Less intent, more impact: Transforming public DH projects toward access, care, and inclusion

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Good intent carries no guarantee of a positive impact on the world. For digital humanities designers and makers building projects that face or involve public audiences, we have an extra scholarly and human responsibility for all the repercussions of our work. Focusing not on what we mean to create, but on how our work could both positively and negatively affect others, enables a more caring, accessible, and inclusive DH.

This paper uses my design, coding, and user testing of the participatory digital edition of James Joyce's challenging novel Ulysses, *Infinite Ulysses* (InfiniteUlysses.com), to demonstrate a public DH project designed with care for its impact on both its audience and the DH community. More importantly, I'll explore how ethical design considerations such as increasing accessibility and inclusion can be added or increased in existing projects that may not have explicitly built these values in from the start.

Infinite Ulysses is a public digital humanities project that has drawn over 25,000 unique site visitors, as well as a smaller body of 775 readers who created user accounts to interact more closely with the digital edition through annotation and other social features. *Infinite Ulysses* is also the bulk of a unique, successfully defended, no-chapters literature dissertation, and as such those interested in the future of humanities graduate education may enjoy this paper.

Building the *Infinite Ulysses* digital edition helped me separate the scholarly values of textual scholarship from the common embodiment of these values (i.e. the scholarly digital edition or SDE). Through this clarification, I imagined new types of digital edition that, while different from SDEs, hold true to the same values performed by SDEs. Through building and testing the public use of one of these new models for reifying textual scholarship values, I experimented with designing an edition that is not just publicly accessible, but also invites and assists public participation in the scholarly love for a text's materiality, history, and meaning. On the spectrum of crowdsourcing engagement, I located multiple paths for meaningful public DH activity that fall between the endpoints of full critical rhetoric and "adding a tag". To enable this public engagement, I explored ways of designing participatory digital editions to adeptly handle an influx of public readers and their annotations, and tested suggestions on what scholars can learn about digital editions and their texts from the accompanying influx of website use data.

The Femtechnet scholars' recentering of DH on ethical questions around technology design led me to connect the fields of textual scholarship and human-computer interaction, porting concepts of humane and ethical digital design to the domain of literary editions. Michael Muller's formulation of participatory design as a "third space" connecting two audiences helped me support both scholarly and public edition readers in "challenging assumptions, learning reciprocally, and creating new ideas, which emerge through negotiation and co-creation of identities, working languages, understandings, and relationships, and polyvocal (many-voiced) dialogues across and through differences". Katie Shilton's exploration of how the design of a technology shapes the social values and ethics of its users helped me plan toward a community of annotators that would care for rather than compete against one another.

My post-dissertation work on *Infinite Ulysses* pulls in thinking from libraries and information science. Librarian Chris Bourg's argues that neither technology nor knowledge infrastructures such as libraries can be neutral, and that therefore we must leverage both toward, rather than away from, social justice. Archivist Jarrett M. Drake calls us to move beyond current institutional archives to build knowledge structures that let us "unlock our futures as humans, as community members, as archivists, and as memory workers", and suggests design that encourages perceptions of community belonging as a way forward. Digital Library Federation Director Bethany Nowviskie asks, "Can we position our digital collections and digital scholarly projects more plainly not as statements about what was and is, but as resources for the building of different, better worlds?" The knowledge infrastructure of libraries and archives ports well to that of digital editions, as well as to DH more broadly. Each of these thinkers push us to create work that would take us from what DH is to what DH

can be; in this presentation, their arguments act as direct prompts for exploring small ways of designing toward a better DH through the specific use case of *Infinite Ulysses*.

This paper quickly but clearly paints a cohesive picture of the *Infinite Ulysses* project, instead spending the bulk of its time critiquing the impact of the project on its users and on the DH community. I will survey the critical DH cultural scholarship that grounded my assessment of the ethical impact of my work (e.g. Roopika Risam, Moya Bailey, Amy Earhart), as well as scholarship in related areas such as libraries feminist interface design (e.g. Bess Sadler, Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, Shaowen Bardzell and Eli Blevis).

In "Do Artifacts Have Ethics?", Michael Sacasas proposes a series of questions to be asked by anyone making something of what they're making—whether that's building an app, designing a class, or in this case designing and coding a digital humanities project. I use Sacasas' provocations to examine the successes, failures, and difficult decisions of *Infinite Ulysses*' design, walking the audience through concrete examples of what I did, what I should have done, or what I could do to make the project have an even better impact on the world.

- *An example of a positive impact on Infinite Ulysses' users:* I provided my annotators with the ability to export their textual annotations from my website, giving them ownership and control over the results of their labor, and not forcing them to risk losing their work if my site crashed or closed.
- *An example of a negative impact on Infinite Ulysses' user*s: I tried to populate the digital margins of Ulysses with the characters in the book, by letting new users choose among illustrations of the novel's characters for the avatar that accompanies their textual annotations. The makeup of Joyce's text means that those avatars were largely white and male, with three white female options, a cat, and no other identities. For a text that already struggles with instances of sexism, racism, and transphobia, making new readers feel "I'm not represented here, I'm not supposed to be here" was an additional negative impact.
- *An example of a positive impact of Infinite Ulysses on the DH community:* I demonstrated that a public DH project could support meaningful public participation that didn't necessitate bending public questions, interpretations, and other comments on Ulysses to fit the mold of scholarly rhetoric. By both successfully designing for public participation (my edition was cited in The New York Times) and performing innovative humanities scholarship through that design (the project received my university's 2016 award for arts and humanities distinguished dissertation), I added to the digital humanities' ever-growing examples of how building can itself be critical research.
- *An example of a negative impact of Infinite Ulysses on the DH community:* I deepened digital editions' duplication of the problems with the print literary canon, by building a project around another canon text and author. When only 11 of 86 projects funded by the NEH Preservation & Access Office 2006-2011 had a topic other than a white male writer, I struggle with whether the positive public impacts of my work are worth deepening our problems with authorial representation.

I act as my scholarship's own harshest critic not to paralyze other DH builders from ever making anything, but to make visible specific examples of how in small ways, by adding the skill of care to the skill of critique, we makers can build a better DH and a better world.

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