

New Media Collaboration Centre: Canadian Arts Content Management System and Centre for Digital Policy and Cultural Rights Initiatives

Project Overview

The proposed infrastructure is an extension, consolidation and integration of the existing CFI infrastructures of two of York University's Canada Research Chairs: Professor Rosemary Coombe's New Media Collaboration Centre (CFI file 202176) and Professor Christopher Innes' Social Dimensions of Performance (CFI file 200999). On completion, the public face of the infrastructure will consist of two components: the Digital Archives of Canadian Culture and an associated Centre for Canadian Digital Policy and Cultural Rights Initiatives (Policy Centre). These will be supported by an underlying open source software Arts Content Management System (CMS) that integrates public licensing systems into every level of its operation. The CMS also gathers empirical data about its use by our various Arts Partners in order to provide researchers, students, and policy workers with information about digital practices of cultural content management online, in the interest of providing data for cultural policy initiatives. The ultimate goal of the project is to foster the creation of an ethos of fair dealing for Canadian culture online.

The infrastructure will be located at York University. Physical workspace/facilities for the two York co-investigators and offices for associated Highly Qualified Personnel including visiting scholars and artists in residence will be housed in a new dedicated space in the Fine Arts Faculty devoted to culture and entertainment research -- tentatively called the CAMP (Culture, Arts, Media, Policy) Institute. Servers associated with the projects are currently housed by York Computing Network Services (CNS) and York Academic Technology Services (ATS), but will be consolidated to York CNS as aging hardware is replaced. The CMS resides on the servers; the DA and Policy are contained in the CMS.

The proposed project is necessary at this time for several reasons. First, it will consolidate the human and material resources available to the co-investigators, supporting their ongoing research in an economical and efficient fashion. Second, it will further develop the Content Management System for use by a growing range of partners in the arts, cultural industries and NGO sector, an emerging research network, and the public, after an eventual general release under an open source license. Third, the policy aspect of the project will generate empirical data about the actual practice of placing Canadian cultural content online at a time when so many discussions are largely conjectural and much of the data is provided by corporate parties with interests that may be distinct from those of arts creators and users.

The project enhances existing infrastructure by upgrading and augmenting existing hardware, software, and content. The arts content of the existing digital archives of both CFI infrastructure projects will be combined in the CMS, enriching the overall archive and increasing its attractiveness as an online destination for researchers, students, and the general public. The overall quality of the CMS will also improve significantly over the

term of the project, as we develop both the ability to track usage of the CMS and the usability and appropriateness of the interface for the various categories of users of the site (developers and programmers, researchers, students, arts groups, artists, and the general public).

The proposed infrastructure will contribute to the development of an existing suite of promising beta-level open source software applications to the status of enterprise-quality alpha releases, which will then become available to the larger Canadian academic and cultural communities. It will sustain a nascent research network, promoting research into digital fair dealing and providing much-needed qualitative and quantitative data on digital publication and archiving by Canadian cultural producers operating at many levels. Moreover, it will enable knowledge transfer between and within the academy, the NGO sector, arts groups, businesses and individual artists, enabling cultural creators to affect the development of digital cultural policy in ways that are specifically amenable to Canadian cultural policy interests.

A Canadian legal and cultural perspective has guided the direction of the proposed project from its conception. It takes into account the specific concerns of Canadian users and rights holders working with digital media objects. While there are certainly other Canadian open source development projects, none address the specificities of the Canadian legal and cultural environment. Currently there is no other CMS development project, open source or otherwise, working with Canadian arts groups at this level of technical sophistication; the proposed research is unique in its reflection of their concerns and offers the benefit of making resources and opportunities available to Canadian arts and cultural groups that are normally outside their reach.

Public licensing regimes imported from the United States need to be modified for Canadian needs (particularly those relevant to moral rights). The CMS will enable these needs to be documented, and new public licensing provisions to be created and tested. Without a fair use exemption, Canadians face the limits of a fair dealing defence without a robust jurisprudence. New forms of digital technology enable the conditions of fair dealing to be built into the architecture of archives, but there has been little effort to actualize these possibilities. Canadian law reform is accelerating rapidly with insufficient public input to inform the direction of policy development. This digital infrastructure is being created in a manner that will facilitate the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data that will assist Canadian and international scholars and policymakers in addressing the technological, pedagogical, social, cultural and legal questions that publishing arts material in a publicly licensed open-source environment poses.

Quality of the Research or Technology Development

This infrastructure project is designed to extend, upgrade and integrate two existing CRC CFI-funded infrastructures in order to retain two Tier One CRCs, and to facilitate their cutting-edge collaborative research in priority areas under York University's Strategic Research Plan. Professor Darren Wershler-Henry of Wilfrid Laurier University, the third Researcher on this application, has been instrumental in supervising the technological development of Dr. Coombe's New Media Collaboration Centre (CFI file 202176)'s Digital Archiving Lab, the Digital Archive of Canadian Culture (CA), and the open-source Arts Content Management System (CMS) that contains it ("the Infrastructure"). His work on this project has been central in developing the research partnerships and collaborations upon which the productive use of the infrastructure depends. We are seeking funds to upgrade Dr. Innes' infrastructure -- the Facility to Explore, Analyze and Document Social Dimensions of Performance (CFI file 200999) -- to integrate it with Coombe's DA and CMS, and to further develop the latter from its current working beta stage to a release candidate stage with enterprise-level functionality.

The first two years of the CMS development will draw to a successful close this fall. With the help of CFI funding, working beta versions of an online courseware system (communicationstudies.ca), the CMS itself ("Artnob"), a web-based emailing list management system ("Tristero"), and a calendaring system ("Tempo"), have been developed with the use of open source software. The successful hosting and development of this culture and entertainment management system, along with its use by our Arts Partners, will act as a crucible for the creation of progressive intellectual property management activities and potentially provide data to influence legal policy and transform public licensing practices. Particular emphasis will be placed on the development of a sophisticated but easily navigable multi-level web interface for the CHS -- the critical element that will determine the degree of its usefulness to the larger academic and arts communities, cultural industries, and the general public.

The project enhances existing infrastructure by upgrading levels of hardware, software, and content. Innes' aging hardware (both servers and development machines) will be supplemented by newer machines purchased for Coombe's CFI; in turn, Coombe's project will utilize Innes' streaming server for large video files. The arts Content of the existing digital archives of both projects will be combined in the CMS, enriching the overall archive and increasing its attractiveness as an online destination for researchers, students, and the general public. The overall quality of the CMS will also improve significantly over the term of the project, as we develop both the ability to track usage of the CMS and the usability and appropriateness of the interface for the various categories of users of the site (developers and programmers, researchers, students, arts groups, artists, and the general public).

An integral part of the research plan for Dr. Innes' Initial CFI award was the creation of a database of images and video (historical and contemporary, as well as records of the research conducted). This is already in existence at moderndrama.com, and is under ongoing development. In its current configuration, the performance laboratory and

associated website enabled by the servers video-editing equipment, etc. have attracted colleagues from South America, the USA and Europe.

This existing infrastructure will be materially aided by integration with the proposed new CMS, which will raise the whole operation to a new level. It will not only extend the useful lifetime of the present infrastructure by aligning it with technological improvements, but will also have important benefits in creating synergies between the theatrical focus of the present research and the literary, aural history and other areas of the proposed digital archive. Moreover; the new infrastructure will enable more sophisticated resource management, facilitating analysis and cross-reference, in addition to expanding the already significant web communication, making this truly the research resource for scholars across Canada and worldwide.

As envisaged, the digital archive will also promote synergies between the different artistic areas represented by the various arts partners, which corresponds with two of the major objectives defined in York's Strategic Research Plan – "to consolidate and build on the excellence of York's liberal arts research" and to "further develop and diversify interdisciplinary research initiatives". In particular, it enhances the research capacities of the Faculty of Fine Arts, which is identified as having "a privileged position by virtue of its links with the cultural industry". The digital archive will also play an important role both in attracting Masters and PhD level students to the new graduate programs in Design and in Theatre Studies, plus programs currently under development in Dance and Visual Arts, and in offering these students material for their own research and dissertations.

The proposed integration and improvements to the Infrastructure will offer enterprise-level web functionality to Canadian researchers, students and the Canadian arts and cultural nonprofit community -- sectors where this level of technological sophistication is normally inaccessible due to prohibitive development costs and a lack of technical knowledge. In addition to its existing content management capabilities, the completed Infrastructure will feature multi-level browser-based authoring and administrative capabilities, web-based mailing list management, bulk content import and document management tools, standards-compliant metadata, system-wide calendaring, detailed user feedback systems for qualitative research and automatic back-end aggregation of user statistics for quantitative research purposes.

Digital infrastructures with this level of power and functionality are rarely, if ever, accessible to groups interested in promoting an ethos or fair dealing and/or a user-centric approach to accessing cultural content. Currently, the uncertainties and obstacles involved in complying with current interpretations of intellectual property laws, combined with proprietary platforms, operating systems, and the control of underlying code, limit the capacities of new media to deliver a full range of cultural content to Canadians.

Despite the capacities for multi-participant collaborative research activities that digital technology affords and the commitment of all levels of government to use this technology to make Canadian cultural content more accessible, intellectual property laws

in Canada pose unnecessarily punitive prospects for potential liability, exerting a chilling effect on Canadian cultural exchange, without adequately serving the needs of Canadian creators, arts organizations, or cultural industries.

This has become especially clear in the library and education sectors, where unknown proprietary claims often serve to prevent making valuable historical and cultural content available for research and study. Economic and technological barriers, moreover, have restricted the ability of many arts sector institutions to place materials online, even when the legal issues have been resolved. We believe that the proposed expansion and improvement of the Infrastructure will enable productive communications and knowledge and technology transfer between three groups of stakeholders: members of the arts community with significant digital archives of cultural content that they wish to make available online; programmers and developers with technical expertise; and academics with expertise in digital culture, law and policy. We anticipate that such a network – a network of people supported by a flexible, intuitive infrastructure – could break the logjam currently preventing a wealth of cultural content from reaching Canadians over the Internet.

The proposed activities are not only innovative in terms of their technical sophistication and the placement of that technology in the hands of cash-strapped arts groups and researchers, but also in terms of the quality and nature of the content we propose to present. We have established partnerships with a core set of groups and individuals with a track record of leadership and innovation in the Canadian arts and culture sector. All of these groups are interested in the establishment of large archives of full-length rich media content online; many have already begun this process. Moreover, all are interested in keeping their digital archives as open as possible, without the restriction of unwieldy and ineffective software-based content locking systems that ultimately inhibit use of their content rather than encouraging it. By integrating public licensing systems such as the Creative Commons licenses directly into every aspect of our software infrastructure, we are laying the groundwork for the emergence of a culture of fair dealing for online Canadian content, creating a set of best practices for those interested in following suit, and making available the tools to do so at little or no cost.

The proposed activities complement comparable research and technology development conducted elsewhere in a variety of ways. Because the infrastructure's software is based on Drupal, a state-of-the-art open-source content management and discussion engine this project's development stream both draws from and feeds into several worldwide open source development communities. The development of the Tristero e-mailing list manager has particularly benefited from such collaboration. We have also received indications of interest from a variety of Canadian programmers and developers who are excited by the project and are engaged in work that complements the Infrastructure being developed (and are anxious to contribute open source code for the uses we envision). Information technology officers working for our Arts Partners are developing code in anticipation of this eventuality, which will dramatically increase the functionality of both their web-based projects and our Infrastructure development.

One of our recently initiated research collaborations has engaged Professors Rowland Lorimer and John Maxwell of the Simon Fraser Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing, and Professor Richard Smith of the Simon Fraser University School of Communication. All three have been involved in a variety of similar research and technology development initiatives over the years, such as the Publishers' Extensible Online Database (PExOD), the Open Journal System (Public Knowledge Project), and the Thinkubator courseware project. Several kinds of knowledge and technology transfer will result from our collaborations including the authoring of a series of papers, possible sharing of code and ongoing consultation as well as student internships in both directions.

While there is a significant degree of complementarity between the proposed activities and other ongoing initiatives, this project differs in substantial ways from comparable research and technology development conducted elsewhere. There is no other CMS development project, open source or otherwise, working with Canadian arts groups at this level of technical sophistication; the proposed research is unique in its reflection of their concerns and in offering of resources and opportunities normally outside their reach. Moreover, the specific focus that the proposed project places on interface design and overall usability of the software is unique. Most development projects end before devoting this level of attention to interface design, leaving the niceties of adapting code for actual users by their target audiences to posterity. Although the Access Copyright Initiative shares an interest in the public domain, the Infrastructure we are developing is based on distinctive premises about its content, creation and sustainability.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of this technology is the integration of the ethos of fair dealing, and support for public licensing, into the uploading of every object housed in the CMS. From its inception, development of this infrastructure has been guided by a Canadian legal perspective, taking into account features that are specific to the concerns of Canadian users and rights holders working with digital media objects (such as moral rights). While there are certainly other Canadian open source development projects, we know of none that address the specificities of the Canadian legal and cultural environment in this way. As the government continues to consider the reform of Canadian copyright laws in terms of online access, projects such as this will become important test cases in terms of the production of scholarship based on actual use of the Internet for the publication of large archives of content. Current arguments tend toward the conjectural and too little in the way of research exists that has not been commissioned by industry actors and industry professional associations. Ongoing international debates about Internet neutrality should also serve as a warning flag. In terms of ensuring that cultural content is not entirely subsumed by commercial concerns, this project may be able to make an important ongoing contribution to larger cultural policy discussions.

It is critically important to pursue the opportunity to develop this infrastructure at this time. Thanks to the previous two years of work, this project has achieved a substantial degree of momentum. We have developed working beta versions of a series of innovative open source software applications that we want to begin to utilize, and to make available to other interested parties. Funding the proposed activities will ensure that this project reaches its full potential in terms of utility and impact. The research network

designed to utilize the infrastructure is also gathering steam; a series of meetings with researchers and arts groups are scheduled and will continue over the next year. The spring 2006 receipt of an SSHRC Image, Text, Sound, Technology Networking Grant by Coombe and Wershler-Henry (with Innes as a co-investigator) serves as external confirmation of the current necessity for this initiative. Coombe and Innes have other pending applications for research grants that also depend upon the ongoing development of the Infrastructure and its expansion and development for new purposes and beneficiaries such as indigenous management of cultural heritage, as well as recording and archiving the history of transnational festival circuits such as the Trinidadian Carnival.

The pending deterioration and degeneration of many collections of Canadian cultural content is also a significant factor of some urgency for arts and cultural organizations that are anxious to preserve and make available significant archives for public purposes. The number of potential Arts Partners continues to grow as news of this project spreads; they increasingly indicate that they lack the capacities to put digital material online, don't have the resources to ascertain how best to do so, and lack necessary bandwidth for the best potential applications.

York University is providing significant and timely support in the next year. A designated research space in the Fine Arts Faculty is being renovated for use by the four CRCs most centrally engaged in culture and entertainment research (Coombe, Fisher, Innes, Marchessault) and their respective research teams. Comprising more than 2500 square feet, the area, tentatively nominated the CAMP (Culture, Arts, Media, Policy) Institute, will contain four CRC offices, two administrative offices, an office for our Technical Lead/Interface Advisor, offices for Visiting Researchers, Artists-in-Residence, and workspace area for graduate technical assistants and research assistants (as well as a seminar room and reception area). The Infrastructure provides a central research resource for the Institute and the Institute is a key symbol of York University's commitment to multisectoral, interdisciplinary, collaborative research into culture and entertainment issues.

Researchers

Rosemary J. Coombe's past contributions and current plans demonstrate the achievement of international stature in the increasingly interdisciplinary field of intellectual property law and policy, which she has uniquely situated within the wider field of international cultural rights. Her leadership is demonstrated by scholarly record, her speaking engagements around the world, the fact that she is routinely contacted by international organizations to participate in roundtables, write columns, provide commentary, and to review scholarship in anthropology, archaeology, cultural studies, law, history, and literary theory. Coombe's previous CFI grant was instrumental in developing the innovative technological platform that forms the basis for the proposed infrastructure.

As the first Tier 1 Canada Research Chair at York University Coombe is helping to design a new and dedicated space devoted to Culture and Entertainment Research. She is in an ideal position to capitalize upon the innovative research and technological development opportunities the proposed infrastructure will afford. Not only is she the most well-published Canadian scholar in the interdisciplinary study of intellectual property but she is well connected to a growing number of researchers exploring intellectual property-related issues across disciplines and around the world. She is currently a co-investigator in five major government funded research networks that explore issues pertaining to global cultural flows, indigenous cultural heritage rights, intellectual property issues pertaining to archaeological and historical research, the ethics of cultural appropriation, and research issues posed by the use of open source software and public licensing to manage Canadian cultural content online. Most recently she has applied for a Research Development Initiative grant to bring anthropologists, geographers, and philosophers together to develop new research questions posed by the growing range of cultural rights claims. She brings her legal background and global cultural rights policy expertise to the design and management of the Policy Centre and a network of researchers and NGOs as potential collaborators and partners to the project.

Darren Wershler-Henry is Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, where he teaches new media and media history. He has extensive experience as a new media consultant, technical writer, editor, designer and publisher. Wershler-Henry has written and/or co-authored ten books, five of them on the Internet and culture including a bestselling Internet directory; a study of virtual community, and a book on open source software and peer-to-peer technologies. His most recent book, "The Iron Whim," is a cultural history of typewriting, featured on the cover of the Globe and Mail's book section and reviewed favourably across the country. He has also been central to a number of historically significant web development projects in the arts sector, particularly the Coach House Books site (www.chbooks.com) – the first publisher in the world to simultaneously publish its entire annual frontlist both in print and in online; and Ubuweb (www.ubu.com), the largest online repository of sound poetry and visual poetry. His areas of expertise also include free and open-source software, social software, the relationship of conceptual art and procedural poetics to the development of new media technologies, and the role of theft and plagiarism in creativity, especially in digital contexts. Wershler-Henry's extensive connections in the Canadian and North American

literary and fine arts communities, combined with his experience in consultancy and over a decade of new media project development, make him an ideal liaison between this research project and the arts sector.

Christopher Innes holds the only Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in the area of Performance, and has developed infrastructure (funded by CFI) to explore, record and analyse the reciprocal impact of theatrical performance and society in its widest context. Specifically this comprises a dedicated performance-research facility (currently housed in Winters College at York University), together with a website documenting aspects of modern drama, which when searched under terms such as "chronology modern drama" ranks as follows: Google, p. 1 #7; MSN p. 1 #1, Netscape p. 1 #2, etc. His 13 books and over 100 articles, together with extensive editorial commitments (as the General Editor of the 23 volume Cambridge "Directors in Perspective" series, editor of the quarterly journal "Modern Drama", co-editor of the "Lives of the Theatre" series for Greenwood/Praeger, or membership on the Editorial Board of the Cambridge Guide to Theatre) have earned him an international reputation as one of the leading scholars in the field of modern theatre. His leadership can be demonstrated by his numerous speaking engagements around the world, and the fact that he is routinely contacted by international organizations to participate in conferences, write articles, and review scholarship in drama and theatre studies, cultural studies, or literary theory. Given this scholarly record Innes is excellently placed to both contribute to and capitalize upon the innovative research and technological development opportunities offered by the Proposed Infrastructure. His international collaborations range for the digital reconstruction of historical theatres and performances to the sociological, symbolic and anthropological study of the Carnival phenomenon in Trinidad, the UK and Canada; and through his existing interests in street theatre and ritual performance he has brought some of the most important Mas Bands of the Toronto Caribana as partners in the Digital Archive to be enabled by the proposed infrastructure.

Need For the Infrastructure

Each component of the proposal to merge and enhance Coombe's and Innes' existing infrastructures is an integral and essential aspect of a comprehensive research program. Integrating Professor Innes' online project at modern-drama.ca into the developing CMS and centralizing the location, administration and usage of computing resources attached to both CFIs will not only produce considerable savings and optimize available resources, but it will also produce substantial academic and cultural benefits. All arts content in the CMS will benefit from association with and contextualization in terms of the Centre for Digital Policy Initiatives. The entire infrastructure will support visionary thinking about digital textuality in order to shape, not merely react to, changes in the academy, the arts sector and wider Canadian culture.

There is no similar infrastructure to the proposed research available at York University or Wilfrid Laurier University. Although York University has a major commitment to culture and entertainment research, it has no means of actively pursuing this research as of yet. When made available to the larger York community on completion of the proposed project, the infrastructure will enable the University to reach out to its arts constituencies and further fulfill its mandate to address issues pertaining to Canadian culture and entertainment.

The Centre for Digital Policy and Cultural Rights Initiatives hosted by our infrastructure will also be unique. Other online centres within the region that deal with issues of intellectual property, such as The Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC) at the University of Ottawa and the Centre for Intellectual Property Policy at McGill University and the Centre for Innovation Law and Policy at the University of Toronto, document issues relating to the production of Canadian culture online, but do not actively participate in the production of tools that facilitate the creation of Canadian cultural content online or assist in its management. Moreover, while these centres produce policy documents and engage in clinical work, they do not produce any empirical data about the creation, publishing and archiving of Canadian cultural content, something our infrastructure is being specifically designed to enable. Thus our project uniquely produces data relevant for policy deliberations. Our work is complementary to CIPPIC because we will be in a position to assist them in designing new public license provisions under Creative Commons Canada that are shaped to Canadian legalities and reflect Canadian realities rather than merely copy U.S. models derived from another tradition of jurisprudence.

The hardware component of the proposed infrastructure has been designed and budgeted for with an eye toward complementarity, sharing and longevity. Highly Qualified Personnel associated with the research of both Coombe and Innes will utilize the research computation. Our various research collaborators will also have graduate students that will be using this infrastructure to further their own work. In addition to supporting the technical assistants for Coombe's portion of the CFI, these machines will supplant the legacy hardware purchased with Innes' CFI, now five years old and in need of replacement as industry standards for digital video and audio processing have changed

significantly. Processor speed and hard drive space have also increased greatly over this time. Likewise, Professor Innes' servers, though still useful, will be supplemented by the more powerful servers purchased for Coombe's CFI over the last two years. Coombe's DA may make reciprocal use of Innes' Helix server for video streaming, which is currently underutilized.

Training of Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) Through Equipment

The Infrastructure will enhance the current and future training environment for highly qualified personnel (HQP) in multiple ways. The Communication and Culture Graduate Program at York University is currently the largest in Canada. Coombe is a core faculty member. Students in this program are extremely interested in new media arts – eager pioneers in the organization, management, and analysis of Canadian culture online. The DA and CMS provide a powerful research instrument to "map" activities of intellectual property and public domain management, while sharing and disseminating new digital tools for these purposes. Coombe's CRC supports six Masters and PhD RAs annually. Innes and Wershler-Henry will together make available two RA positions annually to graduate students from the new Theatre and Communications/Visual Culture Masters programs at York and Wilfrid Laurier respectively. Research collaborations with Lorimer, Maxwell, and Smith at Simon Fraser's Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing will generate internship opportunities for two Masters students to assist with the development of the digital publishing initiatives of Coach House Books and Harbourfront. In Calgary, English and Creative Writing doctoral students will be supervised by Bök in using the Ubuweb archives for research theses. Senior undergraduate and graduate seminars at York and Laurier will offer other research and training opportunities. Courseware already developed as part of the project will provide a platform to focus on the role of new media in Canadian arts, Canadian intellectual property and cultural policy. Students may study the project as a whole, the work of individual artists and/or the issues posed by making this material available online. Those with more technical abilities may be seconded to work with Arts Partners under the supervision of a Research Collaborator in considering their particular architectural needs for making their cultural content most relevant and accessible for research purposes. In the Policy Centre, graduate students will assist in the preparation of research reports, monitor and summarize online commentary, and coordinate activities with other open source DA initiatives. They will correlate materials to be sent to CIPPIC in Ottawa where funds have been secured for law students to tabulate and analyse data regarding intellectual property issues and moral rights preferences for the purposes of adapting public licenses. Other students at Osgoode Law School working under Carys Craig's supervision might use data from the Policy Centre as the topic of research or thesis study by tracking the ways in which trademark and publicity rights issues arise in this new culture of fair dealing. Advertisements for post-doctoral fellows to work with Coombe and Innes will commence upon completion of the CMS. Our Technical Lead/Interface Developer will be training our Technical Assistants (and to a degree, the information technology officers for our Arts Partners) in web development; interface design, webpage coding, integration with middleware and back-end databases, metadata standards, etc. while advising employees of our Technology Partners on best practices in relationships with arts organizations. These activities will better prepare HQP for careers in the academy, the non-profit sector, and in cultural industries through training in web development project skills, domestic and international cultural policy, and public licensing management.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Research and technical development collaborations and partnerships are already in place. These are focused on the Infrastructure as a research tool, a research topic, and a means for developing further collaborative research. For example, in 2006 Coombe (as PI with Wershler-Henry and Innes) was awarded SSHRC Image, Text, Sound and Technology Networking Grant for "Developing an Ethos of Fair Dealing for Research on Canadian Culture Online" that includes Arts Partners with significant digital archives of cultural content to make available online with Technical Partners who have the expertise to make this possible. Arts Partners include Caribana (Mas band records), Coach House Books (literary press with books, posters, pamphlets), the International Festival of Authors at Harbourfront Programme (videos archives of readings, interviews), the Scream Literary Festival (audio, video, and image archive), Toronto Reference Library (Toronto theatre collection), Ubuweb (visual and sound poetry as MP3s, e-books, films), the [murmur] project (audio archives of urban stories) and Video Cabaret (video of performance art, opera, plays, media clips, posters) are already contributing cultural content. Our Technology Partners, include our Information Architect, software developers Openflows Networks, programmers, Stop14Media, and partnership development facilitators, The Commons Group, have been working to develop the architecture of our Digital Archive (DA), continue to build our Arts Content Management System (CMS), and to facilitate collaborations in open-source environments. We have a network of Research Collaborators to further develop the DA and CMS to best make the content accessible and useful to researchers, to develop research questions for students to explore, and to collect and analyse the data for policy and advocacy purposes. Their expertise include: digital reproduction of historical theatre spaces and interactive audiences (Beacham), experimental poetics and new media poetry (Bök), internet intellectual property policy, open source software, public licenses and knowledge management (Bornfreund), digital storytelling, pedagogy and multimedia literacy for youth (Brushwood), multimedia communications for the hospitalized and people with disabilities (Fels), transnational Carnival culture (Ferris, Tompsett), digital archiving and immersive/augmented reality environments (Fisher), the ethics of information management in digital commons (Herman), online publishing (Lorimer), new media urban arts (Marchessault), open source information design (Maxwell), and digital rights management for aural content online (Toner). New collaborations will explore the potential for expanding the DA/CMS for use of other NGOs with interests in cultural rights and the public domain, traditional knowledge access and benefit-sharing arrangements, and indigenous repatriation and traditional knowledge management needs. Interviews have been lined up with the Callaloo (Singh), Forum on Privatization and the Public Domain (Knean), the Centre for International Sustainable Development (Garforth), the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance (Bannister), and scholars on the SSHRC Ethics of Cultural Appropriation Project in which Coombe is a collaborator.

Benefits to Canada

A Canadian legal and cultural perspective has guided the direction of the proposed project from its conception. The proposed project takes into account the specific concerns of Canadian users and rights holders working with digital media objects. No other Canadian open source development projects address the specificities of the Canadian legal and cultural environment in this way while concurrently addressing a gap in the digital management of Canadian art and cultural content.

There is no other CMS development project, open source or otherwise, working with Canadian arts groups at this level of technical sophistication; the proposed research is unique in its reflection of their concerns and offers the benefit of making resources and opportunities available to Canadian arts and cultural groups that are normally outside their reach. Canadian arts groups will begin to benefit from this project as of Dec. 2006 when the first Canadian cultural content goes live for use by the public. Most Canadian publicly licensed material online consists of amateur productions, such as web logs and independently produced music. Our Arts Partners, in distinction, are all recognized forces in Canada's cultural landscape, with established reputations and long traditions of working with Canadian creators. Networking them with Technological Partners who know how to put digitized works (already earmarked as culturally significant by editorial boards, granting bodies, and arts councils) online in innovative ways using open source software, and Academic Partners who can offer insight into the needs of researchers, students, schools and institutions will bring four crucial elements to the efforts to digitize Canadian culture that have heretofore been absent from other attempts: scale, significance, relevance and focus.

Canadian public licenses such as Creative Commons Canada are themselves very new. Educating creators with large archives or cultural content about the pros and cons of such systems, while allowing them to easily and efficiently test them out, will not only create a broader knowledge of public licensing schemes, it will also afford opportunities for creators and publishers to affect the development of these licenses. Because the software tools that we are developing are open source, they too will eventually be available to users in the academic, public, and private sectors who can adapt and augment them for new uses – a significant research contribution in and of itself.

Canadian law reform is accelerating rapidly with no public input to inform the direction of policy development. Our digital infrastructure is being created in a manner that will facilitate the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data that will assist Canadian and International scholars and policymakers in addressing the technological, pedagogical, social, cultural and legal questions that publishing arts material in a publicly licensed open-source environment poses. Initial research papers from the project partners, collaborators, other academics that address these questions will be compiled in an anthology.

Integration With the Strategic Research Plan

The establishment of the New Media Collaboration Centre is consistent with both the general objectives of York's Strategic Research Plan and with the research clusters identified in the plan. Among its overarching objectives, York has identified significance of the consolidation and enhancement of liberal arts research in areas of established international reputations and collaborations, and the development and diversification of interdisciplinary research. The research enabled by the proposed infrastructure will be important in advancing these general objectives.

The research program of the applicants exemplifies the interdisciplinary approach that is a hallmark of York University. It intersects technology studies, literary and cultural studies and the fine arts and involves colleagues in other units at York with complementary areas of research. As such, it fits squarely within the interdisciplinary social science research cluster of York's Strategic Research Plan, where language and cultural studies is identified as a particular priority, and is described as "a vibrant area in which York can build upon research and graduate programming in the fine arts, social and political thought, communication and culture, anthropology; and in languages, linguistics and literature". The proposal will provide catalytic, cutting edge research, building on York strengths, and promises to move the culture area forward into areas no other institution could achieve.

This infrastructure project is designed to extend, upgrade and integrate two existing Canada Research Chair (CRC) CFI-funded infrastructures in order to retain two Tier One CRCs, and to facilitate their cutting-edge collaborative research in priority areas under York University's Strategic Research Plan. Furthermore, this project is also of importance to York University because of the infrastructure's potential to contribute to the attraction of exceptional researchers. The international reputation of applicants and of York in their area of studies means the institution is already able to attract graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and visiting scholars of high caliber. The proposed facility will enhance this vibrant research community and will make it even more attractive to HQP from Canada and around the world.