Reading outside the Book

Margaret Mackey

The concept of reading and the concept of the book seem like natural partners. Many icons designed to express the idea of reading include a book as an essential information-bearing element of the design. Although reading has always included other materials – newspapers, magazines, comics, and so forth – the most substantial common link, for several centuries, has been reader and book. Yet, as technological and commercial changes in our cultural arrangements accelerate, it may be that reading is loosening its tight connections with books, or at least with books alone.

The phrase 'thinking outside the box' is ubiquitous in North America. Originally it meant something new and dynamic, though as it spread throughout the culture, it turned into a cliché, and now, paradoxically, almost represents staleness. Nevertheless, I have borrowed and adapted the terminology as a way of looking at new ideas about reading. It is important to keep in mind that the idea of reading outside the book does not mean an end to the book; it means that the book takes its place alongside other media in a variety of interesting ways. In this article I explore fiction books and their mutating roles in a changing world of multiple forms of imaginative engagement.

I want to approach this project of investigating new configurations of fiction reading from two different directions: from a brief exploration of the behaviours of readers and from a sampling of new directions in texts. It is my contention that reading has now moved outside the book in new and appealing ways, especially but not exclusively in ways aimed at young people. The digital revolution – DVDs, computer games, the Internet and its host of affordances – does not mean that reading print on paper has been replaced; but it does mean that print on paper often co-exists alongside other manifestations of a fictional world. We can also see early signs of paper books straining at the edges of their own covers, so to speak, pushing the limits of what print can accomplish with paper alone, and exploring what happens when digital media augment the book form.

In this article, I will look at the self-reported cultural behaviours of two adult readers, and take a more detailed look at how one of them interprets a particular children's text. From there, I will move on to a more general exploration of some developments in the world of contemporary fiction for both young people and adults. It is my argument that these phenomena are all branches of the same development, which can briefly be described not as '*either* reading *or* the digital world' but rather, '*both* reading *and* the digital world'. I do not simply mean digital reading, though there is plenty of that; I mean that reading augments and supports forms of digital engagement in diverse ways.

Readers and their reading

Recently, I set up a study of what it now means to be a literate adult, since it is clear that today's children are maturing into new kinds of literate and literary life, compared to those of us now approaching middle age or beyond. To investigate possible end-stages of new trajectories of literate development, I worked intensively with a small group of men and women mostly aged in their 20s.

All of these adults enjoy reading novels at least occasionally, all of them regularly watch films and television, and all of them are computer literate, Internet users on a regular basis, and at home with at least one format of digital game. They are dynamic and self-confident users of contemporary popular culture in many different ways. As well as reading standard stand-alone or series novels, however, they use reading in a variety of support roles as part of their engagement with other media. It is this aspect of their cultural lives that I want to describe further.

Two readers

For example, Seth, aged 28, a nurse and an avid novel reader, described a number of ways in which reading also augments how he watches films and television:

- he buys books about movies – books of still pictures and commentary, background books of 'how we made this movie'.

- he owns an art book of the making of *Star Wars*.

- he also owns a screenplay of *Star Wars* but describes it as more of 'something to have' rather than something to read.

- he would buy a book on the philosophy of the movie (a type of spin-off text associated with films such as *The Matrix*) if he liked a film well enough. To him

> The convergence is in the content, or rather, the point of convergence is us, the users of the technology, not so much the technology itself.

it would be a continuation of immersion in the story world. 'Part of the fantasy is to escape that reality, to become what you – what you are in tune with. Like, what you're infatuated with'.

- he uses the Internet to check movie listings, and watches previews and trailers. He also uses the background information on his television set. Beginning to watch the film *Memento* (which tells a complex story backwards in time) on his digital cable receiver, he found himself at a loss. 'I went, 'What's that about?'' so you hit "Info" and it gives you a brief description and that sounds a bit cool'. Just as the words in a caption can sometimes help to direct your attention while looking at a picture, so Seth's brief annotation on the Info screen enabled him to follow the backwards narrative in more intelligent ways.

- he is a big fan of the television program *The Sopranos*, and has done considerable background reading. 'I've gone to HBO [Home Box Office, the home channel of *The Sopranos*] on the Web and everything, and I've looked up, like, the family tree, the FBI files, and all that kind of stuff. It's really neat'. He has read a couple of parodies of the program in America's satirical *MAD Magazine*. At the start of the fourth season, which began after a long hiatus, he purchased an entertainment magazine containing recaps of every episode in the entire series, but found he remembered them well enough that he didn't need to use it. Given the chance, he would read sneak previews of episodes online.

In short, Seth backs up his viewing with a wide sampling of reading. Reading is one way of investing in a broad fictional world. In the cases listed above, the viewing has come first; Seth is reinforcing his connection with the fiction by means of supplementary reading. However, as a confirmed novel reader, he also regularly makes the first – and sometimes only – connection with a fiction through print, and he finds satisfaction in both kinds of reading.

Drew was aged 27 when I met him. He was qualified to work as a computer network manager but was having trouble finding local employment and was temporarily working on a computer helpline. Drew does read full-length fiction, but more sporadically than Seth.

In the winter of 2003, when we worked together, the film trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings* had been partially released. *The Fellowship of the Ring* was available on video and DVD, and *The Two Towers* was showing in cinemas. Drew's engagement with Tolkien was a complex one. Like Tolkien himself, he is fascinated with the creation of complex and detailed words. However, this does not mean he connected with the story at every level. Drew reported the following activities:

- he tried to read the original books, but failed ('too wordy – three pages on describing the elves – Jesus!').

- unlike many readers who do successfully finish the trilogy, however, he has read some of Tolkien's appendices and has also read a history of the world of Middle-Earth.

- he has watched the first film, *The Fellowship of the Ring* on DVD ('15-20 times'), and has watched the background documentary '20 times'.

- he saw *The Two Towers* in the cinema, but only once because admission is expensive.

- he has listened extensively to the soundtrack CDs of both movies.

- he has also carefully read the liner notes of both CDs and was able to recall details about special instruments used in the score. A year later, watching some of the background detail in the DVD of *The Two Towers*, I recognised references that Drew had picked up from the tiny print of the CD liner and referred to from memory.

- he has read many Tolkien-descended novels, particularly in the fantasy series *Forgotten Realms*.

- he is the game-master for a *Forgotten Realms* fantasy gaming group that meets once a week on Monday evenings.

- as game-master, he prepares scenarios for play, reading background information and rules, consulting and preparing maps and charts. (Eager for me to appreciate the complexity of this world, he emailed me a map of the *Forgotten Realms* territory.)

> Video games are lodged in a social world, and subjectivity
> is always situated even as it is constructed.

- he regularly checks online for gaming tips and further background information.
- he collects and paints action figures for his games – though "I get more of an enjoyment when it's done than doing it."

Drew and Seth are dissimilar in very many ways. Seth is exceedingly laid-back and easy-going; Drew describes himself as a perfectionist. Their fictional interests are also unlike: Seth will read or watch pretty much anything that comes along; Drew immerses himself deeply in a highly select number of complex fictional worlds. Yet in their behaviours, we may see a common pattern: their reading is often only one element in a multi-stranded form of fictional engagement. Both of them frequently make an initial entry into a fictional world through film and back up that engagement with supplementary reading. Both perceive reading as an essential component of their experience of digital gaming, reading both within and beyond the game itself. Both of them move readily between media, fuelled by an interest in a particular story rather than a taste for one medium over another.

Reading repertoires

As well as using reading as part of a wider multimedia engagement with fiction, and drawing on reading for background understanding of production issues, musical soundtracks, and so forth, contemporary readers may use multimedia experience as a source of fictional repertoire for reading. In other words, when they come to make sense of a print story, they draw on their broad experience of how stories are put together and interpreted, making use of a range of media exposures. A couple of examples will illustrate this approach, one from Seth and one from my own reading experience.

In my study of these adult readers, I was interested in gleaning their responses to as wide a range of media formats as possible. I was also keen to discover how they reacted when a text surprised them. Among other activities, I asked them to read a picture book, *The Three Pigs* (2001) by David Wiesner. I calculated (rightly) that for most of them a picture book would be a relatively alien form, and that they would not be expecting the metafictional twists

and turns of this funny demolition of a familiar story. I was curious to see how easily they would register the need to draw on unexpected interpretive resources and marshal an appropriate response.

Wiesner's *Three Pigs* begins conventionally with the wolf threatening the home of the first little pig. However, as he huffs and puffs, he blows the pig right out of the panel of the picture. The pig, realising he is safe in the margins of the page, rescues his brothers. Free of the constraints of the story, the pigs, working in the white space surrounding the picture panels, turn the pages into paper airplanes and sail off into the void of a blank page. When they land, they realise they are in the world of 'Hey Diddle Diddle', illustrated in a completely different style (pastel and cartoonish). The cat with the fiddle decides to join them and they tour further stories, also aiding in the escape of a dragon who is doomed to be killed by a prince. Eventually, these adventurers smooth out their picture pages and return to the original world of the three pigs. They discover they can fend off the wolf by capturing the letters that tell the story, and, somewhat cramped in the little brick house, the pigs, the cat and the dragon all live happily ever after. Through a window, we see the wolf on a far-away hillside.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Seth had never seen anything like this kind of story told in such a way. In order to interpret it, he drew on a repertoire of related texts, an activity familiar to most readers. What was interesting was his choice of texts.

I asked all readers to look at *The Three Pigs* and then walk me through a kind of action replay of the things that struck them as they read, a fairly open-ended request. Here are some of Seth's comments:

- *'Basically, I mean, he's [the pig, as he initially departs from the picture panel] – he's just been taken out of the story, out of the pictures. But I mean, it doesn't mean he doesn't exist or didn't exist. . . .I guess* [pause] *this almost sounds like, um, I don't know, this is a really obscure comparison, like a Nightmare on Elm Street kind of thing. You know, where the wolf is Freddy. . . . Yeah, so that's sad to think that The Three Pigs would*

remind us of that, eh? [laughter] *What kind of scary-ass childhood did I have?'*

- 'The beginning made me think of the Prodigal Son in the Bible'.

- 'I don't know, it makes me think of, ah X-Files. I think someone's up there. Everything around us, what we perceive to be the all and be-all of our lives, that's only in our view, our perspective. I mean, we're not, maybe we're not the only life in this universe or this galaxy or whatever, but I see here [on the 'Hey Diddle Diddle' page] they're even drawn differently'.

- 'Different perceptions, yeah, and when they come back again [at the end], all I can think of is Nightmare on Elm Street, you know, where he jumped back through the TV or something, so – and this little guy escapes'.

- *'Now, I don't know, now it seems that we're getting into a – where there's all of them here [at the end], the wolf bullied the pigs and they went out for backup like Boys in the 'Hood, they got shot up in a drive-by, so now they're going back.* [laughter] *I lead a sad life!'*

Seth mocked his own set of referents, but indeed he was entirely correct to spot that Wiesner's *Three Pigs* is a story of alternative universes, and the links he made to films of horror and violence, while perhaps unexpected, are not all that far-fetched. Seth reads very widely, even promiscuously, particularly during his long night shifts at the hospital, but it was to films and television that he turned to help him interpret this unexpected story. It is a matter of speculation whether his audio-visual field of reference (the undeveloped reference to the Prodigal Son was the only connection with a print text he made during the entire discussion, and, of course, he could have heard rather than read this story) was a response to the content of the story, to the fact that it is largely told through the images, both, or neither. In any case, in this small example, Seth demonstrates clearly that a fictional repertoire for making sense of a print story need not be limited to print intertextuality alone, and that literary understanding can be developed across media references. His film references guided him through a world of alternative possibilities but did not lead him to comment on the metafictional

qualities of a book that draws attention to its bookishness on every page.

As a parallel to Seth's interpretation of *The Three Pigs*, which is based on experience with moving images, I also offer my own reading of the new picture book *Brundibar* (2003), by Tony Kushner and Maurice Sendak. *Brundibar* is fascinating for many reasons, but I will discuss just one: a strange footnote late in the story that completely baffled my colleague and me on our first encounter with the book. Jill McClay had given me this book and we read it together, knowing little about it.

Briefly, the story is as follows. Brundibar is a bully; he is also an organ grinder with the obligatory monkey. He attempts to defeat a group of children but they run him out of town. As he departs, two things happen: the monkey disappears, and there is a peculiar line at the bottom of the page indicating that Brundibar was 'followed by a very very very small cockroach who has nothing to do with story, but who was curious'. No other page has any footnotes and this one read very anomalously indeed – until we noticed a strong resemblance between the monkey and George W. Bush and recalled the many Internet jokes about Bush as Curious George, the monkey hero of a number of children's books.

To have a sitting American president represented as an organ grinder's monkey who morphs into a cockroach involves a level of political savagery not usual in children's books – but *Brundibar* is an unusual book in many ways. To have a picture book that is best interpreted through a particular form of Internet literacy is perhaps less startling. *Brundibar* is a book aimed at all ages, and there is no question about the sophistication of Kushner and Sendak. I would not claim that the reading that Jill and I came up with is the only possible interpretation of the anomalous footnote, but it is one that makes sense of several questions that are otherwise quite difficult to answer. As Seth drew on unlikely sources to help him make sense of a strange story, so Jill and I made incongruous but persuasive links between our online lives (jokey, ephemeral, politically alert) and a mystifying line in a children's story.

A more radical account of reading in an age of moving images suggests that books are altered for readers by

being adapted. John Glavin, writing about Dickens' novels adapted for the screen, suggests that '*the Dickens film now shapes Dickens's fiction*' (2003, 5, emphasis in original). Those who have watched Dickens' stories adapted for film or television, he says, when they come to read the book, 'will, and can, only see it as film. . . . it's those adaptations, for the big screen and the small, that generate whatever possibilities remain for reading the fiction' (2003, 5-6).

What Glavin describes here is another form of reading as one part of a multimedia engagement. I am not entirely convinced that those readers of Dickens' novels who have watched a film or TV show may 'only' read the print version in one way, but it is certainly one powerful option. Many of the young people I have talked to over years of research would almost certainly agree with Glavin's strictures. However their wariness concerning the imaginative imperialism of film visuals and pacing often causes them to make substantial efforts to read the book before going to the movie, rather than to surrender their reading experience to the prior impact of viewing. The reader/viewer is not quite as passive as his account suggests.

Books and their limits
In addition to investigating the behaviours of readers, we may find that looking carefully at a sample of contemporary texts helps us to enlarge our understanding of the role of reading in broader interpretive schemes. Books take their place in a multimedia world, and it may be that their place is shifting.

For example, while I was engaged in coming to terms with the cross-media lives of Seth, Drew, and the others, I read an intriguing little news note in the online version of *The Bookseller*, the journal of the British book trade. 'Perennial rethinks paperbacks', said the headline, and the story made explicit links between the DVD model of film distribution and the implications of producing a paperback edition of a hardcover book:

> *HarperCollins' new paperback imprint Harper Perennial is to introduce additional content into its titles. A final section, called P.S., will carry about 15 pages of author CVs and interviews, critical opinion, newly commissioned articles, notes on cover choices and recommendations for further reading. P.S. will be flagged up on the front and back covers of Harper Perennial titles.* **HC said it had been inspired by the film industry, which adds value to releases in DVD format with fresh content such as documentaries, trailers and unseen footage.** *"We wanted to make the paperback a completely different entity, since it is often reaching a different market," Harper Perennial publisher Venetia Butterfield said. "We have looked at the covers and the pitch of the book as a whole, and we thought new content would be a way to bring author and reader closer together.*
> (TheBookseller.com, November 12, 2003, bold emphasis added)

Not long after I read this little note, indicating that at least some books might make use of media models, I came across several titles that made connections with the expansiveness of the digital world in different ways. Perhaps the most orthodoxly recognisable was *The Mrs. Dalloway Reader*, edited by Francine Prose (2003). This book contains the full text of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and many other items. It is not very fanciful to make connections to the standard DVD package: there are the out-takes (earlier versions of the story by Woolf, called 'Mrs. Dalloway's Party'); there are the background pieces on 'how we made this novel' in the form of Woolf's correspondence and diary entries from the time of the novel's composition; there are the commentaries, essays and responses from different critics, both contemporary to Woolf and from our own time. One of these essays is by Michael Cunningham, whose reworking of *Mrs. Dalloway* in *The Hours* (1998) extended the story in new ways (and of course, both *Mrs. Dalloway* itself (1999/1998) and also *The Hours* (2003/2002)were made into films, with further background information located on their own DVDs).

A different kind of nod to the film world was developed by Jeffery Conway, Lynn Crosbie, and David Trinidad in their large book of poetry, *Phoebe 2002: An Essay in Verse* (2003). The entire book is devoted to poems related to the (2002/1950) film, *All About Eve*. Illustrated with stills from the movie, and extending over hundreds of pages, this book of serious poetry would be unthinkable without its film predecessor and progenitor.

At a more popular level, Jake Horsley's book, *Matrix Warrior: Being the One* (2003), also uses a movie as a jumping-off place. It is not so much a book of commentary *about* a movie; rather it uses *The Matrix* as a tool for thinking with.

Gordon Sheppard makes yet another use of movies in his enormous book about Quebec author Hubert Aquin, who committed suicide in 1977. More than 800 pages long, this volume teems with interviews, letters, news cuttings, pictures, and other accounts of Aquin's life and death. To organise this unruly mass of documentation, Sheppard makes strong use of film and Web metaphors. The book begins thus:

> *SOUNDSCAPE: Noises of a sound stage where actors, camera crew, grips, make-up artists, prop masters, gofers, and hangers-on are preparing to shoot a made-for-Internet docudrama, to be accessible on the Worldwide Web on a pay-per-episode basis. A middle-aged jokester plays the MGM lion's roar on a boombox, a voice cries "SILENCE" over a portable megaphone – and the noises reluctantly die away.*
> (Sheppard 2003, n.p.)

The next opening contains few words: three cities listed at the bottom of the page and at the top, the following lines: 'McGill-Queen's University Press presents'. The title page that follows demonstrates what is being presented: *HA! A Self-Murder Mystery*, 'Written and Directed by Gordon Sheppard' (Sheppard 2003, n.p.). The soundscapes continue through the book, and the impact of this unusual addition to the story perseveres through the reading – we are always aware of what we should be imagining ourselves as hearing, a virtual soundtrack that accomplishes some of the aims of movie music in coordinating disparate scenes.

Sheppard's digital accompaniment is virtual; *Time's Eye* by Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter (2004) makes more literal use of digital additions. A CD-ROM is included with the book and it includes two further complete novels by Stephen Baxter, as well as conversations between the two authors, critical essays, author biographies and bibliographies, and so forth. Disappointingly, every element of this CD-ROM that I explored was simply typeface on the screen; there were no multimedia components that I could

locate. Nevertheless, the sense of the book straining at the limits of its format is palpable in this package. The size and scale of the 'normal' book did not allow room for Clarke and Baxter to include everything they thought relevant to the entire package, so they stretched the limits of the textual offering with a physical addition (a CD-ROM) that could fit into the book jacket without distorting the usual marketing arrangements. The book sits on the bookshelf in the store alongside all the others. In this case, what the CD-ROM offers is really 'more of the same' – more words – though involving the same amount of actual paper. It is not hard to imagine fiction expanding in more dynamic ways, however; a CD-ROM could offer more lively forms of extension to the print book. Many textbooks are following this route, with CD-ROM or website 'expansion pack'.

Perhaps it is not surprising that books for children are somewhat more adventurous in pushing the both the physical and the textual limits of the book. Some authors for young people, such as Philip Pullman and Terry Pratchett, have been using the Internet as a home for supplementary information about their fictional universes for some years. The Random House website, for example, has contained detailed information about Pullman's alethiometer ever since *Northern Lights/The Golden Compass* was published in 1995 (http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/alethiometer/index.html, accessed February 24, 2004). Interestingly, the program for the National Theatre's production of *His Dark Materials* (Pullman's trilogy converted into two three-hour stage shows) includes much the same information in the form of a pull-out insert – the alethiometer's history is once again set off from the main narrative thrust of the originating document.

Some adult fiction is beginning to be issued with 'soundtrack' CDs, usually marketed separately. From *Star Wars* (*Shadows of the Empire* [Perry 1997]) is a novel in the saga which has its own musical soundtrack sold in a separate CD (McNeely, 1996) to less popular, more literary fiction (*Dirt Music* [2002] by Tim Winton and *An Equal Music* [1999] by Vikram Seth both can be read to the accompaniment of an associated CD of selected and original music), fiction reading is aligned with a musical accompaniment.

Picture books are also beginning to stretch multimedia wings. For example, *Yellow Umbrella*, first published in Korea in 2001 and produced in the United States in 2002, contains a CD. Wordless pictures by Jae Soo Liu are designed to be accompanied by piano music by Dong Il Sheen. There is no verbal text whatever, only a musical soundtrack, unlike the adult books mentioned above where the music is additional to the words. In *Yellow Umbrella*, the music and the pictures are equal bearers of meaning; the tune fades to indicate a page turn, so the pacing of the book is organised by the piano. The very simple story (more and more umbrellas joining forces in the rain) is delicately conveyed through both media – water colour and piano music. The CD also contains 'extras', a song (sung in Korean, though my American edition contains only the English words for it) and an extended suite of the piano music. Not surprisingly, this stunning little story has won significant prizes in the U.S.A.; despite its simplicity, its appeal is truly something new. The forward thrust of the music acts 'in concert with' the stasis of the page, and the drama of the page turn takes place as the music rests. The page and the piano both play an essential role in the reading experience, if indeed 'reading' is the exact right word to use for this kind of interpretation of wordless pictures and music.

Yellow Umbrella is a contemplative and restrained story; neither adjective could remotely apply to a very different example of a multimedia book, *Philadelphia Chickens* (2002) by Sandra Boynton, with music also by Michael Ford. Boynton is well known in North America for her boisterous lap poems; her sense of rhythm is as faultless as her sense of the ridiculous. All these talents are put to exceptionally good use in *Philadelphia Chickens*, a picture book with accompanying CD, which describes itself as the 'deluxe illustrated lyrics book of the original cast recording of the unforgettable (though completely imaginary) stage spectacular, *Philadelphia Chickens*, a too-illogical zoological musical revue' (2002, n.p.). Although the revue itself is imaginary, some of the songs on the CD are performed by real stars, such as Meryl Streep and Natasha Richardson. Others, including the immortal ditty 'Cows' (2002) ('We can sing very low./ We can dance in a row./ We are lovely and slow, oh, oh - / Yes, you know we are COWS') (p. 5), are sung by ad-hoc groups which

presumably do not exist outside the framework of the book (in this case, 'The Seldom Herd'). The rowdiness and silliness of the songs are well matched by Boynton's illustrations. Each song appears twice in the book, once in an abridged version in big type and with a full-page picture, and then later in its complete version with musical notation and a small picture; the two versions thus function quite differently, even though they are contained in the same book. The package of book and CD is billed as 'for all ages except 43' and I have yet to find any age not enchanted with its sublime foolishness. Boynton's other books are delightful but there is something extravagantly inspired in the over-the-top nonsense of this multimedia joke, for adults and children alike.

My final example of book/multimedia packaging is a development that seems quite logical in the context of all of the above: a picture book containing its own DVD of 'how we made this book'. P.J. Lynch has illustrated an old story by Frank R. Stockton, *The Bee-Man of Orn* (2004), and the hardback book contains a DVD inserted in the cover. In this background disk, Lynch shows us various aspects of his work in the development of the book. Appealing and informative in its own right, this DVD also represents something of an apotheosis of current cultural developments, adding digital background information to the bounded world of print on paper.

Implications

The book has survived for centuries as a kind of best-of-breed, supremely well suited to its manifold purposes. It may be that the multimedia packages of *Yellow Umbrella*, *Philadelphia Chickens*, and *The Bee-Man of Orn* are primitive progenitors of new forms of book – using electronic paper perhaps, with the soundtrack digitally incorporated in the page turn, or the background information hyperlinked to the image. People have always been able to add music to the reading experience or to look up extra information, but we are moving towards an era where the idea of the book may include these extra forms of mediation as part of the package.

Such a scenario need not be a threat to the idea of book reading, merely an addition to an ever-expanding fictional continuum. Books will continue to do best what they do best, and until they are actually replaced by something

> *What is new is the sheer availability of different kinds of texts, and the opportunity to move so effortlessly between them.*

better, are likely to be valued. Paper may be vulnerable to technological change, but such a development need not fundamentally alter the nature of the book, especially if the electronic replacement retains the essential qualities of the paper page (it is notable that the first form of electronic book, the tablet which offers a fixed screen rather than a flexible page, has failed to make a significant impact on the market and is being withdrawn from sale). Audio texts may be incorporated with the book package, rather than being sold separately as at present. Internet links may be integrated, rather than involving a separate search on a different machine. Books, in short, may include more links to 'outside' than they do at present. None of this means, however, that they need lose the essential qualities that we value today, nor that reading is likely to disappear, even as it mutates. How we behave with these new forms of book will be recognisable as reading, even as new additions intensify some forms of engagement.

What are the most important qualities of the kind of extended reading that books allow and that seem likely to survive in the face of new developments?

At a basic level, there is a question of size. Some years ago, I talked to a thirteen-year-old who was systematically comparing versions of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. She read the book, she watched the video, she listened to the audiotape. I asked her which she liked best; 'the book', she said, 'because the plot is biggest'.

For the foreseeable future, books are likely to remain 'biggest' because of the expense of creating texts of comparable scope in other media. At present, few forms plausibly compete with a large novel in terms of scale. One such competitor, perhaps, is the massively multi-player online role-playing game, which is collaboratively created by its players and which is enormous. But such a sprawling fiction lacks some of the satisfactions of shape and organisation that are strong features of a successful novel, and it certainly lacks a distinctive single voice. Another option for the long fiction is the multi-episode, or even multi-year television series; *The Sopranos* is one successful example. But such programs are very expensive to produce when compared to even the longest novel, and thus the number of choices is limited.

The stability of print on paper is another attractive quality. It offers a solid and in many ways reassuring contrast to the evanescence of moving images or the flicker of electronic text. Derrick de Kerckhove speaks of print as "[a] resting place for words," and says,

> *It sounds trite, but in fact the printed page is the only place where words do have a rest. Everywhere else, they are moving: when you speak, when you see them on a screen, when you see them on the Net, words are moving. But a book is a restful place. The printed word is, and always was, still.*
> (de Kercklove 1997, p.107)

Book reading also offers a form of independent management that is harder to achieve in other media, where pacing in particular is outside the user's control. Philip Pullman observes,

> *When you're reading you are the equal partner in the making of meaning, we are in control of the speed process. We go at the rate we want, not the rate someone else has decided for us. When we've finished reading, we bring away what we ourselves and the text have made together. If we don't contribute, if we don't take part, we get nothing. If we do, we get a world.*
> (Rebuck 2004, p.35)

The browsable DVD, of course, offers more control over pausing, repeating, and skipping ahead than film or even video has done, yet the pace of the telling itself is set by the producer. Watching in slow motion is not the same thing as reading slowly and savouring; with viewing, meaning is distorted by the change of pace in a way that is simply not true of reading.

These aspects of reading continue to be satisfying, and there is no doubt as long as reading offers these qualities of experience it will continue to be a valued part of the culture. To what extent it continues to be a singular, stand-alone form of engagement with text is not quite so clear. Lev Manovich, in his investigation of new media, draws our attention to ways in which both reading and viewing are changing:

> *Today, as media is [sic] being "liberated" from traditional physical storage media – paper, film,*

stone, glass, magnetic tape – elements of the printed word interface and the cinema interface that previously were hardwired to content become "liberated" as well. A digital designer can freely mix pages and virtual cameras, tables of content and screens, bookmarks and points of view. No longer embedded within particular texts and films, these organizational strategies are now free floating in our culture, available for use in new contexts. In this respect, the printed word and cinema have indeed become interfaces – rich sets of metaphors, ways of navigating through content, ways of accessing and storing data. For a computer user, both conceptually and psychologically, their elements exist on the same plane as radio buttons, pull-down menus, command line calls, and other elements of the standard human-computer interface.

(Manovich 2002/2001, p.73)

Manovich is largely talking about informational texts here, but the sense of formats and interfaces merging is also a factor in our connections with story. Like the organisational strategies he refers to, forms of engagement with fictional worlds are also much more 'free floating' than they used to be. As print reading supplements and is supplemented by other media, as reading moves outside the confines of the conventional paper book, new, plural, supple and sophisticated possibilities are presenting themselves to the readers of today and tomorrow.

NOTES

To see samples of these jokes, which were widespread during the early months of Bush's presidency, it is sufficient to type 'Curious George Bush' into google.com.

REFERENCES

All about Eve (2002/1950) DVD. Beverly Hills, CA, Twentieth-Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Boynton, Sandra (2002) *Philadelphia Chickens*. With CD. New York, Workman Publishing.

Clarke, Arthur C. & Stephen Baxter (2004) *Time's Eye*. Book One of *A Time Odyssey*. With CD. New York, Ballantine Books.

Conway, Jeffery, Lynn Crosbie & David Trinidad (2003) *Phoebe 2002: An Essay in Verse*. New York, Turtle Point Press.

Cunningham, Michael (1998) *The Hours*. New York, Picador/Ferrar Straus and Giroux.

de Kerckhove, Derrick (1997) *Connected Intelligence: The Arrival of the Web Society*. Toronto, Somerville House Publishing.

Dirt Music (2001) Various artists. CD. Australia, ABC Music.

Glavin, John (2003) 'Introduction'. In Glavin, John (ed.), *Dickens on Screen*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.1-8.

Horsley, Jake (2003) *Matrix Warrior: Being the One*. London, Gollancz.

Liu, Jae Soo (2003) *Yellow Umbrella*. With CD. New York, Kane/Miller Book Publishers.

Manovich, Lev (2002/2001) *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

McNeely, Joel (1996) *Star Wars: Shadow of the Empire*. Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Chorus. CD. Studio City, CA, Varese.

Mrs. Dalloway (1999/1998). DVD. London, Fox Lorber Home Video.

Perry, Steve (1996) *Shadows of the Empire*. New York, Bantam Doubleday Dell.

Rebuck, Gail (2004, March 13) "Word Power." *The Guardian*, pp. 34-35.

Sendak, Maurice & Tony Kushner (2003) *Brundibar*. After the opera by Hans Krasa & Adolf Hoffmeister. New York, Michael di Capua Books/Hyperion Books for Children.

Seth, Vikram (1999) *An Equal Music*. New York, McArthur & Co.

Seth, Vikram (2000) *An Equal Music*. Music by J.S. Bach *et al*. CD. New York, Decca.

Sheppard, Gordon (2003) *HA!: A Self-Murder Mystery*. Montreal/Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Stockton, Frank (2004) *The Bee-Man of Orn*. Illus. P.J. Lynch. With DVD. New York, Candlewick.

The Hours (2003/2002). DVD. Hollywood, Paramount Pictures Home Entertainment.

Wiesner, David (2001) *The Three Pigs*. New York, Clarion Books.

Winton, Tim (2002) *Dirt Music*. New York, Simon & Schuster.

Woolf, Virginia *et al*. (2003) *The Mrs. Dalloway Reader*. Ed. Francine Prose. Orlando, Harcourt.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Margaret Mackey is a professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta. She has published widely on the subject of young people, their books, their other media, and their reading behaviours; her most recent book is Literacies across Media: Playing the Text (RoutledgeFalmer, 2002). She is North American editor of *Children's Literature in Education*.