

CURATING DIGITAL RESEARCH

A WORKING PAPER ON THE USE OF ONLINE EXHIBITIONS
IN TEXTBASED, SCHOLARLY COLLECTIONS

WOMEN WRITERS PROJECT (WWP)
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The Brown University Women Writers Project is a long-term research project devoted to early modern women's writing and electronic text encoding. Our goal is to bring texts by pre-Victorian women writers out of the archive and make them accessible to a wide audience of teachers, students, scholars, and the general reader. We support research on women's writing, text encoding, and the role of electronic texts in teaching and scholarship.

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I. BACKGROUND

In 1994, scholar and [Women Writers Project \(WWP\)](#) advisory board member Susanne Woods published an article in the *South Central Review* in which she wrote,

By the time it is considered complete, the WWP textbase will hold the works of at least 1500 women writers who wrote before 1850...Much of these first few years have been spent developing procedures for entering texts, and coordinating the way in which we 'tag' the texts with the ongoing work of the international Text Encoding Initiatives, of which the WWP is an affiliated project.¹

Woods continues, "There are enormous practical and theoretical issues associated with *how we enter the texts*, beginning with what versions we enter, and how much editorial emendation we allow." (emphasis added)²

Fifteen years later, many of the early challenges of encoding early modern women writers have come under conceptual re-evaluation with the project's recent interest in exploring new and creative ways of enticing users to the collection. Again the WWP is made to think carefully about how one should *enter the texts*. This time it is not the process of encoding texts that must be explored but rather the challenges and complexities presented by the new and ever-more diverse, possible portals into [Women Writers Online \(WWO\)](#) offered by advances in shared software and publishing tools. The practical and conceptual polysemy of the problematic that Woods described in 1994 (How should one *enter the texts*?), is one that will be considered throughout this white paper, as the practical issues associated with how users (new and old) might find *their way into the collection* becomes tied up in urgent questions about the WWP's relationship to the Web 2.0 digital environment encroaching around it.

The notion of entering a text or group of texts is one that takes seriously the conceptual, aesthetic, and practical questions facing digital collections today, as scholarly sites like WWO must contend with demands made by current watchwords like *collaboration*, *visualization*, and *experimentation* that might challenge research collections such as WWO to work toward building out infrastructures for new kinds of relationships between scholars and texts. Following on the first-hand advice of specialists working in digital humanities and research publications on digital media for scholars and historians, such as Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig's often-cited "Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web" (2005) this paper will "critically and soberly assess where computers,

¹ Woods, Susanne. "Recovering the Past, Discovering the Future: The Brown University Women Writers Project." *South Central Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Creating a Literary Series: The Brown University Women Writers Project and the Oxford University Press "Women Writers in English, 1350-1850" Texts (Summer, 1994), 20-21.

² <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3189986>.

³ Woods, 21.

networks, and digital media are and aren't useful...In what ways can digital media and digital networks allow us to do our work...better?"³ Cohen and Rosenzweig introduce early in their text, published both online and in book form, what they call "the promises and perils" of engaging digital technologies for scholarly publication, citing both the qualities of digital media and networks that allow us to do things better (*capacity, accessibility, flexibility, user diversity, manipulability, interactivity, nonlinearity/hypertextuality*) and the so-called dangers with such technology (*quality, durability, readability, passivity, inaccessibility*). Toward beginning to build the foundational infrastructure of an adjunct space to enhance the collection, the WWP recognizes that we must think carefully about the environment in which we imagine the texts should inhabit and the conceptual, practical, and technical issues associated with building such a space. In order to know how one should enter the texts, we must contend with the question of *exactly what kind of space* we want our users to access, and this is a question that this white paper will treat as an open one.

* * * * *

Initiated in Spring 2009, the research and writing of this white paper took place during a period of transition for the Brown University's Women Writers Project. During this time, the WWP came under new institutional support when it joined the Brown University Library in February 2009, as a part of a larger organizational restructuring that meant bringing together several of Brown's digital humanities groups into a more intimate working network and making possible closer working relationships with programmers and metadata specialists within the library.⁴ This structural change has also enhanced collaborative efforts and provided more opportunities for innovative discussion about interface development, research tools, and digitalization projects, such as the extended internal discussions resulting in this paper.

In 2008-2009, the WWP celebrated the 20th anniversary of its first funding, an anniversary that was marked by a series of conferences and events aimed at convening conversations about the role of archives in the study of women's texts and the role of the digital archive in shaping scholarship and teaching, including but not limited to the Women in the Archives two-day conferences that the WWP hosted on March 5-7, 2009 and that will continue to host annually. During these events, the WWP sought to encourage discussion about how the field of early modern women's studies has changed over this time and how our role as a digital collection serving a range of scholars—from young students to leaders in the

Cohen, Daniel J., and Roy Rosenzweig. *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/>>. For more information, please refer to the WWP website at <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/texts/announcements.html>.

field—of early modern women’s writing might adapt as well.⁵ From these conversations, the WWP has worked to generate an agenda for research and textbase development that will guide our activities for the next decade and provide the conceptual and technical framework for gradual movement toward a more community-centered, collaborative space within Women Writers Online (WWO). This paper will focus on the theoretical and design aspects of this engagement so that it might provide some groundwork for the technical planning that will follow.

In late 2008, Women Writers Project’s Director Julia Flanders and Project Manager and Textbase Editor John Melson began what was to become an extended internal discussion exploring how online exhibitions might allow users of WWO—by way of an open call for submissions—to aggregate and explore in new ways all or part of the texts housed in the collection. These discussions were motivated, in part, by ongoing dialogue with former graduate student and WWP colleague Jacqueline Wernimount who after graduating from Brown, maintained a close relationship to WWP and imparted her own research interests in related issues on the work of the project. In January 2009, graduate student Anna Fisher, a third-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Modern Culture & Media, was hired as the Exhibits Editor to explore the major issues and challenges associated with integrating online exhibitions into WWO in a more sustained capacity. This white paper details the findings of this work.

II. FOREGROUND

EXHIBITS

Currently available to a wide audience of teachers, students, scholars, and general readers, Women Writers Online is a well-established, long-term project that makes available a substantial body of writing by early modern women. Despite the expansion of online resources, however, these historical texts can still appear inaccessible to scholars, students, and general audiences who are unfamiliar with the historical period or the traditions, themes and other issues early women’s writing often engaged, as the textbase collection currently operates primarily by way of sophisticated, targeted search function features. Our main point of struggle has been how exactly to bridge this gap (and to engage more openly people who might make their way into the collection without knowing exactly what they are looking for) by making the material in our online archive more easily accessible, more compellingly “browse-able,” and more functionally dynamic for non-technical experts in a variety of academic cultures. In early brainstorming, “online exhibitions” were conceived of as an adjunct space that could live within the main

⁵ For more information, please refer to the WWP website at: <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/about/activities/wia/index.html>.

collection and provide a platform for users to experience a greater degree of interactivity with our published texts in the context of some thematically or conceptually oriented topic.

Still what exactly online exhibitions might mean exactly remained an opaque, and we believed critical, point of consolidation for the theoretical issues and practical challenges entailed in their development for WWO. Exhibits were looked upon as dynamic content that could serve both as brief scholarly introductions to important thematic or conceptual divisions and as explorations of the relationship between current scholarship on early modern women's writing and electronic texts. Exhibits were further believed to offer: 1) opportunities for individual scholars to explore parts of our collection through the lens of specific topics that interest them, 2) to put selected texts into dialogue with one another and with other areas of their research, and 3) to introduce readers to new and potentially unfamiliar authors and texts. Linked to this last point is a question that has hovered powerfully over the research for this white paper: To what extent should the WWP work to build out an infrastructure for showcasing independent work that makes use of connections within the collection with the hope that it will inspire other similar work (*conceiving of exhibits as a place for make-your-own digital publications*) or, as was steadily argued in the interviews we conducted in response to this idea, whether the WWP should instead expand our conception of exhibits to build, rather, a space for users to analyze, annotate, and comment the texts (*conceiving of exhibits more like a scholarly workspace*).

Further goals stated for developing online exhibitions within WWO emerged as the following:

- Enhancing WWO as a curricular tool for student assignments and class-based engagements with the collection
- Creating a more community-centered, collaborative space within the WWP/WWO
- Exposing parts of the WWO collection to non-subscribing readers, both to promote general awareness of the resource and to increase the visibility of the WWP
- Aiding us in further developing relationships with contributing scholars whose research is supported by WWO texts
- Encouraging scholars to publish original work in non-traditional format within WWO
- Exploring and highlighting the variety of ways in which WWO texts "speak" to one another across generic, thematic, geographic, and historical periods
- Modeling scholarly interaction with our texts, at both macro (comparing individual passages or even entire texts) and micro levels (performing and refining advanced granular searches with Philologic)

With these goals in mind, the WWP's efforts around online exhibits took on a two-pronged approach:

1. A sustained effort in thinking about the conceptual and theoretical issues at stake in incorporating online exhibits has remained constant and has ultimately culminated in the writing of this white paper
2. Simultaneously, the execution of immediate plans (Phase One) to launch an initial set of more experimental online exhibits within WWO.

This white paper will focus less on these initial plans and will concentrate more on the conceptual future of the project and the practical challenges of online exhibitions in general. However, it seems important to foreground some of our initial thinking about exhibits in order to provide the necessary frame for further thinking done in this paper about how these goals can best be met and developed in future iterations of exhibits. In so doing, this paper will not attempt to be "the final word" on online exhibitions for textbased, research collections like the WWP, but rather will try to be descriptive about the uneven textures of the questions we are posing in order to illuminate the intricacies and challenges that have emerged in our continued engagement with them.

PHASE ONE

Work began in early January 2009 to create a new space within the site that might house small scholarly exhibits or mini-collections that would extract manageable chunks of WWO texts, as well as Philologic searches and results, and present them in the context of scholarly commentary. The goal was not to annotate passages but rather to produce interesting or insightful pairings/combinations of texts, to explore the development of historical concepts or literary forms (within genres, across genres, within and across historical periods or literary movements, etc), and to expose readers to important trends in current scholarship and overlooked texts.

The project developed out of the WWP's interest in the way that "exhibits" had come into some popularity in the digital humanities world as a way of describing a new form of publication: one which selects or links to specific materials from a digital collection like WWO and presents this selection to the reader. In early March 2009, the WWP went live with a [Call for Submissions](#) [See Appendix 2: "Online Exhibition Submission Guidelines"] for online exhibitions that publicized our ongoing, internal efforts to commission work from friends of the collection, initially targeting young scholars in particular, who were willing to submit an experimental online exhibition. Exhibit submissions were defined in these communications as

topically focused engagements with the collection in which one could write usefully and briefly about a very specific insight, rather than full-fledged scholarly articles. We envisioned these exhibits as a form of scholarly publication that would remain a permanent, publicly accessible feature of the WWP space. Exactly what form they would take remained ambiguous and was left up to the contributor. They could be something closer to an essay, with a component of argumentation and scholarly reflection binding together the quotations, links, and other pointers to primary and secondary sources or they could take on a more experimental form that would direct readers' attention into the WWO collection and to suggest connections, patterns, and interpretive ideas that might increase reader's understanding of and interest in the text/s. We imagined the ideal exhibit would raise questions, which impel the reader to further exploration on her own. The distinctive feature of exhibits were imagined to be their linkages into the WWO collection, which could take the following forms:

- links to entire texts
- links to "quotations": i.e. to specific passages from a WWO text; the quoted material might appear in the exhibit itself together with a link to the full text, or the exhibit might simply offer the link (e.g. "As Margaret Fell argues [link], etc.")
- links which execute searches, or which link to search results: for instance, a link that performs a search for a word of interest. (E.g. "Although the word "feminine" is rare before 1600 [link]...")
- links to visualizations such as timelines, maps, etc., once these are available as part of WWO. (E.g. "This group of authors were all working at about the same time in or near York [link]...")
- links to critical sources, should these be available online.

Exhibits were conceived as formal, citable publications that could be listed on a CV or footnoted in scholarly citations and would be published together in the public part of the WWP site (rather than being access-protected) on a special "Exhibits" page. When we had accumulated a substantial set of exhibits, we would also make them searchable and permit browsing by author and text. When reading a WWO text, a reader would also be able to see links to exhibits that discuss that text, or even conceivably a specific passage--the exhibits were thus conceived to provide a kind of textual commentary and intertextual connection within WWO, a feature that could be turned on or off by the reader.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following are some of the key conceptual and practical questions raised by online exhibitions that will guide the line of questioning posed in this working paper:

“CURATING” RESEARCH: SOME KEY QUESTIONS

- What insights might the relatively recent history of online exhibitions offer into the use-value of the exhibit is today?
- What semantic advantages does the word “exhibit” offer to our conception of our project, in particular if the major goal of the project is scholarly publication? Why not just call these something like “Text in Conversation,” as Sarah Bordac will suggest?
- Can an exhibit be text-based? How would we anticipate managing the pressure placed on exhibits to support images? Should we partner with an early modern image-based archive to share content and build out a more compelling visual component to WWO?
- To what degree might exhibits take advantage of the surge of development work happening around annotation? Can exhibits really avoid the benefits of annotation tools in providing new ways of exploring hypertext?
- What formal attributes constitute a “good” exhibit? Would it be more linear and user-friendly or would it follow a more non-linear, potentially more chaotic format (some point to the)? How do we build out a design interface that might take into account both traditional and non-traditional formal approaches?

THE GENRE OF ONLINE AUTHORSHIP AND ITS TRICKY EDITORIAL POLITICS

- What tensions might arise between the medium of the *exhibit*, understood to reference a curatorial approach, and the *online publication*, that would seem to reference a different online medium altogether?
- How do we intend to publicize the exhibits? Draw new contributors?
- What kind of screening or vetting process will we need to ensure good content?
- Peer review: Should we use it, and if so how should we manage it?
- Can something be both an online exhibit and a scholarly publication? Will this hybrid form be recognized as something that is legible and useful to our userbase?
- Who exactly are exhibits targeting? Is there one user group in particular that we are seeking? If they are intended to appeal to our younger scholarly users, will our more advanced userbase be interested in reading scholarly publications?
- To what extent, and how, might our Exhibits be designated as an online journal space? What might experimental online journal sites recommend we consider?

[In our discussions thus far we have noted that to attract contributions of a certain high caliber we will probably need to have some form of peer review, but we've also noted that we are reluctant to make this a requirement for all exhibits. One possibility would be to have a distinct publication space (in the manner of a journal) for peer reviewed materials, and also a space where peer review was not at issue.]

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Do we imagine that online exhibitions will remain an adjunct part of the collection or perhaps might they eventually act as a threshold or gatekeeper for introducing users to the collection (perhaps in future versions, by way of a global timeline that allows the viewer a overall picture of the collection)?
- How and should we go about producing a template or model that future contributors can use?
- What elements should be included in these plans? **[See the Appendix 3: “Draft List of Design Assets”]**
- Would long-term exhibits require new tools to create/view/store/interact with them? If so, how extensive? What funds development and maintenance?
- Which tools are critical to our use of exhibits (timelines, maps, commenting, tagging, annotation)?

THE WEB 2.0 INFLUENCE

- How might a certain thrall to non-linearity pose unique problems for a scholarly historical collection of women’s writing insofar as turning historical texts into hypertext (by taking them apart in some fashion) might be regarded by certain users as doing violence to the original text?
- How exactly should our work developing Exhibits engage demands for content and tools that would make the project more collaborative and experiential?
- How might recent interest in user-generated content pose a fundamental problem regarding our move toward a structure based on the notion of “exhibits,” widely regarded to index a top-down, curatorial approach that to some has become outdated?
- Are some of the textual and interface strategies suggested by Web 2.0 cultures appropriate for a well-established, textbased, scholarly resource? If so, which ones and how?
- How might exhibits find creative ways to incorporate Web 2.0 currents such as user-generated content in new and unexpected ways? [In Peter Samis’ essay “The Exploded Museum,” he provides an example of how the San Jose Museum of Art organized a 2001 exhibition designed around the comments left by museum-goers about the artwork, entitled “Collecting Our Thoughts.”⁶]

DESIGN INNOVATION AND DATA VISUALIZATION

- How might we build data visualization into the texts/exhibits?
- How can Exhibits be utilized to build a sense of spatiotemporal context for readers of exhibits (as maps and timeline tools seem to be data visualizations implied by the overall banner of “exhibits”)? How might exhibits be used to help create a environment in WWO that would help convey how texts fit into an overall picture of the collection’s holdings?

⁶ Peter Samis, “The Exploded Museum,” *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience: Handheld Guides and Other Media*, eds. Loïc Tallon and Kevin Walker (Altamira Press, 2008), 10.

III. A SELECTIVE HISTORY OF ONLINE EXHIBITIONS

PRINTED MATTER

Relevant print material directly related to online exhibitions is hard to find as research engaged directly on the subject appeared mostly in the early 2000s, with the surge of interest in the subject, and has since become outmoded with the rapid pace of web developments changing the stakes of these debates. Publication of such material has been met by the turn to digital publication to maintain their relevance. Some of the most compelling recent thinking on the subject appears to circulate closely among issue experts working in the field in more obscure digital publications and shared and exchanged across social-networking and information-sharing sites such as [Twitter](#) and [delicious](#). Given the relatively closely held nature of such specialized knowledge, this working paper will also consider closely conversations with digital humanities issue experts given what little critical material is available on the subject.

EARLY ONLINE EXHIBITS

Still, it seems important to acknowledge the brief cultural history presented in what material is available about the early uses and development of the concept of online exhibitions. According to Martin R. Kalfatovic, the Digital Projects Librarian for the Smithsonian Institution Libraries at the time of publication of his 2002 book *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, online exhibitions come loaded with fairly well-defined conceptual expectations and index a particular history of representation that remains semantically linked to the museum space (claims that appear to have since been contradicted by more recent accounts describing online exhibits as increasingly diverse and difficult to pin down in their aims). According to Kalfatovic, online exhibitions emerged from thinking about how the Internet could be used to enhance the traditional roles of libraries and archives. Online exhibitions were originally used as mediums that allowed libraries and archives to create displays promoting their institutions and to tap into a wider audience for their collections.⁷ Online exhibitions appeared early in the lifespan of the Internet, as the Library of Congress made text files and images available on an FIP site as early as 1992 and 1993 (making it possible for users to download files from the exhibit).

Kalfatovic notes the benefits of online exhibitions have traditionally been their usefulness in showcasing objects that could otherwise not be on view in a gallery space due to their fragility or value and their being far less expensive to create and maintain than a live gallery exhibition. This is to say that online exhibitions carry with them, even now, the ghosting presence of some reference to an otherwise more

⁷ Kalfatovic, Martin R. *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002, xv.

“real” or “proper” physicality of which the virtual exhibition is just a supplement or adjunct part. This presence that continues to ghost the concept of the online exhibit is, by and large, the looming figure of the museum, the gallery, the archive, for which the online exhibit would seem to still index as a medium for public display.

According to Kalfatovic, an online exhibition is a specific medium with a *specific set of criteria*. “What separates an exhibition from a collection is that an exhibition has a tight connection between its idea, objects, and script that ties them all together. It is this tight connection that is vital, otherwise a virtual exhibition will ‘amount to little more than a disorganized and decontextualized digital collection,’” writes Kalfatovic citing David Silver’s essay “Interfacing American Culture: The Perils and Potentials of Virtual Exhibitions.” Kalfatovic reminds his readers that there are important distinctions to be made between an online exhibition and a digital collection: “It is important to remember that a collection of objects does not make an exhibition. It is only when objects are carefully chosen to illustrate a theme or tied together by a narrative or other relational threads that they become an exhibition.”⁸

In his own, now-decade-old essay [“Curating \(on\) the Web”](#) (1998), Steve Dietz describes the pivot from object-based curation (“Some have referred to this period of display as the stack ‘em deep, pile ‘em high philosophy of display”) to the privileging of information in what has been called the information age.

Dietz writes:

Museums once thought of themselves as institutions to collect and preserve objects from around the world, places for scientific study of their collections...Today, while museums are diverse, as are their aims, it can safely be said that they are primarily in the business of dissemination of information rather than artifacts. The advantage of thinking in terms of information is that it validates the collection of intangibles...⁹

He notes that this shift from artifact worship to the work of information dissemination has called the role of the curator into question, prompting a crucial rethinking of the notion of the exhibit, and in particular the online exhibit, where renegotiations of the concepts of mastery and authority (as seen in the figure of the author), have found a digital home with the introduction of postmodern writing, from which has sprung a widespread embrace of the politics of hypertextuality and other web-based models for non-linear representation.¹⁰

Dietz goes on to discuss the various curatorial approaches that have been taken up by museums working with the medium of the Internet (mostly amounting to what might best be described as “virtual

⁸ Kalfatovic, 1.

⁹ Dietz, Steven. “Curating (on) the Web.” Text first presented at the International Conference Museums on the Web April 25, 1998. <<http://www.afsnitp.dk/onoff/Texts/dietzcuratingont.html>> Accessed September 12, 2009, 1.

¹⁰ Dietz, 2.

exhibitions” rather than online exhibitions). He describes the “You Are There” approach as an attempt popular in the late 1990s to take the exhibit into the realm of the virtual in order to represent something like an immersive interface. This is now recalled as a dated, and not particularly successful, aesthetic approach to “online exhibitions” once used by museums such as the [Walker Art Center’s Anderson Window Gallery](#) (“QTVR”), the National Gallery of Art’s Thomas Moran (“RealSpace”) or [The National History Museum’s The Virtual Endeavour](#). Dietz remarks in his essay that this decidedly virtual approach to online exhibitions (“Always open! Always free!”) reveals that while visitors prefer greater interactivity, fantasies of total immersion have generally proven “simply ‘bells and whistles,’ which, if anything, complicate rather than enhance communication.”¹¹ This sense of failure that came to be associated with the virtual exhibition is notable as online exhibits by and large have adapted as a result of this history, taking up alternative strategies to those that would attempt to suggest themselves as somehow beyond the limits of representation. This seems especially true when one sees how often current online exhibits appear to be more influenced by film or magazine layouts than real exhibitions.

This brief history of online exhibits might account for why some have described them as indexing a kind of crisis of representation, or in the very least, internalizing a kind of dispute. Online exhibitions would seem to carry with them an uneasy double discourse—on the one hand (in *exhibit*), gesturing nostalgically toward a lost home in the traditional museum and on the other hand (in *online*), indexing the many possibilities offered by an evolving medium inclined toward non-linearity.

EXHIBITING EXHIBITION: ONLINE EXHIBITS TODAY

A survey of online exhibitions and digital galleries over recent years returns a diverse set of responses to the question of what constitutes a compelling direction for the future of online exhibitions. Some museum websites offer austere responses to user demands for digital supplements to their archives and collections while other sites posit the new horizon for online exhibitions as one rich in visual content and flash animation (such as [those](#) produced by the highly regarded, Portland-based, web-design firm [Second Story](#)) or dense in documentary-style storytelling (such as [those](#) out of George Mason University’s [Center for History and New Media](#)).

There has been a surge of recent work in the field of curatorial studies that has reached for contemporary ways for re-imagining the exhibition. In their book *Exhibition Experiments*, editors Sharon MacDonald and Paul Basu introduce work by curators and scholars, such as Mieke Bal, who have described the possibility of exhibits themselves “to exhibit” a greater degree of reflexivity about the medium itself than it has traditionally. They cite Bal’s writing exposing “the work of exhibition” as associated with the narrative

¹¹ Dietz, 4.

strategies and frames through which exhibitions position viewers and offer up particular, positioned readings. Bal has gone on to praise what she sees as successful exhibitions (those she calls “the most effective, gripping and powerful”) as ones who take the form of a “meta-exhibition,” or those exhibitions that explores the nature of exhibition.¹² Brad Johnson, Creative Director of Second Story, has said, “The evolution of interactive media means the story no longer flows in one direction, from the one to the many. Through a framework of possibility that visitors use to weave their own story, the narrative is only visible in hindsight...”¹³

By privileging watchwords like *experimentation*, *discovery*, and *encounter* over traditional forms of curatorial storytelling, Bal and Johnson, among others, have argued for the necessity of an expanded conception of exhibition that would privilege interactivity. The broadening of the scope of what constitutes an exhibition has witnessed a turn to what MacDonald and Basu have described as *assemblage*, an aesthetic characteristic increasingly used to describe online exhibitions in their current incarnation. Previously ill-advised combinations of text, visualizations, multimedia have come into shared space under the banner of the exhibit, providing a strategy for avoiding confrontations with authorial problematics and staging productive interactions that allow various digital elements to speak together in surprising or unexpected ways. MacDonald and Basu write, “It was an idea of putting together different elements and observing the outcome of their interaction.”¹⁴

Of the “exhibit” development tools currently promoted by a number of scholarly working groups (see those listed below), there appears to be a continued conceptual expansion of very definition of the exhibit, as a space that might be understood to host any number of feature sets or tools that enable the user not merely to learn something on one’s own but rather, *to produce something in relationship to others*. Active and interactive engagement can be seen in any number of these projects:

- [NINES \(Nineteenth-Century Scholarship Online\)](#), a project out of the University of Virginia that promotes itself as a peer-review digital space that maintains an exhibits “Sandbox” where users are encouraged to create and share their own exhibits and to peer-review other users’ exhibits [See Figure 1];¹⁵
- [OMEKA, a project out of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University](#) that has launched a free and open source collections-based, web-based publishing platform targeted at

¹² MacDonald, Sharon and Paul Basu, eds. “Introduction,” *Exhibition Experiments*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 5.

¹³ Johnson, Brad, “Beyond On-Line Collections. Putting Objects to Work.”
<<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/johnson/johnson.html>> Accessed August 7· 2009, 1.

¹⁴ MacDonald and Basu, 9.

¹⁵ For information about NINES, please visit: http://www.nines.org/about/what_is.html.

scholars, librarians, archivists, museum professionals, and educators promoting a “five-minute setup” for launching an online exhibition that claims to be “as easy as launching a blog” [See Figure 3];¹⁶

- [SIMILE, a project out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology \(M.I.T.\)](#), that has launched “Exhibits,” a publishing framework for making web pages more interactive through the use of advanced text search and filtering functionalities, interactive maps, timelines, and other visualization “widgets.” [See Figure 5]¹⁷

All three of these online publishing projects heavily promote feature sets or publishing frameworks for building or more easily integrating interactive web or online exhibits. These sites offer themselves up as web-based, web-publishing platforms that offer recognizable standards for sharing and aggregating content into image galleries (often called “exhibits”), maps, and other kinds of data visualizations.

The NINES homepage features an “Exhibits” tab through which one is directed to the Exhibits page, where one can log-in, “Create a new account,” or “Choose an exhibit to view” from two columns designating exhibits that have yet to be peer-reviewed from shared student work [See Figure 2]. While the exhibits themselves seem to be little more than glorified “html” webpages that allow users to plug in their text into a page that also supports hyperlinks and images, NINES affords its users the ability to share and peer edit, making the site a kind of master exhibit workspace, seeming most utilized by students for class projects.

Figure 1

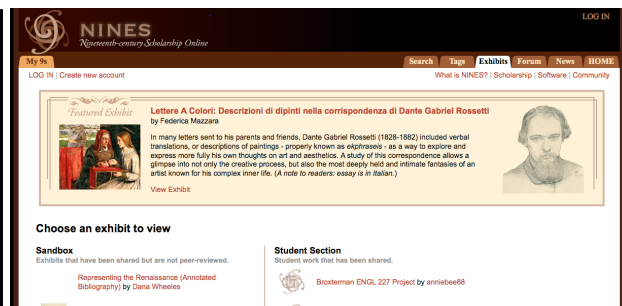


Figure 2

OMEKA advertises an exhibit builder tool ([ExhibitBuilder Plugin 0.5](#)) that aims to help museums, libraries, and other collections “Create rich, interpretive exhibits that combine items in your Omeka site with narrative text...”¹⁸

¹⁶ For more information about OMEKA, please visit: <http://omeka.org/>.

¹⁷ For more information about SIMILE, please visit: <http://www.simile-widgets.org/>.

¹⁸ The ExhibitBuilder plugin is available in Omeka’s downloadable feature list, available at: <http://omeka.org/about/>.



Figure 3

Figure 4

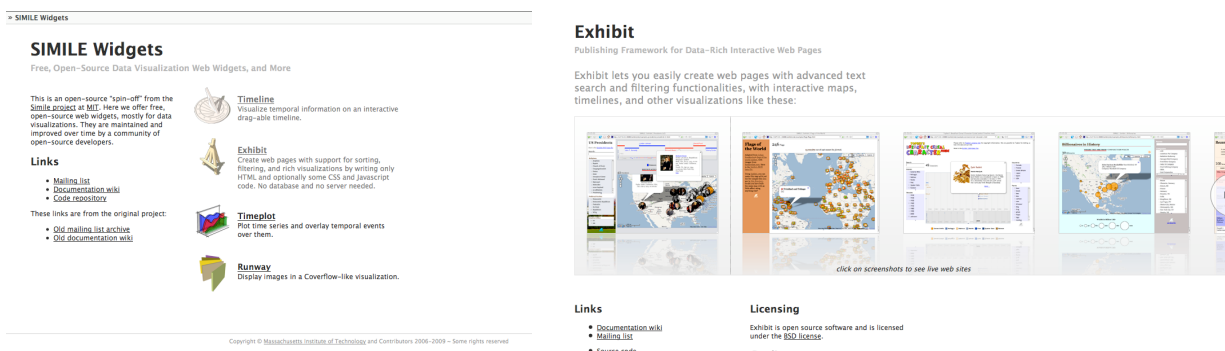


Figure 5

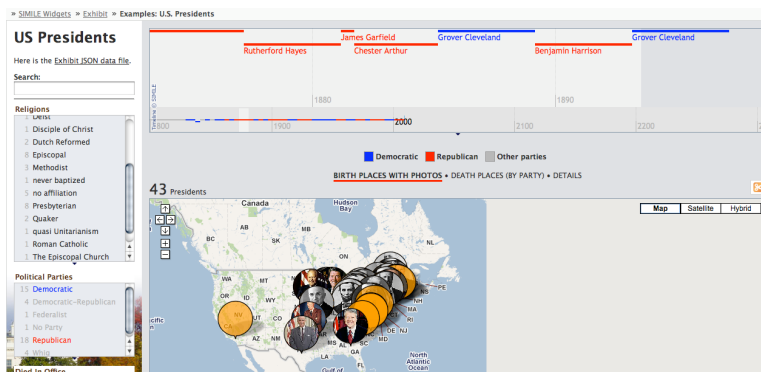


Figure 6

SIMILE boasts its latest “Open-Source Data Visualization Web Widgets,” which includes “Exhibits,” among visualization tools for “Timelines,” “Timeplots,” and something that they call “Runaway” (“Display images in a Coverflow-like visualization”) [See Figure 4]. The SIMILE widget documentation Wiki reads, “Exhibit enables you to create html pages with dynamic exhibits of data collections without resorting to complex database and server-side technologies. The collections can be searched and browsed using faceted browsing. Assorted views are provided including Timelines, tiles, maps, and more.”¹⁹ Under the banner of “Exhibit,” SIMILE appears to offer a kind of webpage platform for innovative, Google-based

¹⁹ For more information, please visit: <http://code.google.com/p/simile-widgets/wiki/Exhibit>.

functionalities that users to create spaces to display advanced text search features and visualization tools that enable user's to filter information represented by interactive maps and timelines [Figure 6].

These “exhibit-based” projects all seem to offer tools for providing users *choices* about how they want to engage with whatever information is being presented that might go beyond mere absorption, responding instead to impulses toward experimentation, visualization, interpretation, and sociability. In this sense, these tools would seem to posit online exhibitions as spaces where a user can experience any number of diverse and unique encounters with the same information and can find tools for sharing these encounters with others.

III. IN DIALOGUE

Many of the conclusions drawn and resources presented in this white paper emerged out of four central conversations conducted between May and July 2009 with four key people—Steven Lubar, Julia Flanders, Sarah Bordac, and Clarissa Ceglio—all of whom are active in the Brown University digital humanities community. We are extremely grateful to each of these issue experts, who graciously offered their time to engage in a dialogue with the WWP. These conversations focused around the conceptual and practical issues (and to a lesser degree, the technical issues) raised by the development of online exhibitions as a curricular tool for a textbase scholarly site, such as WWO.

These interviews, edited only to exclude irrelevant commentary and diversions, have be transcribed and reproduced here in the order in which they took place in order to represent the complex web of ideas and opinions elicited in response to the challenges such issues present scholarly sites such as our own. *Each transcribed interview is followed by a summary of key points and recommendations for the WWP.*

INTERVIEW 1: STEVEN LUBAR

STEVEN LUBAR

DIRECTOR, JOHN NICHOLAS BROWN
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION

On May 12, 2009, Steven Lubar and Anna Fisher spoke about the key issues and challenges associated with online exhibitions. This is an extended excerpt of their discussion.

KEYWORDS: NARRATIVITY, INTERACTIVITY, WEB 2.0, COMMENTING, TAGGING, VISUALIZATIONS, TOOLS FOR CONNECTIVITY
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AF: I just have very big questions...so feel free to pontificate...One question about online exhibitions, have you been following [the various debates around] them?

SL: Yes...*The challenge for most online exhibitions is how to go beyond individual objects to tell stories so the people who have done the most exhibitions...the traditional way which was up until 5 or 10 years ago was that you put objects on page or some sort of organization on a screen and call that an exhibition. So sort of taking the notion of a traditional exhibition, you walk down a hallway, you walk through a room, you have a picture, you have an object, and you tell a story the about it. So in some ways, it's sort of old-fashioned narrative turned into narrative on a screen. People started to say, you know, we could do more with this...why not think first of all about other ways to organize your narrative because on a screen, you don't have to do it one thing after another but you can step back and say let's see the whole thing at once and then let the visitor to the story come up with his or her own narrative so in some ways, it just follows postmodern writing...*

AF: Non-linearity...

SL: *Right. In fact, Brown was the place that invented a huge amount of this in the 80s and 90s...out of the English department...So there are lots of interesting techniques, that are still basically still objects on a screen but instead of seeing them one after another in the order that the author predetermines, you get a big picture...The trend in the last couple of years has been to tell visitors,--this is the Web 2.0 story—that you get to make your own choices and you get to see everybody else's choices. So you get to string things together in a way that reflects not the museum's view or just your point of view but you get to see a whole range of what other people have done. So that in probably a very quick story is the history of web exhibits.*

The latest thing, which isn't a web online exhibit, but is a computer exhibit and will soon be coming online is adding some sort of physicality to it. So the thing that everybody is most excited right now are these big computer screens that are cables that are flat and you can move things around on it. It sort of looks like the surface of an Iphone and you can throw texts at each other from across the table...

AF: So it is a move toward 3-D?

SL: *It's the move toward sociability. Having more than one person involved at one time and adding a real physical sense of that. The challenge for museums right now is that you can do almost everything at home on a screen and so museums stepped back and said so what have we've got, we've got a variety of people coming together in one space and they can talk to each other and we've got physical things and so the challenge is how do you combine sociability, physical things, and an online presence?*

AF: So that reflects the interest in user-generated content across media?

SL: *Exactly. So the whole user-generated can be done online but you can add something to it if you do it in a space where people [inaudible]...Now, the problem is that you've got texts rather than pictures so...*

Well, let me say one other thing that people have played with that no one has done very well is how to combine online exhibits with computer games. And actually somebody who just graduated from Brown a couple of years ago, Noah [Wardrip-Fruin]...he runs something called [Grand Text Auto](#)...And he's thought a lot about how texts can be used to turn them into basically game-like experiences. In some ways, this goes back to the hypertext...

AF: What do you think are the most successful exhibitions? What do you think makes a success exhibition?

SL: *Well the word...the way I like to judge exhibits in general is by engagement so its really hard to...know whether anybody is having fun but you can tell whether or not there is some sense that there is some sense that there is engagement there, that they are paying attention, that they stay involved, that they experiment with things...and so, some of the exhibitions were you can pull stories together or even tell stories about objects...I think story telling tends to be the most useful kind of exhibitions, which is sort of an old-fashioned notion but that's what it involves. You tell good stories.*

AF: So that's really interesting with the fetish for the non-linear at the same time.

SL: *Part of this depends on your audience. You're aiming this at scholars, right? They have a different sense of fun. Plus I assume that you think texts are sacred and important in some way. You don't people messing with texts.*

AF: Right, this gets at something else I wanted to ask you which is what do you think are some of the debates about or challenges to online exhibitions, and I guess we could talk what the WWP's would be, or we could talk broadly about the kinds of...What do you see to be the places where people are conflicted or there are strong debates happening?

SL: *Well the biggest debate is the Web 2.0 debate which is who has the priority to say what goes in. So traditionally in museums, a curator came up with a story line and made an argument and would walk you through it and at the end, it was a success if what he or she said convinced you it was interesting and important and true and all of that. And the curator had all of the authority in that...*

AF: Kind of top-down...

SL: *Top-down. Now everybody wants to give the visitor equal authority or at least the ability to mess with things. So the fad in the online exhibit world right now is tagging. It turns out art historians describe paintings and art in one way and the rest of the world uses completely different language. And the place that has done the most of this is [Indianapolis Art Museum](#). Everybody can tag all of the paintings and all of their art and you can see what everybody else describes it as and you can pull it together in interesting ways based on what the crowd thinks is interesting and important. It annoys the old-time curators a whole lot...*

AF: Does it annoy you? Do you like it?

SL: *I wish it were...if you got good quality out of it, it would be one thing. Mostly people say “big” [or] “blue”....*

AF: Right, this is the comments section on [YouTube](#). It is a place for entire pandemonium.

SL: *So the good places have to figure out a way both to be open and to be...to allow the comments to be moderated somehow. If you look at even any newspaper online, except [The New York Times](#) which moderates things, its just people venting. Its’ sort of amusing if you like that kind of thing but it doesn’t add anything. So, nobody has figured this out but it’s a big battle going on right now...*

AF: Will you give me more background? When you say Web 2.0, will you give me a little bit of background about that?

SL: *Sure, Web 2.0 is basically user-generated content on the web. An example would be YouTube, it’s not just...its user-generated in that everybody posts stuff but then people post video comments and other things. A few museum have set up either tagging or...the postal museum [[National Postal Museum](#)] at the Smithsonian of all places, seems to have figured out a way to allow people who are experts, but aren’t professionals but who know a lot about stamps or whatever, to add their material to it. There is a lot more people out there who have expertise, who have useful things to say but aren’t on the payroll who can add useful material. In theory, you go further and you say we’re doing an exhibit on the Vietnam war and there’s nobody who is saying well here’s the official history, its everybody’s individual comments who was there or who heard about it or who have stories to tell. And it all adds up together. So it is the death of the narrator sort of taken to an extreme, and you just go out there and everybody makes this babble of voices or it adds up to something bigger. I must admit I am still a little bit skeptical. I have yet to see it*

done...there are lots of good places that collect stories about them. After 9/11 there were several sites who set up really interesting ways, tell your story about 9/11, give us your pictures, and then make them available...but to take the next step and make a story out of it is not easy.

AF: It's interesting in terms of storytelling. I think the challenge that the WWP will have is how to tell a story that is somebody else's story, that's a scholarly encounter with a piece of writing...Because we haven't really even been thinking about user-generated...I mean we sort of have, its been something we've had in our minds but we've been trying to think about, not basic tools, but sort of useful tools for, whether it be word clouds that would help people think analogous topics that are raised or to give a sense of other things that are available. In terms of just that kind of stuff, what do you think would be useful tools for us to think about?

SL: Well in some ways, if you say your goal is scholarly online exhibits, it seems to me that what would be interesting is how to make connections between different texts which you don't really currently do. So that becomes a different world that's not so much the exhibit world as text manipulating theories. Let's say you can compare the...let's say you build a concordance in each of your texts and you can say, just like Amazon, "If you like this text, then you'll like that text..." based on similar use of words or there much more sophisticated ways of measuring texts beyond just whether they use the same words...It might be interesting to start to build something based on that.

AF: Sort of tools that make certain recommendations or certain connections that might not have been anticipated between pieces in the collection...

SL: So its building tools for scholars rather than online exhibits. Has anybody tried to take texts and put them into [Wordle](#)?

AF: ...I have played with Wordle. Wordle is interesting.

SL: So let's say if you took all of the texts and took out of the inessential...and let's say you took all of that...But then the trick is making them clickable and comparing things.

AF: It would be nice if there was a feature where it was not only clickable but when you scroll over there was another text you could go to...

SL: Let's say you added in a window at the end of each of your document and one of them would take the text and turned them into a Wordle and the other one allowed you...a set of tools basically and some of them would allow you to take more than one text and use those tools and the online exhibit part would be letting people share what they discovered, what they found, when they did that. I don't know if that would be considered too serious or not but if you can get people to play with the texts in a really interesting way. The people who do the best [exhibits] are [Second Story](#), a firm out in Portland that does interactive exhibits, and they have done...you should look at the things that they can do...So lets say you

put on some sort of timeline somehow, organized...filters, build your own timelines. The problem is that you have texts, each of which require a lot of focus...

AF: Well let me show you something...We have these essays that people wrote and we're are not necessarily thinking about turning them into exhibitions but these give you a sense of the curation around these things and the way that people are sort of trying to make connections between these articles...these would be something that would be a prose-essay version of what we might...like someone doing an exhibition on the book trade. That may give you a sense of what we've been using to think...about what tools we would need. We don't have pictures but we would like to have pictures. We would like to maybe use the John Hay Collection's digitized photographs or something else that might make sense or whatever. Maybe somewhere else.

SL: Have you talked about [Victorian web](#)? Its actually a Brown project...It is old at this point, but it was done at Brown. George Landow had set up a bunch of these projects. They go back...You might see what he's been up to.

AF: ...In a way, I feel like what you are sort of telling me is that online exhibitions have a place but also there seems to be something like a move away from them. Are you sort of describing that?

SL: I think so. Part of it is that people want to connect more than just be looking through something.

AF: There is a way in which maybe online exhibitions are already starting to be a little antiquated even when we are just starting to get the hang of them and maybe what we were rather look at is something like a project about making more channels for connectivity on the site.

SL: Yes and especially for a scholarly site. You want to get the knowledge that people have to share with other people. Making tools for sharing knowledge I think would be really worth thinking about because an online exhibit that shows off the text doesn't do anything like that. The trick is how to help your users find other texts for them to use. Think of it as a way to build business for the site...What tools do you make available to work with the texts? That is a whole separate world that produces tools to work with texts...

AF: What tools come to mind if I may ask?

SL: The old fashion one is a concordance, which is just think of how many words you used in common. But now...[inaudible]. This is an area I know very little about...Find out and see what people say. But that would be...I think if you put some overlay onto your site of tools to use with texts and it will take some work because the texts right now have all of that other material embedded in them that you would need to get rid of in order to work with it...

AF: They are mainly early modern so that's the specialization. Which is...I think is interesting in terms of debates or issues around what we are doing which is that we have people who have been using this forever, and they really like this sort of old-fashioned accessibility of it.

SL: *You can always have the texts so that they can be used in more ways than one...*

AF: Right, they can have what they want and then there can be more available.

SL: *I want to go back to Second Story. [Looking at their exhibit site designed for the MOMA featuring [Kiki Smith's "Book, Prints, and Things"](http://www.secondstory.com/portfolio/works/kiki-smith-books-prints-and-things) (<http://www.secondstory.com/portfolio/works/kiki-smith-books-prints-and-things>)] One of the more interesting things that they have done is how to see the whole thing at one time and then move in to see details and they are just beautiful. You can see all of the images at one time and you can choose which one you want to look at and you can zoom in on things that look interesting to you to know more about them.*

AF: This reminds me a little bit of the Warhol thing. Did you see that? It was a Warhol exhibition that was out of the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh [[Warhol Time Capsule 21](#)]. There was something very similar about it. You would sort of unpack an object and then it would show it to you.

SL: *Yeah basically how do you choose which objects to look at in a way that you get to choose from...and its funny, this looks old now. You have this overview and then you can say, I want to see things that are about "Feminine Contents"...And so then you go on and learn more about that. Again, the challenge you'll have is how to make it work for texts. Really long, boring texts...Let's say that each text were represented by a Wordle and you saw them on a screen and...The problem right now at least when I look at your site is where do you begin.*

AF: You have know what you're doing right now. You have to be very specific and very targeted...There is an interest in exhibit helping us get out of that but there is not a lot of certainty about what that is and how to do it. What is being talked about is having some kind of theme and some kind of non-linear representation.

SL: *The textbase technology, they know about that...These are these very clever tools for how to take huge text databases and do interesting things. So that they know or they can figure out. The thing that I think would be fascinating is how to make it accessible to...let's say you had a screen that showed up that had Wordles for 10 or 20 different texts and you choose the one that looks most interesting and it shows you 10 more that are similar to it and then you can start to explore those texts in some ways. That would be more...*

AF: And maybe you could also go in through "Most Popular" or you could search through key words and then get your whatever...

SL: *Sure. I'll show you the other thing that I'm sort of fascinated with right now called [Prezi](#), which is trying to do a new kind of presentation. And most of them have [inaudible]...But they are...you could imagine doing this...What they are is groups of words and images designed as presentation. You walk*

through them and you see different texts in different ways. You could try to do exhibitions with this and that could be an interesting technique.

AF: So its interesting because we were looking at this with an English professor...and she was saying “This looks so confusing...” It seems that maybe what the deal is maybe there a productive value to confusing the material. Because literally that is disorienting the images and the texts. So maybe there is something about mixing that to give people...

SL: I think so because professors who are using it already know what they are interested in. If you say your goal is to open it up to a wider audience, you will get a more interesting target. I think what they should do is incorporate tools for professionals...I would love to see a window where there is a bunch of tools that you can use to apply to the text, but my guess is that they have already thought about it and it takes more programming because many of the tools are out there and so you could find them. There are developers who make them available for free which is great. But then there is this thing of how you can make this appeal to people who don't care. And that is somehow visualizing the texts and presenting the visualizations as a way into them. It's too late in the semester, but this would be an interesting question to give to a class: How would you know which of these to pick? What would make these interesting to you? How would you make them appeal? How do you get beyond just text?...

KEY POINTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engagements with online exhibitions cannot be dissociated from Web 2.0 advances (calling for more interactive, peer-to-peer, experiential features and tools) as these continue to engage technology to expand who has the privilege to speak. We should be aware of how “online exhibitions” index a conservative historical position (that of the privileged institutional position of the curator) that would suggest top-down, expert-driven, linear narratives designed to educate a more passive audience.
- If our goal is to create connections between texts, online exhibitions might not be exactly the right medium, but rather we might want to look more at text manipulation and analysis tools.
- Instead of creating an entirely new space for exhibitions, make use of already-existing tools to build more experiential, user-focused content into the collection, possibly by designing buttons in the corners of each page making connections between texts. [*“It seems to me that what would be interesting is how to make connections between different texts which you don't really currently do. So that becomes a different world that's not so much the exhibit world as text manipulating theories.”*]
- For example, we might add a layer of links that visitors to the site can build or opt out of (a kind of WWP+ that can be turned on or off). Consider Amazon-like “If you are interested in this text, look at...” links. Allow users to select texts they want to save in their personal archive or allow them to vote on favorites somehow.

- Work toward more sophisticated text analysis tools and tagging.
 - Use Twitter to advertise random or interesting lines from texts to build interest in the collection, especially in new and younger scholars
 - Visuals are important. Consider new ways to visualize the texts, especially if you are talking about online exhibitions. Start with wordle and word clouds and use these to make the texts more visually compelling and the site more visually intuitive. [*“But then there is this thing of how you can make this appeal to people who don’t care. And that is somehow visualizing the texts and presenting the visualizations as a way into them.”*]
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INTERVIEW 2: JULIA FLANDERS

JULIA FLANDERS
DIRECTOR, BROWN UNIVERSITY’S
WOMEN WRITERS PROJECT

On May 15, 2009, Julia Flanders and Anna Fisher spoke about the key issues and challenges associated with online exhibitions. This is an extended excerpt of their discussion.

KEYWORDS: SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION, EDITORIAL PROCESS, WEB 2.0, ANNOTATION, USER EXPERIENCE, VISUALIZATIONS

AF: What issues do online exhibits raise?

JF: *There are a set of technical issues that they raise. Social and scholarly issues. The scholarly issues raised...the exhibit idea is the wedge that we're on the thin end of. We are in a position now to kind of start on this idea, as we embark on it, and as people get interested in it, people using it and writing it, is going to get much more complicated and much more powerful. The technical issues are going to follow that same trajectory. We are already doing the thin end of that wedge. In other words, we already have the [RWO \(Renaissance Women Online\) essays](#) up already that are just HTML. We are about to start making that more complicated by thinking about how you encode that kind of information in a more complicated way which requires us to anticipate the rhetorical and structural features that people are going to want to write into their exhibits. Going beyond things like paragraphs, headings, lists, and quotations. What are the other things that people are going to think of when they start thinking in this mode and then what about linking? What kinds of multimedia do we want to be able to include? How do we want to be able to support the interaction between the exhibit and the full texts? Or the interaction between the exhibit and the search or interface to the full text? Those are technical issues that become conceptual issues.*

On the social side, I think we've already encountered one issue even in just discussing this with our scholars which is the question of vetting. The question of what form of authority these have and whom these speak for. Are they published by the WWP? Do we vouch for them? Can we position them as being strongly authored, in the sense that the authors take responsibility for what they say? Or are we implicated...? Do we need to exercise some editorial control over the kinds of things are being said. There is not just the quality but the kinds of things that are being said. If somebody submitting something extremely smart but controversial piece would we need to do anything to defend ourselves from it. So I think there are a whole set of issues that are going to come up around that which are essentially issues of the politics of scholarly communication. They have to do with what can be said in public and how the vectors of communication are understood and managed as between a publisher, an author, and a readership. And I think that there are also authoring issues that play into that...and I think this is kind of a wedge-shape thing. Our authors are going to come to us in a kind of naïve way, in the sense that they think they are being asked to author a scholarly essay of some kind and they can do that. But I think as we start to get more interesting authors who are interested in the genre of online authorship we may see a more subtle engagement that will complicate how these things are read. In other words, we may need to think about how we present these more complicated objects such that our readers can be lead into them, how you engage with that unforeseen scholarship.

And it think also, when we start to think about some of these issues which are both technical but also social or pedagogical maybe concerning how we usefully provide access to that body of information. And in a way, those questions are analogous to the questions that we tackle in designing WWO in that you dealing with a body of unfamiliar work that you want to give tools for exploring...

AF: This conversation is informed by my conversation with Steve Lubar who was challenging our thinking about what separates exhibitions from Web 2.0-thinking about finding tools to make it possible to browse things, to come in and not know exactly what you're looking for...visualization tools, whether it be Wordle or things of that genre...it seems to me that there is a way in which online exhibits have come to represent all of that kind of stuff...what is your thinking about that? What is the relationship of this text-entrenched product with this move toward visualization'?

JF: I would like to draw a distinction between the exhibit and the Web 2.0 universe, even the part of the web 2.0 universe that has to do with user-generated content. The rationale for me for this distinction is the role of the author. In other words, there is a lot we can and will do and should do broadly speaking, in the Web 2.0 universe, which involves giving users different ways of aggregating and interacting and exploring content. And those include visualizations of various kinds included (wordles, graphs, timelines). It also includes, potentially, areas where we might invite user input, tagging and commenting. Which I think we are mentally pushing back but that is on the agenda.

AF: He talked about the necessity of tagging and the necessity for contributions and then a third layer of contributions...users of the site having some way of playing with material, commenting. He focused on that and that was a major question at NERCOMP [See Appendix 1: "NERCOMP 2009 POSTER"]. People are very interested in commenting and tagging specifically.

JF: I might be positioning myself in a more contrarian or conservative position or maybe I'm right...but my personal feeling is that I have not personally seen a place where it has been valuable. In order for it to be so, it needs to be given more focus and I don't think we're currently in a position to do that. It's something we'll do but not do it right now.

AF: You'll do it well...

JF: Yeah they'll be some kind of coherence to it. At the moment what I see a lot of sites doing is providing an opportunity to comment. And either no body does it or you get this kind of randomness of commenting that doesn't actually amount to anything that can be used. It's not substantive. The comments themselves cannot be counted on to be useful or informative and there are no tools given for actually using the comments...

AF: What if we were to talk about annotation...how much of it is a digression?

JF: *It is in a sense but it is not an irrelevant one. When I say I want to make a distinction between these two domains, we are kind of elaborating what's in the domain that I'm not considering an exhibit. And I think annotation is...I would distinguish annotation from commenting...we've taken annotation seriously...we've attempted to provide the kind of focus and coherence...annotation to provide ways for faculty to create curricular materials, similar to what we're imagining exhibits might be except not sponsored by us. Faculty could create almost mini-essays consisting of linked annotations or students could create their work that would consist of annotations that would interact with our texts in various ways. We also talked about commissioning or starting a user-disciplinary project where users would use annotation to talk about interpret key words (if a student was interested in race, then they could talk about race in the early part of the century, they could find and tag all of the places where...and they could sign up for it. We could build an interface that would be useful. And the project wasn't funded and our own scholars were very worried about it because this issue of authority. Who are these people who are annotated? Do I have to see their annotations? Why am I interested in someone else's annotations? Will my annotations be private? There's still an important project to be done there but it has to wait for the community to catch up and for us to convince a funding body that this is a worthwhile thing to do. End of digression. That is something that I think isn't an exhibit. But we are going to do the annotation thing at some point.*

The exhibits I think of as motivated by the same kind of spirit but providing the focus and coherence by owning them a bit more. I think what characterizes exhibits is that they are authored, that they have somebody owning them who is not us but who wants to make some kind of intervention, who wants to create some kind of information object that is somehow attached to our primary sources. They also have some kind of ontology of their own, they are not purely parasitic, they have something to say. By defining exhibits in this way, as authored ontologically autonomous parasites, we provide a kind of insidious rationale which in years from now will become a way for thinking about annotation. You can publish stuff, they can author stuff that makes use of connection, in a way that enriches the collection, reaches out to the public and that constitutes a publication that sets aside the question of peer review. We review it in the sense that it's not a waste of bandwidth. We are basically saying to the reader that you have to decide if you think this is interesting or not and leave it at that. And that creates a discursive space where readers are talking to each other through us and they are having to adjudicate the terms on which these things will be accepted as scholarship. And once that ecology has started up, I think...we can imagine other kinds of interventions that are shorter or more occasional or private or whatever and then you'll start to see the ecology for annotation...

AF: Do you see online exhibitions as anticipating work in user-generated content?

JF: *I think there is a distinction but there is an important progression.*

AF: You used the words coherence and focus to describe an editorial tendency to separate these two things. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about this coherence and focus...it appears to me that a part of the intervention that online exhibits is making is to produce a productive incoherence where you see non-linearity in a way...what do you make of this disorienting aesthetic that many online exhibits have and what would you like WWP's relationship to that aesthetic to be?

JF: *In some sense that is up to the author. I don't think we have an allergy to that kind of experimentalism. When I've been answering your questions your questions so far, the template I've had in my mind is the scholarly essay. But actually its not that I think our exhibits need to be like that. The genre permits and even encourages a remix as opposed to a discourse. Even in the museum world, or the gallery world, the "unorderedness" of objects in a room for example is partly a factor of human freedom of movement. There are many exhibits that guide you in a certain current...even in an exhibit where. There is a holism that is being authored, since of thematic coherence, non-randomness is achieved...I can well imagine exhibits ranging from a highly conventional, highly controlled scholarly essay which manages all of the terms of its reading and which refers to the text base just as if it were published in PMLA and on the other hand an exhibit that is trying to create a room which there are objects from our collection which can speak to each other in a number of ways...and it might be technically challenging but it would be very interesting to think about how you publish these together. The initial encounter could even be randomizable it could be so the 5 pieces or 20 pieces are each always published in a different order with a comment with the reader takes...in effect creating a dynamic hypertext....once we introduce the idea of visualizations—figures, diagrams, images—one can imagine exhibits having...offering the author the opportunity to exploit that spatial freedom....I hope we can attract people who are interested in interactive hypertext. There will be really interesting technical challenges.*

AF: So kind of a controlled experimentations.

JF: *Not meaning rigidity but something different from chaos...the reader should always come through with some sense that it was a fruitful encounter...and it may be that we need to help educate readers...*

AF: What would you say if we had to be really explicit with someone about our goals? What is success to you with this first encounter with exhibits?

JF: *I think there are two quite distinct vectors of success that maps onto the WWP as a community service and a research project. The community-service form of success is that they would be viewed as desirable, successful, interventions, that people reading them approve of their existence, that they succeed in bringing people into the Women Writers Project...another way of bringing people into the project. They are interesting, good quality scholarship. That's the outreach side. On the research side, they will have*

been a success if they encourage authors to author in a different way. They will have been a success if both the authors and we can arise to that challenge. A part of my agenda is that they push us, in our reading and writing, to think in new ways about how scholarly communication works...

AF: ...What do you feel like WWP's relationship is to something like feminism? Do you see exhibits taking into account certain discourses around feminist curation?

JF: ...The WWP's feminist credentials are antique. Even in the early days of the project it was characterized as out-of-date, reclamationist, women's voices flavor. That's why the Pembroke Center thinks we're idiots. We don't do poststructuralism, theoretically rigorous feminism...what that means in practical terms is that when we pursue our technical agenda, our social agenda and so forth, it is feminist in a very conventional sense. We want there to be more access to women's writing, we believe in a general liberalizing approach to pedagogy which contains a liberal rather than radical feminist agenda, an ameliorative belief in the power of education.

AF: It seems to me that both of these projects...have to live simultaneously.

JF: In the same way that textual editing is dowdy and yet poststructuralism is...

AF: It needs a text to take apart.

JF: Exactly. It is fair enough to critique textual editing. Where exhibits are concerned, there is definitely a place for feminist curation to happen but I don't think that should be our expectation. The WWP doesn't bring that level of awareness and commitment but where people are interested in that, that's great.

AF: Do you think this kind of question should be raised in the white paper?

JF: I think it would be great if it could be explored...if we could lay out or acknowledge it...

AF: What motivates this recent trend in exhibits? Because everything I'm finding indicates exhibits are out-of-date.

JF: I think it's really important to distinguish between the perception of hotness generated by the buzz channel, things that are "so tomorrow" are on the buzz channel. Since it takes finite quantities of human development. This is the buzz and there is the doing stuff. The buzz happens at light speed and we happen at human speed...we are not pundits or tekkies where that's our focus. We are trying to be aware of the cutting edge (markup technologies)...it's important that we are aware of what people are buzzing about...because that gives us a kind of incoming set of thoughts that we process and say oh yes this has legs...we are not going to implement Twitter, I'm sorry we just aren't...but there are things that have legs and those are the things that we have a responsibility to identify and use. Exhibits broke on the scene an unidentifiable number of years...and we're now trying to think about how to make that into something

that is a durable part of what we do. Our audience is not populated by people who are buzz but by people who have to teach the same course every year and are trying to make that course better. And for them, when we introduce exhibits over the next year or so. The idea that there are interesting secondary materials written by people that leads people into the WWP, that will build up to be a rich collection of really interesting critical essays. That's cool. It doesn't matter what we call it or whether everyone else is making exhibits 2 years from now...but the content of those things, the mode of publication that we provide, and the ongoing exploration of what it means to author in that mode are really interesting and sustainable.

KEY POINTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recent innovations by scholarly digital humanities projects have presented online exhibits as a new form of publication.
 - Web 2.0 tools and annotation tools must be distinguished from exhibits for now by the WWP. Funding and planning down the road will make more work on these possible for WWO.
 - Exhibits might be loosely curated, scholarly essays authored by specific scholars who want to make use of the collection. Her conception of exhibits is more as a space for scholarly publication with some multimedia support, than as a space for sharing content and interacting with the collection through analytic or experiential tools. [*"I can well imagine exhibits ranging from a highly conventional, highly controlled scholarly essay which manages all of the terms of its reading and which refers to the text base just as if it were published in PMLA and on the other hand an exhibit that is trying to create a room which there are objects from our collection which can speak to each other in a number of ways...and it might be technically challenging but it would be very interesting to think about how you publish these together."*]
 - It is important to be both aware of new and useful tools for the collection but to differentiate from what tools are unrealistic and unnecessarily trendy for our users.
 - Exhibits would be successful if they offers teachers and scholars a sustainable resource and outlet for their work.
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INTERVIEW 3: SARAH BORDAC

SARAH BORDAC

HEAD OF OUTREACH & INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN DEPARTMENT,
BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY INTEGRATED TECHNICAL SERVICES

On June 5, 2009, Sarah Bordac and Anna Fisher spoke about the key issues and challenges associated with online exhibitions. This is an extended excerpt of their discussion.

AF: What is an online exhibition?

SB: *It can mean a lot of things... Before I came into the library, I worked in museums. I think about exhibits as a literal exhibit, like a physical museum exhibit where you have artifacts with labels and translating that to an online space where its more of a gallery...Also, an online exhibition as an experience and that experience as something different than a physical experience. So it can be a connection between the physical and the online or it can be solely online. And if it is solely online it can be the presentation of something that is the central focus and there are so many different aspects, you can call them web 2.0 type things or just different feature sets. A curator is going to decide what the intention of the presentation is and if the goal is to have users, I hope it is, for users to experience the material and leave something behind. The visitor grows in some way and take away and leave something behind. And that's where the 2.0 piece is so interesting because people can do both and maybe maintain a relationship with the space but online communities are completely different...a different path.*

AF: One thing we are dealing with is how online exhibitions rely on images and our text-based collection...what are your thoughts? Advice?

SB: *Do you know Clarissa, a grad student in Am Civ? Talk to her. One of her challenges is connecting reading and writing. Reading in a solitary experience. We read on our own and then come into space where you are then sharing those thoughts but they are completely detached. If there are tools that allow you to connect, annotate, your text but also do so in a transparent way so other people can see them then it opens up lots of opportunities. He [Patrick Yacht] told me this morning that there is a Mellon Funded project that is doing something similar – an annotation project. That seems to be the missing piece. You have [Flickr](#) and YouTube and you can leave comments. People do this in [Facebook](#) and they do it in more scholarly modes...but the commenting feature is not rocket science. It is the conversations around content in context that would be really interesting. And if you have the same text, you might want multiple instances of comments so you might have a group that is working together or commenting on a text but maybe not everybody that comes to the site...an exhibit isn't the same for everyone. So if you and I are working on a text, let's say we're at different institutions and we're both studying something similar and hey let's work on this together. We may set up a space where we can work on something together...*

...the beauty of an online exhibition is that you don't have one instance of the thing. You have as many as you want. You have an object but you can duplicate it over and over again for different presentations.

And if I understand what your goal is, the audience for this is going to be scholarly, it's going to be community-based...

AF: It is going to range from young scholars to established scholars...I would add to what you are thinking about this problematic of the scholarly with the possibility of multiple viewpoints being enabled...How do you deal with that? How do you deal with the fact that we have scholars that have been using the site forever and really like the way it works and don't want it messed with...? How do you add this other layer, literally adding another layer for annotation to be possible or whatever?

SB: There are going to be people who don't want the other stuff so if you can turn it on or off. But basically looking at it as an enhanced feature set. So it could be WWP now with annotation. It could be something that you wouldn't have to use but the type of people who are going to be interested are going to think it is really interesting but there are people who are just going to want to use the text...One idea would to be just comment on the text as it was written or another way to do it is to be comparing different texts, say in the same time period but two different texts...be able to extract pieces and look at them side-by-side. And not necessarily the whole thing but pieces and each remembers where it came from. You could be working really deep on a small portion and at some point marry it back to the original. And then, if you had multiple instances where say there were five paragraphs and two documents and you work intensely on the first one and the third one and the fifth one and the second one and the fourth one...and so they are all kind of isolated experiences and then suddenly you can pull them altogether and you can see a web or not a mesh of...you could look at real visualizations—term, connections—and you could start to identify commonalities or differences and that might have to be themes that are assigned by the researcher.

AF: It sounds like what we are talking about is literally create your own exhibit that you are putting together, even if it is some kind of a rough working document within the larger site which begins to think certain terms together in a certain way.

SB: And maybe I'm getting a little off...

AF: And this is the question: Is it off or is it not off? Is this completely about online exhibits? Is this rethinking what they are?

SB: I think the experiential part has to be there and if you think about who your audience is what is the experience they are looking for? Are they looking for a button to push that spins around and flashes? No, they want something meaningful and genuine, a real authentic...it's not a toy is I guess what I'm saying. It needs to have some kind of value for them actually use it. The value piece may come from being able to make sense of things that they previously couldn't see because they were separated. Like Clarissa's idea of being able to annotate a text in the context of the text....Instead of just cutting and pasting a quote, putting it in a discussion board, and starting a discussion thread about what does the quote mean. But now its

divorced from the original...But what if you could take that to the next level and not only do that but also to be able to compare two texts?

AF: Because its in the moment of reading something and looking at something while its still in the original body is what produces a lot of thought is what produces something...and you forget it immediately when its divorced from that...

SB: And when you read through stuff, you make notes in the margins or maybe in your notebook, but ok now you've put it in a notebook and its divorced suddenly, no immediately...If the entire process couldn't be contained...I see it less of an exhibit and more of a scholarly tool.

AF: This is the problem. We have three people on staff and there is this flood of ideas. And when you ask people to tell you about online exhibits, they are going to tell you what you are telling me. This is what Steve Lubar told me. This is the answer it sounds like if you are going ask about online exhibits on this date...but our challenge is that we're not probably able to do all of this stuff until multiple generations of exhibits frankly. So I think the question I have to ask would be what do you do when you can't do all of this stuff yet? What do you begin to do?

SB: My guess is that this conversation is happening in a lot of places and something will come together to make it less of a behemoth.

AF: Like tools you can use?

SB: Yeah. You don't have to everything at once and you don't have to built it from scratch. But my guess is that you won't have to wait that long to get to all of these things. So whatever gets built has to be modular enough so that it can accommodate those changes as we go. I don't know what the structure is for the current material, it is data-based driven, it's all encoded...so in that sense, the content is well-positioned to do a lot of different things. And if you have some vocal users that are not completely happy or satisfied with the extent to which the content is presented now. People who say oh I wish it could do this or...You can listen to Steve or to me and you can make sense of what possibly might be but I would satisfy your current users. If it is as simple as providing the ability to annotate a single document and save it, like have a profile....If people log in...if there is a variety of different types of users but if you just picked one. Maybe it's the class model. That way a faculty member could register a class and then you would have annotation available to everyone in the class and they would just log in with the class number...I don't know maybe that's oversimplifying it. But you just pick one of those use cases and just work with that to get the idea moving. The one that's going to biggest bang for your effort. But find out what else is going on...like this Mellon grant that I just found about this morning [UIC-University of Illinois Champagne]. I intend to email Clarissa to find out about it so I'll find out...

I guess the word exhibit threw me for a minute. I'm working on a project right now for the dean of the college and we started by calling the thing we were creating a portfolio, an e-portfolio for students and everyone freaked out because they all had a different idea of what a portfolio is. I think of an exhibit as kind of Web 1.0. That it is not as much about the user-contributed piece as much as a curated and self-contained thing...so that the thing exhibit, even though you can leave comments, but being able to create your own stuff is the experience piece that I don't think...that in my mind is not really a part of the exhibit. Because exhibit suggests curated and curated to me in that context is something that by an expert where the user is not the expert.

You're working with old texts in new technology and that alone is an interesting combo. Why take a step back in time? You don't need to catch up with old technology you need to keep leading with new technology. Not that you have to go jump on a UIUC annotation bandwagon...There's another little tech tip--[Wordpress](#) has a plug-in called [Commentpress](#) that also allows you to do commenting. You have to have a local installation of Wordpress you cannot use the web-based. That's wordpress.org. There are tools out there that would allow you to do the annotating, which just makes sense. What needs to happen is to enhance the content you have...you need something that's available already to...something that's available already like Commentpress may do so much to expose content in a different way than you are already and its free and its available and it could be a feature that people could use or not use and you could just use it to get feedback. There is so much bubbling around on this topic. But the idea of users to be able to work with texts is something that is needed. I mean people are still using discussion boards but that's not really where we need to be. I mean do I use a Wiki, a blog, or a discussion board to do this? Well why do you need to use any of those three? Why not just do it within the content? In word, you can leave comments, but you have to share that document back and forth. In a Wiki, you can have people editing the same text and you can keep track of it and you can comment in a Wiki but even then it's separated out. Its either all merged together which is not really the point here...This next step is something that these existing tools are not really doing very well.

AF: ...Does exhibit to you, if it is made dynamic and is made social, what kind of value does that have?...

SB: I guess the word "exhibit" is something that if I were in your shoes I would consider not using. Just like when we started talking about this other project and we called it a portfolio and everybody started freaking out because they all had it all figured out well why aren't you talking to these people? This doesn't look anything like it should. It's not a portfolio. Oh wait a second. We shouldn't call it that. And so we're calling it an Advisory Tool. How vanilla is that?...The thing that I'm thinking of based on what you're saying is that you focus on the collaboration and experience your audience is going to be working

either on their own with the text or in small groups with the text although there may be the whole community that may chime in on things. But its not really a community site...So I would say that you invest in supporting the activity of those individual scholars and they will each learn from...they may also discover things through the footprints left behind by other people. I don't know to what extent the scholars really want to see what other people while their ideas are kind of gelling, they may but they also may not so the ability to turn it off and turn it on and maybe be able to keep track of their own thoughts may be something of interest.

But I also...if I was doing research, I would be wary of putting my comments only in the tool, I would probably also put them on paper or put them in a word document while I'm working on it online. So what would motivate me to use an annotation tool? It would probably be that the tool can help me uncover things that I otherwise couldn't see. And so that would be the ability to see two things at once and...I don't know. I don't know if it is a matter of looking at words in the two texts in the two texts and connecting them somehow visually with maybe it just pulls out different words and maybe clustering or maybe not, maybe its just highlighting, maybe its just being able to see two texts next two each other. But I definitely wouldn't go 1.0. I wouldn't try to do anything...that's kind of what you already have even though it's encoded, it's rich.

AF: We have been in touch with younger scholars who we have a working relationship with. We have begun to ask them to put together some idea of an exhibit so that we could play with and see what happens and see what is required as we kind of work through this process of what we want. We should be getting those soon. We have two that are coming. So that should be...you know we are moving toward doing that but also these conversations that I'm having , I am getting a really strong sense of exactly what you are saying and maybe I need to talk to more people too but all of the conversations I have had have been like this...and yet there is a desire to not, sort of, have our eyes be too big and also to remain sort of pragmatic about the resources that we have...

SB: I think that the cool thing about the 2.0 world is that you don't have to have it all figured out ahead of time. I mean you can have a sense of where you want to be but you also recognize that in six months its going to be a completely different situation. The environment is going to be different, the tools are going to be different, you know there are going to be more choices, different choices. And in six months, you'll have a better idea of what your users think. And so you always have to be fluid and moving and responding. Start small and just pick one thing. List 20 different feature sets that could possibly be a part of this and pick the one that you think is going to have the least threatening impact on those people who aren't interested but the most useful...Instead of applying something sweepingly across the board to everything, like a redesign or a whole relaunching of the project, I would just start with simple little things and then you can couple them together as time goes on and enhance the tool. Or you may decide that

that thing you rolled out, there is something better. Or people don't really like it and we can try something else.

AF: I think that exhibits had been that thing. But it also more of a we need to figure out what the deal is with this even if it is behind the times...If it is semantic, is there something you think is analogous to what we are talking about that we should think about in terms of positioning ourselves?

SB: I would probably say that the words that we've used, so collaborative and experiential, those are the words that to me capture more of what we're talking about then exhibit because exhibit sounds like presentation and not action...

AF: Like unidirectional...

SB: Yeah. I don't know. It could be...I mean its not really "Text in Conversation," but its facilitating that. And so there is so much of a user's control and decision-making involved...choices...I don't know a term off the top of my head. I don't have one that comes to mind....What is it that Julia wants? What is it that your grad student users want? What do your heavy, scholarly, faculty-type users want? Those are going to be different things, perhaps. If this gets used in a classroom environment, for an assignment, how is that different than how a scholar might use it, whether they are a grad student or a faculty member. Knowing those different use cases may help you narrow down where to focus your energies. Sure, you could do anything.

[Pointing to a printout of [the Brown University library homepage](#)] "These things up here, these are the library website...we just printed it out and handed out to undergrads and asked them to put lines through the things they have never used and circle the things that they use all of the time and then write any comments on them. So we can sit here and say that we know that the library website homepage has way too many words on it. I can tell you that just by looking at the page without any details on it. But what do you do? What do you change? What do people want? So this is only 16 of them but it gives you an idea that people aren't using a lot of things and there are patterns here."

AF: These are all just undergrads, right?

SB: They are just undergrads. So thinking about one user group and focusing in what they need, you can start to get a sense. Now, we aren't going to change the library homepage based on undergrads only, but you know if we do the same things with grad students and faculty, we'll see oh ok, nobody uses that. So we found out that no body uses this and so we replaced it...We are taking a very modular approach to redoing this. We are not going to redesign the home. Were just doing bit by bit.

...[discussion of library technical services]...

Has anyone mentioned tagging?

AF: Yes, Steve [Lubar] talked about tagging. And I talked to Julia about tagging also. And comments and tagging kind of go together in these conversations. People seem to say the same things about them which is just the question about to what extent you moderate and to what extent random person X's tags mean anything to me, mid-level scholar.

SB: *Unless you are working with controlled vocabulary and then you kind of rule out anyone who is a novice user.*

AF: Right, this is the thing. How do you make it respectable for people who want it to be respectable?

SB: *You don't open it up to the free-for-all. You provide controls that allow users the ability to create their own spaces and uses for the content, but you don't allow them to totally transform it. And maybe collectively, eventually, there is a transformation.*

AF: How do you locate the comments? How do you locate where this is coming from, if this is a sixteen-year-old who is working at their high school? Do you code comments based on the commenter's status?

SB: *If in order to comment, you have to be register...?*

AF: And do you have to register beyond your subscription?

SB: *Yes, yep I would think so. And then everybody is identified. You could have a handle. You don't have to use your own name... But I don't know to what extent people in the scholarly realm—digital humanities spaces are different—but how willing scholars would be to participate, either anonymously or non-anonymously, in an open-commenting environment or whether if they knew the members of the party, then they would participate. Like a class or maybe a conference. There is a conference coming up and everybody who registers for the conference...*

AF: That is really interesting doing it by groups. And you could invite your group. And the account could be a group account...

SB: *For classes I think it would be great. I don't know how much of a collaborative scholarship goes on outside of classes. I mean if it does, then that would be a really neat little tool...*

AF: Now for you, what is the important difference between commenting and tagging? And which one do you think...I mean were talking about tagging more right?

SB: *I'm thinking about tagging. I mean if you are tagging you are going to be able to later on retrieve the things you've tagged. When I use tags, I typically use the most general of tags, like on delicious, I often put in anything that I find that relates to media literacy so I just put the letters "ML" because its shorthand*

for me. It means nothing to anyone else right? It's easy for me to then go back and retrieve all of the things that I wanted to group together. And in my mind that's ok. Now does it muck up the experience for other people? No, the way delicious works, no it doesn't. If you go to the main delicious page, its going to list kind of the most frequently tagged articles and things that come up but that is only to show activity and popularity, but it doesn't interfere with what you're doing. You never have to look at it.

AF: We could even do something like that where we have the most talked about, most tagged...

SB: Yeah, You can see where all of the activity is happening. It might be interesting for others to see that others are using it and what they are doing when they are there.

AF: For people who want to start to figure out what they are writing about or...

SB: Now commenting would have to be...I like the idea of being able to comment as you would when you are reading something and just like writing in the margins and not have to worry about anybody else reading it. But also being able to make your comments visible and allow other people to comment on them. There are some things that I might want to know that might make me look dumb...so you'd want to make sure that people had the ability to be private...

KEY POINTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Exhibits can and do mean many things. If it is only based online then the exhibit indexes a form of presentation in which there is some central focus, sustained by “Web 2.0 type things” or different feature sets. It is up to the WWP in designing the interface, and ultimately to the curator or the contributing scholar, to decide what the intention of the presentation is. It is important for a part of this goal to be for users to experience the material and be able leave something behind. This is where developments in Web 2.0 tools become interesting and important for the WWP, as they provide pre-existing tools for users to maintain an ongoing relationship with the space that would have a longer life than just a one-time interaction.
- Exhibit spaces could be spaces for interactive engagements with annotation or for reading content in context. We should look into the Mellon Funded project out of the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign where there is the Open Annotation project.
- Because there will be users who do not want new tools, we should make it possible for users to turn off any enhanced feature sets. We might think about advertising “WWP *now with annotation.*”
- If we were willing to merge the concepts of exhibits and annotations, we could launch a new adjunct space called something like “Workspaces” within WWO, where users might find tools for annotating, comparing, and analyzing various texts from the collection *within* WWO. [*One idea*

would to be just comment on the text as it was written or another way to do it is to be comparing different texts, say in the same time period but two different texts...be able to extract pieces and look at them side-by-side. And not necessarily the whole thing but pieces and each remembers where it came from. You could be working really deep on a small portion and at some point marry it back to the original. And then, if you had multiple instances where say there were five paragraphs and two documents and you work intensely on the first one and the third one and the fifth one and the second one and the fourth one...and so they are all kind of isolated experiences and then suddenly you can pull them altogether and you can see a web or not a mesh of...you could look at real visualizations—term, connections—and you could start to identify commonalities or differences and that might have to be themes that are assigned by the researcher.”]

- We should tap into the tools being produced by other groups so that we do not need to make something new.
- There has to be something experiential about what we are offering so that we can offer our users something that is not a finished product but something that they can use and make use of in order to have a meaningful, authentic interaction with our collection that will offer them a unique value. She feels this value should come from how whatever we come up with will help them see what they couldn't previously see across in the texts in the collection because they were separate. [*“I think the experiential part has to be there and if you think about who your audience is what is the experience they are looking for? Are they looking for a button to push that spins around and flashes? No, they want something meaningful and genuine, a real authentic...it's not a toy is I guess what I'm saying.”*]
- We might proceed by deciding which user-type we want to reach and design simple tools that we might build upon for that user profile. We should try to get user feedback as we implement new tools to see which ones users use and which ones are unnecessary.

INTERVIEW 4: CLARISSA CEGLIO

CLARISSA CEGLIO

GRADUATE STUDENT

DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION, BROWN UNIVERSITY

On July 14, 2009, Clarissa Ceglio and Anna Fisher spoke about the key issues and challenges associated with online exhibitions. This is an excerpt of their discussion.

KEYWORDS: USER INTERFACE EXPERIENCE, VISUALIZATIONS, ANNOTATION, TEXTUAL ANALYSIS TOOLS, NARRATIVITY
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AF: ...How much do you know about the Women Writers Project?

CC: When Steve first mentioned that Women Writers Project had approached him about the idea of online exhibitions. That was the first time I kind of heard about it. So I quickly went to the site and just looked around a little bit. To be honest, I didn't get too far, I found the navigation not ideal...so I don't know much at all but I know it exists.

AF: [description of WWP]...Online exhibits is what they came to wanting to know more about so my research has been around: What are online exhibits? People call them virtual exhibits, digital exhibits. What exactly is that? Who are people who are doing them well? What does it mean to do them well? In asking those questions and talking to different people and doing my own research all these other questions have emerged...

CC: I bet.

AF: ...and are connecting me to you. I know from looking at your profile that you have a background working in museum curation but also you are interested in digital humanities so I was tempted to want to ask you very basic questions about online exhibits. Do you feel like you know a lot about that?

CC: *Where I see myself is maybe not in a position too different than your own. My background professionally is in advertising and marketing and from there into publishing...[discussion of professional background]...Since coming back to graduate school, I've become interested in digital humanities so I've been reading a lot and following a lot...As I was thinking about the Women Writers Project, my initial questions or interest would probably come more from that institutional marketing mode, where getting a better sense of: why online exhibits? How did that come to be formulated...especially if the database is not inherently visual...while you could include illustrations...If you are not dealing with inherently visual media, exhibitions become problematic. To think of what are some of the creative solutions if you are not dealing with inherently visual media? Taking that step back: how was it conceived that online exhibitions would further the project's agenda and how does it meet a perceived need on the part of the imagined audience (who is the imagined audience) and how do these two things work together?*

AF: Let me tell you a little bit about that. The idea was originally to curate around certain thematics that emerge in the collection. The users tend to be young scholars to well-established scholars, so it kind of runs that gamut. In the original manifestation of exhibits, we went to younger scholars who we have a close relationship to contribute original exhibition ideas and we were going to work with those to build out the idea...

I can guide you through some of the main questions that seem to be cropping up if you want to speak to them...There were a couple of things I wanted to you about: One was if you want to say more about what you know about exhibits, that's great. I also understand, just very practically, that you may know something about this Mellon grant that Sarah Bordac was talking about. She mentioned that there was a Mellon grant that the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign [["The Open Annotation Collaboration"](#)]: Read the July 29, 2009 Press Release: ["New Grant Funds Tools & Research to Support the Sharing of Digital Annotations"](#) is doing on annotation so I was also really curious about your work on annotation...?

CC: *...Annotation is a big thing right now and it is being used by different people in different ways. The basic idea is with a blog, for example, if we are talking about a text, the text is over here and the blog is here and conversation and text are not in the same space. Annotation projects typically want to have an object-based conversation (the text is the object) so that they are happening in the same space. I don't have to take your word for it or take the extra time to go find the text. I see them married together. Some annotation projects are collaborative spaces where we can work on a book together. Maybe its my book but I am open to the notion that I can get feedback during the creation process that will make this a more astute project because I have been hearing from other scholars while I'm developing it and incorporating responses to their concerns and its developed as a conversation rather than as a scholar working or writing in isolation. A lot of them are writing-oriented, where it's writing collaboratively or I want feedback while I'm writing. Other annotation projects, and this is where the names are escaping me, but there is a couple of great links that I can send you where libraries or other groups that have been digitizing manuscripts to*

make them broadly accessible are also saying wouldn't it be wonderful if the scholars who work with these texts do their annotations, share their knowledge. It remains their knowledge, you know there are copyright issues but that if someone else comes to this body of work, if that scholar has elected to make their annotations public, I then am suddenly am looking at a manuscript that may have layers of rich commentary from scholars working on this body of literature and I would cite and footnote that just as I would any other scholarly source...

AF: Would that manifest itself as tagging or commenting or...?

CC: That is where annotation software is trying to develop and find the right format. A lot of it will be: here is the text, and there will be what looks like a footnote, you'll click on it, and maybe in a split screen type of format, it will bring the comment up next to the text. Commercial projects, [Adobe Buzzword](#) is one, which interestingly doesn't work with PDFs at all but works with texts. They do more of pop-up bubble format on the document. So there are different formats out there. When I get back to my office, I can send you some links and I know this will relate to the project that Sarah was talking about. Some of the big projects that are going on right now around annotation. My interest in it was as a teaching tool. How can, in the classroom rather than...ok go read this we'll discuss it and when you get here I'll hope you have read it. Or if I have you blog about it, you're all having a discussion but again the text is not with you, was could we encourage collaborative critical reading if student annotations could appear on the document. I was thinking PDF because OCRA uses PDFs. And you could switch it off if you just want to print out your own version or see an unannotated version. But annotation in a very loose sense. More conversation on the document...

...[discussion of her work with STG and annotation]...

What I had imagined, not knowing that it didn't really exist yet, was a tool for collaborative, critical reading. I just needed someone to tell me about the software that was already out there, not realizing that annotation or commentary on documents is kind of a new, evolving thing. Most of it works with either Word documents or text files. I was interested in PDFs because I don't want the students rewriting so and so's article on...There is Commentpress which is renamed. It's part of the whole Wordpress open software and Commentpress has now renamed itself as [Marginalia](#) I think? And that is one of the one's where its kind of a split screen...When I say my project, I had envisioned something for my class only to find out that it doesn't really exist.

...[discussion of her work with STG and why this work has been delayed]...

[There is one] I don't know but I can't remember the name is that is now being hooked into a for-profit because it's a big huge software, encoding thing...its similarities to the Women Writers Project would be

that's about having texts that are digitized and now trying to think of is there collaboration around those texts happening in a virtual space and not just the individual scholar coming to the texts and doing what they want. So how do we make our archives a collaborative space and expand the kind of scholarly work and conversation that can take place in this database? So that would be more of the different annotation, commentary projects, that's probably more in line with you as an archive than say, we're writing a book chapter...

AF: Totally. Yeah I think it is in this rethinking of exhibitions...you see this sort of aesthetic across the best online exhibitions which is an ability to see some kind of globalized view of the content of the holdings...to pick a particular object or series of objects, unpack them and also there is a way in which the object is available many times over. So there can be many things done to the same object...it seems like one thing that we're coming to is this notion of the exhibit that isn't the same exhibit for everybody. So it's this collaborative thing that is the same thing for everyone and everyone's working together and...it is this thing you can take out of context and you can play with or manipulate. I was talking to Sarah...about the possibility of doing some kind of comparative reading of two passages that are in two different pieces of writing in the collection, being able to grab them, put them in your exhibit, make your own exhibit in a way and do some kind of analysis in some kind of workspace. So the exhibit as some kind of workspace...

CC: It is funny that you said workspace because as you go forward and you define who is using this, why do we want this, how does this help us connect to new audiences or enrich what we can do for our existing audience? As you think about those issues, the word exhibit conjures up sort of a fixed image in people's mind. You've got an object, explanatory text, and relationship between multiple objects. So whether it is the physical world or the virtual world, an exhibit is this curated collection of things and themes are exposed and relationships...when you are talking about an ability to work comparatively and to create a workspace, you may find that workspace is really...you may migrate away from exhibit as the word to describe what you are doing. Because workspace had already popped into my mind and then all of a sudden you said workspace so...

AF: Which is ironic because in a way, this notion of a workspace describes this ability to make your own blank slate that is to some degree productively isolated. This is kind of fascinating given this problematic of almost wanting to get away from that on the other side. The reading and writing becoming divorced from each other...

CC: This one link I'll send you, they are looking at different layers of privacy, who can see the annotations, some people may want to keep it more personal, some people may want a group working on something and other people may want it open.

AF: That's like a whole other...that's something we really may want to think about in terms of log-in, setting up your own account, groups that may want to be able to set up their own accounts and work together...and then layers, where you can see things or not see things because we have a very strong-willed, vocal group of followers who have worked forever this way and don't want it to change it all...

We have already talked about this problematic of the visual, and if you know of any good visualization tools that we could think about using to visualize texts, that would be great...

SL: *I know that Steve probably mentioned the Wordle. Again, I will always want to come back to [the fact that] a lot of energy can be put into things that no body will use. I don't know if you have read...["Digital History"](#) [Cohen and Rosenzweig]....it is available online as well as hard copy. The useful thing about this book...it tries to help the interested party really step back and consider mission objectives, audience, where the marriage is, so you don't end up putting a lot of time and energy into creating something that isn't going to be used or that could be used but you don't know how to find your audience for it. Because one of the dilemmas with online efforts is that...there is [The American Antiquarian Society](#) up in Worcester. They have this wonderful website, "Picturing American History," and they have imagined it as collaborative space where scholars who are teaching history and want to incorporate visual evidence into the classroom can have images, talk about how they use it teaching, pose questions and dilemmas. And it has actually been a wonderful space for that but it's dying because the same three people or four people are participating. And it is this great tool and space but they haven't for some reason yet found their audience and that is a recurring dilemma. So this book is helpful in terms of laying out some of those foundational questions. It is kind of saying, before you go off running in that direction, hold on a minute, and really define well what you are doing. Get user input all along the way so you that you don't at the end of the day end up with a wonderful tool that nobody [is going to use or] knows how to find, etc. And doesn't really meet your needs, and that's the other critical component, we want to do this why? How does it help us as well as our users? So its that tandem track...And that is a very good book for some of those questions, even though its about doing history exhibitions and online sites...*

AF: I have to say, I am doing this research and we are really trying to pay attention to what everyone is saying, but at the same time, I think that our problem will be moving too slowly rather than moving too quickly. There is such a loyal following to the site and, like I said, it's [a twenty-year-old project]...so it's a very solid...reputation [that is] not known for these quick permutations or the thrall to the new or anything like that. There are only three people on staff full-time so one of the questions is sort of: what do you do when you can't do everything?...and I think that is where I hear you in terms of really being strategic and thinking about what people need and what we can offer...

CC: *Because when I think about online exhibitions, a primary reason why a group will do online exhibitions, especially with a database that scholars can use, is to give examples, to basically inspire. To say here is what Scholar X has done, how exciting, how wonderful and to inspire people who may not already be using it to think about, wow that does apply to my work or that is something I could do in my time period. So online exhibitions, for places that aren't museums, can typically be a way to share work and inspire others to use the database. So is that the goal? Or is the goal to provide a collaborative space?*

There was kind of a mania for “build your own exhibit.” You have to think about: who wants to build their own exhibit and why? Is there a certain age group, the heavy MySpace...and younger crowd that like to create, like to share, it’s a “fun” thing to do, it’s not research...is that why people are going to come here and build their own exhibit? Or are you looking at again the scholar who wants to share their work and you’re going to provide a space for them?

AF: Yeah I think it would be a part of an enhanced tool set for working with the texts. It would be more toward annotation than exhibition I think. It would provide the workspace in my mind...

CC: And...if you still want to inspire potential newcomers by sharing what work scholars are doing, maybe you have a place on the homepage that is highlighted “Projects” or “Showcase.” Maybe you start by contacting the people...because they publish their work and they would be happy to have some sort of online representation about their big idea...

...There is what you call “early adopters” in the marketing curve. They are willing to put up with inconvenience, risk, difficulty, and barriers because they are so invested in whatever it is that you are offering that hurdles will not keep them from you. And that might be who your hardcore faithful users are because its not a very user-friendly interface, at least my first experience with it and you have to figure it out and be patient with it...they are willing to put up with that because their motivation is so high. Then you have the next group down, this is probably a useful tool for them but they have other tools. They may come in and browse, throw up their hands, and move away because if they don’t have that drive and if they have other places that you can go, they look because you have barriers. So you will continue to please this kind of extra motivated group but you will limit your appeal to growth and the people who may want these Web 2.0 features you talked about are going to be turned off if their first introduction is to the interface, they may not stick around to the Web 2.0...

AF: The site as I see it...the search features are very technical but very solid for people who know how to use them and the holdings of the collection are...scholars who work on early modern women’s writing who want to be able to search different words...basically there are a lot of different ways to use it. But I think what we are talking about is how to, as you were saying, inspire younger scholars to use it, to find connections across texts, and to make something of those that might allow for a kind of relational something to happen between people. This interest in working through this piece of it is coming form a desire to have a little plus beside what is seen...to be totally solid...

CC: Functionality can be superb and I take it that it is...

...[Discussion of restricted access databases and questions of interface design]...

Online exhibits for museums are becoming a still very vital complement to a physical exhibit. Some museums who have the money to do online-only exhibits, because they only have so much physical

space...are becoming very rich, multimedia. There is video, there is voice, there is a lot going on. But again, they are very visual, as well as now visual, audio, and text. I am still not convinced...I haven't heard yet why you need to do exhibits. How that will serve you and how it will serve your user base...So your exhibits would predominantly be textual? Is there visual imagery...?

AF: We don't have galleries built into what we have currently. In the exhibits that people are working on for us, we have two coming in...people who are working on them are going out and getting permissions for images. Now, we've talked a lot about timelines and visualizations of sort of large-scale timelines and there are some really good ones that have been done by Second Story that we really like. So [there is] this idea that all of the texts in the collection could maybe eventually be imaged in a digital timeline so that you could see what years there are the most texts, things are periodized but also...

CC: *So basically what you've just talked about is data visualization. More ways that we can visualize our data...*

AF: And I don't think the fact that we are not image-based necessarily keeps us from...

CC: *...Exhibitions and data visualizations are two separate things. Exhibitions are narratives. You are going to tell me a story. It is a scholarly story, it's a research-based story, but you are basically, whoever is doing it, is taking objects that appear somehow disconnected and they are going to come into relationship through a story. And because it's a scholarly story, there is going to be a thesis and supporting evidence and connections that are new and vital to the field will be revealed. That's an exhibit. A data visualization, and I think the timeline you described is beautiful, because...it's not a story. It's not a narrative. What it does is that it allows me, instead of compiling evidence and creating whatever starts to help me see linkages, if I could have a timeline that first shows you a collection...but if I also had the ability to say I am interested in women writing about the domestic sphere and only those books show up on the timeline and I see there is this critical publishing mass between 1880-1890, suddenly I get the awareness that something is going on in this timeframe and if I didn't have a data visualization, it may take me a lot longer to come to that awareness...*

...[further discussion of images]...

AF: It is being treated as an alternative space to scholarly publication. I hear you in terms of them being narratives and stories and all of that. But also we are interested in having them be...non-narrative stories, in the sense that that seems to be what's important about exhibitions in that they also allow for something that is not going to be a sort of linear approach to a paper say or they can be as traditional as people want them to be...

CC: *Do you know [Vectors \[University of Southern California\]](#)? It's an online publication...it's a venue for presentation of scholarly work. In terms of non-linear approaches, they do a lot of that...in terms of an*

example of a forum for scholarly publication. Some of them are very visual but they are very non-linear in terms of how you can approach...

[Southern Spaces](#) is another online scholarly publication...it's definitely more linear. It is another example. One of the students...I took... Susan Smulyan did a course on Digital Scholarship...I took her digital scholarship course and that's how I kind of got turned on to all of this. One of the students from ethnomusicology she encouraged him to do an article for Southern Spaces but his is text and audio.

AF: That is cool. It would be nice to see how they designed it...The reason that I am talking to you is because we want to write a white paper to put all of our questions in one place. Like you were saying..."Why are we talking about an exhibition versus workspaces versus...

CC: ...versus digital article." Like Vectors and Southern Spaces. They don't call them exhibitions. They are scholarly publications but they in a new mode. They are not just trying to be a piece of paper up on the "big internet."

KEY POINTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- We might try to further define why it is that we want to pursue online exhibitions, given that the database is not inherently visual. This might pose a problem for us and serve to confuse our aims, and users, rather than to further them.
- We should think carefully about who our target audience is and what their needs are, taking into account the fact that our most loyal users might very well be mature scholars who are accustomed to what we offer and may not be interested in changing their use habits. If indeed we want to target younger scholars, then we should consider what tools would be most useful to them, which very well may be more tools for doing collaborative, critical readings of the digitized texts available in the collection.
- The word exhibit conjures up a fixed image in her mind and we might want to encourage more collaborative, unexpected encounters by making space within the database for more dynamic interactions. The concept of building a "Workspace" might better fit this goal.
- There are many annotation projects happening at the moment that we might want to tap into in order to provide tools for our users to put various texts into conversation within WWO, by using digital tools to bring various texts into a shared online space in order to discover ways they speak to each other that might otherwise be difficult to see.
- We should consider how difficult it would be to build in layers of privacy so that people might be able to log-in to make annotations or notes that would not be viewed by their peers or other scholars.
- If we want to draw younger scholars, we might open up the homepage to more advertising. We could designate a place where we highlight certain projects or showcase certain texts.

- If indeed we want to pursue building a space for scholarly publication within WWO, we might look to online scholarly journals (such as *Vectors* or *Southern Spaces*) for more experimental, online templates.
-

IV. LASTING IMPRESSIONS

VIRTUAL EXHIBITIONS VS. DIGITAL EXHIBITIONS

One thing that has been observed in the research that has gone into this white paper is that discussions about future uses of online exhibitions generally seem to call up two main schools of thought on the subject. One would follow in line with the notion of the *virtual exhibition (or virtual gallery)*--advising that the WWP should engage plans for exhibits that would seek out strategies somehow to physicalize or imagine its texts (whether by creative visualization tools that would turn them into Wordles, maps, or incorporating digital portraits of their writers) and present them as an art museum would its images, attempting to tell a loosely woven story about the texts based on a theme determined by the author as curator. The other would consider the former old-fashioned and limited in its use, preferring to take up a broader conception of the *digital exhibit*, seeing in it room for moving toward a more experiential notion of *presentation* by making use of new media and more experimental curatorial approaches (both sharing an inclination toward user-generated content). This perspective would like to think about the exhibit space as more of a workspace for analyzing the texts, imagining the exhibit less as author-centered and more as a user-centered, tool-based space where users could take from and give something back to the material presented.

SHOULD THEY BE CALLED "EXHIBITS"?

In almost every interview conducted, the question arose: "Is what you really mean to say *an exhibit*?" The word "exhibit" indexed for Lubar, Bordac, and Ceglio a shared concern about the conservative aesthetics conjured up by the term—"old-fashioned narrative," linearity, all uni-directionality—all threatening perceptions of a possible regression for the WWP. Bordac encouraged moving toward terms like "experientiality" and "collaboration," rather than moving "backwards" (her words) to catch up with a past digital moment when online exhibitions were popular. Both Steven Lubar and Sarah Bordac made very similar arguments regarding the strong and potentially unproductive, semantic pull of traditional museum or gallery exhibits on the notion of "online exhibits." To Clarissa Ceglio, "the word exhibit conjures up sort of a fixed image in people's mind."

This sentiment was consistently followed by a shared investment, instead, in the WWP creating a more dynamic and open workspace for user's to find tools for analyzing the texts both independently (through

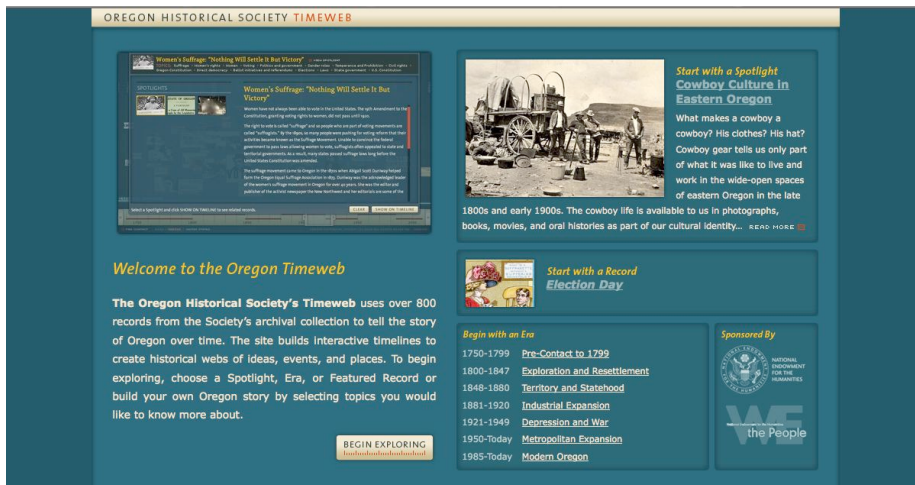


Figure 9

Figure 10

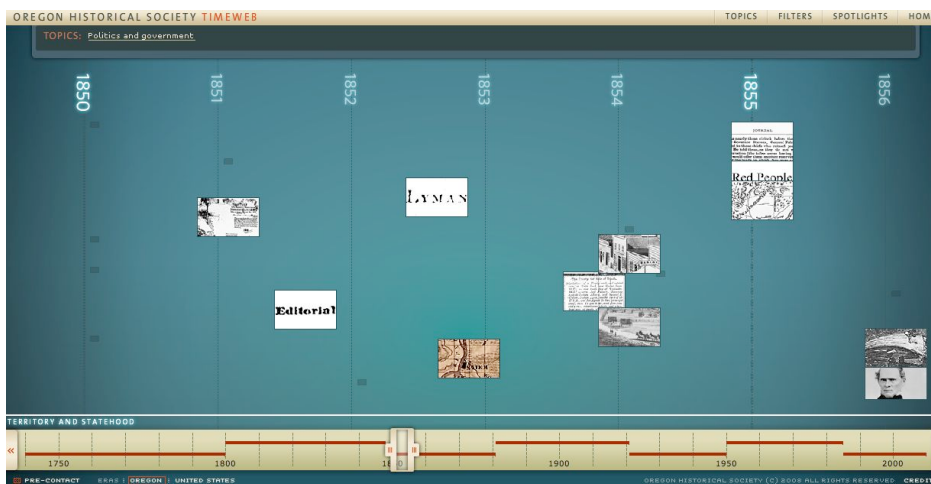
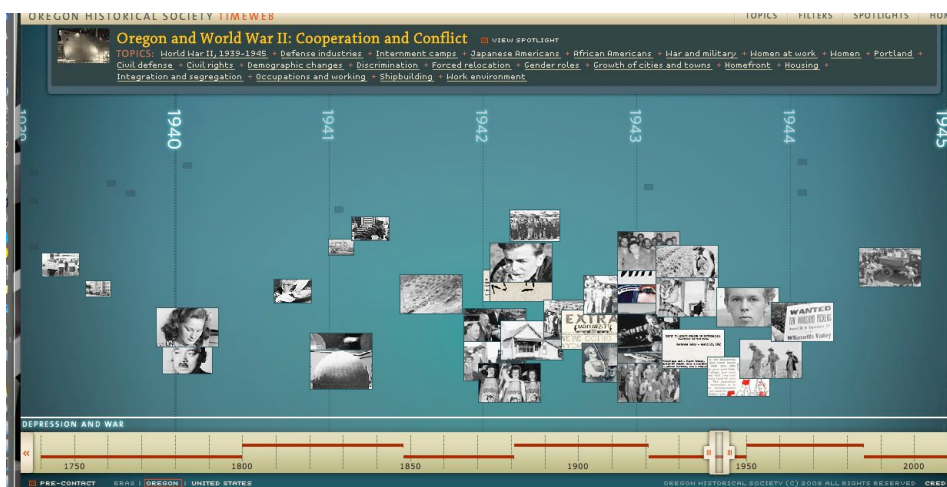


Figure 11



Such a timeline might serve as a global exhibit through which users might find an alternative portal through which to make their way into the collection, if the search functions prove too intimidating for the user who does not know quite what they are looking for.

ROLE MODELS

Indeed, [Second Story](#) has been widely cited as *the* place to look for cues on creating interactive experiences. Its Creative Director, Brad Johnson, has described their approach to creating online experiences in his paper [“Beyond On-line Collections: Putting Objects to Work”](#) (2004), writing: “Visitors can select from a multitude of different pathways and a variety of perspectives; every image that appears in the site itself becomes a hub linking to every other instance (and hence context, story and perspective) of an object.” In doing so, “Individuals can forge new, personalized paths through the site, finding new connections and meaning in the objects to reflect their own interests, experiences and curiosities This interconnected, cross-pollinated approach provides many intersections for interactive exploration to any subject matter.”²⁰ Shutting between his analysis of online collections and online exhibitions (a distinction that is notably, never a particular clear one), Johnson describes the interface of online collections as needing to provide a clear and direct connection between visitors and objects, a necessity that he explains as having evolved from the problematic that many sites have found with what he calls the “library science model where results are retrieved from focused, surgical inquiries, many conventional collections interfaces are excellent for experts who know what they want, but fall short for broader audiences that don't.”

Johnson advocates for interfaces that go beyond traditional inquiry-retrieval paradigms in order to facilitate unexpected discoveries and meaningful itineraries for browsing that serve wider audiences and provide more diverse user experiences. He writes, “When vague curiosities are rewarded as effectively as focused inquiries, an on-line collection can migrate beyond the mere ‘tool’ and start to be thought of as an experience.”²¹ Creative strategies for facilitating meaningful browsing include building an intuitive interface that suggests relationships between objects and ideas by way of extensive keywording applied to objects in the collection and what he calls a “fuzzy logic approach.” This approach is one that is often cited as an aesthetic characteristic of (often some of the most fashionable) online exhibitions aimed at producing a productive confusion of material in order to enable users to make unanticipated connections between concepts and objects (as seen in interactive exhibits by the [Walker Art Center](#) [See Figure 12] and the Andy Warhol Museum to name a few). Basu and MacDonald call this the “labyrinthine aesthetic”—the curatorial equivalent of upending linear narrative paths so as to force unexpected encounters, curiosities, meanderings, detours, delays, and diversions.²²

²⁰ Johnson, 2-3.

²¹ Johnson, 3.

²² MacDonald and Basu, 49.

Figure 12

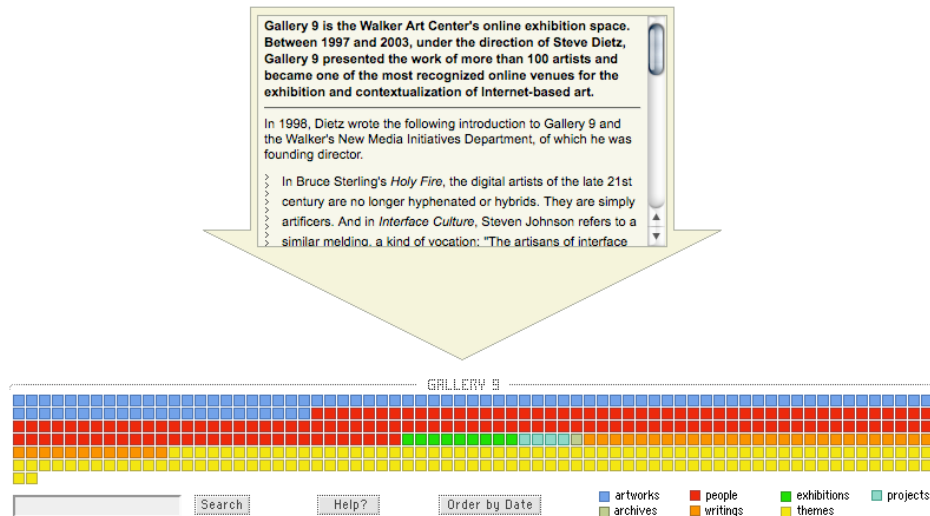
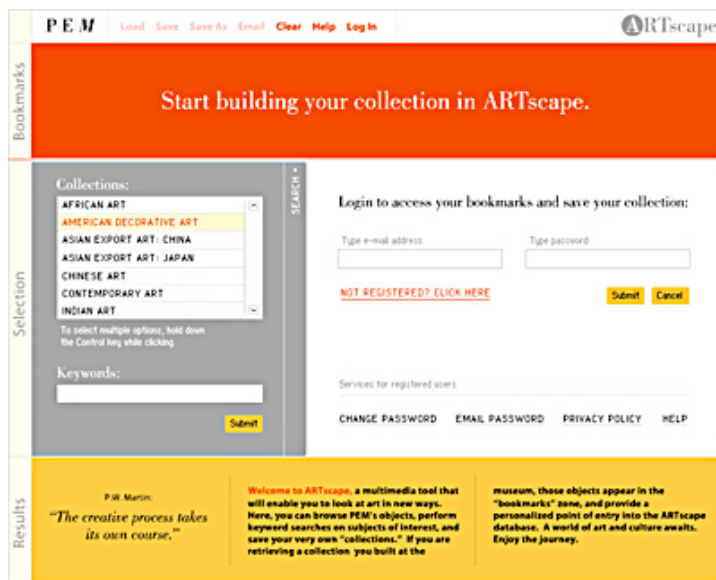


Figure 13



Johnson cites the redesign of the Peabody Essex Museum's website with the creation of [ARTscape](#), a dynamic browsing tool launched in June 2003 that offered the user a means to make their own conceptual exhibit ("Start building your collection"), to make his point. The redesign directed users to either by browse particular collections (organized by geographic or historical periods, like "American Decorative Art") or by searching for keywords that crosscut set periodizations within the collection). The new interface encouraged users to create their own "collections" based on results that would appear in a strip along the bottom of the interface and could be loaded in the center of the interface where the title, date, creator, origin, medium and donor would be revealed. Enabling users to bookmark, tag, comment or share new discoveries also seem to encourage meaningful browsing of the site.

Johnson explains that Second Story tends to think of online exhibitions as loose narratives, or what he often calls “interpretive presentations.” By and large, these tend to manifest themselves in bringing together three main components [See Figure 14 & Figure 15].

Figure 14

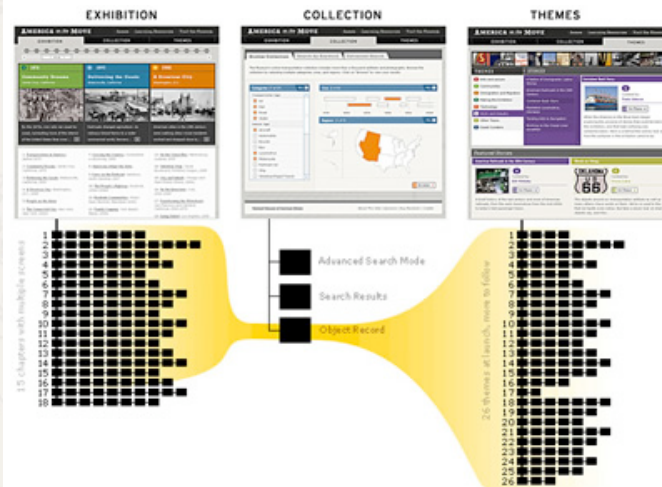


Figure 15

Johnson writes,

There are three principal sections of the site:

- *in the Exhibition section is the meta narrative that glues together the objects and themes of the site historically and geographically, from 1876 to today, from coast to coast.*
- *in the Collection section, visitors can browse objects based on categories, eras or regions, or perform advanced searches with keywords and additional topics.*
- *in the Themes section, visitors can explore the side roads of the exhibition where curators have published dozens of annotated stories on a variety of themes.*

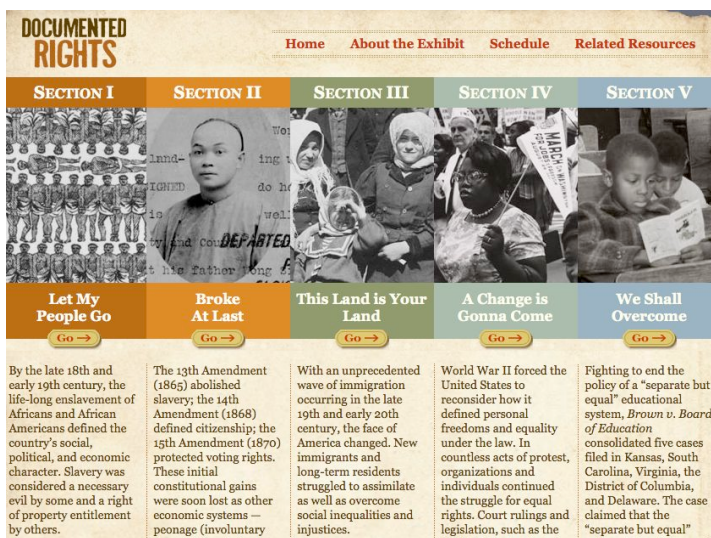


Figure 16

By basing their online exhibitions on three main avenues for browsing, Second Story appears to have found a successful formula for a visually appealing and intellectually stimulating controlled chaos [See Figure 16 & Figure 17] that the WWP find itself very well positioned to benefit from.

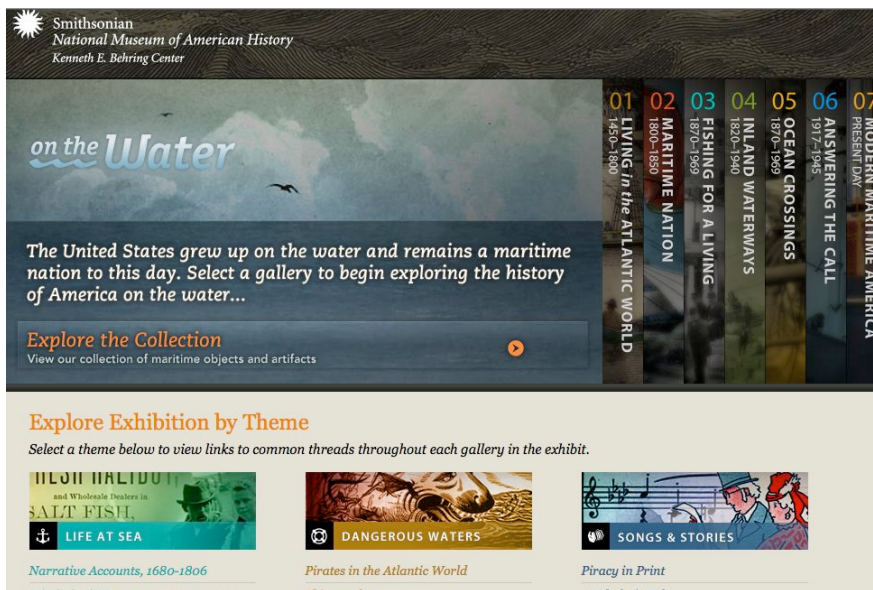


Figure 17

Even if the individuals interviewed were not overtly excited by the notion of online exhibitions, they consistently offered examples of what characteristics might make a good one: one that tells a story; one that might be read in multiple ways through multiple media; one that uses images and data visualizations to allow users to see the information provided in a variety of ways; one that offers some sense of the unexpected—whether it be through humor, irony, or self-reflexivity.

V. NOTABLE RESOURCES & DESIGN INSPIRATION

POTENTIAL PARTNERS, POSSIBLE COLLABORATORS, & INTERFACE TOOLS

Collecting and Exhibiting (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/collecting-and-exhibiting/>

Digital Research Tools
<http://digitalresearchtools.pbworks.com/>

ECHO (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://echo.gmu.edu/>

ExhibitBuilder Plug-in (version 0.5), OMEKA (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://omeka.org/blog/2009/10/01/releasing-exhibitbuilder-plugin-version-0-5/>

Grand Text Auto
<http://grandtextauto.org/>

H-Bot (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/tools/h-bot/>

NINES Exhibits
http://www.nines.org/exhibit_list

Open Archives Initiative (OAIster) and the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting
www.oaister.org

OMEKA (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://omeka.org>

Prezi
<http://prezi.com/>

Second Story
<http://www.secondstory.com/>

SIMILE (The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation & MIT), software called "Exhibit"
<http://simile.mit.edu/exhibit/>

Survey Builder (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/tools/surveys/>

Syllabus Finder (Center for History and New Media, George Mason University)
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/syllabus-finder/syllabi/>

Wordle
<http://www.wordle.net/>

ANNOTATION PROJECTS & TOOLS

Adobe Buzzword

<http://www.adobe.com/acom/buzzword/>

The Institute for the Future of the Book (funded by McArthur grant)

<http://www.futureofthebook.org/>

Marginalia (web page annotation)

<http://www.geof.net/code/annotation/>

CommentPress (collaborative writing and editing)

<http://www.futureofthebook.org/commentpress/>

Crossroads: A New Paradigm for Electronically Researching Primary Source Documents (Private company annotation, very robust)

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0011.207>

The Open Annotation Collaboration (University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign)

www.openannotation.org

DESIGN INSPIRATION

DIGITAL GALLERIES (CURATED BY ARCHIVE)

The Andy Warhol Museum - Time Capsule 21

<http://www.warhol.org/tc21/main.html>

Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)

<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions>

The National Archives Experience, Digital Vaults

<http://www.digitalvaults.org/#/browse/?record=2053>

Walker Art Center

<http://gallery9.walkerart.org/>

Indianapolis Art Museum

<http://www.imamuseum.org/>

ONLINE EXHIBITIONS (CURATED BY THEME)

American Antiquarian Society – Online Exhibitions

<http://www.americanantiquarian.org/exhibitions.htm>

Blood Sugar Archives

<http://artsites.ucsc.edu/sdaniel/bordertech/bloodsugar/bloodsugar.html>

Brown University's John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage

http://www.brown.edu/Research/INBC/virtual_exhibitions.php

The National Archives, Online Exhibits

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/>

The National Archives, Documented Rights

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/documented-rights/>

NINES (Nineteenth-century Studies Online)

http://nines.org/exhibit_list

OUTHISTORY.org – CLAGS - Since Stonewall Contest (online exhibition contest)

http://outhistory.org/wiki/Since_Stonewall_Contest

OMEKA - Gulag

<http://gulaghistory.org/>

OMEKA - Making the History of 1989

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/>

OMEKA – Exhibits Showcase

<http://omeka.org/showcase/>

Oregon Historical Society - Timeweb

<http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/timeweb/>

Public Secrets

<http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/>

Princeton University, Cotsen Children's Library - Virtual Children's Books Exhibits

<http://library.princeton.edu/libraries/cotsen/exhibitions/>

Second Story's Online Exhibition

<http://www.secondstory.com/portfolio?list=online-exhibitions&page=1>

The Smithsonian's American Art Museum – Online Exhibitions

<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/>

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History – “America on the Move” exhibition

(<http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove>)

University of Michigan Library – Scholarly Publishing Office – Online Exhibitions

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/spo/exhibits.html>

USC Shoah Foundation Initiative - Surviving Auschwitz

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/about/survivingauschwitz/index.php>

USC Shoah Foundation Initiative - Stories of Liberation

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/education/liberation>

USC Shoah Foundation Initiative - Remembering Kristallnacht

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/education/kristallnacht/>

USC Shoah Foundation Initiative - Voices of the Holocaust: Children Speak

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/childrenspeak/vhfmain.htm>

USC Shoah Foundation Initiative - Survivors: Testimonies of the Holocaust

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/survivorexhibit/vhfmain.htm>

ONLINE SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS

[Southern Spaces: An Interdisciplinary Journal About Regions, Places, and Cultures in the American South](#)

[Vectors Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular](#) (University of Southern California)

Also, here is a [tool](#) that **Vectors** is working on that may be of interest in terms of database functionalities that are modeled after a scholar's interests

SOCIAL & COLLABORATIVE SPACES

Amazon [Notable for its built-in “Recommended for you...” tools]

www.amazon.com

delicious – Social Bookmarking

<http://delicious.com/>

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/>

Flickr

<http://www.flickr.com>

Twitter

<http://www.twitter.com>

YouTube

www.youtube.com

VI. FURTHER READING: RELEVANT SCHOLARLY SOURCES & ONLINE PAPERS

ARTICLES (AVAILABLE ONLINE)

Alexander, Kirk. "From Virtually Impossible to the Virtual: Building a Dream Exhibition."

<<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/alexander/alexander.html>> Accessed June 11, 2009.

Dietz, Steven. "Curating (on) the Web." Text first presented at the International Conference Museums on the Web April 25, 1998. <<http://www.afsnitp.dk/onoff/Texts/dietzcuratingont.html>> Accessed September 12, 2009.

Johnson, Brad, "Beyond On-Line Collections. Putting Objects to Work."

<<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/johnson/johnson.html>> Accessed August 7, 2009.

Rosenzweig, Roy. "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era." Text originally published in *American Historical Review* 108,3 (June 2003): 735-762.

<<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.3/rosenzweig.html>> Accessed June 27, 2009.

Silver, David. "Interfacing American Culture: The Perils and Potentials of Virtual Exhibitions." *American Quarterly* 49, 1997, 4: 825-850. <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/american_quarterly/v049/4er_folklore.html>

Woods, Susanne. "Recovering the Past, Discovering the Future: The Brown University Women Writers Project." *South Central Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Creating a Literary Series: The Brown University Women Writers Project and the Oxford University Press "Women Writers in English, 1350-1850" Texts (Summer, 1994), 17-23.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3189986>>.

BOOKS

Cohen, Daniel J., and Roy Rosenzweig. *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Kalfatovic, Martin R. *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002.

MacDonald, Sharon, and Paul Basu, eds. *Exhibition Experiments*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

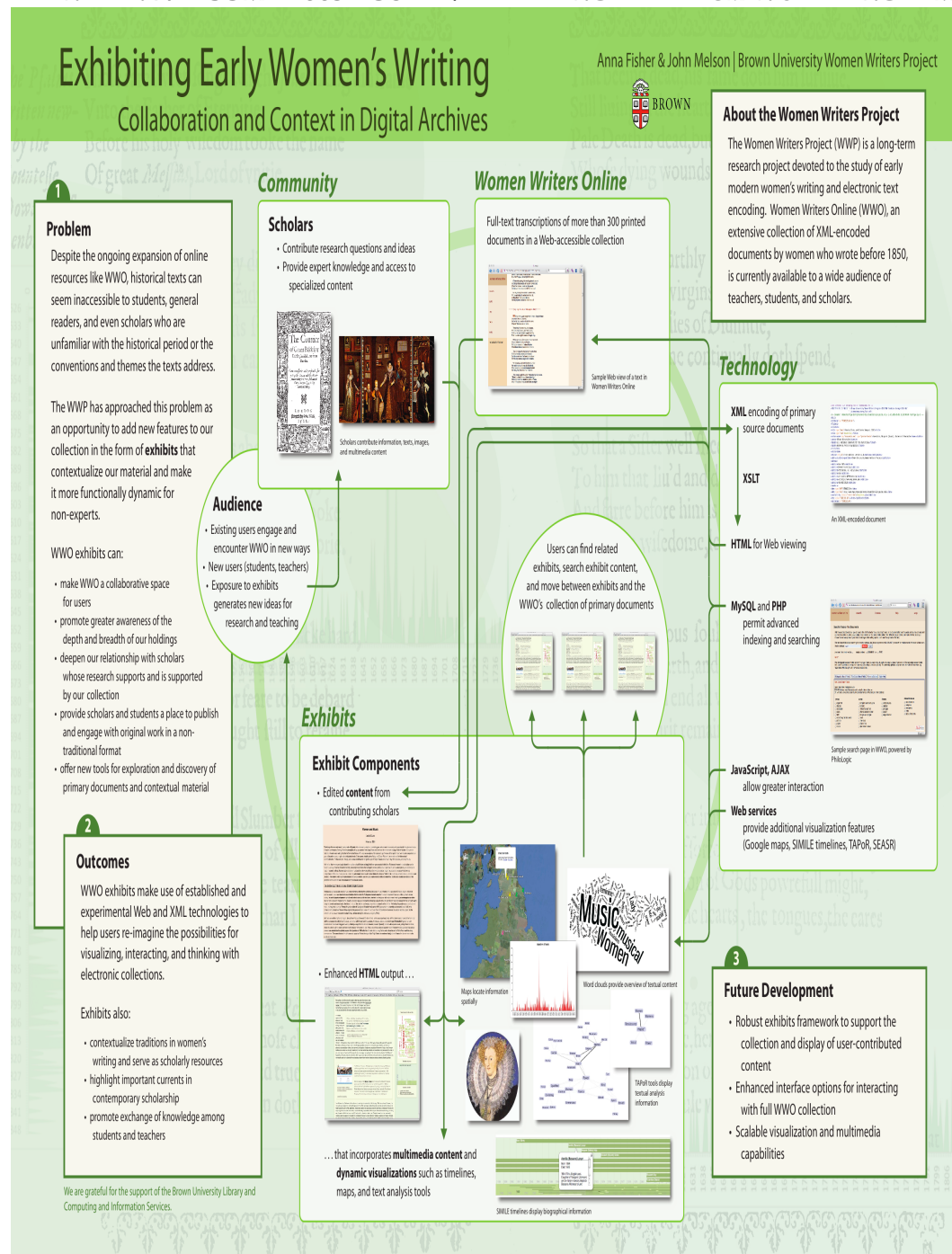
Marstine, Jane, ed. *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Tallon, Loïc, and Kevin Walker, eds. "The Exploded Museum." *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience: Handheld Guides and Other Media*. AltaMira Press, August 2008.

Thiel, Sarah Goodwin. *Build It Once: A Basic Primer for the Creation of Online Exhibitions*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007.

VII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: NERCOMP 2009 POSTER / "EXHIBITING EARLY WOMEN'S WRITING" – MARCH 2009



APPENDIX 2: ONLINE EXHIBITION SUBMISSION GUIDELINES [Available at <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/about/exhibitguide.html>]



SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The Women Writers Project is creating a new Women Writers Online space to house small scholarly exhibits or mini-collections that extract manageable chunks of WWO texts, as well as searches and results, and present them in the context of scholarly commentary. The goal is to produce interesting and insightful pairings of texts, explore the development of historical concepts or literary forms (within genres, across genres, within or across historical periods or literary movements, etc.), and expose readers to important trends in current scholarship. We envision online exhibits as a medium for both emerging and established scholars to publish original work in a non-traditional format.

Form

Online exhibits should be topically focused and should allow you to write useful and briefly about a specific insight. We do not envision submissions at the scale of a full-fledged scholarly article. Exhibits may come in the form of a collection of material curated under a particular theme (war, science, biographical background, etc.) or they may be more like essays which, rather than quoting from primary sources, actually link directly to those sources. Keep in mind the goal of the exhibit is to direct readers' attention to the WWO collection and to suggest connections, patterns, and interpretations that increase their understanding of and interest in the texts. The ideal exhibit raises questions that bring the reader further into the WWO collection, and the distinctive feature of our exhibits is the linkages they provide to Women Writers Online. These might take several forms:

- * links to entire texts

- * links to quotations—that is, to specific passages from a WWO text or texts. The quoted material might appear in the exhibit itself together with a link to the full text, or the exhibit might simply offer the link (e.g. "As Margaret Fell argues [link], etc.").

- * links which execute searches, or which link to precompiled search results: for instance, a link that performs a search for a specific word of interest. (E.g. "Although the word 'feminine' is rare before 1600 [link]...")

- * links to visualizations such as timelines, maps, etc., once these are available as part of the WWO exhibit framework. (E.g. "This group of authors were all working at about the same time in or near York [link]...")

Length

Think of exhibits as falling between a very short article to a full article in length, but with the added flexibility of the digital medium. Exhibits of almost any length may be submitted. A practical range might be from at least one substantial paragraph to a book chapter. On the shorter end, the paragraph would need to be very substantive and suggestive; on the longer end, the piece would truly have to earn the space by holding the reader's attention.

Audience

Our audience spans students and scholars of diverse levels. Online exhibits should engage readers across a spectrum of academic perspectives.

Images

Images and other multimedia may be included in submissions. In fact, contributors are encouraged to include images when possible, or at least to indicate how images might be used in conjunction with the submission. Permissions should be secured by the individual contributor, although the WWP may be able to offer assistance in some cases.

Credit

Online exhibits are formal, citable publications that can be listed on a CV or referenced in other works. Exhibits will be published with their contributor's name in the public part of the WWP site (rather than being access-protected).

Review

All submissions will be reviewed by the WWP editors, who will approve published material and may suggest revisions.

Timeline

The WWP will be accepting its first round of exhibit submissions through June 1, 2009. However, submissions will be accepted on a rolling basis thereafter. Please contact WWP_exhibits@brown.edu if you would like to submit an exhibit but are unable to meet this deadline.

How to Submit

Submissions should be sent in plain text or Microsoft Word format. Please do not send PDF. Submissions should be mailed electronically to WWP_exhibits-at-brown-dot-edu. If you have further questions, or would like to propose an idea for an exhibit, please contact Anna Fisher, the WWP's Exhibits Editor, at annawfisher-at-gmail-dot-com.

APPENDIX 3: DRAFT LIST OF DESIGN ASSETS

Draft – June 3, 2009

Potential **Design Assets** for WWO Exhibits

Based on current RWO essays & ideas for future planning

1. **Exhibit title:** should probably be large, graphically interesting, and look different from the prose of the exhibit (See <http://www.walkerart.org/archive/D/A67381A4CA6C0F6D616E.htm>)
2. **Byline** for exhibit curator (including some means of learning more about the curator, reading short bio, maybe a map of where they are from, link to webpage, and email address)
3. **Date** exhibit curated/produced/updated (the timeline of the exhibit updates itself might be built out in some kind of timeline at a later point, should we later move toward a more collaborative/comment-oriented design)
4. Way of dealing with **quotations** in exhibit – Quotations pulled from texts in the collection might be linked to make the text open in a new window perhaps (perhaps quotations should be color-coded or somehow differentiated if they are pulled from WWO or another online resource or an unavailable resource, etc.?)
5. **Titles of books, poems, or articles** might deserve differentiation from other text
6. **Navigation Bar** – If the exhibition requires multiple pages to navigate, we might want to think about how we want the navigation to appear on each page.
7. **Images** that could perhaps be made clickable, expandable, dynamic, or somehow able to be manipulated. (Many online exhibitions cited as exciting or interesting have an array of images, often a disorienting array, that are initially animated and then become stable as the user begins to explore the exhibition)
8. **Flash opening** as I say in #5, many visually dynamic exhibits open in flash and use animation to lay out the exhibition in a compelling way.
9. **Sound-** also related to the previous idea, we may want to give the exhibits some audio element. Audio when it opens, certain sounds when things are clicked, perhaps in the future audio interviews or conversations with critics on the given topic, etc.
10. **Way of crediting images** that are copyrighted or borrowed from a collection.
11. **Prose** (In the future we might want to have a way for users to make their own internal comments on or somehow tag prose of interest—like a sticky note or book mark should they want to return to it—but this obviously would be an idea for another generation of the design phase and would require building in another layer of the site for personal user accounts or whatnot)
12. **Subheadings or chapter designations** of exhibition material that might be organized as either non-linear or linear depending on the submission
13. Space for managing **citations or endnotes**. (I've seen that these are often shown vertically alongside the information in digital prose environments, see citations in essay here: <http://www.afsnitp.dk/onoff/Texts/dietzcuratingont.html>). Also we may want to consider separating primary texts and secondary texts according to what is available in WWO. This might on the other hand be taken care of by how we handle hyperlinked quotations, as proposed above in #4.
14. **Historical dates** with links in timeline?
15. **Geographic locations** with links to map?
16. Smaller, moveable **search field-** so that a user might have access to the collection without leaving the exhibit page.
17. **"For further exploration" related/recommended links and/or Subject Categories** to similar resources on WWO. This is something we might eventually use tools to build into the site but for now, we could manage recommended links manually based on themes brought up in the exhibition.
18. **Names** – Whether by color-coding and hyperlinking or some other design method, perhaps a name word cloud for each exhibition, we should draw out the names mentioned in each exhibition to maximize crossover with our new Names project.
19. **Biographical data** – This may be redundant given #14, but whenever possible the exhibitions could include biographical background information about the women involved.
20. **Influences/Common Themes-** Whether by making use of information drawn from the "RWO intros" or other research, we might include a discrete section of the exhibition for influences on the writer, possibly as a word cloud. Again, this might be redundant with #17.
21. **WWO logo and/or navigation**
22. Some **brief description of WWO Exhibits:** what they are and what they aim to do, perhaps a description of our editorial process
23. **Exhibits navigation:** Unique means for linking to other WWO exhibitions
24. **Background images or wallpaper:** This exhibit seems to utilize wallpaper effectively: <http://www.walkerart.org/archive/D/A67381A4CA6C0F6D616E.htm>