Comprehending the Unbound Book

For nearly two thousand years readers have been comprehending prose in the form of hand-held, bound books.

What are the opportunity costs of comprehending prose in this form?

Prior to the binding of prose in book form, readers comprehended writing that was drawn in rolling sand, painted on giant slabs, chiseled in large stones, inked onto lengthy scrolls, penned on spacious parchments, and sewn into long tapestries for nearly four thousand years.

What happened to comprehension when the content of books shifted from wall-size, unbound surfaces to hand-held, bound materials?

To grapple with these questions, this talk draws upon historical, technological, conceptual, and pedagogical resources to examine the contemporary case of the unbound book … which newer technologies make possible.

In particular, the discussion will focus on the affordances of wall-size and floor-size spaces for comprehending the unbound book. Working examples will be provided and discussed.

Dr. Douglas Hartman is Professor of Literacy & Technology in MSU’s Teacher Education Department and Educational Psychology & Educational Technology Program. His scholarship focuses on new literacies, history of literacy, and adolescent literacy. His work has appeared in numerous books and periodicals, including the Handbook of Multiple Source Use, Handbook of Reading Research, Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts, and Handbook of Research on Literacy & Diversity, as well as Reading Research Quarterly, Linguistics and Education, Journal of Education, and Reading Teacher. He is currently working with nine MSU doctoral students and 40 middle school teachers in the North Branch Area Schools on project supported by an MDE grant that uses digital technologies to carry out an innovative approach to professional development in rural settings.