The Tablet Book

Edited by Caroline Bassett, Ryan Burns,
Russell Glasson and Kate O'Riordan

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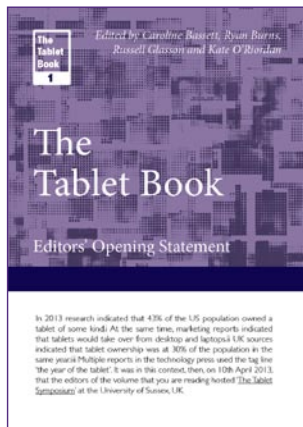
Notes on Contributors

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Caroline Bassett is Helsingin Sanomat Foundation Fellow at the Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki, and Professor of Media and Communications in the School of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex, UK. She researches media technologies, cultural forms and practices and has published widely on feminism and technology, technological imaginaries, and contemporary computational culture. She is currently writing about hostility to computing.

Justin Battin is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Sunderland's Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies. His research interests are primarily geared towards how mobile media technologies intersect with phenomenological interpretations of dwelling, embodiment, and inhabitation. His recent publications include a chapter in the edited collection *New Uses of Bourdieu in Film and Media Studies* (forthcoming 2015) about how Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital can be applied to mobile media technologies. He has also presented at the Freedom and Censorship in the Media Conference held in London, England and The Society for Phenomenology and Media Conference in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. In Summer 2014, Justin was visiting scholar in the University of Silesia's Institute of English Cultures and Literatures, Department of Literary and Cultural Theory (Sosnowiec, Poland). He is currently based in Madrid, Spain.

Ryan Burns is a PhD candidate in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, UK. He is interested in research at the intersection of Media and Cultural Studies and Science and Technology Studies. His PhD thesis (submitted in Spring 2015) is based on ethnographic research in science laboratories where tablet computers are used in the research process.

Jacob Craig is a rhetoric-composition specialist in the Department of English at The Florida State University. His research interests include theories of composing, digital rhetoric, and text technologies. More specifically, his research explores the effect of media, technology, and materiality on the composition, reception, and circulation of texts. He has presented his research at conferences such as Conference on College Composition and Communication, International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference, Computers and Writing, and South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference.

John Farnsworth is an affiliate of the Media, Film and Communication Studies Department at Otago University, New Zealand. He is also a psychotherapist in private practice. Recent work includes publications in ethnography, psychotherapy, social exclusion, networks, mobile and electronic media. His email is johnf@earthlight.co.nz.

Russell Glasson studied Information Systems at Birkbeck, University of London (1998 - 2003), and worked in the video games industry until 2009. Since 2010, Russell has conducted research into the effects readers experience when adopting electronic digital reading material to replace traditional material sources. He employs a variety of ethnographic and discursive methods to understand how digital materiality might impact

the experience of the text. Prior to this project, Russell used a similar approach to seek to understand the implications that digital distribution has for the professional standing of video game producers. He also co-edits SEQUENCE, a REFRAME journal.

Candi Miller teaches Creative Writing at the University of Wolverhampton. She is the author of two novels about the San (Bushmen), *Salt and Honey* (2006, Legend Press. Reprinted 2011, Tindal Street Press) and *Kalahari Passage* (2012, Tindal Street Press). She is currently seeking funding for research around the digitization of San oral folktales.

Kate O'Riordan is a Reader in Digital Media at the University of Sussex. Her work is a cultural studies of emerging technologies, particularly those at the intersection of the biological and informatic. Kate has written about digital and biotechnologies from gaming and the Internet to human cloning and genetics. She engages with feminism and queer theory as modes of enquiry as well as STS and media studies; and is invested in thinking about and participating in new forms of publishing and knowledge production.

Helle Nina Pedersen is a Research Assistant at the IT University of Copenhagen. Trained as a Librarian, she has an MA in Cultural Communication and her area of specialization is music and culture.

Ana-Maria Raus is a graduate of the research master programme "Cultures of Art, Science and Technology" at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University in the Netherlands. Her academic research spans across technology studies, science communication and interactive media studies. As an academic visitor at the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society (InSIS), Saïd Business School, Oxford University, Ana-Maria

investigated practices of digital mapping of social controversies and the use of digital tools in social sciences. She also conducted research on interactivity and enhanced publications at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam, with the eHumanities group, which focuses on digital humanities.

Susana Tosca is an Associate Professor at the IT University of Copenhagen. Her PhD thesis, a poetics of hypertext literature, was awarded the *summa cum laude* distinction in 2001. She has worked for many years on electronic literature, the storytelling potential of computer games, transmediality and complex reception processes, with a side interest in fan activity and the distributed aesthetic formats of the Web 2 era. She is now working on a project about digital production in primary school. Her latest book is *Understanding Videogames* (Routledge, 2013; 2nd ed.).

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Editors' Opening Statement

In 2013 research indicated that 43% of the US population owned a tablet of some kind.[1] At the same time, marketing reports indicated that tablets would take over from desktop and laptops.[2] UK sources indicated that tablet ownership was at 30% of the population in the same year.[3] Multiple reports in the technology press used the tag line 'the year of the tablet'. It was in this context, then, on 10th April 2013, that the editors of the volume that you are reading hosted 'The Tablet Symposium' at the University of Sussex, UK.

As tablets were already being used, theorised and discussed in a variety of contexts, the symposium was motivated by a desire to examine their visibility, as well as the excitement around their emergence, through the lenses of different disciplines. On the one hand, the symposium aimed

> to examine questions about the take up of tablets, readers and iPads across many walks of life including academic, artistic, pedagogical, medical, corporate, activist and everyday contexts. On the other hand, [this event aimed] to create a space of dialogue, discussion and research community across [these areas].[4]

The symposium included sixteen presentations; each addressed the tablet computer in a different way, reflecting the broad scope of the call for papers. A summary of the symposium can be found <u>here</u>.[5] The range of speakers, topics and perspectives made it clear that this object—'the tablet computer'—embodies a wide range of meanings, practices and contexts. Yet there were also many intersections and shared points of reference between the presentations. In this way, the symposium demonstrated both the range of meanings attached to the tablet computer, and the value in identifying ways to connect these meanings. This book builds on that event, publishing research and commentary to mobilise a range of perspectives and approaches in thinking about and understanding the tablet computer.

The original Call for Papers for this volume asked for "empirical, theoretical, critical and creative responses to tablet computers, e-readers and other artifacts." We are pleased to say that the seven chapters selected for publication represent all of these approaches, and develop these ideas in ways we could never have envisaged. Some chapters are text based, others

use visual and audiovisual media to think about and make use of the possibilities that an e-book, read on a tablet, can offer. Thus, the chapters and the project as a whole offer differences in academic approach, in modes of engagement with the object, and in their particular form and design. These creative and critical responses taken together enable a *refraction* of the tablet. They take it apart from the point of view of production, the object as it is experienced, its unseen dimensions, and its contexts of consumption, and reassemble these to unfold the object in its heterogeneity.

In 'Tablet Technostories', Ana-Marie Raus provides a rich description of the moment of adoption of tablet computers. Her examination of the thoughts, feelings, expectations and experience of using a tablet computer for the first time registers an important moment in the emerging history of tablets. The variety of thoughts and feelings associated with tablets when first used is striking. Raus identifies themes including theatricality, the primacy of touch, the blur between work and leisure and the problem of determining the correct or proper role of the object. Taking into account this range of experiences, Raus theorises the tablet as a fluid object.

In 'When Sally Met Harry', Candi Miller interrogates tablet computers and academic practices through the theme of indigenous technologies. If the overall register of this book is that of an attempt to describe, understand, define tablets, then Miller's ficto-criticism reminds us that technologies are always used in context, and that academic intervention must be aware of its own conditions of production. In this piece the liberal promise of empowerment through technology is questioned through a reflection on the encounter and dialogue between different power relations, disciplines and cultural contexts.

Jacob Craig's chapter 'Print Made Fluid' also deals creatively with the form of the e-book. His chapter reflects upon the role of the code 'behind the page' of the e-book in creating meaning for the content. The code behind e-book formats is on the one hand designed to make the e-book adaptable to different devices (so that the text that you are currently reading appears clearly whether you are reading these words on your iPhone, your Samsung Note tablet, or your Kindle Fire). However, Craig also explores the idea that, on the other hand, in aiming to make the text fluid over platforms, e-book formats also fix the e-book in the semblance of a printed book. In his exploration of these parallel impulses – in which the pursuit of an adaptable e-format simulates print – Craig allows an approach to what seems to lie behind, or beyond the surface of the object.

Justin Battin's 'Practical Uses and the Unconcealment of Worldly Investment' works within a phenomenological framework of encounter with the object to consider the immediacy of the experience of using a tablet computer. Working with the Heideggerian concept of 'dwelling', Battin rejects the idea that tablet computers are simple tools that are used for predetermined purposes. He proposes instead that by using tablets, people build intermeshed worlds that they weave through and knot together. Tablet use can be thought of as a kind of world making in this analysis and it opens the tablet up as an object refracted to expose a spectrum of experience.

In 'Affective Mobile Devices' John Farnsworth and Terry Austrin move away from the object itself to focus on relationships that develop in the use of tablets: relationships between people mediated by tablets, and relationships between individuals and their devices. Interrogating these two modes of relationship simultaneously, Farnsworth and Austrin examine the creation of sociability and affective publics in SMS friendships and mobile poker. They

argue that sociotechnical objects allow flows of desire to circulate, and that tablets and similar objects amplify temporary stabilizations of affective relationships developed in this way. In this analysis the felt dimensions of tablets and their capacity to vector patterns of feeling and desire are brought to the foreground.

Susana Tosca and Helle Nina Pedersen, in 'Is There a Text in this Tablet?', consider the form of the tablet from the perspective of the reader. Taking the specific materialities of e-texts and e-reading practices, they discuss a constellation of material and immaterial objects including e-texts, e-literature, tablets, e-readers and paratexts. Tocsa and Pedersen use a self-reflexive comparison of reading practices with paper books and with e-books to develop a critique of this kind of comparison. While acknowledging that e-texts are distinct from paper texts, their ethnographic study of reading demonstrates that nevertheless readers make sense of e-texts within the framework of print culture. Taking these different kinds of encounters as different kinds of reading imports a 'compare and contrast' framework into research that might, more productively, ask about readers' capacity to engage with multiple kinds of texts.

In 'Tablets: Specific, Generic, Perfect' Ryan Burns proposes that a productive critique of tablets can be achieved by treating tablets as perfect. This analysis takes the enchantment with the object and its invested perfection seriously, and allows this to operate as a heuristic device to understand this treatment of the tablet. Examining the relationship between the tablet and its apps, Burns argues that users tend to find fault with apps, but never with the device itself, thus its perfection remains intact whilst being indefinitely deferred. Developing an analytical framework based on perfection, Burns contends that tablets are a specific instantiation of a

general technological rationality that functions on the basis a teleological promise of perfection.

We close this introduction with a note about formats and timescale. The realities of open-access publishing have meant that this (in principle) 'quicker than traditional publishing' model has taken around the same time as traditional publishing. The time and energy that have gone into producing this book are indicative of the material processes and labour that lie behind the creation of all digital objects. We have chosen to present this volume as a collected e-book and each chapter is also individually available as a PDF. While we believe that the best way to approach this book about tablets is to read it using a tablet or an e-reader, the content of each chapter does speak for itself, no tablet required.

Notes
1. Pew Research Centre's Internet and American Life Project (2013) 'Tablet and E-reader Ownership Update' [online] Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/10/18/tablet-and-e-reader-ownership-update/. Accessed 9 February 2015
2. Bajarin, T. (2013) 'Will 2013 Be the Year of the Tablet?' [online] Available at: http://uk.pcmag.com/tablets/18070/opinion/will-2013-be-the-year-of-the-tablet. Accessed 10 February 2015; Charlton, A. (2013) 'PC Shipments to Slump 8% as Tablet Demand Overtakes Laptops' [online] Available at: http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/pc-shipments-slump-idc-figures-laptops-desktops-472290. Accessed 10 February 2015.
3. YouGov (2013) 'Tablets spur news consumption' [online] Available at: https://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/01/29/tablets-spur-news-consumption/. Accessed 9 February 2015.
4. The Tablet Symposium programme. Available at: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/

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5. Burns, R. (2013) 'The Tablet Symposium' [online] Available at: http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue71/tablet-symp-rpt.. Accessed 10 February 2015.