

Transliterations Planning Session

Saturday June 18, 2005 McCune Room, UC Santa Barbara

Principal Investigator: Alan Liu

Notes by James J. Hodge

[Disclaimer: These are notes, not a verbatim transcript, of comments at the planning session.]

I. Introductory Comments: Alan Liu, English, UC Santa Barbara:

(See <http://transliterations.english.ucsb.edu/post/uncategorized/introductory-outline-of-planning-issues-for-transliterations-project-planning-session-by-alan-liu>)

II. Critiques and Suggestions from Conference Participants and Members of Audience:

Jerome J. McGann, English, University of Virginia

- *At UVA since 1993—the last 3 years especially—developed 3 kinds of software designed to investigate text and other cultural practices, e.g. Ivanhoe
- *The great demon: “talk ideas to death and nothing will get done”
- *It was a “good thing” that UVA had no money from 1993–2001; one needs money in order to build, not to talk
- *Advice 1: hire programmers from outside the academy because they are goal directed, work familiarly with timelines and deadlines
- *Focus made a big difference in deciding what to do with money.
- *Advice 2: “Don’t spent a penny on conferences.”
- *Question of audience: “what audience are we aiming at?” Elementary, post-secondary? UVA focused on post-secondary
- *Raise money: go after primary and secondary education. Rationale: it is harder to build tools for post-secondary education

J. Hillis Miller, English and Comparative Literature, UC Irvine

- *Understands the center of the Transliterations project is to develop a technology to enhance online reading
- *Problem: *whose* online reading? What level students? Faculty? Public? Can’t do it all
- *Other discriminations
 1. Research and develop new projects (not necessarily enhancing online reading)
 2. Projects should be accessible on the web
 3. Importance of teaching people how to get information versus teaching people to read material critically (a political act)
- *Miller’s dream: a technology to enhance, grapple with new understandings of poetry based on technology, e.g. Brooks and Warren, based on textual evidence
- *Contention: poetry on web is different
 1. There is much to do in addressing this issue and little scholarly competition
 2. Topic has large political implications

*There is a new generation of computer savvy students and scholars. It is important to harness that energy and use it to reflect on culture and to teach *how to be reflective*, e.g. in examining video games

*Re: Walter Bender: require that everyone learn programming; know how the machine works, it's a way of thinking

1. Analogy: it is crazy to not require math for English majors at Yale because math is a language that is pervasive as a way of thinking)

Jeremy Douglass, English, UC Santa Barbara

*Develop and use a pluggable architecture and an API

*Do actual demos; do things industry can understand

* Re-imagine year 1—examine the kinds of online reading, imagine a comparative module for every single version, map them, comparative ways of reading through architecture

*Allow people to download API, accept as many versions as possible, get people excited

Warren Sack, Film and Digital Media, UC Santa Cruz

*Consider the role of the culture of the demo

- *a demo is a lingua franca with industry—important difference from the monograph culture of academia

*Demos can be “sprightly light-winged creatures”

*Year One: create 20 different demos to explore quickly

*Talk about re-organizing time-table

Anne Balsamo, Institute of Multimedia Literacy, University of Southern California

1. Question: what will the tool address? Don't say you're developing tools for a problem we don't know

- a. Need a tightly focused problem statement: what is it, what can it do, and why is it unique?

2. Create a taxonomy: be able to demonstrate you know what's not being addressed and how to do so. Identify who is also working on similar problems.

3. “I don't want to wait for all those funerals” (for institutional change)

- *How can we get colleagues to use available tools? The people who need to be convinced are peers who have 20 years before retiring

4. What are strengths of humanities so as to benefit the development of a tool?

Christiane Paul, Curator of New Media Arts, Whitney Museum of American Art

Needs:

1. Clarify what online reading is

2. Stick more to textuality (think about visual but in terms of textuality)/ textual theory, electronic lit, new media communities.

- a. Connect these forms of textuality, not in the form of a book, but trace notions of the book and textuality in history.

- b. One might use new media as a starting point.

3. Importance of Code literacy

- a. Programming languages for children, need research database for attempts at code literacy
- b. Gear project toward demo culture, identifying what research has been done (don't try to do the labs' work)

Adrian Johns, History, University of Chicago

“Small things”

* Agrees with Anne Balsamo

*He [Johns] didn't succeed at projects like McGann's because he didn't hire programmers from outside of the university

*Unclear about relation between history and future, for example:

1. history of reading experience.
2. Of new media and their impact
3. RE: history of reading that can contribute to examining this project
 - a. Case studies are not needed (lots done)
 - b. Need: consequential study of reading/deep history of reading

*Personal anxiety/inertia: fear of learning code

*Desire for a coherent history and taxonomy of reading

John Mohr, Sociology, UC Santa Barbara

RE: UC-AGEP critique [correct acronym?]

*NCIE working groups successful, brought in selectively to work collaboratively and productively

*Look around: who's here? And what strengths are there? Look to your strengths (re: txtkit, wiki blogs, Valence)

*What are the distinctive value-added possibilities of this community? Humanists do styles of knowing very well/interpretive work

*What technology do you bring to bear on humanistic thinking traditionally?

*Take inventory of available machines and evaluate them; evaluate how satisfied you are with current projects and suggest alterations

*Don't need new texts (internet is more than satisfactory)

1. Survey the internet and think of available texts
 - a. e.g. kinds of genres?
 - b. What types of technologies are particular to the study of poetry?
 - c. What are the appropriate modalities for hermeneutic and interpretive practices? Play to your strength

Steve Eskow

“Clichés” to contribute and bureaucratize

*Info float: difference between what we know now and what the broader world receives

1. We need to limit the “float”
2. Shift from mode 1 to 2 research
 - a. University functions as a world apart
 - b. Takes time to catch up to info float—from stand-alone projects to networks
3. Work with community colleges as sites of learning

4. For example, instead of conferencing, we need to put into practice what we know along with community colleges and add business and industries
- *Concern RE: divorcing reading from other communication skills
 1. Important to improve reading AND writing of blogs
 2. Talk about communication (reading writing speaking listening) as skills we need on the internet

Judith Green, Education, UC Santa Barbara

- *California-specific initiatives to consider
 1. Internet 2 (in Washington state)
 - a. RE: dialogue with Stephanie Couch in UC offices—good idea to put UC system in dialogue with k–12 system
 2. Consider the humanities' uniqueness and strengths
 - a. The sciences need languages of humanities just as much as vice versa
 - b. Think about how to bring sciences and humanities into dialogue in terms of thinking about text
 3. How to bring resources together with OUTREACH
 - a. Importance of community colleges and reaching out to UC feeder schools
 - b. SBCC professor Guy Williams' new media program needs interns
 - c. Tie into initiatives at place

Carol Braun Pasternack, English, UC Santa Barbara

- *Would like to see humanities keep track of what it does well, and to break out of its mould at the same time
- *RE: the ethical dative; what do we read with respect to, where does it go?
- *Concerned about spending too much time surveying history
 1. Would like to see modules developed based on materiality of reading/writing and how that affects where this reading goes in terms of affecting society
 2. Speaking/listening—need to take care with speaking as a medium with particular effects and overlapping effects in terms of history and culture, circulation
- *Connectedness to community colleges a good idea; might have effect of getting better students when they transfer to UC system

Rita Raley, English, UC Santa Barbara

- *Understands reluctance UC Office of the President has for funding conferences in a time of financial scarcity
- *Conferences produce thinking
 1. We're not going to be able to compete with UVA and MIT
 2. We can produce a vision/plan/perspective that would address the issues of the last 2 days

Cynthia Lewis, Education, University of Minnesota

- *Question of the audience: what can the audience do?
- *Importance of gauging age level; what can young people do?
- *What can teachers do and what are the constraints under which they operate?

Robert Nideffer, Studio Art & Information and Computer Science, UC Irvine

*Concern with tool building

1. Think of ourselves as audience rather than other, imaginary audiences
2. Look at your own set of practices and what need we can address
 - a. Resulting tool ought to be more in tune, more successful, closer to “soul of it” if we take into consideration our own needs as professionals

William Warner, English, UC Santa Barbara

1. Transliterations as trying to study how people read?
 - a. We’re not trained in *how* people read
 - b. Adrian Johns gave us narratives about how social practices embed reading practices
 - c. How to improve? Should we have a way of trying it out? John Mohr’s comments made Bill think it was all too complicated
2. Yesterday, conference stuck on knowledge versus entertainment
 - a. Why not as axis of value? Don’t impose upon a provisional project loaded a priori terms
 - i. Depth and surface
 - ii. Books as “bound”
 - iii. Collective and individual
 - iv. Text versus objects
 - v. Online versus off network
 - b. It is difficult to study things on just a network
 - i. how to deal with the “feedback loop” between human machines and reading machines?
 - ii. Logocentric versus visual media?
 - c. Is it possible to categorize thus? Is it possible to synthesize/taxonomize online/offline reading
 - i. Need to partner people with prior knowledge
3. Advice: defer the question of what reading really is.
 - a. Focus on what readers do and why readers say what they do is reading?
 - b. This is an interpretive practice.
 - c. Balsamo and Bender said that we can’t wait to develop technological toys to investigate reading
 - d. RE: constraints, only read in one room, choose between desks, laptop, in sleeping bags
 - e. Use anthropological techniques
2. Use real-time recording devices to determine how reading happens
 - a. Questions: re: Warren Sack’s interface and small manipulations changing reading, network effect
 - b. Is it impractical in this setting to do this kind of investigation or not?

Bob Stein, Institute for the Future of the Book, USC

*Possible “Finger wagging”?

1. RE: Christiane’s suggestions: work with what is available already
 - a. Lots available that isn’t used much, e.g. textarc, valences, and others
2. First, do a methodological reading with your students
 - a. Analyze programs used
 - b. Use available programs
 - c. Use students as test bed
3. Important conference happening at Stanford University on reading and writing
 - a. Papers by people who teach freshman composition
 - b. Task: get beyond theoretical work
 - c. Marry theory to practice
 - d. Create space for contribution

John Seeley Brown, Visiting Scholar, USC

1. Build credibility
 - a. Look at things not invented here
 - b. Give people reason to think what you have is new
 - c. Why now? What is distinct? What’s pressing? What’s the reason for the critical needs (institutional, divisional, disciplinary, etc)?
2. What now are our capabilities? Computers are different, open-sourced, re-implement with ease older programs
3. What are the project’s particular needs and capabilities? What do you go after?
4. Why is it unique?—Answer must come from passion and the head

III. Concluding Remarks, Alan Liu, English, UC Santa Barbara

1. RE: conversation with John Seeley Brown last night
 - a. Be more honest about why our project is valuable
 - b. Be more honest with ourselves about why it’s available and what it’s for?
 - c. Prestige of grant is a mere book place marker for what it’s for
2. Rework comments here into narrative statement
 - a. Tell a narrative that frames why/how/who, doable, critical, unique (JS Brown’s list)
3. To do:
 - a. Think through session and conference suggestions
 - b. Create a narrative about the project
 - c. Build a support apparatus for building a tool as a way of thinking through, as a focusing exercise
 - i. Question of the audience
4. Next Grant Proposal
 - a. Contact participants and network contacts
 - b. Grow the project, ask members in what sense they want to participate and use their particular energies
 - c. What better way to get the best minds available?