

Do People Read Anymore, and, if So, How?

Collected Articles

The future of reading

By Josh Quittner

(Fortune Magazine February 11, 2010: 11:05 AM ET) -- A few months ago the most amazing thing happened: Unbidden, unpressured, and all by herself (armed only with my wife's credit card), my 12-year-old daughter subscribed to a magazine.

While Clem has long harbored a fantasy of one day being the editor of the French version of Vogue (inexplicably, she is a life-long Francophile), it still surprised and thrilled me when Vogue started showing up in the mail.

Magazines, books, newspapers -- all that printed stuff is supposed to be dying. Advertising pages, which have been steadily declining, dropped 26% in 2009 alone. But here, surely, was some evidence that publishing might have a chance. If an adolescent who otherwise spends every waking hour on a laptop still craves the printed word, then maybe, just maybe, there's a little new growth left in old media.

This tender, green, old-media sprout began to bloom in a curious way, however. Each month Clem was excited when Vogue arrived. She'd rip into the issue and scamper up the stairs to her chambre à coucher, with enough enthusiasm to do Anna Wintour proud. But after digesting each issue, Clem would reappear with it hours later -- only now a zillion Post-its jutted from its pages, stegosaurus-like.

Over time, one by one, those stegosauri began to stack up, spines out, in her closet. One day I decided to take a peek at the dinosaur graveyard to see what my daughter was tagging so furiously. It turned out that she was trying to annotate each issue, sorting the material by outfits, accessories, footwear, and other categories for later reference. I noticed that the more issues she tagged, the more frustrated she became. This was a lot of work. So why was she doing it?

"Don't you get it?" my wife observed. "She's trying to turn the magazine into a computer."

Et voilà! Of course she was.

The more I thought about it, the more I decided there was good news for the evolution of the publishing industry here -- and better news. The good news is that 12-year-olds, just like their parents and their parents before them going all the way back to the publication of the first magazine in 1731 (the year Charles Darwin's grandfather was born), still enjoy the medium. But they want it delivered in an exponentially more useful way.

Raised to expect instant, sortable, searchable, savable, portable access to all the information in the world, these digital natives -- tomorrow's magazine subscribers, God and Steve Jobs willing -- could well become the generation that saves the publishing industry.

The better news is that with the arrival of Apple's forthcoming iPad and other tablet computers -- touch sensitive, full color, easy to watch video on, network-connected to virtual newsstands and stores -- the publishing industry might once again have a remunerative way of giving it to them.

In fact, for the past year I've been pushing the theory that the Age of Tablets will give print media one last bite at the apple -- and publishing companies that are able to make the transition could one day thrive again. I'm so convinced that it will happen that I've been working with other folks here at Time Inc. (Fortune's publisher) to create prototypes of digital magazines that will soon be delivered to tablets and smartphones. So consider this my apologia.

This isn't a case of excessive introspection on the part of a media insider: The future of publishing is fast becoming topic A in business circles. Financiers who make trades based on access to reliable information fret about the fate of outlets like the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times. Urban planners worry about what happens to communities if digital books make libraries obsolete. Nonmedia billionaires, from Mexico's Carlos Slim to real estate magnate Sam Zell, have invested their own money in newspapers.

No one can accuse newspapers and magazines of failing to embrace the web. Shortly after going to Time to write full-time about the Internet in 1995, I abandoned print and did a stint on the web. But I soon realized I couldn't do online the kind of long-form journalism I wanted to do. The web is for scanning, not deep reading. People typically spend two minutes or less on a site. Why do you think the killer app is called a browser?

Worse, it was hard to make a buck. While in those early days we were optimistic about online advertising -- the click-through rates were through the roof -- it turned out that users were actually clicking on ads by mistake. Call it poor mouse control.

The standardization of ad sizes and placements only worsened the problem, relegating pitches to the periphery of content, where they are easily ignored. Revenue growth rates quickly began to tank as it became apparent that no one looks at ads online. (Name one you've seen in the past week.)

That's why today online ads bring in junk CPMs -- about 10% of the revenue per 1,000 views compared with print. The only new media life form that has managed to live off those junk-ad rates is the blog, a medium that tends to favor breadth over depth and cheap opinion over expensive, original reporting.

It's no wonder that traditional publishing companies have been looking beyond the "freeconomics" of the web to find new ways to turn a buck. (I'm not even going to touch on broadcast media or movies here, which suffer from the same problems.)

The New York Times has said it will be erecting a "paywall" on its website next year and has been working with Apple (AAPL, Fortune 500) to create a new (and, we can safely assume, paid) Times app for the tablet.

Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal, which he initially wanted to give away online, is now in full-on pay mode. And Murdoch is so pissed at Google (GOOG, Fortune 500) that he's reportedly been trying to get Microsoft's Bing to pay for the exclusive right to search and index his publishing empire. As for the rest of the newspaper business: Good luck, fellas!

Book publishers, having been tortured by Amazon's attempts to cut them out, are now running into Apple's embrace and will soon be hawking their e-books on the iPad, which CEO Jobs unveiled in late January.

The only media company that's in the money these days is Google, whose \$23.6 billion in revenue last year dwarfed the entire magazine industry's. While Google is paying lip service to how much it loves and respects professionally produced media, its message is essentially: Adapt or die. Well, we've been trying to, Schmidty.

Now along come tablets. Apple's iPad was exactly what we all imagined it might be -- a giant, honking iPod Touch that does what we e-ink-stained wretches want it to do: It browses the web superfast (thanks to Apple's new, homegrown A4 chip), displays images and video in throbbing color, and runs downloadable apps that we can sell.

Even if consumers fail to stampede to the Apple Store, every major computer manufacturer, from Hewlett-Packard (HPQ, Fortune 500) to Dell (DELL, Fortune 500) to Asus and a raft of others you've never heard of, is focusing on the same form factor, which many people believe will replace not only the laptop but the desktop too. (Just add wireless keyboard.) ABI Research predicts that some 58 million tablets a year will be shipping by 2015.

Apple's announcement -- the product will be available in late March -- already seems to be helping the book business: Apple has said it will let publishers set the price of electronic books for the iPad, something Amazon (AMZN, Fortune 500) has refused to do for Kindle books. Now Amazon appears to be reconsidering its pricing policy.

While old media can find much to cheer about with the arrival of the Tablet Age, which promises to smooth old media's transition from paper to digital, the publishing industry still faces considerable obstacles.

As I zigzagged from the media capital of New York City to the tech wonderland of Silicon Valley in my role as tablet evangelist, I sought answers to some of the larger existential questions my bosses and their brethren will need to address. Here are the fruits of my labor.

Question 1: Will anyone be willing to pay for content delivered to a tablet when they can get information for free on the web?

Here, let me quote my longtime sparring partner, Marc Andreessen, who happens to be the father of the modern web, its greatest advocate, and one of the smartest cookies

in the jar. For years he's been (joylessly) predicting old media's demise unless it figures out new business models. The tablet is a false messiah, he argues.

"The problem is that the successful tablet is also going to have a really good web browser on it," he tells Fortune. "So am I going to pay \$5 for something I download through the App Store when I could go on the web -- using the exact same device -- to get it for free? Um, the answer to that is no."

It's an old argument. We heard the same thing about the music industry, back in the days when the "music sharing" site Napster allowed people to "swap" MP3s for free. I myself may have even sinned one or two times.

But now? I pay \$15 a month for a music subscription that lets me listen to virtually anything, as often as I want. Why do I pay for it when I can still get music for free from a dozen pirate sites? I'm lazy. My time is valuable. And the price seems fair. Steve Jobs proved with that first iPod that people would willingly pay for music when you made it easier to buy than to steal -- especially when the media is linked via a store to a cool, fetishistic device.

A great device is actually the key here: When you've invested in a tablet (or an iPhone or a Droid or a Kindle, etc.) and love it, you want to increase its functionality -- with media. That's why nearly half of the 75 million iPhone and iTouch users download one paid app a month, by the way, when they could get the same kind of stuff for free elsewhere.

Question 2: But aren't tablets just a better way to browse the web?

Almost certainly, in a few years more people will be browsing the web via a tablet than on laptops and desktops. Jobs pitched the iPad as a better way to access the web, in fact. But with the tablet, there ought to be room for great, downloaded apps that are usable offline too. Again, Andreessen takes issue.

In fact, he says, there's a real danger if media companies waste precious time trying to put the genie back in the bottle: "I think that's going to be three to four years that are going to be really critical in terms of making the jump to new models. And in this kind of transition, a three- to four-year delay is really dangerous."

In fact, he advises, apps aside, don't even put your websites behind paywalls because you'll be losing your audience and "gutting your advertising revenue and leaving your market wide open for a competitor." The competitor, in this case, is a blogger who will simply read your stuff and repost it in truncated form à la the Huffington Post and so many others.

It's a persuasive argument. People definitely want to browse. And using your headline, along with a few key bits of content, is fair use and legal. But many also crave deep reading experiences. Man does not live by blog alone! It would be like surviving entirely on cupcakes.

Downloadable textbooks will be among the first paid-content to cross the chasm to the tablet. A whole generation of readers will cut its teeth on that experience, and, it stands

to reason, they will grow up both browsing for quick hits and surface understanding while buying the deeper reading experiences.

Question 3: Reading? Reading is dead.

Nearly a decade ago Kevin Kelly, a co-founder of Wired and a great future-of-business thinker, was so sure that reading was dead that he, er, pitched a book on the subject. (He never sold that one.) Still, I think of that these days when I see my daughter Clem communicating with her friends via video messages on Facebook.

So I called Kelly recently and was happy to hear that he has revised his opinion and now thinks reading will prevail -- in a wholly different form. It will, he told me, "become embedded into screens that are full of moving images ... like subtitles in a movie, where you're reading and watching at the same time."

The point is, Kelly says, media are changing. As they get mashed up with other media, newer forms are born. "Right now digital magazines are in the same phase that cinema was when it started out just recording plays. They weren't really movies." Reading will evolve. It's our job to make sure, however, that magazines adapt along with it.

Isn't the idea of a magazine irrelevant in the atomized, buy-the-single-not-the-album world? If that were so, we'd expect to see fewer people reading magazines. But according to the Magazine Publishers Association, 174.5 million people paid to subscribe to magazines in 1970; that number has steadily and consistently risen over the years, to 324.8 million as of 2008. (Paid circulation, another measure of magazines' health, has seen modest declines recently.)

Okay, I know how the sausage gets made in this business -- you can get almost any magazine in America for around 50¢ a copy when you subscribe, vs. a newsstand price that is typically 10 times higher. Publishers, eager to fatten their rate bases -- which ad pricing is based on -- have been known to add other incentives ("a free radio alarm clock!") as well. But even discounting those shenanigans, it's pretty clear that people still derive value from curated, packaged collections of content delivered to them.

Magazines are just vertical collections of content that feed our individual interests. Like blogs. The trick for publishers will be to figure out how to be compensated for individual articles as well.

Question 4: How will tablet-based ads work better than the web?

Three words: full-screen ads. Expect to see them reemerge in digital magazines and other publications -- even blogs. These ads actually have the potential to deliver the best of both the old world and the new: They can have as much impact and be as relevant as the most compelling TV commercials, with the same analytics as the web.

While prototyping digital magazines during the past few months, I've seen new kinds of interactive ads that are cool and arresting -- like highly produced videogames. While I think most publishers will allow you to skip an ad with a swipe of your fingers, a 10-inch full-color touchscreen gives the advertiser a rich enough canvas to grab you by the eyeballs and make its case.

In fact, I suspect ads will work so well on tablets that even if subscription or pay-per-read models don't work, many publishers will be able to thrive on advertising revenue alone.

Question 5: Can traditional publishing companies reorganize and move fast enough to embrace and serve new platforms?

"They've had 15 years to do so since the commercial browser came out," says Jeff Jarvis, a reconstructed old media guy (he worked for years here at Time Inc.) who's now a professor and author of the book *What Would Google Do?* "They haven't reinvented or reimagined themselves. The talk we're hearing now is not at all about reinvention and reimagination -- it's again about trying to shoehorn old models of content and business into this new reality."

Jarvis is right, of course. Publishing companies haven't reinvented or reimagined themselves so far. That's because the old way of doing business has been blindingly successful.

Can you imagine being the operating chief of a newspaper company in, say, 1995 and having the bright idea to start giving away classified ads? Had you done it, you would have immediately gone from being a fiercely profitable business to a highly unprofitable one. Over the next decade, though, you might have been able to repel Craigslist, which has, in large part, decimated newspapers' revenue stream by giving away classified ads. But what kind of a nut would have made that call in 1995?

No, the people running these companies weren't stupid. It's just that the "reimagination" called for in the switch to the everything-is-free web model was untenable and involved gutting multimillion-dollar operations and giving up millions more of today's revenue on the chance that something would happen tomorrow. It was spreadsheet-defying logic that looked like the right thing to do only in hindsight.

The biggest mistake they made was in ignoring the people who might have been able to solve their problems in the late 1990s when things went bad: their best reporters. Instead they tapped consultants and strategists. Publishers of the greatest newspapers and magazines should have gone to their very best reporters and deployed them!

The best reporters I've met thrive on chaos. When men, women, children, and livestock are fleeing the scene of some unexpected horror, the best reporters are the ones running in the opposite direction. They all suffer from certain personality defects -- pursuing truth over money, status, personal safety -- that would have served their industry well here.

But the consultants didn't do any new reporting. They prescribed old, tired fixes -- cost cutting, outsourcing back-office operations -- but failed to address the core problem: Distribution no longer had value.

I doubt that we'll see publishers dragging their feet as tablets take hold, because the potential revenue model is clearer. Publishing companies, however, will indeed need to do more than simply port their print products to the new tablet-friendly format. And dragging all that baggage from the old world to the new will almost certainly slow us

down. The whole enterprise is focused on print because that's still where the money comes from. So in some ways, we continue to face the Craigslist problem.

"The model of the magazine as we know it is just outmoded," says Kelly. "It's doomed if we think of it as the magazine we think of now." Instead, he says, the publishing industry -- books, magazines, newspapers -- ought to be approaching the problem of content creation differently. We should be thinking about selling attention. "Wherever attention flows, money will follow," he explains. "What shape that takes doesn't really matter."

In other words, in the ever-burgeoning universe of media overload, content creators are battling for a user's time. If a book is a 20-hour call on one's attention, a magazine might be better defined as a bid for an hour or so of the consumer's day. "If we think of magazines as an intermediate form -- a read that can last several hours -- it has a tremendous future," Kelly says. "We've just begun to explore what it can do."

I hope the tablet buys us enough time to finally figure all this out, because someday I'd like to visit Clem in her office at French Vogue.

Reporter associates: Beth Kowitt and Christopher Tkaczyk

http://money.cnn.com/2010/02/09/technology/tablet_ebooks_media.fortune/index.htm

10 sages read the future of print

What becomes of the printed word? What's the fate of companies that produce periodicals and books? Here's what 10 media and tech luminaries think.

1 of 10 - Kurt Andersen, Novelist and public radio host

Anything remotely resembling news media is going to continue to migrate online until very little or none of it is produced on dead trees.

But what remains to be figured out is how it's paid for, and whether this whole system of enormous magazine and newspaper staffs can be reconfigured to be sustainable in this new age. I think we'll see content that's a deeper, better hybrid of audio, video, and print emerge, and that will become the default expectation of people.

Take the recent story about NBC's late-night talk show hosts: I want to read a complete story about the decisions, the facts and figures, and the background on the controversy, but I also, at the appropriate moment when I'm reading, want to press the button and see Jay Leno making fun of himself or David Letterman making fun of Jay Leno.

The tablet is the Holy Grail for media people: a more portable, more visually interesting way to deliver news that can be constantly updated. I'm very excited to see what will be possible in the relatively near future in terms of presenting information, curating content -- the whole realm of things that magazine making is all about.

Unlike the computer screen, a tablet might be able to create for the reader more of a sense that you are in this carefully constructed closed garden; when you're online you feel like you're always just a click away into the great sea of media. I think that environ-

ment will be good for editors and content creators, and it can probably be useful for advertisers too.

Are tablets going to save the newspaper or magazine as we know it? Mostly not. Will they be a platform for magazine makers and newspaper editors to reinvent how they're doing what they do in a way that's sustainable and interesting and exciting? In a lot of ways, I think yes.

2. Katharine Weymouth, Publisher, the Washington Post, and CEO, Washington Post Media

This is an exciting time to be in journalism, and I think newspaper companies have been quite forward-thinking about technology and trying new ways to tell stories. Online journalism is still journalism. It's just a different format, which enables us to give Flip videocameras to our reporters so that they can do video with their stories.

We here are moving as fast as we can to experiment with the new technology to figure out, How does this enhance our journalism? How does this give us new ways to reach our readers? We've been on the web since the beginning, and we continue to try new things. We just launched something called Story Lab, which is a sort of journalistic experiment with crowd sourcing.

We do not charge for our content on the web and don't have plans to do so. But our content isn't free -- advertisers pay to be in front of our audience. One of the things that I think is exciting about tablets and the iPad in particular -- although I haven't seen it in person -- is the presentation.

For many of our readers, our ads are content. Many of our readers come to the paper because they want to find out what's on sale on Saturday at Macy's. So the fact that you will be able to have ads on the iPad is just going to be a better user experience.

3. Jimmy Wales, founder, Wikipedia, the collaborative online encyclopedia

I think we're going to continue to see more or less what we see today -- a mix of free and paid, advertising-supported content, and a lot more community-generated content. But I don't think we're really going to see any radical changes to that mix because it is working well for consumers.

Already there's a large movement of consumers generating all kinds of information online, and in many cases the quality is much higher than the content produced by media companies. This doesn't mean people don't trust newspapers, but they've lost their exclusivity as an authoritative voice.

I think tablets can provide an opportunity to media companies because they could make it very easy for consumers. I subscribe to the New York Times on my Kindle, and I enjoy it very much because it's just magically there every day.

Anytime I want I can go on the web to read the same content for free, but it's not really about that. It's about the package and delivery. But the really interesting thing is that through the Kindle, I'm giving money to the New York Times for the first time ever (I've

never subscribed to the physical paper).

The rise of things like the iTunes Store or apps stores or the Kindle Store are huge developments in terms of people's willingness to buy. Once we make it easy for people to buy, I do think we're going to see growth in the paid-content world.

4. Steven Brill, founder, The American Lawyer, and co-founder, Press+, an online payment system for news sites

I think readers now and in the future still will pay editors and publishers to assemble content for them in a way that's distinctive. There's no reason for me to buy my local newspaper in Ohio for a wire story about something the President said in his press conference yesterday. What I will buy my local newspaper for, whether it's online or in print, is how the reporters covered the local zoning board and the town planning commission, local sports teams, and local theater events.

Everybody decided 10 to 15 years ago that it was really cool to give away content for free online. So a reader of a newspaper who is 20 or 25 or 30 years old basically thinks information has always been free.

The online version of news and information in many respects is better than the print version. It gets there faster, it's instantly updated, and often there's video. And yet that improved version doesn't command a premium; in fact, it is free. That is not a brilliant business plan.

Some publishers are just putting down a wall and saying to readers, "From now on, you have to pay for everything." Instead, Press+ has pioneered a metered approach: After someone has read five or 10 or 15 articles in a month, say, you start asking him to pay something for it.

We also enable publishers to charge non-locals for content. If there's a Japanese expat in Boston who reads a Tokyo daily newspaper every morning, the Tokyo paper should get the reader to pay because the information is obviously valuable to him, but he can't go to the newsstand and buy it.

5. Marc Andreessen, co-founder, Netscape and Andreessen Horowitz, a venture fund

The good news is that reading is alive and well and flowering in a way we've never seen before. Text is the primary format of the Internet. More and more text is flowing over Facebook every day. The written word is alive and well and thriving.

Businesses built on the written word, like publishers, have to reinvent their whole businesses from top to bottom if they want to survive, because the economics of the Internet and the online world are different than in print. I think that's becoming increasingly obvious to people, but I worry that there's this temptation to hold on to the old model, and I fear that tablets are feeding that temptation.

Existing companies think that people will read on a tablet in a way that they don't on a PC or phone, and that the tablet will let content providers charge for their product. But to think tablets will essentially be the new newspaper or the new book or the new

magazine, and that all the economics for newspapers, magazines, and books will carry forward on the tablet, is really dangerous.

Businesses like Tech Crunch or Talking Points Memo, which I'm an investor in, have to build their businesses with the assumption that their content has to stand on its own two feet. These outlets get paid based on the value of their content to the users and, of course, to the advertiser. Their revenues are a fraction of what the comparable print publishers are, but that's just a reflection of the difference in distribution costs.

I think in the future they can be high-margin businesses. They may not be \$1 billion or \$10 billion or \$100 billion companies, just because that may not be the structure [for information companies] going forward.

I love the Wall Street Journal, I love the Financial Times, I love books and magazines and newspapers. If they all go under there will be new online versions of each of those. Civilization will endure, but I think it will be a shame because it will have been a missed opportunity.

6. Jeff Jarvis, author, What Would Google Do?

The future of online content is already here. We've been here for 15 years, since the commercial browser was first released. You can access content, you can interact with it; you can link to it and send it around, and add multimedia to it.

By no means have we arrived fully. Look at what happened with Twitter in the least year and the notion of the stream and Google Wave and the idea of collaborative content. There are more frontiers to come, but note that those frontiers are not about putting up static pages of content.

Traditional publishers have to change their own definitions of content. The opportunity here is to change their relationship with the people they used to call the audience and to enable the audience to help create and distribute content.

There's tremendous opportunity in finding new efficiencies because you no longer have to be all things to all people. You should do what you do best and link to the rest. Specialize more.

Online media is about relationships. As Eric Schmidt said, Google (GOOG, Fortune 500) sends four billion clicks a month to publishers, and it is up to them to create a relationship with those people. And if they don't, it's their failure, not Google's.

You can charge for content, that's fine. But in news and publishing you have no limit of competitors. There is a marketing cost that you have to go through when you charge. And finally you lose Google juice if you put things behind a pay wall. You lose the opportunity to discover new readers, to be passed around, to be found in search engines, to be found through Twitter and Facebook and all these opportunities. You cut off the potential to build a richer, deeper relationship.

So I just don't think the economics of charging makes any sense in most cases. (It works for the Financial Times, it works for the Wall Street Journal because that's con-

tent people make money on.)

Magazines are awaiting their digital messiah in the form of a tablet. I guess I'm mixing religious metaphors. But we already have the tablet. We have laptops, we have computers, and we have iPhones and we have plenty of means to the web.

All the tablet is going to be I believe is access to the web. Can you tie some new business models to it? Maybe, but then you've got to count upon millions upon millions upon millions of people using that device. The issue with the tablet, the reason that I think there's so much desire for it, is that it is the last effort, the last hope that old media properties think that they have that there's something that will return control to them.

7. Jeannette Walls, author, *The Glass Castle* and *Half Broke Horses*

Book publishers never gave content away for free, but that's because they were slow to adopt new technology! I love the book publishing world, but in many ways the business operates a bit like it did in the 1950s and 1960s -- in this case it turned out to be a huge advantage.

I used to buy 12 newspapers every day when I was a journalist. I'd be all covered in ink by the end of the day. Once I started getting information online it was immediately obvious to me what was going to happen to all those papers. The transition was less immediately obvious with books. It's harder to read long form online. The Kindle and the Nook have done a really good job, but it took a long time.

I think electronic readers and tablets are going to have a huge impact on the textbook business. Some textbooks cost more than \$100. What student can pay for that? So I think for school books and research materials tablets will be absolutely wonderful. I'm ridiculously optimistic.

For those of us who produce words and have ownership over those words, there's a big question about how we stay in business, but I believe that will work itself out. For those who love access to information and trading information, these new outlets and devices are great. More people than ever will have efficient access to the written word.

8. Paul LeClerc, president and CEO, New York Public Library

It's important to note that libraries have never been afraid of technology. There is lots of evidence that libraries have embraced new technologies as soon as they come along.

The New York Public Library, for example, was doing computerized databases in large measure before just about anyone else was, or any other organization in the cultural domain.

We've got one arm around all the traditional kinds of forms of human expression -- stuff on paper. But the other arm is wrapped around digital information, e-books as well as subscriptions to an extraordinary number of databases so we can provide our readers with access to information they need, regardless of the format. Our position is to be nimble, to move quickly, to exploit technology, to give our readers what they want when

they want it.

One of the most popular parts of our collection now are e-books. We do two things. Let's say we want to buy copies of *Catcher in the Rye*, because the ones we have on the shelves are sort of beat up.

So we could buy x number of copies of *Catcher in the Rye* as books but also through a vendor we could buy y number of copies of *Catcher in the Rye* as e-books or e-audio books and then let's say we buy 50 of each, 50 hardcopy and 50 e-books. It's like having 100 copies of the book.

People can go to a library in their neighborhood, check out the physical copy, or a person could go online any time on his handheld device or computer. The digital version of the book would reside on the devices for three weeks and then disappear -- no overdue fines to pay!

E-books are, in effect, flying off the shelves. We now circulate more e-books than any library in America, some 350,000 last year, and that number is growing dramatically year to year. If you care about people reading, should you be picky about what sort of a format they read it in? I don't think so.

I think the posture for us is flexibility, nimbleness, being unafraid of technology, embracing it, and bringing its benefits to our people -- the people who use us and those are now people around the world.

I'll just give you one little example of something sort of dramatic that happened here: I was involved in organizing the exhibit on Voltaire's *Candide*. It is a small show but really pretty neat. I asked the staff here to put together an online version of the exhibit that would be innovative and might create a new kind of template or model for online library exhibits.

So on Tuesday, on that little teeny part of our website there were 1,069 visitors. That's a very big number in one day for a small show. *Candide* is an important book that's still being read, but still, it's not *Catcher in the Rye*. How did that happen? Well, one guy with one blog that a lot of people pay attention to wrote two sentences about it. So, word of the exhibit went viral.

9. Kevin Rose, founder, Digg

I want a lot of social features to be built into the tablet reading experience. If I'm reading a book I want to see where my friend left off, or I want to be able to leave a voice annotation around a chapter so if a friend stumbles upon that chapter they can listen to what my thoughts were around that area. I want rich media incorporated into my books. I want the ability to go out and look up instantly on Wikipedia what something means or see pictures or video around that. That doesn't exist today.

Hopefully I'll be able to receive on Apple's new tablet the *Economist* or anything else I want to, but rather than go kill a tree and pick it up on the store shelves I can have it right there on my digital device.

Amazon (AMZN, Fortune 500) has really kind of pioneered this in the ability to download any book and consume the first chapter for free and then decide whether or not you want to continue on. I think that's great.

Lending digital books is something that we should all be able to do, too. And if my friend doesn't give the book back? I would click a little button that says "Request book back" or "Rip book out of friend's e-book reader," and digitally transfer it back to me.

10. Matt Mullenweg, founding developer, WordPress

I think in the future we'll see more content produced by smaller organizations. Look at someone like Om Malik who went from Business 2.0 to GigaOM, his own online media business. GigaOM in many ways looks like a traditional media company but a mini-sized version of it.

I think for the written word, the elements of it that make it successful -- the basics of typography, the quality of writing -- haven't changed very much in hundreds of years. And those fundamentals don't change when you're on the screen, whether you're looking at a tablet or a Kindle or anything like that.

The Kindle has impacted my life more than any other device in the past year simply because it's drastically increased the amount that I read. I'm buying more books because I can literally execute one click and it's added to my Amazon account. I used to read only in the morning or night, but now I always have it with me, and I read while I'm waiting on line, going through security, boarding a plane, any number of things. That's pretty darn neat.

In the case of Apple, because they have the one-click iTunes and hundreds and millions of credit cards already on file, perhaps they can provide a pretty compelling experience where you don't really feel like you're spending any money. It's like the App store. I don't buy that much software traditionally and if I do it's in the hundreds of dollars range like a Photoshop. But we've all had that experience where, oh, this looks kind of neat, you click a button and a week later you get a bill for \$3.

Whether people pay for magazines and newspapers on tablets will be the real test. I don't know the answer to be honest. Online you're always one click away from something free; on the tablet publishers might benefit from having a more captive audience.

The End of Reading

(Lecture delivered at the conference "Book/Ends,"
University at Albany, October 12, 2000)

by Peggy Kamuf , Professor of French and Comparative Literature
University of Southern California

In 1986, the American intellectual historian Robert Darnton wrote an essay cataloging what he called in the essay's title "First Steps Toward a History of Reading." It may be that this is one of the first occurrences of what has since become the name of a thriving discipline, the history of reading.

The essay, in any case, is certainly one of the first attempts to define and delineate appropriate questions with which to approach its object, reading. From Darnton's account, however, it appears to be less a matter of opening a new field of historical research than of shifting the focus historians of the book such as himself have customarily brought to their materials. In other words, it is largely a matter of going back over the ground researched by histories of writing, of the book, of printing, of libraries, and so forth with an eye toward the reading process rather than the processes of book production, distribution, collection, suppression, translation, or whatever. Darnton will quickly survey a few already amply documented areas where this shift could be effected, but he remarks first that if the history of reading he calls for is possible, it will not be easy. What is this difficulty that the would-be historian of reading must overcome? I quote:

In short, it should be possible to develop a history as well as a theory of reader response. Possible, but not easy; for the documents rarely show the readers at work, fashioning meaning from texts, and the documents are texts themselves, which also require interpretation. Few of them are rich enough to provide even indirect access to the cognitive and affective elements of reading, and a few exceptional cases may not be enough for one to reconstruct the inner dimensions of that experience. But historians of the book have already turned up a great deal of information about the external history of reading. Having studied it as a social phenomenon, they can answer many of the "who," "what," "where," and "when" questions, which can be of great help in attaching the more difficult "whys" and "hows."^[1]

So if a history of reading is possible, then the so-called difficulty characterized here must not be insuperable. That is, in addition to the "external history of reading" for

which there already exists ample documentation, it would also have to be possible to chart its internal history, the history of its "cognitive and affective elements," of "the inner dimensions of that experience." If such a history is merely difficult and not impossible, however, then the historian has to suppose some means of gaining access to the inner experience of other readers. Now, what could those means possibly be?

Darnton acknowledges that documents, texts, writings may record or report someone's reading experience, but they cannot give access directly to its inner dimensions, only to its outer manifestations, that is, to a text that another reader in turn will have to interpret. This concession concerning the inadequacy of documentary sources for the purpose of this history is quite remarkable coming from a historian. It puts in question the ultimate viability of this project, although Darnton seems to count the fact of the necessary passage through interpretation as just one more difficulty to be overcome on the way to constructing what would be more than or in addition to an "external history of reading." But again, by what means if not through textual documentation will the history of some readers' inner experiences be made available to other readers? For the reason he himself has just conceded, Darnton cannot answer this question.

- There is thus a fundamental problem with any history of reading that would be more than a history of the activity's external manifestations. Moreover, the problem is of such a nature that even the external history of reading, which Darnton finds to have been virtually achieved already, begins to look rather hopeless. Here, however, the problem is not the lack of documents but the indeterminate limits on what counts as documentation of a reading practice. This problem as well is somewhat inadvertently indicated by Darnton when he claims unaccountably, as we have just heard, that "documents rarely show readers at work, fashioning meaning from texts." What can this mean except that the historian discounts as not pertinent to his project all the libraries full of books written by readers of other books? There is all of literary criticism, for example, just to mention the obvious. So whatever is this historian talking about when he asserts with such authority that documents rarely show readers "at work, fashioning meaning from texts"?

- Such an enormous misstatement suggests that, despite everything, the historian maintains the belief or the hope that an inner scene of reading can somehow be manifested otherwise than in an external document or text. A few pages further on, Darnton returns to the question of the "inner process" of reading, this time to acknowledge that "we have not yet" been able to understand its workings even in ourselves. After surveying research that contributes to an external history, he observes:

- Thus we already know a good deal about the institutional bases of reading. We have some answers to the "who," "what," "where," and "when" questions. But the "why's" and "how's" elude us. We have not yet devised a strategy for understanding the inner process by which readers made sense of words. We do not even understand the way we read ourselves, despite the efforts of psychologists and neurologists to trace eye movements and to map the hemispheres of the brain. (170-71)

With this allusion to experimental, scientific research on reading, Darnton seems to imply that the would-be reading historian's problem must await solution from science, even if so far psychology and neurology have in fact been of little help in the matter. But what's interesting is the connection made to the parallel concern with the "inner process" that both historian and scientist would like somehow to lay bare. This parallel raises a further question for us: for if, as we've suggested, this baring of reading's interiority remains impossible and not just difficult for the historian, what of the scientific quest to understand the same process, not through historical documentation but empirical, physical evidence? Is the science of reading's "inner process" any more possible than its history? We will hold this question in reserve and return to it when the time comes.

- Although, with these self-proclaimed “first steps,” Robert Darnton may have sought to initiate a history of reading that would ply between its external and internal faces, few have tried to follow his lead. This is not to say that the project of a history of reading has been abandoned. On the contrary, the bibliography in this field has grown rapidly since 1986, especially in Europe. Some of the best of this scholarship may be found in the collective volume edited by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West*, first published in Italy and France in the mid-1990s and translated into English in 1999. In their introduction to this fine collection, Cavallo and Chartier do not worry the improbable distinction Darnton wants to pose; that a history of reading can deal only with external signs of changes in reading habits is taken for granted or, in any case, this fact is not cited as a constraint, limitation, or “difficulty” of the sort that led Darnton perhaps to dream of overcoming it, even if he cannot begin to imagine how that might happen. More clear-sighted, then, as concerns what might be called the irreducible phenomenon of reading, Cavallo and Chartier set out a program for its historical study that, on the face of it at least, remains precisely on the face of things, without presuming to reach the inner dimensions or inner process that eluded Darnton.[2]

- The comparison of these two historical projects highlights another difference. Whereas Darnton, with his distinction between an external history and an inner process, seems to have relied on a modern and thus paradoxically unhistoricized figure of reading, the historians brought together in Cavallo and Chartier’s collective endeavor do not suppose as he does the figure of silent reading or the silent reader. For it is such a figure that, from a more thoroughly historicized perspective, is seen to emerge only very gradually as the dominant one. As one would expect, *A History of Reading in the West* retraces in some detail a few of the well-known transformations that produced this dominance by the late Middle Ages; but it also strengthens claims for the co-presence of silent reading alongside the standard practice of reading aloud in the ancient world.

The book’s first chapter, by Jesper Svenbro, is even entitled “Archaic and Classical Greece: The Invention of Silent Reading.” The issue for these historians, however, is simply whether the documentary record allows one to affirm that silent reading was indeed practiced by the ancients, albeit only exceptionally. In other words, they worry little or not at all about the dilemma Darnton remarked in reconstructing the inner dimensions of the reading experience.

There may be a sense, however, in which Darnton’s dilemma brings one closer to this event being called the “invention of silent reading” than does the more realistic external history charted by Cavallo, Chartier, and their collaborators. By that I mean that his wish to access the inner experience of another reader lets us see an affinity with the reaction of someone who could actually have witnessed silent reading for the first time, as if indeed it had arrived one day like an unprecedented event. If there were a document recording such an event, then I venture to say we would recognize in it the very same conditions of the problem besetting today’s would-be observers of reading’s inner scene, after many centuries have worn off the strangeness of the event, even for historians.

There may be many such documents, but I have in mind arguably the most famous of them, a scene from St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, which oddly enough receives no mention at all in Cavallo and Chartier’s otherwise richly documented volume.[3] In the passage I will cite in a moment, Augustine describes how he reacted when he first observed someone, St. Ambrose, engaged in the practice of silent reading. It occurs toward the beginning of Book 6 and records one of the rare experiences prior to his conversion that Augustine seems to relate more because of its curiousness than for its role in that retrospective narrative. Although he does not make it explicit, there is nevertheless a connection to be made to the event of his own conversion when, some years later, Augustine hears the voice “as of a child” chanting the phrase “Take up and read,” whereupon he opened the epistle of Paul to

the Romans that was the lying on a table and reads the verses that await him there. And he reads them, he notes, "in silence," recording perhaps with these two words his conversion to the practice that, when he first observed it, had struck him enough to warrant the following description, which I will now read aloud from book Book 6:

When [Ambrose] read, his eyes moved down the pages and his heart sought out their meaning while his voice and tongue remained silent. Often when we were present—for no one was forbidden to enter, and it was not his custom to have whoever came announced to him—we saw him reading to himself, and never otherwise. After sitting for a long time in silence—who would dare to annoy a man so occupied?—we would go away.

We thought that in that short time which he obtained for refreshing his mind, free from the din of other men's problems, he did not want to be summoned to some other matter. We thought too that perhaps he was afraid, if the author he was reading had expressed things in an obscure manner, then it would be necessary to explain it for some perplexed but eager listener, or to discuss some more difficult questions, and if his time were used up in such tasks, he would be able to read fewer books than he wished to. However, need to save his voice, which easily grew hoarse, was perhaps the more correct reason why he read to himself. But with whatever intention he did it, that man did it for a good purpose (*quolibet tamen animo id ageret, bono utique ille viragebat*).[4]

- Augustine writes that he and his companions hesitated as to how to explain Ambrose's behavior. Without resolving which of the possible reasons he might have had for reading in silence rather than aloud as was customary even when alone, Augustine nevertheless concludes that in such a man as the saintly Ambrose, it was for a good purpose and with good intentions. It is, however, as if assurance were needed here to dispel a contrary thought, perhaps even the first one to occur to this witness when he initially came upon the strange behavior: might not that silenced tongue be keeping to itself some secret guilt, an evil and not a good purpose? This conclusion thus ends up lending a note of excuse to the possible reasons Augustine offers to explain Ambrose's reading habits, as if he had to forestall the idea of the fault there was in keeping to oneself what was meant to be proffered openly and *viva voce*.

- What makes this text so extraordinary is not just its historical value as a document, one which suggests how such an important transformation might have been experienced by those who underwent it, those who like Augustine began one day to silence their own voices as they read. At the same time as it records the event or advent of this novel experience, the text also uncovers and brings clearly into focus a condition of the reading experience that is not first of all or above all historical. For Augustine's account reveals nothing less than the ground or rather the gulf of unfathomable, irreducible alterity across which and on the condition of which reading can take place. In effect, we see, we read Augustine who believes that he is seeing reading taking place because Ambrose's "eyes moved down the pages" even though he cannot see to the heart of the other's reading, to what precisely he locates here in Ambrose's heart, which "sought out their meaning."

So, he neither sees nor hears the other's reading taking place; he can only believe that it takes place nowhere that he can hear or see, cut off, therefore from his own understanding. So long as reading manifests itself in the openly spoken voice, then its conditioning ground of alterity can appear to disappear into that powerful figure of sameness Jacques Derrida has called "*s'entendre-parler*," hearing/understanding- oneself-speak. Augustine's experience is one in which that precise figure is thrown out of alignment with the figure of reading and with a reading figure who silences the voice without thereby suspending the reading that is apparently taking place. For Augustine sees or at least believes he can see that Ambrose is reading, there before him, openly and yet not so openly; reading also in

secret because "to himself." What has been made manifest, therefore, is reading as phenomenon of alterity, that is, as the appearance and disappearance of some otherness, alterity no sooner showing itself as phenomenon then it disappears into the belief in the reliability of appearances. It is as if Augustine's startled and startling account had recorded a moment when alterity obtruded itself into his world as phenomenalized by the voice, and to do so it had to appear as the other reading, the other's reading.

In that moment, the reading that appears to be taking place appears also suspended from its condition, which is the other's unfathomable secret and irreducible alterity. Having reread even minimally this page of the Confessions, we may now return to our various latter-day histories of reading with, I hope, minds refreshed by and reminded of our reading condition. Permit me, then, to fast forward about 15 centuries, to some time during the last quarter of the 19th century. The history of reading in the West will take a decisive turn during these final decades of a century that saw the industrialized and democratically-styled societies of Europe and North America gradually institute free, universal, primary education. The promotion of mass literacy and the mass production of cheap books provide two of the main threads that reading historians of this period follow.[5]

Martyn Lyons, for example, contributes to Cavallo and Chartier's collection a chapter titled "New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers." As Lyons points out, in Britain as in France, universal primary education, although on the agenda since the Enlightenment, was only finally put into effect during the last two decades of the century. But he makes no mention of another development taking place right around the same time. First in Germany, then in England physicians and neurologists began to record observations of children with a peculiar resistance to literacy education. Although normally intelligent and adequately instructed, they could not learn to read with any facility. After sufficient cases of the anomaly were recorded, the idea began to dawn on these observers that the activity of reading must be a specific capacity of the brain or the perceptual system. That is, they began to think of reading as depending on a specific set of conditions that are not precisely the same as those that obtained for speech.

The notion of the specificity of reading arose in the context of the neurological study of aphasia. By the last decades of the 19th century, there was already a considerable literature produced by neurologists attempting to track the pathway of speech through the brain. Freud contributed to this literature in 1891 with a paper, "On Aphasia." (This early publication, by the way, is not included in the edition of Freud's complete psychoanalytic works, which signals that, at least for Freud's editors, its methods are those of neurology and not yet those of psychoanalysis.) Another German neurologist whose earlier work on aphasia Freud cites several times in his essay is Adolph Kussmaul. He cites in particular a paper of Kussmaul's from 1877, "Die Störungen der Sprache".[6] Under the title "Disturbances of Speech," this article appeared the same year in English translation as Kussmaul's contribution to volume XIV of the *Cyclopedia of the Practice of Medicine*, published in New York. Although Freud takes no notice of the fact in 1891 or later, this essay by Kussmaul is generally credited as having first coined the term "word-blindness" to designate a disturbance not of speech, but of reading. Here is the opening paragraph, where Kussmaul introduces his new diagnostic terminology: In medical literature we find cases recorded as aphasia which should not properly be designated by this name, since the patients were still able to express their thought by speech and writing. They had not lost the power either of speaking or of writing; they were no longer able, however, although the hearing was perfect, to understand the words which they heard, or, they saw.

This morbid inability we will style, in order to have the shortest possible names at our disposition, word-deafness and word-blindness (*cæcitas et surditas verbalis*).[7] Although Kussmaul uses "word-blindness" here to designate only the condition of those who have lost the ability to read, as the con-

sequence generally of some trauma, the term will be taken up later to name the new category of disorders affecting those who were never able to learn to read in the first place. Later would come other names for the same phenomenon: alexia, dyslexia, strephosymbolia and, in English, reading disorder or dysfunction, to cite only a few of the many names that have been dreamed up.

- Kussmaul, then, is credited with having first identified what these various terms strive to name. His discovery or invention followed, as we've just seen, from the observation of reading's apparent specificity, since it alone could be pathologically affected when other language abilities were intact. What Kussmaul had to challenge was the largely tacit assumption among his contemporary neurologists that speech and the ability to speak comprised and controlled the more specialized linguistic functions of reading and writing. He discovered, if you will, the necessity of distinguishing between phonology, a science of speech, and lexology, a science of reading. Because neurology had concerned itself to that point solely with speech disorders, aphasia, it was a phonology and inapt to unlock the secrets of lexology. In other words, he discovered that he and his fellow scientists knew nothing whatsoever about reading. It was, then, a science of reading that was called for.

The moment we have just chronicled, when the first call was issued to bring to light the principles of a science of reading, has now a familiar ring if we recall Darnton's anticipation of a certain history of reading to come. Whereas, however, later historians of reading essentially ignored, and for very good reasons, Darnton's call to write an internal as well as an external history, Kussmaul's countless successors have kept alive the dream that the "inner dimensions of reading," in Darnton's phrase, will one day be laid bare.[8] By calling it a dream, I mean to suggest not only that there is an illusion being nourished here, but, more pointedly, that the enormous site of the sciences of reading is invested or staked out by forces of desire that seem to me both more and more risky to ignore and yet more and more ignored by all, or almost all of the discourses that, today, are concentrated on this strange object called reading. That reading ought to or must become the object of some science, that its practice can be observed and regulated, trained and corrected, disciplined and remediated, measured and tested, diagnosed and determined, that all or any of these operations will finally yield one day the desired picture from within of the other reading, the other's reading, these assumptions have all been left to stand thoroughly unexamined in the light of what we have just recalled by rereading (for example, but we could have taken any other example as well) that little passage from the Confessions.

For if reading is on the condition of some alterity, some otherness that cannot be appropriated by the same as sure and certain knowledge—thus, a possible science—then would not a science of reading, if it were one day possible, have to spell the end of reading? To be possible, this science would have somehow to overcome the unknowable, irreducible alterity that is the condition at the heart of reading. It can achieve itself as science only by appropriating to itself the heart of alterity—the other's heart—as knowledge. No doubt the same movement toward appropriation can be discerned at work in all scientific endeavors—it is indeed the very movement of science or philosophy. But with the project of the science of reading, this general movement is not only specified; it takes henceforth as its specific object the very heart of alterity, which is the heart of the other reading, the other's reading. The forces that maintain, in all its intensity of investment, the search for a science of reading are considerable, of course. In the US, at present, they saturate almost every discourse about childhood, literacy, and public funding of education. Testing reading proficiency is now the principal technology of social selection. Although everyone knows full well that this technology is the bluntest of blunt instruments, this largely unacknowledged awareness works merely to reinforce the drive toward a finally scientific knowledge of reading, which is still lacking. Bad conscience is doing its work, Nietzsche might have said, which is why one should have no illusions that the would-be scientists of reading can be persuaded to give it up and still less the politicians who stake everything on raising reading test scores.

I don't think it encourages too many illusions of this sort, however, to attempt to situate this new invention, this science of reading that still remains today just a call for such a science, one which is little more than a century old, in its modern scientific form at least. Although few of these scientists themselves show any interest in the longer history of reading, it is one in which their invention has its place, a place that was prepared for it by a long pre-history. That pre-history includes, of course, the other invention called silent reading. By going back through Augustine, for example, we might suggest how the earlier realization—fundamentally that reading does not as such depend on voice or on speech—finds its echo or even perhaps its response in the later moment, when first Kussmaul and then innumerable others began to call for a science of reading, in its specific difference and independence from speech and voice.

What, you may be wondering, would be the point of such situating or of making such improbable, incongruous countermoves to the assumptions of science given that, as I've just admitted, these assumptions so dominate public discourse, policy, investment, and thinking about reading as to appear, at least, altogether unmoveable? I mean, get real: what weight a passage from Augustine against two US presidential candidates running on their programs for testing child readers and meting out fiscal punishment for whoever fails the tests? As if there were not already far too many Church fathers staking out with their clubs the site of reading, which Augustine also did, let us not forget, with his divine authority. So, really, what is the point of recalling not just a certain history of reading but also the anhistorical condition of reading's irreducible alterity?

I'm going to take the ridiculous risk, in conclusion, of throwing out an answer to that question. It's an answer, I fear, that may end up sounding like one more call, echoing with the calls we've already heard first to a science and then to a history of reading. Echoing, yes, but an echo must somewhere, somehow displace the call that preceded it. Echo, to the eternal regret of every Narcissus, does not return the call without some difference that deflects every path of self-appropriation. So, I would call, if possible, for something like this echo, that is, the echo of all these self-knowledges that have been pursued in the name of sciences or histories of reading. As well as, of course, in the name of the religions of reading, also known as the religions of the book. But how, you should ask, could anyone hear such a call, which echoes all these self-knowledges, but thereby displaces them beyond the knowledge of, precisely, self, any self?

Well, I can only respond with something like a story. But since it's not a story even I can tell, I'm going to dispense with all narrative appearances, except to take an arbitrary point of departure. So then, some months ago, I began thinking about how science, for some 125 years or so, has construed reading and how this scientific model, to use a clumsy word, supplies or maintains certain traits of the common sense and normative idea of reading. (Here, to go very, very quickly, because time presses, this model corresponds more or less to that of information-extraction.[9] Reading is or is read as technique for capturing information. Thus, according to the scientific model we are echoing and displacing here, reading is essentially information technology. We can suppose, therefore, that this model of reading will be increasingly reinforced by the general network of information technologies as they continue to replace reading's traditional support, for now some 17 or 18 hundred years, the book. The book ends, but this model of reading, at least, will not. On the contrary, it will become the vastly dominant way in which something still called reading continues.) It is not just as an abstract moment of definition that we must deal with this scientific and dominant model of reading. That model is also getting produced and reproduced in reading practices. The common notion of reading as information-extraction sets the principles, and thus institutes the laws and the institutions through which reading practices are maintained, that is, reintroduced, reproduced, and reinforced in each new generation of readers, as we like to think of them. And we do like our dearest common notion of reading to remind us of the whole family scene. Reading is also thereby getting produced and maintained as site for the

patriarchal, paternalistic family's reproduction of itself. The practice gets passed down, most typically, in the voice of mothers, usually mothers, reading aloud to their children.

There where this ancient practice of reading aloud survives, before the child's invention of silent reading, it is the mother's voice that has been made to echo with the letters taking shape on the page. I say "has been made to" because the scene is certainly not a natural one. It has also to be produced, reproduced, instituted. With the scene we are evoking of the child learning to read by listening to the mother's voice, it is the institution of written signs themselves, and thus of all possible institutions that is being passed down. The institution of the family of man takes place in a scene of learning to read. But what we forget, what we have to forget or repress is that this is always also a violent scene inasmuch as it has to repeat, reinflct the violence that wrenches the human animal out of the state of sheer animality, where, as we are taught to believe once we can read, there is no such thing as reading in this common sense, the sense we all supposedly share, sharing thus the belief that only humans read or do what we call reading. Here one would begin to recognize another trait that all of these discourses attribute or contribute to our common sense of reading: that it is only human, that animals other than human animals do not read each other and do not read us, us other animals. Our common sense of reading, and the way we think we should read, the way we teach others to read, is thus also the site on which to reproduce this limit of the family of man, there where we feign to believe that other animals are not also others reading and reading us, no doubt for the most part to their great horror.

Perhaps you now can see the problem I am having with this whole topic of reading. It is the problem precisely of topic, topos, of a unified and undivided site. Wherever one picks up its thread, reading divides every site, so as to be, at once as we say so hopefully, produced and producing, reproduced and reproducing, doubling itself every time. Any other topic one can think of leads back to and away again from reading, from this strange a-topic non-place or non-site where reading would nevertheless still take place, if that were possible—it being altogether uncertain that such a thing has indeed ever happened as such. That reading as such, without taint or flaw or fault or error, uncontaminated by its contrary or its negation—call it misreading or non-reading—has most certainly, without possible doubt, taken place, this is what can never be simply verified. For who is to say, who could say such a thing has most certainly taken place, or that it is most certainly taking place right now? Reading without the possibility of misreading or non-reading? One just needs to think about it for a moment to realize that— --but time presses. I have to break off what cannot otherwise end, since we're speaking of nothing less than the endless scattering of the general a-topic site where reading just divides up sense, one never knows exactly how or where. No act of reading has ever yet been able to prove that it has not, somewhere, misread or been misread. There can be no proof that anyone has certainly read something correctly. And, yet are not the discourses we've been evoking under those very wishful names of sciences or histories of reading, are these not the discourses whose authority is based on arguments of proof? So am I missing something here? Or is it that these discourses of proof must necessarily miss the heart of reading, that atopic site always being divided by alterity?

In any case, there has been one prominent discourse of the last century that has been conspicuously missing from this immense field of reading research. One might wonder why so little of the literature on reading dysfunctions has come from anyone working with psychoanalytic concepts. Freud, to my knowledge, nowhere referred to this new area of research in neurology, no doubt because he had by then dropped neurology for psycho-analysis. And yet, like his former colleagues in neurology about the same time, Freud too was observing reading practices for signs or symptoms of distortion. He did so most famously in the section of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* devoted to misreadings.[10]

That work was first published in 1901. Now, it happens that the previous year James Hinshelwood, an

English ophthalmologist, saw into print his volume of essays titled *Letter-, Word- and Mind-Blindness*, a book that is almost always cited as the first monograph in what would become the study of dyslexia. Fortuitous coincidence, yet the proximity between these two founding texts has come to stand, at least in my own thinking about all these matters, for the division that installed the reading sciences at the outset. A nearly impenetrable barrier began at that moment to be constructed between the kinds of discourses authorized on one side and the other of this divide. As a result, whatever psychoanalysis might have had to say or show us about the form of misreading that was to be called dyslexia, would be relegated strictly to the fringes, where it has been and is still kept out of the way by the ferocious ban maintained, by so many powerful discourses, on the unprovable hypothesis Freud called the unconscious.

It is, of course, not just psychoanalytic discourses that have been reduced virtually to silence by the dominance of all this pseudo-scientific talk that goes on about reading. No less conspicuously, symptomatically marginalized by the dominant scientific model of reading are all discourses on literature. These are discourses that must somewhere allow for fiction and for its essential unprovability, for that which, in fiction, suspends the order of what counts as proof for science but not just for science. As such, these discourses are simply and as if by definition not taken seriously by sciences of reading, with the result that the so-called sciences will not have needed to pay any attention to the reasons other theories of reading, coming from literary discourses, may dispute the whole ground on which science constructs its model of reading, the model of information-extraction.

Well, let me just conclude with an obvious remark: In an age that promotes the value of interdisciplinarity, it is quite remarkable how rigid the exclusions have become between all these discourses that profess to be engaged with the same thing, which they all call reading. It ought to be easy to make the case that the study of reading, whatever we call reading, calls for radically interdisciplinary approaches. Which is why, especially given the recent fondness for all things interdisciplinary, it is more than a little surprising that these extraordinary conditions gathering so many far-flung discourses around a same object have yet to produce much that goes beyond common disciplinary assumptions, which are thus allowed to reproduce themselves unexamined. I suppose, then, that I have ended up calling for something like a truly interdisciplinary venture in reading. Literary theorists should read cognitive scientists. And cognitive theorists, neurologists, and all the others working on the still unsolved enigma of what they call dyslexia ought to read Paul de Man's essay on allegory in *Allegories of Reading*, at least there where the literary theorist has to borrow the neurologist's term in order to speak of "this radical dyslexia."^[1] And everyone should read and be read by historians of reading. At the very least, we ought to want still to question why it sounds so preposterous to call for such a thing—or to let such a thing echo, for a moment, in our ears.

Notes

[1] Robert Darnton, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), p. 157. [2] See for example, this programmatic statement from their introduction: there are, they write, "two sets of variables—variations in the written forms and in the reading public—that any history intent on reconstructing the shifting and multiple meaning of texts needs to take into consideration." Their collection seeks to do this, they continue, "by identifying the chief contrasts among manners of reading through the long time span; by describing differences in reading practices among various communities of readers within the same society; by focusing on transformations of the forms and codes that affect both the status of text genres and the public for them." *A History of Reading in the West*, Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p. 3. [3] In his richly docu-

mented and idiosyncratic *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel devotes several pages to this episode. See Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Penguin, 1996), pp. 41-45. [4] *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 136. [5] There is a very large bibliography on 19th-century literacy campaigns and their effects. One can find a lot of it cited in Patrick Brantlinger's *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998). [6] Sigmund Freud, *On Aphasia*, trans. E. Stengel (London: Imago, 1953), p. 21. [7] A. Kussmaul, "Disturbances of Speech," in *Cyclopedia of the Practice of Medicine* vol. XIV, "Disturbances of the Nervous System and Disturbances of Speech," p. 770. [8] For an idea of the extent of this literature, at least in English, one may consult Martha M. Evans' *Dyslexia: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1982). Evans catalogues 2401 entries, and that was in 1982. [9] For a critique of this tendency to qualify reading as "information extraction," see J. Marshall *The End of Reading* <http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~kamuf/text.html> 16 of 17 4/17/10 1:37 PM "Education in the Mode of Information: Some Philosophical Issues," in *Philosophy of Education* 1996, ed. F. Margolis (Urbana, IL.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1999). See also Nicholas C. Burbules, "Rhetorics of the Web: Hyperreading and Critical Literacy," in *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*, ed. Ilana Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998). Burbules astutely comments there on how "the emergence of fictionalised, hybrid news/entertainment features has tended to blur distinctions of relative credibility and has made all sorts of information merely grist for the mill of gossip, sensationalism, or opinion formation. As a result, the processes of selection, evaluation, and interpretation that develop information into knowledge and understanding are atrophying for many readers (or are not being developed in the first place" (108-09). [10] Freud is not concerned in this chapter with the child's apprenticeship of reading or writing and does not, therefore, consider how that experience may induce the symptoms of what neurologists or linguists would soon refer to as dyslexia. However, in the chapter on "Childhood Memories and Screen Memories," the example Freud chooses to illustrate the notion of screen memory is, interestingly, that of a child learning the letters of the alphabet. See *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VI, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), pp. 48-49. This choice of example and the brief analysis Freud offers of it deserve closer examination, which I plan to undertake at another time. [11] "What he could not tolerate, however, is the impossibility of distinguishing between the alternatives. This would leave him dangling in an intolerable semantic irresolution. It would be worse than madness: the mere confusion of fiction with reality, as in the case of Don Quixote, is mild and curable compared to this radical dyslexia," Paul de Man, *The Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Proust, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Rousseau* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 202. For a fine analysis and discussion of de Man's thinking as regards reading, see Rodolphe Gasché *The Wild Card of Reading: On Paul de Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~kamuf/text.html>