“From Text(s) to Book(s)”, 21-23 June 2012,
Université de Lorraine, CLSH de Nancy

On 21-23 June 2012, IDEA hosted an international conference on the subject “From Text(s) to Book(s)” on the Campus Lettres et Sciences Humaines in Nancy. The conference was funded by IDEA, the UFR LCE, the Conseil Scientifique de l’Université de Lorraine and the Conseil Régional de Lorraine. It was also supported by the Communauté Urbaine du Grand Nancy and the Ville de Nancy in several ways, as well as by SHARP, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing – the world-reference in the field of Book History.

This resolutely international conference gathered over 70 speakers and close to 100 participants from all over the world: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Puerto Rico, Quebec, Romania, Spain, Taiwan, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom and The United States.

On top of the 26 sessions which were organised over the three days of the conference, 4 keynote addresses were given by invited speakers: CLAIRE PARFAIT (Université Paris 13, France) opened the conference on the CLSH with a talk entitled “From Text(s) to Book(s) in 19th-Century America”. The first day ended in the main reading room at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Nancy, where homage was paid to Hubert Nyssen – whose work inspired the subject and title of the conference – by PASCAL DURAND (Université de Liège, Belgium) in an address entitled “Hubert Nyssen, Du texte au livre, les avatars du sens: entre accastillage et orchestration”. Pascal Durand was joined by BENOÎT BERTHOU (Université Paris 13) and SYLVIE DUCAS (Université Paris Ouest – Nanterre La Défense) for a round table devoted to Nyssen, the man and his work.
The second day of the conference ended with two keynote addresses held in the Grand Salon of the Nancy City Hall on Place Stanislas: DAVID FINKELSTEIN (University of Dundee, UK) presented “There and Back: A Book’s Voyage through Colonial India”; and DANIEL FERRER (ITEM, CNRS, France) addressed the question of “From Avant-Texte to Text to Avant-Texte”. Their talks were followed by an official reception in the Salon Carré of the City Hall.
The final keynote address was given on the CLSH at the opening of the third and last day of the conference by Espen Arseth (Center for Computer Games Research, IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark) and was entitled “Infinite Books from I Ching to Skyrim”.

The 26 bi-lingual sessions, as well as the 4 keynote addresses, made for a rich and wide-ranging treatment of the conference theme. During the first day the participants addressed questions of textual materiality, looking into processes which enable ordinary texts to acquire the status of literature, or focusing on specific literary works which challenge the conventional notions of text and book. They examined how form – linguistic or material – has an impact on content or meaning. Their papers tackled various aspects relating to the writing, editing, illustrating, archiving, storing and distributing of literary works worldwide. The visual aspect of the text was also dealt with: some participants studied the various effects of a text’s layout and compared different editions of the same literary work. Particular attention was given to the collaboration between artists and writers, as well as to the dynamics of ornaments and illustrations in books. The diversity of case studies is worth mentioning: the Flemish book production between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Canadian art books, collections of English poems, French and English novels, New Zealand colonial texts, etc. It gave birth to rich exchanges between the audience and the speakers about book practices around the world.
The second day started with issues regarding the links between book production and cultural identity, as well as the relationships between printing technology and economics. Speakers looked into the way geo-political events and their economics affect the book market. Literature is considered as a “business”, the aim of which is to satisfy markets and to respond to readers’ needs. It is also an “investment” the publisher makes in order to ensure the longevity of texts on the book market.

The text’s digital format, as well as the technological devices (Kindle, Reader, iPad) invented to read, display and contain such texts have opened up a new kind of business. The proliferation of e-books and audiobooks on the book market has redefined the concept of text. In order to study this phenomenon, some participants focused on particular corpuses such as “Google Books”, or the written press in French. Other speakers looked into the reception of books in a digital environment. The experience of reading texts on new devices is obviously different from that of reading a text in a traditional paper book format. A few contributors observed the new forms of creative writing that have come into existence with the proliferation of hand-held electronic devices. The limitations of writing have led to literary and cultural phenomena which reshape language and narrative techniques. Some participants showed how digital books reduce text to narrative linearity and involve typographic restrictions compared to printed book editions.

Also during the second day, other participants studied more traditional textual aspects, such as the role of the paratext in paper books, as well as the role of editing in shaping interpretation. It was contended that the paratext contributes to the book’s reputation, and that by adopting specific editorial policies in selecting, compiling, arranging and ordering the text, editors have implicitly imposed a certain way of reading onto us. This analytic perspective continued over the following day, when other speakers offered
comparative analyses of different editions of the same literary work. They traced the work's textual history and highlighted editorial choices which have triggered specific literary interpretations.

After Espen Aarseth's keynote speech, the third day's series of conferences proceeded with questions concerning the cyberspace. Participants addressed the issue of the disembodiment of books in their online versions. Online materiality entails a new form of spatial organisation of texts, and also a special relationship with texts, from both the production and reception poles – writing and reading. Some participants also dealt with specific cases of book design, printing, as well as production processes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Others brought into question the economics of modern publishing, by focusing on the development of self-publishing and print-on-demand publishers.

The conference was also a rich cultural and social event which provided multiple opportunities for its participants to enjoy the assets of the city of Nancy. The day before the conference (Wed. 20th June), the first arrivees were invited to an informal gathering on Place Stanislas, which allowed those among them who were new to Nancy to get a feel of the city, and those who had already attended IDEA conferences – and notably “The Lives of the Book” on 20-21 June 2008 – to rediscover it. On the opening day (Thur. 21st), those who wished so were given the opportunity to visit the old part of the city. The guided tour started on Place Stanislas and took them to Place de la Carrière and Place d'Alliance, Grande Rue, the Palais Ducal, the Cordeliers, the Maison du Téméraire and the Porte de la Craffe, and then back on Place Stanislas.

At the end of the first day, the participants were welcomed at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Nancy by CLAIRE HAQUET, curator, and other members of staff. Madame Haquet presented the collections of the library to a keen audience, who was able to appreciate the cachet of the Salle de l'Académie Stanislas. This was followed by a guided tour of the library, and by the keynote address by Pascal Durand, which allowed the attendees to take in the majestic Grande Salle de Lecture.
At night, the music-minded also had the opportunity to explore the streets of Nancy on the occasion of the “Fête de la Musique”.

On Friday 22nd, the conference participants were offered a guided tour of the Musée Lorrain, Palais Ducal de Nancy (in French), and two guided tours of the Musée de l’École de Nancy (one in French and one in English).

The official reception which followed the keynote addresses at the City Hall on Place Stanislas was preceded by a presentation of the architectural treasures of Nancy by art historian and Nancy specialist Michèle Maibeuge (Direction des affaires culturelles de la Ville de Nancy). This was followed by a welcome address by Deputy Mayor Jean-Michel Berlemont (Délégué aux relations européennes, internationales et transfrontalières), and a cocktail party which was partly sponsored by the Ville de Nancy. The evening was prolonged by the famous “Rendez-Vous Place Stanislas” sound and light night show.
"From Text(s) to Book(s)”, Conference Co-organisers Monica Latham (left), Nathalie Collé-Bak (right) & David Ten Eyck (back), and Jean-Michel Berlemont (centre), Délégué aux relations européennes, internationales et transfrontalières de la Ville de Nancy

On the final day (Sat. 23rd), close to forty participants stayed in town for the conference dinner which was held at Café Foy on Place Stanislas.

Conference organisers Nathalie Collé-Bak, Monica Latham and David Ten Eyck would like once again to thank the participants for their contributions, as well as the following people and institutions for their help and support:

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