The Power of the (Digital) Reader
New and Old Ways of Interacting with Texts

PUB802 seminar
presented by Alessandra Bordini
March 18, 2015
“A reader is not a consumer, a spectator, a visitor, not even a “receiver.””
Jacques Derrida

“The power of readers lies not in their ability to gather information, in their ordering and cataloguing capability, but in their gift to interpret, associate and transform their reading.”
Alberto Manguel
“[Medieval manuscripts] presented a complex space of words, pictures, illustration, and ornamentation—the most complex prior to the electronic medium.

Jay David Bolter, 1991
The texture and detail of a hypertextual experience is largely in the control of the user. By analogy, this seems to me to be similar to a medieval reader’s experience of illuminated, illustrated and glossed manuscripts containing different hierarchies of material that can be accessed in various ways.

Vincent Gillespie, 1997
Oral culture has no experience of a length, epic-size or novel-size climactic linear plot.’

W.J. Ong, 1982

As a result, readers in manuscript culture were more actively engaged and wielded greater power over the text. They developed specific skills that enabled them to operate without the need for textual linearity.
Digital Hypertexts vs. Medieval Hypertexts

Whereas digital hypertexts diverted the reader away from the text physically, medieval hypertexts typically lead to somewhere else on the same page or to a piece of intertextual knowledge in the reader’s own mind. In this sense, the transition to the extratextual information was more natural for the medieval reader than for the digital reader.
Q: Do you think publishers have made the most of the interactive features of electronic texts, or is there still a long way to go?
Another crucial form of reader interaction in the Middle Ages, and one that we are all familiar with is...
WAIT FOR IT...
MARGINALIA = READERS WRITING IN BOOKS

Marginalia in Langland's Vision of Piers Plowman (1330?–1400?)
In the face of the print revolution, the practice of marginal annotation did not go out of use nearly as quickly as did non-sequential reading and hypertextual practice. Although scholars have argued that it gave rise to gradually emptier margins, it was not until as late as the early 19th century that the practice became significantly less widespread.

Leah Tether
Q: Why do you think the use of marginal annotation lasted longer than non-sequential reading and hypertextual practice?
And today?
2012: AMAZON’S PURGE OF REVIEWS

Mail Online

Amazon deletes thousands of obviously fake book reviews to the anger of several authors

- Writers say thousands of mostly positive book reviews have been deleted from the online shopping site in recent months
- Amazon will not disclose how many reviews it has erased
- Several writers have voiced frustrations with the move
- Others are pushing for more vetting of book reviews
Experience the Harry Potter stories like never before with Pottermore.com from J.K. Rowling. Learn more about the wizarding world as you discover exclusive new writing from the author herself. Explore key scenes from Harry's journey and begin your own. Experience it all for free. Sign up to begin.

Pottermore Shop

Read or listen along with the Harry Potter eBooks and digital audio books - available exclusively from the Pottermore Shop
Q: Should book reviews be held to a higher standard? Should writers be allowed to pass judgment on peers or are they competitors whose reviews should be banned?
Chapter 7

Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his five daughters, he had not had the sense to marry off. The family could do nothing but ill. Mrs. Bennet had been at her wits' ends; and to see her four girls, who had been nothing but a burden to her, now acquiring one after another of theei rights, and all the time increasing in years and beauty, was like hearing that the family had been appointed to a new edition, with a great accession of capital, and a new lease for ever.

The village of Longbourn was on the main road from Meryton to London, and was the resort of all the young ladies and gentlemen in the vicinity. The two youngest of the family, Catherine and Lydia, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds...
Popular Social Reading Platforms:

- Goodreads
- Shelfari
- Library Thing
- WeRead
- ReadSocial
CONNECT READERS

ReadSocial works inside books & magazines, connects people across reading apps.

Spend your time focusing on content creation. ReadSocial delivers a layer of social features and commentary that sits on top of web pages and iPad apps. Heck, it even shares between them. Check out the pricing tiers.

Sign up for a free trial!

Bring on the Social Goodness!

HERE’S A NEW IDEA
VIRTUAL READING GROUPS...

Add Social Features
To your content with a

Attach Comments to
any paragraph.

Add Images and Links
Because comments are

Create Virtual Groups
using #GROUP tags
Reading is an act of contemplation, perhaps the only act in which we allow ourselves to merge with the consciousness of another human being. [...] books enlarge us by giving direct access to experiences not our own. In order for this to work, however, we need a certain type of silence, an ability to filter out the noise.

David L. Ulin

Books have always been a means of social networking, and such networking is characteristic of a generation of users that the popular press has dubbed “digital natives” and “millennials” [...] [R]eading should now be viewed not as antithetical to social networking — solitary, private, outside capital — but as commodified and digital.

Lisa Nakamura
Q: Where do you stand between these two schools of thoughts?

Q: Do you see social media as an obstacle or a key element to promoting reading?
That's all Folks!
Sources


