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## **Note from the Editor and Introduction**

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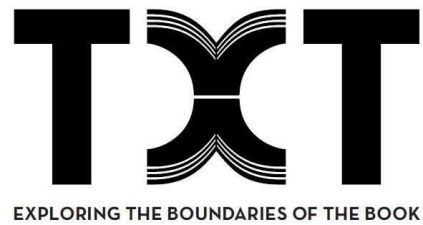
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# Note from the Editor

Dear Reader,

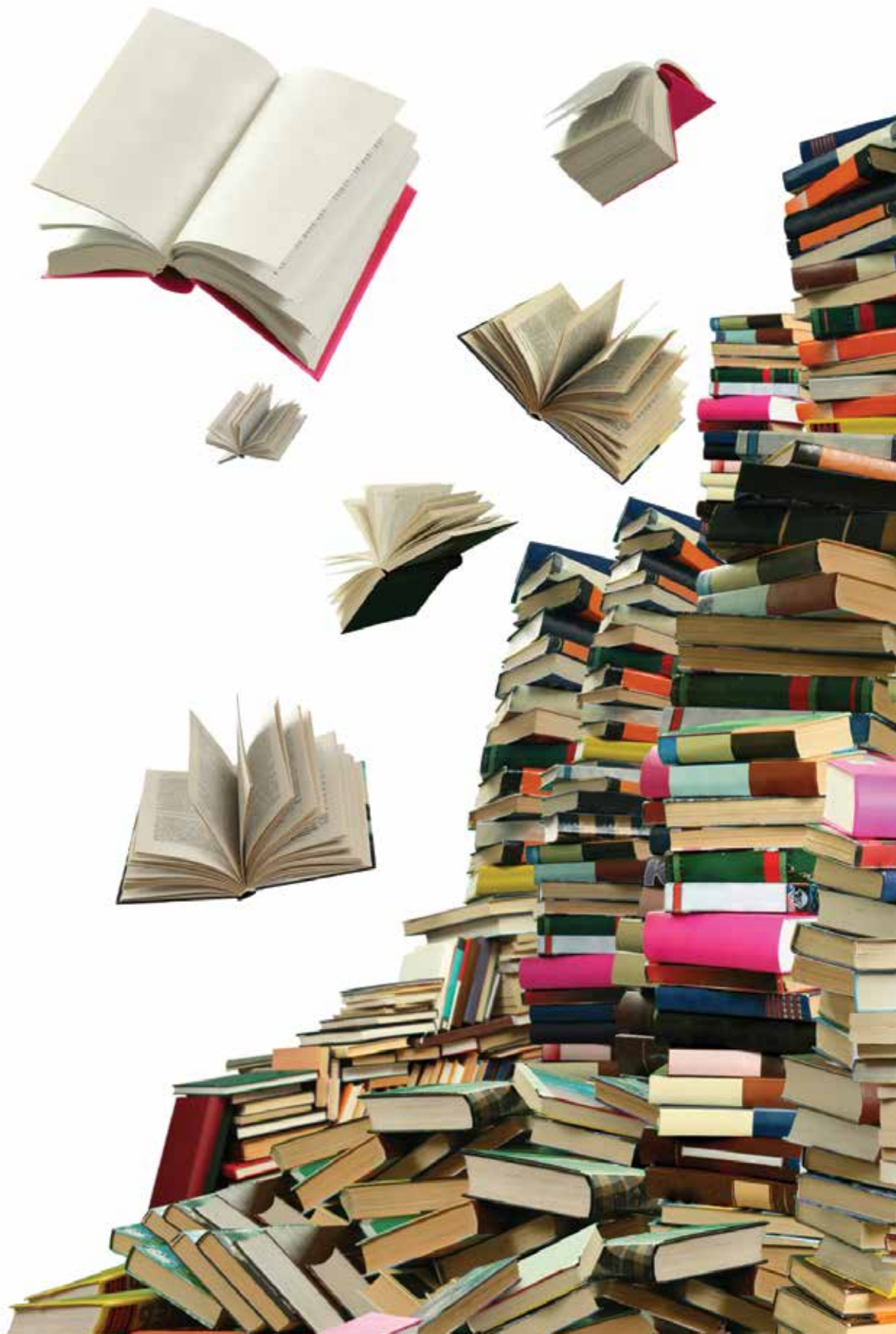
You are holding in your hands a year's worth of writing, analysing and philosophising about textual transmission by the students of the 2014 Book and Digital Media Studies programme at Leiden University. Inspired by our predecessors, we wanted to build on a new tradition to create a magazine that brings together various aspects of the world of the book anno 2014, as witnessed by students, faculty members and industry professionals. In rapidly changing times like these, great insights can result from bringing together these three perspectives.

This year, TXT will explore the boundaries of the book in an age where the digital is increasingly taking over from the analogue. We are confronted with entirely new ways of presenting and transferring the written word. How does this affect the reader, the book industry, the world? What can we do with text that was not possible before? And what contribution can the paper book still have? We have attempted to answer these questions and more in this publication.

TXT could not have existed without the help of a number of people. First of all, our editorial board, which consists of twelve motivated students, all with a passion for text: for its physicality (or not), for its meaning, or for its design. Secondly, I would like to thank all the students, faculty members and industry professionals who have contributed to TXT. We are thrilled about the high quality and rich content of the articles in this magazine, which all shed a different light on the boundaries of the book. Finally, this publication could not have been produced without the kind support of Boom Uitgevers. We want to thank them for their constructive advice and for printing our magazine. We hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Marian Spruit  
Editor-in-Chief

*A digital edition of TXT is available on our website, [txtleiden.org](http://txtleiden.org) and in the Leiden Repository.  
Please send any remarks or thoughts to [info@txtleiden.org](mailto:info@txtleiden.org).*



# Introduction

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**W**e are at war. I do not know if the reader realises this, but there is a battle raging, and it shows no signs of ending. Paper versus the screen; ink versus pixels; the book versus the e-reader; John Updike versus Kevin Kelly; flicking versus scrolling. We love to put the new up against the old and watch them have a go at it. *Des Anciens* against *des Modernes*: winner takes all. This is the dominant manner in which developments in the book industry seem to be portrayed these days, and it is harmful. The death of the book has become a cliché, an exercise in saying the same thing in a thousand different ways.

If there is one thing that connects the articles collected in this volume, it is that while they are all situated on this battlefield, they are all trying desperately to fan the flames. Not that they do not take position: some argue in favour of the digital and some stick to the printed book, but the former avoid the pitfalls of technology fetishism and the latter do not revel in nostalgia. What all authors share is a preference for the two to be exhibited side-by-side, for them to be if not on romantic then at least on friendly terms with each other. As the publishers of Visual Editions have it: ‘what is more important is using both mediums to complement each other, rather than championing one and acting against the other.’

The first section of this reader, ‘Beyond Boundaries’, tries not so much to solve this dispute, but to make it visible. ‘Artists’ Books’, as discussed in Van Capellenveen, constitute a part of print culture that is not easily transferred to the screen. They highlight the tactility and the aura of the printed book. At the same time, Soulellis takes digital-born material, art—a form of art that is the digital equivalent of readymades, the author argues—created on and through the web and on and through the screen, and sees what is gained by transferring this to paper. Texts ‘scraped’ from the internet and then sent directly to the printer are insightful: what, thanks to the fluidity and interactivity of the digital paradigm makes sense online, sometimes looks awkward and uncomfortable when imprisoned within the confounds of the traditional, rectangular page. While artists’ books might amplify the strengths of print, the automagically and algorithmically

compiled texts that make up Soulellis' Library of the Printed Web project do the same for the digital platform.

Perhaps that much is obvious. That first section is concerned with breaching the boundaries, so it will always play out in that borderland. Nevertheless, we find the same unwillingness to wave flags for either side of the querelle in the rest of the articles. This nuance is perfectly illustrated in the title of Spruit's article, where the rather ominous phrase 'Bye-bye bookstore' is qualified with a question mark. The article shows that although there are some worrying figures for bookstores, there are good reasons for these, and the success stories of innovative booksellers prove that there is no reason for defeatist sentiments. The interview with Soetenhorst, director of Boom Publishers, similarly suggests that continuous innovation and change can garner success in the industry. Bhaskar, in theorising publishing, once again poses the bold and by now familiar claim that 'digital technology [...] is the greatest single change to happen to publishing for hundreds of years,' only to immediately ensure us that, 'publishing, a mutable, flexible and essential activity of filtering, framing and amplifying content, remains.'

Open Access, another topic that in a way could be considered an affordance (or at least a direct result) of the internet and digital text, is represented through articles by Leiden University faculty members Van der Weel and Verhaar, in which they discuss the pros and cons of the topic. Other subjects discussed in this section on digital innovations include such diverse ones as green publishing (Vermaas), the edges of books in the Bibliotheca Thysiana (Hoftijzer), bibliophilia (Beros) and Arabic typography (Vrolijk).

Notable, also, are the geographical boundaries that are explored in this volume, reminding us of the diversity of cultures and how this is reflected in the publishing industry. Kesaree talks about book culture in Thailand (as does Visel, by the way, talking of his move to Bangkok when discussing the subtle influences of the digital revolution on literary communities) and the influence of listening upon reading habits there, Birtle discusses Japanese publishing, and Papazova's first article takes us to Russia.

Every generation, at any time, has been wont to think of its own era as defining, revolutionary and more important than the one that came before and the one that will follow. Given the current ubiquity of the term 'sea-change', it is therefore important to remind ourselves that this sea changes more often than we care to remember. Gangel reminds us of the concerns of Czech writer Čapek, who thought that film would prime us to be more visual (that is, more immediate) as opposed to the more patient reading paradigm that reigned before. These thoughts anticipated Heidegger's division between calculative and meditative thinking, which in turn inspired Nicholas Carr's influential tract *The Shallows*. Papazova backtracks reading practices all the way to the Middle Ages, in order to argue for a continuous evolution of reading towards discontinuity. Her theory admits some eras to be more 'disruptive' than others, but at the same time underlines the truism that the waters of change are always in motion. A similar historical perspective is taken by Vermaas in 'Social Developments and Reading'. The article by the authors of the wonderfully named blog *Sexy Codicology* perhaps does

most to link the past to the present. *Sexy Codicology* was created to gather some much-needed attention for digitised manuscripts. Their article concerns a project called DMMmaps, an aggregator of sorts for the manuscripts hidden several clicks away in university library databases worldwide. Effectively, *Sexy Codicology* is trying not so much to breach as to bridge (a subtle yet significant difference) the boundaries between the paradigm of the present and the culture of the manuscript, a feat which has proven quite challenging in the digital environment. That such past developments can help us put our own times into perspective should be obvious. We can speak of it from a safe distance; we are not as emotionally involved with Gutenberg as we are with Zuckerberg, I would think.

At the same time, the constant flux of the digital revolution is fascinating and you could argue, as Soulellis does, that we would do well to document it. Let this volume be a small contribution to the flood of data; let it be a drop of water in the sea of change. We are interested in text—no matter what form it takes and in what manner it reaches us. ■