

FOREWORD:
IMAGINING THE MANUSCRIPT AND PRINTED BOOK IN A
DIGITAL AGE

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One of the most intriguing imaginings of the book and manuscript codex occurs when we endow it with human characteristics, when the book is something we perceive to have a body and a mind, a heart and a soul. Over time, we have both pleurably noted and marvelled that the book at once *is embodied by us*—that is, we give it a physical shape, form, and content—and *is an embodiment of us*—acting, say, as our surrogate, across place and time. When we speak of the new and evolving electronic manifestation of the book today, however, we typically steer away from consideration of its more human characteristics. Instead, we have an awkward pattern of veering toward a characterisation of bookish manifestations that are quite foreign to us, focusing on the notion of an object that lacks recognizable physical form: disembodied texts, the ether of that which can be transmitted over computer networks, and so on. All told, this trend gestures more to the stuff of the grotesque and the futurist than that of the humanist, whose influence will surely be as strong in guiding the development of the book's current and emerging electronic manifestations as it has impacted, for centuries, the evolution of the manuscript and printed book. In our thinking about this, we need to chart a new course, one away from the futurist and the grotesque, and rather strongly toward that of the ongoing humanistic tradition of engagement with the codex form. Perhaps this should begin with a clearer understanding of our human relationship with the book itself.

The electronic representation of the codex—a book with no covers, as is said, perhaps with no immediately apparent physical form, lacking in assured fixity, and potentially with no beginning and no ending—can benefit from an understanding of the way in which aspects of the book have been figured variously across a number of centuries, centuries which we widely acknowledge to have seen two paradigm shifts: the first, from a culture that saw transmission of the codex via scribal copying to a culture that embraced the mechanical processes

of the printing press, and the second, which is currently well along its way in seeing transmission shifting from the mechanical processes of the printing press to that of computer-assisted forms enabled by electronic media and the internet. My entry will be via several vignette-like imaginings of the codex form alongside its human producers and consumers, imaginings that imbue the book and manuscript with a reflected humanity and personality that is, realistically, denied by its physical limitations but are suggestive of the relationship between physical form and intellectual content, between presence and meaning, in both the physical book form and its electronic counterparts.

A context for theorising the codex

Our attention to the physical elements of books and reading is omnipresent, though often taken for granted. Indeed, many of us only consciously engage the physical form of the book when we encounter a form that somehow challenges our expectations; to list a few examples: the young child's first encounter with the book, which most likely involves the sense of taste at least as much as sight; the paperback that has permanently-bent pages and, thus it sits awkwardly; the book that is, say, circular in shape (rather than rectangular), or with a fold-out cover; and the book which has a page layout or font that is unique, such that our reading may be thrown off-balance for the first few minutes. Such encounters we have with books provide ample evidence of our engagement with the codex as a physical object as much as one housing intellectual content, and this separation of the codex's physical and intellectual attributes is something that has seen remark, exploration, and even good exploitation for some time.

Inscription and the human codex

Beyond the anecdotal, one finds this exemplified well in early manuscript culture: where the connection of the book with the physicality of its production, inscription, and use is much closer than it could possibly be in an age of comparatively hands-off mechanical reproduction—and even closer than it might be in early print culture, which adopted aspects of the scribal codex form at the same time as it sought new formal expressions, ones at times made more convenient or possible by the technologies of mechanical reproduction. Specific to my

purpose here is the notion of inscription as it relates to that time, to the manuscript, and to the body. When we say, today, that we've inscribed something, we most likely mean that we've put pen or pencil to paper and written, yet an earlier interpretation of inscription would have the potential to be much more allusive.¹ Beyond the marks of the scribe on the page, one might equally consider the inscription left by one's feet on the ground, or, by way of further example, the marks of violence inflicted on a martyr (<Plate 1>). The footprint and the wound are each a type of inscription that have clear association with the marks on a scribe's page. Each of the inscribed media, if you will—the earth, the skin of Christ, and the prepared skin of the animal out of which most medieval manuscripts are made—bears the mark of the inscriber, in an act associated as much with the consequence of making that mark (walking, infliction of life-threatening wounds, or writing) as with what the mark suggests and represents (perhaps flight, martyrdom, or the word of God).

The codex was a bodily entity for the early reader, one might say, and the acts of reading and writing were as much dominated by intellectual activity as by conscious sensual experience, even at times depicted as sexual. For those who produce it and for those who consume it, the book is an object very much associated with the humanity and human desire that is analogically imbued via its creation and use. The book's physical form and sensuality is seen to resemble ours, the content with which we imbue it is wholly ours, and the actions associated with its creation and use are human as well.

Content and meaning inscribing book form: The book of the heart

Ideas associated with the notion of the *book of the heart* illuminate this further, one of the best-known exemplifications of this seen in a fresco from the Cathedral of Albi (c. 1490, see <Plate 2>), depicting the last judgement with human figures in which their hearts are represented as opening like books.² Founded on the idea that one's innermost thoughts and personal history could be considered as inscribed within us, this tradition sees depiction across several millennia as a

¹ Following, here and below, Frese and O'Keefe, Carruthers, Camille, and others.

² Following Jager and others, here and below. Scroll depiction by Origen (ca. 250). Wax tablet as per St. Basil (ca. 329–79).

scroll rolled up in one's heart, a wax tablet which could be wiped clean by conversion to Christianity and, in the codex form, as a metaphoric reference to one's life record, connoting also intellectual capacity to recall, comprehend, and enact one's moral sense. Consider, for example, the personal associations of the heart-shaped book in the much-copied work by the Master of the View of Saint Gudule (<Plate 3>). While the physical form of the heart materially reflects an essential intellectual frame of reference, it is not the physicality of the book that is of paramount importance here; rather, form here readily depicts for us content, such that we can begin to understand content via observation of form. Our body here is represented by its most significant element privileged by this tradition.

*Formal presence, illuminating meaning and practice: Herbert's
"Easter Wings"*

While textual theory of the past several decades has taught us not to ignore the importance of form, most will concur that form is rarely an end in itself and that medium is not exclusively the message, as much as medium may have everything to do with its conveyance. Rather, form and content, meaning and presence, are correlative, each informing the other. The seventeenth-century English devotional poet George Herbert illustrates such a relationship in his poem "Easter Wings", which has captured the professional imagination of those involved in textual studies, and editing, for over a century. The poem resists a traditional pattern of reading in its early printed form, in the first instance because one has to change the orientation of the text in order to begin to engage its textual content. <Plate 4> (showing the second edition) depicts the text as it appears when one holds the book in the traditional manner. It must be re-oriented for the text to be read in normal fashion. Should one choose not to turn the book, one treats the content graphically rather than textually and appreciates the image of a pair of wings suggested by the correctly-oriented title. If one does choose to turn the book after recognising the shape, one can engage it textually and, in doing so, might note that the poem is connected as the title suggests to the church calendar and treats, among other things, the ascension of Christ and all that it symbolises.

In changing the orientation of the book, one also realises via its content that "Easter Wings" is a poem the form of which plays a very important role beyond that of the wing shape resembled by the

text. Each ten-line stanza represents a decline and an elevation, with the decline emphasised in the shortening of the poetic lines, which move towards the phrases “most thin” and “most poor” in the middle of each stanza. The rise is indicated by increasing line lengths from the centre of each stanza to its end. When those expert in Herbert’s thought discuss “Easter Wings”, most work towards discussion of the notion expressed in the second-last line of page 35—“if I imp my wing on thine”—and treat it as a plea of the speaker, who presents the poem as a prayer for his own rise with Christ’s ascension.

This pattern of interpretation is significant, to be sure, but its significance is increased by a clearer understanding of the full richness of interaction between presence and meaning in this text. It is generally accepted that each of the stanzas have association by their first word with, respectively, the speaker (on page 35 of the original; the first to be read in Figure 3) and (on page 34; the second to be read) the Lord, and it is considered that the poem is a prayer that can be intended for actual use, as are others in Herbert’s collection of *The Temple* that houses them. Further, it has been suggested that devotional practices in Herbert’s time would see a set prayer (such as this one, perhaps) read, silently alone or aloud to a group, followed by a time of silent deliberation in which the prayer book would likely be closed. Noting these points when exploring the relationship of form and meaning makes available to us some pertinent considerations. The first is that the reading process encourages holding the book in a specific manner, making it necessary to turn the volume in such a way that the poem can be read, and requiring both hands to be on the volume; one on each page and cover. The second is that, after the poem is read, the book would likely be returned to its more usual alignment and then, with two hands still on the pages and covers, the volume would be closed. The third takes place at the closure of the text—an act that many say brings the greatest formal significance to the content of the piece, because in closing the book in the manner that many believe it would have been closed, two very important events take place: one is that the two wings on opposite pages—that associated chiefly with the speaker and that with the Lord—are “imped”, are brought together, in the way called for by the prayer; the other is that the most natural position of the closed hands on the volume as the book is closed is that resembling the position of prayer. Ingeniously, form encourages action and reading practice in ways central to that which is treated by content.

*Multiplicity of Intellectual Presence and its Formal Representation:
A Comment on Peter Lombard's Commentary*

Without engagement of the poem's form, in the case of "Easter Wings" the reader cannot even begin to engage the textual content; but, once engaged, it is clear that form and content serve each other cleverly. Academic tradition might hold that the more salient of the two—that associated with form and physical presence and that associated with content and meaning—is intellectual content, but this example and others suggest the importance of remaining cognisant of the salient strength of form and presence. When the book, which can be figured as an extension of ourselves, speaks for us and encourages us to act, formal concerns manifest at least as importantly as that which form can hold and communicate for us. In this regard, one last print-oriented artefact to consider is presented in <Plate 5>, a page originating in the scriptorium of Peter Lombard, Bishop of Paris, exemplifying a contribution to the tradition of representing the complexly-interwoven commentary associated with the Epistles.

Here, in a method which serves as a recognisable foundation for that employed in scholarly editions today, extensive commentary is arranged to surround one small section of one epistle, the formal considerations of the page mimicking and augmenting, visually, aspects of the intellectual engagement by those whose expertise is rendered in the commentary on the section residing at the page's centre. The composite authorial form is provided by a line that runs almost the full vertical length of the inscribed page's right side, from head to feet of the human representation, at times marked with indications relating original text to the originators of the commentary (Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose) that provides the intellectual context for the reader's consideration. The visual image both identifies those providing the commentary and suggests clearly the composite, corporal nature of commentary in relation to the central author's body of work; the visualised body represents the composite sum of its constituent, intellectual parts—much as the way in which the material on the page is comprised of the original text itself plus that which tradition has deemed essential toward the understanding of this original text.

Presence and Meaning, in the Absence of Physical Form

Turning from argumentative preface to the matter of the collection, it is worth noting that one important trend in what is increasingly being called e-science and e-humanities research is not such an exponential leap forward in impacted disciplines that one cannot understand the future of disciplinary endeavour as anything other than a forward progression built on the progression of past advances, extending extant intellectual tradition. For all the radical rhetoric which surrounds the move from print to electronic media, even this paradigm shift isn't so radical that history and tradition are fully erased or rendered wholly irrelevant. Indeed, a valuable perspective for understanding our current paradigm shift is via the lens provided by that of the movement from manuscript culture to print culture, from scribal reproduction to mechanical. Our adoption and understanding of electronic media in those book-related activities that we carry out professionally and personally is best informed, explicitly and analogically, by our understanding of a past that presents valuable perspectives on and prospective solutions to concerns arising as part of our engagement of electronic media, specifically with reference to the patterns of physical and cognitive representation and the transmission, as well as the interaction, that they facilitate.

One does not have to look beyond the contents of this volume, and its resonance into all corners of the fields drawn upon and reflected among its papers, to see a very clear recognition that humanities-derived textual technologies and methodologies drawn from the age of manuscript and print have ready application to our understanding of the evolving new media culture in which we live, in the e-humanities, and even in emerging e-sciences. Examples abound, in the pages of this collection and well-beyond, the most striking along these lines perhaps being the adoption of techniques associated with complex textual collation by those doing string-based analysis of DNA; equally striking is the connection between twelfth century attempts at rendering detailed, human-associated commentary with that of our own evolving implementations of commentary in social computing environments that very clearly connect our own contributions to argument and discussion with visual self-representations, and the way in which we are beginning to imagine our human relationship to the form and style of the physical computer as well as its on-screen interface—particularly

in increasingly ubiquitous devices such as laptop computers, iphones, and emerging micro-computers and reading tablets.

As with the book over time, so, too, with these devices. The devices that we embody by giving shape, form, and content continue to act as embodiments of us. Study of the multiple-authored disembodied text as represented by Lombard offers an important starting point in such considerations, as does our understanding of Herbert's method in manipulating physical form to augment significantly the reader's devotional experience, as does engaging the book of the heart tradition and the nature of the form-content relationship there—and, I would urge overall, as does our consideration of the relationship we have had, over time, with the book's physical form. Indeed, whatever the book might be—in manuscript, print, or some electronic manifestation—its connection is at least as much with us as humans as it is with the technologies associated with its production and dissemination, and surely more. Its sensuality is seen to resemble ours, the content with which we imbue it is ours, and the originating actions associated with the creation and use of the book are ours as well.

Nevertheless, even working in a tradition that understands the relationship between content and form, meaning and presence, we are often surprised when the results of our technological translation from print to digital representation yields unexpected results—largely, I would argue, based on a seemingly unconscious extension of our print expectations to the electronic medium and, further, by our tradition's valuation of intellectual content over physical form. A focus in our attention, now, on what is lost in that media-technological translation, on what from manuscript and print culture cannot yet be readily rendered and modelled in electronic media, provides us with a crucial foundation for research endeavour that gets to the heart of the paradigm shift and encourages an awareness of the way in which the electronic medium reconfigures our relationship to text at all levels. Examination of this crux requires exactly what is championed by the work represented in this volume: a firm grounding in the traditions associated with textual history and its culture coupled with the intellectual dexterity and interdisciplinary foresight to imagine how such a history can be extended into the world of electronic media. Chief among pertinent concerns here are issues of representation and re-presentation—and a focus on the maintenance of the conjoint importance of form and content, of presence and meaning, and the

creative patterns that we have brought and continue to bring to our design and our intellectual engagement of the textual artefacts that show no sign of wavering in their centrality.

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