specificity that the book is in fact not transparent, but in fact structures our interactions with it at every turn) has given rise to some fascinating publications that should, it seems, not be books. An immaterial situation that embraces our ability to print books affordably and to make all that was once air solid again. Whether we are thinking of spambots that troll the web for free content to be sold as e-books or authors like Kenneth Goldsmith and other members of the conceptual avant-garde whose writing practice resembles remix, remediation, appropriation, or, in Goldsmith's formulation, "uncreativity" (2011).

These books are fascinating artistic artifacts, like Nick Thurston's [Of the Subcontract](#) (2013), a collection of poems crowdsourced through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, with its shiny metallic cover and minimalist design.

Like Thurston's mirror-faced paperback, many of these appropriations draw our attention to reader as much as author, repositioning the writer him or herself as a reader/curator. For those interested in the aesthetics of such projects, Paul Soulellis maintains an online repository, [Library of the Printed Web](#), and related projects can be found at [Gauss PDF](#) (whose recent works include a series of lovely close-up photographs of Emmalea Russo's re-typing of Gertrude Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*, with stitching obscuring nearly all of the text save the recurrent word "they"—a project that clearly plays with re-enactment and remediation, particularly since it includes recto and verso of every page) and [Trollthread](#) (among whose many "unprintable" books you'll find the antithesis of Thurston's shiny surface: Holly Melgard's *Black Friday*, whose 734 pages are entirely black onscreen, but devolve gradually during the printing process as your printer's toner depletes) two PDF publishers specializing in books that push on the boundaries of book-ness and authorship.



The Future of Creativity and Books in the Face of Probable Doom, Part 1: Creative Systems

by Michael Simeone

I believe, with at least 75 percent conviction, that we are all doomed. The environment of our planet is badly damaged. Not beyond recovery, but whatever recovery may come will probably take too long to matter. Disease and overpopulation are also threatening, as is a massive global crisis in fresh water supplies. All of this is to say that whatever time period we have defined as a “future” for the future of books to live in will be relatively short. Terrifyingly short, even.

But in the time leading up to a total collapse of civilization as we know it, there have been some fascinating developments in publishing, in writing, and in general knowledge systems that could (if they were not curtailed by a global apocalypse) genuinely transform how we think about expression, knowledge, and identity. It’s a pity they will not happen.

Just for fun, though, let’s think about what could have been.

Let’s think about what it’s still possible to make, and what we might make soon before we cannot any more.

Authorship and the Stream

Social media platforms (I could list them but you know them) have re-centralized how readers can come to knowledge (you also already know this, but there needs to be some establishing part of this conversation. But I won't waste too much time because we're already running out of it). Right now, individual written objects like articles and books and blog posts serve as the anchors to which researchers and writers attach their social media streams. It is possible to, by Twitter alone, brush up on world news, discover current research in your field, and find out about new books and poems to read. Streams are fast becoming channels for knowledge types. No, they are not complete, and no, it's not the same as a library. It is a social knowledge system that circulates a lot of analog-format objects that are, for now, the accepted end products of creative effort. It could also indicate what creative effort could look like in a few years.

The strengths of social media—powerful mechanisms for circulation, accommodation of heterogeneous items, fun and addictive delivery systems—help us think about what social publication might look like, or about a product aggregated by associations rather than an editorial impulse. Books may be replaced by feeds. The connection of resources alongside the creation of resources may be a new dimension to individual creative efforts. At the same time, the ability to draw relationships among items is why it may be possible to have both individual and collective creativity. We could think of creativity as a graphical problem, where new combinations of ideas and people are curtailed by social, physical, and disciplinary limitations. Being a creative agent as a writer or owner of a feed seems to be one path for authors in a time of social media, but assessing and bridging synapses in associations, knowledge, or resources would be the purview of a *creative system*. Systemic creativity is different from individual creativity. Creative systems optimize contact among human and nonhuman resources, infer or suggest new linkages, and show us the topography of our own intellectual production. One person may have written an experimental narrative about growing up in New England when there were still elm trees. Another may be studying invasive insect species. There is creative potential between them, whether or not they decide to or are allowed to pursue it. Creative potential, one of the objects of creative systems, exists as a structural feature of a social network. Examining co-authorship networks or citation networks in academic publications only scratches the surface of this domain. Individual creativity is an artifact of books. What happens after books will force us to explore further the nuances of creative systems, and by extension the concept of a system-author.

Or it would if we had enough drinking water to sustain a democracy and academic freedom in the year 2050.

Sprint 2

**Sustainability/Ephemerality: What Thy
Mind Cannot Contain You Can Commit to
These Waste Blanks** 148

by Sally Ball

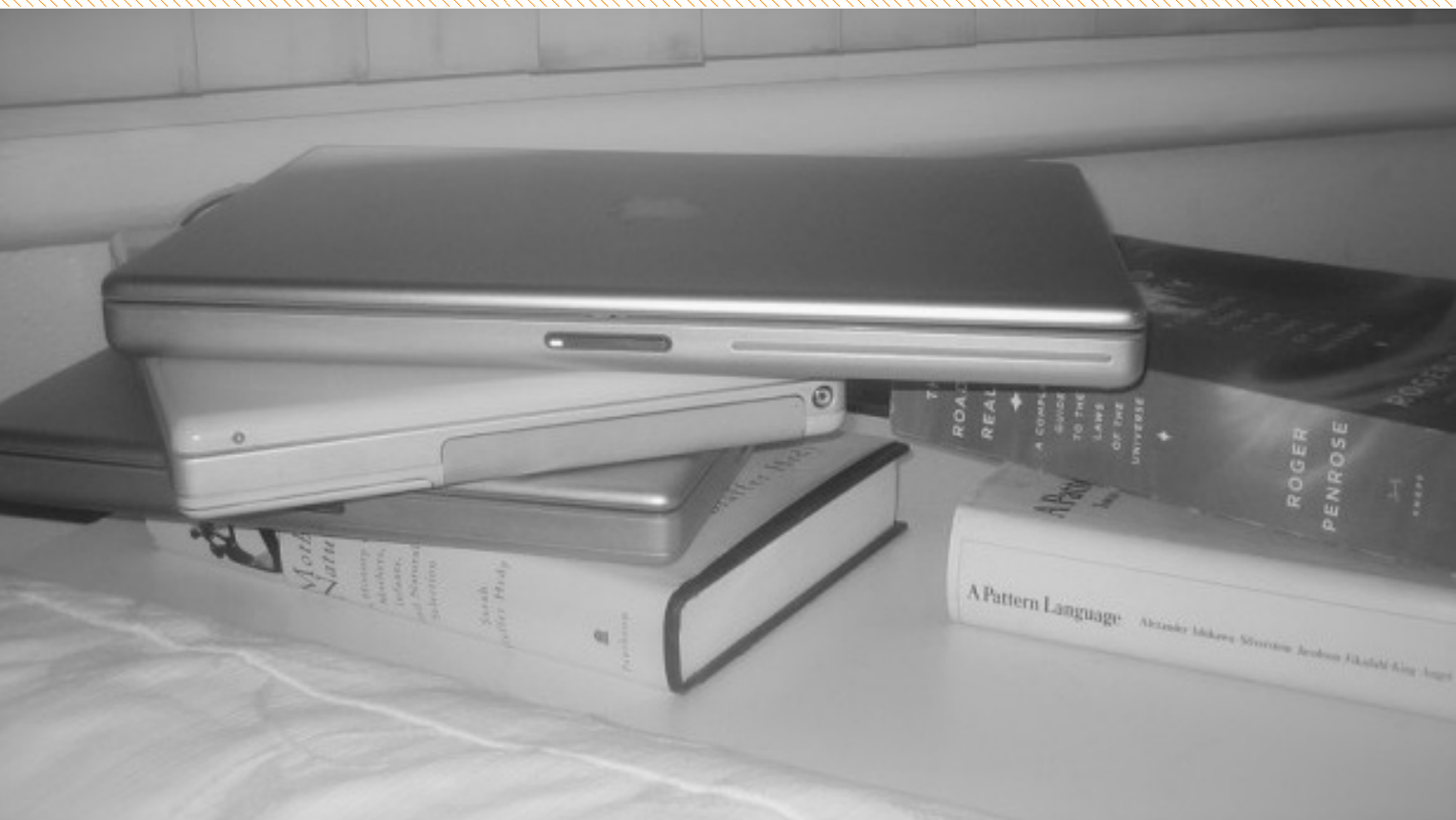
Amaranth Borsuk:
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The Book (and E-Lit) as Nostalgic Object 151

by Amaranth Borsuk

**The Future of Creativity and Books in the
Face of Probable Doom, Part 2: The Resolution
Race: None of this is sustainable. But that
is why it is interesting.** 154

by Michael Simeone



Sustainability/Ephemerality: What Thy Mind Cannot Contain You Can Commit to These Waste Blanks

by Sally Ball

Once upon a time, it was a commonplace to think one lived on after death either by having children or by creating art. Art was permanent: Lascaux and Stonehenge achieved a kind of mega level of permanence (who made them? imagine lasting so long!) and Sonnet 17, the Canterbury Tales, the Pièta—these gave (are still giving) centuries of life to the names of their makers. Also, destroyers of civilizations have long known that to incinerate the art, or the library, is to eliminate culture, to wipe the slate clean for one's own use: Alexandria, Sarajevo.

As we've spent today talking about the future of the book, I have this gnawing (Luddite?) question about what other than digitization plays a role in that future? Every answer circles back to at least the effects and implications of technology. One thing I have noticed among writers is that *if* they still believe their writing promises some type of immortality, they don't let on. We are resigned to the ephemeral (even as we love and hate the Internet

because whatever we put out there is there FOREVER). But ephemerality has won, or it's the less terrifying name we've given to what is really a matter of flood and surge. No one is going to read us or notice us because the life cycle of a book is less than a year, the influx of new books drowns the already-old ones within shorter and shorter periods of time. Web publications too, zoom, on to the next thing. Who will ever find the previous tables of contents, except for someone who knows to look? Ephemerality has advantages: it encourages experiment; it makes us feel brave.

If my book is an object made of acid-free paper, or if it's a letterpress throwback, lovingly made by hand in Tucson or Manhattan, it can take a lot of wear and tear. Maybe there are 1000 (or 100) of them in the world (75 percent in the publisher's garage, okay). They have a scent; there may be pretty endpapers with a shiver of flaxen texture. If it's a download, there could be infinitely many, but.....one knows better. One knows that particular infinity is easily all promise and no count.

We might worry that the sprawl of the internet, or, say, the *pfst* of whatever server houses one's work (the squirrel who fried New England.....) we might worry that together these possibilities, as well as questions about data storage, built-in obsolescence, etc., make the future of the electronic book comparatively delicate. And as we now know, you can't sneak things around on the Internet (not in America), and books have a long clandestine history. So there are good reasons to recognize that what seem to be advances have a downside.

I'm thinking of Robert Pinsky's poem "Book," in *First Things to Hand* (2006). It's a poem that, at first, seems nostalgic, luxuriating in the language of bookmaking and stories of books worth dying for, almost, and even the mouthsounds *bk*, *bch* of the very word in English, in German. The poem is full of the voluptuary pleasure of holding books and the mental voyages books enable. And then:

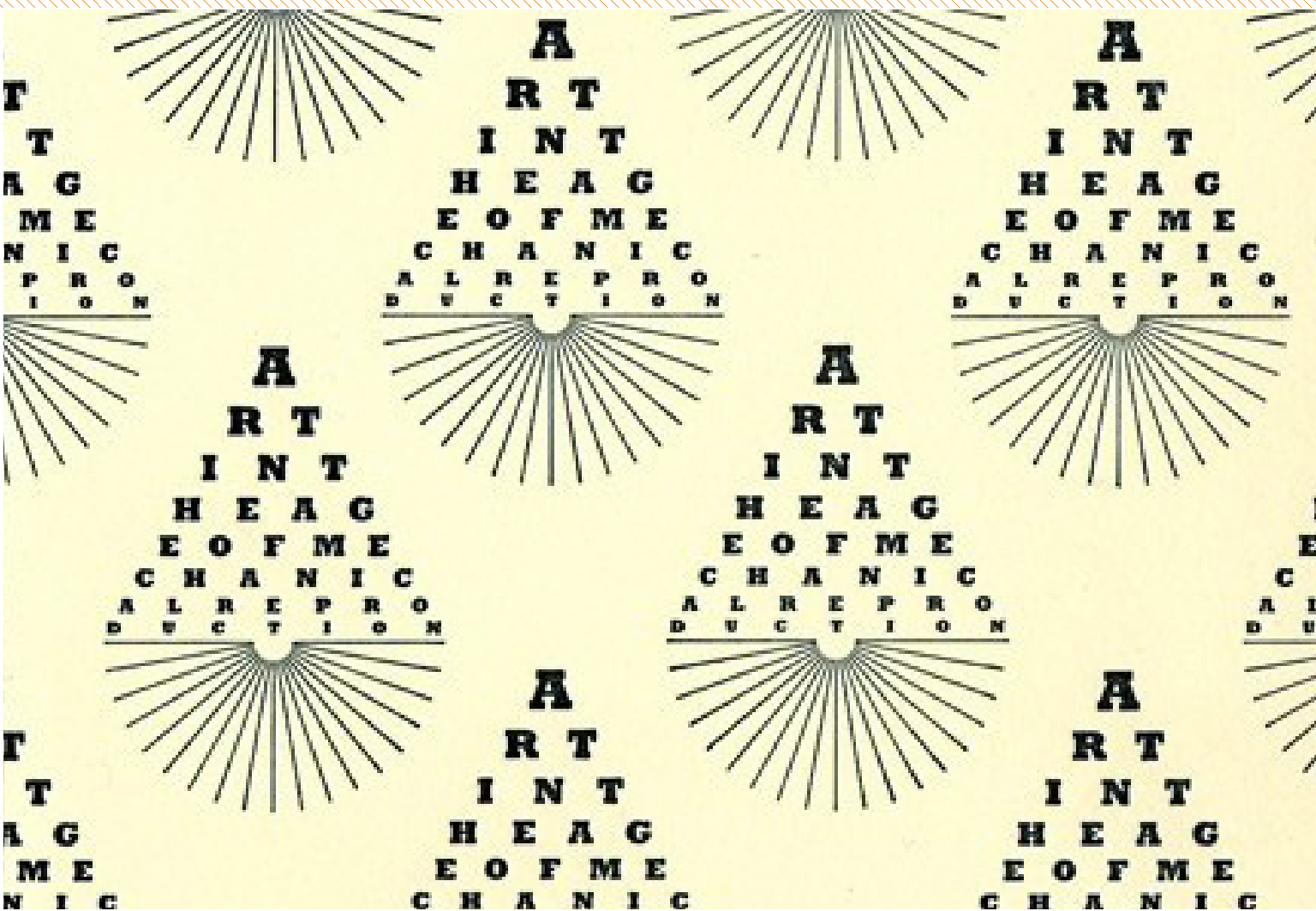
.....the passion to make a book—passion of the writer

*Smelling glue and ink, sensuous. The writer's dread of making
Another tombstone, my marker orderly in its place in the stacks.*

*Or to infiltrate and inhabit another soul, as a splinter of spirit
Pressed between pages like a wildflower, odorless, brittle. The stacks themselves a
cemetery.*



Amaranth Borsuk: Nostalgia for Digital Devices



The Book (and E-Lit) as Nostalgic Object

by Amaranth Borsuk

Not only does digital fluidity facilitate the creation of printed media that have no right to exist physically (that should stay digital and not “waste” paper—the using up of these resources clearly pushes our buttons because of both concern over conservation and over cultural capital— *that gets to be a book?*), expanding (or shrinking, depending upon your perspective) authorship, it also raises questions of access—how do we ensure these texts remain available as platforms change? As Michael Simeone [notes](#), digital books are far more brittle than their physical counterparts and decay in a far different fashion. Sally Ball has [addressed](#) the way this ephemerality impacts conceptions of authorship—knowing that our works are likely to become dated within a short span of time prevents many writers from experimenting with new media and alternative or app-based publishing forms (many poets won’t even reference the contemporary moment in their work, lest a temporal reference prevent its resonance for subsequent generations). I myself collaborated on

a [book of augmented reality poems](#) whose content can change at the drop of a hat—since the text does not appear on the pages, but only comes to life when those pages are presented to a webcam, emerging from barcode-like markers on the page’s surface (in fact, the reader herself can now change what appears on-screen, thanks to a web-based tool my collaborator Brad Bouse developed). That very terror, though, of dating oneself, can alternately be seen as liberatory—if we fail, we can erase the evidence, and we can even adapt or update our work to meet a new audience. If Michael Simeone’s doomsday predictions are accurate, then *what me worry?* about whether my book is accessible a year or two from now? Poets are always accused of fiddling while Rome burns, so to worry about who’s listening only expands our image of writerly narcissism.



Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, a Philadelphia purveyor of fascinating goods and spirits.

To be serious, though, this state serves as a reminder that a book is an event, a performance between reader and page. Artists have known far longer than writers that the best way to save the ephemeral (happenings, performance, some land art) is through documentation.

Though I may be willing to give up on work that can no longer be supported, scholars like [Lori Emerson](#), [Dene Grigar](#), and [Stuart Moulthrop](#) are doing wonderful work to build archives of new media writing (from magic lantern slides—which once upon a time, of course, told highly immersive phantasmagoric stories—to hypercard works and Flash-based texts). In addition to this scholarly interest, what about the resurgence in pop culture of “antiquated,” outdated, even

obsolete aesthetics? It's no coincidence that I picked up letterpress printing in graduate school while studying electronic literature, or that my students are fascinated when I bring a typewriter into the classroom, or that we are so inundated by nostalgic-looking image filters that we need a #nofilter hashtag to assure us what we are seeing accurately reflects "reality." Perhaps the electronic literature projects being made today, even those that seem glossy, interactive, and lovely in the best ways (like [Aaron Koblin's](#) interactive [music videos](#), and mass collaborative [artworks](#) created for Google) will indeed look wonky and wiley and willful to future readers (perhaps they may be utterly inaccessible), but it is also possible that, like the resurgence of interest in glitch and animated GIFs, their very stylistic issues will make us treasure them more.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabooti.....



Turn to page 156.



The Future of Creativity and Books in the Face of Probable Doom, Part 2: The Resolution Race: None of this is sustainable. But that is why it is interesting.

by Michael Simeone

This kind of conversation is possible because we're not currently thinking about how there are millions of people today who will use more than a gallon of fresh water to dispose of a mere cup of their own urine. Or how it will be impossible to feed the world without honeybees (who are all dying, but you know that already). We are, in so many ways, plummeting at maximum velocity toward impact. The idea of a digital platform for books should seem laughable if you've ever seen the burning e-waste trash pits of Lagos, or the island of plastic floating in the Pacific. Do we honestly expect that the age of digital books will last even a

quarter of the time of the print book? Surely we will choke on our own garbage before we perfect the art.

But that is what makes this arresting. We are making things possible now at the expense of the future. We are nearly maxed out on credit.

The rapid advancement of display technology really is an incredible thing. You already know very much that “technology grows rapidly,” but it is easy to take for granted what our eyes expect. In 2004, the display on a mobile phone was about the size of a Fig Newton, and graphics looked as if they were constructed from Legos. That is, if they were even in color. In 2014, it is possible to procure a portable full color HD display that fits in pants pockets for less than the cost of a mediocre wool area rug. Screens are now the size of a reporter’s notebook and we can debate the merits of various pixel arrangements and color reproductions on pocket-sized displays rather than that they are in color at all. And displays are only getting bigger! Their resolutions are increasing as well. HD has gained widespread diffusion as a standard for graphics, only to see 4K emerge. Blu-ray barely had any time beating out HD DVD.

This is not to be facile and lament that things are changing too quickly, or that this growth is somehow manufacturing interest where there is no need. We are already doomed, so why not look for the good in things? Instead, let’s take a moment to appreciate the quality and detail of images that are becoming more and more accessible. A 75 dollar phone purchased at the grocery store can outperform a television from the 1990s. High resolution digital images are not everywhere, but they certainly are in more places than ever. This breakneck acceleration in display quality has a deep history that stretches back to the 1960s and 1970s. As shown by the career of pioneers like Sutherland and Fuchs, the history of computer graphics is intertwined with the search for optimal display solutions. What we see today is not different. To say that the world is visual is a cliché, but the impulse to increase resolution and quality of images holds such generative potential when we think about the future of books and knowledge systems.

For instance, very high-resolution images and videos allow for more visual detail in digital platforms. And detail is a transformative feature of image reproduction. For instance, the University of Illinois’ [Medici](#) allows users to zoom and inspect the image in a way that simulates the changing perspectives brought on by increasing the number of pixels used to represent an object. To understand this image as a collection of specimens is a standard definition perspective. To see that each specimen is visually distinct and interesting is a high-definition perspective. To appreciate every hair on the legs of each insect as part of an impossibly intricate collection, as a miraculous panoply of specialized components (such as we see when fully zoomed in), we require a format beyond HD.

And so there will be more visual information in knowledge systems. Not explicitly in the sense of increased numbers of charts, videos, and pictures, but in a very non-referential way, that of visual richness. As they increase in resolution, images could simulate more than represent. Or even represent more than they currently represent. In textbooks and fiction alike, there is a difference between demonstrating an example and calling that example into presence. Presented by better and better displays, future knowledge systems could be aggregations of simulations, narratives, and representations in a far more graceful and viable way than print or current mobile tech will allow.

This assumes that displays will always be pocketable or handheld. Perhaps they will not. Perhaps they will be part of our eyes one day. Perhaps we will run out of resources for batteries and there will be far less mobile technology in the next 20 years. Or both.



All the Lost Jewels of #Nabootj.....

You smile as you add the Shakespeare badge to the collection in your SmartCookie.

You sigh, thinking of your cousin Ada and her overly clever riddle.

A love of good prose and the world of Shakespeare -- yes a true jewel, the jewel of knowledge.

You decide to retire to the local tavern; turn to page 111.

Sprint 3

Materiality: Rectangles, Accordions 158

by Sally Ball

Dennis Tenen:
Multimedia vs. Textual Books 161

**The Body of the Text:
When Materiality is No Longer Marginal** 162

by Amaranth Borsuk

**The Future of Creativity and the Book in
the Face of Probable Doom, Part 3:
In the Wake of the Google Book** 166

by Michael Simeone



Materiality: Rectangles, Accordions

by Sally Ball

In the science fiction part of our conversations here, we've inched toward imagining books once they stop looking like books, or like rectangles. What will it be like when we "read" via a chip in our parietal lobes? I just reread (the old fashioned way) Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* (2012) and that novel's deliberate banalities and its querying of how fiction interacts with reality, or with autobiography—and with beauty, how it stakes a claim for genius in part by being ugly!—remind me of Conceptual Poetry. Heti's book is both a story we may or may not fall into *and* an argument with storytelling, with novels; in that way it's quite similar to Kenneth Goldsmith's poetry, his [printing out the Internet](#), or Joseph K(aplan)'s making his own name by listing the names of, and arbitrarily (or not?) identifying the socio-economic status of, other poets in a long "poem" (*Note*: Kaplan's *Kill List* was published online in 2013 by an independent press, [Cars Are Real](#). The Poetry Foundation's [blog](#) about the book helped facilitate explosions of condemnation and defense).

Goldsmith says in an interview with the Academy of American Poets, "The best thing about

conceptual poetry is that it doesn't need to be read. You don't have to read it. As a matter of fact, you can write books, and you don't even have to read them. My books, for example, are unreadable. All you need to know is the concept behind them. Here's every word I spoke for a week. Here's a year's worth of weather reports.....and without ever having to read these things, you understand them" (2011). I imagine the paperless book will often have additional ambitions, but I think our embrace of conceptual lit, our genial welcome of high jinks and provocation and contentlessness (or content overload, or content disingenuousness) to the conversation (Goldsmith is featured on the Academy of American Poets and the Poetry Foundation websites, the grand dames of contemporary American poetics, both of which over the last fifteen years have become increasingly open to experiment and avants of various kinds) signals something about how ready we are to consider books in new ways.

Two areas of book-change stand out to me: first, the relationship of the book to whatever paratextual material accrues around it. As writers reconstrue (for better or worse) the way they allocate time and energy between making novels or poems and making a context for those novels and poems to find readers via, usually, social media, they either generate such paratextual material, or permit it to be generated via interviews, audio recordings, etc., and as they also help disseminate it, the book is increasingly likely to be encountered inside the nest of all this other stuff. As, for example, book trailers grow more beautiful, or more funny, or more engaging in any of a range of ways, or as other kinds of video are linked to books, as the ruminations of writers about their work or the work of others are easier to find and read before, during, after reading the referenced literary work.....has that started to create a new conglomerate book, the sum of these many parts? Already some books seem to want to house more and more within their covers or their e-carnations of whatever kind.

And here is one example, Rachel Eliza Griffiths' visual poem based on Victoria Redel's *Woman Without Umbrella* (2012) of why that's potentially so appealing:



Second, there are a plethora of wonders now being produced for large audiences: Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010), the new collection of Dickinson's envelope poems, Matthea Harvey's *Of Lamb* (2011), Mary Ruefle's *A Little White Shadow* (2006) (thanks to the poet Erika Meitner, (*Makeshift Instructions for Vigilant Girls* (2011), *Ideal Cities* (2010), for helping me think of some of these; she also mentioned Daphne Gottlieb (a performance poet) who used to give out little 8-page chapbooks of new poems to people she met and liked, chapbooks hand-bound with ribbon—a smaller instance of tenderness toward the book's richness as an art object.....). Some of this may derive from the [nostalgia](#) Amaranth Borsuk is writing about. In any case, as we perceive the traditional book to be threatened, we seem to become wistful about its physicality, its capacity to be both a container of consciousness and a joy forever..... When [Richard Nash](#) started Cursor and Red Lemonade, part of the idea was to make books widely available as e-books and also beautifully available in limited editions, the best of both worlds. So as books grow increasingly ephemeral, we've embraced their materiality anew.

Conceptualism may facilitate the deletion of materiality from our list of expectations of "literature," from even the book itself. If you don't have to read it, you don't need to hold it in your hands! Your experience may be enhanced—or muted, mitigated, alloyed—by reading while also (or instead?!) consuming the paratextual stuff. And then, too, the opportunity to unfold the accordion of Carson's paintings and notes and collagings and to read her poems and translations surrounded by that colorful, unwieldy, gorgeous origami text—even if that's driven by future-of-the-book anxiety of some kind, it's pretty glorious to do.

How will
the **concept** of
the book **evolve**
in the **future**?



Dennis Tenen

Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities and New Media Studies
Columbia University

Dennis Tenen: Multimedia vs. Textual Books



The Body of the Text: When Materiality is No Longer Marginal

by Amaranth Borsuk

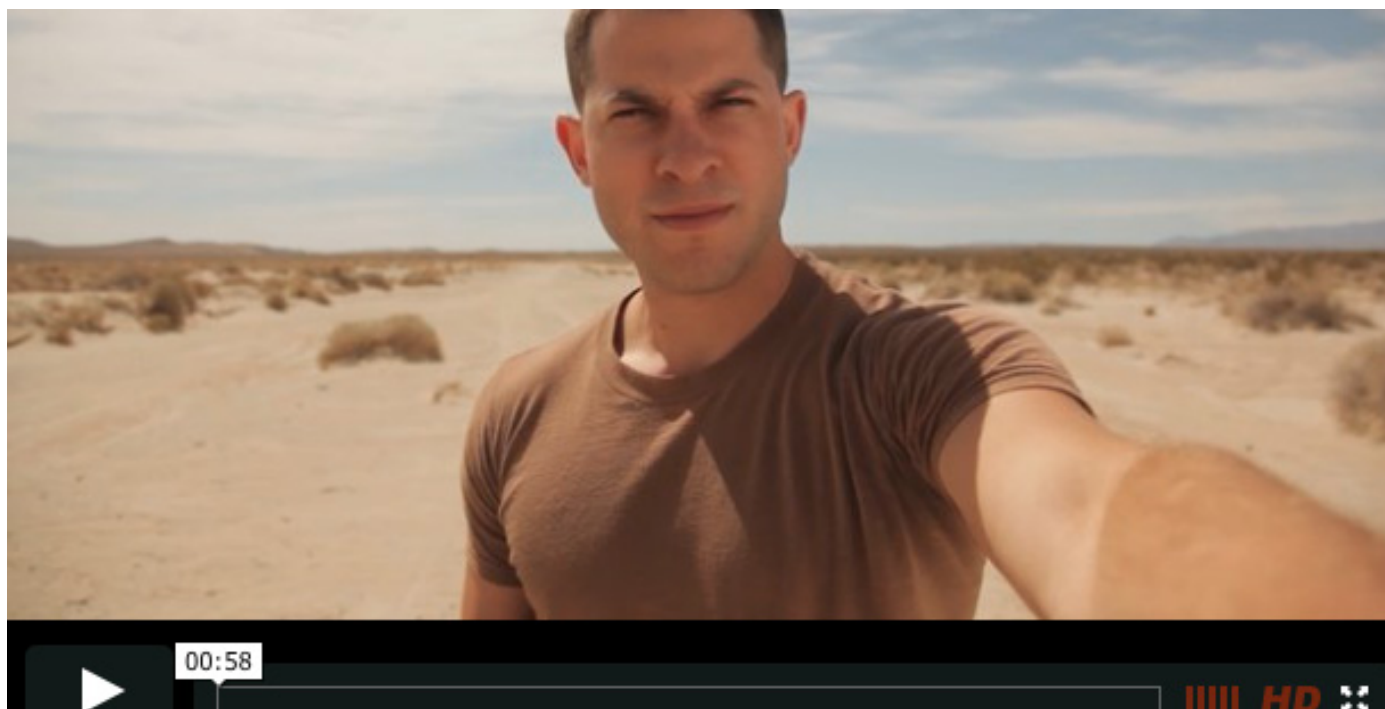
Given that, as I mentioned in my last piece, and as Sally Ball touches on in her [second missive](#), some writers fear new media and digital publishing, concerned both about the sustainability of Kindle, iPad, and Nook platforms and over whether an e-book will “respect” their line breaks and, by extension, authorial intent, where is the real innovation happening in digital writing and publishing? Which experiments look promising for the potentials of digital storytelling?

Publishers have embraced the enhanced e-book as the future, embedding additional materials around a text (like bonus features on a Laserdisc or DVD). These materials can certainly deepen the reading experience, but they are predicated on our interest in interviews, videos, typescripts, and manuscript editions of a given work (I *do*, actually, want this material when reading Shakespeare or watching a Merce Cunningham dance). But such material remains paratextual, it is *extra*, rather than being integral.

Some of the most interesting experiments in the book and bookishness are those in which form and content interlink—as they do in the artist’s book—treating the object as an interface we do not simply look through or beyond (Michael Simeone informs me that when we read, in fact, our eyes are literally focused on a point just beyond the surface

of the page). These projects embrace the affordances (and work with the constraints) of digital platforms to create “books” that engage the act of reading as a physical, embodied experience, even when mediated through a screen. I am interested in reading experiences that embrace embodied (or haptic) reading via touch, gesture, and sound (especially interactive binaural audio). These projects are not “the future” of the book, but they are forays into the present moment, and experiments at the edge of possibility—immersive experiences that do not pretend reading is a disembodied experience, either on the part of the reader or the text itself (which, of course, has a body of its own).

I’m especially excited about Samantha Gorman and Danny Cannizzaro’s forthcoming, a novel for iPad about a soldier dealing with PTSD whose memories and imagination are layered vividly upon one another in a narrative that is itself a palimpsest of video, text, and sound. *Pry* takes advantage of the potential of the iPad to facilitate alternative approaches to storytelling. Not a “book,” “game,” or “film,” the project encompasses aspects of all three, creating an immersive (not to mention beautifully-designed) reading experience. Perhaps more importantly to me, *Pry* makes the medium through which readers encounter it part of the text. Nothing is paratextual, all is integral to the work. By prying open the text with her fingertips, the reader goes deeper into the protagonist’s subconscious, learning more about why James has hidden certain memories away and masked others with imagined experience. Elsewhere, one can force him to open his eyes and confront the external world, which he can only do in bursts due to an injury about which we learn as the story unfolds (or as we unfold it).



Erik Loyer’s Opertoan has put out some of the most sophisticated app-based reading

experiences I have seen, including “Strange Rain,” in which the reader can control the first-person speaker’s meditative state through touch as he watches the sky during a downpour. Opertoone recently ventured into gesture-based reading with *Breathing Room*, a project for Leap Motion that allows the reader to navigate a landscape with a wave of the hand. Unlike visions of heads-up augmented reality interfaces that act like invisible screens (drag items from one place to another with your hands, double click with your fingertips), this work uses gesture as a metaphor for the act of reading itself (or this is how I read the interface): when you wave your hand, a gust of wind tosses the trees onscreen, clouds drift and shift depending on the speed of your movement, and the sound of a breath suggests the landscape itself is breathing, the reader providing the oxygen that activates the text. Loyer describes the work as a graphic novel, in part because the images and text onscreen appear in panels that suggest time’s passage through juxtaposition. One can reverse time, however, dialing back the clock by spiraling one’s finger in space, a beautiful and rewarding experience in which the role of the reader in traversing a text becomes tactile and present.



Even as publishers experiment with enhanced e-books that include a range of bells and whistles built around the text, these creators are integrating them into the narrative and aesthetic experience. These innovations are not driven by market concerns, but by the desire to tell specific kinds of stories using the material at hand, whether that be a beautiful

accordion fold-out book like Anne Carson's *Nox*, which Sally Ball has described, or in a short story we navigate through spatialized binaural sound. I admire the way the interface is integral to the work in both of the cases described above, and I am reminded of Johanna Drucker's claim that the book is better thought of as a "call" to a storage mechanism that can take many different forms (2013). Or, as Craig Dworkin puts it in *No Medium* (2013):

As much acts of interpretation as material things, as much processes as objects, media are not merely storage mechanisms somehow independent of the acts of reading or recognizing the signs they record.

It's not that the medium is the message, but that the message is aware of its medium and its reader, working with and against the technical supports that underlie it. Creative practices can be invigorated by these constraints, particularly if they avoid the trap of thinking of reading, in any form, as immaterial.

My trajectory in these essays/posts/parries has been from the immaterial to the material, from the way cut and paste scraping facilitates the printing of unpublishable texts to app-based books that integrate their interface into their narratives. Or is it the other way around? Those first books take part in the tradition of the artist's book as democratic multiple, they give material form to work that could have remained purely conceptual. Perhaps immateriality does not exist at all even in the sort of "[asocial](#)" reading Dennis Tenen describes, where it feels as though the world beyond the text has disappeared. The body of the reader and the body of the book may be taken for granted, but they never disappear, leaving print and digital reading intertwined by material threads.



The Future of Creativity and the Book in the Face of Probable Doom, Part 3: In the Wake of the Google Book

by Michael Simeone

Eventually we will run out of stuff. It's simpler to grow paper than it is to grow tin or aluminum, or fresh water, or viable ocean, or MRSA-resistant cells. This kind of despair is boring. There must be something that comes after.

So where are we? On the one hand, we face remarkable possibility: future books and publishing platforms, among many things, could offer an increasingly networked experience among items, as well as an increasingly rich visual and simulative experience. On the other, we face a likely scenario where, at best, resources necessary for production and survival will become increasingly constrained (at worst, well, we shall not belabor the point).

If we do not exterminate one another over food and water or perish from incurable disease, in future decades we may consider all of Google's services to have been a single book, a single knowledge system. Google is, on the broad view, a creative system, comprised of individual creators whose skills range from programming to poetry. It has a systemic creativity.

However, Google is not the only possibility. Other systems could emerge.

The point of considering systemic creativity and display resolution together is to highlight the increasing richness of links between objects and objects, as well as content and persons. There are other ways that content is getting denser and more interconnected (next generation broadband networks, cheap and small RFID transmitters, augmented reality programming, etc.), but considering social networks and displays together helps us see the balancing act of knowledge systems that deliver systemic and personal, experiential richness.

But what does this have to do with thinking about Google as a book? There is a positive correlation between the elision of individual works as they are networked together with the increased richness of information offered by software services and hardware. Google offers personal experience just as it offers readers millions of books in an anonymous heap. Both the former and the latter enrich a “user experience,” where the user is always assumed to have more to do than read. There are no more readers. There are only users.

And in a world of users instead of readers, software services like search, mapping, communication, social networking, and electronic publishing are all part of a knowledge system. It is both analogous to a book as well as an aggregation of other books. But this also means that software services and apps are a form of creative output that is not just a use of human creativity, but a part of a systemic publication of a broader work.

And so the future of creativity is both very old and very new. Creating individually will never stop, but there is more room for also creating things that are not writing human language at all. Services, apps, and systems have creativity of their own even if it surpasses human design. Publication and creativity in the context of users instead of readers is about creativity that is agnostic to individual people.

But it will fail.

As John Law (2011) reminds us, complex systems do not degrade; they collapse. It is easy to imagine this kind of creative environment over the next 30 years. It is impossible to imagine it over the next 200. The Internet will not seem like an unlimited knowledge frontier if we have to run computing devices on solar power or biodiesel, or if we no longer have the fresh water or rare earth minerals to support their manufacture. What we discover in the short term through this exciting revolution in creative potential and publishing may well be passed on, but the system itself probably will not.

I don't imagine that this will translate into a return to books as if the Internet had never happened. But it does mean that in addition to individual and systemic creativity, there will arise a need for a kind of translational creativity. How do we invent a new form that can capture what we've done as the resources to support it cease to exist? There will be

creativity in facilitating a graceful decay. Authorship could be considered a kind of ligature between digital and non-digital, or sustainable and non-sustainable.

Humanity will probably survive. Enlightenment sensibilities of creativity will not. In the ruins of informational and creative riches, there will be new knowledge systems cobbled together from the past, just as all knowledge systems have been. But this present will be defined by what we can salvage from it, not by what it passes on to subsequent generations as part of an overall march toward limitless progress.

All the Lost Jewels of #Nabootj.....

As soon as you select Ada's Shakespeare node, it disappears and the SmartCookie dissolves to become a window into a old-timey, smokey tavern.

There is an actor with a ruff atop the bar inviting you to the Globe Theatre.

To follow the actor to the Globe, turn to page 83.

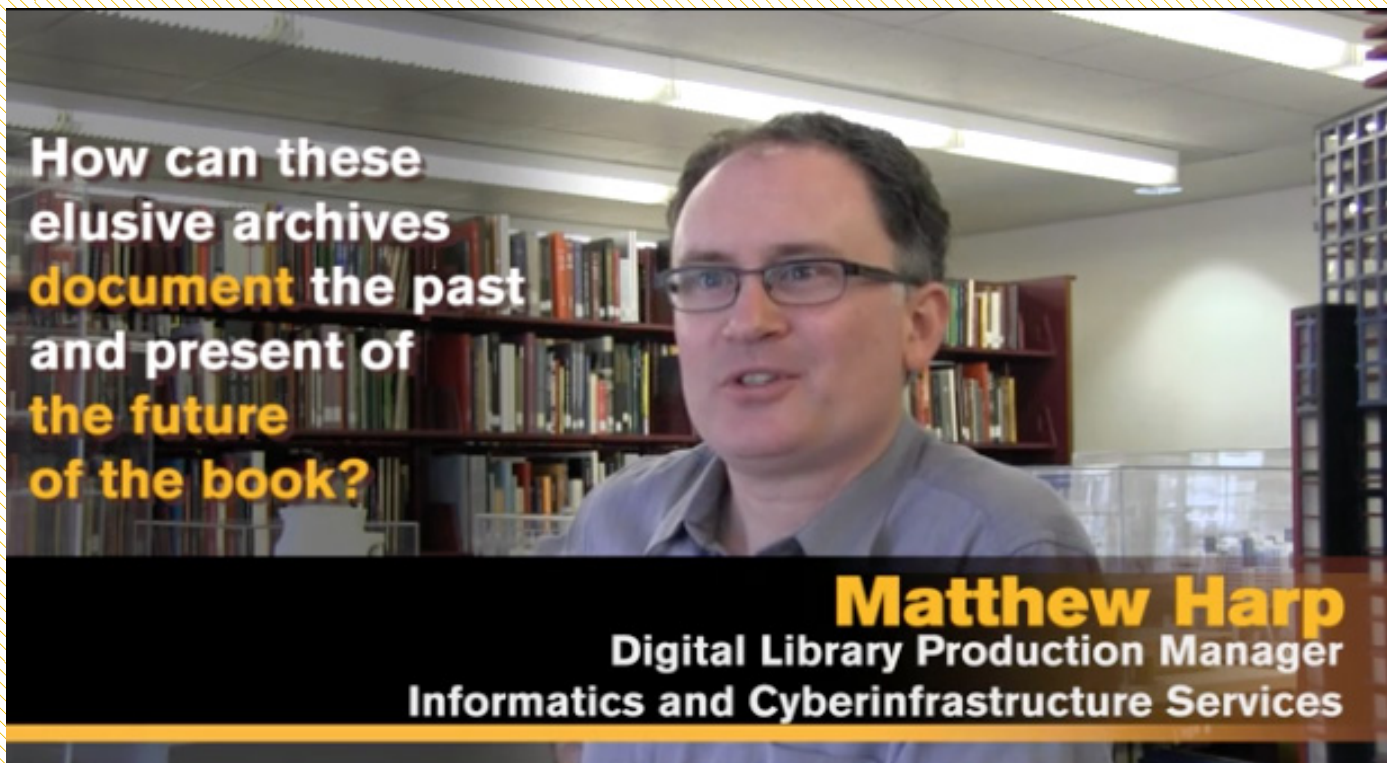
To ignore him and order a beer, turn to page 111.



Book Archives and Repositories

Since the advent of digital publishing, researchers, artists and publishers have responded to the transformation of the book through a number of prototypes, experiments and collaborations designed to model new forms of authorship, editing, reading and circulation. But these experiments are scattered and often poorly maintained, making it difficult for book innovators to build on past insights and inventions. How should we archive born-digital materials so they are stable and easily accessible? What ad hoc archives and repositories already exist that could be a foundation for archival work on the future of the book? How can archivists identify, collect and assemble grey literature and other elusive texts into archives documenting the past and present of the future of the book?

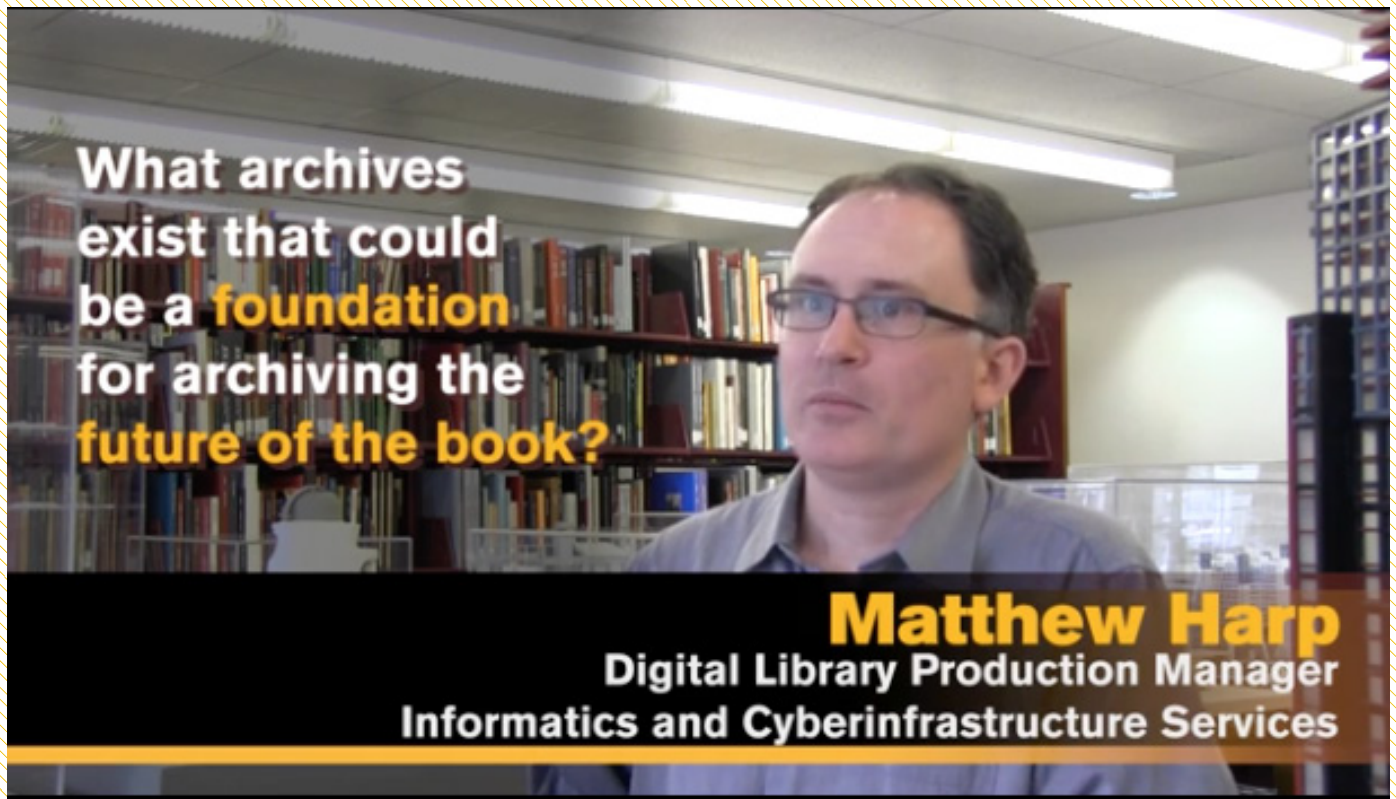
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