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The Present and Future of Humanist Inquiry in the Digital Field

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores literary uses of mobile media, with a particular emphasis on poetics. Its primary examples include SMS poetry contests sponsored by entities such as *The Guardian*, RMIT, and Onesixty and SMS-enabled public performances such as City Speak, TXTual Healing, and SimpleTEXT. The paper articulates some of the paradigmatic qualities of mobile media poetics, with a particular emphasis on liveness and ephemerality and commentary on mobility and location as signifying elements. It also suggests that some of the literary and socio-political potential of mobile media poetics can be seen in the shift from the single desktop to the mobile screens of large-scale public interaction. This investigation of mobile media poetics is situated as a partial redress to the seemingly ubiquitous worries over the decline of reading.

Keywords

Mobile media, digital poetics, poetry, electronic literature, SMS, text messaging, performance, liveness, literary studies, reading.

1. INTRODUCTION: NOT READING

One does not have to look too hard to find someone making an argument for the end of reading, the end of the book, the end of print, even now the end of the university. Alongside of the eschatological narratives, we have empirical and anecdotal evidence of the socio-cultural transformations brought about by new communication technologies and platforms, SMS and Twitter chiefly among them. The two are often inextricably linked in the institutional world of letters in the U.S., as when the book editor of the *LA Times* testifies to his own recent difficulties with the deep and contemplative reading putatively demanded by print books as a consequence of “our over-networked culture, in which every rumor and mundanity is blogged and tweeted.” [38] Such explorations of changing reading habits are staged upon a familiar opposition: print reading, the “lost art,” requires deep focus and concentration and yields ideas that become etched into our minds. In contrast, reading in a networked environment results in distraction and resolutely ephemeral insights that could not reasonably be termed “knowledge.” Indeed, in a networked environment, one might not even be able to identify practices of reading as such. The object of these lamentations is traditionally Literature, another “lost art” in these accounts, with the literary imagination – our capacity for imaginative transport into a fictional world, our inhabitation of a consciousness not our own – compromised by our new incapacity for sustained attention. If we

situate the near-ubiquitous personal anecdotes alongside of quantitative assessments of reading practices – most notably, the studies of “reading at risk” conducted by the U.S. government’s National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which calculate a massive decline in literary and non-literary readers, particularly among youth – a clear picture emerges.¹ [26, 27] Reading is over, done, finito. The end.

We have been here before; indeed, one could say that reading has always been ending, in the sense that it implies a practice that is proper, correct, and standard. New genres, and new media, are by nature deviations and a deviation can always be freighted with ideological significance. The most powerful response thus far to the end of reading argument as it has been advanced by U.S. public intellectuals has been to highlight the many and varied media, applications, and platforms in which people are cognitively and psychically processing text. [21] In other words, we need a concept of reading that is robust and expansive enough to accommodate print as well as mobile communication technologies. In turn, we must necessarily require a concept of writing that is as robust and expansive, such that it can refer to in-depth critical analyses and texting alike. Here we might anticipate the skepticism: can anything of value emerge from a medium whose principle literary genre is the adolescent romance (mobile phone novels) or from a platform that promotes instantaneity and ephemerality (Twitter)? To legitimate poetic uses of mobile media, however, one need only think in terms of art-as-*techne*, which “appreciates” practices of making and construction rather than art objects with putatively objective aesthetic properties. But we might push further to identify the paradigmatic qualities of mobile media poetics and thereby articulate the practice as one that has not only physical constraints (character limits) but repeatable elements, which signals the beginnings of a mode, if not also a genre and a tradition. Reading in the networked environment particular to mobile media quite often involves a variety of cognitive and bodily processes not necessarily duplicable with a print text. “Reading” is thus “not reading” in the sense that the visual processing of linguistic signs is not necessarily granted priority over touching, listening, moving.

¹ It is important to note that the NEA studies of reading are based upon the *traditional literary genres of the novel, poem, short story, and play*.

2. LITERARY USES OF MOBILE MEDIA

Much has been made in the last few years, at least in big media publications such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and the *New Yorker*, of the phenomenon of Japanese mobile phone novels, essentially genre texts produced by and for young women quite apart from the traditional literary institutions, yet dominating the print markets. [11,31,32] The commonly cited statistic is that five of the top ten bestselling print novels in Japan in 2007 were republications of novels written for distribution via mobile communication technologies. Such statistics may tell us more about the differences in national telecommunications architectures than anything else, though it is worth remarking that the medium and genre alike have effected quite dramatic changes in the reading and writing of the Japanese language: the characters are ordered left to right on the mobile screen and reproduced in the same fashion in print. (The message size is of course limited, as with all SMS, to 140 bytes, whether this be the form of 160 7-bit characters, 140 8-bit characters, or 70 2-byte characters in languages such as Japanese or Russian.²) There have been a few English-language literary art projects that use mobile devices as a narrative medium³ – e.g. Knifeandfork's *The Wrench* – but, as of this writing, most are poetic rather than narratological. [24] Indeed, in 2001, around the same time that Yoshi's *Deep Love* began (the first cell phone novel in Japan), one of the first artistic experiments with SMS in English was a poetry competition sponsored by *The Guardian*. [20] As one might expect, many entries were haikus, but the first- and third-place winners were composed in electronic English, the dialect (or sociolect) particular to text messaging and chat:

txtin iz messin. mi headn'me englis. try2rite essays, they all come out txtis. gran not plsed w/letters shes getn, swears i wrote better b4 comin2uni. &she's African	Pls, stop sendg msgs2this no, i am not linda, I hv not slept w/yr sis, +i wd nvr call any1's ma a slag. Gd luk w/viag. Luv, yr wrong no. xxx
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The manipulation of words, lines, and syllables is clearly exemplary poetic practice, supplemented and we might even say enriched by the unfolding of the text from top to bottom, as the reader scrolls down the screen. It is less the physical work that is interesting here than the controlled reading, such that the poem cannot be absorbed all at once, as an integral unit. The second-place and fourth-place winners are notable for their content, which introduces movement and place, necessarily crucial elements of mobile media:

Sheffield Sun on maisonette windows sends speed-camera flashes tinting through tram cables startling drivers dragging rain-waterfalls in their wheels I drive on	Reunion Slough Reading Didcot Parkway my face flashes between telegraph poles, solemn as the passport photograph no one recognizes
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Cars on a city street and connecting railway stations: as we are reminded, SMS poems might be written and read while one's body is in motion, the temporal gap between production and

consumption closed so as to approach nearly synchronous communication and to produce the effect of liveness.

A survey of the discourse on mobile media thus far – academic and public – reveals a set of core themes that is clearly not exhaustive but may be useful for critical orientation to this emerging field of study. There has been substantial work on modalities of social engagement, especially collective political action. Howard Rheingold's *Smart Mobs* would perhaps be the most familiar touchstone here, as would Vincent Rafael's analysis of Manila's Generation Txt and the People Power II movement. [33,35] There has also been substantial fieldwork on the scale and scope of market penetration, particularly into the global south. [6] As one representative example, essays in the *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies* address the role of mobile network technologies among different segments of the populations in Ghana, China, Japan, Egypt, Singapore, India, Tanzania, Israel, and Korea. [10,18] (Earlier work tended to focus on the US, Europe, and East Asia. [19]) Studies such as these point to the widespread usage among the poor and illiterate; generational shifts (the new "digital divide"); the effects of mobile communication technology on relationships; and other tangible signs of sociocultural transformation. In the same vein, there has been compelling work on mobile devices and intimacy [16] and the effects of mobile communications on our sense of space and place. [39] Recent work on artistic uses of mobile media, particularly AR games, has similarly been concerned with issues of media publics and public space. [34] Less studied are the literary, and particularly poetic, uses of the medium, the province of this paper. As a critical language, poetics brings to the fore not only the techniques and technologies of construction – bringing a poem into being – but also the materiality of mediation and issues of performance. Mobile media poetic practices can be oriented both toward the single screen, as with the SMS poetry competitions, and large-scale public projection spaces. What is most compelling, and indeed transformative, about poetic practices that involve large-scale public interaction is the twinning of *poiesis* (making) with *aesthesis* (perception), which suggests a communicative, relational, inter-subjective aesthetic experience. [15] As we will see, SMS-enabled performances such as TXTual Healing precisely enact such an experience, incorporating the viewer's responses into the signifying field of the text: response both in the sense of perception and in the sense of co-production, contributing to the text that drives the work.

3. HUMANITIES IN CRISIS (AGAIN)

The perpetual crisis of the humanities, exacerbated by the defunding of public universities under neoliberal governance, is that we can never seem to escape the problem of legitimating literary studies and humanist inquiry more generally. One response has been to argue for the marketability of symbolic analysis and to suggest that the premium placed on original thinking in the humanities curriculum primes its students for corporate innovation: in other words, literary majors make good investment bankers and software engineers. But if we wish to legitimate literary studies and humanist inquiry as something other or something more than skills training, how might we do so? Must we always resort to historical narratives of legitimation, particularly those of the human, enlightenment, and national citizenship? Can the recently-resuscitated "beauty myth" and the return to the ethical stand up strongly as justificatory accounts of the critical and pedagogic importance of the literary? No doubt

² For a thorough account of the history of SMS, see Goggin [10]; Taylor and Vincent [37].

³ Here I bracket out mobile storytelling through photo and video sharing [23] because of my underlying concern with language, the literary, and reading in the ordinary sense of the term.

they can in part, but I would like to suggest that we continue to invest in the “literary” as a way of thinking about language structured by incongruity, disruption, incommensurability, unpredictability, and complexity. Such a conception of the literary means that we need not assume, or even require, a particular technological substrate. If the category of “Literature” is historically and institutionally bound to print, the “literary” need not be enacted, performed, or instantiated in this medium alone. Moreover, because it does not have a fixed or stable ontology, the “literary” is flexible enough to incorporate multiple sensorial experiences as signifying elements.

While one could argue that deep literary-historical knowledge is becoming ancillary and even expendable, where it was once a fundamental and foundational component of the research university – insofar as everything except one day’s worth of “trending topics” seems to be obsolete – the literary is by no means irrelevant. It may be the case that technicity (a result of specialization) and basic communicability are more highly appreciated uses of language, but the literary maintains its power to disturb, move, transport. The door is thus open for a consideration of the varieties of *poiesis* that have emerged with mobile media.

4. TXTIN IZ MESSIN

A few months after *The Guardian* SMS-poetry contest, *Onesixty: The SMS Poetry Magazine*, made its debut at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature.⁴ Though unable to realize plans to deliver the first issue as a series of text messages, Centrifugalforces collected a number of poems both for web and print delivery. [7,40] As with the winning *Guardian* poem (“txtin iz messin”), there are many that introduce questions about the differences texting has made to language; such at any rate, is what David Crystal has called the “gr8 db8.” [8]

@ 1st ure msgx xited me
a sudn stream of flirty txt frm 1 l hrdly knw.
bt now as I attempt 2 decifr yet anotha
all I can thnk is
'I bet shes shit @ scrabble' [36]

Here the reader’s struggles to decode a poem composed in the “txt speak” particular to electronic English are linked to those of the lyric voice, as each works to decode, to “decifr,” to make the seemingly illegible legible.

Some of the material effects of the new computing and communication technologies on language have been abbreviated syntax, a simplification of grammatical rules, and the incorporation of numbers and typographic symbols. Grammar, syntax, and orthography do not necessarily matter to the communicative languages of mobile telephony. What is inefficient and not useful is removed in order to form new dialects wherein all that matters is a basic meaning, a standard communicational template (see: Controlled and Simplified English). However, it is by no means the case that a resolute literalism precludes the

⁴ There are many other examples one could cite here, among them RMIT University’s anthology of mobile poetry, distributed via text at the Melbourne Writers Festival. See

<http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=5a5xhxob95m11>

figurative. Just as the literary experiments with Basic English were designed to illustrate the rhetorical flexibility of an 850-word, basic language system, so, too, do texts such as “@ 1ST URE MSGS XITED ME” remind us that all languages, all symbolic information systems, contain the potential for deconstruction and play. This, at least, is not a subject for db8.

5. POETICS IN MOTION

Though the selection of poems in *Onesixty* (along with those from *The Guardian*) is available in print and archived online, they are after all text messages and thus produced, circulated, and received via mobile media. Interpretation must necessarily be affected by the environment in which one receives a “live” text message. A live, albeit asynchronous, text creates situations in which the chance meeting of text and reading environment would produce unexpected effects and affects. Receiving a poem about rail travel while waiting in a station brings environment and landscape within the signifying field of a text, as would receiving a text message-poem entitled “Quiet is the New Loud” while sitting in a library: “quiet is the new loud/ deafening in empty rooms.” [30] The chance meeting of text and reading environment, or reading circumstances, depends upon the disjunctive experience of receiving a text itself, which interrupts the flows and rhythms of both activity and inactivity. It is this element of chance and the unexpected that makes liveness paradigmatic for mobile media poetics, while at the same time complicating formal analysis. That is, liveness, as I am using it here, can only be understood in its abstract generality, or, more precisely, a formal and schematic account of the effects of each specific instance of reception would require scholarly tools neither available nor desirous. It is possible to imagine a repeatable spatio-temporal element – for example, participants in an SMS poetry project could agree to follow a prescribed navigational course at a fixed time – but it would be practically difficult to achieve. Since the reading conditions are not easily duplicated, and each reading-viewing experience maintains its singularity, we are left with the critical problem of articulating underlying form. For this reason, mobile media poetics must be understood as a *practice*, one with clear analogies to performance and conceptual art.

6. POETICS OF PLACE

Centrifugalforces has also collaborated with Dutch artists on CityPoems, SMS projects that invite participants to generate and solicit impressions about urban space and place in poetic form. Stadschromosomen, with its 25 “text points” around Antwerp and its districts, twinned with CityPoems, a network of Poem Points around Leeds, each offering up to ten free text message poems written by people who live and work in the city (the results were also distributed as a downloadable booklet).⁵ In an exercise of transpositional geography, Stadschromosomen and CityPoems linked locations in Leeds and Antwerp, such that participants could use their mobile devices to reflect upon their particular location as well as the location of their urban counterpart. As a result, one reflects on both the particularities of one’s own place and points of commonality, as with this text on the experiential effects of immigration in both England and Belgium: “WALKING with immigrants through my city./ I guide them through the past./ They show me the future.” Projects such as

⁵ <http://www.stadschromosomen.be/>

these are not alone in their efforts to emphasize connectivity and community and to offer bottom-up rather than top-down imaginaries of urban space. They are instances of geo-annotation, the composition and archiving of micro-texts that record an individual's impressions of place. In the case of projects such as *[murmur]* and YellowArrow, the tags for these micro-texts are often invisible to the unschooled eye — green ears or yellow arrows indicating the presence of virtual graffiti — but they are still designed for public access. Readers who locate the yellow arrow stickers text the number inscribed on the sticker and receive a micro-text, a “poem,” as a message in return. On Kearny at Clay in San Francisco, for example, Chrixxx has tagged the “Scenic Drive” sign: “A relic of the auto age. Out of place in the density.” We might situate all such artistic projects under the rubric of “City Poems,” subjective atlases that emphasize the situatedness of the users’ texts and their ties to place.

7. LIVENESS

In the summer of 2008, media artist Paul Notzold partnered with a group of rap artists to present a series of events entitled “MCTXT,” SMS-enabled freestyle rap sessions during which the artists improvised lyrics based on the text messages sent by members of the audience and then projected onto the walls of the room. [28] The rhymes were sometimes remarkably good and sometimes hard to come by — after all, it is not always easy to know what to do with phrases like “grilled cheese” on the fly — but the more surprising moments were those in which it was possible to perceive the circuit: text message leads to rhyme leads to text message leads to rhyme. A comparable audio/visual public performance was Family Filter’s SimpleTEXT, which similarly relied on audience participation and the dynamic input from mobile devices such as phones or PDAs. [9] Both performances stage a dialogic circuit, with the participants submitting messages in response to the textual output projected on the central screen. SMS performances such as these prompt us to become aware of our own “polyattentiveness,” a term I take from Merce Cunningham in order to think about the dominant mode of data processing in the contemporary moment. [2] I appreciate the term “polyattentiveness” because it suggests a cultural and behavioral, rather than neurobiological, understanding of attention and distraction. In this context, polyattentiveness ups the ante on ‘reception in a state of distraction’: it requires that we process visual as well as audio content, data streams that are not spatially fixed and that move well beyond the one-dimensional surface of the screen and even the projected three dimensionality of virtual environments.

Such instances of real-time composition also take us back to the concept of liveness. Following the work of Philip Auslander, the liveness to which I refer does not presume a binary between the live or real on the one hand and the mediatized on the other. In other words, in this context, liveness cannot be stabilized ontologically or practically as either live or mediatized. [1] It is instead mixed or hybrid. For some time now, digital poets have endeavored to produce the effect of liveness, to enact the improvisational, with all of the risk, surprise, and uncertainty it involves, with putatively random word and letter scramblings, combinatorial texts based on OuLiPian practices and ideas. There have always been at least two limits to such exercises, however: one is that it is not possible to achieve true randomness with a prescribed dataset, as with John Cayley’s algorithmic texts in which only so many combinations, however numerous, are

possible; and the second limitation is that one-way broadcasting or streaming necessarily curtails the possibilities of improvisation in the way that a live socket connection would not. That Cayley’s recent update to his ongoing *Translation* series, a performance entitled *Imposition*, should be designed for an audience that participates with multiple laptops and cell phones, rather than a single, network-distributed work, tells us something about the current and future state of digital poetics. It tells us that digital poetics, like mobile media poetics, are tending toward multiple rather than single screens, live performance rather than private consumption, and crowds rather than the single reader.

8. PUBLIC SPACE

There has been a definitive turn from the fixed space of the desktop window to the multiple screens of handheld devices and to urban screens, projection billboards, and even absent screens, as in the case of video projections on building walls.⁶ Paul Notzold’s TXtual Healing series — SMS-enabled, interactive street performances in cities all over the U.S. and Europe — will initially illustrate the point. [28] Using a building façade as a projection screen during these performances, Notzold distributes numbers to passersby and invites them to text messages that fill in the writing spaces he demarcates with speech bubbles or geometric shapes. In this context, the cell phone becomes a device to explore public space, rather than a device to remove oneself from it, or a means of enveloping oneself in what Michael Bull has called mobile media bubbles. Bull recalls prior readings of the church as “a zone of immunity for the citizen, an ordered place in which the subject could feel secure. [But today, he notes] this zone of immunity and security is a mobile one, existing between the ears of iPod users” and, we might add, in the invisible zone comprised of a user and her handheld device. [4] A text message can both create and puncture this zone of immunity, this zone of intimacy. [12] Many media artists have sought to puncture such zones in the interests of relationality and community. Practically, they have sought to break the closed-circuit networks of mobile communication technologies by inviting participants to contribute text, to make private text public. Such performance spaces are often exterior to the gallery and designed for crowded public spaces, bridges, street corners, public squares. This was the case with early SMS projects such as “Clickscape” in Linz, which was presented as “clickable public space” (1998) and “Blinkenlights” in Berlin, which set out to “reclaim public space” (2001-2002). Perhaps the best example of a language-based SMS project designed for multiple installations in public space is City Speak, “ephemeral graffiti, an exploration into using private modes of communication to drive transient public displays of commentary.” [29]

⁶ Also see Giselle Beiguelman’s *esc for escape*, <http://www.desvirtual.com/escape/english/index.htm>

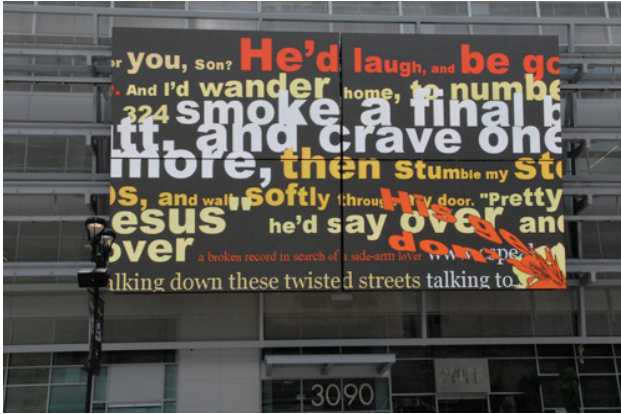


Figure 1. City Speak, Victory Park,
Dallas (June 17-24, 2007)

9. RELATIONALITY & COMMUNITY

Since these mobile media performances rely upon a spontaneous or planned audience remaining relatively stationary for the duration, they might paradoxically seem to require immobility, cognitive rather than physical engagement, thus retaining stillness as an integral feature of reading. But reading in the strict sense of processing linguistic signs is only one of the activities one performs when engaging the work; there is also listening, watching, sensing, remembering, playing, and of course texting. In this respect they expand the signifying field from the purely textual to the multi-sensorial. A full analysis of the poetic uses and effects of mobile media, then, must account for form, content, code, context or location, as well as somatic response. It must also account for the mode, scale, and gestures of large-scale interaction and participation, which necessarily suggests audience feedback, user contributions that are enfolded within the semiotic field of the text. Attending to the mode and scale of crowd participation is particularly necessary because these performances frequently offer up the fantasy of our temporarily situating ourselves as individuals in relation to a dynamic and mutable large-scale community.

Elias Canetti's sociological investigation of crowd dynamics might be appropriated in this context to encapsulate the affects and effects of mobile media poetics: "In the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person." [5] The barriers separating self and the crowd dissolve in a process not of assimilation but of temporary and incomplete transport. It is in these terms that I would also like to connect mobile media poetic practices to the "relational aesthetics" of contemporary art, art situated within "the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space." [3] These are artistic practices "where the substrate is formed by inter-subjectivity, and which takes being-together as a central theme, the 'encounter' between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning." [3]

If the culture of technological tools in the network age is about customization and individuation, SMS-enabled performances such as City Speak and TXTual Healing provide by way of contrast a synthesizing of individual contributions, a way of establishing relationality. What we see in them is an appropriation of utilitarian communication networks and tools for the purposes of producing personal and communal affect, experience, and

empathetic identifications. We also see an overcoding of administered and rationalized urban space with the still-possible spontaneity, enjoyment, and shock of art. The endgame here is the formation of "virtual-physical hybrid micro-communities." Mobile media poetics thus complicate the notion that networked communication means being elsewhere, a-present, disembodied. And they also complicate the notion that liveness means unfiltered, unmediated, physical performance.

10. CONCLUSION

That the famed Japanese mobile phone novels should often be republished as books might introduce certain questions about the differences between an SMS text and a print text. Both allow for shared reading practices – here one could think of the many online community sites devoted to reading and rewriting individual works – but this need not suggest an equivalence. However, the purpose of this paper is not to claim a strict theoretical difference. Indeed, the real difference that concerns me is that between the single reader of a text, whether distributed via mobile device or print book, and the crowds, whether large or small, that gather in front of a public projection space to participate in an SMS-based performance. "Performance" here speaks to participation in public projections of different durations, whether seemingly on-the-fly like TXTual Healing or temporarily fixed like the screen-based installations of City Speak. These performances literalize the very reading-in-common that we are accustomed to pursuing through core curricula and book clubs. But the immediacy of real-time performance means that the subject/participant exposes herself to, even surrenders to, the risks of large-scale participation.

At first glance, one of the implications of my claiming that projects and performances such as I have described here have literary value and content might be the possibility of reconstructing a genealogy of literary practice that would, for example, include the video works of Nam June Paik. In other words, if literary practice with mobile media and in a networked environment takes polyattentiveness and multi-sensorial engagement to be axiomatic, would not Paik's multiple-screen installations be literary in this regard? While there are institutional implications of my gathering together this particular set of works – SMS poetry, TXTual Healing, City Speak, and others – the object has not been to articulate a new definition of digital poetics or electronic literature. It is by no means unusual for literary scholars to think in terms of *poietic* work rather than poems. Rather, my analysis points toward a more expansive, and perhaps liberating, notion of the literary as mediation. Understanding the literary as mediation means that we might see both continuities and discontinuities between print and mobile media practices. It also means that we ought to continue to think about the materiality of texts, the technological substrate or platform that itself serves a mediating function, whether it be paper or code. [13,14,22] Moreover, understanding the literary as mediation frees us from mournful contemplation of the "fate of reading in the digital age," a formulation that implicitly and explicitly defines reading as a print-based activity.⁷ This

⁷ As just one example, see the symposium on "Bookishness: The New Fate of Reading in the Digital Age," University of Michigan (May 15, 2009),

definition of reading is far too restrictive and it might even prevent us from noticing the ways in which processing an intricately constructed print novel itself conjures up and requires multi-sensorial engagement (see: Proust). It is for this reason that I want to insist that “reading” in a networked environment is in fact “not reading,” but not in the traditional and conservative sense suggested by the NEA studies. [26,27] The conservativeness of the “reading” concept here arises from a deeply felt need for conservation, one for which I have great sympathy, but, in my view, literary studies will be richer for having situated symbolic analysis alongside of, and inextricably bound up with, other modes of sensory processing. When we participate in an SMS project or performance, we are making, using, decoding linguistic signs, but we are “not reading” in the sense that these activities are not necessarily given priority over seeing, listening, touching, and bodily movement. Just as Marshall McLuhan saw electronic media as a “total media environment” and therefore a challenge to the hegemony of vision, we might come to understand literary practices with mobile and networked media as, paradoxically, a challenge to the hegemony of words. [25] This challenge resonates with the convergence culture thesis, which suggests that printed books are one part of a broader media ecology but not distinctive in and of themselves; rather, they are part of a discourse network in which a work can be a book, anime series, video, or game. But there is a significant payoff: if we articulate the literary as mediation, we can reassert the cultural and institutional importance of the traditional disciplines of rhetoric, history, and linguistics. Finally, we might also fundamentally complicate the dialectic between the analytic and the experiential, the mind and the body.

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