From Book to Screen: Creating a Digital Paradigm for Scholarly Editions of Literature

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Abstract: Electronic media constitute a new vernacular for scholars, students and educators. It is the responsibility of graphic designers not only to master this vernacular but also to foster its development. The greatest challenge at present is the need to adapt the new media to the intellectual and cultural values that we esteem, as well as establishing a paradigm for its use and development. The outcome is a digital bibliographic code, if you will, that builds on the strengths inherent in the traditional codex while incorporating the advantages that a digital format brings. In my M.F.A. thesis project, for which this paper was written, this is exemplified as a digital scholarly edition of literature for hand-held reading devices. This prototype can become a point of departure for graphic and software designers, providing a best practice system and a well-realized example of an intuitive, seamless reading experience with a low learning curve for the user. The system I have developed for use on hand-held reading devices like the iPad is not only of value for scholars, but can also be used as an educational tool for teaching literature and facilitating reading and comprehension of the source text and supplemental critical and contextual materials.

Keywords: New Media, Digital Edition, Hypertextual, User Experience, e-Books, Information Society, Electronic Texts, Innovation, Hypertext, Digital Publishing, Enhanced e-books, Interactive, e-Learning, e-Scholarship, Digital Scholarly Edition of Literature, Digital Bibliographic Code, Graphic Design, Literature, Design

Introduction

ELECTRONIC MEDIA CONSTITUTE a new vernacular, much as Dante's use of Italian for his *Divine Comedy* did at the time of its writing. It is the responsibility of graphic designers not only to master this vernacular but also to foster its development. As George Landow states in his book, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, "Electronic text processing marks the next major shift in information technology after the development of the printed book. It promises (or threatens) to produce effects on our culture, particularly on our literature, education, criticism, and scholarship, just as radical as those produced by Gutenberg's movable type" (19). The greatest challenge at present is the need to adapt the new media to the intellectual and cultural values that we esteem, as well as establishing a paradigm for its use and development. In my M.F.A. thesis project, for which this paper was written, this is exemplified as a prototype for a digital scholarly edition of literature for hand-held reading devices.

To paraphrase William J. Mitchell, the emergence of digital scholarly editions of literature for hand-held reading devices (also known as e-readers) makes it imperative that graphic designers rethink the task of making language visible. Indeed, one of the great possibilities of our current technological explosion lies in the interface between the verbal and the visual inherent in the creation of a digital hypertext format for scholarly editions of literary works.

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The emergence of this new vernacular also leads to a change in reading itself and the cognitive space of the reader. The digital reading environment is adjusting our conception of reading as a continuous activity in one cognitive space derived from the absorption of one set of ideas by the author and/or editor to a critical and comparative exercise that encompasses several cognitive spaces. Furthermore, this new unifying power fuses the coherence, context, and sequence which distinguish what we now know as reading with something immediate, inclusive, and participatory. It reconfigures the cognitive space of reading and opens the way for newfound ways of knowing (Sutherland, 11).

There has been much debate on whether the development of digital editions of literature is 'good or bad' for reading in general, and for literary scholarship in particular. Both sides agree that the shift is momentous, involving a reexamination of such issues as the stability/fluidity of text, the dis-/relocation of knowledge, and the foreseeable changes in reading practices. However one interprets these issues, the shared impression is that the limits of what we know and how we obtain that information is changed for ever (Sutherland, 1). This shift to the digital realm for literature also allows graphic designers to explore and expand the boundaries of how designing a hypertext literary format can be most effective on many levels: informationally, structurally, and visually. As Kathryn Sutherland states in the introduction to her book, *Electronic Text: Investigations in Method and Theory*, "Unless we are determined to think of texts as no more than their linguistic codes (words with only an accidental relation to their material means of presentation), we will recognize the contribution of technology to meaning" (2–3). It is therefore imperative that graphic designers, as visual communicators and shapers of meaning, have a hand in its development.

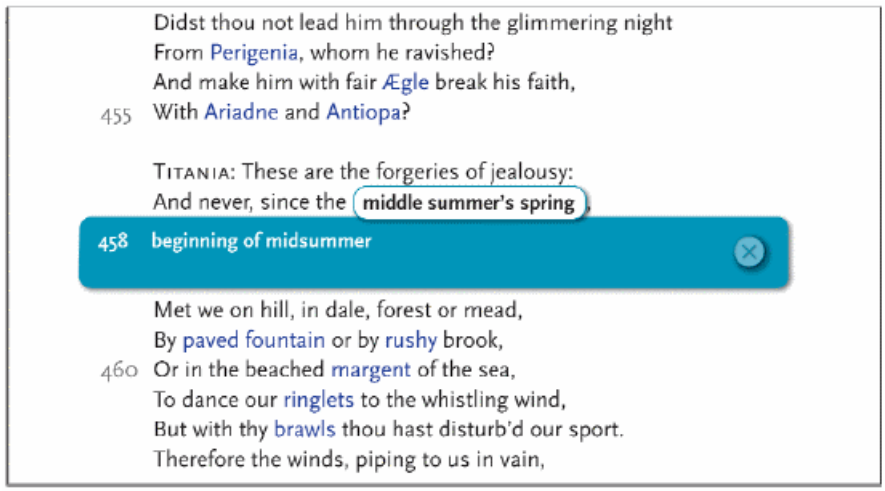
In the past, traditional textual theories have generally viewed the 'text' as consisting exclusively of words. Recently though, C.S. Peirce's semiotic theory concerning the growth of human experience through the mediating structures we create has influenced a different view on this matter (Keeler, 157). This new theory sees the text and its meaning as "…carried not only by the words (the 'linguistic code') but also by the material features of the text such as layout, illustration, size and kind of lettering, use of space, binding, cost, and the like (collectively known as the 'bibliographic code')" (Bornstein and Tinkle, 1). The creation of a prototypical digital bibliographic code was the prime purpose of my thesis project.

Comparisons of Digital Scholarly Editions to the Printed Codex

The traditional approach in printed scholarly literary editions is to present auxiliary information such as variants, glosses and so forth (known collectively as the critical apparatus) as cumbersome devices in the text that must be displayed and/or engaged with at the primary reading level. It is challenging to read a version that is presented in this way, because the referenced materials lie spatially distant from the references to them, forcing the reader to constantly move back and forth between text and notes, picking through what is relevant for the particular study at hand. By comparison, as George Landow explains in his book *Hypertext 3.0*, "Electronic hypertext…makes individual references easy to follow and the entire field of interconnections obvious and easy to navigate. Changing the ease with which one can orient oneself within such a context and pursue individual references radically changes both the experience of reading and ultimately the nature of that which is read" (4). Unlike the traditional codex, the reader of a digital literary edition can tailor the interface preferences to suit his/her requirements easily and quickly, adjusting them over time as the need arises.

An additional benefit is the ease with which the user can search for particular words or phrases within the text and any accompanying auxiliary information.

Another intrinsic drawback in a printed scholarly edition becomes apparent when readers need or want materials to supplement the semantic content of the primary text. Due to the widespread use of the Internet for reading blogs and newspapers, et cetera, user's expectations of what is possible in the presentation of information has greatly changed. Wouldn't it would be wonderful, if while reading the scene where Oberon and Titania quarrel in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one could easily access different video versions of the scene, or a painting depicting it, or an illustration showing the Jacobean stage? Fortunately, hypermedia within a scholarly edition allows for the inclusion of many different types of documentary materials that are only a tap or a click away. Perhaps most importantly and in contrast to the print annotative forms, the quantity of annotation so generated would be invisible until called forth.



Page detail showing the gloss/annotation function, which provides readers with annotative material for unfamiliar terms or additional material that is specific to a particular word or passage.

The parallel text, another popular form of scholarly print presentation, allows one to read a single version of a text and make comparisons to another version at any point. Typically, print-based editions can only display two versions of a given text. Due to the comparatively vast storage capabilities of a digital edition, one can select from any number of versions to compare. This is especially important for older texts, such as Shakespeare's plays, for which a single definitive version does not exist, with differences arising between the various Quarto and Folio editions. Unlike these older texts where errors potentially originated from the copying and recopying of manuscripts, publishers of modern editions contend with authors that may have made extensive revisions to a work over a great deal of time, resulting in a number of versions that may all have legitimate claims to the reader's attention. For example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* has at least eighteen different versions and Ezra Pound's first *Canto*, thirty-seven (Lavagnino). In instances like these, the difficulty lies in deciding which version is to be published as the definitive one. Fortunately, a digital

scholarly edition can include as many or as few as are deemed worthy of the reader's consideration.

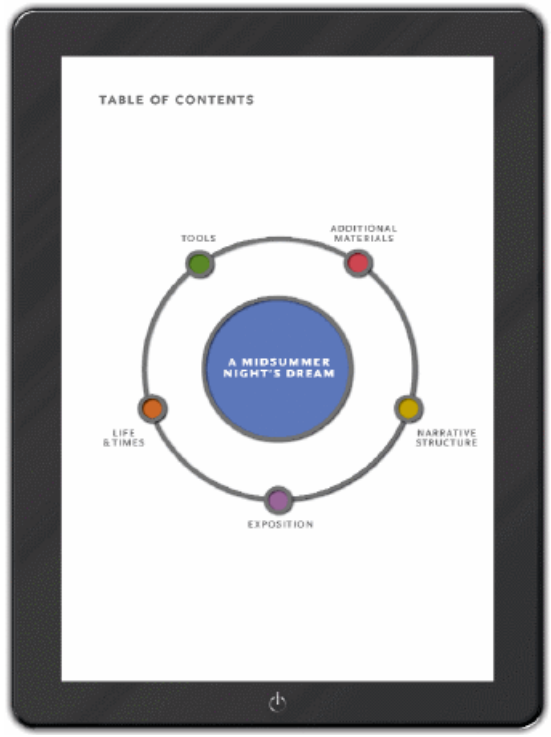
The detail above shows the facsimile comparison function, which is particularly valuable for scholars.

Undeniably, the digital medium escapes from the space and time limitations of a printed codex. Print-based scholarly editions are costly to create and to distribute, but a digital scholarly edition's comparatively low cost, ease of distribution, intrinsic ability to be updated as new material becomes available, and its great storage capacity allows for a more expansive and inclusive presentation of a text. In addition, a digital edition can organize, access, and analyze materials not only more quickly and easily, but to depths no print-based edition could hope to achieve (Sutherland, 40). It also provides freedom from the organizational conventions and linearity inherent in a printed text. As George Landow avows, "[Hypertexts] liberate us from the confinements of inadequate systems of classification and permit us to follow natural proclivities for selection by association, rather than by indexing…" (*Hypertext 3.0*, 10). This medium also allows for the addition of modules that can extend its usefulness, such as worksheets, lesson plans and the like for educators. Due to the ability to link the main text to all of these auxiliary items, it exists embedded in a larger system in which the totality exceeds that of the main text alone. Consequently, it is woven more tightly into its context than its printed counterpart, allowing for a new appreciation and greater understanding by the reader.

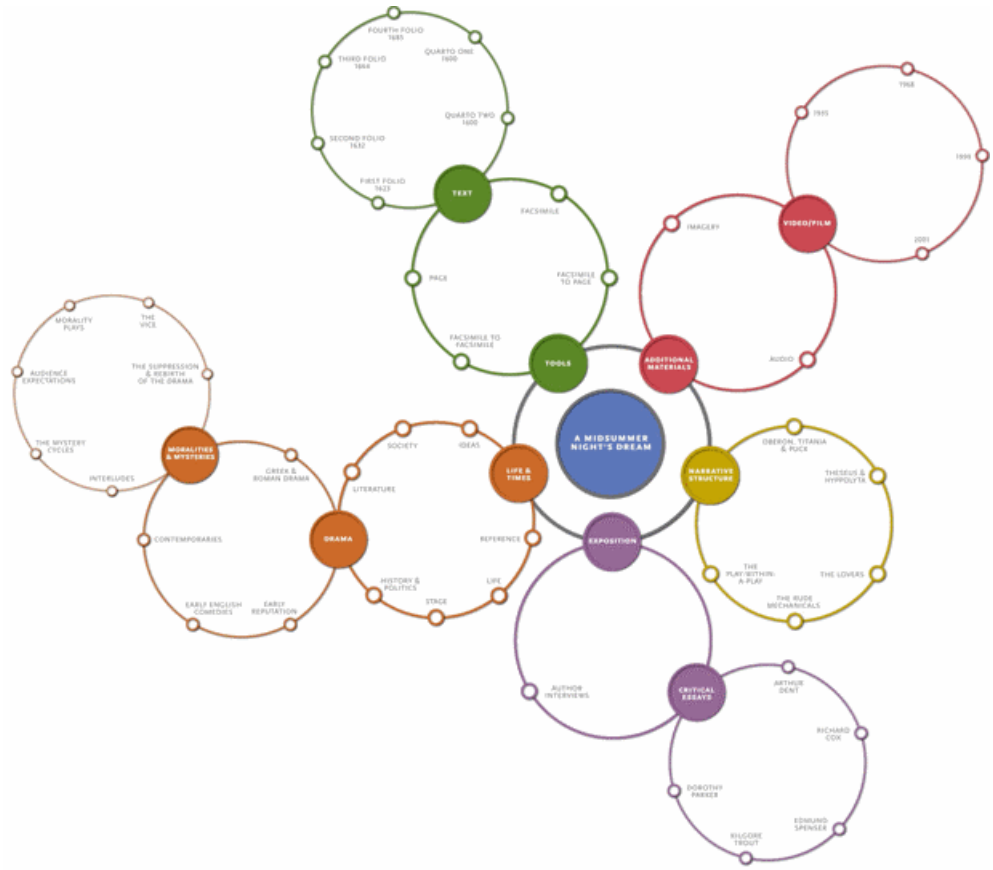
In his book, *Hypertext 3.0*, George Landow asserts, "…One of the greatest strengths of hypertext lies in its capacity to permit users to discover or produce multiple conceptual structures in the same body of information" (10). This strength allows the reader to discover the intertextual forces at work in the text. Intertextuality, a term first propounded by Julia Kristeva in 1966, refers to the presence of other structures within a text. An example of one such structure is the social subtext operating intertextually in the various card games in Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. Annotators of Austen's novels recognize that the reader will have a deeper understanding of her purpose for the passages depicting the card games if the social context and rules of the game being played are known (Sutherland, 52). Landow suggests that, "…Hypertext intertextuality…shifts attention from the triad constituted

by author/work/tradition to another constituted by text/discourse/culture. […] The most salient effect of this strategic change is to free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships" (*Hypertext 3.0*, 55). Unquestionably, one of the major strengths of hypertext is its ability to inspire the reader to create and perceive these interconnections and structures.

With so much information that is able to be included in a digital scholarly edition, there is the danger that the wide range and variety of choices available will overwhelm the reader. In his essay "Simplicity Is Not the Answer," Don Norman maintains that, "The whole point of human-centered design is to tame complexity, to turn what would appear to be a complicated tool into one that fits the task, that is understandable, usable, enjoyable." Graded access and its attendant visual cues can mitigate this problem of quantity and information overload. Graded access, as defined in my thesis project, is how best to visually and architecturally distinguish between information useful to the student and the wider and deeper material wanted by the scholar, while also providing a transparent presentation of what the reader chooses to display or access at any given time.



This is the table of contents, showing a clear and uncluttered initial view.



This Diagram Depicts a Portion of the Underlying Navigational Structure for William Shakespeare's a Midsummer Night's Dream Used in the Prototype.

Comparisons of Digital Scholarly Editions for E-readers to Web-based Forms

In addition to the advantages that a digital scholarly edition has over the traditional book form, it also has many advantages over web-based forms. Foremost among these is the inherent authority that a digital scholarly edition contains. It is commonly accepted that the amount and degree of editorial authority varies quite widely from web site to web site. Whereas in a digital scholarly edition published on an e-reader, an editor chosen by the publisher, not a potentially anonymous and/or unreliable source, would oversee the inclusion of any element and dictate its structure relative to the main text.

Second, as storage capacity increases and its associated cost decreases for electronic devices, a digital scholarly edition can be as comprehensive as the text demands, allowing the editor(s) great flexibility over what to include. This permits the edition to become an infinitive rather than a definitive one. Third, for the graphic designer, control of the visual

presentation of the material increases both qualitatively and quantitatively, specifically relating to typography. Typographic control online has greatly improved since web sites were first developed; it continues to do so with the development of CSS and other technical advances, yet it is relatively primitive even now. The designer of a digital scholarly edition for an e-reader is not constrained by different browser's characteristics, the types of computers employed, the user's bandwidth restrictions, or the current programming limitations of HTML.

Fourth, the benefits to the reader are numerous as well. A digital scholarly edition in a handheld device does not need Internet access and hence can be read anywhere and much more comfortably than that afforded by a laptop or desktop computer. Because Internet access is not necessary, Internet connection speeds that are dependent on bandwidth do not limit the robust inclusion of hypermedia. Although Internet access is not required for use, the text can still be updated or augmented via the Internet as new material becomes available from the publisher, author or editor. Unlike a text presented through a web browser, a hand-held reading device allows the reader to tailor the interface to his/her preferences and add his/her own content as notes and bookmarks and the like.

Existing Hand-held Reading Device Forms

Texts on e-readers at present exist only as traditional codices in an electronic shell, with limited user preferences and a straightforward presentation of the main text only. Other than a search function, the ability to bookmark, change text size, and perhaps make notes these e-readers do not yet utilize the types of interactivity that is inherent in digital formats nor do they include supplemental critical and contextual materials other than the traditional introduction or foreword.

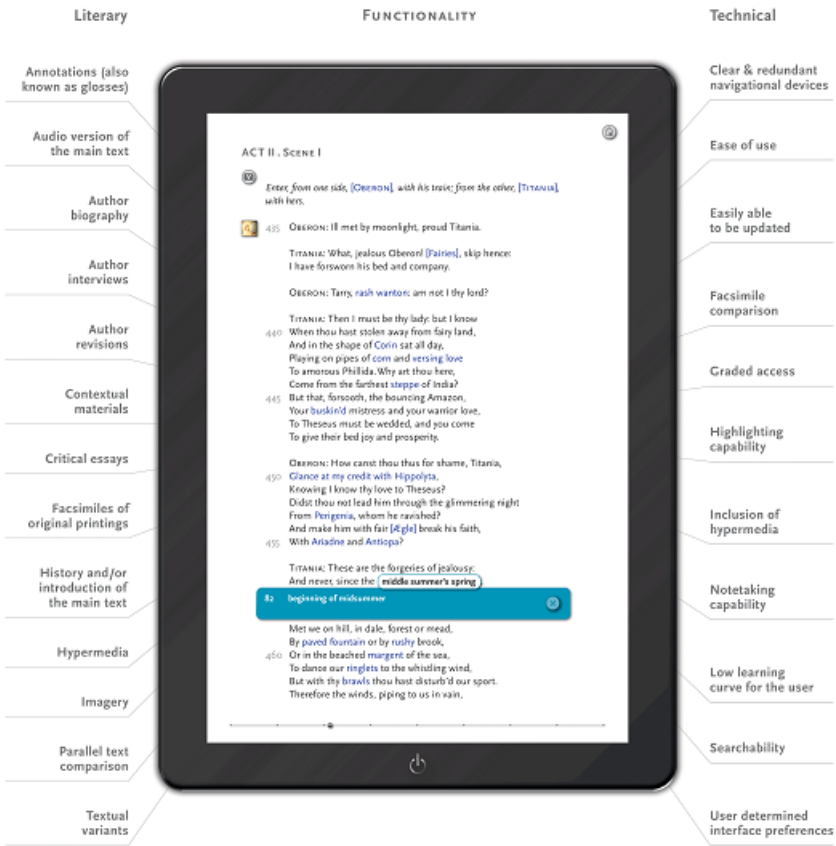
Relevance to Education

Given the comprehensive nature of a digital literary hypertext and its ability to store and deliver great amounts of information, its value for education is easily perceived. To begin with, this type of interface inherently demands a reader's active mental engagement with the information. George Landow states, "…Systems of digitally assisted learning based on hypertext are rightly called learning systems, rather than teaching systems. […] By requiring learners to move towards nonlineal thinking, they may also stimulate processes of integration and contextualization in a way not achievable by linear presentation techniques" (*Hypertext 3.0*, 273–4). Experiencing a text as part of a network of navigable relations is a reader-centered exercise, providing quick and easy access to a wider range of contextual materials than is currently possible with conventional educational technology (278–9).

Another pivotal affect digital scholarly editions have on education lies in the way they challenge conventional assumptions about teaching and learning. Much as they change the role of the reader, they change the roles of both teacher and learner (272). Critical thinking relies on multicausal analyses and the association of different types of data. Hypertext's essential interconnectivity provides an efficient means of accustoming students to forging connections between information they encounter and then evaluating its relative importance. A well-designed digital scholarly edition of literature encourages this habit (278–9). The flexibility and inclusivity of digital scholarly editions for e-readers permit teachers to introduce students to the way scholars in a given field think and work by giving the students access to

items at a variety of levels of complexity. By interlinking and interweaving an array of materials at differing levels of difficulty and expertise, it encourages both exploration and self-paced instruction. What is more, these varied materials allow educators to accommodate the needs of learners at different academic levels within the classroom (277).

The comprehensive and adaptable nature of digital scholarly editions provides students with the means to incrementally improve their abilities by providing access to more advanced materials. Because authors and/or editors would no longer have to tailor the materials to a single level of expertise, its true value as a flexible and inclusive educational tool becomes apparent, allowing the student to experience a range of materials that vary in their degree of difficulty. Beginning students have the opportunity to follow their curiosity and interests as far as they choose; yet, it still allows advanced students to review relatively basic materials if needed (280–1).

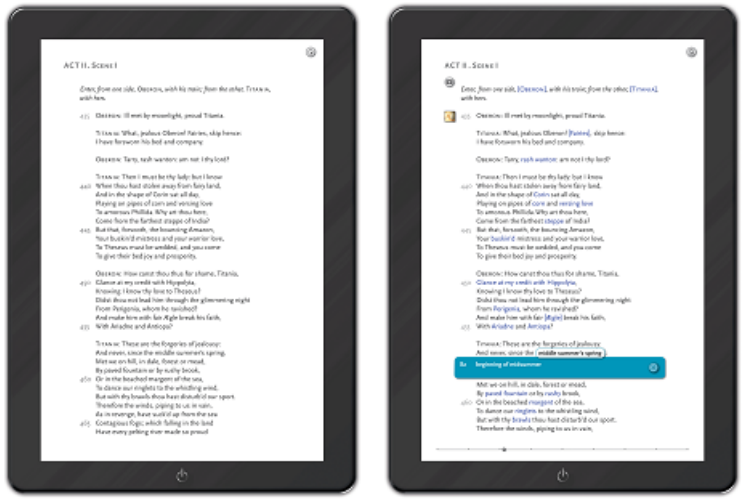


Functionality

In the center of the diagram above is a representative screen/page showing a dense amount of data. The column on the left describes supplemental critical and contextual elements of the main text. The column on the right describes functional components of the interface.

Design Considerations and Challenges

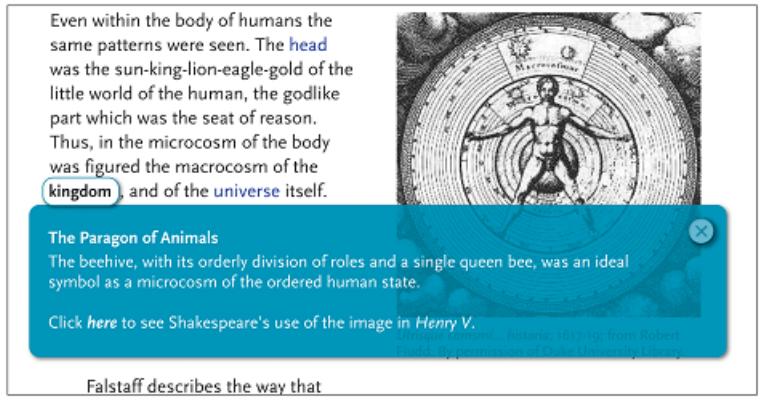
Providing a seamless reader experience while also allowing for the inclusion of a great deal of material that augments the main text was one of the greatest difficulties faced in the development of the system for my thesis project. This challenge involved decisions not only about the digital scholarly edition's purpose, but also about the way the user/reader is treated. Should the user have continual visual reminders of the complexity and amount of information available? Alternatively, should he/she principally be presented with an elegantly uncluttered text? I believe that both avenues for exploring the text should exist in a digital scholarly edition of literature, by giving the user the option to easily and quickly choose how he/she wants to experience the text at any given time. The interface, at least initially, should present the user with a clear and limited range of choice. Therefore, my design includes methods for the user to choose to experience the text with or without the attendant visual signals that communicate the myriad informational options available at any given point. An advanced reader or scholar can choose more visually dense views that contain more information. Other readers can work with a less cluttered view, with any indications of textual complexity being subordinate to the main text, creating graded access to materials that is dependent on and responsive to the needs of the reader at any particular time.



The Image on the Left Shows Just the Text, with only the Home Button at Top Right to Indicate that there is more Information Available. The Image on the Right Shows the Same Text with a Dense Amount of Supplemental Information Indicated.

The graphic designer of a digital scholarly edition of literature for e-readers has the weight of centuries of the traditional printed codex to carry into the new medium. One must consider basic design decisions, such as how a digital 'page' looks or whether it should be considered a 'page' at all, in order to create a visual language that is readily comprehended by the user and presents the text accessibly. Text that is visually represented with metaphoric fixed lines and pages is one method of making the digital interface more intuitive for users, but doing so limits the power and flexibility of the medium. My investigations lead me to conclude that allowing the user to choose to make the screen look more book-like, and hence more familiar, or to choose a view that is more fully adapted to the digital medium allows for the best solution to this dilemma.

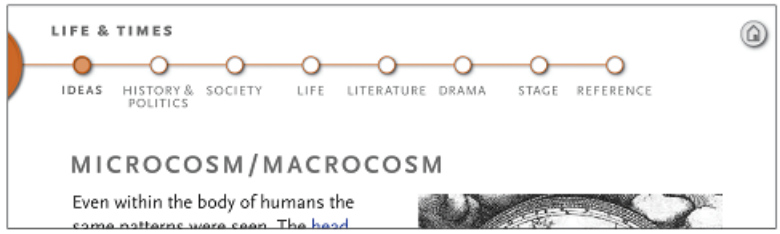
The small amount of the display area available relative to the amount of data to be displayed presented another challenge to interface design in this context. The central design issue revolved around how to better support, "…both focusing attention on a single interface object (without distraction from other objects) and dividing or time sharing attention between multiple objects (to preserve context or global awareness)" (Harrison, et.al.). The constraint of limited screen size currently results in interfaces with a profusion of overlapping windows, menus, dialog boxes, and tool palettes. There are too many objects to make it feasible to 'tile' the objects in order to keep track of them and overlapping opaque objects obscures portions of information, making it difficult for users to have access to all the information they may need to see. However, the use of semi-transparency addresses many of these issues and in the interface prototype for my thesis project I explored how this can be used to best effect. In virtually all interfaces, the reader needs to be aware of multiple items at once, items that may overlap and conceal one another. All of these situations have at least two or more tasks that need the user's attention. In some cases, the reader may wish to time-share the two tasks (divided attention), such as in parallel text comparisons. In other cases, the reader may want to selectively exclude their attention from one task while focusing on another (focused attention), such as when reading an annotation. Many of the proposed task pairs have a tacit active and passive task. In most instances, the reader needs at least a peripheral awareness of the passive task while temporarily diverting his/her attention to the active task. For graphic designers, this means that they must consider the visual contents and the distinctiveness of the layers within the task. One must take into account the amount of similarity, the information density, and the level of detail in each layer. These considerations determine how much interference may result when one focuses one's attention on a single object (Harrison, et al.). I used Harrison's physiological studies on transparency use in an interface to determine the ideal levels of transparency or opacity when depicting additional information that a reader accesses separately from the main text.



In this Detail, a Semi-transparent Area is used to Give Additional Information as Called up by the User.

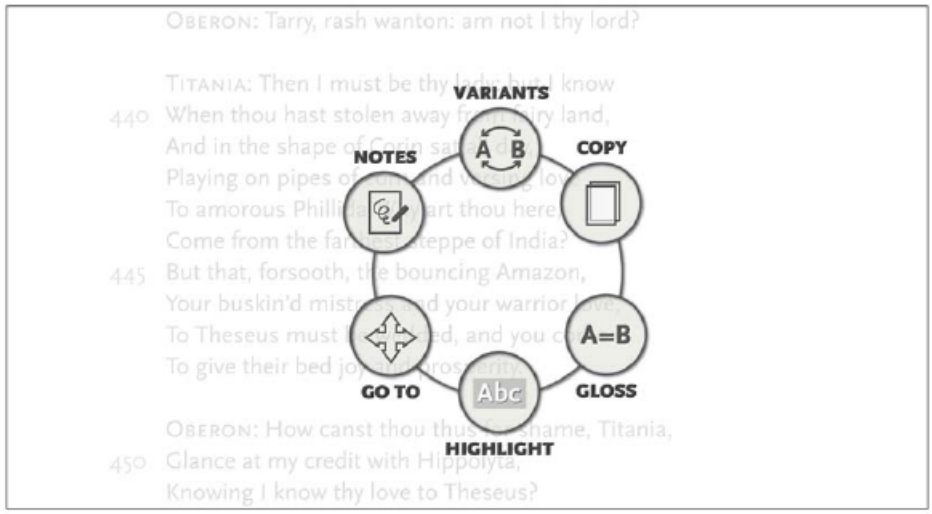
Along with my investigations into the use of transparency in my thesis project, I considered optimal typefaces and their characteristics for screen use. According to Robert Bringhurst in *The Elements of Typographic Style*, good legibility and readability is increased onscreen if typefaces have, "…low contrast, a large torso, open counters, sturdy terminals, slab serifs or no serifs" (192). They should also have rugged construction, easily discernible numerals and well-defined weights (Spiekerman and Ginger, 73). In the prototype that I developed, I chose to use the type family Scala and Scala Sans, as it fits well within these parameters. Specifically relating to typography, I considered color use according to physiological and cultural studies, incorporating that information in the color choice for signaling the presence of a hyperlink within the text and in creating the color scheme for the main navigational device in the table of contents and throughout the edition.

Ease of navigability, clear information architecture and hierarchy, and incorporating multiple and/or redundant access to information were paramount in my explorations for the creation of an optimal and seamless reader experience. Using the analogy of travel, the initial challenge concerned the orientation information required for finding one's place within the corpus of interlinked lexia. The second refers to the navigation information essential for making one's way through the materials. The third relates to exit or departure information and the fourth to arrival or entrance information. In each instance, designers of digital scholarly editions of literature must determine what readers need to know at either end of a hyperlink in order to make use of what they find there (Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, 152–3).



In Addition to the Home Button (Top right) that will Take the User to the Table of Contents, the Top of Page Navigation Serves as a Reminder of the Area Currently being Explored while Allowing one to See the other Areas of Information Available in this Category.

In considering these challenges, I drew heavily on Don Norman's writings on affordance, constraints, conventions, signifiers, and their relationship to design. The perceptual psychologist J. J. Gibson originally coined the term 'affordance' in the late 1970s to refer to the actionable properties between the world and an actor. Norman went on to clarify this term in his writings for design with the term 'perceived affordance' by which he meant, "…In design, we care much more about what the user perceives than what is actually true. What the designer cares about is whether the user perceives that some action is possible…" (Norman, "Affordances and Design"). According to Norman, in graphical interface design, instead of affordances (perceived or otherwise), "…One is really talking about conventions, or what I called logical and cultural 'constraints.' […] Cultural constraints are learned conventions that are shared by a cultural group" ("Affordances and Design"). One such example given is that of the graphic object to the right of a display known as a 'scroll bar' that allows the user to alter their view of objects on a screen by dragging a mouse up or down on it. The way it is displayed, designed, and used is a cultural, learned convention, since there is nothing inherent in the device or interface that requires the system to act in this fashion. To Norman, what matters in design is whether the desired controls can be easily perceived and interpreted, and, if the desired actions can be discovered, whether standard conventions are obeyed. In my interface, I aspired to make these actions readily and easily perceived, understanding that like the use of the scroll bar, users will learn new conventions over time as they become more familiar with the technology.



The Detail above Shows the Floating Navigation Function, which Incorporates user Favorites.

Conclusion

Gregory Crane was correct when he stated that, "We must decide on what our audience will be and what kind of experience we hope to foster. The greatest danger here is transferring habits of thought and usage that are the products of print technology into an electronic environment with different constraints and possibilities." The development of personal computers, the Internet, laptops, and most recently a variety of e-readers (including the iPad), has radically altered the means of accessing and interacting with texts. People now expect to have a wide array of digital information readily available, presented in a visually stimulating and interactive format. Therefore, in the development of my M.F.A. thesis project, I endeavored to take advantage of the possibilities inherent in a device like the iPad or similar e-readers to create a digital bibliographic code that can be used for scholarly editions of literature. I attempted to create a prototype that was as visually sophisticated as the workings of the interface and as comprehensive in its inclusion of supplemental materials as possible, while also providing a well-realized system for an intuitive, seamless reading experience with a low learning curve for the user. The outcome exists as a prototypical digital bibliographic code for scholarly editions of literature that builds on the strengths inherent in the traditional codex while incorporating the advantages that a digital format for a hand-reading device brings. Graphic designers, as visual communicators and information architects, can and will be invaluable partners with the software engineers and editors at publishing houses who are developing this nascent form.

Acknowledgments

Text for *A Midsummer Night ' s Dream* and supplemental and contextual materials derived from:

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