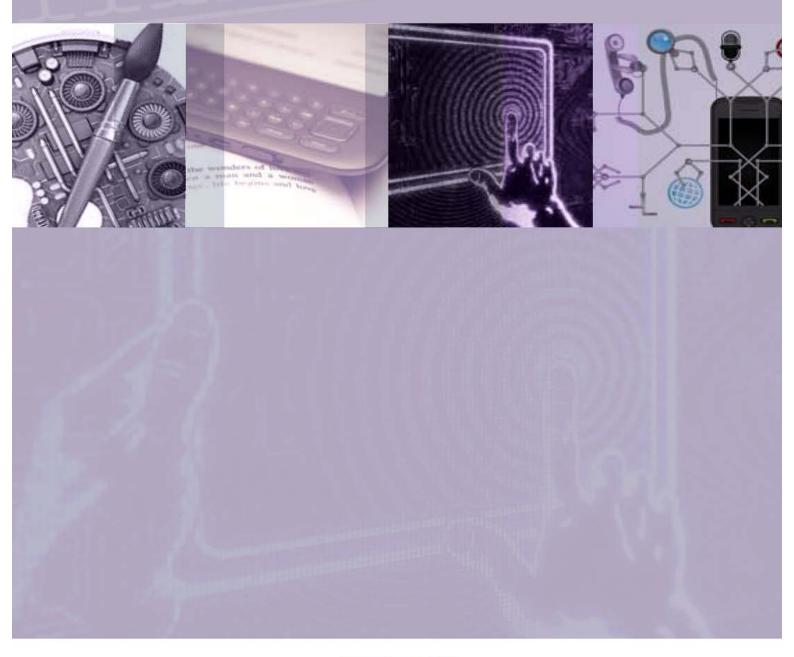# Digital Transformations

Tackling crucial issues for a digital age, such as intellectual property, cultural memory and identity, and communication and creativity

Transforming Artist Books

Beth Williamson

Executive Summary

With the growth of digital technology, there is a new expectation among potential users of artist books and those that collect and care for them that the activities of making, cataloguing, storing, displaying, handling and looking at artist books can and should be enhanced by the digital. The discussions of the research network 'Transforming Artist Books', running from February to August 2012, began from a recognition that important national collections of artist books are largely inaccessible to the majority of their potential users and that this situation could be transformed through digital technology. Rather than viewing the computer screen and electronic text and image as a challenge or threat to the physical printed page, this international research network explored the potential of the digital to transform our understanding, appreciation and care of artist books. These issues were explored through a series of themed workshops pertinent to the study of artist books and digital transformations: 'Transforming the Medium,' 'Transforming Creation' and 'Transforming Discovery.'

Researchers and Project Partners

The project partner institutions for 'Transforming Artist Books' were:

Tate
The British Library
Victoria and Albert Museum
University of the Arts London

The researchers participating in the project were:

Bernadette Archer, Victoria and Albert Museum

Sarah Bodman, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West of England

Betty Bright, Curator and Historian, Minnesota Centre for Book Art, Minneoapolis

Eugene Ch'ng, Senior Lecturer in Visualisation, Visual and Spatial Technologies Centre, University of Birmingham

Richard Clay, Senior Lecturer in History of Art and Co-Director of Heritage and Cultural Learning Hub, University of Birmingham

Paul Coldwell, Professor, CCW Graduate School, UAL

Helen Douglas, Book artist and lecturer on Book Arts Specialism,
MA Visual Arts, Camberwell College of Arts

Johanna Drucker, Bernard and Martin Breslauer Professor of Bibliography, UCLA

Bryan Eccleshall, Artist and PhD Candidate, Sheffield Hallam University

Elisabeth Fairman, Senior Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts,
Yale Center for British Art

Karen di Franco, Digital Archivist, Book Works

Nicolas Frespech, Book Artist

Adrian Glew, Archivist, Tate

Gustavo Grandal Montero, Collection Development Librarian, CCW, UAL

Melanie Grant, Serials Librarian, Tate

Eileen Hogan, Co-Investigator and Professor, CCW Graduate School

Clive Izard, Head of Creative Service, The British Library

Elizabeth James, Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

Susan Johanknecht, Subject Leader, Book Arts Specialism, MA Visual Arts, Camberwell College of Arts

Sharon Lacey, PhD Candidate, University of London

Anne Lydiat, Artist
Jo Melvin, BA FA Theory Coordinator, Chelsea College of Art & Design

Maxine Miller, Library Collections Manager, Tate

Jennifer Mundy, Head of Collection Research, Tate

Clive Phillpot, Writer, curator and former librarian at Chelsea College of Art & Design and Director of the Library at the Museum of Modern Art in New York

Jane Rolo, Director, Book Works

Barry Smith, Professor and Director, Institute of Philosophy, School of Advanced Study, University of London

John Stack, Head of Tate Online, Tate

Michael Stocking, Director, Armadillo Systems

Roger Thorp, Publishing Director, Tate Publishing

Rowan Watson, Senior Curator, Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

Anne Welsh, Lecturer in Library and Information Studies and Digital Identity Manager, UCL

Maria White, Chief Cataloguer, Tate

Beth Williamson, Principal Investigator and Post-doctoral Research Assistant, Tate

Steve Woodall, Director, The Center for Book and Paper Arts, Columbia College, Chicago

Summary report

Introduction

The project 'Transforming Artist Books' explored the potential of the digital to transform our understanding, appreciation and care of artist books. These issues were explored through a series of themed workshops.

The first workshop 'Transforming the Medium' addressed two different but related questions. First, it worked with technology specialists to examine the relationship of the physical book to its digital representation and how that might be rendered. Secondly, it worked with book artists and librarians to interrogate how that transformation might affect users' experience of the book. Touch, scale and the intimate relationship of the book to its reader were important issues explored in this session.

The second workshop 'Transforming Creation' worked with artists to understand better recent developments in the creation of artist books in digital form (that is, born-digital works). By extending our understanding of the concepts and formats of artist books from the printed page to iPad publications, free downloadable e-books, hypertext works and phone-based works, for instance, this workshop asked how we might nurture those practices and facilitate their growth. By engaging directly with contemporary practice in this way, the network embarked upon understanding significant shifts in the nature of the artist book.

The third workshop was initially titled 'Catalogues and Copyright' but with the assistance of the librarians in the network it developed to become 'Transforming Discovery'. This asked how artist books of all forms could be catalogued to make them more accessible and so transform the way in which people can engage with them. Should they be catalogued as both books and art objects? Should they be more fully catalogued to enable thematic searching? How we might collect new formats of artist books? Should images be provided to allow visual browsing? And how might questions of copyright be addressed in this context?

Collaborations

The collaborations that developed throughout the project were sometimes planned and sometimes serendipitous. The partner institutions and core participants had already been identified at an early stage when the funding application was initially made. These individuals and their institutions were planned collaborations from the outset. However, once the project began and awareness of it spread throughout the academic, museum, library and book arts communities, other individuals made contact. Some of these individuals were invited to participate and existing participants were also able to suggest further specialist participants for future workshops. One of the unexpected routes to collaboration was the development of new working relationships between individual participants. The PI was invited by librarians in the group to share the work of the network with the ARLIS UK & Ireland annual conference. The Co-I collaborated with Armadillo Systems to create a new artwork using Turning the Pages 2.0 (TTP 2.0) software. Artist Helen Douglas of Weproductions collaborated with Tate Research and Armadillo Systems to develop a prototype iPad app. As well as contributing considerably to the work of the network, this app continues to be further developed and will soon be made available for public download.

Project evolution

Of the three main topics of interest for Digital Transformations, 'Translating Knowledge' was the topic originally identified as important for 'Transforming Artist Books'. The three workshops all focused on different aspects of 'Translating Knowledge' (for the artist, the art school, the museum, the library, the reader) and the project was able to being to refine some of the questions initially set out. Questioning how readers come to know and experience an artist book through its surface and their senses was central to discussion in the first workshop. However, these questions remained with participants and seemed to gather urgency as the project developed. The introduction of classical and contemporary philosophical perspectives on these matters was particularly helpful in refining these questions. The PI is currently bringing those same perspectives to bear on related scholarly articles and potential future projects.

The overarching question has always been one of access. Currently these books are available by appointment only in library reading rooms. Yet, this is not just about digitising collections and offering the possibility of reader's accessing those collections globally at any time of day or night. It is about cataloguing existing collections more fully and making the job of discovery easier. It is also about using those digitised books to encourage readers back into the library to explore the materiality of the book for themselves. At once reassessing and reaffirming the physical book, the digital offers restitution to the idea of the book, offering new modes of engagement and a new surface to explore. Here each form of the work supports the other, while informing our understanding of both**.**

Other questions relevant to the topic of 'Text: Authority and Power' also emerged. Artists collaborating with software developers quickly perceived their authorship and ownership of artworks to be under threat. However, questions of authorship are not new and more work would be required to establish whether such questions are sufficiently unique in digital transformations to make them worthy of further research.

Lessons

Working within the Digital Transformations theme participants have gained a much firmer understanding of what Digital Transformations is and what it could achieve. Thinking beyond the idea of simply digitising individual books or collections, we can now think through a range of possibilities to transform artist books into digital assets. For instance, digital artist books might be associated with a range of other texts for a variety of different sorts of readers. These might include scholarly essays for academics, artist biographies for all readers and small publisher profiles, for example. And while major collections of artist books each have their own strengths, they also overlap. It is perhaps at these points of overlap that there is most potential to digitise and enrich collections. In this way new readers gain access to enriched material and are offered new experiences. Enabling readers to annotate digital renderings of artist books and generating an on-going critical dialogue might capture and further enhance these experiences.

One lesson that has been appreciated by all participants is the importance of collaborating with colleagues from other disciplines and from different sorts of institutions and organisations. The importance of having a diverse group of colleagues from art history,

museology, fine art, librarianship, publishing and digital technologies cannot be emphasised enough.

The expectation of speed of development and of permanent online connectedness has been another lesson of the theme. The increasing use and importance of social media for outreach and to engage new audiences is already well known. Its importance for the sharing and exchange of ideas in research itself is only just beginning to be understood.

Future plans

The research has developed a number of future plans that fall into two categories. The first category concerns extending the life of the initial project beyond the funded period in several ways. Before the end of 2012 the existing project webpage will have been supplemented with ten short texts commissioned from selected network participants; a cross-section of participants were asked to reflect on artist books in the digital realm. These will be framed by a short introduction from the PI and added to with thematic essays by PI and Co-I.

At the same time, a number of model catalogue entries will also be made available in a similar way. It is hoped these will form the basis of future discussion and transform how existing collections of artist books are catalogued and accessed. Tate is already beginning to review its cataloguing and collection policies for artist books in order to make them more accessible. A report on the proceedings of the 2012 conference 'Book Live!' will also be posted to give a sense of broader concerns for book artists in the digital realm.

The prototype iPad app *The Pond at Deuchar* (2012) is now being fully developed and will soon be made available via Tate Online through the Apple app store. At time of writing timescales for this cannot be confirmed. However, it will be made available for download at the earliest possible opportunity so becoming widely available to new readers.

Between October 2012 and March 2013 the PI will fulfill invitations to speak about the work of the network to staff and students from Central St Martins College of Art and Design, Camberwell College of Arts and Winchester School of Art. PI and Co-I will jointly present a research seminar at CCW Graduate School, University of the Arts London in the same timeframe.

The PI is already preparing a number of related texts for a variety of publications:

'Transforming Sacred Books: Recasting Image and Surface' in Danny Aldred, *Fantasies of Escapism and Containment*, Winchester School of Art, 2012 [forthcoming]

'From paper scroll to iPad app: Transforming Helen Douglas's *The Pond at Deuchar*' in *Book 2.0*, Vol.2, Issue 1, 2013 [forthcoming] (peer reviewed)

'History in the making: Helen Dougals's *Traquair Manuscript*' in *The Blue Notebook: Journal for artists' books*, Vol.7 No.2, April 2013 [forthcoming] (peer reviewed)

In these ways the research outcomes of the network will be made readily available to specialist and generalist audiences. In the longer term, they will help to inform future engagement with artist books among those who collect and care for them as making, cataloguing, storing, displaying, handling and looking are transformed by the digital. Impact

will therefore be felt within the partner institutions and among the artist book community more widely, as well as ultimately users of these collections when steps are taken to improve the cataloguing and online reproduction of artist books.

The second category of future plans concerns a potential new research project which is in its formative stages.

Dissemination and outreach

The project has established a webpage on Tate's Research pages: http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/. Audio recordings of the workshops are currently in the process of being archived by Tate's Library and Archive, and will thus be fully accessible to future researchers. The PI made a number of postings to Tate Blog. She also delivered a conference paper 'Transforming Artist Books: A Return to the Scene of Reading?' at the ARLIS UK & Ireland Annual Conference, June 2012.

It is particularly satisfying to report that two new art works were made as a result of the network's activities. These works both extended the collaboration of network members beyond the original remit of the project and establishing new ways of working. Firstly, Helen Douglas of Weproductions worked with Tate Research and Armadillo Systems to develop *The Pond at Deuchar* (2012). This is a prototype iPad app of an original paper hand scroll work and formed the basis of comparative discussions of surface and the senses at the first workshop. Secondly, Eileen Hogan worked with Armadillo Systems to develop *A Narrative Portrait* (2012) using Turning the Pages 2.0. This was presented at the final workshop and acted as a point of reference for questions of copyright. In both cases the artists set out to digitise existing work, but came to view the result as new work. The relationships that grew between artist and developer threw important questions of authorship and authority into sharp relief.

Visual evidence

Helen Douglas, *The Pond at Deuchar* 2012

© Helen Douglas

Eileen Hogan, *A Narrated Portrait* 2012 TTP 2.0.

© Eileen Hogan

References and external links

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External Links

Book Works Digital Archive (Supported by Knowledge Transfer Partnerships)

http://bookworks.org.uk/publishing?content_type[]=item

Centre for the Study of the Senses

http://www.philosophy.sas.ac.uk/?q=censescenses

Creative Digital Media Research Practice: Production through Exhibition (AHRC 2008 - 2010)

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/culturelab/events/item/creative-digital-media-research-practice-production-through-exhibition2

Network for Sensory Research

http://networksensoryresearch.utoronto.ca/Network_for_Sensory_Research.html

Special Collections using Augmented Reality to Enhance Learning and Teaching (SCARLET) (JISC 2011 – 2012)

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/ltig/scarlet.aspx

http://teamscarlet.wordpress.com/

The Book Unbound: Disruption and disintermediation in the digital age. (AHRC 2012)

http://www.publishing.stir.ac.uk/2012/02/15/ahrc-digital-transformations-project-the-book-unbound/

The Centre for the History of the Book, University of Edinburgh

http://www.hss.ed.ac.uk/chb/index.htm

The Elements of Drawing. John Ruskin's teaching collection: images and catalogues, including his notes and instructions (AHRC 2002 - 2004)

 http://ruskin.ashmolean.museum/welcome

Touch and the Value of Object Handling (AHRC 2006 -2007)

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0610/06101702

What will be the Canon for the Artist Book in the 21st Century? (AHRC 2008 - 2010)

http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm

Digital Transformations

Digital Transformations is one of the AHRC's Strategic Themes, which were Identified through the Future Directions for Arts and Humanities Research Consultation in 2009. The themes provide a funding focus for emerging areas of interest to arts and humanities researchers. Professor Andrew Prescott, AHRC Digital Transformations Theme Leadership Fellow, has said:

> *"The AHRC Digital Transformations theme is about more than the creation of online editions or the digitisation of books, manuscripts or pictures. It is about fostering completely new methods of scholarly research and discourse. It will encourage arts and humanities researchers to work with scientists in developing new concepts for digital technologies to explore our artistic and cultural heritage. It will show how the theoretical insights generated by the arts and humanities enable us to better understand the profound changes currently occurring in identity, culture and society. Researchers in the arts and humanities will create new relationships with creative and cultural businesses, memory institutions and technology producers. The digital has already profoundly transformed the arts and humanities; the AHRC Digital Transformations theme will show how the arts and humanities can transform digital cultures."*

Further details about the theme can be found on the AHRC's Digital Transformations web pages at:

http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/digitaltransformations.aspx