
Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE)

Publications

Introduction: Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing

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Introduction: Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing¹

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As scholarly research evolves alongside digital technology, many researchers and practitioners across disciplines and communities have begun to explore different venues and modes for sharing knowledge. On February 5 and 6, 2014, researchers, students, and other participants gathered together in Whistler, BC, Canada, to discuss issues relating to scholarly publishing in Canada. The day-and-a-half-long meeting, “Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing,” welcomed participants representing several Canadian libraries, universities, publishers, and scholarly organizations, among others. The event was hosted by Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE, 2014) and sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). This gathering aimed to facilitate collaborations and discussions around the future of scholarly publishing. The gathering was animated by changes in publishing wrought by the digital turn – when research is disseminated online, for example, it is no longer bound to the fixity of print and can be endlessly updated and revised. The increasing trend toward using open peer-review systems and open access online publishing platforms represents a major shift in academic culture and scholarly publishing. As a result, the speculative nature of research projects is increasingly tied to the evolution and development of technology and programming standards. The conventional print-based production of scholarly artifacts such as scholarly journals and monographs makes them ready candidates for transformation and renewal. Not since the emergence of print culture have the humanities been so closely related to the development of communications technology for the purposes of knowledge dissemination.

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This transformational period also holds new consequences. When scholarship is done digitally, valuable research projects are exposed to the risk of becoming inaccessible or irrelevant due to technological failures, rather than academic weaknesses. Projects may be archived in ways that are not accessible or transferable in the medium or long term. Ongoing funding and institutional support are now required to host, maintain, and update online projects and resources. Even though recent studies show that online dissemination increases the reach and citation statistics for scholarship, the stakeholder communities of researchers, students, and the general public have yet to devise the best way to support sustainable, accessible digital content.² As participants at “Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing” acknowledged, scholarly publishing must be pragmatic, practical, and productive. Knowledge mobilization is increasingly online, open access, and broadly searchable; the cultural, political, and economic contribution of the humanities may now be measured by the empirical rigours of forum activity of community collaborators, page views, and reused open source digital resources.

Alongside the challenges noted above, there are significant opportunities in the development of new avenues to disseminate scholarly research. Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2011), Director of Scholarly Communication at the Modern Language Association, has given voice to the current state and future possibilities of scholarly communication in *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy*. She optimistically looks for ways to open academic culture to “the possibility that new modes of publishing might enable, not just more texts, but better texts, not just an evasion of obsolescence, but a new life for scholarship” (p. 14). Fitzpatrick’s forward-looking thinking seemed to implicitly frame much of the conversation at “Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing.” During this energetic gathering, participants shared their research projects, introduced new initiatives, and deliberated on the collaborative action items necessary for realizing the “new life for scholarship” and publishing in Canada and beyond. This collection provides a snapshot of the conversations, deliberations, and provocations from our time together in Whistler.

The terms of academic publishing are undoubtedly changing as digital innovations grow and proliferate. One of the lead speakers, Brian Owen of the Public Knowledge Project, adeptly covered this topic in his talk: “The Software and System Development Lifecycle: From Prototype to Production.” In addition to the broader changes in scholarly communication, those working in libraries, research centres, university presses, academic journals, and para-academic organizations are taking on new roles and responsibilities. The keynote speaker of “Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing,” Janet Halliwell, opened the gathering with a comprehensive overview of the many moving parts of Canadian scholarly production, challenging participants to examine how their own contributions are contingent on, or at least connected to, all of the factors involved. She focused on stakeholders, areas for growth, shifting norms of practice, and, perhaps most importantly, action-oriented next steps.

Clare Appavoo, another lead speaker, and Sabina Pagotto, both of the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN), reflected on Halliwell’s contribution by explicitly discussing the shifting role of academic libraries in this transformational environment. They introduced CRKN’s Integrated Digital Scholarship Ecosystem (IDSE), a developing

initiative that integrates the many players and priorities of Canadian digital scholarship. **Rowland Lorimer** of the Canadian Association for Learned Journals (CALJ) comments on the state of scholarly publishing in Canada, offering thorough insights into the financial, social, and cultural obstacles that arise as academic institutions move toward an open access model of knowledge mobilization. Lorimer emphasizes the importance of long-term thinking in order to support Canada's research libraries as open access hubs of orderly, sustainable, and productive information.

Theoretical engagements with scholarly publishing and the changing face of academic work remain important avenues for debate, speculation, and reflection. Critical interpretations of online platforms created and sustained outside of traditional academic forums offer valuable insight into a development trajectory of scholarly communication. Through an exploration of eTheology platforms, **Richard Lane** explores the advantages of popular or non-academic digital knowledge spaces and their potential application to secular electronic publishing. Longer running projects also offer a wellspring of experience that is valuable to many research communities. **Susan Brown** and **John Simpson** draw on tool development by the INKE Project, the Orlando Project, and the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory in a reflection on the iterative and recursive nature of humanities scholarship. In order to avoid being top-down, tools meant to ease scholars' day-to-day practices and help build digital projects should be developed in response to the actual textual editing, changing, and, perhaps most importantly, versioning that is at the heart of cultural scholarship. Skeptical about the rush to new publishing platforms and their attendant tools, **David Wright** questions the value of transforming scholarly publishing in a peer review paradigm, which often dictates the content and form of scholarly content. Wright places an emphasis on the future possibilities of peer review and how scholarly production will evolve to become an increasingly public process.

As research in the humanities becomes more collaborative and interdisciplinary, large groups of scholars must negotiate the challenges of collaborating productively in a digital environment. **Lynne Siemens** reflects upon the challenges faced by humanists when entering a collaborative research environment and the cultural changes necessary to adapt a cooperative working relationship traditionally found in the sciences or social sciences. Siemens uses her experience in the INKE Research Group as a case study to offer further recommendations for other research teams. **William Bowen**, **Matthew Hiebert**, and **Constance Crompton** report on the next stage of the INKE-associated Iter Community's social network experiment. Building on the original vision of Iter Community, the new space extends the social to include an online scholarly collaboration space that reflects John Unsworth's (2000) "scholarly primitives." It also fosters the development of online editions within a larger digital environment that supports production, community feedback, and peer review. Similarly inspired by a need to improve collaborative research within the Humanities and Fine Arts Digital Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, **Jon Bath** has worked with a team to develop a plugin compatible with the open source reference-management tool Zotero that enriches large-scale research projects. Bath's team sought to facilitate collaborative research in digital environments by better collecting, organizing, and annotating resources through a visualization interface that links relevant content. Its game-based approach inspires participation.

User interface is a central research question for many digital humanists and animates many of the essays in this collection. For example, **Stan Ruecker** and INKE's interface design team consider the centrality of metadata and other digital apparatus to better design electronic text. Ruecker and his co-authors are working to align form with content and to produce fully integrated reading tools. **Jon Saklofske** invites his audience to imagine a space where archival material can be explored on a very large scale. By taking inspiration from interface designs of video games and online mapping platforms, Saklofske describes how the NewRadial Web-based digital environment for humanities research and collaboration will visually transform our experience of large collections.

The proceedings from this gathering are also punctuated with more specific research projects. Representatives **Liz Grumbach** and **Laura Mandell** share the premise and activities of the Advanced Research Consortium (ARC), a research group that aggregates written documents spanning from the Middle Ages to the start of the modern period, provides users with high-quality images and transcription, offers peer review to contributing projects, and supplies guidance on metadata standards to ensure the sustainability and interoperability of digital resources. Further, Grumbach and Mandell outline the affordances of the virtual research environments provided by ARC's five nodes: the Medieval Electronic Scholarly Alliance (MESA), 18thConnect, Nineteenth-Century Scholarship Online (NINES), Modernist Networks (ModNets), and the Renaissance Knowledge Network (ReKN). In their paper, **Daniel Powell** and **Ray Siemens** report on the status of ReKN, the ARC node they are most involved with. ReKN is a large-scale collaborative project that spans the University of Victoria, the University of Toronto, and Texas A&M University. While still in the planning phase, ReKN aims to centralize and integrate research and production in a single online platform that will serve the specific needs of early modern scholars. **Brent Nelson** picks up on the ReKN discussion and considers the limitations of contemporary networked knowledge for scholarship. Nelson suggests developing a person authority mechanism for linking data across digital projects that have a specific focus on Renaissance materials.

Laura Estill details the origin, evolution, limitations, and potentialities of the World Shakespeare Bibliography. As the technology continues to evolve from the Bibliography's beginnings in the 1949 issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Estill seeks a means of modernizing this large and vital online resource for students in the field and future scholars. Jumping ahead a few centuries, **Stephen Ross** of the Modernist Versions Project (MVP) introduces the Linked Modernisms Project, an initiative that aims to allow researchers to discover, visualize, and build on relationships among versions of modernist texts and other outputs of cultural production. The Linked Modernisms Project relies in part on harvesting information from the forthcoming *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, edited by Ross. **John Simpson** outlines the value of the Semantic Web for humanists, demonstrating how RDF markup will let scholars add elements, metadata, and reciprocal links. By connecting resources in this way, computers can infer connections between entities and make the Web more than the sum of its individual documents and databases. Although the current Web often seems to be connected in a unidirectional manner, the Semantic Web could connect data through reciprocity and inferencing, which could, as Simpson says, "forever chang[e] the face of scholarly research."

In active discussions, the participants of “Building Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Publishing” repeatedly returned to four focus areas for improving current Digital Humanities (DH) and electronic publishing practices: public outreach and education, open access, resource and infrastructure improvement, and knowledge sharing. By developing these areas, those aligned with the digital humanities, broadly considered, could embark on widely discussed institutional change. In order to capture the connections between the articles, and to outline some pragmatic next steps, the attendees gathered in small groups to determine the following:

1. An increase in outreach would enable the digital humanities to serve the public on a larger and more visible scale. There are many avenues for increasing outreach, from improving PR activities to hosting community-focused workshops, such as hackathons or K-12 humanities fairs (in partnership with local school districts). Continued, immersive scaling up of participatory DH training, coupled with a lowering of the barrier to access for students, researchers, librarians, and other interested parties, would be highly beneficial. Community engagement can be adroitly realized through more public education, better promotion of current research and projects, and a more distinct focus on the true meaning of accessibility – that information must be both *available* and *comprehensible* in order for others to engage with it.

2. Open access is a key element for knowledge sharing between communities. A disconnect persists between current publishing initiatives and an ideal, sustainable, open access future. *But how do we get there?* More pointedly, how do we get there without bankrupting journals, crushing publishers, and destroying other valuable, long-established humanities traditions? One step in addressing this disconnect could be searching out co-op research models for sustainability – perhaps a viable task for libraries or consortia. Other important strategies include leading by example, maintaining a commitment to open access publishing activities, and promoting the value and pragmatics of open access.

3. We need better strategies to improve infrastructure and increase resources. In order to persuasively communicate with individuals and organizations, researchers and practitioners must consider how to connect and collaborate with others to meet resource, infrastructure, and sustainability needs. Working closely with national digital infrastructure providers (e.g., Compute Canada) is one way the DH community can leverage existing Canadian hardware and human resources and foster the sharing of knowledge across geographic and disciplinary boundaries. Bringing together various invested parties in the same place, and on equal footing, is necessary for these productive, supportive collaborations to take place. The importance of ongoing support for projects and prototypes throughout their lifecycle – from planning to implementation to sustainability – cannot be understated. Not only do research communities need to be bridged, but a need for co-ordinated leadership, overall national strategies, well-managed and curated data sets, and long-term repositories also persists. There are various suggestions to attend to the above, including developing an overarching catalogue of digital humanities tools (including ones that have been retired), services, and researchers. A service catalogue would potentially alleviate the lack of data sharing, mismatch of appropriate users and projects, and issues with

existing tools. This service catalogue of tools and projects would ideally take the form of an attractive national clearinghouse, developed through strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships.

4. Sharing knowledge and conclusions across disciplinary, administrative, institutional, and even national boundaries is crucial. One of the more poignant suggestions at the gathering was to *get out of the university* – to expand research and interest scope beyond academia and begin real communication initiatives with other groups. This general practice-based shift could be realized in many ways. Researchers, for instance, could improve the visibility of their routines and projects (via explanatory videos, social media, a maintained Web presence, et cetera). Academic prototypes could be tested with individuals from many disciplines and backgrounds and could focus on how varied users engage. Tools could be promoted better and made more accessible to a larger public (including through DOIs, versioning, evaluation, and generalization). And finally, although scholars are not traditionally experts at self-promotion, this activity has been identified as pivotal for sharing conclusions and attracting interest in ongoing endeavours. Through sustained action, cross-domain development and communication can and will improve.

These conversations will continue at the INKE-hosted “Sustaining Partnerships to Transform Scholarly Production” in Whistler, BC, on January 27 2015.

Notes

1. Authors who have submitted articles to this special issue are in bold.
2. See the studies performed by Péter Jacsó (2009) and Yassine Gargouri, Chawki Hajjem, Vincent Larivière, Yves Gingras, Les Carr, Tim Brody, and Stevan Harnad (2010).

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