The Book and the World Wide Web

Aleš Vaupotič

University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia
ales.vaupotic@ung.si

The essay considers the effects of internet-based communication on the book as a carrier of a message. An examination of Teo Spiller's "sonnet-like" web projects and of web archives such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy shows which aspects of the book have changed or were improved in web-based communication forms, and which aspects are book-specific and thus retain their value in the Internet era.

The method

There are many methods of theoretically exploring a communication medium. One of them is to study its history, which in the case of the book would mean studying the codex medium (i.e., the manuscript book) from the era before print, and then following the modifications of its material embodiment and use in new historical and social circumstances. However, to tackle phenomena that are developing, a different method can be proposed. Rather than focusing on the alleged replacement of the book by devices such as Sony Reader, Kindle, and so on, a less technology-based approach focusing on actual use seems more productive. Moreover, considering the situation in Slovenia, it needs to be noted that very few people regularly use e-paper devices. There may be many different reasons for this, but there is one unambiguous consequence: there are no concrete studies on the experience and different uses of e-books. In order to gain some general relevance, this kind of survey would also have to describe all the different uses of similar devices for facilitating reading, among many other things (e.g., "smartphones"). Again, such research would need to be region-specific; for Apple Inc., until recently, Slovenia was a market that was not large and attractive enough to sell iPhones or iPads.

Nevertheless, whether one reads e-mails and attached PDF files on a subway on a larger phone or a small laptop, or browses the Web in an office, the changes brought about by the spread of Internet access—and the World Wide Web interface in particular[1]—are omnipresent.[2] The wide

201

range of issues concerning the relationship between the book and the new communication media that depend on the Internet infrastructure are considered in three cases of transformation of the carrier of texts, which simultaneously involve the transformation of reading practices. To understand the impact of the Web on the uses of books, a description of current simultaneous uses of a text in book format (or at least in printed form) and online can serve as a starting point. Next, the Internet-dependent transformation of the encyclopedia is presented. The third and last case stresses the radically new condition of the text, which enters the living environment in ways that are beyond the reach of print.

A reading of a literary theory volume

To read a theoretical volume that discusses a complex literary term (e.g., Joseph P. Stern's *On Realism*, 1973), as a rule it is impossible to start with computer-based tools such as computerized searching for words, generation of "word clouds," and so on. The book has to be read in a quiet atmosphere that, it could be argued, does not favor any sophisticated technical gadgets.[3] After one initially decides what text to read, the text itself has to be obtained. There are several possibilities. A book can be borrowed from a library. There is a drawback, though, because no comments or marginal notes can be added to the text during reading. It is possible to buy the book containing the volume. Often readers—students in particular—photocopy the book (illegally), which in fact provides the most space for annotation. Another materialization of the text is a digital version of the book. For Stern's classic scholarly volume there is no Kindle edition available; there might be some—possibly illegal—PDF files somewhere on line (based on scans and "retyped" by means of OCR).[4]

Even if the digitized version were acquired, it is unlikely that a literature student or scholar would read 200 pages from a laptop screen. It still seems highly unlikely that he or she would display a PDF version of the book on an e-paper display device in order to read it.[5] On the other hand, a very common scholarly practice is in fact entailed in both the photocopied book (from a library) and the printed version of a PDF file: when one decides to read an online article, then, if the article requires much concentration, he or she will probably print the text on paper first and only then read it. For book-length texts such as Lukács's *Die Seele und die Formen* (1911), which is freely available[6] on the *Internet archive* website, it seems even more probable that to read the whole book one would probably print it out (e.g., two pages per A4 sheet of paper).

It is safe to say that the first reading of Stern's monograph would rely either on a book or on paper photocopies or prints (bound together for convenience). However, after the initial reading, the reader, now using the text for reference and quotations in research, can make use of more than just the table of contents and the index to navigate through the text and, for example, search for a specific reference that still "resonates" in his or her mind, but not clearly enough to produce a scholarly quote. The *Google Books* website can help in this situation. The scanned version of the book is available in the "preview" mode, which restricts access to a portion of pages. It is important to be aware that the "Search this book" feature of the site is not limited to the pages available through the "preview" filter. One can thus search the entire book and see page numbers or sometimes even images of pages—which can be quite helpful if the printed copy is not immediately available. The scans in the *Google Books* database are not perfect; in Lukács's case, the actual word *Lukács* is misspelled *Lukäcs*, which the user has to take into account when using the "Search this book" feature.
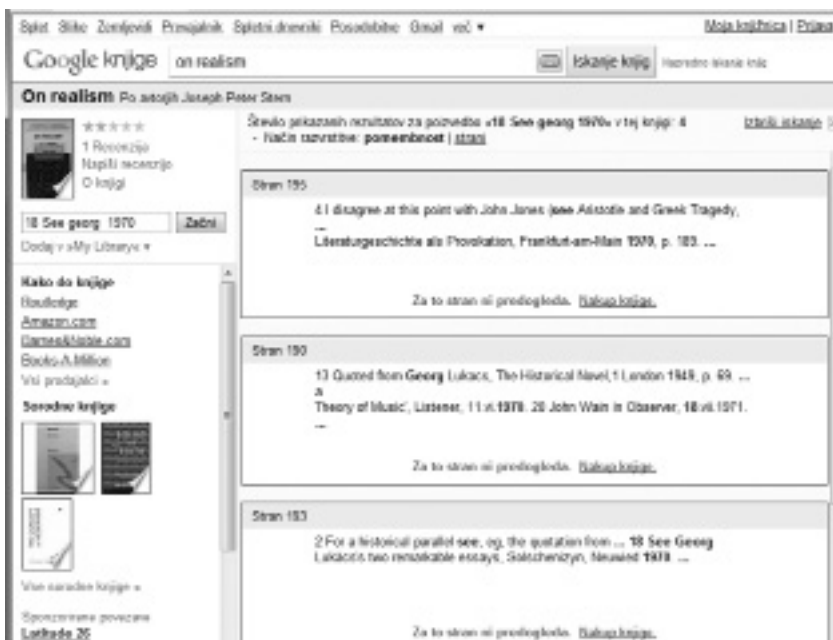

Figure 1: *Google Books* screenshot.

The "snippet view" filter in *Google Books* hides all pages, but nevertheless shows search results (i.e., "snippets" with corresponding page numbers).[7] This enormously speeds up the search for references and it works for

most well-known works in major languages. The Amazon bookshop website provides a similar type of search service, but also without access to the complete text.

The "scholarly dynamic reference work": The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998–)[8]

What almost seems like an "abuse"[9] of *Google Books* in fact indicates possible advantages of online texts. It emphasizes that these advantages are a real possibility and also a legal one. A project that systematically uses the symbiosis of text and the World Wide Web is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (*SEP*). It is an example of a "dynamic reference work" that is web-based with open access and maintains academic editorial standards. These standards (i.e., the "scholarly" aspect of the work) are a result of the refereeing of each entry and substantive update by the members of the Editorial Board[10] on the one hand and, on the other, of the possibility to quote fixed versions of entries. The "Projected Table of Contents" lists entries from three categories: "already published," "assigned," and "currently unassigned but nevertheless projected". The main interface for the *SEP* is a search engine, substantially upgraded by Paul Daniell in 2006, that far exceeds the tree-like structure of "themes" or a mere alphabetical list. Many entries have not been assigned yet, but nevertheless the project has reached a critical size and it is already a functional reference work.[11] As opposed to *Wikipedia*—which is a completely different phenomenon with its own advantages, of course—all entries are reliable references. At the same time, the entries are constantly being revised and updated with new findings.

The *SEP* publishing model includes a number of features (see http://plato.stanford.edu/about.html):

(1) A password-protected web interface that enables authors to download entry templates, submit private drafts for review, and remotely edit or update their entries.

(2) A password-protected web interface that enables the subject editors to add new topics, commission new entries, and referee unpublished entries and updates (updates can be displayed with the original and updated versions side-by-side with the differences highlighted). The secure "background" of the project therefore makes use of automation in cases when this is useful because it is virtually impossible to see minor changes even in short texts. This is crucial because such technical aids enable a very small group of people to run a very large editorial project.

(3) A secure web server for the principal editor, through which the entire collaborative process can be managed with a very small staff. However, the "very small staff" does not mean that the project is created by the few that have invented the model and are managing it. The project is in fact a "digital community," a collaborative society facilitated by an online content management system and its editors, but also in a way existing autonomously. Granted, in many aspects the *SEP* resembles a traditional editorial project; for example, the editors still correspond with the authors. However, the list of differentiating features continues:

(4) A tracking system that documents deadlines for the authors, automatically sends occasional friendly e-mail reminders, provides a summary to the principal editor, and so on.

(5) Software that dynamically cross-references the SEP when new entries are published, and that periodically checks for broken links throughout the content.

(6) Software that automatically creates an archive, providing the proper basis for scholarly citation.

(7) Mirror sites (faster access, extra backups).

The *SEP* differs from other web-based encyclopedia projects. Often, these:

(1) Are behind a subscription wall and even invisible to search engines;

(2) Do not have an administrative system capable of screening new entries and updates prior to publication and ensuring that entries are responsive to new research;

(3) Do not allow the authors/editors to directly contact the server to update/referee the content;

(4) Lack a system of archives for stable, scholarly citation; or

(5) Lack a university-based advisory board as a supplement to the editorial board.[12]

The "scholarly dynamic reference work" also differs from academic journals on the web and online preprint exchanges (see, e.g., http://arxiv. org), which:

(1) Typically do not update the articles they publish;

(2) Do not aim to publish articles on a comprehensive set of topics;

(3) Do not aim to cross-reference and create links among the concepts;

(4) Typically serve a narrow audience of specialists (the *SEP* is the seventh hit for "Kant" on *Google*, the second on *Bing* and *Yahoo!*; it is regularly cited on *Wikipedia*; its influence seems unstoppable, which might be connected to the "right" length of entries—the length of a scholarly article); and

(5) Do not have to deal with the asynchronous activity of updating, refereeing, and tracking separate deadlines for entries because they are published on a synchronized schedule.

In comparative literature studies, the *Directory of International Terms of Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies* (DITL)[13] shows a similar ambition, and it would be well worth continuing it. It is a global project that was initiated by the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA/AILC) in 1964. Since 1986, the general editor has been Jean-Marie Grassin. The *SEP* can serve as a model here. Its usability and quality could be challenged—or brought into a dialogue—only through building a comparable "new media object" (Manovich *The Language*); that is, another online encyclopedia matching all its qualities in a field close to philosophy (e.g., comparative literature studies). Here, the key issue is of course sustainability. The core task in such cases is to find a way to provide an institutional foundation for collaborative efforts that result in actual contents and for the maintenance of the online archive and its diffusion. Digital community projects such as *Wikipedia* prove that the exchanges involved are not necessarily financial, but they nevertheless require a "business model."[14]

Such an online encyclopedia can be read in two ways: it can be read from a computer screen, or it can be printed on paper. It transforms the printed book in similar ways as the online scholarly journal or a (preprint) text repository. Because of its size, it is unusual to read the complete *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

The advantages of computer-based and/or online encyclopedias in fact make the printed multi-volume versions obsolete. The main reason for this is the size of a multi-volume work, which is difficult to transport. Reference works, of course, need to be consulted frequently and by many. Dictionaries are also more functional if they are on a computer—or even on a smartphone—because scholarly activity requires only the most comprehensive versions of dictionaries. In the case of a dictionary, though, if its databases are on the Internet, this might prove to be an obstacle because Internet access is still limited and costly. To move outside the city to write a paper often entails limited Internet access and a preference for an off-line application. Thus, the most convenient option at the moment is to install multiple stand-alone dictionaries on some kind of hand-held device or laptop. Of course, these dilemmas have theoretical consequences. An important distinction presents itself between an online encyclopedia and a local installation of a digital dictionary. Frequent queries through dictionaries should be executed locally, whereas a download of a thirty-page entry from an online encyclopedia seems to be better served by an online website, which has all the advantages presented in the case of the *SEP*.

The issue of "proximity": the book and online access

Vilém Flusser suggests "proxemics" as a research approach that attempts to measure the distances between people in communication. The distances should be measurable in the "scientific" sense. If the interlocutors are able to reply to each other's utterances, then they are close, according to Flusser's approach; they communicate in a dialogue. In the case of television, a reply to the program content is virtually impossible, which means that people using it are far apart (see Flusser 84).

The issue of proximity as conceived by Flusser points to the main difference between a book and the World Wide Web. The book is dispersed in space, but it is not omnipresent. The Internet brings the Web virtually everywhere. Does this mean that all things are automatically close to each other once they are online? Not necessarily. In the first example, the reading of a humanities treatise, a succession of reading types was suggested: a literature student or scholar would typically first read the book and become familiar with its overall argument, and only subsequently resort to the search options facilitated by the digitized versions of the text. The two readings are different because after the first one the reader becomes "familiar" with (i.e., close to) the work as a whole, but not its parts. In the beginning, however, the reader could quote isolated sentences from the book, but had no access to the core thesis (because the isolated summary necessarily diminishes the book's persuasive powers). Subsequently, of course, the possibilities of searching for terms and so on push the medial preference towards the Web and computer media. Therefore, book communication favors an ordered pair of media to communicate its contents: a traditional book, on the one hand, and the digitized Internet—and preferably free—version, on the other. In this case, the book medium retains its use in the Internet era; moreover, sometimes, the digitized book is not only printed, but also bound into a "codex."

The existence of the *SEP* raises the issue of a possible monopoly—and of partiality or inconclusiveness—because it can gain too much influence like another Stanford project, Google. From Flusser's communication point of view, the issues of interpersonal proximity also touch upon issues of open access. For example, commercial e-books such as those for Kindle actively prohibit printing and also technically "protect" the work against printing. These practices are a remnant of obsolete copyright laws and are tackled in all their complexity by the Creative Commons initiative, for example. The problem currently remains unsolved. Digitized and "born digital" contents should be evaluated, and the authors have to be paid; however, the automated work executed by machines has to be separated from the "genuine" authorial contribution.

Beyond the book: the new media textuality

To conclude, artistic creativity using words also leads to projects that use Internet communication to add specific layers that cannot be mediated by using the book format.[15] The *SMS sonnet* (2010) by Teo Spiller is a website application that invites users to complete the fourteen lines of an Italian sonnet, and the title, with ready-made fragmentary lines of text, quasi-verses, that the project obtains from an interactive non-artistic system installed on city buses in Ljubljana.[16] The bus passenger can watch a screen with piles of horoscopes and other useless information, and at the bottom there is a field displaying SMSs sent by passengers.[17]

On Spiller's website a list of around 500 text fragments—the SMS messages sent to the screens on buses—is available to the online user to order them into sonnet form (by clicking a number in front of the text message, thus filling the appropriate verse position).

This project involves a community of passengers facing the screens on Ljubljana city buses. By sending SMSs, they do not reveal their location, but enter a cellular telephone network space that blurs their location across the network of the city bus lines. This spatial area is subsequently, but at the same moment in time, experienced by online users of the new media "poet's" website, who could be anywhere on the planet. The sonnet is not pre-composed; the array of 500 lines allows some considerable creativity for the user of the web page. One may even send an SMS to the system, if one feels that a particular "verse" is missing. The "techno-poet," the apparatus-operator complex, consists of the website and the online user, including the passengers riding buses in Ljubljana. These interlocutors in fact have means to communicate; they are able to reply to the messages of others, which means that they are drawn closer together in Flusser's communicative sense. Spiller's project—the author has in fact expanded the work into an artist's book based on the project—shows features that are beyond the reach of the book. In such cases, a reintegration of textual material from the website project into a book requires a substantial reconceptualization of the text.

NOTES

[1] Developed by Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau in 1991, WWW technology was declared freely usable by anyone in 1993; see http://www.w3.org/History.html.

[2] Note the problem of the digital divide (see Wakefield).

[3] Technical mediation typically causes the addressee's disappointment through estrangement, *Verfremdung* (see Flusser, *Kommunikologie* 305–6).

⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Optical_character_recognition.

⁵ This paper assumes that any speculation about future changes in the reader's perception and attitude towards electronic display devices should be made with caution. The indications that e-paper could replace printed paper are few, even though gadgets such as Kindle, already emulate various book-reading actions (e.g., writing notes on the margins of the "page"). The position of Lev Manovich's last book *Software Takes Command* should be considered, which cites Alan Kay and Adele Goldberg's seminal article "Personal Dynamic Media" (1977), emphasizing that a computer-based simulation of the book "need not be treated as a simulated paper book since this is a new medium with new properties. [E.g., a] dynamic search may be made for a particular context" (Kay & Goldberg 395). Manovich's approach argues for a "deep-remixability" of features of media in the computer as a meta-medium. Peter Weibel's vision of the "postmedia condition" points in the same direction; namely, that the changes in communication media are truly fundamental and revolutionary: "Das Verhalten eines Gegenstandes und eines Menschen, videografisch oder fotografisch dokumentiert, kann eine Skulptur sein, Sprache kann eine Skulptur sein, Sprache auf LED-Schirmen kann Malerei, Buch und Skulptur sein, Video- und Computerinstallationen können Literatur, Architektur oder Skulptur sein. Fotografie und Videokunst, ursprünglich nur zweidimensional, erhalten räumliche und skulpturale Dimensionen" (http://www.neuegalerie.steiermark.at/05/postmediale/konzept.html). To avoid the pitfalls of unfounded prediction, this paper discusses practices that can be observed now or are widespread.

⁶ See http://www.archive.org/details/dieseeleunddiefo00lukuoft. The copyright information in the PDF file reads: "Digitized for Microsoft Corporation by the Internet Archive in 2007. From University of Toronto. May be used for non-commercial, personal, research, or educational purposes, or any fair use. May not be indexed in a commercial service" (http://www.archive.org/download/dieseeleunddiefo00lukuoft/dieseeleunddie-fo00lukuoft.pdf).

⁷ For example, *Foucault* by Claire O'Farrell: http://books.google.com/books?id=Uw7XAAAAMAAJ.

8 See http://plato.stanford.edu.

⁹ See the discussion on the "abuse" of a Microsoft gadget in *The New York Times* (Wortham).

10 See http://plato.stanford.edu/board.html.

¹¹ This text refers to the site as accessed in November 2010. By the end of 2011, all the entries were assigned, but some of them were still unavailable online. However, as a general model of transformation of the book-type encyclopedia, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* example clearly illustrates the early but already functional stages of the project; that is, a new condition that the printed-book medium cannot support.

¹² In the case of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the work of the advisory board is performed by the Department of Philosophy at Stanford University.

¹³ *Dictionnaire international des termes littéraires*: http://www.flsh.unilim.fr/ditl.

¹⁴ The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is looking for a sustainable existence through the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy International Association* (SEPIA): http://plato.stanford.edu/support/.

¹⁵ Narvika Bovcon explores citation networks as text fields, presented both in print and interactively on a computer.

¹⁶ See http://www.gem.si/si/uporabniki/javni_multimedij_gem/default.html.

¹⁷ As in the case of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spiller's project is unavoidably bound to the time and place of its conception and functioning. By 2011, the interactive system that displays text messages on the buses in Ljubljana had lost much of its original freshness and appeal because it was invaded by advertisements and so on, all of which led

to less interesting text fragments that were reused in Spiller's system. Here are some lines of text from the evening of 8 August 2010:

Tincy iz skofljice pa vode ne pozna se dz ji je neznan
upam da mi tokrat rata, ker si fuuul zelim!
idem ja u kladusu..pejt zmano
BABINI SU NAJJACI !VELIKA KLADUSA!POZZ OD SRBA
Se malo, pa dopust ;-)
zivlenje je lepo, zivi ga!
saska lize "liziko" na 25

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Knjiga in svetovni splet

Ključne besede: Google Knjige / medmrežje / spletna komunikacija / referenčna literatura / računalniško branje / sistem za upravljanje z vsebinami / novomedijska literatura / kibertekst / Spiller, Teo

Besedilo bo pregledalo, na katere značilnosti knjige kot nosilca sporočila so vplivale možnosti, ki jih ponuja komunikacija prek medmrežja. *Ad hoc* sinergije med tiskano knjigo in strojno pretipkanimi besedili na spletiščih Googla in Amazona kažejo na radikalne spremembe, kar se tiče dosegljivosti fragmentov v literarnih in teoretskih besedilih, obenem pa opozarjajo na dejstvo, da se je pomen prvotnega bralnega stika s tekstom

ter njegovim celostnim smislom v celoti ohranil. Primer spletnega refe-renčnega dela, kot je *Stanfordska enciklopedija filozofije*, je predstavljen z vidi-ka aparata, sestavljenega iz materialnih nosilcev in institucionalnih sistem-skih ureditev, ki nadomešča tiskanje in postopke urejanja enciklopedij iz obdobja pred spletom. Neposreden globalni stik z enovitim besedilom, ki ga omogoča spletno besedilo, ponuja množico prednosti, ki pa v tem pri-meru niso zakrile specifik uredniškega postopka, ki je pred pojavom spleta vzpostavljal tiskana pregledna dela. Iz cikla »sonetoidnih« novomedijskih spletnih projektov Tea Spillerja je predstavljen *SMS soneti*, ki ilustrira spre-membo materialnega nosilca besedil s strani v knjigi v povečano resnič-nost današnje urbane krajine in naprej v globalne razsežnosti medmrežja. Primeri se z več vidikov osredotočajo na temeljno vprašanje: kateri vidiki knjige so se spremenili in dobili svojo nadgradnjo in izboljšave v spletnih oblikah komunikacije, kateri pa so tisti, ki so značilni za medij knjige in ohranjajo svoj pomen tudi v dobi medmrežja?

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