

EDIT: This is an *early* GDoc draft of my dissertation prospectus (10/25/2012 vs. final submitted to department 4/9/2013), and was never intended as a public document; sharing now so folks looking at my finished prospectus can compare. A couple marginal comments from 2022 Amanda throughout. - Amanda

Sites of Multiple Interpretation:

Extending Textual Potential through Participatory Design

Amanda Visconti, 10/21/2012 Working Draft for Prospectus

I want to expand our knowledge of textual potentials by building tools that

1. put to work recent theories about the possibilities and boundaries of digital editions;
2. apply visually conscious, code-aware, and intervention-/ludic-friendly techniques; and
3. expand the audience for this quintessential scholarly form, providing a more public humanities via participatory, pedagogical approaches.

I will create a set of code libraries that privilege subjective knowledges of text such as the material, the playful, and the serendipitous, resituating play, visual design, exploration, uncertainty, failure, counterfactuality, and subjectivity as valid critical tools. This code will explore the potential for transforming the major PHP-based content management systems into platforms for publishing digital literary engagements suitable for learning, play, and scholarly practice.

The meat of this dissertation is a series of digital experiments in tool form that make statements about the nature of texts and editorial acts, each with a critical introduction linking the tool to a tradition of scholarly approaches and each applied in recognizably literary-critical style to an example complex Modernist text. Additionally—in the best tradition of scientific experiments—each experiment will be replicable as well as extendable to other literary texts through open-source code and a sandbox website. Finally, I hope to document some best practices for streamlining DH user studies, identifying what facets of usability, use, and usefulness are most important when evaluating a digital tool or publication on a limited budget.

One section of this dissertation will specifically reach out to traditional humanists by concisely exploring

- the relation of this work's non-traditional format to key digital humanities methodologies and beliefs,
- the critical place of textual scholarship within the literature department, and
- the arguments for building as scholarship (citing existing theoretical objects such as Jean Bauer's DAVILA and Alan Galey's *Visualizing Variation*),

as well as by foregrounding recognizably humanist, literary questions of complex and subjective textual knowledge, supported by Ramsay's *Reading Machines* discussion of our long history of algorithmic criticism and by a connection of each code set to traditional literary practice via John Unsworth's scholarly primitives.

This dissertation is very much about not just describing, but actually making tools that perform the methodologies I've been percolating; thus, you'll probably get the best picture of my goals by reading the following descriptions of proposed code. When this dissertation is eventually presented as a website, the code sets will be presented in the following order, with the code that is most experimental and least recognizable to the traditional literary scholar appearing last. All code will be developed as a CMS-agnostic PHP library whenever possible, with a shell of code connecting this library to at least one of three CMSs (Omeka, Drupal, Wordpress) depending on intended use.

1. "Infinite Ulysses": Can we migrate complex print hypertexts to a digital space of socially multiplied annotations without "diminish[ing] the force of the book" or "normaliz[ing]" it

(Attridge, Marino)? This code set deals with concerns about a) crowdsourcing thoughtful annotation of complex texts and b) the information overabundance of an “infinite” digital Ulysses (or any other complex Modernist novel) open to any annotators. Tactics will involve mimicking a Reddit-style upvoting system, allowing toggling of annotations by community tagging, public and private saved sets of curated annotations, and providing highly upvoted annotators (i.e. “front page of Reddit” posts) to edit their submissions (i.e. submitting thoughtful, well-regarded content allows you a larger pulpit for your theories). Print precursors are the print Shelley-Godwin notebooks and variorum editions such as Gabler’s synoptic *Ulysses*; digital precursors are Groden’s *Ulysses in Hypermedia*, the *Shelley-Godwin Archive*, and my own early [UlyssesUlysses](#) project.

2. “Choose Your Own Edition”: In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein states, “I always say that you cannot tell what a picture really is or what an object really is until you dust it every day and you cannot tell what a book is until you type it or proof-read it. It then does something to you that only reading never can do.” Most non-editors do not have a good comprehension of the complicated issues at stake in scholarly editing; being presented with a manuscript draft and asked to render a transcription of this is a wake-up call to the many decisions an editor makes on the page level, but a more extensive exercise is needed to help non-editors understand the larger critical decisions at stake when editing a text. **How might we diversify and increase attention to the cultural importance of scholarly editing by teaching people other than editors-in-training about the fundamental processes of editing? What might developing a decision tree model for our editing workflow as part of this teaching in turn help editors steps back and re-evaluate their methodologies?**

This code provides a relatively short digital facsimile edition that presents highlighted moments of editorial decision-making, which, when clicked, provide the reader with multiple possible editorial interpretations and interventions for that moment, as well as the opportunity to suggest his own solution (e.g. how to deal with this strange punctuation?). When the user reaches the end of the text, his cumulative editorial decisions are presented as a single written methodology reflecting how his personal edition might appear. The individual editorial choices will be weighted among various characteristics of existing editing methodologies (e.g. x choice is a McGannian move), which means that this tool can also provide suggestions as to further readings in both similarly and oppositely thinking editorial schools, as well as retain data on demographics and editing choices. This tool will likely involve a single, fixed literary text, but ideally I would create a framework which editors could supply with their choice of teaching manuscript facsimiles; I will at the very least lay out possible next steps for achieving this ideal tool by surveying useful existing image-annotation code such as TILE.

Editing is a close reading game (what did an author mean?), a detective game (who’s intervened with a text, and why?), and a design game (how will my editorial choices influence modern readings?), and this tool might provide a framework for not only demonstrating the exciting intricacies of editorial work, but also exploring applications of game studies to textual scholarship. This code and its accompanying analysis will consider critical factors of editorial decision-making, the comparison of possible critical choices as a scholarly primitive, and the role of the ludic in scholarly editing. Print precursors are print edition methodologies and discussions (e.g. Masten’s *An/The Old Law*, Wayne’s “The Sexual Politics of Textual Transmission”, Hodgson’s *Taming of the Shrew*, Werner’s *Open Folios*, Schulze’s *Becoming Marianne Moore*); digital precursors will be drawn from various digital edition methodologies (e.g. *Blake*, *Whitman*, *Twain*, *SGA*); writings on digital editing such as Eaves’ “Electronic Textual Editing: Multimedia Body Plans: A Self-Assessment” will also be considered.

3. “Iconic Screen”: The move of the last century to greater attention to graphic properties of texts has largely *not* extended to attention to the graphic properties of the forms mediating those texts—that is, to the visual features of editions. To take a MVC view of things, there’s been discussion of the model (i.e.

database) of digital archives and the controller of other DH endeavors (i.e. critical code studies), but the rhetoric of the view layer of digital humanities projects has received less attention. **How might digital editions look if we imported the same privilege we now grant to the iconic page of literary objects of study to those objects' meta-texts? Has editing theory succeeded at incorporating graphesis (e.g. via Bolter's "breakout of the visual" and "reverse ekphrasis"), and with what intellectual gains?** This code set seeks to apply the current scholarly awareness of the impact of iconic choices to digital editions, treating digital edition interface as interpretation.

While the exact form of this code is still under consideration, it will probably take the form of a stylesheet changer tied to both a space for recording the interpretive changes created by each new set of visual decisions and a space to document how the information of the original interface ties into its creators' overall editorial methodology. This code might additionally extend the Anthologize plugin's EPUB/PDF output capabilities to allow a variety of personal edition-making, commonplacing, and/or digital Grangerizing. The code will take a secondary place to an several sets of interface mock-ups creating different visual arguments or emphases for a single marked-up literary text.

Print precursors include Jeffrey Masten's *An/The Old Law*, various artists' books as part of textual conceptual wholes, and Blake's image-texts; digital precursors are Saklofske's *NewRadial*, the *WebLabUX* style assessment tool, Alan Galey's *Visualizing Variation*; additional applicable writings are Bornstein and Tinkle's *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture*; Drucker on graphesis, artists' books, and graphic design; and various works incorporating conceptual decisions into visual features (e.g. artists' books, e-lit, and book-hacking techniques such as Grangerizing and extra-illustration). The example text for demoing this code will be the "Circe" section of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which offers interesting fodder for multiple interfaces including its murky division between real and unreal.

4. "JuxtaPo" (Collation with a Post-Modern Serendipitous Sensibility): Most digital archives of literary objects heavily emphasize linear entry into their catalogs. **What might we learn from our large databases of related literary objects by introducing new ways to not only move through these collections, but record the serendipitous discoveries engendered by continuously juxtaposing new pairings of objects?** This code set explores cross-collection values assessment by providing an interface that, instead of sending the user to a random object's metadata page, juxtaposes two random items on the same page and provides space to record critical observations about the effect of this juxtaposition, which are then added to the metadata of both objects. Given this code set's emphasis on archival objects, the current plan is to develop an Omeka plugin that might build on the current Item Relations code, but an exploration of Omeka data migration methods such as the OAI-PMH Repository/Harvester might allow this code set to be as CMS-agnostic as the other code options. Precursors for this experiment include Ramsay on serendipitous discovery and Manovich, Folsom, McGann, et al. on database versus narrative.

5. "OuliPress": How might we advance our scholarly use of critical interventionary tactics by combining markup standards with theories of algorithmic criticism and playful, purposeful textual alteration? This code set will allow textual operations on TEI-encoded text such as "substitution, insertion, deletion, relocation, transposition" within a webpage framework (Kraus); I will draw on such precursors as Ramsay's *Reading Machines* and work on serendipity and play ("Hermeneutics of Screwing Around"), TEI standards and the TAPAS project, the *Whitman Archive's* TokenX tool, the "Tumbarumba" narrative insertion script, Pope's *Textual Interventions*, and Motte's *Oulipo* anthology. The end product will be a sandbox where researchers can upload an encoded text and apply various critical interventionary tactics, taking a snapshot of each resulting text, and record scholarly observations about the knowledge provoked by these changes. The experiment will also develop a set of XML tags appropriate for intervening in texts (e.g. identifying words and phrases that might be meaningfully swapped or substituted). Building on my preliminary "*Ulysses Usurped*" experiments, this code set's example text

Commented [VAW(1)]: Current (2022) Amanda interjecting a repentant 🙏 at the "no one else is doing this"

Commented [VAW(2)]: 2022 Amanda might just have pandemic brain, but reading this now and I have zero idea what this was supposed to be

might focus on the “Telemachus” section from Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

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Commented [VAW(3)]: Extra 2022 disclaimer—my final bibliography did not achieve what I’d want today in discovering, citing, and building on an accurate and effective (e.g. much more diverse) set of scholarship, and this initial draft does so less. Much fantastic work in here! Just don’t want anyone to take it as representative of any subfield.

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