# CHAPTER 1: INTERFACE

In this study I am not focused on the questions of exegesis and interpretation that typically inform the study of the bible, and of religion more generally. Rather, my focus is on the material practices that constitute the rich history of bible. Looking at bible in terms of interfaces and users instead of simply books and readers offers us four primary advantages. First, thinking of bible as interface rather than book can unsettle the unquestioned binding of bible and codex, which coincides with the dominant cultural reduction of book to codex. By looking back at the bible roll as an interface and forward to kindle reader as an interface for bible, we can imagine better what constitutes bible for users beyond our current limited conception of book. Second, a focus on bible as interface highlights the material affordances operative in different user relationships with bible that extend beyond typical modes of reading, such as annotation and illumination in margins, organizational schemes, and use of bible as artifact. Third, exploring bible as interface can challenge us to conceptualize bible through its use rather than reducing definitions of bible to the content it contains. Fourth, tracing moments in the history of bible as interface allows us to see the continuities and discontinuities involved in media transitions/translations brought on by emerging technologies. Bible has always been interface and one of the key things to remember as we explore the many interfaces of bible throughout history is that these interfaces all borrow from each other and technological transitions are never total transformations.

## Why Interface?

As I mentioned in my introduction, one of the aims of this project is to focus our attention on the materiality of bible. This bent toward materiality stems from two main convictions that I bring to this work. First, I begin with the assumption that the material characteristics of the technologies we use shape our relationship with texts and with one another. Second, I affirm that the digital is decidedly material. A shift to talking about bible as interface foregrounds a user’s interaction with the particular material technologies of bible and connects the pre-digital materialities of bible, such as roll and codex, to a participatory construct and language that is ubiquitous in digital environments today.

Brent Plate has helped promote the importance of materiality in the study and practice of religion. More specifically, Plate calls those who study religion to attend to the role of the senses in religion.[[1]](#footnote-1) In his work with religion and the senses in *A History of religion in 5 1/2 objects*, Plate foregrounds the role and importance of material objects such as stones, drums, and bread by suggesting that “Religious people are not *believers* so much as *technologists*.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Rather than articulating a notion of religion absent of belief, Plate is simply suggesting that the *craft* of practicing religion entangled with material objects–what Plate calls “know-how” derived from the ancient Greek word *techne*–carries at least as much weight as what a religious person “knows/believes” about what they are practicing.[[3]](#footnote-3) Plate hints toward the role of interface and users in religion when he defines technology as “human connections to and uses of natural and human-made materials… .”[[4]](#footnote-4) Though Plate is using an ancient and broad definition of technology to highlight the importance of material objects and their use without pointing toward specific examples of interfaces that we might call technological today, he is setting the stage within the material religion discourse for a more particular technological analysis of bible. Just as Plate argues for religion as technology irreducible to belief, I am arguing for bible as interface irreducible to text.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## Bible as Irreducible to Text

James Watts was one of the founding members of the Iconic Books Project, which gathered together scholars from several disciplines to explore the role of books in history, society, culture, and religion beyond simply the interpretation of their texts within. This project continues presently as “The Society for Comparative Research on Iconic and Performative Texts,” incidentally, with Brent Plate as their current president.[[6]](#footnote-6) If the semantic dimension of books relates primarily to the interpretations of the texts contained in books, then as the society name indicates, SCRIPT is decidedly focused on the non-textual dimensions of books. Iconic Books and SCRIPT have taken up Plate’s challenge to take materiality seriously in the history of books and their users. Through his work with the Iconic Books Project, Watts has articulated three dimensions of scripture, the semantic, the performative, and the iconic.[[7]](#footnote-7) The semantic dimension of scriptures focuses on the interpretation of, commentary on, and other appeals to the *content* of religious texts.[[8]](#footnote-8) Watts takes the time to note that both religious practitioners and scholars of religion have historically focused almost exclusively on this semantic dimension of scriptures.[[9]](#footnote-9) The performative dimension of scriptures pertains to the use of writings through practices of recitation, monumental inscriptions, music, and artistic expression.[[10]](#footnote-10) The iconic dimension of scriptures refers to the material forms and uses of these writings along with artistic renderings of these material expressions, such as the mosaics in Ravenna depicting the gospel writers with their scriptures.[[11]](#footnote-11)

With these three dimensions, Watts takes a similar approach to that of Plate, suggesting that scripture cannot be reduced to the interpretation of texts just as religion cannot be reduced to belief. Also like Plate, Watts turns to the materiality of books particularly in the iconic dimension to help interrupt these reductive trends. The concept of bible I have articulated for this project, the technologies that afford the use of Judeo-Christian sacred writings, is one example of the scripture produced through the ritualization of these dimensions outlined by Watts. Focusing on the readerly uses of bible as interface brings together the performative aspects of using these texts and the material aspects of the iconic dimension and continues to argue that bible is irreducible to the texts it contains and the interpretive practices of the semantic dimension. Framing bible in an interface theory that values both the performative and iconic aspects of books, while pushing our notions of materiality toward the digital and beyond book will provide a fruitful methodology for carrying the important emphasis on materiality championed by Plate and Watts into the emerging technological landscape in which bible finds itself. Now for a closer look at interface.

## Interface as Irreducible to Consumption

At its most basic, interface denotes some kind of relationship of interaction between entities.[[12]](#footnote-12) With this generic definition, we can imagine countless examples in everyday life, such as the the relationship of interaction between my son and his dog, or the relationship between neurotransmitters and receptors in a chemical synapse in your brain, or the relationship between my fingers and the beautifully designed butterfly keyboard I am using right now to type this sentence. Though I find a great deal of usefulness in the ubiquitous relationality this broad imagination of interface offers, we need a narrower definition of interface as we consider the relationship between bible and user. Even a quick glance at a dictionary entry for “interface” will highlight its relationaility and its importance in the realm of technology.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has entries for “interface” as both a noun and a verb. Interestingly, both noun and verb entries in the OED figure Marshall McLuhan, of “medium is the message” fame, prominently as the first quotation in the non-scientific definitions of the term. In fact, the OED credits McLuhan as the first user of “interface” in the verbal form in a 1967 collaborative effort with Quentin Fiore.[[13]](#footnote-13) Although I will not use any of the OED definitions as a basis for my own elaboration of interface, the OED provides a historical backdrop for the term and the categories of the term’s use. In both parts of speech, noun and verb, the google define algorithm and the freely available Oxford Dictionaries online include a specific definition for interface related to computing, which signals that the term “interface” has taken on special significance in the area of technology.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The first definition of interface in the OED is a scientific definition, which denotes the boundary between two portions or phases of matter.[[15]](#footnote-15) Though this earliest use of the term is not our primary focus here, it is worth noting that even this scientific definition foregrounds the irreducibility to consolidation operative in interface. Whether the interface identifies a boundary surface (the OED actually uses the term “face” here) within the same substance or between substances, the interface signals the interaction of two entities without either being eradicated. Even in these early technical uses of the idea of interface in the late nineteenth century, we hear the relationality of interaction and the resistance to reduction into one entity or the other at work in interface.

These processes of interaction that sustain relationality without the collapse of one entity into another are maintained in the computing focused definition of interface, which is “A device or program enabling a user to communicate with a computer”[[16]](#footnote-16) or “a device or program for connecting two items of hardware or software so that they can be operated jointly or communicate with each other.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Here we see that interface has become a technical term in the technological realm to describe the piece of technology that is needed to allow two systems to meet and interact. Because of the difference between the modes of communication of a human user and a machine, an “interface” as a translation layer is needed to allow the entangled interaction of “interface.” Here in the computing definition of interface, we find the noun and verb operations of interface coming together to suggest a multilayered notion of interface that includes both the material bridge that affords interaction and the interaction itself.[[18]](#footnote-18) The operation of interface in this connection or communication between user and machine allows for a relationship between these entities without reducing one participant into the other.

## Interface as Event

Johanna Drucker’s work draws our attention to the verbal character of interface. She argues that texts are events not entities and that interface is a zone of encounter not a window through which we access content.[[19]](#footnote-19) It was Drucker’s essay, “Humanities Approaches to Interface Theory,” that first led me to consider the notion of bible as interface.[[20]](#footnote-20) Drucker helpfully intertwines digital media studies explorations of interface design with humanities questions of subjectivity to provide a theoretical foundation for interface as a zone of encounter, not simply a piece of technology that connects two things. In an exemplary fashion, Drucker demonstrates a reflexive practice by stating her desire to explore the theory undergirding her own scholarly working environments at the cusp of a transition from print to other dominant media/interfaces. She writes,

The motivation here is simple. The authoring and reading environments for interpretative scholarly work are only just beginning to be designed in such a way that the linear, finite conventions of print media can be changed for the constellationary, distributed, multi-faceted modes of digital media…As this process develops, a challenge for humanists is to reflect on and articulate the theory of interface that underlies the design of our working environments.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Drucker shows her awareness of the shifts at work in the emerging digital media age and asks humanists to become a part of the process of constructing a theory to support the design of our reading and writing spaces as a counter balance to the often mechanistic principles at work in the software industry.[[22]](#footnote-22) The mechanistic approaches to design and to the user in the software world are a progression of the development of the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and the growing economic importance of Graphical User Interface (GUI). These mechanistic approaches tend to over determine the relationship between machine and user such that the ambiguity of interaction is ignored.[[23]](#footnote-23) Drucker challenges the consumer market tendency toward functional determinism in software design by connecting her idea of text as event with interface as a zone of encounter. Pointing back toward her work on texts as event, Drucker suggests that “attention to the specific relations between properties and affordances of electronic environments within a system of codependent relations of production [with subjects] will be the starting point for assumptions about interface as a space that supports interpretative events and acts of meaning production.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Critiquing the “window” metaphor that is so prevalent in our understanding of interface, Drucker pushes us to imagine interface as an event, both a thing *and* a process, both noun and verb as we saw in our exploration of definitions above.[[25]](#footnote-25) Drucker’s binary rhetoric of entity to event might suggest that she devalues the materiality or thingness or noun character of interface in order to highlight the productive process at work in event. Yet, if we look closely at her concept of event, we get a more material sense of what she is doing with interface as “not a thing.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Drucker writes, “Probabilistic materiality conceives of a text as an event, rather than an entity. The event is the entire system of reader, aesthetic object and interpretation.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Much like we saw in Plate’s suggestion of religion as technology irreducible to belief,[[28]](#footnote-28) here, Drucker’s interface as event entails entity without being reducible to it. Interface as event accounts for both the material conditions of the participants and the process of their interaction. The “entire system” of Drucker’s interface as event, which includes “reader, aesthetic object, and interpretation,” maps nicely onto Watts’s three dimensions of scripture, performative, iconic, and semantic, respectively.[[29]](#footnote-29) Like Plate and Watts, Drucker resists a reductive approach that might conceptualize interface as simply a window to content and user as a mechanistic consumer.

Interface as event always exceeds content and consumption. If we think of consumption as the absorption or consolidation of one entity into another, then the earliest definitions of interface already suggested the irreducibility to consumption of interface. Interface is the moment and space of interaction of two *distinct* entities. If one participant in the event of interface absorbs the other or if the distinct entities consolidate into one entity, there is no longer any interface. Thus, the very notion of interface is predicated on resistance to consumption. Some interfaces are more durable in their resistance to consumption, while others are designed to quickly resolve into consumption by one participant or another. In this project, I am interested in bible interfaces that ongoingly resist consumption–bible interfaces that consistently promote interface, the sustained engagement that happens in the moment and space when *different* entities interact and simply cannot consume one another.[[30]](#footnote-30)

## Provoking Probabilistic Production

Near the end of her exhortation to humanities scholars to take seriously the task of building a theory of interface, Drucker reminds us that book has always been an interface.

Clearly those with rich experience of book culture perceive the dynamic properties usually attributed to new media already active and present within the older forms, and rightly so. The book is no more self-identical, static, or fixed, than any other artifact that provokes a constitutive reading or response. Strict binarisms and technophilic exuberance lend themselves to exaggerated inaccuracies and hyperbolic rhetorical claims-charming in their own way, but perhaps not so useful for actual design. Many points of continuity exist between print and digitally networked artifacts and these don’t have to depend on the seductive, special-effects, images of frictionless manipulation in holographic information spaces that will supposedly enable our lives in some fantasmatic future. Books, after all, are structured environments that provoke a reading that is probabilistic, not mechanistic, and the text or work is produced as an event, not an entity.[[31]](#footnote-31)

I quote Drucker here at length for two reasons. First, I have at times been prone to and accused of the charming “strict binarisms and technophilic exuberance” Drucker cautions of here. Though I have found hyperbolic rhetoric useful at times to unsettle our unquestioned assumptions about media, I want to be exceedingly clear that, with Drucker, I am not interested in propagating some old/new hierarchical dichotomy between well established book technologies such as the codex and emerging interfaces that push us as users beyond our current imagination of books. This is why I introduced material media translation at the outset of this project as a way to focus our analysis on the continuities and discontinuities of the material interfaces of bible throughout history. Each emerging technology is a translation of what came before it, carrying forward some characteristics of its predecessors, while providing some new affordances.

Second, this passage from Drucker begins and ends with a reminder that book has always been an interface. As the materiality of this interface shifts, we will undoubtedly learn from previous forms as we explore the affordances of emerging technologies. The last full sentence of this passage captures nicely the importance of understanding book as interface. To paraphrase in alliterative fashion, Drucker suggests that a book is an interface that *provokes probabilistic production* through the reading event.[[32]](#footnote-32) Let’s look closely at each of these p-words in reverse order, production, probabilistic, and provokes.

### Production

Reading is production. It is important to remember that in any medium, a book is not simply a container of information to be ingested by a reader. The materialities and cultural contexts of both book and user entangle to produce the possibility for meaning in a reading act. Each encounter between book and user has the potential to offer something different, because reading is a production of meaning contingent upon the particularities of the encounter and its participants. If I read Emmanuel Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being* in a hard bound print monograph as an undergraduate student in the early 2000’s while sitting in the library at a small liberal arts college in Colorado, this will produce something different than my reading of the same text on a computer screen in a continuous scroll text editor as a late stage doctoral student in my house at the dawn of a Trump presidency. Though the “content” or the words of the text may remain identical in both of these cases, the readings simply cannot remain the same. These two reading events are moments in the ongoing making that is my reading of *Otherwise Than Being*. In this sense, perhaps it would be more useful to talk about reading *with* a book rather than the reading *of* a book to help unsettle our typical notions of reading as consumption. Reading *with* a book points toward book as interface, where user and platform are entangled in an emergent relationality that cannot be reduced to consumption.

Drucker emphasizes her constructivist approach to both subject and text by reiterating that a text or work is *produced* in the encounter facilitated by the book. This is another way of stating that book is not simply a window or a container through which we access and consume a text. Rather, book is a space that begs an encounter between user and the structured environment of the technologies and more. Drucker’s foregrounding of reading as production rather than reduced to consumption of a text resonates with the creative tension between production and consumption in Michel de Certeau’s work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.[[33]](#footnote-33)

De Certeau’s explorations of “the practice of everyday life” respect the deep concerns about commodification so well articulated by many materialist critiques of culture. Yet, De Certeau refuses to take on the low view of mass culture and the consumer that often accompanies these historical materialist critiques. De Certeau restores some poetic dignity to the masses by reframing consumption as *production*, giving each person in each moment an agency in the meaning making endeavor.

As unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices.[[34]](#footnote-34)

I am not explicitly taking up the power dynamics de Certeau explores in this work. Yet, his consistent challenge of the production/consumption binary without erasing the role of the structures or the participation of the “consumer” reinforces our approach here of book as interface that provokes production. De Certeau also helpfully highlights that book as interface does not necessarily erase the operations of book as container. The container attributes of book remain as a part of the material structures that constitute the potential productive space of the interface. A theory of interface can resist the reduction of book to container and user to simple viewer without the need to eradicate the container aspects of book or the viewer aspects of user.

De Certeau uses reading as one of his examples of “everyday practices that produce without capitalizing.”[[35]](#footnote-35) He notes the often assumed writing-reading binary as a specific example of the production-consumption binary, but articulates a notion of reading that cannot be reduced to this dichotomy. Reading is a “silent production,” “an ‘art’ which is anything but passive.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Reading as everyday practice is a poiesis, a making, within structured constraints that resists the production-consumption binary and thus offers a notion of reading as interface.

### Probabilistic

In her essay titled “Entity to Event: From Literal, Mechanistic Materiality to Probabilistic Materiality,” Drucker expounds in much more detail her use of the term probabilistic as it relates to reading interfaces.

Probabilistic materiality conceives of a text as an event, rather than an entity. The event is the entire system of reader, aesthetic object and interpretation – but in that set of relations, the text is constituted anew each time. Like weather produced in a system around a landmass, the shape of the reading has a codependent relation to the structure from which it arises. Probability is not free play. It is constrained play, with outcomes calculable in accord with the complexity of the system and range of variable factors, and their combinatoric and transformative relations over time. A text is a highly complex system, containing a host of thermal sinks and basics of attraction.[[37]](#footnote-37)

We can tell even in her interface theory that probabilistic is an alternative to mechanistic for Drucker in her analysis of the shortcomings of interface design as driven by the software development world.[[38]](#footnote-38) Here, in this passage from “Entity to Event,” with its strange alignment (I will include an image of the passage or try to format similiarly in Word to demonstrate her play with alignment), we can see her ability to both show and tell the role of materiality in the reading event. The basic distinction between the mechanistic and the probabilistic for Drucker is that the former attempts to present a user with an entity to consume, while the latter presents the user with a set of possibilities that condition a reading event that will inevitably be new every time. This set of constrained possibilities in the probabilistic production of interface sounds a great deal like the emergent properties of affordance I mentioned in the introduction. Affordances are the set of real or perceived use possibilities offered by the material design of an interface *in relationship to a particular user and context*. As McGrenere and Ho demonstrate, there is a lot of debate and extension around this definition.[[39]](#footnote-39) For our purposes in this section on interfaces, the importance of pointing toward affordances is to remind us that there are material properties of an interface that present a set of possible uses to a user.

With such concepts in mind, we see the page, book, print, or screen space of text and image quite differently from the usual static presentation of thing, and see it instead as an active, dynamic field of forces and energies in dynamic suspension, acting on each other and within a frame of constraint, to produce the conditions a reader is provoked by in the constitutive act of reading that makes the text. Again I come back to the central premise that a text, work of art, aesthetic expression is an event not an entity. The material existence serves as a provocation, set of clues and cues for a performance of the text.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Rather than simply presenting a user with an entity to consume, a probabilistic materiality of interface *provokes* production of both text and user in the practice of reading. Let’s look more closely at the provocation of interface, which Drucker suggests is related to the cues and clues an interface offers for the performance of a text.

### Provoke

With Watts and De Certeau, I begin with the assumption that reading is a material act of production, no matter what the medium. Whether with an ancient papyrus roll, a medieval illuminated manuscript, a print codex, a computer screen, or a mobile phone, reading is an act shaped by both the materialities of the medium and the user.[[41]](#footnote-41) Yet, I want to push us to consider the materialities of the so called “virtual” – digital technologies, computers, the internet, social media, mobile devices, the cloud, artificial intelligence, etc..[[42]](#footnote-42) These technologies also have materialities that shape the encounters they afford and the idea of interface can help us stay attentive to the materiality of reading as use in the age of the internet.

Drucker celebrates the material provocation of reading interfaces. A codex doesn’t simply lay passive on the shelf waiting to be opened and penetrated by the reader. The materiality of the book as interface participates in and provokes a reading event. A page from a book in Kindle reader on my iPhone, which gives me as user all kinds of power over the page, provokes a possible set of reading tactics, even if not entirely determinative. A print codex, with its bound spine, uniform page size, covers, and large open margins begging for participation offers a user a different set of possible encounters. Neither of these interfaces, codex or Kindle reader on an iPhone are simply containers of information. Book as container just waits to be consumed, book as interface provokes encounter. This provocation reminds us that platform is an active participant as structured environment in the relationality that is interface.

## Proximity as Optics

One of the strategies Drucker offers for pursuing a theory of interface as relationality irreducible to consumption is to foreground the role of the subject in interface.[[43]](#footnote-43) Drucker works with a constructivist notion of subject, where the subject is constructed through participation in interface with its environment.[[44]](#footnote-44) Another structure of subjectivity that provides a useful optics for our consideration of bible as interface is the notion of proximity in Emmanuel Levinas. Though the term proximity is often used as a simple synonym for physical closeness in human relationship, Levinas articulates a notion of proximity that problematizes the reduction of relationality to nearness in space and provides an optics for human relationship that is not reducible to consumption.

In drawing on Levinasian notions of subjectivity to inform my analysis of bible as interface, I am not attempting to articulate an alternative to the constructivist subject that animates Drucker’s idea of interface. Nor am I interested in suggesting that bible interfaces participate in the proximity that structures human subjectivity in a Levinasian phenomenology. Instead, the operations of proximity in the face to face encounter of Levinasian ethics offer us an optics or an apparatus for seeing interface as a relationality irreducible to consumption.[[45]](#footnote-45) Rather than asking whether emerging technologies are ethical, I will use proximity as an optics for exploring the affordances of bible in its many lives as interface. Levinas himself speaks and writes very little about technology explicitly,[[46]](#footnote-46) but his negotiations of relationality that cannot be reduced to spatial nearness or to consumption through his idea of proximity have a great deal to offer our discussions of interface.

In the last of Levinas’s major philosophical works, *Otherwise Than Being*, proximity blossoms as a problematization of the distance/nearness spatial binary. He writes, “for proximity is not a simply asymptotic approach of its ‘term.’ Its term is not an end. The more I answer the more I am responsible; the more I approach the neighbor with which I am encharged the further away I am.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Levinas uses the mathematical concept of asymptote, a line that gets infinitely closer to a curve without ever contacting it, to emphasize that his notion of proximity can not be reduced simply to increasing closeness in human encounter. In this resistance to the asymptote as a metaphor for proximity, Levinas indicates concepts of relationality or even interface as face to face that are not derived simply from spatial contiguity or its lack. First and foremost, proximity is a sociality, a “relationship with,” not simply a physical closeness in space and time.[[48]](#footnote-48) This “relationship with” is the core of interface as I have defined it, so we can already imagine proximity as a kind of interface. Proximity, which cannot be reduced to physical or cognitive closeness,[[49]](#footnote-49) is conceptualized with many other terms by Levinas, such as approach, contact, and responsibility. All of these terms connote a kind of engagement that is a process of being approached by a neighbor or a stranger that demands a response more than an intentionally willed choice to approach another and engage. This proximity demands participation before there is a choice.

Typically, the kind of encounter or relationality described here would involve a demand for an intimate knowledge of the other person to make the “relationship with” of proximity compelling. Yet, Levinas is exploring a relationality that is not dependent on such a knowledge, where approach as response precedes knowing. Here is where, in what might initially seem odd, distance plays a role in proximity. There are two distances at work in the discussion of proximity in *Otherwise than Being.* The first distance is the distance of sight or knowledge or the incomplete objective genitive construction, “consciousness of…,” characteristic of phenomenological traditions of intentionality to which Levinas is responding.[[50]](#footnote-50) This distance is simply the distance required for a subject to comprehend an object or for the eye to see an object. Levinasian proximity squeezes this distance by enacting a contact that precedes comprehension, an encounter that is blurry. While proximity in a Levinasian sense resists this distance of comprehension through an asymmetrical entanglement of sociality not reducible to understanding, another kind of distance emerges.[[51]](#footnote-51) This second distance is another way of articulating the difference always at work in this encounter that is proximity.

Levinas calls this distance “a diachrony without a common present,” which suggests that proximity does not actually bring the two terms of this relationship or encounter or interface “together” in any reciprocal way in a shared appearance.[[52]](#footnote-52) This distance as diachrony or difference is not somehow an interruption of an original synchrony or sameness, to which a system is hoping to return. Rather, this distance in proximity is the ever expanding and insatiable demand by the other, which consistently troubles any attempts to consume the other. Levinas writes, “The subject is the more responsible the more it answers for, as though the distance between it and the other increased in the measure that proximity was increased.”[[53]](#footnote-53) This sounds a great deal like Levinas’s reflections on the asymptote metaphor we saw above, where he writes, “The more I answer the more I am responsible; the more I approach the neighbor with which I am encharged the further away I am.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Here, the “further away” that indicates distance refers to the inexhaustibility of the responsibility operative in proximity. At no point, can one draw near enough through the approach of responsibility to master the needs of the other. Instead, as proximity enlarges through the relationality of response to the demand of the other in encounter, so does the inability to fulfill this demand and thus master or consume the other.

Levinas offers at least two hints in the direction of proximity as an optics for interface. First, as Sean Hand highlights so wonderfully in his analysis of Levinas’s evolving relationship with art, Levinas saw in Paul Celan’s poetry “a language of and for proximity.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Hand writes, “Levinas’s appreciation of Celan, in contrast [with Heidegger on Hölderlin], emphasizes the poverty, inadequacy and non-radiance of a language, a language that therefore signifies proximity rather than mastery, and a being for the other rather than a world in being.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Without delving into all of the details of a Levinasian philosophy of art or the ways in which poetry operates in language, we can see here in Hand’s comment and in Levinas’s own reflections on poetry that proximity can offer an optics for poetry that resists simple consumption and provokes probabilistic production in the interface between reader and poem. Thus, if proximity can provide an optics for poetry, proximity as optics can also inform the use and design of bible interfaces.[[57]](#footnote-57)

More specifically related to our questions of bible as interface, Levinas describes his own relationship with bible as book using language that sounds a great deal like his discussions of proximity. In a set of interviews conducted in 1981 on French radio with Philippe Nemo, transcribed in *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas describes his relationship with bible and philosophical writings.[[58]](#footnote-58) It was these very interviews that first stimulated my interest in the possibility of proximity as an optics for bible as interface. In the early discussions of the first interview, which is titled “Bible and Philosophy,” Levinas describes his view of bible as the “book of books,” saying, “It is that extraordinary presence of its characters, that ethical plenitude and its mysterious possibilities of exegesis which originally signified transcendence for me. And no less.”[[59]](#footnote-59) The extraordinary presence of the biblical “characters” is not a celebration of the cast of characters in the biblical stories. Rather, these *characters* are the very letters of the text before they are assembled into words and phrases. These characters are *present* in ways that are beyond the ordinary, irreducible to the semiotic performance of their combinatorial effects.[[60]](#footnote-60) The bible demands a response from its users, a participation that opens to “mysterious possibilities of exegesis.” Ethical plenitude refers not to an abundantly recurring theme of ethics in the content of the biblical writings, but to the inexhaustible resistance to simple consumption enacted in encounter with this book. As we saw in the structure of proximity, even as a user approaches in response, bible can never be contained and thus will always overflow any possible fixed and stable readings, demanding ever more response.

Proximity emerges for Levinas as a reflection on human subjectivity and a particular interface of two humans. Through his reflections on poetry as language and bible as book, we see the operations of proximity at work in a different kind of interface, that between reader and text. Without any attempt or desire to suggest an equivalence between the mechanisms or gravity of human-human interface and user-bible interface for Levinas, this proximity which structures a relationality irreducible to consumption can provide an optics for bible as interface. Proximity as an optics also provides an apparatus for articulating interface that cannot be reduced to simply the interaction and entanglement of user and technological platform. Proximity begs for us to push further to consider the human relational possibilities afforded by these bible interfaces for the larger community of users.

## Tracing Affordances

With proximity as an optics, I will explore the possibility of bible as interface through the affordances of high surface area, collaboration, and anarchy. As discussed in the introduction, an affordance is a possible relationship between a user and a platform in interface. Taking Drucker’s lead in remembering that books have always been interfaces, tracing affordances through several examples of bible as interface will help my analysis stay focused on the relationality made possible by the materialities at work in interface and can help highlight the continuities and discontinuities among the historical and emerging technologies involved. At its best, bible as interface exhibits affordances of high surface area, collaboration, and anarchy.

Interfaces that afford high surface area have many possible points of contact between user and platform. The illustration I often use for high surface area is grinding coffee beans. The finer a coffee beans is ground, the more surface area that gets created for the water to contact and thus the water can draw more flavor from the bean. Interfaces affording high surface area provide expansive points of contact for the relationality of interface. The excessive possibilities for contact make it difficult for an interface to become overly deterministic because of the vast interactive possibilities. In a high surface area interface, a user would find it difficult to exhaust all possible encounters, thus the relationship of the interface always exceeds a users ability to master an interface in its entirety. For example, watching a full length feature film straight through on YouTube is a fairly low surface area interface, since the user engages a continuous linear narrative that is taken in as a whole. On the other hand, searching YouTube for clips related to a recent election scandal can offer a high surface area interface through the many ways into the event offered by the search results.

Interfaces that afford collaboration provide possibilities for both participation in constructing the space of interface and chances for user interaction. Kindle reader on the iphone for example, affords several opportunities for the reader to participate in constructing the interface, such as choosing a font size or a background color for the page. Additionally, Kindle reader allows users to annotate and highlight as they use a book, which can create an entirely new navigation scheme through the material. We find a similar collaborative affordance in the marginalia so popular in medieval manuscripts.

Kindle annotations highlight another aspect of the collaborative capacities of interfaces, the communal process of use. Kindle reader allows users to share their annotations with others and users can enable a feature that will show popular highlights while reading through the book. This popular highlights feature is similar to checking out a book from the library and seeing the markings and highlights left by previous users. The Kindle reader example demonstrates the two layers of collaboration afforded by interfaces that provoke probabilistic production through a relationality irreducible to consumption. First, there is a relationality of participation in constructing the material aspects of the interface rather than simply consuming the content. Second, there is a relationality of community, using and making together not entirely on a user’s own terms.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The third affordance of interfaces that we will look for is anarchy. Levinas himself speaks of proximity as anarchic, saying, “Proximity is thus anarchical, a relationship with a singularity without the mediation of any principle, any ideality.”[[62]](#footnote-62) It is the anarchy of proximity that first drew me to Levinas and it is the anarchy of proximity that offers bible an afterlife in our emerging media age with its proliferation of interfaces. Anarchy in the sense I use it here is something beyond disorder as another order and something significantly more complicated than the simple absence of a beginning or origin. Exploiting the *koine* semantic range of αρχη, which can mean beginning and reign, I hear the anarchic as that which is *without the reign of an original*.[[63]](#footnote-63) Just as proximity resists any mastery or consumption of the other, anarchy in interface resists the closure or consolidation of use to any mechanistic determinism governed by original author, original version, or final form. Anarchy in interface constantly exceeds attempts by users to grasp and order the whole in a stable manner. The Talmudic page provides a beautiful example of anarchy in interface, in the medium of print. The structure of the Talmudic page is very consistent, with Mishnah and Gemara down the center column and additional commentary around the page from there. Yet, the design of the page does not promote an over-determined reconstruction of any original meaning of the biblical text, the mishnah, or its commentary, nor does it promote the reign of a single author or principle. Rather, the Talmudic page anarchically invites users to participate in the ongoing process of exploration and conversation.[[64]](#footnote-64) Articulating this anarchic sensibility of the Talmud, Jacob Neusner writes, “Every Talmudic tractate–there are thirty-seven of them in the Babylonian Talmud–begins on page 2; there are no page 1s because there is no beginning. Wherever you start your study, you will feel you have joined a conversation which began long before you came along.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Of course, every tractate does have a beginning, even if on page 2, and every user does start somewhere. The anarchy of the Talmudic page need not eradicate beginnings, or endings. In interface, the affordance of anarchy facilitates a relationality between user and platform as well as among a community of users that is irreducible to the reign of these originary impulses

With these three affordances of interface in mind, high surface area, collaboration, and anarchy, we can now move toward looking at particular examples of bible as interface throughout its many manifestations in history.[[66]](#footnote-66) These three affordances are not unique to bible nor are they the only affordances at work in bible interfaces. What makes these three affordances particularly important for this study is that they make bible interfaces more durable as interface, sustaining a relationship between user and platform that resists reduction to consumption. Implicit in my argument for bible as interface that affords high surface area, collaboration, and anarchy is my conviction that bible, at its best, refuses reduction to consumption and we can see this durability of interface throughout the life of bible.

I will first trace these affordances of bible as book interface through a roll bible, an ancient codex manuscript, and a kindle bible. Once we have seen the operations of these affordances in bible as book, I will explore the possible translations of high surface area, collaboration and anarchy into bible as interface in one attempt to move beyond the book through manuscript digitization, XML encoding, and web design. Finally, we will trace these affordances into interfaces that have pushed decidedly beyond the book, such as an XML digital bible library, a mobile bible app, and a bible application programming interfaces (APIs). Amidst the common fears and anxieties emerging as new technologies threaten the dominance of the book, attending to the affordances of bible as interface can help use of bible flourish beyond the book, while remaining deeply connected to the material history of bible.

1. At several points in his book, *A History of Religion in 5 1/2 Objects*, Plate cleverly articulates his aim with the turn of phrase, “bringing the spiritual to its senses.” See p. 19-22 for some examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Plate, *5 1/2 Objects*, 22. In a personal conversation with Jeffrey Mahan, he mentioned that in teaching Plate’s methodologies, some students assume Plate is articulating a notion of religion that is absent of God or belief. I can see how this quote could be taken in such a binary or exclusionary fashion, even if not necessarily Plate’s intention. For our purposes here, I will use language of religion as technology, which is *irreducible* to belief, in order to dethrone the role of belief in the study and practice of religion without a need to eradicate it as a part of religious phenomena. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Plate, *5 1/2 Objects*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Plate, *5 1/2 Objects*, 22. As Hutchings notes in “Augmented graves and virtual Bibles,” 88, Plate’s approach is closely connected to the physicality of the human senses and often doesn’t explicitly deal with the materialities of the digital. With Hutchings, I am taking a more technical (pun intended) approach to technology than Plate by focusing on what we more readily imagine as technological platforms for accessing Judeo-Christian sacred texts through books, websites, mobile devices, and APIs. Yet, Plate signals his attention to the religious ramifications of the extended materialities of emerging technologies in his treatment of media in the skinscape of religion and his articulation of the soul as technology. In *5 1/2 Objects*, 23, Plate writes, “Religion in a high-tech, media-saturated, global-economic age is as reliant on objects as it is in smaller scale societies.” For more on skinscape and the skin of religion, see Plate, “The Skin of Religion : Aesthetic Mediations of the Sacred,” *Cross Currents* 62, no. 2 (June 2012): 162–80. For more on soul as technology, see Plate, *5 1/2 Objects*, 184-192. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Both belief and text are complicated and rich categories that are not always reducible to content. For example, see David Morgan’s treatment of belief in “The Matter of Belief” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, David Morgan, ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-18. In this study, conceptualizing the text of bible as content simply points out the typical propensity toward focus on exegetical and interpretive practices without close attention to the material relationship between bible and user. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For more information on the Iconic Books Project and SCRIPT, see http://jameswwatts.net/iconicbooks/ and http://script-site.net/, respectively. James Watts happens to host the Iconic Books Project website under his own web domain, he is the main contributor to the Iconic Books Project Blog, and he is the current treasurer of SCRIPT. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Watts, “Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” 6. Watts finds these three dimensions in all books, not just scriptures. Scripture emerges from the degree to which a community ritualizes these dimensions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Watts, “Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In *More than Belief*, Manuel Vasquez provides a practice based approach to challenge the textualism, the focus on the interpretation of texts, that has dominated the study of religion and biblical studies at the expense of a careful attention to the role of the senses in relationship to the material objects of the world as constituting the theory and practice of religion. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Watts, “Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Watts, “Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” 7-8. As a reminder, Watts’s thesis has to do with the ritualization of these three dimensions as the production of scripture and he finds these dimensions in all books. The meaning of the words, the performance of reading, and the materiality of the book always matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Interface,” https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/interface, accessed on September 29, 2017. The noun definition of “interface” is “A point where two systems, subjects, organizations, etc. meet and interact.” Even though we often see the word “between” used with “interface,” such as “the interface between religion and science,” the simple noun definition of interface I have quoted above highlights that interface is a “point” or space or surface of meeting. This space of meeting is mutually constructed by the contact of the differing systems. Interface, in this sense, is not necessarily a space “between” two systems, but the space created by the entangled “interaction” of two systems. Since our definition states that systems must meet *and* interact, contact alone is not sufficient for interface, there must be some interaction among the systems. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. If I were working with a medium other than print here, I would embed the results from my google search for “define ‘interface.’” The google search algorithm for definitions draws on many sources to provide a quick look at the main definitions of a term, its etymology, its frequency over time, and gives you the ability to translate the term into other languages. Due to the demands and customs of the print genre and related citation tendencies, I have chosen to reference a combination of OED and other useful definitions, particularly because the OED entries for this term are vastly outdated. Given my experience with this particular word, “interface,” I can’t help but question the subtitle of the OED online, which is “The definitive record of the English language.” The google define algorithm results for “interface” can be found by running a google search on “define interface” and the Oxford Dictionaries Online free version entry can be found at https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/interface. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “interface, n.”. OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.du.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/97747?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=QjGVLf& (accessed December 21, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/interface [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. google “define interface” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The verbal definitions of interface are simply “to interact with” or “to connect with.” Link to the Oxford Online Dictionaries. The simplicity of these verbal forms and my brevity in addressing them are not indicative of the importance I place on the verbal aspect of interface. Yet, our difficult task here is to explore bible as interface without reducing interface to any one of these definitions at the expense of the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Johanna Drucker, “Humanities Approaches to Interface Theory,” Culture Machine 12, no. 0 (February 18, 2011), https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/434, and “Entity to Event: From Literal, Mechanistic Materiality to Probabilistic Materiality,” Parallax 15, no. 4 (November 1, 2009): 7–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. It was actually a combination of Drucker’s essay and my conversations with Timothy Beal about “bible as media” at the 2014 Nida School of Translation Studies, where Beal was Nida Professor. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Drucker, “Interface Theory,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Drucker, ‘Interface Theory,’ 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Drucker, “Interface Theory,” 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Drucker, “Interface Theory,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Drucker, “Interface Theory,” 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Drucker, “Interface Theory,” 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Drucker, “Entity to Event,” 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Plate, *5 1/2 Objects*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Watts, “Three Dimensions of Scriptures,” 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This notion of consumption as homogeneity, consolidation, and absortption and my resistance to it in articuating a rich notion of interface comes from a combination of the dominant view of media as homogenizing in the Frankfurt School and Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of proximity as that which infinitely resists homogenization. For an example of the Frankfurt School view of the role of technologies in consumption, see the discussion of the telephone and radio in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s essay, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 94-96. As will become clear throughout this project, I do not hold the same pessimism about technologies that pervaded the Frankfurt School’s critiques. For an example of Levinasian proximity as resisting consumption, see the note on obsession, a synonym for proximity, in Emmanuel Levinas,* Otherwise than Being, Or, Beyond Essence\*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2009), 191, n. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Drucker, ‘Interface Theory,’ 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Drucker, ‘Interface Theory,’ 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Some have used the language of “prosumer” or “prosumption” to indicate this blurring of production and consumption. Introduced by Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave* CITATION, the use of prosumption langauge has resurfaced in relation to web technologies in the work of George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson (CITATION). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. de Certeau, *Practice*, xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. de Certeau, *Practice*, xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. de Certeau, *Practice*, xxi-xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Johanna Drucker, ‘Entity to Event: From Literal, Mechanistic Materiality to Probabilistic Materiality,’ Parallax 15, no. 4 (2009): 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Drucker, ‘Interface Theory,’ 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See McGrenere and Ho, “Affordances: Clarifying and Evolving a Concept,” 1, for a brief history of the use of the term. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Drucker, ‘Entity to Event,’ 14. Again we see similarities with Watt’s three dimensions of scripture as the interpretive act is about making semantic meaning in the performance of reading as constrained by the materiality of the space of the event of encounter between user and book. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. I am aware of the limitations of talking about medium and user as distinct entities and the ease with which we might slip into simple subject/object binaries here. One of the difficult tasks of this project is to challenge these dichotomies in so far as they encourage a subject consuming object model of reading. Perhaps the emerging discussions of object oriented ontology could provide an interesting conversation partner with interface theory. Imagining both medium and user as objects that have properties and methods they bring to an encounter could help emphasize the entangled production of reading as process model I am advocating for here. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Drucker, “Entity to Event,” 7, also challenges the material movement to consider more thoughtfully the materiality of the virtual, pointing back to the Abrahamic traditions of mapping matter to flesh. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For an introduction to the role of different philosophical notions of subjectivity and the role of ethics in interface, see Lucas Introna, “Phenomenological Approaches to Ethics and Information Technology”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/ethics-it-phenomenology/>.] [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Drucker, *Interface Theory*, 3, writes, “The constructivist subject of the digital platform emerges in a codependent relation with its affordances. This is the ‘subject of interface’ when interface is conceived as a dynamic space of relations, rather than as a ‘thing’.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The term optics appears four times in *Totality and Infinity* on p. 23, 29, 78, and 174. The most often noted articulation of this idea in Levinas is his phrase, “ethics is an optics.” An optic is an apparatus for seeing or a necessary precursor for the ability to see. For Levinas, the ethical encounter of the face, otherwise stated as one’s infinite responsibility for the other, is not governed by vision or knowledge or intentionality of the typical sort. Instead, this ethical encounter provides the apparatus for the very possibility of seeing, knowing, and willing. This is how I mean proximity as an optics, as an apparatus for the possibility of interface as relationality irreducible to consumption. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. As Richard Cohen, *Ethics and Cybernetics*, 28, notes, the most pivotal chapter of Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being*, which is titled “Substitution,” offers a fitting mention of proximity in relationship to terminology we often find in discussions of technology, such as “circulation of information” and “resolved into ‘images.’ After introducing the shortcomings associated with placing consciousness qua knowledge at the foundation of humanness, Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 101, articulates an alternative, saying,”In starting with sensibility interpreted not as a knowing but as proximity, in seeking in language contact and sensibility, behind the circulation of information it becomes, we have endeavored to describe subjectivity as irreducible to consciousness and thematization. Proximity appears as the relationship with the other, who cannot be resolved into “images” or be exposed in a theme. It is the relationship with what is not disproportionate to the arche in thematization, but incommensurable with it, with what does not derive its identity from the kerygmatic logos, and blocks all schematism." [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Levinas, *OTB*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Levinas, *OTB*, 17, writes, “It figures as what is near in a proximity that counts as sociality, which ‘excites’ by its pure and simple proximity.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Levinas, *OTB*, 48, writes, “An analysis that starts with proximity, irreducible to consciousness of…, and describable, if possible, as an inversion of its intentionality, will recognize this responsibility to be a substitution.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Levinas, *OTB*, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Levinas, *OTB*, 90, writes, “Proximity, suppression of the distance that consciousness of… involves, opens the distance of a diachrony without a common present, where difference is the past that cannot be caught up with, an unimaginable future, the non-representable status of the neighbor behind which I am late and obsessed by the neighbor. This difference is my non-indifference to the other. Proximity is a disturbance of the rememberable time.” [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Levinas, *OTB*, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *OTB*, 139-40. I would argue that Levinas unhelpfully uses proximity as a synonym for nearness in this passage, since proximity is the dual operation of increasing distance and nearness. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Levinas, *OTB*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Levinas, “Being and the Other: On Paul Celan,” 17, writes, “A language of and for proximity–more ancient than that of the ‘truth of Being’ (which it probably bears and supports), the first of languages–response preceding question, responsibility to the neighbor–, making possible through its ‘for the other’ the whole miracle of giving.” [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Levinas, *OTB*, 192 n. 10, makes another explicit claim for the relationship between poetry and proximity in his discussion of obsession, writing, “But is not the poetry of the world prior to the truth of things, and inseparable from what is proximity par excellence, that of a neighbor, or of the proximity of the neighbor par excellence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. In his reflections on revelation in the Jewish tradition, Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 132, suggests, “It is by going back to the Hebrew text from the translations, vulnerable as they may be, that the strange or mysterious ambiguity or polysemy authorized by the Hebrew syntax is revealed: words coexist rather than immediately being co-ordinated or subordinated with and to one another, contrary to what is predominant in the languages that are said to be developed or functional. This coexistence of words before and irreducible to their coordination is the extraordinary presence of the characters of the bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Wikipedia offers another good example of collaborative capacities, where a user can participate in crafting an entry with a team of people from around the globe without any previous “knowledge” or who these partners are. Now, Wikipedia does not necessarily demand participation in the same way that the encounter with the other does in Levinasian subjectivity, because a user can simply take in the content of the page. Yet, again, the possibility of collaboration both in building the entry with strangers and sharing bits of it with others, as an affordance, has the potential to shape a disposition toward response-ability in human-human interface. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Levinas, *OTB*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Despite the semantic negation built into the word an-archy, I am uninterested in arguing for the absence of original. In my early attempts to articulate this anarchy in the realm of translation studies through a talk titled “From Murder to Anarchy” at the Nida School of Translation Studies 2014, I fear I had fallen into the trap of archaizing the anarchic by arguing for the eradication of the notion of original in the process of translation. The conversations with translators who have spent their lives caring for and working with both biblical and literary texts taught me that we needn’t eschew the presence, value, and operation of an original or source text in the process of translation in order to question said original’s governance over the validity or even methodology of a translation. We can always construct an original given a particular data set and time frame. Instead of eradicating any notion of original, I am asking us to consider a kind of reading, a mode of making, that operates *without the reign of an original*. In this vein, anarchy becomes one mechanism for the probabilistic production offered by interfaces that we discussed in chapter 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 5, points toward this anarchic sensibility of the Talmudic page, writing, “The pages of the Talmud, mischevious, laconic in their ironic or dry formulations, but in love with the possible, register an oral tradition and a teaching which came to be written down accidentally. It is important to bring them back to their life of dialog or polemic in which multiple, though not arbitrary, meanings arise and buzz in each saying. These Talmudic pages seek contradiction and expect of a reader freedom, invention and boldness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*, 170. Joel Luri Grishaver, *Talmud with Training Wheels*, 13, points out that though Nuesner touches on a truth of Talmudic interface, tractates begin on page 2 also because page 1 was reserved materially for the title page. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. In her Media Specific Analysis methodology , N. Katherine Hayles uses the helpful language of “instantiation” to refer to the particular manifestation of a set of affordances in a given material media context. This language of instantiation continues to highlight the continuities at work in material media translation. For Hayles’s Media Specific Analysis of hypertext, see N. Katherine Hayles, “Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 1 (March 20, 2004): 67–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)