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KATHERINE BODE AND ROGER OSBORNE

Book history from the archival record

The *OED* defines the archive simply as 'A place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept'. Whether in a library or museum, an online database or a dusty box in an attic, archives are the basis for all humanities scholarship. In book history, they hold a particularly special place, because scholars in this field are concerned with not only what is ostensibly recorded in the archive, but the material evidence of print culture that archives contain. Quite simply, archival research provides the principal way for book historians to explore and understand the history and nature of authorship, publication, distribution and reception of print culture. Since the early twenty-first century, there has been significant growth in interest in the concept of the archive, in the context of, and arguably motivated by, the processes and implications of digitizing our cultural heritage. This extensive body of critical scholarship spans a range of fields, including literary studies, history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and political science. Much of this research builds upon important analyses of the archive by philosopher Jacques Derrida and historian Michel Foucault. These scholars' conceptions of the archive are complex and challenging, but broadly speaking, both emphasize its contingent nature – the way in which an institution tends to respond to changing values – and its relationship to history and memory, as well as to social, political and technological power.

We accept the broad argument of recent critical scholarship on the archive: that these are not passive and innocent collections of documents and reflections of our collective past. Scholars now regard archival collections as representations of history, as cultural texts in their own right. The meaning of any given archive is constructed at several levels – first by the values held by the men and women who originally created the records it preserves, and later by those of subsequent owners and of the archivists whose task it is to order and preserve the records. Archives perforce change with shifting cultural values. However, we do not survey these arguments in detail.[1] Our focus is more practical, and considers how book historians can approach – and read – the archive in all its complexity. We explore the two main ways of reading the archive in book history: first, analysing individual documents within the archive (a qualitative approach); second, using what the archive contains as the basis for bibliometric studies (a quantitative approach). More briefly, we consider the emergence of new, digital archives, and the opportunities and challenges these present for book history. For each approach to the archive – qualitative and quantitative – and for material as well as digital collections, we consider, in turn, the main sources for book history and highlight some of the scholarship that makes the best use of those sources, as well as discussing the practical and methodological issues raised by archival research.

Reading the qualitative archive: sources

Archives contain books but, as D. F. McKenzie reminds us, 'no book was ever bound by its covers'.[2] The many other archival records associated with print culture – of authors, publishers, printers, booksellers, policy-makers and readers – are part of the 'bound'-less history of the book. Having served their original purposes, these records can be put to use again in the hands of book historians, as vital sources of information about the history and operations of print culture. The three main categories of archival records most used in book history are correspondence, publishers' records and booksellers' and library records.

Correspondence from and to people involved in the production and reception of books provides some of the most direct evidence of relationships between individuals in print culture and of the broader operations of the communications circuit. An author's correspondence might include letters to friends, literary agents, publishers and readers, and provide insight into the way a book was written, edited, printed, distributed and read. The correspondence collected in the archive of a literary agent might provide access to direct communications with an author, or opinions about the work that the author was not privy to. Further removed from the author, the correspondence of a library or bookseller might provide specific reasons why a book was or was not purchased for a particular group of readers. Scholars can be greatly assisted by editions of an author's correspondence, bringing together material from archives across the world. Despite their value, such collections are often one-sided, so a trip to the archive – or consultation of related, but tangential correspondence between other people – can be necessary to fill in the other side of the correspondence.

Scholarly editions, particularly those that are accompanied by editorial projects devoted to an author's correspondence – such as the Cambridge

editions of Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence – provide some of the best examples of how correspondence is used in archival research. The temporal specificity of correspondence has been of particular value to scholarly editors, who use such sources to track the composition, publication, distribution and reception of books. Correspondence can draw attention to the involvement of a range of actors in print culture, including scribes, printers, publishers, booksellers and readers. In this respect, the use of correspondence provides a good example of the ways in which authority is attributed to items within the archive. In cases where the primary objective of a scholarly edition is to capture the author's final intentions, the authority of readers' and booksellers' correspondence about the work is attributed little value. However, the value of such correspondence increases in editions that aim to represent the work as it was delivered to specific audiences. Scholarly editions also provide some of the best examples of the ways in which previously undiscovered correspondence can destabilize established arguments by directing attention to new information. The Mark Twain Project, for instance, identifies this potential of correspondence as one of the main reasons it delivers online versions of Twain's works that are amenable to revision.

In addition to correspondence with authors, publishers' archives contain numerous records relating to all aspects of book production and distribution. These records can include evidence of the calculation of pre-publication costs, content acquisition, editing, design and illustration, preparation and manufacturing, marketing and selling, post-publication costs, author royalties, distribution and general and administrative costs. With such a multitude of variables to include in the decisions about whether or not to accept an author's manuscript, some have likened the business of books to gambling.[3] The participants in this gamble include author and publisher, but in a busy publishing house, this activity will also include editors, outside readers, salespeople, accountants, printers and others, all of whom may leave records of their involvement. The production files, readers' reports, estimates, contracts, sales reports and statements all provide evidence of how books were transformed from authors' manuscripts to printed form. Publisher records are not only found in the business records of a company. Sometimes, the production of a book can be pieced together by consulting the records of an author or literary agent. Contracts, statements, rejection letters and other such records could be scattered across several collections, requiring the researcher to connect fragments, retained separately and under different circumstances.

Instances of exemplary use of publishers' records abound, but it is worth noting a few to show the range of evidence available in such archives. An early but notable example is Robert L. Patten's *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (1978). Patten augments the main narrative with a series of appendices – constructed from publishers' archives – that detail the sales, profits, income and circulation of Dickens's books, and the printing history of his monthly serials, including circulation figures. More recently, Ben Yagoda was able to offer a detailed account of the business and culture of *The New Yorker* because of the extensive records held at the New York Public Library. In *About Town*: The New Yorker *and the World It Made* (2000) Yagoda draws on eighty years' of correspondence, manuscripts, readers' reports, photographs, cartoons and other records related to the publishing activities of *The New Yorker* to describe the material and cultural conditions under which many of the most significant American writers saw their work delivered to readers. Similarly, in *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-class Desire* (1997), Janice Radway draws on the personal archives, including oral history recordings, of judges of the American Book-of-the-Month Club to describe the culture of the book that evolved through the engagement of the judges with publishers and readers since the club's establishment in 1926.

Collections of bookseller or library records are rarer than authors' or publishers' archives, and those that do exist often supply only a fragment of the historical record that these institutions would have produced. Such records found in research on library usage in nineteenth-century America have been used, however, to demonstrate that male library patrons 'commodified their reading into categorizations like "useful knowledge" and "rational amusements"', in order to adopt specific acts of reading in the definition of character.[4] Such civic activities occurred across the world, and so the minute books and annual reports of both small and large libraries often indicate the types of reading to be pursued under the watchful eye of committees. The range of studies of library records suggests the rich sources of information potentially held in the archives of libraries around the world. The records of booksellers can be read in a similar way to library and publisher's records. The bookseller frequently takes a gamble with the books stocked on the shelves and serves the community in a similar way to libraries by providing a meeting place for book talk and a collection of books that reflect the taste of the community served. As institutions, libraries and booksellers provided a space for communities to procure the books they used for entertainment or edification, leaving records that can be analysed to explore how individuals and cultural groups perceived their position in the community, nation and the world.

Researchers have regularly drawn on the records of libraries and booksellers to describe the readers and reading of particular times. The most notable of recent studies is William St Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004). In his revisionary literary history, St Clair draws on

around fifty separate archives, including those of a number of booksellers and lenders. This research contributes significantly to the development of quantitative methods, as discussed in the second part of this chapter, but this occurs in conjunction with consistent reference to the evidence of individual and collective reading found in correspondence, journals and other commentaries housed in the archives of book clubs, authors and libraries. James Raven draws on a similar number of archives in *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450–1850* (2007), demonstrating how booksellers were central to the evolution of books from a luxury to a commodity. Using archives rich in documents relating to the everyday lives of African-Americans, Elizabeth McHenry expanded the conception of nineteenth-century literary societies in *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (2002). Such studies as these draw attention to the content of archives by compiling rich and compelling narratives that make the archives 'talk'.[5]

Reading the qualitative archive: issues and methods

While serendipitous discovery on-site can be thrilling, advance planning when visiting an archive will enable more effective use of the researcher's time. The contents of archives can be considered from afar through a range of printed and online guides, providing opportunities to prioritize visits according to the descriptions provided. The website of the Society for the History of Authorship, Publishing and Reading (SHARP) is a good source of information about the location of publishers' and printers' archives and other resources. Such guides often identify institutions or individuals that can provide more detailed finding aids, in some cases down to the collection level. This sort of information is useful to novice and experienced researchers alike, and can provide invaluable assistance to those who have to travel great distances to conduct their research. No two archives are the same, but all have protocols that dictate entry and use, including in some cases the need for official introductions or permission to visit. Seasoned researchers will always advise novices to make contact ahead of time and become familiar with the archive's policies. This applies particularly to retrieval times. Some archives store material off-site and may take more than twenty-four hours to deliver requested material. Ordering such material ahead of time will save time and money.

It is a good idea to communicate with the archivist in advance of a visit. Archivists have specialized knowledge of the material that researchers come to see, knowledge that can be useful in formulating and expanding the researcher's questions. Most collections do not have comprehensive finding aids – and some are uncatalogued – and a good archivist will increase the productivity of your visit, providing links and clues that are not evident in the guides or published material. The archivist will also be an important guide to the provenance of the records, enabling the researcher to better understand the original accession, the collection policies that preserved the records and the effect of these on any collection's ability to represent the past.

In addition to these practical considerations, a range of methodological issues are important when accessing and interpreting the archival record. These issues highlight how the researcher does not simply read history off the archive, but takes account of the construction and nature of each collection. Perhaps the most important issue to bear in mind is that, whether it relates to an individual, business, institution or state, no archival record is either complete or fully revealing. Rather, there are various levels of construction and mediation of the archive. Most records have already undergone a process of 'archiving'. Individuals make decisions about what documents they want to keep or discard. For instance, Vance and Nettie Palmer (two prominent twentieth-century Australian authors) destroyed their business records – presumably believing them not worthy of preservation – removing from their personal papers information regarding earnings, contractual arrangements and other financial dealings. This same principle, on a larger scale, applies to an institution's records. For instance, the Doubleday Records at the Library of Congress are heavily weighted to the valuation of the editor Ken McCormick, who selected and annotated groups of records that he thought were important or interesting.

All archives are formed in relation to the methods, rules and spatial limitations of their managers, whether the archivist is professional or amateur. The creation, organization and storage of business or personal records influence decisions about which records to retain, and which to dispose of. Consequently, the records we find in the archive come with contexts that exhibit changing attitudes to value and historical knowledge. An impulse to collect the 'best' records or the most 'memorable' or 'important' is shared by the archivist and the author or business in question. The records that are retained or donated might reflect a hagiographic impulse or the sentimental feelings of an individual. When records are donated and transferred to a formal archive – whether a library, museum, public record office or university – another process will further shape the archive through selection and disposal of records, according to the archivist's methods of valuation. Finding aids may also reflect value judgments, for example by cataloguing folders containing the records of famous writers, but relegating more obscure authors to general folders filed alphabetically or otherwise.

Archival records are not only incomplete and mediated by various levels of archival intervention; they are also subjective. The records of individuals and institutions are strongly influenced by the beliefs, perspectives, values, interests and aims of those that produce them. For instance, in terms of correspondence records, authors have been known to provide competing accounts of an event to different correspondents, depending on the stake each recipient has in a book. All of these issues point to the careful sifting and interpretation required of archival research. James L. W. West III's account of preparing a scholarly edition expresses these requirements well:

> The editor must examine the surviving notes, manuscripts, typescripts, proofs, and other evidence. The editor must also read the relevant letters and journals and study the publishers' records and account books. From these materials an account of the composition of the work can be fashioned. The narrative will be assembled from the evidence that is otherwise inert. One does not 'allow' the archives to talk; one 'makes' them talk, crafting stories in the same way that biographers and historians do, by selecting and arranging the evidence and writing a story that ties the whole together.[6]

In other words, reading the archive involves not only exploring a wide range of sources, but producing a narrative out of this sorting and sifting, one that further shapes – or manipulates – the contents of the archives used. As with the organization of the archive, the historical narrative is selective and subjective. When researchers enter the archive and sit down to receive the documents they hope will inform their narratives, it is important to remember this selection and subjectivity in order to appreciate the complexity and contingency of the field.

Reading the quantitative archive: sources

The subject of book history is, as Simon Eliot writes, 'rooted in the material world'; and while this material world incorporates elements that cannot be quantified – such as the tone of an editor's correspondence with an author or an individual's reading experience – it is also 'characterized in part, and therefore is to be understood in part, by countable quantities: reams of paper, tons of type, print runs, and percentage returns on capital'.[7] The three main categories of archival resources used in quantitative book history are the records of publishers and allied trades; bibliographies and library catalogues; and information created by legislative and governing bodies in managing the book trade.

The archives of individual publishers, booksellers and printers provide rich sources for quantitative book history. Many such records take the form of lists: for instance, of print runs, wages, shipments and sales. Features of the archive can also be transformed into data for quantitative analysis. For instance, in *Edging Women Out* (1989), Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin analyse gender trends in Victorian novel publishing in part by sampling the number of novel manuscripts – by men and women – accepted and refused by London publisher, Macmillan. Where this and other studies – such as Darnton's *The Business of the Enlightenment* (1987) – analyse quantitative information from a single publisher's archives, other studies survey multiple archives. From the fifty publishing and printing archives he surveys for *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004), St Clair draws data on prices, print runs, intellectual property and readership to explore the movement of, and access to, literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The archives of organizations related to the book trade – including the many (usually national) associations, societies and guilds of publishers, authors, booksellers and libraries – also represent a key source of historical data, especially regarding members and business and legal processes. A particularly important archive of this type is that of the Stationers' Company, a guild of printers, typesetters, bookbinders and booksellers based in London and operating from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. This company supervised entry into the publishing trade, controlled working conditions and wages, set the retail price on books and regulated copyright. Its archives represent a unique and important source of quantitative information on British print culture. Other sources of bibliometric information arising from the book trade include listings of publications and publication statistics in trade journals such as *Publishers' Weekly*, *Publishers' Circular* or *The Bookseller*; the catalogues of book fairs, including those of Frankfurt, London and New York; and sales data (while collected differently in different countries and regions, the global sales database, Nielsen BookScan is an increasingly prominent – though expensive to access – source of information on sales).

The lists and descriptions of books compiled by bibliographers and librarians sit at the heart of quantitative book history. Union catalogues – which describe the collections in a number of libraries and include the Library of Congress Catalogue and the WorldCat Database published by Online Computer Library Center Inc. (OCLC) – provide valuable bibliographical information. So too do the many national and other bibliographies, which incorporate information about printed material ranging from the basic (titles, authors, publishers, dates and places of publication) to the detailed (specifics of printing, illustration, binding, size, price and editions). All this can be rendered as metadata for quantitative studies, and is particularly suitable

for such analysis: devised with reference to established standards and fields, the data have a high degree of consistency across the record. Significantly, these sources frequently collate many of the records of the book trade discussed above, as well as multiple other sources (including previous bibliographies). For instance, *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (2000) is compiled from 'eighteenth- and nineteenth-century review notices, booksellers' and printers' records, advertisements and term catalogues, followed by extensive searches of ESTC [English Short-Title Catalogue], OCLC, and hands-on stack work in many hundreds of libraries worldwide'.[8]

Quantitative analysis of library catalogues and borrowers' records has contributed significantly to reading history. In *A Measure of Popularity: Public Library Holdings of Twenty-Four Popular Authors, 1883–1912* (1992), Eliot surveys over eighty library catalogues from England and Scotland to explore the relative popularity of authors such as Walter Besant, Charles Dickens and Margaret Oliphant. Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (2001) incorporates quantitative analysis of library records and survey results – in addition to analysis of autobiographies and memoirs – to explore the autodidact tradition in Britain. In a different national context, Tim Dolin's recent quantitative studies of the holdings and borrowings of subscription libraries have significantly expanded understandings of reading practices in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bibliographies likewise provide the source for quantitative research in a number of studies, underpinning, for instance, analyses of trends in national histories of the book for Britain, Canada and Australia.[9]

A final, major archival source of information for quantitative archival research in book history comes from the records of legislative bodies managing and monitoring the various aspects of the book trade, including copyright, taxes, trade and legislation. Alexis Weedon's *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836–1916* (2003) incorporates data from a range of government records. For instance, she uses the Annual Statement of Trade published in Parliamentary Papers to explore the international expansion of the British publishing industry. In a pair of essays discussing the use of publishing statistics, Robert Darnton and Priya Joshi both employ quantitative information from the Indian Civil Service (ICS) archives. Joshi's 'Quantitative Method, Literary History' focuses on the quarterly 'catalogues' registering and describing new publications in India, while Darnton's 'Book Production in British India, 1850–1900' uses the annual 'reports' quantifying and analysing book publication in each province. Both highlight salient features of Indian print culture in the colonial period, from the slow emergence of the novel in India to some surprising similarities in book production in India and England.[10]

Reading the quantitative archive: issues and methods

Darnton's and Joshi's essays also provide a useful introduction to some common challenges in bibliometric research. The chief – indeed, overarching – difficulty for such research is data quality. As with archival records generally, historical data is often 'patchy . . . much more has been lost than survives'.[11] However, this inevitable incompleteness – while obviously decreasing coverage and consistency – is not the only issue affecting the quality of historical data, as the case of the ICS archives shows. Although Darnton and Joshi work on ostensibly the same archive, as both acknowledge, their statistics and results differ significantly; as Joshi puts it, they are 'mutually inconsistent . . . incompatible in significant points of content and abstraction'.[12] Their justifications for the historical data they study highlight two further issues affecting data quality.

The first arises from record keeping and reporting procedures. Darnton argues that the annual reports 'cover data that were not included in the catalogues', while Joshi describes reporting procedures for these same documents as so lackadaisical as to render them 'abstract at best, and at worst simply misleading'. Inconsistent record keeping and reporting procedures – which can create gaps, inconsistencies and errors in the historical record – affect even the most well-known and utilized resources in quantitative book history. For instance, although registration with the Stationers' Company provided the normal means of securing copyright in Britain for much of the last five centuries, Michael Robertson estimates that only two-thirds of British titles are included in the company's entry books. Likewise, Michael Suarez proposes that approximately 10 per cent of titles and editions published in the eighteenth century no longer exist, and are thus not recorded in the *English Short Title Catalogue* for that period.[13] It is significant that, even for these major records, the quality and completeness of historical data can only be estimated.

A second issue affecting the quality of historical data is perspective. As with individual archival records, historical data are not created in a vacuum but are inflected by the perspectives and intentions of the individuals and institutions that create and curate them. In the case of the ICS archives, both Darnton and Joshi agree that the reports and catalogues often reveal more about British perceptions of Indian culture than about the publishing industry in that country. While historians frequently read against the grain created by such perspectives – as Joshi does, in highlighting the presence of both British

and Indian interests in the quarterly catalogues – such an approach is only possible if one first identifies the perspectives shaping the historical data at hand. As with archival records generally, perspective also affects preservation of historical data, with documents archived because of particular understandings of significance, rather than at random or because they represent the range of activities in which particular individuals, companies or institutions engaged. Whether book historians read archival records qualitatively or quantitatively, they face similar challenges, and these require analysis of the archive itself as well as examination of its contents.

Closely related to perspective is the common problem for bibliometric studies of categorization or terminology. Darnton raises this issue with respect to the categorization of religious texts in the ICS annual reports. Noting that, '[i]n India, unlike England, religion was so broad as to be nearly coextensive with culture', Darnton describes the difficulty – for contemporary scholars as well as British officials of the period – of 'deciding whether a particular book should be categorised under religion or philosophy or poetry'. Such difficulties, which obviously influence the results of analysis, are not particular to data from other cultures. Rather, they are endemic to all quantitative representations of culture specifically because this approach requires that a range of qualities, experiences or artefacts be collected under a limited number of headings or categories. As Weedon writes, '[c]ategorization is a useful tool to group together similarities whether through the putting together of books by genre, authors by social background, or publishers by turnover', and this process 'aids the analysis of broader historical trends which could not be understood otherwise'.[14] However, the creation of categories also inevitably occludes variations and differences within the historical record.

A number of methods – ranging from detailed knowledge of the data to sophisticated statistical approaches to gauge probability and error – exist to counteract these common challenges in bibliometric studies. In Eliot's words, all aim to use quantitative resources 'to the full without asking them to bear a weight of interpretation that they are not strong enough to carry'. Detailed knowledge of one's data – a 'biography of a data source' – is a key first step.[15] Producing such a 'biography' requires asking and answering as many questions as possible about the data: Who compiled it? When was it created? What selection criteria were used in its construction? What was the purpose of the information and who was it intended for? Why has it been kept and by whom, and what physical, social or material circumstances have affected its curation? If the data has been managed or created by a professional archivist, librarian or bibliographer, that person should be consulted in answering these questions. Although not all answers may be forthcoming, addressing as many as possible will provide a vital basis for ascertaining data quality, including coverage and accuracy, the perspectives involved and the terminology used. Employing multiple sources also provides an important means of gauging the reliability of data as well as counteracting gaps in the record.

While the majority of quantitative studies in book history use very basic statistical methods, more sophisticated techniques have been employed by such scholars as Simon Eliot and Alexis Weedon. Even with simple statistical approaches – such as counts and proportions – an understanding of such issues as sampling, timescales, data fluctuations and data visualization are important. In terms of more sophisticated statistical methods, the most relevant for book history are those used in historical research, including measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode) and dispersion (range, variance and standard deviation), frequency distributions, linear correlation statistics and other metrics of relationships between variables (such as categorical and continuous) and linear and multiple regression. All of these measures should be presented with error statistics, and thereby assessed for their level of statistical confidence. Good reference works exist for book historians wishing to develop skills in statistical methods. These are designed for use with statistical software, including the proprietary Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) or the free-to-download 'R' Statistical Package (which includes excellent online resources and discussion boards). Weedon also provides an introduction to sophisticated statistical approaches for book historians.[16] Whatever level of statistical analysis is employed, it is imperative to select an approach that suits the data, and the questions one intends to ask.

Sophisticated statistical approaches have considerable potential in book history, but – in contrast to history and the social sciences – the field has no established tradition of using such methods. A number of scholars point to problems with this situation: Michael Suarez comments that, '[m]uch book historical work manifests a statistical innocence that impoverishes otherwise valuable research', while St Clair argues that the relative absence of statistical approaches render this field, and the history of reading in particular, 'at the stage of astronomy before telescopes', ill-equipped to 'describe, understand, and theorise complex systems'. The incorporation of such methods into book history will take time. Where Saurez complains that book historians are unable to understand and learn from relevant statistical research in other disciplines (intended for audiences familiar with statistics), book historians who incorporate sophisticated statistical methods – or collaborate with statistical experts – will obviously be faced with a different problem of audience: namely, that the predominant readers of their work (other book historians) may have difficulty interpreting the meaning and significance of their findings.[17]

All these methods for working with historical data – from knowing your source well to the careful application of statistical methods – are designed to assist in counteracting common problems relating to the quality and composition of historical data. But no matter how well one applies these methods, it is impossible to discover, create or claim a perfect data set. In an important way, book historians will always be left – as in Darnton and Joshi's discussion of the ICS archives – arguing for the value and reliability or, more accurately, the extent of the value and reliability, of the historical data they employ (whether those arguments are made primarily with reference to the personalities and institutions involved in creating and curating the data, or through statistical analyses of error and confidence). This awareness of the inevitable limitations of historical data has motivated some scholars to offer metaphors or analogies to describe the type of knowledge achievable using quantitative methods, and Darnton is surely the most inventive in this respect. For instance, he argues that, in struggling with statistics, 'the historian works like a diagnostician who searches for patterns in symptoms rather than a physicist who turns hard data into firm conclusions'. Elsewhere, he compares the 'general picture of literary culture' offered by historical statistics to 'the early maps of the New World, which showed the contours of the continents, even though they did not correspond very well to the actual landscape'.[18] These metaphors emphasize the importance of quantitative methods in book history, in particular their capacity to enable analysis of and insight into aspects of the field that would not otherwise be possible. At the same time, they highlight the importance of established methods (akin to those used by the diagnostician or map maker) for understanding the nature and composition of the sources used, and warn against an interpretation of those results as the truth or final word on historical phenomena.

Reading the digital archive

Digital technology is challenging the definition of, and how we use, archives. The term 'digital archive' can be used to refer to almost anything existing in digital form from discrete collections of related electronic documents (such as the Rossetti Archive or Emily Dickinson Electronic Archives); to digitized versions of existing material archives (for example, the Nineteenth Century British Library Newspaper Database or the National Library of Australia's Trove Newspaper database); commercial databases (including academic search and citation engines such as JSTOR and Web of Knowledge); and emerging digital libraries (most prominently, Google Books, but also non-profit initiatives such as the Internet Archive and HathiTrust).[19] Darnton has described the e-book as a new form of digital archive for book historians, and the term has even been ascribed to the internet itself.[20] Multiple archival resources relevant to book history have now been digitized, including many of the sources already discussed in this chapter. To give just a small selection of possible examples, projects such as the *Australian Common Reader* and *What Middletown Read* provide access to rich databases of library records, while the Stationers' Company archives as well as many national bibliographical records – including *AustLit*, for Australia, and *Canadiana*, for Canada – are now available in digital form.

The benefits of digitizing archives have been widely acknowledged. Chief among them are increased access and decreased cost. While archival material can be widely dispersed in the physical world, digitized archives can be accessed from a computer terminal, reducing the need for researchers to find the money and time to travel to archives. This additional time potentially allows research into a greater number and range of archives, encouraging expansion of the parameters by which scholars currently conceive of book history projects. Digitization of archival material also increases search options. While search possibilities differ between digital archives, many provide facilities to search by words or even concepts, and thus enable researchers to identify references and records they would only otherwise find serendipitously. Increasingly, book history projects generate their own digital archives. This output will enhance sharing of resources and the likelihood that existing projects will be expanded, including through collaboration between researchers in different places.

The increased access to archival records provided by digitization benefits both qualitative and quantitative approaches to reading the archive. In respect to the former, researchers can view documents before visiting the archive, the better to formulate research questions and approaches, or compare individual records held at different locations. For quantitative approaches, many digital archives provide access to large amounts of data. For instance, one can search an online bibliography for information about particular authors, texts, publishers and so on; but this information can also be extracted or 'mined' as quantitative lists or metadata (whether using inbuilt searches and facilitated extraction, or by creating automated searches and data harvesting programs). The access to data provided by digital archives greatly increases the potential speed and viability of bibliometric studies. For such studies, digital humanities initiatives also provide increasingly sophisticated and user-friendly tools for managing, analysing and visualizing historical data, including Zotero, TAPOR, Mallett and Gephi. Even Excel – software that might now be considered 'old-fashioned' – offers a useful platform, and array of tools, for simple statistical analysis of book historical data.

Arguably, it is in the visualization of data – including geospatial data – that new technology holds the most exciting possibilities for book history. The 'Mapping the World Republic of Letters' project, for instance, visualizes the trajectories of over 55,000 letters between 6,400 correspondents in the Electronic Enlightenment database to represent intellectual networks in this period and provoke new insights into how ideas circulated. Among other projects that demonstrate the new possibilities for book history of geospatial analysis, the Innerpeffray Library Project uses geographical information systems (GIS) technology to visualize borrowing distances and patterns for Scotland's first public lending library. While GIS is not without potential difficulties – particularly, identifying suitable data and analysing trends over time – computer technologies promise to expand significantly the presence and impact of geographical research for book history. More broadly, digital humanities researchers are proposing new ways of conceptualizing the visualization of data that could be usefully incorporated into book history. As computers enable data to be manipulated and represented in multiple ways, computer visualizations can provide a form of hypothesis testing, as described in Willard McCarty's *Humanities Computing* (2005). Alternatively, data visualization can be understood as a speculative and intuitive process that provokes researchers to new questions, thus functioning as a problem-generating rather than problem-solving strategy.[21]

While digital archives and methods for reading them have enormous potential for book history, this trend presents its own challenges for reading the archival record. The emphasis that is sometimes placed on the 'seemingly infinite' potential of digital archives – including 'unprecedented access to rare or inaccessible materials; comprehensiveness . . . [and] consolidation' – downplays the many aspects of our cultural heritage that are not being, or cannot be, translated to digital form.[22] Issues preventing digitization include funding, copyright and storage space. Digitizing documents to appropriate scholarly standards is often very time-consuming and, hence, expensive, so even when archives are digitized, they may not be in forms useful to researchers. Although the situation is improving as book historians become involved in digitization initiatives, some existing projects do not incorporate aspects of the archive important for book history, such as the covers and title pages of books, the size of pages and the nature of bindings. Other aspects of print culture – including the weight, smell and feel of the material record – are difficult or impossible to represent digitally. The danger also exists that a single digitized record will be considered sufficient to represent all versions of a work (regardless of the manifestation and physical characteristics, such as marginalia and other page markings). If these other versions are neglected or destroyed, we could witness a reduction in, rather than expansion of, our access to the cultural record. Some commentators also point to a canonical focus in digitization projects, with records of well-known authors and institutions translated into digital form, while others are overlooked.

Conclusion

This chapter has not presented one mode of reading the archive – qualitative or quantitative – or one type of archive – material or digital – as inherently preferable. Rather, different approaches are necessary for different questions, and different archives are useful for different purposes. As Eliot writes, without qualitative case studies, we would lack the 'texture and taste of book-making humanity'; without quantitative studies we would lack 'the context to confer . . . a proper significance' on the details of the case studies.[23] Likewise, despite some recent portrayals of digital archives as superior to the 'analogue' version, these new archives bring their own challenges, as well as possibilities, for book history. Ultimately, where a particular project might necessitate a particular method or mode of access, only a combination of approaches and resources is sufficient to provide adequate insights for book history more broadly.

Jared Gardner provides a good example of this need for multiple methods of reading archives in describing his work on the rise of newspaper comics at the turn of the twentieth century. After researching this aspect of print culture using online archives – including the 'underground electronic archive[s]' of individual collectors – he went to the material archive to find an illustration, only to discover that, 'In the "flesh", these early comics supplements were different than anything I could imagine', including in their size, colours and intertextual references to other parts of the paper.[24] Where the digital archives provided him with access to a breadth of materials – including materials that would otherwise have remained within non-institutional collections – researching the individual documents in the material archive offered him a different, and no less important, understanding of this feature of print culture.

NOTES

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MARY HAMMOND

Book history in the reading experience

Argentinian-born critic Alberto Manguel's optimistic view of reading as a universal practice, and of readers as all-powerful, addresses a set of questions which has informed a growing strand in book history research over the past two decades: the history of readers and reading:

> [I]n every case, it is the reader who reads the sense; it is the reader who grants or recognises in an object, place or event a certain possible readability; it is the reader who must attribute meaning to a system of signs, and then decipher it. We all read ourselves and the world around us in order to glimpse what and where we are. We read to understand, or to begin to understand. We cannot do but read. Reading, almost as much as breathing, is our essential function.[1]

Ever since Robert Darnton, one of the founders of book history, first argued in 1986 that 'Reading has a history', increasing numbers of scholars have been wrestling with the questions that writing such a history inevitably pose.[2] What do we actually mean by 'reading'? Is 'reading' a book the same thing as 'reading' a film, a play, a painting or a social situation, as Manguel implies? If we decide to take 'reading' in its most literal sense to mean active engagement with a text, then who during the act of reading is actually creating the meaning: the author, the reader or a combination of both? Does a book, a magazine, a manuscript or a document on a computer screen have any meaning (beyond its materiality as a bundle of paper and ink or an arrangement of pixels) *before* it has been scanned by a human eye (or a human finger) and processed by a human brain? What contribution does the editor, printer, publisher, illustrator, paper-maker, binder or software designer make? Is meaning the same in every case, for every reader? How does meaning – and the specific conditions which help to create it – change over time and space and across different media? And how can historians capture traces of reading experiences which may be – and usually are – ephemeral and unrecorded? This chapter aims to show some of the ways in which these important questions have been addressed.