"How can you love a work, if you don't know it?":
Critical Code and Design toward Participatory Digital Editions
Dissertation Abstract
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Scholarly editors are integral to the continuum that keeps the stories of the past available to and
understood by the present—but that public of readers beyond the academy whose interest keeps the
humanities alive and relevant is just as important. What if we build a digital edition and invite
everyone? What if millions of scholars, first-time readers, book clubs, teachers and their students
show up and annotate a text with their “infinite” interpretations, questions, and contextualizations?
My dissertation pursues this speculative experiment through the creation of the Infinite Ulysses
digital edition; I've studied how to improve the design and functionality of a key artifact of the
digital humanities—the digital edition—through this unlikely hypothetical.

First, I designed, coded, and publicly released an actual digital edition of James Joyce’s Ulysses with
various experimental interface features. Second, I conducted user testing and analyzed site analytic
data with real readers and researchers. Third, I used the results of the experiment to build on
knowledge from fields with a stake in digital social reading: literary studies, textual scholarship,
information science, and visual design rhetoric. I'm using this speculative experiment to dream big
about the public humanities, produce something practically useful, and capture data to support
critical responses to the challenges of a more public digital humanities.

Three research areas were explored through these methodologies:
1. How can we design digital editions that are not just public, but invite and assist participation
   in the scholarly love for the nuances of a text's materiality, history, and meaning? Are there
   ways to design for meaningful participation that don't necessarily scaffold critical
   participation?
2. How can we design participatory digital editions to handle an influx of readers and
   annotations? What might we learn about digital editions and their texts from the
   accompanying influx of site use data?
3. Can we separate the values of textual scholarship from the physical manifestations of these
   values? How might this clarification help us imagine new types of digital edition that hold
   true to those values?

A whitepaper serves as a report on the dissertation's process and products.
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