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Introduction

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PROOF

Introduction

Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed

A student reads her textbook in preparation for a class, while another passenger, engrossed in the music on his personal music player, casually reads the advertising hoardings inside the train's compartment. One passenger is occupied in reading the business section of a bought broadsheet paper, reading perhaps for profit, while another picks up a free copy of a daily tabloid left behind by an earlier reader, to while away the travel time with trivial entertainment. While one commuter reads a downloaded short detective story through a 3G mobile phone application as an e-book interface, another uses a smart phone to access a social networking account and contribute to a discussion about a book read recently by a friend, adding inexorably to the wealth of collective and individual responses to reading available on the Internet. Reading for information, a couple of tourists board the train clutching their guide book and consulting a map, while a local reads and responds to a series of SMS messages, perhaps sent from another location or time zone far away. One passenger is reading their way through a lengthy nineteenth-century novel in daily, sequential instalments, while another discontinuously reads a seemingly random section of a holy book, offering themselves a thought or prayer for the day.

This is a scene which is replicated on a daily basis in the public transport systems of London, New York, Delhi, Beijing, Mexico City, Cairo or any other large metropolitan centre across the world. It is so routine an activity that few of us even notice it, and yet it is a perfect example of the textually super-saturated world that we inhabit. In an increasingly – almost universally – literate world, reading matter

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is everywhere. Text is ubiquitous and all pervasive, and readers are mobile, numerous and multifunctional. How then, in this dense forest of reading matter, can we study the behaviour of readers, and their individual signs of engagement (or refusals to engage) with the printed or digitized word? Can work on the history of reading in earlier periods inform future research? What sort of methodological approach should we consider? And how might readers themselves leave a trace (whether accidentally or deliberately) of their reading choices?

To answer some of these questions, the eleven chapters in this volume bring together the work of thirteen scholars based in seven different countries, and from a diverse range of academic disciplines and intellectual perspectives: literary studies, history, bibliography and librarianship, linguistics, sociology, art history, information science and literary theory. All these chapters engage directly with the central issues concerning the three volumes of *The History of Reading*: how do we accurately assess who read what? How do we recover the experiences and responses (textual or otherwise) of readers through history? How do we interpret these findings, and extrapolate trends and patterns of reading practice from the data? And finally, how do new modes of reading change both our modes of enquiry and interpretation in recovering the behaviour of contemporary readers? Unlike the chapters in *The History of Reading, Vol. 1: International Perspectives, c.1500–1990* and *The History of Reading, Vol. 2: Evidence from the British Isles, c.1750–1950*, the chapters in this volume are not exclusively concerned with either a particular historical period, or the examination of a discrete case study of a reader or reading communities. Rather, they are more explicitly focused on the appropriateness of a specific methodological perspective for their field of study, advocating particular tactics for finding and interpreting data, and exploring whether their adopted strategies offer valuable possibilities for mapping broader trends in reading practices across time or space. Indeed, all contributors to this volume posit the reading of multifarious texts (and not just books) within the wider context of a mixed- and/or multi-media environment. Reading does not (and has not) ever existed in isolation from a variety of other different forms of communication, whether in the visual arts, mass media, advertising, merchandise, social networking or the pervasive oral/aural culture of conversation.

This volume opens with two contrasting and compelling chapters, the first drawing upon historiography and the second literary theory, in

order to explore broader perspectives in the history of reading (Part 1, 'Perspectives'). In 'Altick's Map: The New Historiography of the Common Reader', distinguished book historian Jonathan Rose revisits Richard D. Altick's pioneering study in the history of reading, *The English Common Reader* (1957) half a century later, and argues that the collective efforts of book historians gathering data from a wide range of primary source materials in the last three decades have started to fill in the gaps that Altick had earlier identified and mapped out. Rose persuasively argues that the study of ordinary readers – the overwhelming and often critically neglected majority of the reading public – necessitates the gathering of a wide range of data: 'police reports, wills, booksellers' ledgers, sociological surveys, the minutes of literary societies, the memoirs of common readers, letters to newspaper and magazine editors, fan mail to authors, book canvassers' reports back to the home office, marginalia, and library records'. Rose's position is in opposition to the rise of literary theory – the so-called 'theory wars' – that raged across the campuses of America and Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. While he is dismissive of 'theory-spinning in a vacuum', he is measured in his assessment of the 'hard' data upon which enumerative bibliographers and historians of the book have often relied: 'there is no such thing as a wholly trustworthy source . . . all documents have distinctive epistemological strengths and weaknesses, and that therefore we must use the broadest possible repertoire of source materials to reconstruct the experience of the reader', he cogently reminds us. Rose's espousal of the use of a diversity of sources is in contrast to his commitment to a quantitative, evidence based, historically contextualized methodology. For Rose, the new historiography of reading cannot and must not simply speculate or theorize about reading, but should instead painstakingly map out the territory with corroborative data from multiple sources, from which we can begin to identify patterns and trends. Quantitative and qualitative data takes precedent over theoretical agendas.

In contrast, Simon R. Frost's 'Commodity Readers: An Introduction to a Frame for Reading' views reading as intimately related to a wide range of forces (especially economic ones) evident in the public sphere. Approaching the subject from a European humanist scholarly tradition, and drawing upon both literary theory and philology, Frost's perspective is the inverse of Rose's: he uses a range of theoretical perspectives and discourses (Kant, Adorno, Appadurai, Culler, etc.) to

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inform his interpretation of the material artefacts and reading communities around a single text, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–2).

Frost makes a powerful appeal for historians of reading to examine not only the textual (and other) records left behind by readers, but also to assess the influence of socio-economic forces upon the act of reading: 'if we are to understand the relationships between readers and pages, then we must understand what other forces are at play at any particular historical moment', he notes. Using the mid-nineteenth-century theories of William Stanley Jevons as an interpretative jumping-off point, he notes the interplay between goods and texts, plotting the rise of the 'George Eliot Cycle' and 'George Eliot Mushroom Ketchup' against successive, increasingly illustrated editions of *Middlemarch*, and noting the lexical usages of the terms 'good' and 'goods' in the novel. Texts are commodities and readers are consumers who chose to engage with particular literary works from a range of other material objects. Frost's approach reminds us that literary works are themselves commodities existing within a matrix of evolving socio-economic market forces: something that historians of reading, working around the confines of an increasingly doctrinaire global free-market order ought to acknowledge.

The next three chapters (Part 2, 'Methods and Tactics') illuminate three distinct methodological approaches, all informed by the disciplinary background of their investigators, to recovering and interpreting the evidence of reading in both contemporary and historical frameworks. Hanna Adoni and Hillel Nossek's 'Between the Book and the Reader: The Uses of Reading for the Gratification of Personal Psychosocial Needs' (Chapter 3) summarizes the results of a 2001 comparative survey of media consumption habits (books as well as radio, television and the Internet) amongst 616 adult Israelis from a deliberately diverse and representative demographic catchment. As social scientists, Adoni and Nossek draw upon the functionalist paradigm of the 'uses and gratification' school and the technological displacement school (proposed by Marshall McLuhan amongst others) to interpret reading preferences within the wider consumption of different types of media. Using both quantitative (telephone questionnaire) and qualitative (focus discussion group, recorded and transcribed) methodology in their study, Adoni and Nossek propose a new model, that of 'interchangeable functionality', for interpreting how consumers engage with different types of media. Is reading books displaced by

other types of media content (film, television, radio, the Internet), or is its particular functionality not easily substituted? For twenty-first century Israeli readers and viewers, Adoni and Nossek surprisingly found that the lowest level of interchangeability was between television viewing and reading books. Adoni and Nossek's work provides concrete quantitative and qualitative evidence from their survey sample indicating that the rise of new visual media, far from heralding the demise of print, has created new spaces for the reading of books (especially fiction). In a mixed-media world, reading books still provides greater psychological and emotional satisfaction (while perhaps demanding greater engagement) than other (broadcast) forms of cultural consumption.

While Adoni and Nossek use the interview and focus group model to investigate individual responses to reading, in 'The Mediation of Response: A Critical Approach to Individual and Group Reading Practices' (Chapter 5), linguists Daniel Allington and Joan Swann appropriate ethnomethodology to closely examine the social construction of reading through verbal discourse. Contesting Rose's advocacy of the primacy and self-sufficiency of the textual evidence of reading found in autobiographies, diaries and correspondence, Allington and Swann study one specific reading group in the south of England over the course of nearly a year (2007–8) to demonstrate that their reading experiences (and eventual textual records of their reading) were shaped by the discussions that took place at successive reading group meetings. In closely examining the discourse of reading groups, Allington and Swann demonstrate that the reading of any given work is often constructed and re-negotiated through discussions with other members of a group, and that the final textual record of a reading experience may give us a misleadingly absolute outcome for what is in fact an iterative and constantly mediated process. In fact, the process of mediation and meaning construction, rather than the eventual record of reading, might be more worthy of our attention as historians of reading, as Allington and Swann provocatively argue: 'the attempts to discover readers' real responses to texts are ultimately less interesting than attempts to understand the practices that mediate response'.

Whereas Adoni and Nossek and Allington and Swann examine twenty-first century Israeli and British readers respectively, Barbara Ryan in 'One Reader, Two Votes: Retooling Fan Mail Scholarship' (Chapter 4) returns to the evidence yielded up by her investigation of

a late nineteenth and early twentieth-century reading phenomenon: readers' responses to Lew Wallace's bestseller, *Ben-Hur* (1880), later made into a popular Hollywood film. Ryan's chapter persuasively reconceptualizes the relevance of readers' fan mail to authors, a previously critically derided but very rich source for the evidence of reading. Carefully mapping the physical and imaginative trajectory of a single piece of fan mail, a postcard from N. Lubschutz to Lew Wallace, Ryan demonstrates the extent to which fan mail represents both an unsolicited plebeian engagement with the public sphere, and uncontested evidence of the completion of the feedback loop between authors and readers, seen in Robert Darnton's 'communications circuit'. Ryan notes that fan mail can be a demonstration of partisanship, as well as an active engagement in advocacy; it records a type of reading and response specifically designed for further public consumption, even though archives have often deliberately marginalized it as ephemeral, or excluded it as critically unconsidered and therefore irrelevant. All three chapters in this section demonstrate that the continued attachment of readers to the printed book in an increasingly multimedia world has potentially profound implications for assessing the practices of future readers, a topic that we return to in the last section of this volume.

If Part 2 outlined three different (and highly contingent) methodological tactics for locating or generating data about or around reading, Part 3 ('Interpretative Strategies') showcases two highly original and distinct strategies for interpreting primary source material. In 'Representing Reading Spaces' (Chapter 6), Stephen Colclough directly engages Roger Chartier's agenda that recovering the various spaces for reading, and with it, the 'forgotten habits and gestures' of the readers who inhabited them, can provide us with valuable information about reading as a material, bodily act. Reading, Colclough reminds us, is always a material act occupying a physical space (humans are not, and cannot become, dematerialized readers), and in his examination of both public and private reading spaces in Britain in the period from c.1780–1850, he outlines a phenomenological interpretation of data. Small provincial circulating libraries, the numerous subscription coffee houses catering for working-class newspaper readers, mechanics' institutions and mutual improvement societies all provided public spaces (albeit often cramped and ill-lit) for the consumption of print. The prevalence of reading spaces and the particular practices that they engendered were not only public, but private too. Examining the

journal of teenage reader Emily Shore (1819–39), Colclough notes the complex interdependence of reading alone, reading aloud collectively, and writing (both solitary and collaborative) undertaken by the Shore family in their living room as a kind of daily shared performance within a domestic reading space. How a text was read aloud by members of the family circle had a direct impact upon their reception of the work, as did existing domestic power relationships; Shore's journal reveals the extent to which both her father and uncle attempted (not always successfully) to determine her teenage reading. Domestic reading spaces, Colclough reminds us, are every bit as contested and contingent as public ones.

Reading spaces are not just the physical spaces where readers consume texts, but the paratextual or extratextual spaces suggested (and often filled) by the book itself. In 'A Book of One's Own: Examples of Library Book Marginalia' (Chapter 7), Mats Dahlström investigates contemporary Swedish conceptual artist Kajsa Dahlberg's anti-edition of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Dahlberg's approach places the original text at the very bottom of the analysis of reader response. Intrigued by the marginal notes inscribed on a library copy of Woolf's masterpiece, Dahlberg embarked upon a project to gather together every marked copy of *A Room of One's Own* held at libraries across Sweden; the result was the compilation of an edition of the work which gave priority to the marginal notes made by the many anonymous readers over the single authored original text. In Dahlström's account of Dahlberg's performance of reader response, it is the readers through their marginal marks who quite literally, fashion the text and make it their own. Although both Colclough and Dahlström draw upon practices from other disciplines (material culture/social history and performance art respectively), their application of these strategies to help answer important questions in the history of reading is highly productive.

If Kajsa Dahlberg's project applies ideas from performance art to investigate the collaborative reading of a single text, the two chapters in Part 4 ('Reading the Visual') explore the complex relationship between text and image through the filter of the technological progress in mechanical reproduction. The expansion of cheap print in nineteenth-century Britain transformed the walls of the cities and towns as billstickers advertised products and more often entertainments; however, very little attention has been paid by historians to the ways in which

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ephemera was read *in situ* by the fast growing (and increasingly literate) urban masses. In 'Reading Ephemera' (Chapter 8), Sadiya Qureishi shows how the ephemera (posters, handbills and catalogues, pasted on walls and distributed to paying customers) accompanying touring exhibitions of foreign peoples in London allowed audiences to more readily interpret the displays that were presented to them. Ephemera accompanying exhibitions was not created in a vacuum: passages were borrowed from seemingly more authoritative texts such as travel books and newspapers, and vice versa, so that these ephemeral materials, especially when read during the performances, shaped attitudes to racial difference. The production of ephemera was dependent on technological developments in printing and illustration: steam presses, lithography and lower taxes on paper created both readers of print, and viewers of images. Nineteenth-century readers inhabited a world in which word and image coexisted and were often co-dependent. Nowhere is this relationship more evident than in this vast and relatively neglected hinterland of ephemeral material, designed specifically to support visual (non-textual) spectacles and performances.

While Qureishi's chapter considers textual material read while accompanying a visual spectacle and often discarded afterwards, Kate Flint's 'Books in Photographs' (Chapter 9) reverses our gaze, and closely scrutinizes the representation of reading in photography.

The history of photography, Flint convincingly demonstrates, is inseparable from the history of reading. From its very inception as a mode of reproduction, photography has utilized books as props, as visible signs of cultural capital and social aspiration, as objects to keep photographic subjects still and occupied during long exposures. Indeed, the seeming photographic reality of a putative reader holding open a book and apparently engaged in an act of reading was often something very different; as Flint observes, 'the co-presence of a human photographic subject and a printed text does not, by any means, guarantee that reading has taken, or may take, place'. Instead of asking whether the presence of a book in a photograph was incidental or contrived, Flint argues we should instead regard the image as evidence of 'prevalent attitudes towards reading and the spaces in which it is conducted'. Long exposure times and the sensitivity of early photography to light helped to create its own circumstances for the representation of reading, often at odds with reality. Fox Talbot's 'A Scene in a Library', Flint observes, gestures towards earlier visual registers

(such as the still life), rather than capturing a *mise-en-scène* of the reading act. Despite this, the photographic representation of a book interpolates the act of reading into the image. Flint perceptively comments that 'because it is *of* a book, its metatextuality is foregrounded: we are propelled into considering the types of reading in which we engage when we interpret a photograph'.

Finally, in Part 5 ('Reading in the Digital Age') Vernon Totanes and Alan Galey focus squarely on the increasingly digital (and digitized) access to reading matter and evidence of reader response in the twenty-first century. In 'Filipino Blogs as Evidence of Reading and Reception' (Chapter 10), Vernon Totanes examines personal blogs that respond to reading two recently published and influential works on the Filipino nationalist leader, José Rizal (1861–1896): Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979) and Ambeth Ocampo's *Rizal Without the Overcoat* (1990). The spread of personal computers, the rise of Internet cafes, and above all, the ubiquity of 3G mobile phones has meant that even in relatively poor developing countries, a significant proportion of the population have access to the Internet. In the case of the Philippines, nearly 30 million people, (30 per cent of the population) are now online, which means that the country has the seventeenth highest number of Internet users in the world (more than Spain, and just behind Italy). The spread of the Internet and the rise of blogging has largely democratized the publication of critical comment on books, though the proliferation and transience of personal blogs poses new challenges for the interpretation of reader response. As Totanes demonstrates, bloggers' comments on books need to be read alongside evidence provided by the ways in which individuals have customized their sites. While bloggers discuss the various texts they have read, the practice of reading blogs pushes the boundaries of readership studies even further. A large proportion of our reading is now conducted in a digital environment, and as the prevalence of literary blogs demonstrate, a significant proportion of our responses to reading of analogue printed matter (as in the case of these two books on Rizal) is now expressed digitally. The book and the blog have become increasingly interdependent modes of cultural mediation, much as the manuscript and the diary were in earlier centuries. To successfully chart the readership and reception of a book published in our digital twenty-first century, we must be conscious of the digital mediation of readers' responses.

Historians of reading in the twenty-first century also need to be aware of the interface itself as an agent that mediates both reading and response, and can provide valuable evidence of individual reading practices. In 'Reading the Book of Mozilla: Web Browsers and the Materiality of Digital Texts' (Chapter 11), Galey argues that while browsers are meant to impose order on the unquantifiable number of texts available on the World Wide Web, the inherent instability of digital texts seems to defy any attempt at a rational understanding of the information available on a particular subject. Moreover, as demonstrated by other authors in this volume, Galey shows that texts cannot be analysed outside the systems that surround them, be they social or mechanical. Internet browsers like other interfaces (lending libraries, bookshops, the codex, etc.), offer additional tools for analysing reading; these have so far been largely overlooked, but are in desperate need of concerted scholarly attention. Galey draws important parallels between the understanding of texts and the process of reading in the past and the present. For instance, Galey encourages us to consider browsing, whether onscreen or in the library, as 'a readerly activity, one which links humanists of the past and the present'. Whether in Renaissance Europe or Qing Dynasty China, the book wheel serves as a post-Gutenberg, pre-Microsoft metaphorical and conceptual precursor to our own incessant (web) based browsing.

Both Totanes and Galey interrogate new methods of assessing reader engagement and response through digital media (blogs and browsers respectively) while also looking at historical content (Totanes) and earlier historical models (Galey). Matthew G. Kirschenbaum's award winning study *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (2008) and N. Katherine Hayles's groundbreaking *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008) have demonstrated the complex interpretability and inherent fragility (how do we now recover and 'read' a first generation floppy diskette?) of new, 'digital born' media, while at the same time offering penetrating analyses of how digital texts are composed, stored, distributed, consumed and effaced. Drawing upon the implications of these and other production and distribution focused studies, Galey and Totanes offer insightful approaches to the consumption of texts through and via digital interfaces by examining reading practices in an increasingly digital world.

The range of methodological and intellectual perspectives offered in this volume is rich and diverse, but not entirely exhaustive. Other

academic fields, especially in the social and empirical sciences, are also beginning to research and interpret the act of reading. Recent pioneering research on reading by neuroscientists and developmental psychologists has shown how the brain processes and interprets the visual representation of language that is text, and has demonstrated how the acquisition of reading as a skill significantly increases the plasticity of the human brain and our capacity to learn. Maryanne Wolf's *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (2007) and Stanislas Dehaene's *Reading in the Brain: The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention* (2009) have argued that despite the ability to read not being an evolutionary requirement or an inherited trait, reading is itself a biological effort that has a intrinsic effect on the physical development of the brain: the act of reading is both physically and psychologically transformative. Such discoveries have profound implications for historians of reading; but while Wolf and Dehaene have cogently argued for the importance of reading on human neural development, they have not been able to explain individual or social differences in reading practice or preferences, nor have they examined the extent to which readers (who are also often themselves writers) shape their own engagements with textual matter. Readers, no matter who they are, where they live or what language they read in, have considerable agency: they can chose what to read, or not to read at all.

The study of reading, and especially the location and interpretation of readers and reading communities, has both a historic hinterland and many (some as yet uncharted) future frontiers. The eleven chapters in this volume offer a representative sample of different methodological perspectives to assess and interpret the multiple, co-extensive reading practices that have developed (and are continuing to develop) over the last two centuries. In the last five thousand years, reading and writing have gone from being the highly specialized skills jealously guarded by the few, to an essential engagement for almost all. Increasingly, humans construct their understanding of the wider world and negotiate their social relations with others through their reading and engagement with multifarious texts in a variety of forms. Reading and technology cannot be separated as the rise of a new generation of e-readers, such as Amazon's Kindle, testifies; but reading has always been far more than simply ingesting the words on a page or a screen. Reading, the process by which text is deciphered and meaning is produced, is conditioned by the circumstances in

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which it occurs: the physical attributes of the text, the space in which it is consumed, the practices or bodily postures adopted by the reader, and the related events which follow. E-readers such as Amazon's Kindle represent a significant development as a tool which will change publishing and distribution patterns. However, claims that it will spark a reading revolution are almost certainly overstated. Kindle will not spark a reading revolution, because in fact the key to its success lies in its ability to draw upon the methods, tactics and strategies that have been employed by a wide range of readers for many centuries. Many of those, as well as the relationship between the past and present, are explored by the authors in this volume. Lest we forget the sometimes absolute importance of the circulation of textual material and the process of reading and writing, the 33 miners trapped in the San José gold mine in Chile's Atacama Desert on 6 August 2010 have sent us a telling reminder. 'Estamos bien en el refugio los 33' (All 33 of us are alive and well), read the capitalized hand-written note in red marker pen that was attached to the drill shaft that reached them 17 days after they were trapped. For those miners, cut off 700 metres underground, the act of writing and its consummation through reading – the completion of textual circulation – verified their existence and offered them their only prospect of rescue.