Escaping the Shallows: Deep Reading's Revival in the Digital Age

David Dowling <david-dowling_at_uiowa_dot_edu>, University of Iowa

Abstract

Among the many reactions against the digital revolution is a humanitarian movement toward long form online reading in collective and social networks. This movement — visible in online book clubs such as "Infinite Summer" and 1book140, websites such as longreads.com, and the trend of blogs-to-books publication — is a reaction against superficial increasingly brief headline-driven Internet news. Called to action by the threat of what critic Jessica Helfand has diagnosed as digital culture's "narrative depravation," the deep reading revival has reclaimed narrative and returned it to the populace, transforming reading into an act of mass collaboration on an unprecedented scale. Despite studies corroborating Nicholas Carr's claim in *The Shallows* (2011) that the distractions of the digital environment are anathema to immersive linear deep reading, online culture has actually enhanced and accelerated the appreciation of longer richer works through its support of "radial reading" as described by Jerome McGann. This essay argues that while the intrinsically distracting virtual geography of the Internet has threatened to diminish the role of textured narrative in our intellectual and social lives, the Web has ironically provided the media for the most salient movements in support of the deep reading it threatens to obliterate.

Introduction

> The great virtue of collective reading projects is that they give us an occasion to work together to help us sustain our attention, to achieve goals we might have thought too difficult to attain working on our own. So let's get going — with a chaos of connections, a blizzard of studied silence, a whirling vortex of intense, collective focus. #OccupyGaddis, Lee Konstantinou, June 2012. [Konstantinou 2012]

A movement in long form and literary journalism is currently gaining traction on the Internet, representing a revival in deep reading whose roots were barely visible in Internet culture just ten years ago. The advent of platforms such as *Longform.org* in 2010 just after the release of the iPad that same year, followed by *Atavist* and *Byliner* in 2011, has inspired a host of vibrant online reading communities. The collaborative mass movement seeking longer more textured writing has risen in direct opposition to the shrinking attention spans associated with the digital revolution that have threatened to diminish, if not utterly annihilate, the status of narrative as the transmitter of core values shared and contested in the culture. Ironically, this crusade to rescue narrative from the distracting ecosystem of the Internet not only has adopted the very medium blamed for its demise, it has done so with a robust "chaos of connections, a blizzard of studied silence, a whirling vortex of intense, collective focus" [Konstantinou 2012]. Testifying to the rich diversity of digital culture and its ubiquitous reach, the Internet has provided both the setting and tools for the counter-revolution to reclaim narrative from the "attention economy" and the commercial distractions of its infrastructure, from Google searches to social media [Briggs 2011, 15].

This essay tracks the most effective responses to the digital revolution's marginalization of print books signaled by the rapid decline since 2002 in all forms of print reading, according to a 2012 Pew study, and the attendant rise of online reading [Kohut 2012]. The shift away from print has suggested for some critics the loss of the literary mind associated with it, as deep immersive reading would appear to have yielded to highly distracting hyperlinked e-book alternatives and increasingly superficial online reading. But deep reading and online reading are not mutually exclusive pursuits; the Internet provides fertile ground for critical immersion in a wide variety of media texts. Surging demand for those digital texts is buoying rather than sinking the publishing industry, as sales rose to twenty-three percent of book publishers' revenue in 2012 for a six percent gain reaching $7.1 billion in revenue that year [Boynton 2013, 129].

Speed and access to rich stores of data characteristic of digital reading, I argue, do not signal the inevitable decline and extinction of serious reflective reading. Indeed, the latest wave of online reading communities has harnessed hypersocial participatory Internet culture for sustained focus on long immersive works. Whereas digital reading has been previously criticized for the haste and superficiality it encourages, the movement toward deep reading has given rise to a new premium on media products' "stickiness," a measure based on how much time a reader spends with a digital text. Platforms such as Longform.org operate according to this model. In 2012, for example, sixty-five percent of *Longform*'s readers completed every 2,000 plus-word story they read [Boynton 2013, 130]. Among the diverse reading communities now populating the digital ecosystem from Harlequin and fantasy serial fiction to classical literature groups, Longform's young mobile and well-educated readers represent a demographic Robert S. Boynton has called "the envy of any advertiser," as fifty percent are under 34, thirty percent read mainly on phones and tablets, and forty-two percent have attended graduate school [Boynton 2013, 130].

This study begins by situating deep reading within the larger critical debate about the impact of digital culture, followed by a segment defining deep and immersive online reading practices. Focus then turns to how deep and immersive reading play out in particular digital reading communities, with emphasis on the signature moves that characterize their social function to support deep immersive reading and foster an appreciation for narrative. Consideration then turns to how such groups constitute social reading as mass collaboration, a process made possible by nature of its deinstitutionalized participatory culture, the subject of the next section. The conclusion argues for the crucial role of narrative immersion in the formation of conscientious moral judgment.

Reading in the Digital Age: The Critical Debate

If Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1852) stands as one of the literary world's great monuments to narrative achievement, the *Moby-Dick* Marathon Reading became a major occasion in popular literary culture to safeguard that achievement along with its print and oratorical origins from the distractions of the digital age. The annual New Bedford, Massachusetts live non-stop relay reading of Melville's novel functioned in 2009 as a "sit-in protest" against electronic media saturation according to Mayor Scott Lange. Although Lange accurately predicted that "You won't hear or see a cell phone," 2009 would actually be the last anti-tech year for the reading, which then transformed from a tacit luddite rite to a full-blown technological feast, complete with giant screens displaying texts, tweets, and forum posts from virtual participants throughout the world discussing live streaming video of readers delivering passages of Melville's epic narrative [Dowling 2010, 38]. In only one year — from 2009 to 2010 — the event went from print-only to a multimedia extravaganza that ironically sacrificed nothing of its original intention: to reaffirm the power of complex narrative and the sanctity of the reader's full immersion in it. Once digital, the novel's global reach expanded the reading community of an event previously limited to its live participants and reported by a few bloggers and local reporters. That reading community has since grown with the proliferation of social media channels in each successive year. Fear of technology's stultifying effects in 2009 proved moot in 2010, as the novel would build new significance through its widening readership.

The spread of live Melville readings online is just one of many examples of the deep reading renaissance now taking place in digital culture. The now thoroughly digitized literary marathon readings reveal how online communities have seized the tools of social media for deep reading, effectively refuting skeptics such as Nicholas Carr (2011) and Jessica Helfand (2001), who insist that new media necessarily has a deleterious effect on narrative, perhaps the most crucial link to our humanity. But old media do not die; they converge, according to Henry Jenkins (2006). In his recent study of

Melville in participatory digital culture, Jenkins points out that "it is simplistic to assume that technologies can support only one mindset" associated with scanning and skimming. It is also "wrong-headed to assume the Internet's intellectual ethic is in direct and total opposition to that associated with books" because, as the history of media suggests, "one medium does not displace another, but rather, each adds a new cultural layer, supporting more diverse ways of communicating, thinking, feeling, and creating than existed before" [Jenkins 2013, 11]. Convergence culture, therefore, is at the core of the latest online movement for deep reading, as it embodies media merging together in an ongoing process at the intersection of technologies, industries, content, and audiences [Jenkins 2013, 13]. Indeed, the online movement in deep reading illustrates precisely how communities can respond to the disruption of an old pattern of consumption — the solitary reading of print — by establishing new participatory cultures across media platforms.

The debate over the fate of deep reading in digital culture has drawn considerable attention recently. The January 2013 issue of the *Publication of the Modern Language Association*, for example, dedicated its department of "The Changing Profession" to research on "Reading in the Digital Age." In it one study concluded that online reading "privileges locating information over deciphering and analyzing more complex text," necessarily making "deep and sustained reading (for work or pleasure) run second to information gathering and short-term distraction" [Baron 2013, 200]. Yet such arguments, as Jim Collins notes, "remain an exercise in nostalgia, grounded in a discourse of inevitable loss." The hypersocialization of online readers, I concur, is not "merely a distraction" but "an entryway into an endless variety of reading communities," a point made stronger in light of how they engage in archiving, sharing, and discussing texts, all edifying behaviors that cultivate both individuality and community [Collins 2013, 212].

7

Within the wider public debate on the impact of the digital revolution, deep reading's fate plays a central role in several highly visible works expressing dissent toward online culture [Carr 2011] [Harkaway 2012] [Lanier 2010] [Bauerlein 2008] [Turkle 2011]. The virulent effects of Internet culture on news media, cognitive function, privacy, retail, and democracy have been cause for alarm from a variety of sectors [Ophir, Nass, and Wagner 2009] [Levy 2007] [Jeong and Fishbein 2007] [Long Form 2011] [Dretzin 2010]. Others have defended the democratic [Shirky 2009] [Gillmor 2006]), cognitive [Johnson 2006], and commercial benefits [Briggs 2011] [Howe 2009] of electronic media. Luddite arguments lament the loss of human idiosyncrasy, intimacy, and sympathy though the marginalization of print as witnessed by the disappearance of brick and mortar bookstores, particularly independent ones, seemingly rendered obsolete by mammoth online superstores such as Amazon [Miller 2007]. Utopians instead extol the virtue of the new avenues for group formation [Shirky 2009] and participatory culture [Jenkins 2006] that have opened up on the Internet.

8

The web would appear the least likely environment to host the revival of deep reading given the findings of several studies of online reading. A 2005 survey of the influence of hypertext on comprehension concluded that "the increased demands of decision-making and visual processing in hypertext impaired reading performance" unlike "traditional linear presentation" [DeStefano and LeFevre 2007, 1639]. Jakob Nielsen's eye-tracking study of web users revealed that the eye follows a pattern resembling the letter F when reading text on websites compared to line-by-line reading encouraged by printed material [Nielsen 2006]. Nielsen's further experiments found that web users actually read in the traditional linear sense very little, spending instead the majority of their time skimming webpages in haste [Nielsen 2008]. Such browsing was indicative of the desire to scan and absorb material quickly, a factor of speed concomitant to the distracting nature of digital culture's new premium placed on "multitasking". Research at Stanford University conducted by Clifford Nass [Ophir, Nass, and Wagner 2009] has contributed convincing scientific data supporting the cognitive losses incurred from multitasking compared to work performed without distraction. His lab's findings have since been verified with alarming implications that suggest a profound blindness to otherwise obvious elements — "invisible gorillas" as Chabris and Simons call them — in our environment when attention is divided [Chabris and Simons 2009].

9

The most successful movements averting such liabilities transcend the unhelpful assumption that digital media is anathema to deep reading by embracing new technology to spark a humanitarian revival in long form and book reading. Technology has not deterministically prevented the formation of deep reading communities while only shrinking units of interpersonal communication and news stories in the online environment. Counter-movements to these trends have gained traction with digital technologies that would otherwise seem capable of only dividing our attention and preventing sustained reading. Indeed, the tools and practices at the heart of that digital culture, particularly tweeting, texting, and

10

following hyperlinks that gloss media texts, are instrumental to the new movement toward sharing and discussing books and long form works. Paradoxically, the core of this countermovement therefore exists primarily online [Staley 2003, 4] [Pham and Sarno 2010, A1]. Whereas the Internet has been blamed for marginalizing and neglecting narrative in obvious ways, it has also nonetheless provided the media for its revival, proving that computer mediated communication (CMC) and short messaging service (SMS) are inert value-free tools that can have either corrosive or revitalizing effects on the culture depending on their use [Harkaway 2012].

Deep Immersive Reading Defined

Nicholas Carr argues in *The Shallows* that linear narrative stripped clean of hypertext and embedded links makes for a more personal and absorbed mode of reading [Carr 2011, 128]. But narrative free of hypertext is not always causally linked to deep, focused reading. In many instances, narrative does not require or even solicit deep reading. Guy Montag's wife Mildred in Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*, for example, is addicted to her daytime TV series she watches on "the parlor walls" precisely because it intellectually anesthetizes her, providing her with a pacifying substitute for books, which her government systematically suppresses by burning any volumes that leak into the culture. Although free of the distractions of hyperlinked data and easy access to social media, her media text is designed for passive consumption. She is drawn to the linear narrative of television soap operas precisely because they do not demand deep complex interpretation and/or inspire discourse with her community. She is immersed, in this sense, but not engaged critically in her subject in a way characterizing deep reading. Marshall McLuhan described such immersion as a feature of "hot" media that encourages emotional rather than intellectual — and thus potentially political — engagement. A high-definition medium like the one that absorbs Bradbury's character represents McLuhan's sense that new media technology could furnish an overabundance of the imaginative stimulus (usually through escapist fantasy) for the reader without challenging them to exercise their own imaginations or grapple with provocative ideological scenarios and propositions [Kovarik 2011, 10] [McLuhan 1965]. Thus narrative can be not only shallow, as the facile episodes of electronic home entertainment in Bradbury's dystopia suggest. Narrative can also be socially corrosive since "Millie" Montag has in effect substituted the fictional figures on her parlor wall for the real ones who actually populate her life.

The neutralizing asocial effects of the media immersion envisioned by Bradbury and McLuhan are symptomatic of a culture deprived of online social media. The digital ecology has enabled immersive reading — in which the consumer is fully absorbed in a work's characters, scenes and narrative — to be intellectually empowering. My use of "deep reading" here denotes analysis and critique, whereas "immersion" suggests a completeness of experience. Depth does not necessitate immersion; deep reading can occur with simple texts and vice-versa. These are not always mutually dependent categories, as many instances illustrate. Indeed, what readers actually do in their participation with texts reflects an expansive heterogeneous range of online practices marked by a willingness to dive deeply into a wide array of texts.

The online reading communities I examine tend to engage in both deep reading and immersion in the extreme. Internet readers of immersive narrative reflect a completeness of experience that inspires rather than silences discussion, draws out rather than erases the individual reading experience, and socializes rather than isolates the pastime of media consumption. This socializing tendency renders a morally conscientious reading experience. Narrative is particularly effective in driving that social exchange of analysis and critique because it humanizes online news media's notoriously brief, abstract, and impersonal standard mode of expression. Set in the context of long form narrative, deep immersive reading becomes more provocative for readers, inspiring more nuanced and serious consideration of any given set of events or ideological circumstances superficially skimmed by traditional headline-driven news. As discussed in the conclusion, narrative becomes necessary for making moral judgments.

The concept of the "linear" text bears directly on critical presumptions about deep and immersive reading. A key assumption in Carr's [Carr 2011] argument, for example, privileges linear narrative of the sort associated with cause-effect realistic fiction of the Victorian era, as his favorite examples in *The Shallows* tend to be Charles Dickens and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Yet he also includes modernist James Joyce, noting that "nonlinear narrative" by writers like William Burroughs "would have been unthinkable without the artists' presumption of attentive patient readers." Privileging print, he argues that "when transcribed to a page, a stream of consciousness becomes literary and linear"

[Carr 2011, 76]. But Burroughs in print is just as nonlinear as Burroughs online. Hypertextual links would enable rather than disable fluent readings of his enigmatic and densely allusive idiosyncratic texts. Thus print does not automatically make all texts more linear and thus more literary and deep. Indeed, what distinguishes so many texts embraced by online reading communities is precisely their nonlinearity, their narrative tendency to yield to enriching diversions or downright distractions and their capacity to shatter artificial distinctions between high and low cultural products.

Surges in Reader Demand for Digital Texts

Efforts to establish and integrate long form works into the digital world abound. Social media directly serves the revival of deep reading in the area of politics. Social media mitigated by SMS are tools primarily concerned with expressing opinions; when users aggregate opinions they create public opinion. Traditionally public opinion has been measured by surveys (online, telephone, face-to-face), but now social media provides a new way to learn about politics, read the news and connect with others through a process now referred to as social reading available in forms such as Facebook's News-Apps Center [Facebook 2012]. It enables users to select from options and share news videos and stories with Facebook friends while also seeing what those friends are reading and watching. *The Washington Post* and NBC News have applications with hundreds of thousands of followers. The Huffington Post Social Reading App socializes the reading experience by enabling readers to share stories, start conversations, and keep abreast of their friends' reading. Mashable's mission is to empower people by spreading knowledge of social media and technology, and has become the largest independent news source dedicated to covering digital culture, social media and technology. The Hill Social Reader provides news inside the beltway and is created by The Hill, a congressional newspaper that publishes daily when Congress is in session, with a special focus on business and lobbying, political campaigns and events on Capitol Hill.

15

The most spectacular illustration of online political news consumers demanding in-depth reading followed the November 2012 presidential election. Sales skyrocketed for Nate Silver's *The Signal and the Noise* (2012) based on his *New York Times* blog, *fivethirtyeight*, which predicted an Obama landslide months before it occurred. Sales of Silver's book increased 850% in one day, making it the second bestselling title on Amazon at the time [Silver 2012] [Isidore 2012]. As with Curt Brown, long complex works by journalists and bloggers such as Silver go viral when readers can access and recommend these titles easily through social media. Bloggers are increasingly motivated by the desire to publish their entire blogs as books [Pedersen 2009].

16

As Silvers's success illustrates, the way to create demand for "after broadcast sales" of blogs as books and television shows as DVDs is "through complexity," according to Lawrence Lessig [Lessig 2008, 94]. Complexity in visual media trafficking in narrative has also been steadily rising for the last half century. Plots of television shows have become increasingly complex and demanding, not simpler, since the 1950s [Johnson 2006, 27]. Because viewers are not likely to grasp in one viewing the full range of critical and narrative complexity of today's television shows, viewers thus have reason to watch them again by purchasing the DVD for repeated viewing. David Foster Wallace was a notorious *X-Files* fan for precisely this reason and *The Wire* has won scholarly praise for the current generation just as *Twin Peaks* did for the prior one. Many narratively rich cultural products warrant such "follow-on consumption" [Lessig 2008, 94]. Most who attend the aforementioned New Bedford *Moby-Dick* Marathon reading, for example, are savoring in a live format a work they have read many times as with a Beethoven symphony [Dowling 2010, 121]. Serial fiction writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Harriet Beecher Stowe published their stories in weekly segments one chapter at a time to an audience that expected it to be available for purchase to re-reread after its periodical run in bound novel form. Time bound, one-time reading was not enough for mid-nineteenth century readers. The same principle holds true in today's market.

17

Online Readers as Radial Readers

Long form journalism's resurgence through both blogs and social media (which feed into print and e-books) enriches and deepens the culture of digital identity, particularly the conventions of personal expression in social media. As social reading increasingly becomes a means of shaping online identity, it provides a more sophisticated extension of self-presentation commonly found on Facebook. The sharing of reading can raise the stakes of personal profiling beyond

18

how "social networking site users typically interpret cues deposited in member profiles, such as messages on Facebook 'walls' or messages or pictures of member friends to make inferences about the member's character" [Papacharissi 2009, 203] [Walther 2008, 28–49]. So while social reading serves user demand for the circulation of readings, it also has the effect of showcasing reading tastes as a richer more sophisticated expression of one's personal profile. Prior to social reading the construction of identity on Facebook has been rigidly confined to a set of conventions that purport to express individuality, but only on a superficial and often pretentious level. Social reading, furthermore, offers the online world a profile more reflective of one's bookshelf — providing a portrait through intellectual, political, and aesthetic interests — reaching well beyond the limited milieu of requisite photos showcasing one's children, spouse, and vacation along with humorous links or witty quotes that have become the social norm for Facebook users. Recent research indicates the "most popular features of Facebook include its photo-sharing abilities" [Papacharissi 2009, 204], a feature now used for book-sharing and social reading. Indeed, the development of social reading has been fueled by its adaptability to the contributions of "applications that work with the open source foundation of the website, constantly refreshing and rejuvenating content" [Papacharissi 2009, 204] which now increasingly includes e-books and long form journalism. The Facebook community is currently embracing the once isolated factions of long form aficionados and bibliophiles. Although self-presentation online and impression management form a common point of interest in recent research, social reading as a measure of the surging demand for long form reading has received less attention.

Due to the ease with which such social reading networks can be formed online, works of 2,000 or more words that engage in learned controversy or delve into historical topics relevant to contemporary issues actually lend themselves well to the Internet. With its abundance of easily accessed data through hyperlinks, the Internet enhances "radial reading," Jerome McGann's concept which he contrasts with "linear reading" [McGann 1991, 113]. Linear reading, particularly the sort that disempowers the reader as noted by Moody [Moody 2012], is at odds with varieties of spatial and radial reading that instead are more in tune with current notions of narrative characterized by fragmented diverse genres alluding to and intersecting with interior consciousness of self and community. McGann explains that "radial reading involves decoding one or more of the contexts that interpenetrate the scripted and physical text" [McGann 1991, 113]. In this sense, "the reading eye does not move only in a linear direction" [McGann 1991, 113]. Complex material encourages radial reading because it "necessitates some kind of abstraction from what appears most immediately," as McGann observes [McGann 1991, 113]. "The person who temporarily stops 'reading' to look up the meaning of a word is properly an *emblem* of radial reading because that kind of 'radial' operation is repeatedly taking place even while one remains absorbed with a text" [McGann 1991, 113]. Radial reading has never been so rich and rewarding as in the context of the online ecosystem, with its readily available search engines and social media tools. SMS drives such radial reading in an apparent paradox in which brief messaging can aid rather than truncate deep understandings and experiences of longer texts, leading to further interaction among readers through tools such as email that allow for longer nuanced expression.

Works that encourage online debate and civic dialogue enact precisely this pattern, as readers delve deep within the text while also moving outward into now readily available online data networks. "Emily Dickinson tells us that 'there is no frigate like a book' in order to remind us that reading sends us away from and within the books we enter" [McGann 1991, 113]. It is important to note that deep reading that sends us away from the text in order to burrow deeper into it, as McGann explains, is far more critically engaged than the escapist experience of Bradbury's Mildred Montag of *Fahrenheit 451*. Interestingly, Harlequin romance readers, today's corollary to Mildred, are hardly so escapist, but are increasingly active in reading community forums of exchange that not only invite socially and politically engaged online discussions, but also encourage professional development, catering directly to this active digital generation of the formerly passive audience personified by Bradbury's Mildred. Indeed, Harlequin's "Community Home" offered in early 2014 "some great reading challenges" for "aspiring authors" who are encouraged to utilize "the information, support, and advice to be found on our writing forums." Harlequin's rebranding, "Entertain, Enrich, Inspire," is consonant with the active social nature of its thriving online reading community countering older tendencies toward isolation and passivity associated with paperback romance consumption. The publisher encourages readers to enter this personalized community through a link suggesting, "Introduce Yourself Here" [Harlequin 2014]. This participatory culture that fosters critical engagement is ideally suited to the online world because it encourages and enables not only the "radial" consultation with other outside data — "information, support, advice" — in support of the reading, but utilizes that basis

of enhanced knowledge for informed and learned dialogue [Harlequin 2014]. Both popular romance fiction and literary polyvalent texts are not only "linguistic and spatial, but multiple and interactive as well"; they are hypertextual, just as the richest poetry and prose tend be [Redman 1997, 142]. Such works demand explication and interrogation now easily accessible on the Internet through the ready consultation with others willing to share their knowledge and expertise.

Internet culture has spawned this new form of immersive radial reading as witnessed in the heterogeneity of readership on such platforms as *BookTalk.org*, *LitLovers: A Well-Read Online Community*, and *onlinebookclub.org*. *Shelfari*, *LibraryThing*, and *Goodreads* that emphasize archiving, connecting readers based on shared titles on their virtual bookshelves. *LibraryThing*'s forum system, Talk, enables users to see conversations occurring in all groups or just their own. Discussion here can be intensely specialized, as in one thread about Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which freely dovetails into contemporary scientific books, as seen in the contribution of a reader called southernbooklady. In response to the assertion that "the genetic clock can be tracked to show the split between the two species ca. 3 million years ago," she references the contemporary book, *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic*, for its treatment of how "genetics are used to trace the evolution of not just pathogens, but the way pathogens become integrated into the lifecycle of hosts," particularly in "different strains of HIV," a pattern evocative of "the genetic history of various flu viruses" which she notes places evolution into proper perspective [LibraryThing 2013]. Far from becoming untethered by unsupported assertions and doctrinaire soap-box rants one might expect from an online discussion of evolution, this discussion and others like it remain steeped in such useful data and allusions, all of which serves the purpose of illuminating the core meanings and contexts of the text at hand, in this case, Darwin. Talk on *LibraryThing* thus represents complex movement back and forth between the text, other texts, SMS with other readers (texting, tweeting, social networking, and emailing), and Web searches. The key is that engaged critical readers truly immersed in the process will return to the text, rather than exiting into an endless series of distractions, one begetting the next, which the Internet has been notorious for encouraging. Thus Internet culture has extended the dialogic nature of critical reading. This revises Carr's binary expressed in his metaphor for deep reading as deep sea diving and Internet reading as frenetic jet skiing [Carr 2011, 7]). The immersive radial reading of expressive texts dives deeper into subjects with tools of illumination retrieved at the surface rather than flitting mindlessly only on the surface, the very nature of *surf*ing, according to more common Internet reading practices.

In an online discussion of *Outlander* in #1book140, such radial reading was on display. Twitter, in this case, served as the medium through which to share a revealing link to a *Books and Writers Community* post, offering data on how the original marketing plan for the text impacted its genre, especially its use of conventions typically found in romances. "Melissa" tweeted, "Any thoughts on the wedding? A romance starting with a forced marriage didn't sit well but maybe was historically accurate?" to which "Sandy" replied: "Marriage is a practical solution — protects Claire [the protagonist] from BJR, keeps Jamie from leading the clan. Not a traditional romance." Melissa registered her disappointment, "True, but was hoping for something more romantic in a romance novel. I'm enjoying their post-wedding courtship more." This tweet inspired Sandy to share the link to the *Books and Writers Community* forum detailing how marketing plans for the book shaped its blending of genre conventions, a contextual clue tapping into the book trade's larger industrial motives as an explanation for the author's aesthetic choice. Sandy's tweet, "Here's an explanation from @Writer_DG on why Outlander was originally marketed as a romance," offered the link to data that, Melissa acknowledged, had enriched her reading experience: "Thanks for the info about Outlander. Didn't know much about it until I decided to do #1book140" [#1book140 2014]. The Twitter exchange was fruitful and indeed drove directly at the heart of what makes *Outlander* author Diana Gabaldon so interesting: her willingness to blend genres from historical fiction to mystery to science fiction to fantasy. This source of knowledge about the text enlightened the reader, while spreading the conversation to a separate but related online reading community. Elsewhere on #1book140, readers credit their community for encouraging them for concentrating their attention. On 11 February 2014, jompoi, for example, tweeted that "#1book140 helps me learn 2 appreciate different genres, books' merits and flaws," thanking the reading community for helping to sustain his attention and interest. "I've completed every #1book140 selection, and will do so with this one as well," he said, allowing that "otherwise I would have quit after 100 pages or so" [#1book140 2014].

Such discussions reveal how reading communities can use the web to increase users' intelligence through speed and efficiency without neglecting a more time-honored understanding of intelligence measured by depth of thought.

Collaboration among *Outlander* readers places into proper perspective findings suggesting cognitive effects of the massive increase in Internet use in the last decade include a decline in "deep processing" that underpins "mindful knowledge acquisition, inductive analysis, critical thinking, imagination, and reflection" [Greenfield 2009, 70]. Such reading communities dispel fears that browsing, scanning and skimming would eliminate the capacity to immerse oneself in a longer work of writing, and commit a level of concentration that exerts control over the text rather than succumbing to the whim of clicking on the next attractive hyperlink or banner advertisement. With each new media product, the Internet will continue to spawn "new forms of 'reading'…as users 'power browse' horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts going for quick wins" in order to adapt to those new modalities [Liu 2005, 700–12]. Such browsing and scanning can co-exist with deep reading and even enhance it, as the speed with which the reader's shared link about *Outlander*'s genre conventions attests. Ironically, the culture of distraction in which newspaper sections like the *Boston Globe*'s "Short Takes" have become staples in most daily print and online formats has only encouraged readers to share such material through CMC and SMS to enrich their collective deep reading. The power of the Internet to scatter attention becomes the very resource providing the tools for this counter-revolution.

Online Social Reading as Mass Collaboration

#OccupyGaddis is a reading group whose stated purpose is to discuss William Gaddis's *J.R.*, "a book about our fragmented attention and a book designed to tax our capacity to pay attention — to demand higher and deeper levels of attention from us — in a world imagined to be (both in 1975 and today) a kind of conspiracy to keep us from focusing on what is right in front of us" [Konstantinou 2012]. The large online reading group recently assembled through Twitter and message boards to peruse Gaddis's exceptionally difficult and complex novel. Lee Konstantinou [Konstantinou 2012], the group's founder, called the project #OccupyGaddis invoking a spirit of protest against the fragmentation and alienation of digital culture. His project was inspired by the *New Yorker* article on Gaddis by Jonathan Franzen, "Mr. Difficult," which alerted him to the unsalable yet brilliant 976-page narrative sprawl. Konstantinou's hypothesis was that, confined to the medium of print and offline discussion, the novel's value remained hidden from readers. They lacked what the Internet would provide: access to each other and rich stores of data to gloss the text and unleash its full significance. Once the online public had disintermediated access to it, the success of the group would represent a form of protest against the most distracting reading environment in media history, ironically proving that digital ecosystem conducive to collective deep reading. Exhorting the readers, he wrote, "the great virtue of collective reading projects is that they give us occasion to work together to help us sustain our attention, to achieve goals we might have thought too difficult to attain working on our own" [Konstantinou 2012].

[24]

The inspiration to launch the project on the web came from the online reading of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* by a group who called their undertaking of his unwieldy and profound novel from June through August of the year the author passed away "Infinite Summer" [Coscarelli 2009]. This movement's taking place online and not live and in print suggests the compatibility of serious reading discussions with popular social media. Jim Collins (2010) asks why serious literary work should be understood as *competing* with the Internet and popular entertainment. Instead, he suggests reframing the question in a way that does not pit literary reading against popular reading in an antagonist relation, considering instead "how the experience of serious literary work [has] become popular visual entertainment" [Collins 2010, 17]. Konstantinou's experiment illustrates precisely the interdependence of mass media and literary reading illuminating the "crucial associated tastes" conjoining "literary experiences…no longer restricted to the solitary act of reading a book" [Collins 2010, 17]. "Infinite Summer," which took place summer of 2009, has found a lively following, further indicating the type of interest in more sustained reading experiences than the Internet typically offers, while also capitalizing on the networking capacity of social media.

[25]

When entering the "Infinite Summer" message board, one is immediately struck by a sense that reading passively for escapist entertainment is anathema to the objective of this online community, signified by the notice at the top of the screen in red: "There are NO spoiler restrictions in this forum" [Infinite Summer 2009]. "Infinite Summer" readers were unleashed from such concerns about spoiling the entertainment of the uninitiated, and thus could delve into the full scale of interconnected scene sequences and foreshadowing in *Infinite Jest*'s sophisticated narrative structure. Online Wallace readers were thus not only analytically inclined on the forum, their critical impulse had them thinking in terms of the book within the context of its convergence across multiple media platforms. One of the 154 topics introduced by

[26]

readers on the forum, for example, received 41 replies to a post on "Movie Adaptations of *Infinite Jest.*" The critical discussion that ensued ranged from speculation about which directors could possibly pull off such a feat — David Lynch, Terry Gilliam, and the Coen Brothers topped the list — in terms of the resonance of their aesthetic with that of Wallace's, a concern problematized by the translation of his seemingly unfilmable and unwieldy narrative into a motion picture. The difficulty of such a project raised the question of what specifically in Wallace's novel could speak to its essence on film, releasing a tide of suggestions on which parts of the novel were indispensible and which could be omitted. Indeed, the seemingly profound and intractable incompatibility between Wallace's work and the medium of film presented readers with a conceptual challenge they embraced as an occasion to immerse themselves in the finer points of the novel. One discussant, "Doubtful Geste," for example noted, "Lynch seems to find his greatest pleasure and/or solace in rushing towards a certain extreme surrealism and individual obsession that DFW is trying to make sure (his characters) are NOT lost in, to make sure (his characters) find ways to reconnect/remain invested in community and personal connection" [Infinite Summer 2009].

The "Infinite Summer" forum not only engaged readers in broader critical considerations of the translation of Wallace's aesthetic across media and in the hands of other cultural producers. It also featured discussion reflecting an appreciation for Wallace's linguistic brushstrokes at the sentence level. Those puzzling over the tone of a scene or the logic of the novel's discordant plot sequencing received feedback clarifying the text and drawing them into the conversation's broader concerns. One reader, "TIBBIT," wonders why Wallace mocks the AA gathering and men's meetings the character Hal attends, and learns from another reader that "This scene is hilarious and painful at the same time, like so much of the novel. I think the book is a tragedy, so [it is tragic] that Hal almost makes it to a meeting where he can connect with others, but ends up in the wrong place at the wrong time, which turns out to be a big unhelpful joke" [Infinite Summer 2009]. The irony of this comment is that *it* comes in the context of a group discussion among participants conjoined by a common interest who would otherwise be strangers, not unlike the meetings Hal attends. Only this online gathering, as the post and its response demonstrate, is both functional and mutually edifying. The forum's own eccentric posts tending toward inadvertent self-parody or disruption of the community's analytic bent are met with the democratic process known as the non-reply. [27]

The default behavior of "Infinite Summer" members is the facilitation of deeper understandings of Wallace's work and its broader significance. Discussion may be sprawling, but it touches base with keynotes from the text with regularity. Retyping passages for readers who do not have immediate access to the text is common practice. For example, one reader's request for "the text of the section where Himself reminisces about 'how [he] first became interested in annulation'" was met by another, Robbi60, who dutifully retyped the lengthy multi-paragraph excerpt and posted it immediately from Italy. Such facilitation of material simultaneously breaks down the isolating barriers of reading alone on print, and opens channels of discussion driven by a shared desire to engage critically with Wallace's novel. [28]

The free flow between print and digital media in online book communities such as "Infinite Summer" illustrates Jeff Howe's assertion that "conventions, like the 'novel,' the 'book' and even the very act of reading are no more immutable than language itself" [Howe 2012]. Not only is deep reading and the book thriving in our culture, the very engine driving their renaissance ironically is the web itself. "A book club that meets virtually on the Internet represents something wholly new in literary culture: reading as an act of mass collaboration" [Howe 2012]. To communicate one's thoughts on difficult and richly crafted works through a truncated medium like Twitter would appear to defeat the purpose. Yet Twitter is just one step in an elaborate transmedia chain in which "bookies" "copy passages off their iPads, Nooks and Kindles and then paste them into tweets before toggling back to their texts. They post longer comments to their Facebook accounts. They create Google maps that display the GPS coordinates of where individual members are reading" [Howe 2012]. CMC and SMS typical of such reading groups embodies a "language and media ideology that emphasizes the fluidity and instability" of typographic expression [Soffer 2012, 1105]. The wider cultural movement toward deep reading and long form texts paradoxically "is well-integrated in the postmodern trends that provide ideological justification for undermining rigid, modernist linguistic rules" [Soffer 2012, 1105]. 1book140, a month-long meeting of readers who collectively choose a book to read from one announced genre, has brought new life to "reading, the original 'lean back' occupation" [Howe 2012]. [29]

Deinstitutionalization and Participatory Culture

This dynamic of reading as an act of mass collaboration suggests a grass roots movement like those defined in Clay Shirky's defense of the Internet's democratic function to offer a space for organization without the hegemonic bureaucratic features of formal organizations [Shirky 2009]. The movement away from institutionalization, he argues, has enabled a greater degree of such mass collaboration in which "we can do things for strangers who do things for us at low enough cost to make that kind of behavior attractive" [Shirky 2009, 127]. Jurgen Habermas's comments are helpful here in describing the processes of deinstitutionalization, which help explain this as a type of romantic reaction against the development of capitalism. Indeed, the proliferation of online commerce has accelerated, reduced, and dehumanized interpersonal communication during the digital revolution, just as the mechanization of culture during the nineteenth century increasingly calibrated and automated everyday labor and leisure life. Romantic thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle rebelled against the mechanization of culture to defend and retrieve humanity they felt was lost in rigid Lockean rationality. Habermas argues that the public sphere is incapable of providing meaningful concrete confirmation of social structures and their subjective identities within them [Habermas 1974]. The anthropological protest against modernity is inclined toward that which is presumably more real. For Andrew Jackson, this was specie, or hard currency. For Ralph Waldo Emerson, this was intuition and nature. For the rising mass of online deep readers, this is textured narrative.

Social theorist Arnold Gehlen has also argued that deinstitutionalization occurs when normative codes for social behavior lose their plausibility [Turner 2001, 95]. We are in an era in which the conventions of online communication are no longer agreeable with a populace demanding more sophisticated material. This brings the taken-for-granted background structure into the foreground, where institutions are self-consciously rearranged. Nineteenth century collectives such as Brook Farm represented precisely such a gesture, in which normative codes of acquisitive behavior were radically reconceived in communal living. Emerson did the same with conventional codes of vocational expectations. Today, the online collectivization of intellectuals offers an escape from the shallows of Internet culture. Gehlen identifies a salient feature of modernity in that the foreground of choice is growing, while the background pattern of stable, reliable institutions diminishes [Turner 2001, 95]. The Internet — with its unlimited number of reading communities now making themselves known to each other — has radically proliferated choice and in the process has unleashed the culture from the institutions that formerly regulated intellectual exchange.

Rebellion against the institutionalization of technology works to liberate the culture to use the technology for its own self-determined aims. In *The Blind Giant: Being Human in the Digital World* (2012), Nick Harkaway voices a similar optimistic view of new media, and the future of digital reading. Although he expresses his disdain for Google, describing it as "a faith-based technocapitalist entry," a point Carr also expands on convincingly, Harkaway concludes that we are responsible for the world that technology helps us create: technology is an instrument, not an agent. The enemy, he assures us, is our ignorance, not software. Harkaway is particularly critical, however, of Google's insistence on digitizing the world's books, a concern which intersects significantly with the pattern of the Internet's development into the medium that subsumes all other media [Harkaway 2012]. The effect on books, once digitized, directly bears an effect on narrative. Texts become broken up, mixed and spread around, in a realization of the precepts of mashup theory. Once digitized, books become subjected to "Collage, montage, sampling or remix practices" that borrow fragments "through alteration, manipulation, [and] recombination" to make a whole new piece, in which "the sources of origin may still be identifiable yet not perceived as the original version" [Sonvilla-Weiss 2010, 9]. This is a process by which different information is recombined without changing the original source of information, one evolving as a unique combination of the conversational media known as user-generated content and mass media platforms. Will remix culture destroy narrative as we know it?

Twentieth century authors Jorge Luis Borges and Ray Bradbury have argued through their imaginative writing that, although under the significant pressure of the changing media climate, the books and their libraries will survive. Before them, Washington Irving makes precisely this claim in "The Mutability of Literature," a story in his famous *Sketch Book* published in 1820 in which the protagonist snooping through a library of dusty old tomes is accosted by one particular volume that speaks back to him. The book tells of his concern for being lost into obsolescence at the hands of the popular presses and cheap literature at the dawning of the dime novel and the penny press in publishing history. In Borges's "Library of Babel," books are lost in their exponential proliferation in an endless archive; in Ray Bradbury's

Fahrenheit 451, books undergo a stripping down to factoids and an ultimate replacement by screens. Both are prophetic of our current situation with the Web's limitless capacity to create more text than anyone could ever assimilate in a lifetime and in today's culture's inclination not to preserve but to break down, scatter and recombine text. However, the Web's unlimited size leaves enough room for both the sacred and the profane, for both superficial diversion and serious long form works.

Restoring Narrative through the Internet

The replacement of print books with e-books has raised questions of the electronic text's impact on narrative. E-books render the reader, according to Rick Moody, "the passive recipient of some narrative bludgeoning," making devices such as the Kindle "seem as heart-warming as an electro-stimulator" because they disincline users from moving back and forth through the text [Moody 2012]. The print book, he contends, instead radically empowers the reader because it constitutes "a physical object you can come at in completely different ways" [Moody 2012]. Similarly, Ted Striphas rejects the argument that print books are anachronistic artifacts "whose longevity only hampers our achieving a divine digital future" [Striphas 2009, 4]. According to Jenkins's concept of convergence in which new media do not replace old media but coalesce with and interdepend on them, print books "hold a deep and abiding history that belong in and to our own age" every bit as much as "so-called cutting edge technologies" such as iPad and Kindle [Striphas 2009, 4]. Critics have concurred that the publishing industry is undergoing an e-revolution, but the question of its effect on narrative and reading experience is subject to debate. If "it will do society little good to waste time lamenting, because e-books are here to stay" [Carreiro 2010, 220], how have readers responded to the social dimension of digital reading's new interactive potential? The counter-revolution under way is not just technological, but a very human movement to recapture what the digital age has threatened to rob readers of: the power of the immersive deep reading in long form narrative. Because its dialectic is rich enough to accommodate such a humanitarian movement, the Internet can provide the medium to inspire its own counter-revolution.

A new appreciation for narrative has developed in response to the loss of sustained reading on the Internet. Alexander Chee's "I, Reader," a 2010 personal essay in the *Morning News*, laments the deterioration of deep reading in our culture. He particularly regrets the moral detachment that comes of brief, quick-hitting news stories, which for him developed into a malaise of civic apathy. He finds a remedy for this moral conundrum of consuming news in vast quantities but so superficially and quickly as to inspire apathy rather than compassion and civic activism. Immersion in longer works made Chee [Chee 2010], as it does for many others now visible online, care again about the social consequences of the news. Susan Sontag has similarly found that "By presenting us with a limitless number of nonstop stories," a symptom of their increasing brevity and superficiality, "the narratives that the media relate — the consumption of which has so dramatically cut into the time the educated public once devoted to reading — offer a lesson in amorality and detachment that is antithetical to the one embodied by the enterprise of the novel" [Sontag 2007, 217]. The loss of immersion in narrative comes with the loss of morality.

The need to reclaim the conscientious moral frame of mind deep reading encourages has indeed been a source of motivation behind the movement for longer and more sophisticated material on the Internet. Carr's measure of the maladies brought by Internet culture serves as a method of understanding the source of discontent with superficial content that has sparked the current deep reading movement. McGann's more nuanced sense of reading proves a digital humanities culture is indeed viable. But if the message shapes the medium, radial reading online must necessarily be different from its print counterpart. If so, then how has narrative changed in this new media environment? Has digital deep reading altered narrative as we know it? The online revolt against narrative depravation had been brewing since 2001, roughly five years after the Internet rose to prominence. At that stage, long reading online itself was entirely nascent or embryonic at best, as early signs of backlash and sharp criticism prevailed ahead of the concerted mass collaborative social reading movements currently under way. Like most social movements, its beginnings were marked by protest and followed by organization and mobilization. Among the first questions raised at this time addressed the fate of narrative in the digital age. Design critic Jessica Helfand, for example, asked, "what happens when a story becomes infinitely changeable?" How can "we design for such perpetual unpredictable interruption in a culture in which linear parameters are gone?" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 122]. If, as McGann has argued, the reading of poetry and literary prose has always been radial rather than linear long before the Internet, it certainly has become

more externally referential and polyvalent through online hypertext. We see this not only in literary texts, but also in mainstream popular fiction, music, gaming, film, and graphic novel forums on the Internet. Television shows, like *American Idol*, as Jenkins [Jenkins 2006] demonstrates, have engendered online followings that have outpaced their own producers (and even reviewers as in the case of the *Twin Peaks* series) with their capacity to critically interpret the shows with context and analysis that has enabled them to predict and thus "spoil" upcoming episodes. McGann's formula should apply not only to the literary text, but to any media text — from Melville to the World Wrestling Entertainment — whose audience has the appetite and intensity to make it the focal point of serious online discussion. Here we might learn from Chee that what is needed in such a text ideal for deep immersive reading is not necessarily high art, or canonized literature, but one that lends itself to exploration unlike the facile Internet news snippets designed to deflect and diffuse serious reflection, much less foster it. Horse_ebooks gives a sense of the diversity of media texts capable of inspiring thoughtful, extensive conversation on its strangely poetic non sequiturs, a wildly popular platform that emerged from attempts to avoid spam while marketing e-books through the unlikely medium of Twitter. Equal parts online prank and cryptic digital performance art, Horse_ebooks has inspired extensive witty self-reflexive philosophical commentary in blogs and forums. The inspiration for fan art and fiction, Horse_ebooks has amassed 200,000 followers in 2013, signaling a milestone in participatory culture on the web. It also signals a landmark in the diversity of media texts — in this case Tweets — that can function like literary texts for discussion.

When the Internet was in its infancy in 2001, there was concern that computer culture would disenfranchise not only written but visual narrative. The advent of the consumer electronics industry, Helfand argued, led to a neglect of "filmic storytelling" and the "power of visual narrative," which had yielded to an "interactive screen-based media" characterized by a "reductive pictorial syntax" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 120]. Such compromised syntax hampered the storytelling power that Michael S. Malone now promotes as the engine of success in the era of new media. "The edge will go to those institutions," he argues, "that can effectively employ imagination, metaphor, and most of all, storytelling" [Malone 2012]. This is not storytelling in the sense of creative writing, although his purview is inclusive of that form, but "Twenty-first century story telling: multimedia, mass customizable, portable and scalable, drawing upon the myths and archetypes of the ancient world, on ethics, and upon a deep understanding of human nature and even religious faith" [Malone 2012]. Helfand similarly understood that successful "interaction design is not only information design" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 121]. Writing in 2001, she accurately predicted more than a decade ago that "as richer more complex content finds its way into the electronic sphere" design will demand "more comprehensive thinking that involves cognitive, spatial, and ergonomic considerations" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 121]. But even beyond more attention to graphic and directional clarity, the demand will only truly be met through the force of narrative. "Like the filmic model," according to Helfand, "successful visual communication will become critically dependent on our understanding of narrative, of audience, and of drama" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 121]. Eleven years later Malone would draw precisely the same conclusion. "The demand" for narrative excellence is there, but the "question is whether the traditional humanities can furnish the supply," he urges, invoking the economic forces driving this current trend [Malone 2012]. As code writing and hardware engineering become more insular and less accessible, the challenge now lies in making a product's storytelling capacity robust and indispensible. As Steven Jobs remarked, "It is in Apple's DNA that technology alone is not enough — it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that makes our heart sing" [Dediu 2012].

At the heart of the humanities, of course, is Aristotle, the figure of ancient philosophy, whose own notion of storytelling is now in radical flux given the demands placed upon it from online media. This is a situation in which "each viewer becomes the *de facto* storyteller," which raises the question: "how do we maintain the integrity of authorship, the focus of plot, the lyrical cadences of a storyteller's voice and vision and point of view?" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 122] Has this fragmentation eventuated in our narrative depravation, the malady Helfand identifies with shortening attention spans and online news stories? Conversely, can this pattern be understood as enriching diversification, an opening of the process of production of mass media to the populace? Instead of lamenting "the emergence of a kind of shared authorship in which the linear parameters of classical narrative structure no longer apply" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 122], an opportunity for a narrative renaissance has been seized and is currently under way. Indeed, this is an opportunity to transform the benefits of radial reading into a richer more immersive experience. The challenge is to devise new methods for "visualizing stories in multiple layers, for designing with multiple points of entry" [Helfand and

Maeda 2001, 123]. For film, that challenge has been met by such companies as Media Storm, Brian Storm's platform for multimedia long form documentary investigative journalism.

The Internet has proven to be a large enough environment to both threaten and provide the means of support for a thriving narrative culture. According to Henry Jenkins's formulation, "participatory culture is one where there are relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, where there is strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others, where there is some form of informal mentorship whereby what is known by experienced community members is passed on to novices" [Jenkins 2010, 98], a feature typical of the best and most vibrant online social dynamics. At its most powerful, participatory culture is one in which "each member believes their contributions matter" making "each member feel some degree of social connection to each other" [Jenkins 2010, 98]. Indeed, this online environment encourages commentary from readers who do not belittle or abridge narratives such as Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and Gaddis's *J.R.* but diversify and democratize them. Longer works are enjoying a resurgence of interest precisely because readers are now more capable than ever to participate in the narratives themselves by demonstrating through online social reading culture precisely how they intersect with and make meaning of their own life stories. Of course, this is no utopia, and strands of the coarse underside of such unrestrained access remain in those who indulge in an "ill-defined, anything goes expressionism," as Helfand describes it, "messy and myopic, part stand-up comedy and part soapbox-proselytizing" [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 91]. But most online readers, whether formally assembled in an announced discussion of one text, or informally engaging in an organic exchange over a long narrative work, are not merely solipsistic and ignorant of public issues. To the contrary, there is a considerable standard for accuracy and mutual support in the social matrix of online reading discussion. Any "outpouring of unedited thoughts" in serious long form online discussions tends to receive direction support and focus from others [Helfand and Maeda 2001, 92] [Jenkins 2006].

Toward a Digital Reading Class

The increasing interest in deep reading of such long form works online calls into question the pessimism of some critics who have proclaimed the death of the book in the digital age. As Mark Twain would say, reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated. Witness Carr's apocalyptic bent that fears a "narrowing of expressiveness and a loss of eloquence" due to "our indulgence in the pleasures of informality and immediacy" with the replacement of the formal letter with email and Twitter [Carr 2011, 108]. Writing in advance of the deep reading counter-revolution illustrated by 1book140 and Infinite Summer, his rhetoric is unremittingly bleak. He fears the cost of digitization will be "a further weakening, if not a final severing, of the intimate intellectual attachment between the lone writer and the lone reader" [Carr 2011, 108]. Reading, as recent digital book clubs have dramatically demonstrated, has never been more social, convivial, and intellectually vibrant. Serious readers have never been content to remain solitary and silent in their reading practice, but historically have sought out each other by first forming informal circles, then coteries and clubs, before finally becoming institutionalized in colleges of higher education. Margaret Fuller, for example, spearheaded a series of literary "conversations" in the Boston bookshop with her friend Elizabeth Peabody in the 1830s to provide the outlet for discussion craved by the followers of Emersonian transcendentalism. They would have certainly made use of online media if it were available at the time, given Fuller's belief in the powers of mass communication, the most potent of which during the antebellum era was the periodical press which she promoted as "the only efficient instrument for the education of the people" [Cane and Alves 2001]. Thus Carr's nostalgia for isolated reading and isolated authorship appears suspect to harkening back to a golden age of print culture that never really existed. His indictment of online book clubs complains that they are merely symptoms of "the Web's tendency to turn all media into social media" [Carr 2011, 106]. He mistakenly assumes that online book clubs make "social concerns override literary ones" in which "writing becomes a means of recording chatter." To the contrary, such groups typically reveal an astonishing depth of immersion of a collective whole that can number in the thousands, a remarkable feat in intellectual history that was never remotely possible before 1995. Carr fears writing will be shaped by the ever-present social buzz of email, texting, Twitter, and Facebook to the extent that it will betray a "groupiness," as Caleb Crain describes it, all but suffocating the solitary author distilling his or her own unique voice [Carr 2011, 107]. But authorship was never such a solitary endeavor, even in the nineteenth century [Dowling 2011] [Okker 2003].

As Henry Jenkins points out in Douglas Rushkoff's recent PBS documentary film *Digital Nation*, every era in history has

always been challenged with the advent of new media that in fact has placed at times tremendous pressure on the culture to reinvent itself. But the culture, Jenkins urges, has proven perennially adaptive when it maintains an open-minded spirit of exploration [Dretzin 2010]. Speculation about technology's encroachment upon the fate of books and reading ranges from Bradbury's dystopic vision of nomadic renegade infidels guarding their secret archive of printed material from government book burners in *Fahrenheit 451* to the 2005 *Annual Review of Sociology* that made a strikingly similar bleak prediction. Changes in reading habits, as one study claimed, meant the "era of mass [book] reading" was a brief "anomaly" in intellectual history. "We are now seeing such reading return to its former social base: a self-perpetuating minority that we shall call the reading class." The study then speculates as to whether this reading class will enjoy an exalted privileged status in the future, or whether it will be cast aside and relegated to living on the margins like Bradbury's nomadic bibliophile hermits, practitioners of "an increasingly arcane hobby" [Griswold et al. 2005, 137]. The "reading class" has emerged from the shadows and onto the Internet, where the media now serves to bring them together more efficiently and in greater numbers than ever. Bradbury's renegade outlaw readers have found one another through the Web and are expanding their ranks as the appetite for serious reading surges into a large and vigorous mass. This is hardly the dwindling marginalized offspring of a superannuated pastime, but the forefront of a renaissance that is taking on all the features of a religious revival. Sustained intense reading is possible and indeed flourishing in the online environment, which has proven electronic media fertile rather than sterile. Such a movement toward online group readings calls into question the anxiety over digital media's isolating effects. But with GPS regularly in use during the 1book140 readings to locate and bring readers together in physical space, and with events such as the *Moby-Dick* Marathon readings that have recently spread in popularity from New Bedford and Mystic to Nantucket and Manhattan, there is abundant evidence of the Web's use as a conduit for collegiality and association. Of course there are cases where individuals hide behind their screen identities and squander their lives in online gaming or chat rooms as detailed by Turkle [Turkle 2011]. But the characterization of online use as exclusively isolating and socially alienating breaks down in light of the millions currently discovering new likeminded readers they would never have known prior to the digital revolution.

If journalism has begun to collapse under what is now "an Internet age, a headline age," and the "the gray text page, once a magazine staple, has been all but banished" [Carr 2011, 95], its long form offspring are thriving. The culture has rediscovered a world beyond the easy-to-browse blurbs and captions that have come to dominate magazine and newspaper formatting. Now that consumers can talk back to the performances they witness through online media, they can also consume products of intellectual culture, readings that inspire not superficial but profound commentary, in this same dialogic way. The conversation has grown, as the design of electronic products beyond long form written works now encourages social networking. The Blu-ray version of Disney's *Snow White* enables viewers to chat with each other while watching the film. The *Watchmen* disc links directly to Facebook to allow live commentary on friends' pages. Film aficionados now have the equivalent social viewing experience of the "bookies." Novels, as Clay Shirky contends, may have been "a side effect of living in an environment of impoverished access" when they came into popularity with the rise of the middle class at the dawn of the industrial revolution [Shirky 2009, 111]. But now, in the twenty-first century, at the apex of the digital revolution, the revival of demanding and deep long form works have left us with an embarrassment of riches not only in data, but more importantly, the richness of contact with each other. McGann had the foresight in 2001 to observe that digital technology is a boon to the humanities and the richness of deep narrative reading, warning that "the general field of humanities education and scholarship will not take the use of digital technology seriously until one demonstrates how its tools improve the ways we explore and explain aesthetic works" [McGann 2001, xii]. As Douglas Rushkoff reminds us in the coda of *Digital Nation*, technology "challenges us to serve our human values, but we must first learn what those values are" [Dretzin 2010]. As the online deep reading revival has shown, narrative — and all its media manifestations — continues to be the vehicle through which those values are expressed.

Works Cited

#1book140 2014 Various Twitter users. *Twitter search results for #1book140 and #Outlander*. 2014. https://twitter.com/search?q=%231book140&src=hash.

Baron 2013 Baron, N. "Redefining reading: The impact of digital communication media". *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 128: 1 (2013), pp. 193-200.

Bauerlein 2008 Bauerlein, Mark. *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes the Future*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Boynton 2013 Boynton, Robert S. "Notes toward a supreme nonfiction: Teaching literary reportage in the twenty-first century". *Literary Journalism Studies* 5: 2 (2013), pp. 125-131.

Briggs 2011 Briggs, M. *Entrepreneurial Journalism*. New York: CQ Press, 2011.

Brown 2012 Brown, C. *In the Footsteps of Little Crow: 150 Years After the U.S. Dakota War of 1862*. Minneapolis: Star Tribune Media Company, LLC, 2012. http://www.startribune.com/local/166467906.html.

Cane and Alves 2001 Cane, A.F., and S. Alves, eds. *The Only Efficient Instrument: American Women Writers and the Periodical*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001.

Carr 2011 Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains*. New York: Norton, 2011.

Carreiro 2010 Carreiro, E. "Electronic books: How digital devices and new technologies are changing the face of the publishing industry". *Publishing Research Quarterly* 26: 4 (2010), pp. 219-235.

Chabris and Simons 2009 Chabris, C., and D. Simons. *The Invisible Gorilla: How Our Intuitions Deceive Us*. New York: Random House, 2009.

Chee 2010 Chee, A. *I, Reader*. *The Morning News*. 2010. http://www.themorningnews.org/article/i-reader.

Collins 2010 Collins, J. *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Collins 2013 Collins, J. "Reading, in a digital archive of one's own". *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 128: 1 (2013), pp. 207-212.

Coscarelli 2009 Coscarelli, J. "David Foster Wallace lives on for an infinite summer". *Salon* (2009). http://www.salon.com/2009/07/14/infinite_summer/.

DeStefano and LeFevre 2007 DeStefano, D., and J. LeFevre. "Cognitive load in hypertext reading: A review". *Computers in Human Behavior* 23: 3 (2007), pp. 1616-1641.

Dediu 2012 Dediu, H. "Steve Jobs's ultimate lesson for companies". *Harvard Business Review* (2012). hbr.org.

Dowling 2010 Dowling, D. *Chasing the White Whale: The Moby-Dick Marathon; or, What Melville Means Today*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010.

Dowling 2011 Dowling, D. *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth Century America* . New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Dretzin 2010 Dretzin, R. *Digital Nation*. Public Broadcasting Service, 2010.

Facebook 2012 Facebook. *News-Apps Center*. 2012. http://www.facebook.com/appcenter/category/news/?platform=allplatforms.

Gillmor 2006 Gillmor, D. *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People For the People*. Sebastapol: O'Reilly Media, 2006.

Greenfield 2009 Greenfield, P. "Technology and informal education: What is taught, what is learned". *Science* 323: 5910 (2009), pp. 69-71.

Griswold et al. 2005 Griswold, W., and T. McDonnell, et al. "Reading and the reading class in the twenty-first Century". *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005), pp. 127-141.

Habermas 1974 Habermas, J. "The public sphere". *New German Critique* 3 (1974), pp. 18-34.

Harkaway 2012 Harkaway, N. *The Blind Giant: Being Human in a Digital World*. London: John Murray, 2012.

Harlequin 2014 Harlequin. *Welcome message*. *Harlequin Community*. 2014. http://community.harlequin.com.

Helfand and Maeda 2001 Helfand, J., and J. Maeda. *Screen: Essays on Graphic Design, New Media and Visual Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Howe 2009 Howe, J. *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*. New York: Random House, 2009.

Howe 2012 Howe, J. "Books with 140 characters". *New York Times Review of Books* (2012), pp. 35-35. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/20/books/review/books-with-140-characters.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Infinite Summer 2009 Infinite Summer. *Infinite Summer: Formed in Summer 2009 to Read David Foster Wallace's Masterwork "Infinite Jest.".* 2009. http://infinitesummer.org/forums/index.php.

Isidore 2012 Isidore, C. "Nate Silver gets a big boost from the election". *CNN Money* (2012). http://money.cnn.com/2012/11/07/news/companies/nate-silver-election/index.html.

Jenkins 2006 Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Jenkins 2010 Jenkins, H. "Multiculturalism, appropriation, and the new media literacies: Remixing Moby-Dick". In Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss, ed., *Mashup Cultures*. New York: Springer, 2010. pp. 98-119.

Jenkins 2013 Jenkins, H. *Reading in a Participatory Culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English Classroom*. New York: Columbia University Teachers College Press, 2013.

Jeong and Fishbein 2007 Jeong, S.J., and M. Fishbein. "Predictors of multitasking with media: Media factors and audience factors". *Media Psychology* 10: 3 (2007), pp. 363-384.

Johnson 2006 Johnson, S. *Everything Bad is Good For You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Kohut 2012 Kohut, A. *In changing news landscape, even television is vulnerable*. *The Pew Research Center*. 2012. http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/2012%20News%20Consumption%20Report.pdf.

Konstantinou 2012 Konstantinou, L. "Too big to succeed: On William Gaddis's J.R.". *Los Angeles Review of Books* (2012). http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=1024&fulltext=1.

Kovarik 2011 Kovarik, B. *Revolutions in Communication: Media History from Gutenberg to the Digital Age*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2011.

Lanier 2010 Lanier, Jaron. *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*. New York: Knopf, 2010.

Lessig 2008 Lessig, Lawrence. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Levy 2007 Levy, D. "No time to think: Reflections on information technology and contemplative scholarship". *Ethics and Information Technology* 9: 4 (2007), pp. 237-249.

LibraryThing 2013 LibraryThing. *Talk*. 2013. http://www.librarything.com/topic/168986.

Liu 2005 Liu, Z. "Reading behavior in the digital environment". *Journal of Documentation* 61: 6 (2005), pp. 700-712.

Long Form 2011 ProPublica. *Long Form Storytelling in a Short Attention Span World*. New York: The New School, 2011. http://www.propublica.org/atpropublica/item/watch-the-propublica-long-form-storytelling-event.

Malone 2012 Malone, M.S. "How to avoid a bonfire of the vanities". *The Wall Street Journal* (2012), pp. A17-A17.

Many 1996 Many, P. "Literary journalism: Newspapers' last best hope". *The Connecticut Review* 1 (1996), pp. 59-69.

McGann 1991 McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

McGann 2001 McGann, Jerome. *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

McLuhan 1965 McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965.

Miller 2007 Miller, L. *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Moody 2012 Moody, R. "Fugue for centrifuges: On Chris Ware's Building Stories". *Los Angeles Review of Books* (2012). http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/fugue-for-centrifuges-on-chris-wares-building-stories.

NPR 2012 NPR. *The future of short attention span theatre*. *National Public Radio*. 2012. http://www.npr.org/2012/10/26/163649283/the-future-of-short-attention-span-theater.

Nakamura 2013 Nakamura, M. "Words with friends: Socially networked reading on Goodreads". *Publication of the Modern

Language Association 128: 1 (2013), pp. 238-243.

Nielsen 2006 Nielsen, J. *F-Shaped pattern for reading web content. Alertbox* . 2006. www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html.

Nielsen 2008 Nielsen, J. *How little do users read? Alertbox* . 2008. www.useit.com/alertbox/percent-text-read.html.

Okker 2003 Okker, P. *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

Ophir, Nass, and Wagner 2009 Ophir, E., C. Nass and A. Wagner. "Cognitive control in media multitaskers". *Proceedings of The National Academy of Science* 106: 37 (2009), pp. 15583-15587. www.pnas.org/content/early/2009/08/21/0903620106.full.pdf.

Papacharissi 2009 Papacharissi, Z. "The virtual geographies of social networks: A comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn, and ASmallWorld". *New Media & Society* 11: 1-2 (2009), pp. 199-220.

Pedersen 2009 Pedersen, S. "Have you got a Blook in you? Bloggers moving into print". *The International Journal of the Book* 6: 2 (2009), pp. 96-100.

Perlmutter and Dowling 2012 Perlmutter, D., and D. Dowling. "How the humanities and journalism can save each other". *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012). https://chronicle.com/article/How-the-Humanities-and/135604/.

Peters 2012 Peters, C. "Journalism to go". *Journalism Studies* 13: 5-6 (2012), pp. 695-705.

Pham and Sarno 2010 Pham, A., and D. Sarno. "The future of reading; beyond the words; on electronic devices; books talk to readers, play videos, and connect them to authors and other fans". *Los Angeles Times* (2010), pp. AI-AI.

Redman 1997 Redman, T. "An epic is a hypertext containing poetry". In L.S. Rainey, ed., *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in the Cantos*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. pp. 142-156.

Shirky 2009 Shirky, C. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Silver 2012 Silver, Nate. *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail — But Some Don't*. New York: Penguin, 2012.

Soffer 2012 Soffer, O. "Liquid language? On the personalization of discourse in the digital era". *New Media and Society* 14: 10 (2012), pp. 1092-1110.

Sontag 2007 Sontag, Susan. *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*. Edited by P. Dilonardo and A. Jump. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2007.

Sonvilla-Weiss 2010 Sonvilla-Weiss, S., ed. *Mashup Cultures*. New York: Springer, 2010.

Staley 2003 Staley, D.J. "The future of the book in the digital age". *Futurist* 37: 5 (2003), pp. 18-22.

Star Tribune Minneapolis: Star Tribune Media Company, LLC, eBook. Available at http://www.startribune.com/local/166467906.html.

Striphas 2009 Striphas, T. *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Turkle 2011 Turkle, S. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Our Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Turner 2001 Turner, B.S. "Social systems and complexity theory". In A.J. Trevino, ed., *Talcott Parsons Today: His Theory and Legacy in Contemporary Sociology*. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001. pp. 85-100.

Walther 2008 Walther, J.B., et al. "The role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on Facebook: Are we known by the company we keep?". *Human Communication Research* 34: 1 (2008), pp. 28-49.