HOW NOT TO CREATE A DIGITAL MEDIA SCHOLARSHIP PLATFORM: THE HISTORY OF THE SOPHIE 2.0 PROJECT

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"INTRODUCTION TO SOPHIE"

Introduction to Sophie. (Internet Archive snapshot from 2012, March 15). Retrieved May 23, 2018, from https://web.archive.org/web/20120315044511/http://iml.usc.edu/flashVideoPlayer/sophie/sophie_video_2.m4v

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WHAT WAS SOPHIE 2.0?

- An update on Institute for the Future of the Book's 2008 Sophie 1.0 platform
  - 1981 Hypertext demonstration
  - 1992 Expanded Books Toolkit
  - 1996 work on TK3 through Bob Stein's Night Kitchen company begins
  - 2004 Institute for the Future of the Book founded

- Sophie 1.0 demo released 2007

- Create dynamic multimedia "books" where the content was all equally important could be arranged in different ways and annotated

- A variety of uses were proposed for the software, narrative storytelling was not one of them

THE PROBLEM: SOPHIE IS MISSING

- Net worth: $4,194,500*
- Last seen 2011
- What happened?

HAS ANYONE ELSE NOTICED?

- The Sophie 2.0 developer site http://sophie2.org/trac/ not updated since 2011

- Founder Bob Stein in two interviews (2010,2011) discusses the failure of the Sophie project

- There was a January 2017 *Computers in Libraries* digital humanities piece that mentions Sophie 2.0

Taking a New Approach to the Case

- Placing computer applications in the history of science and technology

- Understanding and appreciating the challenges faced by the creators

- Putting creator decisions in the context of beliefs at the early 21st century about technology and software development

So You Want to Reinvent the Book

- Decide what makes a book a book
  - Is it still a book if it incorporates new media and authoring from comments?

- Figure out how to translate those features into a completely new media

- Convince people that the new media is better or at least just as good as the old media

ROBERT "BOB" STEIN

"In saying that I 'left the project after blowing through more than $2.5-million,' your article implies that I left the enterprise cavalierly, when in fact, the University of Southern California put someone else in charge."

- Letter to the Editor, *Chronicle of Higher Education* March 1st 2011

ROBERT "BOB" STEIN

- Former leftist publisher, digital media pioneer

- Let predecessor to Sophie, TK3 never come to market to keep the Mac version

- Maoist with McLuhan-esque view of the power of software

- Project management style for Sophie 1.0 was more suited for traditional book publishing

INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE BOOK

- Based in New York but affiliated with University of Southern California

- Overly ambitious

- Multiple projects and experiments with different visions of the future of the book going at once, CommentPress

- Documentation and tech support services were limited

- Kept changing their mind but did not insist on using an iterative type of project management

if:book A Project of The Institute for the Future of the Book

SOPHIE 1.0 TEAM AT IMPARA GMBH/UNIVERSITY OF POTSDAM

- Sophie 1.0 built in the Smalltalk programming language
- Wanted to include the most features possible
- *Field of Dreams* marketing strategy
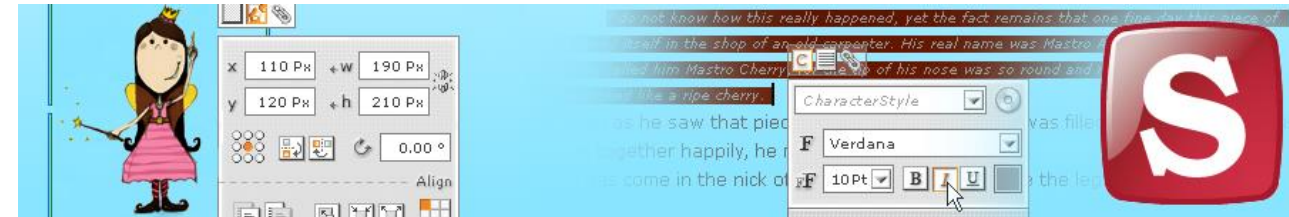
THE ANDREW MELLON FOUNDATION RIT PROGRAM

- Only provided funding for prototypes

- Required the switch to Java with belief that software would be maintained by open source Java developers

- Global economic recession resulted in a shuffling of people on projects

The Open Source Java Developer Community

- Never came through
- Were never asked what they wanted
- Were missing in action long before Sophie was
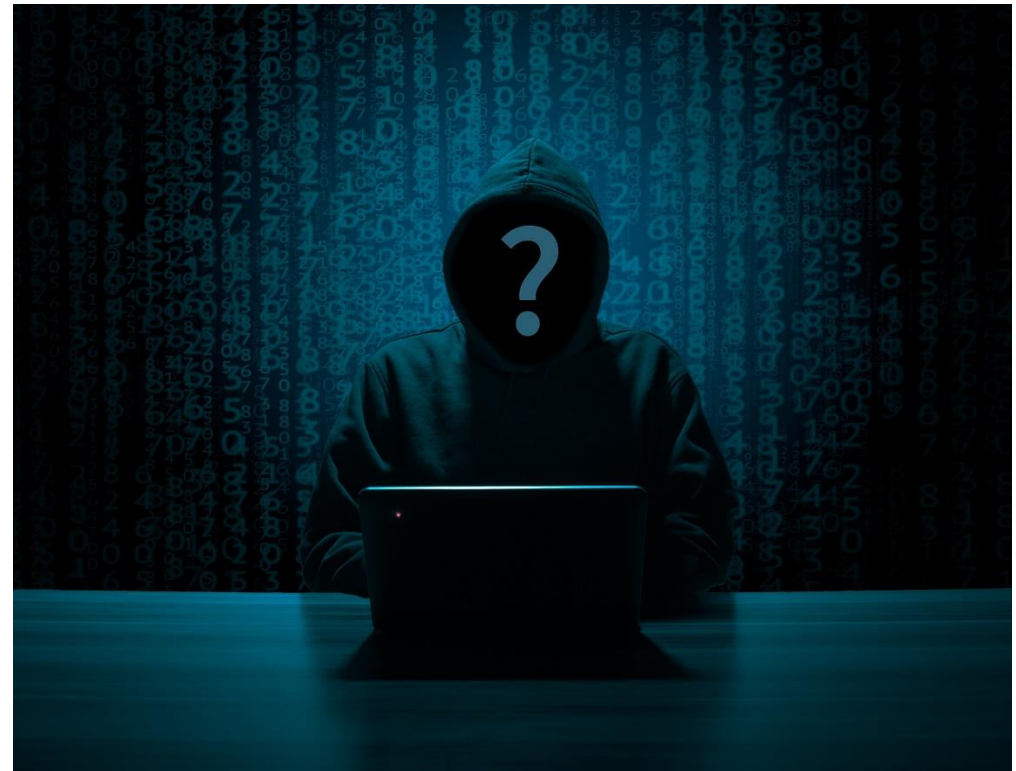
THE SOPHIE USERS

- Never really defined, mostly educators

- Blame themselves for not being ready for the software of the future

- Really just wanted a software that worked

- Needed more love
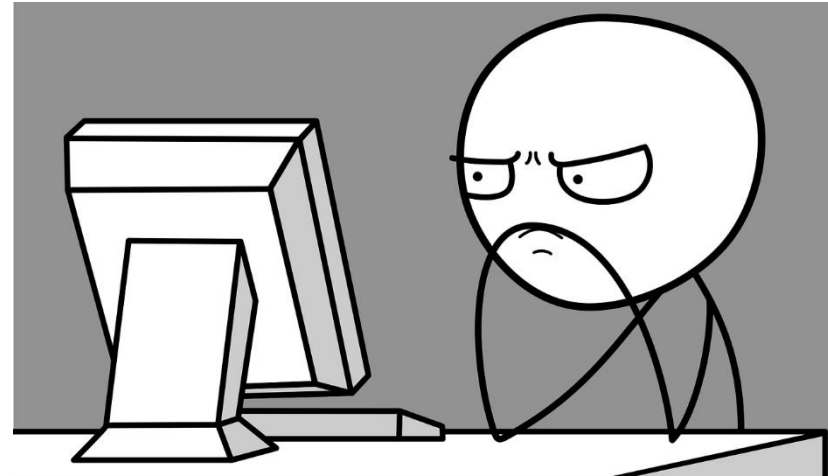
ASTEA SOLUTIONS

- Programmers for hire affiliated with the University of Sofia in Bulgaria that were tasked with switching Sophie 1.0 to Java

- Inherited a mess and just focused on translating the mess into Java

- Not easy to get involved in the open source project if you weren't in Bulgaria

- Didn't reach out to mainstream publishing companies experimenting with mixed media books at the time

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR MEDIA LITERACY

- Provided "evangelism" for the Sophie 2.0 project

- Emphasized creating a software for free and open source, multimedia document creation, and new forms of authorship and intellectual property

- "Original Synners" pedagogy that encouraged experimental media forms created with experimental software

- Focused on how Sophie 2.0 would change scholarly practices

AND THE CULPRITS ARE…

- They all did it, working together!

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ADDRESSING RUMORS OF A MORE RECENT SOPHIE SIGHTING

- Scalar is in no way related to Sophie whatsoever

- Different history, projects overlapped

**Greater visual impact.
Easier to read, navigate and edit.**

Scalar 2 is here.

Worried About the Digital Humanities Tool You Work with Going Missing?

- Has this been updated? When was the most recent update? Are updates regular or sporadic?

- How is this project funded? Is this grant funded? What happened to other recipients of these grants?

- How well does the software work? Has the software ever worked? Is this software supposed to work?

HERE ARE SOME MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE:

- Where can I get tech support? How fast is the response for questions about glitches? Are users told to fix glitches themselves?

- Was this software created accounting for intellectual property laws and other legal issues faced by users?

- Does this software claim to be meant for nontechnical users? Is there documentation? Is there a glossary for software-specific terms?

- Are there reviews? Demo projects? Are demo projects created by ordinary users or institutional groups with advanced IT resources?

WHILE THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SOPHIE 2.0 IS A TRAGIC STORY OF WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN:

- It is not the job of librarians and digital humanists to use software we hope will work because it aligns with values we find important
- It is our job to recommend and contribute to digital tools that won't eat our users' homework

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!