

Kindling, Disappearing, Reading

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Abstract

Where will all the books go? A version of that question has occupied commentary about Amazon's Kindle since news of its release first made its way to public attention in September 2007. Posed out of curiosity, excitement, as well as trepidation, the question includes anxiety about the re-invention of reading embodied by new features and the intricacies of downloading policy. In this essay, I focus on disappearance for the ways in which it indexes concerns about the Kindle's material impact on reading. Tracking these concerns, I turn to three major moments in the Kindle's "biography" in order to emphasize Amazon's investment in mimicking the transcendence associated with reading and the ways in which this investment is met, and at times exceeded, by readerly desires to possess that transcendence. That the very name "Kindle" should occasion parallels between e-reading and book burning, that Jeff Bezos should claim unobtrusiveness as the device's exemplary feature, and that Amazon's unannounced deletions of Orwell's *1984* from thousands of Kindle libraries should meet with such ire, makes visible the two ideologies of reading — on the one hand, the invaluable (because ephemeral) force of reading and on the other, reading as a relation of ownership and agency — that stand in both an uneasy and profitable tension for Amazon and its reader-consumers.

Kindling, Disappearing, Reading

Within two weeks of the Kindle's public release in the fall of 2007 a rather telling fantasy had begun to emerge. In this fantasy, one that cohered out of book industry and tech blogs, media features, interviews, and articles on-line and in print, Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.com, arrives one weekday afternoon to Oprah Winfrey's Harpo studios for a surprise guest appearance on her show. To an audience of attentive Oprah devotees, Bezos speaks about the Kindle, describing it as a portable service that, thanks to its ability to connect with Amazon.com, will change the face of reading by making it more accessible, even more enjoyable to even more readers. As Winfrey looks on approvingly, Bezos asserts that "this is the most important thing we've ever done. It's so ambitious to take something as highly evolved as the book and improve on it. And maybe even change the way people read" [Levy 2007]. With a significant glance at the talk show host, Bezos then takes a breath and announces that "for a limited time, Oprah viewers who buy a Kindle from Amazon will get digital copies of all future Book Club books delivered directly to their device for free" [Borenstein 2007]. The Oprah audience — accustomed to corporate promotions as well as pronouncements about the incalculable value of reading — cheers, and the camera pans wide to take in and broadcast their glee at the prospect of reading made so spectacular.

As phantasmatic as it was premature, this scenario was striking on various counts, not the least of which was its imagination of a marriage made in media heaven, a union of two moguls already iconic in book culture. There was, then, a sense of the inevitable realized when a year later (in October of 2008), Oprah announced on-air and on-line that the Kindle was "absolutely my new favorite thing in the world" [Gonsalves 2008]. Not unlike those who touted the Kindle on Amazon's website, Oprah insisted that using the Kindle had changed the way she read and enhanced her love of reading.^[1] As she implied later in a video testimonial on Amazon's website, the Kindle was "life-changing" because it enabled all the more her capacity for reading. The efficacy of her endorsement was especially salient at that moment, for Oprah the reader stood at the crossroads defining much of the talk about Amazon's first made product. The bibliophilic Oprah who prizes and collects first editions for their rarity, regarding them as material treasures, is, after all, also the Oprah who views reading as a spiritual and democratizing vocation, who has translated that sense into a book club that is as much a multi-media phenomenon as anything else. Yet the speculation following her endorsement suggested that even an alliance with Oprah, the unquestioned "Queen of Reading in America," might not win the battle for the Kindle. Indeed by the time Oprah brought the device to the attention of her viewers, the public debate over the Kindle and its impact on contemporary reading practices was already in full swing. To what extent would the Kindle replace the book? What is a Kindle book, and how does one read it? Where would books go in the wake of the Kindle? For Oprah to confer on the Kindle her particular readerly and literary authority was to allay some of these anxieties. For Oprah to tout the Kindle was not only to position the device in the mainstream, but also to foreground that Kindle-reading would simultaneously maintain and depart from the experience of book reading.

That simultaneity, and Oprah's embrace of it, functioned to reassure and excite her viewers with an account of reading as fresh as it was familiar. In this essay, I contend that Amazon's construction of reading is similarly nostalgic and forward-looking, and that understanding this construction marks a crucial step in accounting for the Kindle's reception. The seamlessness Amazon attributes to Kindle-reading depends, I argue, on a careful ideological suturing. To perform this suturing, Amazon in design and discourse insists that the Kindle's innovations enhance reading without altering its long familiar nature. In this balancing act the symbolic resonance of print reading tempers the sensibility that the digital will remake reading. My point is not to judge the success of the Kindle, to lament its shortcomings or herald its triumphs, but to argue that its evocation of print, or what Jerome McGann might call a virtual bibliographic coding, *grounds* Amazon's promotion of its revolutionary nature [McGann 1991]. If McGann writes to remind literary critics that print materiality is constitutive of meaning, then I suggest that something similar is true for the Kindle. The print conventions Amazon invokes in the Kindle's form and functionality recall traditional pleasures of solitary reading; in so doing, they also call attention to the Kindle's difference — to the interface and features that place it at a remove from print. The Kindle turns to print as the embodied spirit of reading that will now acquire a new legibility.

Interrogating the Kindle in this way is to focus on *Amazon's* negotiation of an ideological terrain of reading. But any understanding of the sea change effected by the Kindle's remediation of print reading must also take into account the response to the device. This is to extend the line of thinking Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin pursue when they address what impact the remediation characteristic of new digital media has on subjectivity. Their premise that "...we see ourselves today in and through our available media" defines the subject in an intimate relation to media, and that relation, they suggest, tips over to a kind of mediated interpellation [Bolter & Grusin 1999, 232]. The subject who watches a film adaptation of a novel "bring[s]," they assert, "a notion of self appropriate to voiced prose" [Bolter & Grusin 1999, 232]; that subject is hailed by both the novel and the film that puts it on the big screen, and her agency emerges out of the work of representation. While Bolter and Grusin take care to delineate the agencies specific to remediated subjectivity — the virtual self, for instance, can, thanks to her immersion, shift her self by shifting her point of view — they do not address how the responses these subjects might have to their remediation can further illuminate its workings. To the extent that their focus lies with deployment, with what a networked self does in "being connected," they do not imagine the work of reception. My point in examining the Kindle's remediation of reading is to interrogate it, on the one hand, as an instance of subject formation in which Amazon has invested rhetoric, time, and money, and, on the other hand, to treat the reception of the device as an index of the tensions that continue to underlie the relations between print and digital spheres. I therefore include the ways in which self-identified readers return Amazon's address, and suggest that their comments often turn that address on its head. For the responses of Kindle readers — proponents as well as fence-sitters and detractors — constitutes a discourse on disappearance, a troping that reveals just how literally the material impact of reading is registered. This discourse emerges out of a series of moments, and in constructing from them a biography of the device I argue that what Kindle-reading has come to mean is marked in no small way by readers' *refusal* of Amazon's vision for reading. When readers turn to *Fahrenheit 451* to describe parallels between Kindle-reading and book burning, when they object to the exclusivity of Stephen King's Kindle novella, and critique the deletions of Orwell's *1984* from thousands of Kindle libraries, their prior investments in reading infect their response to the device. Kindle-reading has therefore generated a possessiveness about reading.

It looks and acts like a book

The first physical product of Amazon's making, the Kindle was from the start no eye-pleaser. Even over the course of its evolution it neither achieved nor sought the sleekness vaunted by so many technophiles or the friendly aesthetic of Apple products. The first version, an off-white plastic rectangle, was plain in shape, color, and material, and inspired dismay and not a little disdain. Early reviews of this first Kindle made much of this plainness, commenting, and at times complaining, that Amazon's device could not compare, at least aesthetically, with Apple's iPod or iPhone:

I briefly looked at it and my first reaction is that the gadget is not sexy. I mean, when you look at an iPod or iPhone, you feel the desire to own it, partly because of it's [sic] looks (don't deny!). The things I didn't like are the plastic look and the odd shape with sharp corners...If you own a iPod Video or an iPhone, you know how cool the round corners [are] with a steel casing [Thurrott 2007].

Compared to Amazon's account of the Kindle's "ergonomic design," one that emphasized how the device is "as easy to hold and use as a book," Paul Thurrott's assessment foregrounds the relationship between affect and aesthetic. The Kindle is strictly pragmatic, its multiple features designed in the service of reading rather than, say, in anticipation of pleasure. Its privileging of function creates, as Thurrott put it, little desire, while the iPod, pleasing to the eye, generates "the desire to own it." This split between form and function turns on the yoking of desire with aesthetics, generating much of the commentary that there was no pleasure to be had from the Kindle's look. This is the point Thurrott goes on to make in his more sustained review:

The Amazon Kindle is a small, white, slate-type computing device with a 6-inch screen and a small QWERTY keyboard with Chiclet-like keys. In many ways, the Kindle is the anti-iPod, the ego to Apple's id. They're both white portable devices with screens. But the similarities end there. Where Apple's devices are Spartan in design, favoring form over function, the Kindle is all buttons and ports, a utilitarian device that was quite obviously designed around the content you'll be reading onscreen and virtually nothing else. This is what the extreme version of function over form looks like, and its [sic] hard not to wonder whether there isn't a happy medium between the Kindle and Apple's form over function devices [Thurrott 2010].

Thurrott's comparison attributes to each device a particular aesthetic and affect, doing so in such a way as to further distinguish the Kindle from the iPod: purpose versus pleasure, function over form, id pit in opposition to ego. Indeed if his focus pushes reading to the margins — somewhat appropriately, since the iPod did not feature reading capacity until later — it also enacts the strict functionality he ascribes to the Kindle approach to reading. There is, as he puts it, "virtually nothing else."

Embedded in this rather damning assessment is, however, a logic that the Kindle's aesthetic presupposes a view of reading as a disappearing act. In a *Newsweek* interview following the launch of the device Bezos touched on this view as he argued for the Kindle's distinctiveness. On the one hand, he observed, its portability, wirelessness, and storage capacity would foster reading by bringing readers closer and more quickly to the act. Indeed these features define the Kindle through its capacity to do things "that ordinary books can't do" [Levy 2007]. On the other hand, he also insisted that the Kindle's looks possessed an awareness of form, in particular, the codex form of books. His response to the commentary swirling around the Kindle's appearance thus pivots on books and their materiality: "I've actually asked myself, 'Why do I love these physical objects? Why do I love the smell of glue and ink?'" [Levy 2007]. The answer, he went on to say, resides in the smell that reminds him of "all those worlds I have been transported to...the key feature of a book is that it disappears" [Levy 2007]. Physical sensuality — "the smell of glue and ink" — enables the fantastic, the imagination of "all those worlds I have been transported to" [Levy 2007]. If books are made, and their sensual existence as made objects prompts bibliophilia, some of their force resides nonetheless in their immateriality, in their ability to disappear. When read, the book loses its force — its charge — as a physical object; it gives up something of its physicality. While the good faith of Bezos' comments remains uncertain at best, and while some of the changes in the later Kindle editions have reconfigured its design, it's important to note that his remarks align reading with form and its erasure. Over the course of the Kindle's history Amazon has continued to idealize this sense of disappearance in a way that echoes the familiar saying that one is lost to the world when reading a good book. From this point of view, one that Amazon has made profitable, plainness of design aligns the Kindle with this elusive immateriality.

This investment in immateriality draws on and magnifies the sensibility that idealizes books as icons of culture. To understand this relation is to note, as one commentator did early on, that an "aura of bookishness" makes the Kindle "less of a whizzy gizmo than an austere vessel of culture" [Carr 2011]. The Kindle's pursuit of the bookish aura has meant eschewing material traits that signify mechanized gadgetry in favor of the unassuming shape and dimensions of a paperback: a slender, slight thing with a tapered silhouette it "emulates the bulge toward a book's binding" [Carr 2011]. The early Kindle looked like a printed paperback, and Amazon's rhetoric made clear that this resemblance was both deliberate (there's a reason it doesn't look like an iPod) and purposeful (it seeks to do something with this mimicry). Indeed the first Kindle featured on its back cover a series of glyphs, from Egyptian hieroglyphics, Norse runes, and Mesopotamian cuneiform, Hebrew and Arabic script, Greek, and Germanic blackletter, as well as variations of the Romance letterform, that together suggested the evolution of written language, inscribed here as an element of the Kindle's design.^[2] In the context of the Kindle's homage to the book, this representation also recalls scrolls, paper, manuscripts: an invocation of the medium as well as the history of writing and reading. The inscribed glyphs point, therefore, to the book's long history as "an austere vessel of culture." Books possess this status because they are said to transcend the materiality that defines them — their bindings, covers, and pages — by disappearing from view when read. Referring to this transcendence, the Kindle thereby assumes its austerity. In so doing, it becomes an instrument of culture, a "vessel" that like the book knows its place.

In this context I want to underscore how the Kindle's mimicry both calls attention to and absorbs its revolutionary status. This dynamic is especially apparent in talk about the Kindle screen, which Amazon from the outset has heralded as a technological advance that nonetheless maintains reading as it is. For when the website asserts that the Kindle provides a reading experience "as sharp and natural as reading ink on paper — and nothing like the strain and glare of a computer screen," its gesture sets the device in relation to both book and computer, places it closer to the book, and perhaps most significantly, naturalizes Kindle-reading through the association.^[3] Paper is the measure of the Kindle screen as it indexes readability, and perhaps more importantly, enables the bookish feat of disappearing. As fantasy writer Neil Gaiman put it in his testimonial, "It's very, very crisp. Very functional. Very readable" [Amazon.com Gaiman nd]. In his account, meanwhile, author Michael Lewis echoes Bezos when he notes that "after five minutes I've ceased to think I'm looking at a screen" [Kafka 2010]. Endorsements like these rend the Kindle of technological resonance, while celebrating, almost breathlessly, the advances in technology that have made that erasure possible. Indeed the point might be made that the former enables the latter — the Luddite stance, one that understands reading in all-but pastoral terms, promotes the claim that we are on the cusp of something revolutionary. Or perhaps is it the other way around? When *Lemony Snicket* author Daniel Handler compares the Kindle to a book he emphasizes that the latter requires no connectivity: "You just have to put it in your hands and read it" [Amazon.com Handler nd]. Here the *point* of Kindle technology appears to be its mimicry of the book. Wireless, the Kindle disdains cables, plug-ins, or battery life; the device is so advanced it's simple. Implicit in this claim is the primacy of books as technology par excellence. In this way the author's delight in the Kindle's wirelessness reminds his audience that the book has always been so unwired.

As witnesses to Kindle-reading, these authors — whom Amazon invited to try out the device — also legitimate the Kindle through scenes in which the device intensifies reading. Their presence matters, then, because their significance as *readers* derives as much from their authorial positioning as it does from their bibliophilia.^[4] When Amazon claims them as "people...we knew were lovers of books," its gesture is to assure would-be owners that the device has the right kind of backing. Book-lovers, the authors are first figured in domestic terms, appearing in shots of spaces lined with books, speaking about the Kindle from comfy chairs. When they speak about where the Kindle can go, their terms shift to the Kindle's mobility, the likes of which makes it equally accessible at home, in airport terminals, and airplanes. The global author — Gaiman cites traveling from Beijing to Budapest, while Toni Morrison refers to giving talks around the world — in this way implies that the Kindle can confer something of his or her cosmopolitanism to reading.^[5] This yoking of the domestic with the global cosmopolitan perpetuates the sense that the Kindle's advances are so astonishing that reading, far from losing its transformative force, is just as magical as ever: perhaps even more so, given the Kindle's affinity for travel. In a conflation of technology with magic, the Kindle contains books even as it snatches them out of thin air. What this means for the reader, Morrison observes, is an almost magical subjectivity. In her testimonial Morrison draws on the equation of reading with empowerment before describing the Kindle as a *spell* for agency, one that allows readers to do reading in ways previously unimaginable. "That sense of 'I own it now' is the best thing about reading anyway," she says — and the Kindle intensifies that experience because "it's faster, it's lighter, [and] I can carry it and I can have more at my disposal" [Morrison]. Possession goes hand in hand with self-possession because Kindle-reading makes that affiliation literally — materially — possible. In the reverse of this thinking Gaiman claims that the Kindle's ease of use matches the intuitiveness with which readers approach books. Indeed, if the Kindle's ability to retrieve books is impressive because it resembles having a genie on call, it is his experience of Kindle-reading over which he lingers. After reading for a few minutes, he remembers, "I'd done the thing that you do with books where you're actually on the other side of the text...there's nothing between you and the story...you're in book-reading land" [Amazon.com Gaiman nd]. Like Morrison's reference to the spell of reading, Gaiman's account is of the reader magicked, an Alice who crosses with the Kindle in hand to the Wonderland that book-reading has always been. This Kindle-reading is therefore fantastically *familiar*.^[6]

A recursive logic, then, underlies claims that the Kindle is extraordinary, and a bookish resonance remains even when Bezos and other Kindle advocates insist that the Kindle differs in kind from the book. That this logic extends as far as features touted explicitly for their pragmatism suggests the extent to which the Kindle needs this evocation of book-reading. In its marketing Amazon has made much of the device for its ability to meet readerly needs, highlighting, for instance, alterable font size, ever-increasing storage capacity, and search features as conveniences designed with the reader in mind. And specific readerly needs — economic, technological — frame the accounts of each of the Kindles currently on the market: there exists, it's implied, a Kindle for every need.^[7] In all these instances the Kindle functions, as one observer notes, as an "extension of the familiar Amazon store," and foregrounds service as a constitutive dimension of the reading it imagines [Levy 2007]. To put it slightly differently, Amazon is frank in its claim that the Kindle anticipates and offers what readers need: it is there before reading actually takes place, preparing the way for its felicitous happening. At the same time, this pragmatism is enabled by the sensibility that as an act, reading requires, if it does not deserve, such service. Free chapter samples seek to create anticipation, but so do they rely upon the notion that anticipation is one of reading's greatest pleasures. The canniness of these samples therefore derives from their intimation of the particular value of pleasure and its attachment to reading.^[8] Like the dynamic that defines the actual act of purchase, this tableau of reading on demand justifies turning immediacy into a consumer good by recalling the good associated with reading. The notion that the Kindle's speed of delivery *serves reading* confers some of that loftiness onto the device, softening the consumerist logic that equates an Amazonian subject's desire with need. If the Kindle exceeds the material limits of reading it does so by insisting on the value of remaining attached to them.

Kindling?

The legibility of that value emerged early on in discourse that tied the Kindle to Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*. official Amazon stance foregrounded an idiomatic use of the term — in an interview a senior public relations staff manager asserted that "we named the device the 'Kindle'...because we want to kindle people's love of reading" — public speculation moved very quickly to translate that vision into something more literal [Herderer 2008]. This more skeptical reading of the device's name inserted books as the objects of a material kindling, thereby resisting Amazon's figure of the Kindle as the bearer of a populist reading that spreads like fire.^[9] Even a report that the design team had chosen "Kindle" because it was "memorable and meaningful in many ways of expression" could not dissuade posters on forums and message board discussions from asserting that the origin of the Kindle's naming lay in the novel's dystopic milieu [Herderer 2008]. Implicit in those conversations was the suggestion that the institutionalized book burning in *451* had an analog in the virtuality Kindle books occupy: thanks to that association, the Kindle's naming acquired a graphic ideological tenor, one made excessive by virtue of the material act described. Taking Bradbury's novel as the Kindle's eerie precedent thus enabled readers to articulate their unease, and in

so doing, generated a resistant understanding that reading 451 on a Kindle would constitute an act of supreme irony.

When Ray Bradbury pronounced at BookExpo 2008 that “there is no future for e-books, because they are not books” his comment fueled a reading that had already intertwined the Kindle with the novel [Wolfe 2008].^[10] The author’s quip that e-books “smell like burned fuel” predicted doom for the Kindle in the fiery terms 451 sets out, but it also resonated with a metacritical impulse that readers on Amazon forums — where both Bradbury and the Kindle have a loyal and close following — were articulating. In two forums devoted to the Bradbury-Kindle affair, Amazon readers expressed their sympathy and respect for Bradbury’s position, but were nearly uniform in their conclusion that the Kindle and Bradbury need not be opposed. His insistence on keeping his works only in print was explicable, as one poster wrote, “since KINDLE implies the onset of burning,” and to that extent the novel “should be the poster child for the anti-e-reader movement” [McMillan 2010]. On this view the privilege 451 accords to books has everything to do with their physicality, and Bradbury’s hostility towards the Kindle, understood here as a dystopic end to print materiality, is justifiable. The majority of posts, however, claim the Kindle for its potential to skirt that future through an increase in reading, and go on to argue that the device could constitute “a serious library” that could act as a “survival venue quietly and easily hiding books for future generations” [Catcher 2011].^[11] Rendered a virtual analog to the Book People Montag meets outside the city, the Kindle becomes in this account a book partisan, a savior, even, for books in hiding. In one exchange readers took this line of thinking further still, suggesting, interestingly, that a comprehensive digitization of books, had it occurred, would have pre-empted the scenario *Fahrenheit 451* imagines. Digitization would have made Bradbury’s firemen unnecessary because there would have been “...no chance of self-doubt and hiding books in ventilation shafts,” or, more radically, “*F-451* could not have happened” with “no story line” to propel it forward [Cook 2010]; [BobLenx 2010]. That both assertions speculate about a past that did not occur — a past in which the firemen, fictional or not, never existed — testifies, I think, to the posters’ imagination of reading in a world of Kindles. For both posters, apparently aware of the fantastic historicizing at the heart of much dystopic fiction, subject the fictional history posited by *Fahrenheit 451* to a similar fate. In so doing they emphasize what another reader calls “the irony that the author of *Fahrenheit 451* is opposed to unburnable, indestructible e-books” [whitearrow 2010a].^[12] On this view Kindle reading (or the technology of reading the Kindle represents) is aligned with posterity while Bradbury, somewhat strangely, becomes an author without a story.

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For all the protesting on Bradbury’s part, Kindle readers considered, queried, ventured opinions about, and debated the work the Kindle might do (or not do) for reading by citing the novel as the Kindle’s metaphorical ground. That this gesture anchored the Kindle in fiction, that a literary representation of a dystopic future should frame an understanding of the device, produced no qualms: readers were willing to assume the link between device and text, and thereby granted 451 an explanatory authority. That authority generated much of the conversation about information control and censorship, and turned the world Bradbury represents into a likely model for the unforeseen consequences of Kindle reading. Bradbury’s vision of a world forced to accept book burning in the name of civility and peace should, these posters argued, force Kindle owners to think about the security of reading in the digital moment.^[13] For some, the analogy renewed the issue of banning precisely because it suggested that e-books, touted for their immateriality, were no less vulnerable than their print counterparts. Indeed one line of thought reiterated that e-books are particularly susceptible because their materiality is less trace-able. When one reader reported that Amazon had “reached down to my Kindle and deleted the book” he had returned earlier for a refund, he articulated his unease with Amazon’s reach in a way that clarifies another’s anxiety about scale: “if all books become e books, isn’t it very easy to control what books are allowed? Have I read too much 1984???” [Bremner 2008].^[14] A similarly dystopic view fueled a series of posts concerned that the Kindle could make what one reads open, and therefore useable and exploitable, knowledge. Here the reader’s security is said to be at stake, and the prospect of institutional access to one’s readerly choices (the thread also takes up the notion that the government is a corporation) becomes something like surveillance. This possibility unnerved even the most vocal of Kindle supporters on the *Amazon Kindle: The Start of the Fahrenheit 451 reality?* forum which opened by asking “Is there danger in giving CORPORATIONS knowledge of what books you have read?” [Turiya 2008]. The familiar belief in Kindles and their fluid materiality thus runs aground an anxiety the novel depicts: about being tracked, about leaving a trace. However much they endorsed the e-book for its elusiveness, however much they imagined themselves as virtual Book People whose preservation of books means erasing their physicality, readers articulated unease when contemplating the prospect of having *their own* readerly selves found out.

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These responses, in referring to Bradbury’s novel to make sense of what the Kindle might mean to reading, converged on the broader worry that the Kindle might displace culture. That these responses occurred with regularity online, cropping up on blogs and websites and forums devoted, on the one hand, to e-books, and on the other, to science fiction, that they emerged with some mass on Amazon testifies to the coherence of a discourse about reading that takes the literary as its precedent. Here a longstanding debate about genre witnesses readerly protectiveness of 451, of the novel’s status that the Kindle was said to threaten. For those Kindle advocates who were also self-identified readers of science fiction, this tension was as familiar as it was frustrating, for in casting science fiction in opposition to “literature,” it damned the legitimacy of the genre with faint praise. This view then fingered the Kindle for its complicity in isolating 451 from the literary, suggesting that reading 451 with a Kindle tainted the novel with the very technophilia it critiques (here Bradbury’s comment that the novel is less an anti-censorship screed and more so a manifesto for literature acquires new strength). In this context that the Kindle’s relation to the literary canon should emerge as an issue is not surprising. Readers who reveled in the prospect of downloading canonicity at little cost — most of Austen’s novels, for instance, are available for free as Kindle books — faced the disdain of those who not only expressed a preference for print but insisted, in a way Bourdieu would recognize, that it is the rightful medium for the reading, say, of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. The association with the Kindle raised readerly hackles and was said to diminish 451’s credibility as a literary classic (this despite the fact that it exists only in print). The reception of Bradbury’s novel and the Kindle are therefore *mutually* illuminating of how readers articulated their desires around the literary. To take a more synthetic view, however much the Kindle divided readers, that split emerged with all the more force when the literary was at stake. As a result, the Kindle emerged as an agent of the novel’s erasure from literature.

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If discourse on the Kindle saw readers reaching for *Fahrenheit 451* to understand their newly mediated relationship to reading, the reception of the novel on Amazon found in the novel’s cautionary rhetoric a coherent view of the shape and fate of reading in the Kindle age. The novel, to put it another way, provided readers with an analogy for anxieties about the Kindle’s capacity to make print obsolescent, to make its disappearance a reality. Thus while Amazon reviews of 451 preceded the Kindle’s release by a decade, discussion of shifts in media technology and their impact on reading were in the air from the outset — in the title of the first review, “Literal bookburning in a world too like our own,” [A Customer 1996a] and in the early remark that the novel “raises issues about... letting the technological wonders of the 90’s take over the simplest pleasures” [A Customer 1996b]. And in the months leading up to the Kindle’s release in November 2007 reviews of the novel hewed closely to the position that the doom Bradbury imagines for books — as one post put it, “one of the most important devices ever created by man” — had proven prophetic [jimiwine 2007]. For in “this modern day ‘burst culture’ of Blackberry’s, Wi-Fi, 24/7 TV and countless entertainment outlets,” [Wilson 2007] and as “TV screens get bigger and clearer as people walk around with iPod earbuds blaring, ignoring one another completely” [jimiwine 2007] books are understood to stand little chance of engaging attention. In comments like these, posters described the immediacy of attention these demanded, and implied of book reading that its mediations, however meaningful or pleasurable, were thereby obscured. Indeed in reviews that both predate and follow the release of the Kindle, posters echoed a lament that had fueled much of the early public discourse about the digital and new media supported by it precisely by sounding a death knell for reading. As melancholic as Sven Birkerts, these reviews constructed and cohered around an opposition in which reading *ought* to have nothing to do with media. If for Birkerts reading is immersive, an act of measured consideration, of slow and deliberate existence, 451 endorses this view, reviewers argued, through its unflinching account of life without books. Again and again the reading of 451 triggers a diagnosis of contemporary culture; again and again the reading of 451 occasions references to reading made bereft, “robbed of literacy and creativity by...such mindnumbing channels as TV, social media, gaming, internet surfing, etc.” [Swaty 2011]. The impulse to translate the novel’s account of a culture “detached from people...and, of course, books” to the reader’s context thus generates the sensibility that reading by nature is *antithetical* to the status quo 451 represents [Von Ray 2009].

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Nostalgic for reading *before* it disappears, these reviews of 451 are all the more striking because they refer to Kindle-reading despite the fact that the novel, as a result of Bradbury’s insistence, remains only in print. Indeed, that Amazon constitutes the infrastructure for their commentary, that the device embodies reading imagined by Amazon foregrounds for these reviewers that their reading of *Fahrenheit 451* must be marked by it in some way. Kindle reading, in other words, becomes for these reviewers an almost irresistible example of the novel’s cautionary rhetoric. Meanwhile, if the novel’s sense of the inevitable prompted an urgency of response to Montag’s world, so did it emphasize for posters the sense of *this* moment in the history of reading, when “books have been translated into electronic forms and more and more people watch television and laze around” [kdbrewer 2011]. Implicit references to the Kindle index this awareness, as reviewers, wondering to what extent virtual reading resembles video game play or web surfing, articulated the blurring of contemporary media use with contemporary reading practices. These rather more tangential observations about media culture stand in contrast to the explicit references that charge the Kindle with displacing relations of production long enabled by print. “The most important thing about this book is how much more relevant it seems today than when it was written,” writes one reader. “Today, newspapers and print media are going away (thanks, kindle)” [Lascowicz 2008]. Either unaware, indifferent, or skeptical of the newspaper subscriptions the Kindle makes possible, this reader insisted the Kindle’s existence means the erasure of print. His error is less at issue here than his belief that the novel’s importance lies in its present relevance, for that occasions the directness with which he yokes the Kindle to the circumstances depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*. Like many of his fellow reviewers, this reader applauds the novel for its futurist imagination of a stark moment in the history of reading. His comments are distinctive because they turn directly to the Kindle, and, in situating the device in a history of reading parallel to the world of 451, he emphasizes the irony that the device is an Amazon product.^[15] That references like these represent only a fraction of the reviews of 451 uploaded since June 1996 (1407) is an oddity given that elsewhere, particularly on the Amazon forums devoted to Bradbury or the device, the discourse is rife with commentary linking the Kindle with 451. These forums were full of commentary about the kind of kindling the device would make possible: either the demise of books or their human reincarnation. Why, then, has the dynamic not been reciprocal? More specifically, if 451 readers willingly imagined the novel’s relevance to the contemporary milieu, and openly discussed the position of book culture in this moment, then how does the Kindle’s absence signify? As a body the reviews focus on the novel’s social critique of a world without books in a way that makes the Kindle’s absence from that critique pronounced. In a way, though, this absence is fitting. For it marks a *readerly* enactment of the device’s disappearance from the scene of reading.

18

“Ur” reading

While the association with *Fahrenheit 451* originated in the Kindle's first release, it has extended to the device's entire biography, marking it broadly with narrative and political resonance. Indeed to a certain extent *451* so prevails in the imagination of Kindle readers that their attachments to the novel's metaphorical force yields the device sui generis: the Kindle as such. The security of this attachment, however, began to unravel shortly after Amazon, announcing the release of the Kindle 2 (February 2009), also revealed that it had commissioned a story from Stephen King that if pre-ordered, would appear on Kindle screens on the day of its release. King readers in particular responded with enthusiasm that the author had inscribed his stamp on the device — in "Ur" a Kindle with hyperbolic features allows the protagonist to download novels written in alternate dimensions as well as news from that urgently compelling dimension, the future — but also expressed dismay that he had agreed to the commission in the first place. For a significant portion of these fans the commission bound King to Amazon, and interrupted a prior, and more meaningful relation between an author and his readers.^[16] Taken by the prospect of having "Ur" materialize on Kindles on the day of its release, struck by the fitness of having a King story about a Kindle appear on thousands of Kindles, these readers were equally taken aback by their sense that Amazon had intruded on, and therefore weakened what they knew, felt about, and expected from reading. "Ur" infected their unease that the Kindle could unmake their status as readers and owners of Kindles and the texts that appear on them.

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The two initial sources framing the news that "Ur" was on the horizon — the official King website and Amazon's press release — first positioned author and device as an irresistible match, a pairing that promised great things. The King website greeted readers first with the reminder that the author's longstanding history "as a writer who constantly redefines his readers' experience [sic] by working in various genres and formats" testifies to his ability "to deliver a reading experience like no one else can" [King 2009]. "Ur" is no exception, the web blurb goes on to remark, for it bears King's signature qualities and demonstrates them in his command of a form that the blurb notes is fast disappearing. While this account defers mention of the Kindle until the bottom of the page, its reference to genre, and its claim that "Ur" gives the novella new life, anticipate the link to the Kindle press release by emphasizing King as an author open to (and practiced in) innovation. King's generic flexibility thus frames the way the website figures the Kindle as a technological chameleon. The Amazon press release, meanwhile, follows a similar rhetoric. There the announcement of the Kindle 2, emphatic about this edition's improvements, goes hand in hand with a summary of the extraordinary events that occur when Wesley Smith receives a mysterious pink Kindle in the mail. The breathless claim that the Kindle 2 is "thinner, faster, crisper, with longer battery life and capable of holding hundreds more books" thus corresponds to the observation that the "Ur" Kindle "unlocks a literary world that even the most avid of book lovers could never imagine" [Amazon.com 2009]. Meanwhile the boast that the Read-to-Me feature is "something new we added that a book could never do" anticipates the flourish that the "Ur" Kindle opens doors to "things that one hopes we'll never read or live through." Rhetorical counterparts, these tie the device to its textual self. In so doing, they situate King in the middle, and foreground his authorship as a bridge between Amazon's Kindle and the Kindle of "Ur."

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Aligning the two Kindles was, of course, a marketing gesture, one that sought to create anticipation by blurring the lines between product and representation. While readers were well aware of the realities of this gesture, and, as I will argue, prepared to live by their readerly critique of it, this symmetry set out the terms by which they nonetheless continued to idealize the bond linking device and text. King himself participated in this conversation, observing shortly after the story's release that his condition for writing *a story for the Kindle* was his desire to "do one about the Kindle" (original emphasis) [Susan King 2010]. Meanwhile King fans, quick to assert that the author's metafictional gesture was no surprise — as one poster put it, "Leave it to King to write a story about the Kindle on the Kindle" [Edwards 2011] — were just as quick to claim "Ur" for the Kindle. Several describe choosing "Ur" as the first download for their new Kindle 2s, suggesting that the text's fantastic Kindle has infected their enthusiasm for the device and its new features [A Customer 2010a]; [Wickham 2009]; [Tharp 2009]; [Jean 2009]. One reader says of "Ur" that it marks "a great way to start my new adventure in reading," while another claims that "I can't imagine a better way to have broken in my new toy": out of positions like these "Ur" emerges as an exemplary Kindle text [A Customer 2010a]; [Wickham 2009]; [Tharp 2009]. This sense of exemplarity reached its apex when "Ur" reviewers agreed that the novella, because of its especially immersive nature, should "come pre-loaded on all new Kindles." That "Ur" is said to suit the Kindle because it is so wholly absorbing — one Kindle owner compares finishing the novella to the feeling of leaving the movie theater "after seeing Star Wars for the first time" — means that for this readership, the proximity to the world of "Ur" defines their Kindle reading [An Ikeatrain Brain 2009]. On the flip side of this thinking, readers embraced the Kindle as material confirmation of King's device. Whatever their praise for "Ur," these reviews insisted that reading with a Kindle enhanced the intensity of the "Ur" experience. "Reading it on a Kindle added to the uniqueness of the novella," writes one poster, "it was fun as King talked about the various features and menus of the Kindle to be able to see what he was talking about while reading" [Partin 2011]. Toggling between text and device, this reader grounds his experience of "Ur" on the physicality of the Kindle, looking to its body to establish what he reads on its screen. For this reader a matter of fun, this closeness produces for another an enjoyable shiver, the result of reading *and* writing her review of "Ur" on a Kindle.^[17] These descriptions emphasize what other reviews will frame as an aptness of correspondence — of Kindle reading "Ur" one concludes, "It really doesn't get much better than that" — one that makes even *thinking* about reading "Ur" on other devices seem a pale, because lesser, reflection of a Kindled "Ur" [Tate 2011].^[18] All this is to say that the turn to symmetry works in both directions. For if it claims "Ur" as the exemplary Kindle *text* it also declares the Kindle as the best *medium* for the reading of the novella.

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The enthusiasm generated by the Kindle and "Ur" pairing in turn indexed readerly identifications. Thus a number of reviewers described their pleasure at the novella's speculative literary histories, remarking that they, like Wesley Smith, would find an unheard-of Hemingway or an unpublished Poe an irresistible temptation. Others admitted, significantly, to a jealousy prompted by "Ur's" account of universes in which authors long-dead continue to write. A fascinating mix of affect, these comments articulate posters' identities as "book-obsessed," as "avid readers" whose desires "Ur" both illustrates and renders fantastic. King fans, meanwhile, insisted that their history of reading, and not a one-time corporate commission, constituted an authentic exclusive relation to the author. Here the Constant Reader — a figure of loyalty in King fan discourse since the publication of *Misery* — emerged as a point from which readers, citing the novella's intertextual references to the *Dark Tower* series, could recommend "Ur" as a King classic. "I would not suggest this novella unless you have read other King works," remarks one poster, "There are many references that only a Constant Reader will understand" [Poppa Bear 2010]. The fact of these references occasioned the distinction between casual reader and King fan, and enabled the latter to argue that "Ur," "not a story for the first time King reader," belonged to those for whom its references were already foundational knowledge [Hilbert 2009]. To write in about "Ur's" intertextuality was thus to claim this constancy in reading. The refrain that "Ur" needs an expert King reader thus privileges a knowing intimacy, one made all the more exclusive by what one reader calls "hidden" references, or, more broadly, by the sense that with "Ur" King was "perpetuating [sic] the 'inside joke' we have all come to know and love over the years" [Swystun 2011]; [Hilbert 2009]. Claimed in this way, "Ur" reinforces the authority of the King readership by emphasizing the intersubjective dynamic at the heart of intertextuality. The "inside joke" confirmed the *primacy* of communication between author and readers, and King's *Dark Tower* references, understated in this way, "make me feel like I am part of a secret society" [Arnold 2009].

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That there exists a correspondence between the novella's articulation of readerly investments and readers' insistence on clarifying their identifications goes a long way to explaining the strength of their feelings about "Ur" as a Kindled text. For when "Ur" readers declare their readerly selves they do no less than the novella's protagonist, whose views on the Kindle shift from refusal to fascination to horror. "Ur's" plot shifts into high gear when a pink Kindle, appearing mysteriously at Wesley Smith's door, pushes him — on the heels of an unhappy break-up — to break from his rather Luddite notions and give the device a try. The scene thus associates the Kindle's sudden, inexplicable presence with the beginnings of a medial shift in reading for Smith, for whom books are simultaneously professional and personal objects. More entrenched in his identification with print than many "Ur" readers, Smith embodies a romanticized, vocational book reading, and in this way he too figures a constancy of reading, a fidelity to books — he considers them his cherished "friends" — he will not dream of betraying [King 2009, 258–267]. The "minor chill" he feels when a student in one of his literature classes demonstrates that the image of pages on the Kindle screen "flutter, like in a real book" testifies to his unease with its bibliographic remediation; when this sense intensifies with the arrival of his Kindle, so does the chill [King 2009, 258–267, 267–274]. Indeed, faced with operating his own Kindle Smith's imagination takes a horrific turn, and he contemplates turning the device off, as the narrator puts it, before "a hand — or perhaps a claw — was going to swim up from the grayness of the Kindle's screen, grab him by the throat and yank him in" [King 2009, 473–478]. If King's gesture to grant this Kindle a monstrous agency follows, as many "Ur" readers observed, a line of thinking the author had already pursued elsewhere, its force lies in the way it marks the Kindle's remediation in uncanny terms.^[19] Remediation at this moment is as aggressive as any of the instances Bolter and Grusin describe precisely in its threat to the reader's self-possession. This tension increases when Smith, after having discovered that the Kindle *can* reach out to alternate dimensions, shares with a colleague and a student the knowledge that that range can put one in touch with literary histories wonderful in their strangeness. In these Urs, Hemingway, Poe, and Shakespeare author unheard-of texts that read with authenticity, their remediations constituted by their radical familiarity. Smith's colleague says of *A Black Fellow in London*, a play written by one of the several Shakespeares the Kindle locates, "it's got his *lilt*" (original emphasis) [King 2009, 764–770]. His observation speaks to the impossible truth of the play's existence; it also performs his identity as a reader who is rightly and properly moved by this truth. Even as it points out the horror of a Kindle that knows no limits, "Ur" authenticates Smith and his circle as readers whose identifications lie with the texts they read.

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However forceful, these identifications do not last, displaced when the group abandons its literary forays to explore other temporalities to which Smith's Kindle has access. For would-be "Ur" readers access was precisely the dilemma, as it interrupted the idealized bond between text and device. The *contingency* of "Ur" led more than one poster to urge Amazon and King to issue a print "Ur," claiming that their respective histories of reading the author's works should deserve just recompense: "I have everything King so please a BOOK" [Anonymous 2010]. Appeals like these constituted the gentler end of response. For if Amazon had touted the Kindle for increasing access to books, and if King had done much the same in interviews, the novella's exclusivity also generated ill-will, hard-line response and even outright resistance. From this perspective one reader's question — "Since when do we have high end books?" — is simultaneously naive and pointed, revealing the end to a faith readers had previously had in Amazon and King and the cynicism that now informed their view of both company and author [KimberlyreadKing 2009]. The populist aura that Amazon and King had courted, the popularity both enjoyed as one effect of that stance: neither could absorb what readers perceived as a deliberate production of inequity. An economics of scale thus drove commentary that refused the built-in expense of the Kindle that owning "Ur" would require; here readers, finding the Kindle's price disproportionate to the price of the novella, shifted the terms of their response to Amazon and held the company responsible for creating an impossible situation. Even when one poster declared her decision not to purchase a Kindle her comment was no less pointed in charging Amazon: "Since I won't be making that purchase, I guess I don't get to read the story" [CarrieB 2009]. Resigned to her fate, this reader still invokes the sense that "Ur's" exclusivity has stripped her of rights as a reader. That her resignation is another's ire is revealing not only of the range of response generated by "Ur," but also, and perhaps more importantly, of its personalized nature:

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This is how you repay loyal fans, by releasing something new only in one format? Maybe some of us prefer printed books and don't want a Kindle. Ever think of that? It sucks that there's a new King book I can't read. And makes me want to hesitate about buying any more.[nom-de-nick 2011]

Writing about "a new King book I can't read," this reader emphasizes the breach that "Ur" represents, claiming her right as a fan to read the text, significantly, by calling attention to her inability to do so. Having agreed to the commission, King had, on her view, compromised his authorship by aligning himself with Kindle readers. He was now a Kindled King.

What is a Kindle author, then, and who or what is the author of "Ur"? Readers who regarded "Ur" as a betrayal asked a version of this question when they charged King with having abandoned his principles and his fans. And more: Constant Readers in their critique of King implied that his relation to fans, more than anything else, had distinguished his authorial integrity, and should continue to do so. Thus while few questioned Amazon's investment in pursuing King, observing that the company's behavior was to be expected and, interestingly, that King's imagination made him a natural choice for the enterprise, many fumed at King for what they called improper authorial conduct. A sense of a moral high ground thus informed almost all the commentary that viewed "Ur" as an instance of product placement gone awry. "Product placements are a part of our lives," writes one reader,

We see it in the film industry, TV is crammed with advertisements, we're bombarded with it on radio, billboards, and everywhere possible. We're all used to it, but...I don't want to read it in a Stephen King story/novel(la). Many of you will over look this and accept it as just part of the story or possibly even another barrage of some consumerism, but to me it marred what I would consider to be an excellent tale. I don't want not-so-subtle buy-buy-buy messages coming from one of my favorite authors; it just seems so tawdry. [Atlantic 2010]

To the claim that an author's participation in everyday consumerism "seems so tawdry" this reader suggests a further twist: that in its capacity as a Kindle advertisement or infomercial "Ur" could not be truly literary. Even as he acknowledges the reality of product placement, the fact that it appears "everywhere possible," this reader seeks to draw a line between it and the work of an author he admires. Over and over again posters like these cited the aesthetic weaknesses — "Ur" feels incomplete, rushed, and uninspired — that resulted, they argued, from the novella's commercial sensibility.^[20] In this way textual criticism, originating in moral judgment of the commercial, generated a critique of King's lapse in authorial judgment. For some, this effect confirmed their suspicions that the logic driving King's recent work — work that prompted one reader to compare the author's rate of production to "a copy machine," and another to recall "the *Family Guy* riff on King when he's just pitching a new book idea about a haunted lamp" — was as corporate as it was ridiculous [Higby 2009]; [Mastrangelo 2011]. Those less willing to see the ironies of this development opted for sharper critique, framing their disappointment in terms of a failed transaction between author and reader. Complaints that "Ur" is no more than a "well written advertisement" or that the reader "should have been paid for this one" thus implied King's responsibility in diminishing the value of readers' possession of the text. Even the most balanced of these accounts cited Seth Goldin before going on to offer a blunt assessment of this commercial occlusion: "this is a product that tells a story" [Lee 2009]. In this way "Ur" may have fulfilled its promise to appear as magically as Smith's pink Kindle, but that materialization could not signify enough. The perception that King had sacrificed "Ur" to Amazon for many marked the loss of the text, or at least the loss of its resonance as "a story." Hailed for its immediacy, "Ur's" presence on Kindle screens turned out, interestingly, to matter too little.

1984 has come and gone

The reception of "Ur" revealed a darker side to the promise of instant gratification. Indeed this devolution of response suggests that the "Ur" experience had rendered Kindle-reading dystopic for King readers. The thrill Wesley Smith experiences when his pink Kindle discovers unheard-of Hemingway novels intensifies his desire to read, but for King readers, their frisson of pleasure was short-lived. For them the Kindle had interrupted a much-cherished sense of kinship with the author, and without that relation, not even the idea of reading Wesley's Smith near brush with fate could temper their embitterment. Their ire over the exclusivity of "Ur" led King readers to turn against the reading Amazon imagined for them, to articulate a rather more possessive sense of reading in response, and ultimately to charge the author himself for having compromised his bond with readers. This last makes clear that the ownership King readers had in mind involves the author as a subject whom reading possesses. It would be fair to say, given the ferocity of critique eventually leveled at King, that readers felt as strongly about having a relation with the author through reading as they did about having "Ur" appear on their Kindles on the day of its release. There was no question that Amazon had with "Ur" another delivery success on its hands; this pursuit of day-of-release delivery had endeared the company to Harry Potter fans since 2000, prompting hundreds of thousands to pre-order the novels in order to be able to put their hands on the books as immediately as possible. Already auratic for fans, these release dates became distribution events, and time itself became a good for Potter fans, who like King's Constant Readers, constituted an audience whose intensity of devotion suited the desire for such timeliness.^[21] Yet in the case of *Ur*, the compression of time — itself a remediation of the anticipation of waiting for one's book — could not overcome readers' dissatisfaction with Amazon's mediation of King.

The overwhelming sense that the Kindle had stripped ownership from the act of reading returned with greater force six months later, when copies of Orwell's *1984* disappeared from several thousand Kindles in July 2009. In the sixteen discussions on Amazon forums alone Kindle readers took to the boards, writing to one another and to Amazon in ways that for the most part mirrored media coverage of the incident. Like that coverage, Amazon reader discourse regarded the deletion as an unjustifiable outrage, one that for many warranted a boycott of the company. Even in the wake of Bezos' apology, which observed that the copies had been illegally published before calling their removal "stupid, thoughtless, and painfully out of line with our principles," readers urged a return to books and the view of reading implicit in that return [Bezos 2009].^[22] That call for a return emerged, in other words, as a refusal of Amazon, and a critique that the company had, in its failed remediation of *1984*, revealed its indifference to the readerly subjects constituted by the Kindle. Those discussing Justin Gawronski's case felt variously about his claim that the deletion had lost his annotations to the novel, but most agreed that his suit lodged the very real objection that Kindle readers are defined most, and most unfortunately, by their *tenuous* ownership of the texts they purchase.^[23] "Have I 'purchased' something that I can have some reasonable expectation of permanent use," wondered one poster, "Or have the TOS dictated that it's only mine as long as I remain a customer in good standing with Amazon (and Amazon doesn't go bankrupt)?" [Postcall 2009]. Contingency scripts this poster's question, marking the discrepancy between purchase and possession. It's not surprising, then, that in the aftermath readers imagined going back to bookstores — as one put it, "Good chance to go to Borders and socialize" [White 2009]. Doing so not only reverses earlier claims that virtual Kindle conversations would enhance readerly interaction but seeks to relocate readerly self-possession in a space at once physical and social.

At the same time there was also a sense that this incident was to be expected, that the fluidity of copyright in the almost-digital moment made possession precisely a risky and fleeting prospect, and that the incident would measure just how long-sighted Amazon was in its understanding of the future it had brought to reading. For these reasons, commentary on the forums — less driven by a personalized disappointment over the author/Amazon pairing that had yielded "Ur" — concerned itself primarily with the company, and in particular, with its management of relations with reader-consumers. The discussion thread titles are on their own revealing for they cite again and again Amazon as an agency possessed with a directness and invisibility of action, the likes of which now highlighted the position from which Amazon had operated as a model of distribution. The perceived discrepancy, a kind of aporia illuminated by Kindle libraries suddenly bereft of their copies of *1984*, prompted readers to discuss what Amazon could or should do to acknowledge and remedy the situation even as they struggled to account for the intrusion in the first place. In all the furor, however, the novel's presence was unremarkable, appearing primarily as an iconic analog for Amazon's dystopic conduct. Caught up in the conversation about an ownership undone, Amazon readers remediated *1984* in the light of their Kindles, doing so by targeting Amazon as a direct and literal referent. If King's fictional Kindle led readers to comment on the corresponding desires Amazon constructed for them, the erasure of *1984* made drawing the parallels between Big Brother and Amazon a fitting, if not necessary, response. In this instance, Kindle-reading had shifted the dynamic through which texts, themselves no less made than things, articulate and critique the conditions of their production. For the turn to analogic reading that these Kindled texts have inspired has as *its* focus what it means for reading to be so newly mediated.

Notes

[1] As Ted Striphas notes at the beginning of "The Abuses of Literacy: Amazon Kindle and the Right to Read," this was a "love affair" Oprah could celebrate with her audience. See *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7:3 (September 2010).

[2] As Robert Mohns notes, the glyphs embedded in the Kindle's cover constitute its "one real concession to design for design's sake [...] It's a brilliant graphic, expressing the evolution of written language ... and the heights Amazon hopes Kindle will achieve" [Mohns 2008].

[3] The first Kindle featured "electronic paper," while more recent Kindles incorporate E-Ink Pearl display. The rhetoric remains the same.

[4] Of these testimonials Steve Kessel, Amazon's vice president of digital media, reported that Amazon had approached numerous authors several months before the launch, returning to film them discussing their reactions to the product. "We don't do a lot of print and other marketing," he observed, "What we wanted to do is put Kindle in the hands of people that we knew were lovers of books to get their reaction to it... Who better to test the experience than authors?" [Rodgers 2007].

[5] One early slogan for the Kindle was "Buy once, read everywhere."

[6] In the discourse of technoculture, I might use the term "automatic," which describes a process that occurs so seamlessly and automatically that it appears as magic. Techies use the term as a rhetorical sneer, a gesture that among other things, opposes technology and magic, and insists that reading must always rely on technology. My thanks to John Laudun for making me aware of the term.

- [7] Thus the Kindle Wi-Fi, targeted at the user who seeks usage tied to wireless capacity at home and elsewhere, or the Kindle 3G, for those who imagine usage in terms parallel to cell phone roaming, or the Kindle app, for usage across platforms and media.
- [8] Since 2009, sampling and reading could also occur on smart mobile phones and on computers using Kindle software; in fall 2010, Amazon announced that readers could now sample first chapters via web browsers. Meanwhile a reader can also look for a book by searching the entire contents of the Kindle Store.
- [9] See Steven Heller, "Who Named the Kindle (and Why)?" [http://www.printmag.com/article/who-named-the-kindle-\(and-why\)](http://www.printmag.com/article/who-named-the-kindle-(and-why)) [Heller]. In this interview, Karen Hibma recalls Voltaire as an inspiration for the device name: "instruction we find in books is like fire. We fetch it from our neighbours, kindle it at home, communicate it to others and it becomes the property of all."
- [10] See also Susan King 2010. In this short interview, Bradbury says that he "was approached three times during the last year by Internet companies wanting to put my books" on an electronic reading device. "I said to Yahoo, 'Prick up your ears and go to hell.' "
- [11] In another post whitearrow writes that "once a book is in ebook format, it's literally impossible to destroy every copy. It can be passed from person to person digitally" [whitearrow 2010b].
- [12] In "Ray Bradbury's Books on Kindle Edition," manco 82 observes how "amazing [it is] that the author of *F-451* would be against something that increases reading" [manco 82 2011].
- [13] W. Cook writes, "But the whole government controls what you can and can't read thing? Vastly easier in a digital world. Does no one remember the 1984/Animal House incident?" [Cook 2010].
- [14] Ron B. Turiya's post leads off this thread [Turiya 2008].
- [15] See Paul Theis' remark that "I find it very ironic that Amazon is out with their new product Kindle" [Theis 2008].
- [16] No burning occurs in "Ur," but it's worth noting that King's 1980 novel *Firestarter* raises, albeit minimally, the relationship between burning and textuality. At the end of the novel, the protagonist Charlie McGee, having escaped from the government agency The Shop, takes her story to the New York offices of *Rolling Stone* magazine in an effort to publicize the events that led to her father's death. In a striking echo of *Fahrenheit 451*, fire consumes everything but the story, which lives on in the person who tells it [King 1980]. My thanks go to Jessica Pressman and Lisa Swanstrom for reminding me of the novel.
- [17] "As only the master himself could, Stephen King does it again and strikes fear of the everyday into our hearts. Reading this on a Kindle (and writing the review on one as well) becomes very disturbing as this modern retelling of the classic 'the monkey's paw' unfolds" [A Customer 2010b].
- [18] "I read this on an iPad using the Amazon Kindle app and can't help but think the experience would have been better using an actual kindle" [John 2011].
- [19] See, for instance, *Cel* [King 2006] and "Word Processor of the Gods" [King 1985].
- [20] John Fulton "Power Reader" remarks that "this Kindle advertising disguised as a short story is neither bad nor boring, but it feels unfinished and hastened" [Fulton 2011]. Meanwhile Heather Bella writes that the product placement "was a little jarring and interrupted the flow of the story" [Bella 2010].
- [21] Amazon managed these operations beginning in 2000 through a partnership with FedEx [Amazon.com 2000]. The temporal urgency of possession drove Potter fans to order 350,020 advance copies of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and the success of that venture prompted Amazon to normalize the procedure for the remaining novels in the series.
- [22] Bezos' apology appeared in the Amazon Kindle forums on 23 July 2009 [Bezos 2009]. The copyright on 1984 has not yet expired in the U.S. The copy of 1984 in question was made available by Mobile Reference.
- [23] For an overview of the incident and Gawronski's suit, see "Student sues Amazon despite finding 1984 notes" [Basten 2009].

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