**TOWSEY — Remapping**

<0 images>

**Remapping Cultural History? Digital Humanities, Historical Bibliometrics, and the Reception of Print Culture**

Bode, K., Burrows, S., Lamond, J., Reid, M., Roe, G., Shep, S. and Towsey, M.

This panel brings together leading book historians and digital humanists to explore the dynamic and complex interface between the two fields. Book history is increasingly recognised as playing an important role in the development of digital humanities (DH). Alan Liu describes book history as a Levi-Straussian ‘trickster figure’ for the field​​, uniting DH’s commitment to older humanities disciplines, and the value of the old itself, with more recent interest in emergent media and design (2013, 410). Elsewhere he points to the way book historians ‘increasingly compare, and not just contrast, earlier writing/reading practices to their digital successors’ (2012, 16), and the potential of this approach to enhance understandings of DH as well as the digital age to which it responds. As Matthew Kirschenbaum and Sarah Werner (2014) argue more recently, key methodologies of DH—cataloguing, counting, sorting, and mapping—have long been part of the book historian’s toolkit. Mass digitisation has highlighted the need for textual and scholarly editing; book history skills must also be brought to bear in examining the limits and nature of the data (both text corpora and metadata) that is being digitised and analysed as part of DH projects.

At the same time, the digitisation of the media landscape in which books are produced and read has profound implications for book history as a discipline, both in terms of its methodologies and the nature of its objects of inquiry. Kirschenbaum and Werner position this shift as ‘a series of material interventions in established systems of reading, writing, and publication, interventions that take shape and define themselves in relation to the affordances of other, more familiar media, the printed page not least among them’ (408). The digital turn has refocused our attention on the materiality of the objects with which book historians work, but as digital archives become increasingly important both to digital humanities and the humanities more broadly, it is more important than ever that we think about how best to represent and study material sources in this changed scholarly landscape.

Despite what would seem to be a natural affinity between these disciplinary formations, Kirschenbaum and Werner suggest, the

big data trend in the humanities is not one that has spoken to book historians. It has been the tool of literary and linguistic scholars, something prized by researchers interested in text, rather than textual production. But ignoring what digital tools can offer the study of book history cuts us off from opportunities to further develop our knowledge of how books are made and used. (410)

There is, however, an emerging body of scholarship working at the intersection of these two interdisciplinary fields, as evidenced, for example, by the success of projects such as the Australian Common Reader, the French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe, the Reading Experience Database, Dissenting Academies Online, and What Middletown Read. These projects have been brought together by the AHRC-funded international research network on ‘Community Libraries’, a group of over 80 scholars, librarians, and archivists from across the Americas, Europe, and Australia driven by a shared interdisciplinary interest in the dissemination, circulation, and reception of books in the past.

The network was founded to share approaches and stimulate conversation about how library historians are harnessing the analytical power of digital methodologies to deepen and complicate our understanding of past reading communities and the social impact of print, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Historical library records lend themselves particularly well to large-scale digital analysis, providing rich seams of data on book collecting, lending practices, borrowing habits, and membership patterns. Individual projects such as the Dissenting Academies Online’s Virtual Library System or What Middletown Read encourage a more holistic approach to historic library records, shaped not by the researcher’s own specialist and disciplinary interests but by the research demands of the user. However, surviving records are rare and can hardly be considered representative; as Priya Joshi suggests, ‘The conclusions one could draw from a single library’s circulation would need to rest closest to the regional, class and social history of that library only and could probably not be applied too widely before becoming irrelevant’ (2002, 52). There is an urgent need, therefore, for library historians to think about how to connect together digital research on libraries of different types, in different places, and at different times, lending greater statistical meaning to the collection patterns and borrowing figures available for individual institutions. Since libraries are inseparable from other elements of the ‘communications circuit’ influentially outlined by Robert Darnton (1982), digital research into library history must also connect with scholars working on wider aspects of historic print production, distribution, and reception—including those interested in the book trade, reading habits, ephemeral print, and the newspaper press.

This panel seeks to develop the potential revealed by the Community Libraries network for collaboration across national and disciplinary contexts in creating and making use of DH projects and methods for addressing questions about the circulation and reception of print culture. It brings together leading scholars working at the intersection of DH and book history: Mark Towsey will introduce the work of the Community Libraries network, together with the network’s plans for a digital Atlantic Union Catalogue; Sydney Shep will discuss 19th-century typographical journals and global communication networks, William Colenso and the Victorian Republic of Letters, and the New Zealand Reading Experience Database; Katherine Bode will explore the ‘world’ of serial fiction in 19th and early-20th-century Australian newspapers digitised by Trove; Simon Burrows will outline the aims and ambitions of the French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe project and how its historical-bibliometric digital tools might be developed for wider use among book history projects; Julieanne Lamond and Mark Reid will show the potential for mapping the circulation of popular fiction in the Australian Common Reader database; and Glenn Roe will discuss reconstructing the 18th-century commonplace book using the Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) dataset.

**Panel Organisation**

The panel will consist of six papers (five given by one contributor each, one shared between Lamond and Reid), each reflecting on how the speakers’ projects are opening up new perspectives and possible answers to the research questions posed below. This will be followed by a full 30-minute discussion, with the aim of motivating debate about how book history and DH are feeding into each other, and illuminating the key theoretical and methodological challenges they currently face.

**Research Questions**

The panel will draw on this vibrant body of research to address the following questions:

• What does book history have to offer DH and vice versa?

• What challenges does DH pose to existing projects and approaches?

• How can DH approaches expand the scope of book-historical enquiry, especially across national boundaries and in new transnational and translocal arenas?

• What is the relationship between the digital, the physical, and the material in both disciplines: as Kirschenbaum and Werner ask, what is ‘the value [of] digital tools and . . . theories of the digital for complicating and reconfiguring our notions of textual “materiality” and dissemination’ (409)?

• How can DH approaches to large datasets (text mining, data visualization, etc.) inform book history’s understanding of authorship practices by way of large-scale approaches to national and transnational literary cultures?

• How best can we bring together these two methodological approaches, and how can methodological debates in each expand our understanding of the humanities?

**Speakers**

*Katherine Bode* is senior lecturer in literary and textual studies in the Centre for Digital Humanities Research at the Australian National University.

*Simon Burrows* is professor of history at the University of Western Sydney.

*Julieanne Lamond* is lecturer in English in the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics at Australian National University.

*Mark Reid* is research fellow in the Research School of Computer Science and Engineering at Australian National University.

*Glenn Roe* is lecturer in digital humanities in the Centre for Digital Humanities Research at the Australian National University.

*Sydney Shep* is reader in book history and the printer at Wai-te-ata Press, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

*Mark Towsey* is senior lecturer in modern British history at the University of Liverpool, and a British Academy Mid-Career Fellow for 2014–2015.

**References**

**Darnton, R.** (1982). What Is the History of Books? *Daedalus,* **111**(3): 65–83.

**Joshi, P.** (2002). *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel in India.* Columbia University Press, New York.

**Kirschenbaum, M. and Werner, S.** (2014). Digital Scholarship and Digital Studies: The State of the Discipline. *Book History,* **17**(1): 406–58.

**Liu, A.** (2012). The State of the Digital Humanities: A Report and a Critique. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education,* **11**(1–2): 8–41.

**Liu, A.** (2013). The Meaning of the Digital Humanities. *PMLA,* **128**(2): 409–23.