

AFTERWORD: NOTES ON PRODUCTION

THIS BOOK is a metalogue: a dialogue that assumes the form of that which it discusses. In the present case, we knew that collaboration would be a key theme, so we entered into the construction of this volume with the meta-issues not only in mind, but also in flux. We've noted elsewhere that we did not want this to be a collection of disparate essays, or even a whole with individually signed parts. Instead, we strove to create a consistent, if choral, voice. We also wanted the book's design to be integral to its writing, to acknowledge the inseparability of form and content. From our very first working session we each contributed to the shape of the book, thus we are all listed as full co-authors, a signal that multiple types of knowledge formation require multiple modes of authorship.

The first step toward crafting this voice was, of course, the composition of the team itself. Here the evolution was organic. Each of us had a past working relationship with at least one other member of the team, and we found ourselves coming into ever-increasing contact thanks to a series of allied initiatives concerning the impact of technology on the academy. The convergence accelerated when Jeffrey came down from Stanford to spend the 2008-09 academic year at UCLA co-teaching a mixed reality seminar with Todd. The seminar, entitled "What Is(n't) Digital Humanities?," was funded by the Mellon Foundation and was part of a Mellon-sponsored initiative at UCLA to support transformative approaches to the humanities. During this period they co-wrote the first draft of the "Digital Humanities Manifesto" on Commentpress, opening it up initially to a few other contributors, including both Peter and Johanna, and, subsequently, to contributions, annotations, and even fulminations from seminar participants and the entire World Wide Web.

The following academic year, with the support of the University of California Humanities Research Institute, Peter organized the conference "Nowcasting: Design Theory and Digital Humanities," in which all five co-authors participated and the team convened for the first time. That year, Jeffrey was transitioning from Stanford to Harvard; Todd, Johanna and Peter were steering a new Digital Humanities undergraduate minor and graduate certification through UCLA's academic senate; and Anne was co-writing "Digital Learning, Digital Scholarship and Design Thinking" with Holly Willis. The next year, with the UCLA Program established and metaLAB launching at Harvard, all five of us gathered in Cambridge for "Digital Humanities 2.0: A Conversation About Emerging Paradigms in the Arts and Humanities in the Information Age": an evening in which we each presented our own work within a unified framework. In other words, we had long been testing out our ideas and developing a rapport with one another while at the same time marshaling foundation and institutional support—from the departmental level all the way up through university-wide initiatives.



For two days before the event, we held the first of several charrettes. A few words of explanation are perhaps in order. In the 19TH century, architecture professors at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris were known for conducting a workshop exercise known as the charrette, in which small groups of students were given a design brief to resolve within a short time frame. As the deadline approached, a charrette (or “cart”) made its rounds to collect each group’s designs. Students were often observed leaping into the cart along with their submissions, working passionately to add finishing touches, even as the cart bounced along the streets of Paris. We looked to the charrette, an abiding feature of architecture and design training even today, as a fitting means to undertake the writing of a book about the centrality of design to the Digital Humanities. The challenge was to design the book conceptually and graphically in a form that emerged from the ideas.

We worked at the Harvard Graduate School of Design with white boards, laptop computers, and a projector whose long cable we threw back and forth to whoever needed to project something. We began by identifying the areas we wished to frame and then broke into alternating groups to develop headers into lists and lists into structured chapters. These were then posted on white boards as we took turns typing out expanding outlines of the book. Guided in part by Anne’s persistent attention to the shape of our arguments and organization of text by theme and format, the design infrastructure began to emerge in the process. By the time we took the dais at the Harvard Humanities Center on the evening of the third day, it felt as if we’d collectively entered the state of focused motivation that social psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls “flow.”

To keep the flow flowing we considered a number of production models. We thought of books developed by means of crowd-sourcing, like McKenzie Wark’s *GAM3R 7H30RY*, an online initiative carried out with the Institute for the Future of the Book in 2006 that came out as *Gamer Theory* with Harvard University Press in 2007, and Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* which was put through an open peer-review process on MediaCommons before its publication with NYU Press in 2011. Though some of the early ideas for the book appeared in condensed form in the “Digital Humanities Manifesto,” we wanted to keep the face-to-face mindmeld alive throughout the entire writing process, experimenting with a variety of private document-sharing platforms and relying upon regular meetings either in person or via Skype.

We imagined a shared-access manuscript as the best analogue to what we had been developing in person, but found that the main platforms were less robust than expected, and, more importantly, that the proliferation of iterations hurt more than the transparency of the compositional process helped. After starting with Google

Docs, we ended up using email and tracking changes in attached word processing documents to create a round-robin writing-and-editing loop. When one person finished drafting a chapter or section, he or she would pass it on to another, who would edit and amend it, and so on. As the round robin proceeded, the book grew with both a speed and unified character that came as a surprise to all of us.

By the time there existed a beta version of the whole, the full manuscript was run through another round of editing by team members. Each iteration was passed on with changes visible to all. The next editor/author/designer in the sequence treated this as a “new” version, looking back at other changes only briefly before moving forward with the iterative writing process. The most uncanny effect of the process was running across lines, paragraphs, or whole sections you yourself had authored but which now were subtly tweaked or appeared in unfamiliar new contexts. We came to analogize this to crossing paths with an amiable ex-lover at a party. There was familiarity and affection, but also a new sense of remove.

While the manuscript was still underway, Anne spent the summer of 2011 at Art Center working on a research project called “MICRO MEGA META.” The project investigated the future of scholarly production through the creation of speculative prototypes and design fiction. Both Johanna and Peter spoke to her graduate student researchers about the overarching issues and how they related to the book project. The student researchers, in turn, worked with drafts of the book to design digital environments built upon humanities values. This interaction led to a second charrette at Art Center which was devoted to thinking through the structures of the text and how they might be embodied through the design of the book.

Making the shift from the linear vertical scroll of word processing software to the spatiality and recto-verso of the codex altered the rhythm and organization of the text. We worked with a reader in mind; revisions made the rounds, sections were dropped or altered or moved. Lastly, Anne and Peter spent two days “writing to the design”—editing and embellishing to make the most of the semantic changes brought about through line breaks, recomposed information hierarchies, navigational maneuvers, and spatial relationships. Though Anne created the actual page layouts, the book’s design had been underway since that first meeting at Harvard.

The book in your hands is the result of several years of collaborative composition, design, and writing. It will have future lives and iterations as a transmedia artifact, as it migrates into various digital forms and gives rise to its own generative scholarship. We see this book as a beginning, an opening to create and re-create that deep linkage that we call *Digital_Humanities*.

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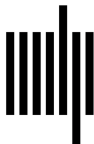
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