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PRINT CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL ERA:

THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By

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BA, University of Guelph, 2007

A thesis presented to

Ryerson & York Universities

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of the

Master of Arts

in the program of

Communication & Culture

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

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Shannon Culver

ABSTRACT

"Print Culture in the Digital Era: The Publishing Industry in the 21st Century"
Shannon Culver
Master of Arts, 2010
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This thesis provides an examination of the impact of new technologies on the book publishing industry and literary culture; analyzing the ways in which digital technologies like the eBook and eReader are changing reading practices and the conception of the book as a physical object and cultural artifact, as well as the way in which the Internet, and Web 2.0 applications in particular, are being used to create new literary communities. I posit that the communications circuit described by Robert Darnton is disrupted and reconfigured by new technologies that facilitate novel forms of communication between authors, publishers, booksellers and readers, but that these changes are an extension of existing practices within literary culture. Further, in significant ways, these changes signal a recuperation of collaborative forms of production and reading practices that predate the print era, and herald an era of renewed collaboration and communication amongst literary communities.

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 January 2010, Apple Inc. co-founder and chief executive officer Steve Jobs held a press conference at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, California, to introduce his company's newest product, the iPad. The invitation sent by Apple to the press simply read, "Come and see our latest creation," and the announcement of the tablet device had been shrouded in secrecy. Apple had not even confirmed that the device to be introduced at the event was a tablet computer, yet rumours had been circulating on the Internet for weeks as technophiles and media pundits speculated about the capabilities of the new product, and its consequences for the publishing industry. Valleywag.com, the technology-focused arm of Gawker Media Blog, even launched a farcical competition called the Apple Tablet Scavenger Hunt, offering a reward of $100,000 for photos of the device, and the opportunity to try one out. On 25 January 2010, two days before the scheduled press conference, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story with the byline: "Not since Biblical times has the arrival of a tablet been greeted with such anticipation" (Chmielewski and Pham).

The literary publishing industry had been wracked by conflict over the preceding months, with the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers locked in a legal imbroglio with Internet giant Google over allegations of "massive copyright infringement" caused by the Google Books Library Project, and publishing houses in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom fretting over the timing of release dates and pricing for e-books. Some viewed the release of

the Apple tablet as the potential saviour of the publishing industry, while others foresaw its release as the harbinger of death for print culture. The online book sale and e-book market had thus far been dominated by Amazon, and its e-reader device, the Kindle, and Job's unveiling of the iPad tablet marked a direct challenge to Amazon's monopoly. During the press conference, Jobs announced that four of the five largest publishing houses in the western world had signed on to sell digital versions of their texts in Apple's online iBook Store. The North American publishing industry, steeped in its own romantic history and loath to change for most of the twentieth century, was finally coming to terms with the digitally altered landscape of the consumer market.

The full consequences of the introduction of the iPad have yet to be seen; there is much speculation about the way in which new digital devices will transform the way we create and consume literary texts, and whether the iPad will be as successful in cultivating the e-book market as the iPod was with the digital music market. The race to dominate the e-book market, while well publicized and much debated, represents only one small segment of the massive transformations underway in the literary publishing industry in the early twenty-first century. New technologies are having a profound impact on every element and actor in the literary realm, from the way that texts are created and disseminated, to the interaction between authors, publishers, and readers. Online stores have given readers access to a wider variety of titles, while print-on-demand software has enabled publishers to create smaller print runs, making it more economically feasible to publish more titles. Online self-publishing services like Amazon's

CreateSpace and Lulu.com have enabled authors to seek advice and feedback on their work from potential readers, and to circumvent the traditional publishing production system entirely by creating digital and hardcover copies of their own books. Many new and exciting opportunities are presented by digital technologies, but in many instances those opportunities come at the cost of rendering obsolete facets of the traditional publishing industry. The digitization of texts transforms the modes of production associated with the printed book, changing, and in some cases rendering obsolete, facets of the industry involved in creating and disseminating texts. Will technological advances convert the publishing world into a cottage industry, since it will be more economically viable to print smaller numbers of texts, and to do so locally? How can authors, publishers, and booksellers best utilize new technologies to preserve and promote the creation of quality literature? Is there a place for bricks-and-mortar bookstores in the new digital realm? At the industry level, there are many questions relating to business practices that have yet to be answered.

The way in which we understand ourselves and the world around us is moderated by the media that we use to interact with other people, and with artistic and cultural forms. In his pioneering analysis of media ecology, *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan writes that the "personal and social consequences of any medium result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (23). The Internet as a new medium has had a profound impact on the way in which we create, disseminate, and access literary texts. Mark Nunes writes that the Internet "creates a metaphorical

world in which we conduct our lives" (315). He contends, "No longer does technology encompass the world. Now it replaces it with a 'more real than real' simulation" (321). Online relationships replace face-to-face ones, and online texts and works of art supersede those created in the physical world. Rather than understanding these new media as a radical break with the past, it is necessary to comprehend how new media are always in interaction with their predecessors. McLuhan asserts, "No medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media" (McLuhan 39). The effect of new media on old always necessarily flows both ways: digital technology and the printing press are mutually influenced by their interaction. Further, the development of new tools in the digital era used to enhance communication amongst producers and consumers of texts, and to create new literary communities in many cases represent a revitalization of reading practices that predate the print era.

New digital technologies will have a major impact on the way that readers access and interact with texts. E-reader and tablet devices like the Amazon Kindle and the Apple iPad allow consumers to store hundreds of digital texts on a lightweight, portable device, and software applications enable them to transfer those texts from one device to another, saving their page number and annotations. In theory, digital technologies should make available to consumers an unprecedented number of titles, no matter where they are in the world, so long as they can access a wireless signal. This freedom comes at the cost, though, of dismantling the traditional idea of the book as a printed and bound collection of paper, a physical object that has structured the creation and dissemination of

knowledge, information, and creative works for the past 500 years. Our understanding of the text as a coherent object is based on this physicality, and the characteristics of typography, graphic design, and page layout by which we identify such an object are irrevocably implicated in the materiality of the book. French literary theorist Gérard Genette calls these elements the "paratext," and positions them as the frame of the written text, shaping how the work is interpreted. The paratextual elements of a book are drastically altered in the digital realm, and we must assume that this has an impact on the way in which we receive and understand the work of literature. What is lost in the translation to the digital realm?

Technology has always played a central role in the transmission of thoughts, images and information. Walter Ong reminds us that "writing is a technology, calling for the use of tools and other equipment: styli or brushes or pens, carefully prepared surfaces such as paper, animal skins, strips of wood, as well as inks or paints and much more" (Ong 107). These technologies seem simplistic in comparison with the digital bits and interconnected computer networks of the twenty-first century, but at the time they were introduced, each represented the height of technological achievement and transformed social and cultural processes of information dissemination and artistic expression. It is important to view the technological developments of the new millennium as a subsequent phase in an ongoing narrative of change, in order to appreciate the social and technological continuity from the pre-digital era. Digital texts and reading devices have not been developed in a cultural vacuum, they are predicated on the structure of the printed book, and our approach to digital texts as both producers and consumers is informed by our

experience with the traditional paper book.

In the past decade, a field of scholarship focused on the impact of digitization on the publishing industry has emerged. Some scholars, such as Sven Birkerts, fear that written culture is in danger of being destroyed by electronic communication, while others like Jason Epstein view digitization as an opportunity to extend the publishing industry into new markets and a wider variety of texts. Epstein contends that the Internet does not change our fundamental relationship to information and texts; it simply alters the ways in which we access and interact with them. Roger Chartier envisages a relatively peaceful coexistence between printed and electronic texts in the years to come. In his article "Readers and Reading in the Electronic Age," he writes that this coexistence will require us to think about the new ways that fields of knowledge will be constructed, and about the reading modalities enabled by the electronic book. In another article entitled "Languages, Books and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text," Chartier characterizes the electronic text as a moving, pliable text in which the reader can intervene. Chartier proposes that the shift to the digital world is a new phase in the development of written culture, which requires a new understanding of the text, and a new relationship of the reader to the work. John B. Thompson and Angus Phillips share Chartier's optimism about the future of reading in the digital era. Both are engaged in an analysis of the changes currently underway in the publishing industry, and see opportunities for positive change through the establishment of online literary communities, which allow authors and their audiences to communicate directly, and for new writers to establish their work without the support of a publishing house.

In order to understand the changes currently underway in the publishing industry, it is necessary to examine the characteristics that comprise the conventional concept of the book, and how these are altered by digital technology, as well as the way that digitization affects the writing, publishing, and book-selling processes. It is also imperative to analyze the cultural significance of the book, and how the human relation to the text as a unique work of art is altered by digital reproduction and new participatory practices in the publishing industry. Digitization constitutes a shift away from the production of the book as a singular, cohesive object. This is a change from the way that literary texts have been produced over the past few decades, but it is not actually a new concept. Prior to the twentieth century, works of literature were often published in serial format, and in manuscript culture, readers created their own texts by compiling excerpts from a number of sources. The changes currently underway in the publishing industry have historical precedence; they are not representative of entirely new practices and conceptualizations. While the changes wrought by digitization are having a profound effect in many forms of media ranging from newspapers to academic journals to historical archives, the focus of this study is the literary text and the changing social and cultural role of the book.

Chapter one of this study investigates the changing concept of the book as a physical object and a cultural artifact. It will begin with an overview of the history of the printed book in Western culture in order to illustrate the role that technology, from the development of the written alphabet through to the creation of the printing press and the personal computer, has played in the creation and transmission of

information, images, and opinions. Transformations in print culture are impelled as much by social change as by technology, and it is necessary to understand the changing role that books have played in Western culture over the past five centuries in order to appreciate the significance of the developments of the twenty-first century. The digitization of works of literature creates new opportunities for ways that individuals may interact with texts, enhancing the potential for intertextual reading and communication amongst communities of readers. Through hyper-linking the book can be linked to thousands of other texts, and readers may intervene in the text in novel ways. The consequences of these changes will be explored in the first chapter.

The second chapter explores the role of the author in the digital era; beginning with a historical outline of the way in which the concept of the author as a solitary creative genius developed in the early modern period, and how that notion is challenged by new technologies. Twenty-first century authors are being encouraged to interact with their readers in unprecedented ways: by creating websites and running personal blogs, posting their work on forums to solicit feedback from potential readers, creating film trailers for their books, and making available sections of their work for free on the Internet. The digital era provides many new opportunities for writers to connect with publishers and readers, but it also poses new hazards to their livelihood. Piracy of digital texts is already an issue of chief concern in these early days of the e-book era, and self-publishing technologies make it possible for anyone to be an author. In the twenty-first century, authors will need to find unique ways to market and sell their work.

Chapter three provides an analysis of the changing landscape of the North American publishing industry, exploring the make-up of the industry at present and highlighting the chief opportunities and hazards posed by new digital technologies. There is a great democratic potential in such technology; participatory software, digital texts and print-on-demand allow a wide selection of books to be published at a diminished overhead cost, but they also change the role of the publisher in the process of creating texts. Self-publishing software enables authors to forego the middleman of the publisher entirely, and in the years to come it will be of utmost importance for publishers to find ways to make their services relevant and necessary to authors and readers. The role of booksellers is likewise altered by new technologies; in the digital realm authors and publishers may sell their texts directly to readers through their own websites, and consumers can find information about new titles through social networking sites and blogs. Booksellers, and particularly bricks-and-mortar bookstores, will need to reinvent their role in the literary world in order to retain their relevancy in the digital era.

The fourth chapter will consider the changing desires of the reader; how the tenets of "Generation Upload" are influencing cultural production and consumption, and how authors and publishers will need to adapt their practices in order to cater to the new generation of "digital natives," the term Don Tapscott coined for the first generation to grow up with the Internet. Theorists often characterize this generation as "pro/sumers" because they are not satisfied to simply be treated as consumers, they want to be able to produce content and alter that which is fed to them by the media. Digital technologies have altered the expectations that readers

have of texts, and the ways that they interact with them. Books are now read on Personal Digital Assistants, discussed in online communities, mashed up and taken apart. In the same way that the iPod has enabled users to express themselves through organizational features and applications, digital reading devices will need to reflect the individuality of their users.

While the changes induced by digital technology will have a far-reaching and profound impact on the publishing industry and book culture, these transfigurations are extensions of the written culture that has been developed over the past 500 years, and not a dramatic break from it. In the wake of digital publishing, printed books have continued to hold a special place in literary culture, and the transition from print to digital is not a transformation from a material to an immaterial state, so much as a transition from one medium to another. While books may now be accessed and interacted with in novel ways that allow for increased reader participation, the relationship between narrative structure and technology is a two-way channel: technology may change the way that we approach texts, but the traditional form of literary texts will also inform the way that we use new technology. The technical acts of writing, producing, and disseminating texts are altered by digital technology, but the desire to tell stories, and to share them with an audience through writing is not altered by digitization. New media require new modes of understanding and interaction, but these changes do not portend the end of the book or of readership, but rather an extension of a cultural practice that is deeply imbedded in our social and personal lives.

CHAPTER ONE:
The Concept of the Book as a Physical Object and a Cultural Artifact

When people speak of their experiences of reading literature, they speak not only of the pleasure of discovering new worlds or seeing things from a different perspective, but also of their interaction with the book as a physical object. The reading of a printed book is a tactile and potentially deeply personal experience; when people describe their encounters with the printed word, they speak of the texture of the pages under their fingers, the smell of the book, the artwork on the cover. The form of the printed book, the physical object made of bound leaves of paper, encased in a jacket bearing a unique design, the title of the text and the name of its author, is central to the experience of reading literature in the Western world. The medium of the printed book is a construct so deeply rooted in Western culture that it has come to seem natural, the obvious and optimal vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and stories. The printed book is not just a vehicle for the communication of the text, but a cultural artifact, with personal and social significance.

During a panel discussion at the 2007 London Book Fair, Canadian author Margaret Atwood said that her main fault with the eReader is that you cannot take it in the bath (Kindersley). A dichotomy currently exists in literary culture between the printed book, the "natural" vessel of the printed word, and the eReader, the electronic device designed for the purpose of reading books. Atwood depicts the printed book as a deeply personal object, welcomed into the private realm of the bathroom, while the eReader is depicted as incongruous and even dangerous in that

personal space. The printed book is not actually practically suited to the bathtub either, but as a cultural artifact it is so firmly entrenched in Western literary culture that it has come to seem natural within the private realm of human life. The electronic book, commonly referred to as the eBook, and its vehicle of transmission, the digital eReader, do not yet fit into the quixotic conceptualization of the reading experience, and the introduction of a digital device to those spaces seems like an intrusion on that personal time and space; a harsh juxtaposition of futuristic technology with a traditional pastime.

The technology of the eReader is often positioned as antithetical to the structure of the printed book,[i] when in fact the printed book is also a product of technology, albeit a less complex form. Technology has always been deeply implicated in the construction of the book as a physical object and cultural artifact, and the advancements in digital technology we are seeing now are a continuation of an ongoing narrative of change, rather than a radical break from the past. While changes in form do require new modes of understanding, and alter the ways in which we access and interact with texts, to date the structures governing literary production and reception in the digital realm are imitative of those associated with print culture, rather than the product of an entirely new form of creation and dissemination. The new interactive functions associated with reading on a digital device do modify the way in which the text is accessed by the reader, but the reading experience and the culture of literature is not fundamentally altered by them. The battle between print and digital texts does not need to result in the definitive triumph of one over the other; the two forms can co-exist and even benefit from

interaction with each other. The printed book and the digital text are not polar opposites, they are products of the same cultural field and history of production and the eBook is simply a new manifestation of the literary tradition that has governed the communication of stories and information in Western culture over the past five centuries.

Contemporary literary culture is bound up in the form of the printed book. The codex has been the dominant mode of conveying information, images, and stories for more than six centuries, and its structure shapes the transmission of knowledge in the Western world. Paul Delany and George Landow write that, in a literate culture, “the textual structures that have evolved over the centuries determine thought almost as powerfully as the primal structure that shapes all expression, language" (3). The format and construction of the printed book frames our expectations of the text and how we presume to interact with it. The textual structures of the digital text differ from those of the printed book, but the differences can and should be viewed as an extension of the structure of the printed text, rather than a radical divergence from it, just as the form of the printed text that dominates literary culture in the early twenty-first century is an evolution of earlier textual structures.

The form through which literature is created and disseminated is never static; the technology used to create texts, and the meanings associated with that technology, are constantly changing, but each innovation develops out of preceding modes of creation and comprehension. Chartier identifies three major shifts caused by technological innovation in the creation of texts that have shaped the progress of

written culture in the Western world. The first was the development of the codex by the Romans in the first century AD "the book made up of leaves and pages gathered into the same binding or covering," which replaced the scroll or volumen used by Greek and Roman societies ("Languages " 141). The second revolution came with the appearance of the *libro unitario* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the book that "assembled in the same binding all the works of a single author, or even just one sole work" (141). The third and most significant transformation came with the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. From that time until the late-twentieth century, the printing press held a firm monopoly over the reproduction of the written word, and the technology that has evolved from that innovation has shaped print culture in the Western world ever since and continues to shape the development of digital texts. Each of the transformations discussed by Chartier required major shifts in the way that individuals conceptualized and interacted with texts, but each phase evolved out of that which preceded it.

Each technological shift in the history of written culture caused massive changes in the way that human beings organized, and interact with information. The creation of the codex caused individual texts and documents to be grouped and linked to each other in novel ways, enabling readers to draw new connections between texts and to create new systems of categorization. The collection of the works of a solitary author in a single, distinct object was the result of transformations in the conceptualization of individuality and authorship during the early modern era and the eighteenth century. Changes in literary culture are always the result not only of technological advancements, but socio-cultural

transformations as well. Adrian John asserts that the printing revolution was caused not only by innovations in paper-making and printing technology, but by changes in the conventions of handling and investing credit in textual materials (60). Over the course of Western history, developments in the creation and dissemination of literary texts have caused, and simultaneously been caused by, changing conceptions of the self, the role of art and literature in culture, and the importance of literacy in society. McLuhan contends that "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human behaviour," and each of the technological developments identified by Chartier introduced a new scale of creation and comprehension into Western society (*Understanding* 24).

Developmental narratives regarding technology are often framed as models of innovation resulting in the annihilation of previous models, in which each new form obliterates the one that came before it. Paul Duguid describes this model of creation/destruction through the concept of supersession: the idea that "each new technological type vanquishes or subsumes its predecessors" (65). In certain cases, there is some truth to this hypothesis: for instance, in the second half of the twentieth century, the music industry bore witness to a rapid process of supersession as the vinyl record was supplanted by the eight-track, which was then in turn displaced by the cassette tape, and the compact disc. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the MP3 digital audio format began to replace the compact disc as the most prevalent form of audio recording. It seems that almost every decade over the past half century has seen the introduction of a new device that boasts

better sound quality and heightened usability and portability, rendering previous models obsolete. In other scenarios, however, the process of supersession has not been so clear-cut. When the personal computer was introduced to the home and workplace in the 1970s, it was heralded as the harbinger of a "paperless society," but 40 years later, that prediction has yet to be fulfilled. In some cases, older models of technology are maintained or recuperated for nostalgic reasons, like the recent surge of popularity in vinyl record players (Walker). In short, there is no one clear-cut model of supersession that can be applied to different fields of technology or cultural artifacts; the ways in which different forms of media interact with each other are unique and often inexplicable.

Duguid views the construction of narratives of supersession as a type of false dichotomizing between a pastoral past and a complex future. He writes that, if we accept this dichotomy of a simple past in opposition to a complicated future, it is easy to assume that complex new technology will sweep away its simple predecessors (63-64). But to view the printed book as a simple form of technology is to deny the centuries of progress that have been put into its development, the crucial role it plays in storing and disseminating information and shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Duguid proposes viewing the book as a machine, in order to "bridge the supersessive chasm some have dug between new technology and the book, as if one were a machine and the other not" (78). The printed book may not be able to play flash videos or read a text aloud, but it is just as much the product of technology as the eReader. Digital technologies have already been incorporated into the creation and distribution processes of the

literary industry for a number of years; processes for creating books through digital print-on-demand software, organizing them on digital databases and networks, and selling them over the Internet to consumers are already well-established in the North American publishing industry. The digital book is simply the latest development in this ongoing process of technological advancement.

In the construction of the dichotomy between print and digital texts, the main point of contrast that is typically cited between the two is the capacity for novel forms of interaction offered to the reader by digital texts. While the introduction of hyperlinks and hypertextual functions to the literary text does enhance the reader's ability to view each text in a matrix of relations to others, and to intervene in the margins of that text, these developments are extensions of properties that also exist in the printed book. Delany and Landow point out that the table of contents, page numbers, chapters, verses, footnotes, and indexes of a printed text are all hypertextual functions, enabling each word, stanza, paragraph, and chapter to be linked to other sections of the text and to other texts (4). These functions are accelerated in the digital realm — rather than looking up a referenced text and seeking it out in hard copy in a library or bookstore, one may click on a link and access the source material instantaneously in digital format — but they are not new.

The process of lateral reading, which begins with one text and leads to the discovery of others through it, has simply been sped up by the implementation of new technologies. Likewise, the concept of "decentered" reading, in which the reader is able to choose his or her own center of investigation and experience, is not unique to the digital realm either (Derrida 225). Individual readers have always had

the choice to read a printed text in whatever order they choose: skipping passages, pages or chapters, reading the book out of order, or reading only sections of it. The form of the printed book suggests how that text should be accessed and interacted with, but it cannot compel the reader to interact with it in the prescribed manner.

Very little is actually fixed or permanent in the process of meaning making involved in the printed book. No text is ever read in a void, and the significations assigned to particular texts, authors, and contexts are in a constant state of flux. Stanley Fish contends that "there are no fixed texts, only interpretive strategies making them" (358). Postmodern literary theory asserts that the meaning of a text is created as much by the individual reader, and the experiences he or she brings to the text, as those intended by the author and publisher. The significance of an individual work of literature may change drastically over the course of time, it may not be lauded until long after its author's demise, or it may lose prominence as literary trends and cultural paradigms shift. As Roland Barthes writes, "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological meaning' (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (223). The printed book is a permanent object in the sense that the reader can only intervene in its physical appearance in a secondary and external manner, but the literary text contained within the book is a constantly shifting entity and, as such, is not altered by its introduction into the digital realm.

The meaning of the text is constructed by the reader's impression not only of the text itself, but its paratext as well, those elements described by Genette as the

practices and discourses that surround the text; productions such as an author's name, a title, illustrations, or a preface (2). Genette writes that it is the paratext that "enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers" (1). The paratextual elements are what enable the reader to physically identify a work of literature; the conventions of size, design, and typography differentiate the novel from the cookbook or the travel guide at first glance. Some of the paratextual elements of the book are altered in the digital realm; the physical properties by which we identify a book are not present, but to date eBook designs have attempted to replicate the paratextual characteristics of the printed book. Texts are still organized by paragraphs, pages, and chapters, and designed to be read in a sequential order dictated by the author and publisher. The iPad, Apple's tablet computer, has technology that simulates the act of turning paper pages; the reader moves a finger across the screen from right to left to flip the page, and the appearance of individual pages on the monitors of all eReaders are designed to replicate the look of a printed page. In some ways, the eReader and eBook provide an enhanced version of the reading experience offered by the printed book, but it is not an essentially different reading experience, rather one based on the conventions and paratextual characteristics of print culture.

One significant paratextual difference between the printed and the digital book is in the presentation of the book as a physical object. Whereas printed books come in countless different sizes and shapes, every book that is read on an eReader is consumed through the same medium. Regardless of whether the text being read on a digital device is a pulp romance novel or a canonical classic, the machine

retains the same appearance. Historically, the paratext has played a crucial role in delineating works of literature from other genres of printed books, but it also provides a more subtle form of identification in delineating between different forms of literature.

Paratextual productions have long been used to create hierarchies within literature; to delineate "high" from “low” literature, and mass-produced texts from specialized ones. In the classical period, large formats (quartos) were reserved for serious works such as religious and philosophical texts, or for prestige editions of literary works, while popular texts were typically produced in smaller formats, enabling readers to discern easily by appearance alone the genre of a text (Genette 18). In the nineteenth century, the octavo format was used for serious literature, and the duodecimo format was used for cheap editions of popular literature and, in the mid-twentieth century, the mass-produced pocketbook was introduced as a portable, less expensive alternative to the trade edition. Distinctions based on the perceived quality of the text have long been manifested in its physical properties, and we have used these paratextual productions to categorize and evaluate works of literature. In the twenty-first century, the eReader has problematized this physical categorization of texts because, in the digital realm, all texts are transmitted through the same form.

The physical paratextual elements of the book – the cover art, the texture of each page under the reader’s fingers, the size and bulk of the object – that are so much a part of the work in print culture, are rendered obsolete in the world of electronic reading devices and eBooks. Walter Benjamin writes that each original

work of art elicits an aura, or sense of awe, in its audience, and that the aura is displaced and degraded by the technique of reproduction. He asserts that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (20). The question we must ask in the digital era is whether it is possible for a text to be said to be truly anywhere if it only exists as a transitory assemblage of digital bits.

Benjamin adds that the "unique existence of the work of art determined the history which it was subject to throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as various changes in its ownership."(20) A book takes on sentimental value as it becomes dog-eared and weathered by passing through different hands and places. In the digital era, a text can be reproduced by the million at the touch of a button, without any degradation in quality, because the text no longer exists as a cohesive whole, but rather as a collection of fragmentary bits. In the digital realm, there is no longer any original work of art in the traditional sense.

An online text can be conceived of as in a permanent state of creation, since it can be altered and interacted with by each reader; a literal manifestation of the postmodernist projects of intertextuality and deconstruction. Digital texts are simulations of printed texts, but in many instances, the digital text has entirely replaced the printed text. The book has moved into the age of simulation, in which models of the real can be generated without origin or reality: a hyperreal. Baudrillard writes that the real is "produced from miniaturized cells, matrices and memory banks, models of control - and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of

times from these" (*Simulacra* 2). This depiction aptly describes the make-up of eBooks, assembled from a collection of digital bits that can be replicated unendingly. Baudrillard writes that the Age of Simulation begins with a liquidation of all referentials, and consequently threatens the difference between true and false, real and imaginary. In the context of print culture, the real of the text as a physical artifact is erased by the fragmentary nature of digital technology.

In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Baudrillard writes that the hypertelic movement of postmodern technology simulates presence "without even the faintest glimmer of a possible absence, in a state of radical disillusion; the state of pure presence" (32). The digital text is no longer a substitution or alternative for a printed book; it is a simulation that eliminates the potential of any "real text" outside of the digital realm. Baudrillard contends that there are "no more media in the literal sense of the word – that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of real and another" (*Simulacra* 82*)*. In this context, the authenticity of the text must be gleaned through the platform it is accessed on, and through the moment of reception.

Issues of originality are put into contestation in the digital era in all areas of artistic endeavour. Visual artist Douglas Davis writes that there is no longer a "clear conceptual difference between original and reproduction in virtually any medium" (381). Davis proposes that the aura now resides not in the thing itself, but "in the originality of the moment when we see, hear, read, repeat, revise" (386). This viewpoint diminishes the importance of the book as a material object, because the reader, at the point of reception rather than creation, bestows the significance of the

text upon it. Jeff Gomez writes, "Books are just husks, 'souvenirs,' if not trophies. What affects us least is the paper." (167) It is the text itself that retains cultural significance, not the container through which we access it. Literary culture is not threatened by its induction to the digital realm. Likewise, while the new medium of the digital text requires new modes of understanding and offers new opportunities for interaction, this new form of consumption does not need to replace the printed book.

In the past decade, many literary theorists have contributed to the construction of the dichotomy between printed books and digital texts by focusing on the materiality of the text and subscribing to the theory of technological supersession. Sven Birkerts is one such technological pessimist; in his book *The Gutenberg Elegies*, he positions the printed page and circuit-driven information technology as dialectically opposed. Birkerts echoes McLuhan's claim that new media technology has shifted our society from a condition of isolated individualism to decentralized mediation, and asserts that, because written culture is associated with the humanist project of individualism, it is degraded and threatened by the onslaught of new technology. Birkerts contends that "as the world hurtles on toward its mysterious rendezvous, the old act of slowly reading a serious book becomes an elegiac exercise" (6). He adopts a fatalistic tone in describing the inevitable death of literature at the hands of new technology. There is a note of fear in his argument reminiscent of the lamentations of F.R. Leavis and Lazarsfeld and Merton in the early-twentieth century about the besieging of high culture by mass, popular culture. Birkerts fears for the sanctity of literature in a world where "everyone is a

publisher" and the special status of the writer as singular creator is jeopardized. Birkerts's argument is short-sighted; the same fears about the death of literature arose with the invention of the television, radio, and personal computer, and in the wake of the proliferation of trade magazines and daily newspapers over the twentieth century, but literary culture survived each of those encounters, and we must assume it will prevail in the digital era as well.

Publisher Jason Epstein's criticism, however, envisages a more optimistic future for the publishing industry. Epstein maintains that the Internet is new only by virtue of its electronic form, not because of its intellectual substance. He contends that humans have always immersed themselves in a web of information, and that the Internet does not alter the fundamental nature of human work and understanding. Epstein asserts that "digitization and the Internet have made the Gutenberg system obsolete but not the printed book" ("The End" 10). He believes that future reference and research materials, such as encyclopedias and journals, will be produced solely in digital format, but novels and other literary works will continue to be produced in the traditional printed format in the digital era. For Epstein and others, different forms of media can co-exist and interact with each other in a mutually beneficial manner, rather than engaging in a battle for cultural domination.

Many literary theorists are already asserting the continued importance of the printed book in the digital era. David Gunkel, for example, points to the paradox inherent in the recent proliferation in books about the death of print technology and culture: printed books about the death of printed books. Gunkel repudiates the view

that the inception of digital technology portends the demise of the printed text, offering as an alternative the concept of remediation, in which a new medium takes the place of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of the writing in the older medium and reformulating its cultural space (289). Gunkel quotes McLuhan's concept of the process of technological transformation, asserting that a new medium does not simply replace an old medium; the content of any new medium is always the old medium it is said to be replacing (*Understanding* 23). Theorists like Gunkel, Chartier, and Duguid seek to dismantle the dichotomy between new and older forms of media, offering an alternative model of development that highlights continuity rather than disparity.

Gunkel situates the development of digital texts within the history of written culture in the same manner as Chartier, locating the new technology within an established trajectory of progression that normalizes the changes incited by digitization. Chartier posits that, in the decades to come, "there will most probably prevail a coexistence – not necessarily a peaceful one – between [the electronic and printed book] and the three modes of inscribing and communicating texts: manuscript writing, printed publication, electronic texts ("Readers and Reading" 2). Further, many critical theorists assert that digital texts are not void of physical presence despite their immaterial, intransitive essence. Marlene Manoff writes that "electric objects are as dependent upon material instantiation as printed books. We access electronic texts and data with machines made of metal, plastic and polymers" (312). Manoff dismantles the print/digital dichotomy by pointing to the fact that digital texts still have a material presence, and cannot exist independently of the

media in which they are instantiated, a reverberation of McLuhan's infamous statement, "The medium is the message." According to these theorists, the electronic or digital book does not need to replace the traditional printed text, but will find its place alongside it.

There are many different visions of the form that the coexistence between the digital and printed will take in the years to come. Epstein maintains that most digital files will be "printed and bound on demand at point of sale machines [...] which within minutes will inexpensively make single copies that are indistinguishable from books made in factories" ("Reading" 103). He sees this as a potentially democratizing tool in the publishing industry, that with print-on-demand machines available in libraries, bookstores, and other retail locations, "readers nearly everywhere with access to a computer screen may eventually search a practically limitless digital catalogue linked to innumerable databases" ("Reading" 103). Epstein sees this technology as having the potential to dismantle the monopoly that large publishing houses and book companies currently have on the market.

Chartier takes a more cautionary tone, warning that the electronic revolution, which at first seems universal, can also deepen, rather than reduce, inequalities. He cautions that "a new 'illiteracy' could emerge, no longer defined by the inability to read and write, but by the impossibility of gaining access to the new forms of transmission of writing – which, to say the least, do not come free" ("Readers and Reading" 5). There are barriers to access involved in online reading that are more severe than those involved in accessing a printed book. One requires a

computer and a connection to the Internet to even begin to interact with the digital world, and e-Reader prices currently range from $300 to $600. Further, the vast majority of texts currently available in digital format are in English, the dominant language of the Internet. Certainly digital technology will not prove to be the great equalizer in literature, but it does provide opportunities for more books to be printed in more languages, and accessed from more diverse locations.

One of the chief benefits attributed to the digitization of literature is the preservation of aging texts in a format that is perceived to be impervious to physical degradation. Through endeavours like the Google Books Library Project, hundreds of thousands of texts have been digitized in an effort to make them available in the public domain, and to allow texts to outlast the lifespan of their physical containers. Digitization is viewed as a method by which to circumvent the "slow-fire phenomenon" causing books produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to deteriorate at an increasingly rapid pace (Palfrey 252). Paul Duguid writes that the deterioration of books printed on high acid paper with silver nitrate film is currently causing the silent destruction of significant regions of twentieth century cultural production (70). Digitization is promulgated by technophiles as a mode by which to enable texts to live forever, transforming them into ethereal and eternal collections of digital bits, impervious to physical degradation and damage by the elements.

The rate of supersession in the digital realm, however, is much higher than that in the world of printed books; the constant and continual updating of hardware and software can render documents and archives obsolete and inaccessible within the span of a few short years. In some cases, archivists are already resurrecting

paper documents recently determined otiose to comprehend unreadable digital archives (Duguid 71). We need to consider the full consequences of digitization before we deem it the ideal and exclusive vehicle for the resuscitation of endangered literature; while it may save texts from disappearing alongside their physical casings, digital texts are not immune to supersession, and in some cases may be more prone to it because of how quickly technology is updated.

Aside from the practical concerns involved in the technology of digitization, we must take into account the important cultural role that printed books play. Books are not just vehicles for the transmission of texts; they are records of human endeavour and culture. Sherman Young writes, "Printed books are the physical embodiment of a particular moment in time" (109). Paratextual elements like cover art, typography, and wear and tear to physical books locate a text within a specific socio-historical context in a manner that cannot be replicated in the digital realm. It may be more convenient or efficient to read certain texts on an eReader, but efficacy is not the only factor taken into consideration in decisions regarding cultural objects and pastimes. Books, as artifacts of a particular moment in time, and physical manifestations of an individual's knowledge and taste, serve a distinct purpose in the construction of the self.

In the digital debate, it is important not to conflate "information" and "literature." For texts like instruction manuals, textbooks, encyclopedias, and other reference materials, which are continually updated and amended, the digital form may be preferable, because digital texts may be revised much more easily than printed books, but literature does not need to be updated or amended – it is the

product of a particular and unique space and time. In this context, printed works of literature may be considered more similar to works of visual art than other printed materials. The process of supersession is not as applicable in fields of artistic endeavour as it is in other areas of technological production. Artists still use the medium of oil paint and brushes, even though photography provides a much more accurate and efficient mode of representation, and there is still a market for the sale of paintings. Original works of art gain value as they age because they retain their aura and acquire cultural signification throughout time. Printed books may become more of a niche product as the popularity of digital texts spreads; they may become collector's items as the eBook becomes the dominant medium for the consumption of literature, but they will not be rendered entirely obsolete.

To view the printed book and the digital text as diametrically opposed is to disregard the eBook's basis in the structure of print culture and the printed book's special role as a cultural artifact. Rather than viewing the technological capabilities offered by the eReader as an advanced, superior version of the printed book, it may be more useful to view it as an extension of print culture, and an alternative to the printed book with distinct benefits, but with marked drawbacks as well. A printed book cannot run out of battery power in the middle of a chapter, and it will not be rendered obsolete by technological advancements within the next decade. It does not require access to the Internet, or the use of an expensive device, to be consumed. The individual printed book as a physical object, distinct from other books by its unique artwork, design, and typography has value on both a personal and a social level, and serves as an artifact of cultural processes and periods. The

transformations that have shaped the modes by which we produce and consume literature as part of an ongoing trajectory, a narrative in which digital texts are only the most recent chapter.

CHAPTER TWO:
The Place of the Author in the Digital Realm

The concept of the author as a cultural figure has evolved drastically over the course of Western history, as a result of ever-changing social, economic, and technological factors. The perceived role of the author at any given time is a reflection of cultural values and notions of ownership over intellectual and creative property. Since the eighteenth century, the author has generally been conceived of as a solitary, creative individual, with unique rights over his or her work. Digital technologies that allow individuals to work collaboratively and enable effortless transmission of texts are currently transforming this construct, however, and in several ways are creating a shift towards a more fluid and collaborative form of authorship, such as existed prior to the print era.

The move towards a more open and collaborative conception of authorship poses new opportunities as well as hazards to the profession of authorship; while the Internet enhances the ability of individuals to promote and disseminate their writing, it also endangers their ability to safeguard their rights to their intellectual and creative work. This change is a reflection of a larger cultural shift created by the dynamic, interactive form of the Internet. Music, texts and information can be shared with great ease in the digital realm, and these developments are transforming the ways in which consumers conceptualize cultural objects and their creators. The book publishing system has traditionally operated as a one-way channel, with texts moving through a "communications circuit" from the mind of the author, through the publisher and bookseller to the hands of the reader ("What is

the History" 11). This system is being broken down in the digital era, however, as authors are expected to share more of their selves with readers through blogs and social media profiles, and the established system of copyright is being called into question by writers and readers alike. Rather than changes signaling the end of the profession of authorship, these shifts denote a return to a more collaborative conception of the profession, such as existed prior to the print era, and the constructs of that period can be viewed as a precedent for how to proceed in the future.

In pre-literate oral cultures, stories were conceived of as collaborative constructions, added to and amended by each individual who retold a particular story. Before the invention of the printing press, the concept of the author was of little importance to a text's meaning; Arthur F. Marotti writes that "in the system of manuscript transmission, it was normal for lyrics to elicit revisions, corrections, supplements, and answers, for they were part of an ongoing social discourse" (Marotti 135). The manuscript was conceived of as a living social document, a malleable, evolving organism, altered by the hands that shaped it, but not ultimately the property of any one author. The Internet has provided the conditions for a return of this conceptualization of the manuscript by enabling a new form of collaborative writing. The World Wide Web offers an open and dynamic space in which readers can influence and intervene in the shaping of a text, and authors can work collaboratively on a single document.

From the beginning, this capacity was one of the Internet's strengths; the online realm allows multiple authors to work on a single text in a much more

efficient manner than in the pre-digital era. Individuals are collaborating on creative work in unprecedented ways through interactive websites that enable multiple users to work on interlinked web pages. Wiki software was used to create the collaborative novel *A Million Penguins,* a joint initiative between Penguin Books and the Institute of Creative Technologies at De Montfort University in the United Kingdom. While *A Million Penguins* never came together as a cohesive novel in the traditional sense, 75,000 people viewed the site during its period of creation, and 1,476 registered as users of the wiki, illustrating that while the novel may have been released to negative reviews, the concept of the collaborative novel captured the interests of a broad Internet audience (Mason and Thomas 16).

Collaborative writing projects can be viewed as a literal manifestation of Barthes's destabilizing of the singular Author-God, by enabling the process of imbuing a text with meaning to be shared among many individuals. They try to deconstruct the traditional relationship between author and reader; each reader is invited to participate in the writing process, and organizers view themselves as technicians and moderators who remain in the background (Hartling 291). Recognizing the variety of roles that individuals play in the creation of a collaborative text enables us to comprehend the many different types of authorship that exist. Nora Miller describes the wiki as a "transition from the view of writing as a product to the understanding of writing and reading as moments in a process of communication," a paradigm that is rapidly gaining relevance in the new world of online text creation, but that also has historical precedence in the pre-print era (Miller).

The thirteenth-century Franciscan monk St. Bonaventure described four different kinds of actors involved in the "making" of a book: the *scriptor/scribe*, who adds nothing and changes nothing; the *compilator/compiler* who puts together passages from other texts which are not his own; the *commentator* who adds his own words or commentary to those of others; and the *auctor*, who writes both his own words and those of others, but with his own in prime place and others' added only for the purposes of confirmation (Bennett 38-39). In St. Bonaventure's system of classification, the *auctor*, who writes his own words, is configured as part of a continuum, and his role differs from that of the scribe only in technical matters.

Elizabeth Eisenstein writes that prior to the 1500s the writer was conceived of as "a man who 'makes books' with a pen just as a cobbler is a man who makes shoes on a last" (85). Writing was not conceived of as especially different from any other vocation that involved creative capacities, and the author who writes his or her own original work was not valued above the scribe. In the digital era, as media become increasingly personalized and interactive, it is feasible that we may see a return to a form of manuscript culture, in which individuals create their own texts derived from excerpts of the work of others. The music industry has already made this leap, enabling individuals to download single songs from the Internet rather than purchasing entire albums, and it is likely that as people become accustomed to this type of personalized consumerism, they will expect to be able to interact with other forms of media in this way as well.

The development of this form of individualized consumerism can be viewed as an extension of a cultural process that has been in development since the sixteenth

century, when social focus shifted from the community to the individual human subject. Raymond Williams writes that the origin of the author figure is predicated in the early modern concept of the individual; he attributes this shift in the conceptualization of human relations to the "break-up of the medieval social, economic and religious order" (163-64). Social and political transformations such as the revolts against feudal power in the Late Middle Ages, divisions within the Catholic Church, and the rise of mercantilism and urbanization, all contributed to a transfer in emphasis from the collective to the individual in European society.

The cultural figure of the author was created in this era, as the new focus on the individual caused the reading public to take notice of particular authors, and writers began to assert their legal rights over their creative work. During the Renaissance, writing became inaugurated as an individualized activity and a potential source for recognition and social advancement as a result of the expansion of literacy among the European bourgeoisie, as well as the availability of cheap, mass-produced writing materials (Finkelstein and McCleery 70). For the first time, individual writers, such as Chaucer and Gower, began to cultivate a distinctive style of writing and authorial voice, and readers began to develop an appreciation of particular individuals' work and bestow esteem on gifted poets and authors. Michel Foucault writes that the "coming into being of the notion of the 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences" (225). This new sense of the individualized self, combined with the technological development of the printing press and transformations in concepts of property ownership, led to the entrenchment of the

modern concept of the professional author in Western culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

During the Romantic era, the newly formulated construct of the author entered the commercial realm, as demand for literary texts grew and the newly expanded reading public developed an appreciation of the identities of particular writers. During this era, advancements in the technologies of print production and paper-making, combined with the growth of the reading public and changes in legal statutes and business practices, "created circumstances by which printed texts, manufactured more quickly and at increasingly cheaper costs, could be sold to a widening mass audience" (Finkelstein and McCleery 79). The proliferation of literary texts generated larger profits for publishers and allowed individual authors to claim continual profits from their work, leading to the conception of the professional author.

Authorial identity acquired new import as printers perceived the commercial market value of printing texts by established authors. Writers, in turn, recognized their own financial and cultural value and fought to forge a link between artistic endeavour and copyright, eventually leading to the establishment of the "concept of copyright as a representation of authorial ownership of intellectual property" (Finkelstein and McCleery 70). The identity of the author became central to the value of the text, and this paradigm has remained essential to the way we conceptualize authors and their texts through to the twenty-first century.

The cultural persona of the author that was established during the early modern era has continued to gain import over the past few centuries, and individual

writers have gained special status in society as singular, unique individuals. The characterization of the author as a lone, creative genius has been fueled by the tradition of the aloof, solitary writer, embodied by ascetic authors such as Emily Dickinson, Harper Lee, and Marcel Proust. This persona has persevered through the twentieth century through notoriously private authors like J.D. Salinger, Alice Munro, and Thomas Pynchon. Reclusive authors occupy a paradoxical position, simultaneously implicated in and opposed to commodity culture, refusing the celebrity role while profiting from their reputation, and we have indulged this paradox, and accepted it as a necessary factor of their brilliance (Moran).

This cosseted existence is becoming less feasible in the digital era, though, as people share more of their thoughts, opinions, and actions with the world through the digital medium, and publishing houses are absorbed into multimedia conglomerates, forcing authors to compete with actors in a variety of media. Writers are not excluded from the expectations of the digital realm and, in the past decade, have been encouraged to take on a more public role through the maintenance of personal websites and social media profiles. The online author is a character created by the writer to represent him or herself in the interactive and individualized milieu of the Internet. In the digital realm, avatars of authors and readers may interact in a way that is impossible in the real world.

The author is simultaneously more and less present in the digital era; the author as character created through social media profiles and blogs provides readers with a new insight into the candid thoughts and opinions of the writer, but the unique identity of the individual author is also obscured by the construction of

these simulated representations of the self. The online persona created through applications like Twitter and Facebook is a caricature of the actual individual, and interaction between individuals over the Internet occurs on the plane of hyperreality; a simulation of face to face interactions that supersedes reality (*Simulacra* 2).

The communication that takes place over the Internet between authors and their readers may be a simulation of interaction, but it has consequences in the world outside of the digital realm. A new generation of writers is embracing the unprecedented level of exposure offered by the Internet, and using it to gain recognition for their work. Florian Hartling writes that in creating online personas and maintaining blogs and websites, "[b]oth traditional and Internet authors practice almost unlimited, exaggerated self-portrayal and self-production" (291). One author who has utilized the potential for exposure offered by the Internet to his advantage is Brooklyn-based author Tao Lin. Soft-spoken and retiring in person, Lin has created a gregarious alter ego in the digital realm that has attracted a cult following among young readers. He is an avid blogger, maintains profiles on multiple social media profiles, and has engaged in publishing stunts as far-fetched as auctioning off his used notebooks on eBay, and selling shares in his latest novel on his blog for $2,000 each. In a January 2009 article in *New York* magazine, Sam Anderson writes, "in the midst of publishing's slow-motion collapse, Lin's stunty, DIY approach to fundraising seems like a possible glimpse into the industry's future." Through his online exertions, Lin has circumvented the traditional publicity protocols of the publishing industry to acquire an audience through alternate

means.

Lin's success is a reflection of his recognition of the ways in which the Internet can be used to create communities of like-minded individuals. Lin's association with other alternative authors and artists has contributed to a degree of his notoriety, and he has worked in collaboration on a variety of projects with a number of other young authors and poets. In 2008, he founded the literary press Muumuu House, which publishes original prose and poetry, as well as alternative and often ironic texts such as transcripts of online conversations from Gmail chat. As a member of "the first generation of writers to come of age entirely under the backlit glow of the Internet," he is aware of the unique opportunities for collaborative work provided by the digital realm, and operates within a community of writers whose work mutually influences and enhances that of the other members (Anderson). Lin provides a prototype of a new breed of writers who are embracing the communal nature of work carried out on the Internet, and using the opportunities for exaggerated self-representation in the digital realm to their advantage.

The book industry has traditionally operated as a one-way channel, in which the transformation of manuscripts into books is a private practice, taking place behind the doors of publishing houses, and consumers are only entitled to the finished product once it has been made available in bookstores. In the digital realm of networked texts and social media platforms, readers can provide feedback to authors directly, authors can respond publicly to their critics, and publishers can gather information about what kind of books consumers would like to buy in an ongoing system of communication and idea-exchanging. These changes have the

potential to enhance the democratic qualities of the publishing process by enabling authors to promote themselves and their work without going through the traditional publicity channels of book reviews and tours, and to give consumers more power in the decision-making processes involved in publishing literary works.

The "blog to book deal" phenomenon provides an example of the ways in which success in the digital realm can translate into success in the publishing world, as authors and publishers begin to recognize the value of acquiring an audience over the Internet prior to publication. Many online writers have made the successful transition from the web to print in the past few years; in January 2009, Internet copywriter Christian Lander started a blog called *Stuff White People Like*, a satirical compendium of observations and stereotypes about things that middle class white people purportedly enjoy. Lander's blog quickly gained traction as readers forwarded the link to his blog to friends and quoted it on social media platforms; it soon transcended the digital realm, garnering discussion in newspaper articles and on radio programs. Within a few short months, the blog had generated so much buzz that Lander was offered a book deal by Random House. Jeff Gomez writes, "blogs can offer a track record, showing that the writer can indeed connect with readers and that people are interested in his work" (152). The number of readers an author's blog attracts provides palpable proof of that writer's popularity, giving that individual leverage with which to approach publishing houses.

In the digital era, it is becoming exceedingly important for authors to acquire an Internet audience in order to get a book published, as an assurance that the text will have a pre-existing audience by the time it reaches bookstores. This new system

holds advantages for authors, publishers and readers alike; for authors because they can acquire a reading audience prior to signing with a publishing house, for publishers because they know a new title will have a guaranteed audience, and for readers because they are the ones who initially popularize the blog, and consequently have an unprecedented form of influence on the decision-making process of publishers.

By bestowing the reading public with new responsibility in determining which authors' work will be published, the digital era provides a literal manifestation of Barthes' project of shifting the task of imbuing a text with meaning from the shoulders of the author to those of the individual reader. In his essay "The Death of the Author," he writes that "[t]o give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (223). Barthes argues that the meaning of the text is bestowed not by the author, but by the reader – by the experiences and knowledge each individual reader brings to the text. In the digital era, publishers are recognizing the veracity of Barthes' assertion and enabling readers to select texts for publication and bestow them with significance.

In recent years, traditional publishing houses such as HarperCollins and Macmillan have been capitalizing on the ability to gather the opinions of the reading public on texts prior to publication by creating "digital slushpiles" through the establishment of websites where authors can submit their manuscripts, to be read by an online audience, as well as editors from the publishing houses. HarperCollins's site, Authonomy, allows users to upload up to 10,000 words, and texts are voted on by members of the Authonomy community. HarperCollins has pledged to read the

top ten rated submissions each month, and has already published four novels culled from the website (Neill). In February 2010, Authonomy bought the rights to the novel *Someone to Love Us,* the true story behind Agatha Christie's play *The Mousetrap,* from Terence O'Neill, the brother of the boy whose death inspired Christie's play (Flood). O'Neill's story quickly gained popularity with Authonomy's online community, attracting the attention of editors at HarperCollins.

Initiatives like Authonomy enable aspiring writers to receive feedback on their work from potential readers prior to publication, but the opportunities for self-promotion and communication with readers are not limited to new authors. Established authors are also utilizing the opportunities afforded by the digital era to interact with readers in novel ways. Canadian author Douglas Coupland operates a personal website (www.coupland.com) that showcases his writing and visual art and provides links to articles pertaining to and reviews of his work. His website exposes fans of his writing to his other artistic endeavours and creates a three-dimensional image of Coupland as an artist and an individual. In the digital era, it has become accepted practice for individuals to share minute details about their lives with others through social media profiles and websites, and authors are recognizing the value of establishing a presence in the new communities of readers created on the Internet.

All of these new technological trends and developments related to the digital era ultimately point to one thing: the necessity of acquiring an Internet audience in order to make the transition to published author. The inception of the digital era has renewed the importance of communities in the literary field; authors gain

recognition by participating in online groups, and working in collaboration with other writers. Christian Landers, Tao Lin, and Terence O'Neill each made a name for themselves by cultivating a virtual audience through their online endeavours before traditional publishing houses approached them. The digital era is often described as an era of oversaturation; there is such a proliferation of texts available on the Internet that it is difficult for publishers and readers to wade through all of them, and so proving one's ability to garner an audience prior to publication has become a critical skill.

In some ways, this development can be interpreted as a move towards the democratization of the publishing industry; readers are now choosing the authors and texts they want to read and publishing houses are pursuing the populist verdict. Readers can be mobilized into communities in unprecedented ways in the digital realm, and as a result, are playing a larger role in influencing the decisions made by publishing houses. While this may be a daunting prospect for traditional authors and publishers, this scenario provides exciting new opportunities for entrepreneurial writers, and for publishing houses that seek to gauge reception of a text prior to publication.

The collaborative dynamic of much of the work carried out on the Internet, and the importance of virtual communities can be read as a type of return to the pre-print era concept of knowledge as a public good, residing in the communal realm. In *Understanding Media,* McLuhan predicted that "as we approach the final phase of consciousness […] the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society" (19). The development of the

Internet provides a fulfillment of McLuhan's prophecy, and while there are many benefits to the enhancement of communal access to knowledge and information, these transformations raise new questions about issues of textual ownership.

In preliterate oral cultures, as well as in medieval manuscript culture, stories and texts resided in the public realm and no one author or editor had exclusive legal or creative authority over a text. It was not until the late eighteenth century that the concept of copyright as a representation of authorial ownership of intellectual property took hold in Europe, as a result of increased cultural recognition of individual authors. In the digital realm, the concept of the book as the sole property of any one writer is being challenged anew by the opportunities for revision, duplication, and amendment offered by the Internet.

Wolfgang Iser asserts that the literary work has two poles: the artistic pole, which is the author's text, and the aesthetic, which is the realization accomplished by the reader, and the work must reside somewhere between these two poles (291). In the digital realm, the space between these two poles is enlarged by the reader's ability to intervene in the text and to reorganize the work on an unprecedented level. The question demanded in the digital era is at what point does a text stop belonging to its original author and become part of the public commons? In the early twentieth century, Benjamin predicted that "[t]he great work of the future will consist of fragments torn from the body of other work; it is a reassembly, a patchwork quilt of meanings already accomplished" (Parini 192). His statement takes on new prescience in the digital era, as texts become less static and enter into new relationships with each other. So where does this era of fragmentation and

intertextuality leave the author? There are many dangers posed by the digital era to the ability of professional authors to make a living from their work and to retain control over the rights to their texts. As it becomes easier to amend, alter, and duplicate texts in the online world, the intellectual and creative rights of the author over his or her texts are being subjected to enhanced contestation and re-conceptualization.

A debate has already been raging in the online literary world over the past few years as to the ways in which authors' rights to their work should be recognized in the digital era. Proponents of the Free Culture Movement, which promotes the freedom to modify creative works in the online realm, advocate for a diminishment of restrictive copyright laws. Lawrence Lessig believes that we currently live in a restrictive "permission culture, in which creators get to create only with the permission of the powerful, or of creators of the past" (xvi). A founder of the Free Culture Movement, Lessig asserts that digital technologies could produce an immensely more creative and competitive market for the creation of culture if restrictive copyright laws did not impede the abilities of individuals to make independent or critical works (9). Lessig perceives current copyright laws as functioning to maintain a monopoly over cultural production and advocates for a more open system of access to creative works in the digital era. Lessig is also a co-founder of Creative Commons, an American not-for-profit organization that provides free licenses and other legal tools to "mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix and use commercially or any combination thereof" (*creativecommons.org).* The purpose of Creative Commons is

not to allow users the freedom to copy and counterfeit work, but rather to give the author the ability to grant that freedom to subsequent users, putting the decision as to how their work should be used in the hands of individual authors rather than publishing houses, lawyers, or media conglomerates (Goss 978).

Cory Doctorow, author of several works of fiction and contributing editor to *Wired* magazine, was the first writer to release a novel under a Creative Commons license in 2003, and has long been an advocate of the theory that releasing a title for free in digital format prior to the for-purchase paperback format increases sales of the paperback. Doctorow maintains that personal recommendations from friends are the best way to sell books, and that giving away free copies of eBooks is an effective way to amplify and accelerate the word-of-mouth transmission. Conclusive evidence to reinforce Doctorow's claim does not yet exist; a 2010 study published in the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* found that "there is a moderate correlation between free digital books being made permanently available and short term print-sale increases. However, free digital books did not always equal increased sales." (Hilton and Wiley) While advocates of the Free Culture Movement maintain that there is a way for free and for-profit texts to coexist peacefully in the digital realm, not all authors are so eager to rescind the rights to their work.

The Google Books Library Lawsuit is a prime example of the clash between authors who want to retain the intellectual rights to their work and the technophiles who believe that artistic and intellectual works should reside within the public realm, unfettered by copyright rights and prohibitions. Since December 2004, Google has been collaborating with some of the world's largest libraries in an effort

to "build a comprehensive index of all the books in the world" (Grafton 22). They have been systematically scanning books, "providing full-text searching and making books in the public domain available on the Internet at no cost to the viewer" ("Google"). Google estimates that between five and ten per cent of known books are currently in print, while twenty per cent are out of copyright, and the remainder (around seventy-five per cent of all books ever printed) are "orphans," which means that they are still covered by copyright protection but are out of print (Grafton 32). For the roughly 90 per cent of books that are either out of copyright or out of print, Google adopted a "Scan first, ask questions later" attitude that incensed many authors and publishers (Kelly).

In September 2005, a group of authors and publishers brought a class-action suit against Google, alleging violation of copyright. In October 2008, the three parties involved in the lawsuit, the Authors Guild, the Association of American Publishers, and Google reached an agreement titled The Google Book Settlement – a document of 303 pages outlining a new revenue model designed to compensate authors and publishers for use of their copyrighted books through Google's digital platform. The Settlement Agreement created an enterprise known as the Google Book Rights Registry to represent the interests of the copyright holders, which allows copyright holders to decide how much, if any, content from their texts will be displayed in Google Books (Google Books Settlement Agreement 3.5[b]). Google's "Scan first, ask questions later" policy, combined with the ruling of the Settlement Agreement, gives Google a "liberty right" over the vast majority of texts they have already scanned, which means that Google can digitize and display any text for

which no author or publisher has filed a take down or transfer request (Hohfeld 719). The Settlement Agreement ruled that Google would pay a one-time fee of approximately $125 million to cover attorneys' fees and compensate the aggrieved authors and publishers. Google will then sell access to a "gigantic data bank composed primarily of copyright, out-of-print books digitized from research libraries," to which libraries will have free access, but for which colleges, universities, and other research organizations will have to pay through an institutional license and individuals will have to purchase through a consumer license ("Google").

While the Settlement does provide a new revenue source for authors and publishers, it also threatens to give the Google Books Registry a monopoly over the digital publication of hundreds of thousands of "orphaned" texts, and leaves the decisions over pricing for e-books and subscriptions purchased through the Google Books Project solely with Google (Grimmelman 5). The controversial lawsuit has become emblematic of the conflict that exists in the digital realm between the rights of individuals to retain control over their creative works and the cultural impetus of increasing access to texts for the benefit of society at large. Publishers and authors, not only in the United States, but in Canada, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the world as well, are closely monitoring the proceedings of the Google Books Library Lawsuit since the final outcome of the class action suit will serve as a major precedent in future legal battles over digital rights management in the publishing industry.

The new constructs of authorship generated by the digital era have profound

repercussions for individuals who make their living from writing, and opinions within the publishing industry are divided as to the ways in which ownership of literary texts should be conceptualized in the digital era. The libertarian Free Culture Movement argument for freedom of information conflicts with the desire of authors to retain the intellectual rights to their work, as well as their right to make a profit from that work. Robert Darnton asserts that it is not a law of nature that the book, a product of human intelligence and creativity, belongs in the public commons ("Google"). To deny authors the right to receive compensation for their work is to relegate the craft of writing to the realm of recreation, which would inevitably diminish the quality of literature created.

Great works of art, in any field, often require a massive investment of time and effort on the part of their creators in order to be realized. Visual artists are not expected to give away their work for free, nor are composers, dancers, or musicians. There are similarities between the situation of authors and musicians in the digital era, as the ability of individuals in both professions to make a living from their creative work is threatened by piracy, but authors are not rock stars. They cannot rely on income from concerts, merchandise, and endorsement deals for their living in the same way that rock musicians can. In order to sustain the profession of authorship, individual writers must be able to make a living from their work, whether that compensation comes from sales profits, patronage, or elsewhere.

In many regards, the digital era shows similarities to the era preceding the introduction of the printing press on a mass scale and the cultural entrenchment of the professional author. Authors are working in collaboration over the Internet, and

soliciting the opinions of readers and other writers prior to publishing their work. Readers are gaining more power in determining which books are published, and have unprecedented access to texts and their authors in the digital realm. Oren Soffer and Yoram Eshet-Alkalai write that "the collaborative and open web-based technology [of the digital era] restore, to a large extent, the pre-print era's perceptions and practices of knowledge as a free common human asset which is developed by everyone and shared by everyone" (55). Concepts of individual intellectual and legal ownership over literary texts are weakened by the interactive and dynamic nature of the digital realm, challenging a cultural construct that has held prominence in western culture for over three centuries.

The new modes of communication and access to information offered by digital media have profound and myriad consequences for individuals who make their living from writing literary texts. Authors need to learn to communicate with the reading public in new ways, to share more of themselves, yet simultaneously find new ways to protect their legal and creative rights. Perhaps libraries, research institutions, and universities will act as modern-day patrons to authors of creative works. Perhaps the government will be forced to increase subsidies allotted to professional writers, or corporations will give away more literary prizes with cash values. Or perhaps authors will be given over to the commercial realm entirely, and readers will be presented with persistent advertisements for online printing services, software applications, and film tie-ins as they read digital texts. In the digital era, a new model of ensuring financial compensation for authors who invest significant time and creative effort in their texts has yet to be established. It is clear,

however, that in the coming years, authors will have to develop new skills and techniques and adapt to the rules of the online environment in order to maintain their professional status.

CHAPTER THREE:
Eliminating the Middleman: Finding a New Role for Publishers and Booksellers in the Twenty-First Century

The trend within the publishing industry in the past half-century has been towards globalization and corporate amalgamation, which has made it difficult for publishing houses to retain autonomy and wield power in their relationships with booksellers. The introduction of digital technologies to the industry offers new opportunities to publishers that have the potential to dramatically alter the way that books are produced and disseminated, and the ways in which publishing houses interact with authors and consumers. Print-on-demand technology, digital texts, and online sales have the potential to eliminate a large degree of the wastefulness involved in the production and distribution models associated with printed books, and the Internet offers a vast new resource for publishers to communicate with consumers. By enabling the production of a wider variety of texts, in more physical locations, new digital technologies have the potential to enable publishers to reverse the trends of the past fifty years and foster the development of a more diverse and localized industry, fostering new forms of collaboration amongst literary presses, as well as among communities of readers. The implementation of new forms of media into the publishing industry and literary culture is creating new modes of communication and comprehension among the reading public, and publishers and booksellers are taking up new forms of media and technologies to recuperate traditional forms of textual dissemination and enhance literary culture.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the publishing industry in English-speaking countries like Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom largely consisted of independent, family-owned presses, but the trend towards globalization in the latter half of the century transformed many of the constituents of a cottage industry into subsidiaries of large multinational corporations. John Feather writes that, in the 1960s, business dogma argued that "only big companies were efficient enough to survive," and the "trend towards expansion accelerated towards the end of the century because technological developments made the dissemination of information in any form, including print, an essentially international business conducted in a de facto international language" (41).

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the publishing industry has come to be defined by this trajectory towards consolidation and integration into multinational multimedia corporations. In the United States, general book publishing is dominated by five multimedia corporations: Bertelsmann, Holtzbrinck, Longmans, Pearson, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, and Viacom (*Book* 11). In Canada, eight publishing houses were combined in 1998 under the conglomerate of Random House of Canada, a subsidiary of the German private media corporation Bertelsmann, which would come to control twenty-five per cent of Canada's English-language trade market (MacSkimming 368). As publishing houses are incorporated into conglomerates, they lose a degree of their autonomy, as their business practices become subject to corporate policies and mandates. Jason Epstein notes that "conglomerate budgets require efficiencies and create structures that are incompatible with the notorious vagaries of literary production,

work whose outcome can only be intuited" (*Book* 12). In this context, the absorption of independent literary presses into multimedia corporations impinges on the ability of publishers to produce marginal or experimental texts, because such works may not guarantee as profitable a return as titles by established authors or certain bestsellers.

The retail market became increasingly subject to corporate monopolization over the course of the 1990s as well; in 1994, Lawrence N. Stevenson bought the Canadian chains SmithBooks and Coles and all of their subsidiaries, including Classics, World's Biggest Bookstore, Librarie Smith and Book Company, and merged them into one massive corporation called Chapters. The new chain exerted tremendous pressure on Canadian publishing houses; if Chapters declined to order a title, that book automatically lost access to half of the domestic retail market (MacSkimming 360). By 2006, the consolidated chain of Chapters/Indigo accounted for more than forty-four per cent of domestic book sales in Canada ("A Strategic" 18). The concentration of the retail market augments the trends created by the incorporation of publishing houses into multimedia corporations; corporate chains located in shopping malls are subject to high occupancy costs, and as a result become dependent on a consistent supply of bestsellers to cover their expenses, creating a degree of homogenization in the selection of titles offered to consumers.

The trend towards amalgamation has made it increasingly difficult for independent publishers and booksellers to survive. The business practices designed by and catering to conglomerates make it challenging for independent publishing houses to find room for their titles on the shelves of bookstores, and for

independent booksellers to compete with the selection provided by large chains like Chapters/Indigo and its online competitor, Amazon. Extraneous expenses, like the "co-op payment" fee charged by traditional booksellers to display a book prominently in a window, on a table at the entrance to a store, or even to have a book facing outwards on a shelf, are felt much more strongly by small houses than by multinational conglomerates. A report published by the provincial government in 2006 notes that Chapters/Indigo continues to drive "ever-tougher terms with book publishers on discounts, co-op marketing contributions, and preferential shelf space," using its monopoly over the retail market to leverage its demands ("A Strategic" 18). Retail booksellers reserve the right to return unsold copies of texts to their publishers, a practice that further cuts into the profit margins of publishing houses.

These expenses weigh heavily on publishers, causing them to consider carefully each decision regarding which titles to release, and resulting in a scenario in which the selection of titles offered to consumers is increasingly homogenized because of the risk inherent in publishing unknown authors or titles that are not expected to do well. The current state of affairs impedes the ability of publishing houses to cultivate and promote original literature, which in turn has negative repercussions for consumers, who find the choice provided to them by booksellers limited, and the experience of buying books depersonalized in large chains.

Jason Epstein asserts that "trade book publishing is by nature a cottage industry, decentralized, improvisational, personal," in which context the trend towards globalization is counterintuitive to the nature of the industry (*Book* 1). New

digital technologies offer a variety of resources and opportunities for publishing houses that have the potential to wrest some of the power in the relationship between publishers and booksellers out of the hands of the large retail chains and return it to the individuals involved in creating literary texts. Robert Darnton has noted that, traditionally, a text moved from the author, to the publisher, through the printing and shipping process, to the bookseller, before finally ending in the hands of the reader ("What Is" 111). This circuit, which has shaped the cultural production of the book for centuries, is now being disrupted by the implementation of new technologies to the printing process.

Technological developments such as digital texts, eReaders, and print-on-demand processes have the potential to eliminate much of the unnecessary expenditure caused by large print runs and shipping and warehousing physical books. Web 2.0 applications, such as Facebook and Twitter, enable publishers to communicate directly with consumers and to identify and target specific audiences in an unprecedented manner. Creating digital backlists lets publishers offer more titles to readers in more locations, catering to regional and special interests. These changes have the potential to create a more personalized and decentralized form of publishing that better addresses the individual interests of consumers and fosters a more diverse literary culture.

One printing technology that has the potential to revolutionize the industry is print-on-demand publishing. With this technology, new copies of a book are not printed until an order has been placed, thereby eliminating much of the expenditure involved in printing and warehousing large print runs. Book files are

stored in a digital database that is connected to a network of servers and computers and can be printed in much smaller numbers than traditional print-runs, thereby allowing publishers to increase the number of titles that they print (Young 103). Jason Epstein envisions a future in which most digital files will be "printed and bound on demand at point of sale machines...which within minutes will inexpensively make single copies that are indistinguishable from books made in factories" ("Reading" 103). Epstein sees print-on-demand as a potentially democratizing tool in the publishing industry; with machines available in libraries, bookstores, and other retail locations, "readers nearly everywhere with access to a computer screen may eventually search a practically limitless digital catalogue linked to innumerable databases" ("Reading" 103). This technology has the potential to dismantle the monopoly that large publishing houses and book companies currently hold over the retail market, because independent bookstores would be able to compete with the selection offered by online booksellers such as Amazon, and small presses could print more titles and sell them online through their own websites and POD databases.

Canadian publishing houses and booksellers are already experimenting with print-on-demand technology; the campus bookstores at McMaster University, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Alberta have each acquired and begun operating the Espresso Book Machine, created by Epstein's company On Demand Books. The EBM prints, collates, covers and binds books on-site in a matter of minutes. The cost of the Espresso Book Machine is still quite prohibitive for smaller bookstores or publishing houses: the purchase price of the machine ranges from

seventy-five to one hundred thousand dollars. A 2007 report prepared for the Ontario government on the impact of digitization on the book industry ruled that print-on-demand technology "offers options for short runs, but is generally still too expensive on a per unit basis or too limited in the formats offered to work in any substantive way" (Davy 13). The report does note, though, that, "if and when short run printing can achieve acceptable unit costs and greater flexibility, it can substantively change the economics of the industry" (Davy 13). By eliminating the need for costly storage and large print runs, print-on-demand technology could enable publishing houses to print more titles and cater to special interests in an unprecedented manner.

Another technological advancement that is currently transforming the publishing industry is the digitization of texts for use on eReaders, smartphones and laptops. Wireless devices provide a new form of enhanced access to texts; consumers can purchase books from any physical location at which they can access the Internet, and read them on the screen of a machine that serves a variety of other functions in their personal and professional lives. Transmitting books through multimedia devices enables publishers to provide a new type of reading experience for the consumer; a traditional work of literature can be enhanced by audio and visual components, as well as search capacities and links to other texts. Books can be deconstructed into excerpts, and chapters, and accessed by readers in new ways. While the digital nature of these developments is new, the reading practices that they encourage have historical precedence.

Digital technologies enable publishers and other actors within the literary industry to experiment with the form of the book, employing traditional modes of textual dissemination in new ways. DailyLit is a website that sends subscribers daily excerpts from works of fiction via email or RSS feed, much in the same way that magazines published the novels of Victorian authors such as Charles Dickens in serial format in the nineteenth century. DailyLit has also applied the concept of the book club to the digital realm by creating a number of discussion forums for its members to participate in dialogue about the texts that they are reading. The website has implemented historical concepts through a new medium, and enhanced them with the tools provided by that medium.

Digital technologies are being used to create new communities of readers, and enable consumers to access texts in novel ways, but they are also being used to augment real-world communities and events. Toronto-based Coach House Books provides an example of a Canadian publishing house that has been particularly effective at using the opportunities provided by social networking sites to promote real-world events. Coach House Books has a "group" page on Facebook, with more than 1,500 members, and actively maintains a newsfeed on Twitter, the micro-blogging site. Group members receive email updates about book launches, promotions, and events facilitated by the publishing house, and the Coach House publicist, Evan Munday, regularly posts photos and links to the group's profile pages on both sites. Social networking sites enable publishing houses to enhance existing communities, and to create new virtual communities of readers.

Increasingly, publishing houses are using applications like Facebook and Twitter, the micro-blogging site, to communicate with readers, book reviewers, and literary bloggers. Web 2.0 applications offer a low-cost, personalized mode of marketing, enabling publishers to communicate directly with consumers and identify and access distinct groups of readers. An employee at a Canadian publishing house notes:

> "The beauty with social networking is that the profiles are set up so you can target a very dedicated group that's active online. With Facebook, you can advertise only to people who are fans of Canadian fiction for instance, or…you can target just male fans of Douglas Coupland who live in British Columbia. That's a powerful marketing tool." (Questionnaire 18 May 2010).

Traditional marketing strategies such as print advertisements allow publishers to provide consumers with information about titles and their authors, but they do not enable personal dialogue between the two parties, or give readers the ability to respond to the information they receive through any official forum. Social networking sites enable publishers to form a more direct and individualized relationship with their readers.

Digital technologies enable booksellers to identify and cater to niche audiences in a variety of ways, providing consumers with a renewed variety of titles. Online book sales have allowed web-based companies like Amazon to create a business model that counters that of corporate chains; rather than relying on selling mass quantities of a limited number of bestsellers to generate revenue, they sell fewer copies of each individual book, but offer far more titles. This strategy has been

dubbed the "Long Tail," described by Chris Anderson as the theory that products that are in low demand or have low sales volume can collectively make up a market share that rivals or exceeds the relatively few current blockbusters ("The Long Tail"). Amazon's model is made possible by the medium of the Internet; displaying their products as pages on a website rather than physical objects in a store enables them to evade the costs associated with the retail space. By enabling booksellers to offer a larger number of titles, digital sales provide a renewed level of diversification to the literary publishing industry, and enable publishers and booksellers to use traditional sales models in new ways.

One option currently being explored by publishing houses in Canada and the United States is the subscription model, another revitalization of a traditional mode of textual dissemination. Subscription models such as the Book-of-the-Month Club have long been used to sell books to consumers, but the Internet provides a way to streamline the process; books can be delivered instantaneously via the Internet to readers' devices, eliminating the cost and time associated with traditional mailing. An employee of a Canadian publishing house writes, "Imagine subscribing to a Giller Prize bundle, whereby on the morning of the Giller shortlist announcement you can automatically download all five nominated books?" (Questionnaire 18 May 2010). Or consumers could subscribe to a series of books and receive each new title in the series as it is released. This sales model may necessitate new forms of collaboration among publishers and booksellers; Lloyd notes that "readers don't care about publishers…a useful network of books will almost always, inevitably, cross the boundaries between a number of publishers" (36). Publishers and consumers are

learning to conceptualize the book in different ways, and to recognize the modes by which digital technologies enhance traditional reading practices and enable readers to interact with texts, and other readers, in new ways.

The changes to modes of production and distribution that are currently underway in the publishing industry affect the way that consumers perceive the book as a commodity. The reading public is affected by the conceptual shifts accompanying the book's transition to the digital realm, and individual consumers are in the process of integrating digital technologies into their reading practices. McLuhan writes that the "effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance" (*Understanding* 33). One of the challenges currently faced by publishers is the need to facilitate an understanding of the ways in which new technology such as the eReader interacts with pre-existing media, and the use of such new devices in the lives of the reading public.

A 2005 study conducted by the Department of Heritage found that only four per cent of all books sold in Canada the previous year were bought online, and only eleven per cent of the overall sample for the study had read a book online or in eBook format over the past twelve months ("Reading and Buying" 17, 46). These numbers have likely increased significantly in the five years since the study was completed, but eBook sales still occupy a slim fraction of the trade book market (Gomez 123). Jeff Gomez describes the current situation regarding digital texts as the "eBook Catch 22: sales are small, so publishers don't convert and make available their entire catalogue…yet sales are small because there's not a big enough selection

from the publishers of books to choose from" (130). Consumers are currently engaged in a process of making sense of the ways in which digital technologies will interact with traditional forms of media in their reading practices, and it is not yet clear to what degree the new technologies of the eReader and digital text will be embraced by the reading public.

One of the key obstacles impeding the development of the eBook market thus far has been the lack of clarity provided by publishers and producers regarding the technology and their products; the title "eBook, for example, has been ambiguously applied to the digital text, as well as the device on which it is read, and the process involved in downloading files to machines is often confusing and hampered by digital rights management policies (Gomez 118-23). New media require new modes of understanding, and digital texts and eReaders alter the nature of readers' relation to the book as commodity, and the modes through which they access and interact with the text.

The process of acquiring and consuming a literary text is altered notably in the digital realm, and the concept of ownership over a particular copy of a text is also transformed. When a printed text is purchased, the book as physical object belongs solely to the consumer, and he or she may choose to lend that book to a friend or sell it to a secondhand bookstore once the text has been consumed. Ownership is a more tenuous concept in the digital realm, as publishers and booksellers often retain the rights to eBooks, even after they are purchased by consumers. Texts purchased through Amazon for use on the corporation's Kindle eReader device are protected by restrictive copyright measures that prevent consumers from sharing texts with

other users or selling used texts. The company has also retained control over texts loaded onto device after purchase, which has been a controversial issue amongst consumers and the media.[ii] [iii]

In July 2009, the corporation removed purchased copies of George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm* from customers' devices without warning, after realizing that the digital files were illegal copies of the texts. This incident illuminated to the public the disparity between notions of ownership in the real world and in the digital realm. The countermand of the Orwell texts exposed the transient nature of ownership on the Internet; the system of objects that exists in the real world is replaced by ephemera in the hyperreality of the digital realm (*Ecstasy* 14). Changes to the materiality of an object require an adjustment in the way it is understood as a commodity, and the book as a personal possession is subject to new terms of ownership in the digital era.

There is also concern over ownership of rights to digital texts amongst publishers and authors; because the market for digital books is so new, there is not yet a comprehensive or standardized system in place to regulate ownership in the digital realm. Jason Epstein notes that "since an author retains all rights over their intellectual or creative work not granted to the publisher, electronic rights for books published before the mid-90s…do not belong to publishers"; however, book contracts also stipulate that authors may not publish versions of their work in competition with their publishers, leaving the electronic rights to hundreds of thousands of texts in an indeterminate state (*Book 25*). The positive aspect of this quandary is that the digitization of backlists opens up a new revenue stream for

publishers and their authors, recuperating texts that had formerly been resigned to obscurity. Diane Davy writes that some publishers have instituted a minimum payment per royalty period for as long as the publisher wishes to retain the rights to a particular title. She notes that this appears to be emerging as a best practice and may become a standard business procedure (7). The life cycle of a book is altered by digitization, requiring publishers and authors to reconceptualize notions of ownership over the text as commodity.

Changes to the way in which books are created and accessed require a number of conceptual shifts that require alterations to business practices in the publishing industry, and require new modes of comprehension and organization. There are a number of difficulties faced by publishing houses in fully utilizing the opportunities provided by new digital technologies and the Internet. In Canada, the Ontario government has conducted several studies investigating the impact of new technology on the publishing industry, signaling recognition of the importance of these issues. The findings of the Ontario studies are applicable to the industries of other provinces, as well as those of other English-speaking nations. A study by the Ontario Media Development Corporation Book Industry Advisory Committee reports that digitization offers the industry a variety of novel opportunities, ranging from improved efficiencies and lowered costs, both in internal workflow and throughout the supply chain, allowing publishers to exploit their book content in new ways ("A Strategic" 24). As publishers develop an understanding of the new opportunities and challenges posed by digital technology, they are investing in

training and resource development to determine how new technologies can be put into practice most effectively.

The OMDC study outlines several distinct obstacles that are currently impeding the ability of Canadian publishers to access digital opportunities, chief among them the lack of technical expertise among publishers, and new complications surrounding copyright laws ("A Strategic" 24). The incorporation of new technologies into an industry is a process of gradual adaptation, as new media find their place among existing ones, and new systems are developed to accommodate changes in modes of production and distribution. McLuhan writes that "the new media and technology by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body," and it takes that body time to adjust to the new systems and sense ratios created by those changes (*Understanding Media* 70). Publishing houses are recognizing the need to work in collaboration, and learn from the experiences of other organizations, in order to make sense of new technologies and incorporate them effectively into their business practices.

At present, large publishing houses are carrying out most of the experimentation with new technologies, because they have the resources to invest in new devices and organizations. HarperCollins, for example, already has its own internal, globally accessible digital warehouse in operation, and works with search engines like Google and Yahoo and online retailers like Amazon to direct consumers to its site (Davy 25). Smaller, independent publishing houses lack the resources to build such complex databases, and as a result are entering into new alliances, with

other publishing houses and with associations like the supply chain organization BookNet Canada, and the copyright organization Access Copyright. Collaboration enables independent publishers to pool their resources and take advantage of those offered by governmental funding programs. A consortium of independent publishers under the direction of the Associated Canadian Press recently received a Partnership Fund grant for an initiative described as " a project to digitalize books and help the companies involved deliver books in electronic formats, transitioning these companies into a new arena of publishing to become an 'on-screen' industry" (Davy 15). The digital era is precipitating a new age of cooperation and communication amongst publishers, as presses recognize the necessity of collaboration in accessing the resources required to make a successful transition to the digital realm.

Independent booksellers may not yet be able to compete with the selection offered by online corporations or large chains, but there are unique opportunities provided by the Internet that can be used by individual stores and organizations to be what the Internet cannot be: "tangible, intimate, and local" (*Book* 38). In many instances the Internet is being used to revive traditional cultural activities, such as story-telling and public dialogue, that cannot be replaced by the virtual environment of the digital realm. The New York-based organization The Moth has used the Internet to revitalize the tradition of oral storytelling; the group uses their website to notify followers of events that take place in different cities across the United States, and air the recorded sessions via podcast. The digital realm is used as a conduit to bring people together in real time, to partake in an oral tradition that

requires no technology or mediation. The revival of storytelling in American popular culture over the past few decades serves as a reminder of the limitations of the digital era: that the virtual communication provided by digital technologies is not always an adequate substitute for face-to-face contact and real world communities.

Booksellers are also capitalizing on the limitations of the digital realm by using their retail spaces as a location for dialogue and the meeting of like-minded individuals. An example of a Canadian bookseller who is experimenting with a new form of local retail and community engagement is Jason Rovito, founder of the independent bookstore Of Swallows, their Deeds, and the Winter Below. Rovito primarily sells secondhand academic texts out of his storefront space, located on College Street in Toronto, but he also rents out spaces to like-minded organizations for writing workshops, editorial meetings, and readings. Rovito's concept is to "surround the books with related activities, things that can't be translated into electronic exchange" (Posner). The communities created by organizations like The Moth and Of Swallows, their Deeds and the Winter Below use the Internet as a medium for disseminating information, but the virtual communication carried out by such groups is used to enhance real world gatherings, rather than replace them.

Digital technologies are transforming the landscape of the publishing industry, and the dynamics of literary culture. The communication circuit described by Darnton is being altered at every stage of the process; print-on-demand and the digitization of texts are changing the way books are produced and disseminated, and transforming the relationship between publishers, booksellers, and consumers. If new technologies can be utilized effectively, they can enable the publication of a

wider variety of texts in more locations, reversing the trends towards globalization and corporate concentration that have defined the industry for the past half-century. Digital technologies provide new opportunities for publishers to communicate with authors and readers, and to enhance business practices and foster the growth of literary communities. New forms of media are being used to revitalize traditional modes of organization and distribution, and to forge new alliances among actors in the industry. The tools provided by the Internet for communication and creation serve as an opportunity for publishers and booksellers to fashion a more decentralized, dynamic industry, creating a more diverse and collaborative literary culture in the new millennium.

CHAPTER FOUR:
The New Reader

Digital culture offers new opportunities for a more dynamic and personalized form of reading, which in several significant ways reflect a return to the modes of reading practiced in Europe prior to the invention of the printing press and the widespread institution of literacy. The new technology of the digital era is enhancing traditional practices of reading and the cultivation of literary communities. The Internet enables readers to interact with texts in new ways, creating new expectations amongst consumers for the ways in which they will access and consume texts, yet many of these new developments constitute a recuperation of historical reading practices. Modes of reading are altered in the digital realm, but these changes are extensions of established cultural practices, rather than representative of a break with traditional literary culture.

Over the past decade, critics and actors within the publishing industry have expressed anxiety that the inception of new digital technologies has an adverse affect on reading habits. In *The Gutenberg Elegies,* Sven Birkerts echoes Marshall McLuhan's claim that new media technology has shifted our society from a condition of isolated individualism to decentralized mediation, and asserts that because written culture is associated with the humanist project of individualism, it is degraded and threatened by the onslaught of new technology (22). Paul Delany and George P. Landow assert that "because hypertext systems permit a reader both to annotate an individual text and also link to other, perhaps contradictory texts, it destroys one of the most basic characteristics of the printed text: its separation and

univocal voice" (13). These theorists position the printed and the digital text as two opposed entities, facilitating different modes of reading, failing to take into consideration the fact that readers have always operated within communities, and that each reading bestows a text with new meaning and relations to other texts.

The capabilities offered by hypertextual links are often cited as one of the primary points of divergence between printed and digital texts, because they allow readers to toggle quickly among many texts, gathering information from a variety of sources.[iv] Hypertexts are computer-based literary works that contain links to other texts, as well as music, photographs, and other multimedia experiences (Gomez 141). They are purported to differ from printed texts because they do not need to be read in a linear, sequential fashion (Bolter 122). Jay Bolter writes, "while a printed novel presents its episodes in one order, the electronic writing space removes that restriction for fiction" (122). This dichotomy takes for granted, however, that parts of a book always reference other parts, and other texts as well, and that the reader is engaged in a constant process of constructing meaning and creating connections between different texts.

Each reader brings his or her own unique experiences and knowledge to each reading of a text, and each reading endows a work with new significance and new relations to other texts. Reading, despite being defined as a relatively solitary pursuit in contemporary Western culture, is a social behaviour and modes of reading have always been mediated by the manner in which each reader approaches a text. Stanley Fish writes that the interpretive strategies of the reader "are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they are the

shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than as it is usually assumed, arising from them" (355). In this context, the various leaps from page to page and idea to idea that are made by the individual in reading a printed text are not altogether different from those made by the individual navigating a text in the digital realm.

The physical mechanics of reading further contradict the rationale behind the dichotomy between reading printed and electronic text. Careful observation during reading reveals that one's eyes do not actually follow a steady path from the top left-hand corner of the page to the bottom right; rather, while scanning text, the eye jumps about the page roughly three or four times per second at approximately 200 degrees per second (Manguel 36). It is only during the brief pause between these erratic movements that we actually read. In this context, the difference between reading a page of a printed page, and reading a series of linked web pages is minimized because the eye is always already engaged in a process of erratic skimming of the text.

Even when a text is read silently and alone, the reader is always occupied by a process of drawing meaning from other sources that enhance and shape the significance of the text. Molly Travis writes that "readers never escape a social context; they are both constructed and constructing in that they read as part of interpretive communities, and are involved in collective cultural imagining and reimagining" (6). Readers have always shared texts with their peers, and discussed them in public forums. Robert Darnton writes that "for most people throughout most of history, books had audiences rather than readers" ("First Steps" 169). In the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as literacy rates grew and books became more accessible due to printing innovations, silent, solitary reading habits grew more prevalent, but the tradition of conversing about books prevailed (Finkelstein & McCleery 79). Social reading practices have always been an aspect of literary culture, and the development of new technologies that bring those habits to the digital era represent an extension of a well-established cultural activity in Western culture.

Despite the apprehension expressed by theorists that include Bolter, Delany and Landow, concrete evidence is scant that the number of Canadians who choose to spend part of their free time reading literature is in decline. In fact, a handful of studies conducted by the Department of Canadian Heritage in the past five years have found that Canadians' attitudes towards reading for pleasure have remained positive and changed very little over the past fifteen years (*Reading and Buying* 5). The study found that the average amount of time spent reading for pleasure recorded among Canadians in 2005 was identical to that documented in 1991 – four and a half hours per week – and that the time that is now occupied by the Internet has primarily affected audiovisual activities and reading of newspapers and magazines (*Reading and Buying* 10). Moreover, Canada has one of the highest reading rates in the industrialized world. Eighty-seven per cent of the Canadians who took part in a national telephone survey for the *Reading Books for Pleasure* study had read at least half a book in the past year, and 54 per cent of respondents stated that they read every day (*Explanatory* 8). Reading for pleasure clearly holds an important place in the lives of Canadians and, for now at least, fears that the

diversionary pastimes provided by the Internet and digital communication will destroy literary culture appear unfounded.

Additionally, the findings of the study *Explanatory Model for Leisure Book Reading Rates in Canada* contend that chatting over the Internet actually has a positive and significant correlation with the general leisure book-reading rate (2). The odds of reading are 1.7 times higher among respondents who chat over the Internet than among those who do not (*Explanatory* 2). It can be inferred from these findings that any opportunity to practice and hone one's reading skills, whether with traditional print or online, encourages all types of reading. Much of the time spent on the Internet today is occupied by reading. Accessing news online, viewing blogs, and even chatting on social networking websites primarily involve reading practices that are extensions of those developed through print culture.

While the time Canadians spend on the Internet does not detract from the time they devote to reading for pleasure, their online experiences and the behaviours learned from using interactive digital media are affecting the ways in which Canadians read and their expectations of the media they consume. Walter Ong asserts that "[t]echnologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word" (107). Social networking and book cataloging websites enable readers to form new communities, and interact with texts in new ways, providing a new alternative to solitary, silent reading. In many ways, these changes represent an enhancement of reading practices with historical precedence, and a recuperation of collaborative reading practices that pre-date the print era.

Robert Darnton writes that, for the majority of people in early-modern Europe, reading was a social activity, "taking place in workshops, barns and taverns" (*Kiss* 165). Reading was conceptualized as a performance, an oral recitation intended to be received by an audience rather than individual readers. Stories resided within the public realm, altered by each re-telling, so that it was possible to consume a story repeatedly, hearing it re-told with slight variations each time. Through this process, meaning was inscribed not only by the original author of a text, but by the many performers involved in sustaining that text. This mode of reading provides a manifestation of Barthes's claim that "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (224). Because reading was a communal pursuit, narratives functioned as evolving social documents shared by communities of readers.

On the Internet, readers are forging a new public realm. The traditional concept of the book club is applied to the digital realm by websites operated by libraries and other organizations in order to enable like-minded people in disparate locations to communicate about the books that they are reading. Social cataloging websites such as GoodReads and Shelfari enhance the ability of readers to acquire new information about books from other users, share recommendations, and discuss texts. Readers share information through tagging, a collaborative referencing system that enables texts to be organized by criteria determined by readers, rather than those dictated by publishers and booksellers. Social networking and cataloging sites create communities of people who perceive themselves as a

segment of a larger body, even if they never meet the majority of that group's members face-to-face (Anderson 6). On these websites, reading becomes a basis of kinship, and literature a focal point for the formation of a group of like-minded people.

One of the applications offered by social cataloging websites like GoodReads is the ability for users to create a web page that list all the books that they have read. The construction of a list of the books one has read functions as a type of virtual reproduction of the physical bookshelf. The bookshelf provides a way for individuals to communicate their interests and areas of knowledge to their peers through a visual format, and the creation of virtual bookshelves has enabled that process to be extended into the digital realm. Physical possessions have long served as representations of the self, and books have historically played a special role in characterizing aspects of the self. Anna Perrault writes that in the early 16th century, individuality was represented in portraits through the objects the subject was shown with; objects that conveyed their wealth or station in society, and books were often the objects chosen to display aspects of an individual's personality and intelligence (2). In the nineteenth century, the appearance of bookshelves in the home represented a "cultural shift related to the end of Victorian values, new conceptions of the home as a place for leisure rather than spirituality, and conspicuous consumption" (Striphas 30). The traditional function of books as a symbol of an individual's artistic and intellectual taste, as well as their wealth and class level, is now being translated to the digital realm through interactive media and new technologies.

The Internet also serves to enhance the public nature of reading by promoting the consumption of texts through means other than traditional reading of the printed book; audiobooks have experienced a surge in popularity in the digital era, as their conversion to digital format has increased their accessibility and portability (Rubery 63). The audiobook offers an alternative to the solitary, sedentary form of reading most often associated with printed novels in the twentieth century (Philips 299), by offering new opportunities for the performance of reading in a variety of locations. Chartier writes that reading is "not only an abstract operation of the intellect: it puts the body into play and is inscribed within a particular space, in a relation to the self or others" ("Labourers" 50). The audiobook enables the body to interact with the book in different ways, offering the opportunity for new experiences of the text. Deborah Philips writes that the "move from the printed page to the recorded voice represents new elements in the mediation of a text"; the change in media transforms the way the reader interacts with the text (300). The experience of listening to an audiobook reproduces the experience of attending an oral recitation of a text, a communal practice popular in the pre-print era.

The Internet enables texts to be transmitted in a variety of new ways; publishing houses often create book trailers now, short videos that serve as an advertisement for new titles, adding audio and visual components to the reader's experience of the text. Authors such as Douglas Coupland are posting videos of themselves reading excerpts from their novels online, creating a new form of intimate interaction with both texts and their authors. These new forms of textual

transmission represent the extension of the book into the realm of hypermedia, which Delany and Landow assert "extends hypertext by re-integrating our visual and auditory faculties into textual experiences" (7). The written text is linked to graphic images and sounds, creating a dynamic new form of reading that encourages collaboration amongst authors and readers in the project of bringing a book to life.

Prior to the invention of the printing press and the establishment of copyright laws, texts were much more fluid entities. McLuhan writes that manuscript culture was producer oriented, based on a do-it-yourself culture, and it was common for readers in the medieval era to create their own personalized books by binding together different documents written by different authors (*Gutenberg* 131). The goals and rights of the author were not privileged over those of the reader. According to Darnton, in early-modern England, people often kept commonplace books in which they copied down passages under different headings, adding their own observations and reflections (*Case* 149). As texts became more easily accessed and copyright laws became more stringent over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this approach to reading was gradually replaced by a more passive mode characterized by individuals reading text silently by themselves. But with the rise of digital technologies, the segmented, individualized form of the early-modern era seems poised for resurgence.

Readers in the digital era are taking up new forms of technology to create newly personalized forms of media, much as readers in the early-modern era created commonplace books and personalized texts. McLuhan posits that the "habits of reading print create intense forms of individualism," whereas electronic media

return us to group dynamics ("Myth" 344). The interactive capabilities of the Internet enable readers to create their own texts by using themes, scenes, and characters from popular literature, television shows, films, and video games to create new content in the reincarnated form of fan fiction and mash-ups. There is a growing demand for such user-generated content; the website *harrypotterfanfiction.com* features over sixty thousand stories composed by readers of J.K. Rowling's fiction series about an adolescent wizard and receives over thirty million hits per month (www.harrypotterfanfiction.com). Rowling recognized the demand for such artistic freedom among her reading audience and has officially given her blessing to readers who want to create new adventures for Harry and his friends, stating that she is "flattered by the fact that there is such great interest in her Harry Potter series" (Waters). Creations such as mash-ups and fan fiction represent a new form of collaborative experimentation with cultural objects, and a revival of manuscript culture in a new context. Authors such as Rowling realize that they must necessarily loosen their control over their creations in order to appease the contemporary young reader.

Publishers and booksellers are also recognizing the desire among readers to create content and share their opinions about the books they read on the Internet, and providing forums for consumers to do so on their websites. Each book listed on Amazon has a web page linked to it listing user reviews, and publishing houses like Random House have created online book clubs for readers to share their views. Publishers now send advance copies of new titles not only to print journalists, but to book bloggers and online reading groups as well. People, who write blogs about

books, or participate in online forums, constitute new interpretive communities, described by Fish as "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (357). These developments represent a recognition, on the part of actors within the publishing industry, of the importance of literary communities and the ways in which the Internet can provide new opportunities to capitalize on word-of-mouth transmission, and foster the cultivation of literary culture.

The format of texts on the Internet encourages readers to view them as more fluid entities than a traditional printed book. Chartier writes that the structures and modalities of objects and forms govern the way in which we perceive and interact with them, and the format through which the digital book is presented to the reader differs from that of the printed book in significant ways ("Labourers" 48). The printed book comes to the reader as a physically distinct object, and while the text contained within may be subject to the interpretation of individual readers, the book itself retains the appearance of a finished product. Digital texts, in contrast, can be conceived of as more open and malleable, offering readers new opportunities for interaction. Jay Bolter writes that the crucial difference between the printed and electronic text from the reader's perspective is that "readers of a printed book can write over or deface the text, but they cannot write in it," whereas readers of electronic texts are sometimes given the opportunity to alter the primary text itself; the digital realm allows the reader to delete words, add sections, and rearrange the text while maintaining the appearance of the original form (144). This ability changes the way that readers understand the text and their expectations of it.

Readers may take a more active role in the construction of the form and meaning of a text in the digital era, and increasingly this ability is creating a demand for a more personalized, interactive form of reading.

The creation of personalized content has become a hallmark of the digital age. Devices like the iPod, which allow users to dismantle the albums compiled by musicians and create their own playlists of songs and share them with friends, as well as Web 2.0 applications like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, which allow users to upload, alter, and share content freely, are setting the bar for the way in which media are expected to serve as a vehicle for self-expression and representation. For many, digital devices like the iPod, the laptop, and the e-Reader are not just forms through which content is accessed, but aspects of the self, vehicles through which their owners construct self-representations and share them with the world.

In the past decade, a new generation of users has begun to dictate the way in which media are created, accessed, and consumed in the digital realm. Digital Natives conceptualize themselves and the world around them differently from their predecessors; their identities in the online realm and the real world are fluid and not easily divided, and they perceive information as malleable, something they can "control and reshape in new and interesting ways" (Palfrey 6). They expect to interact with the media they consume in novel ways, to create personalized versions of texts and share them with their peers in the online realm. Jeff Gomez predicts that, "once books become more widely available electronically, it will be just a matter of time before a generation raised on the user-generated content of YouTube, mash-ups and machinima starts to interact similarly with its texts" (98). The

Internet encourages a new form of collaborative innovation, and offers readers the tools to interact with and communicate about texts in new ways.

Reading has always been a social process, with groups of like-minded individuals assembling to discuss the books that they read, and share recommendations and information. The text has always been a malleable entity, influenced by the experiences and knowledge brought to it by each individual reader, and bestowed with different meaning by each particular reading. The development of digital technologies has enhanced traditional reading practices by enabling individuals to form new interpretive communities, and interact with texts in new ways. Many of the developments in textual transmission associated with the digital era, such as the surge in popularity of eBooks and the addition of audio and visual components to the act of reading actually represent recuperations of collaborative reading practices that predate the print era. While the shift in media from print to digital format does alter the modes by which readers consume texts, these changes are representative of an extension of long-standing aspects of literary culture, rather than a radical break from the habits associated with the print medium.

CONCLUSION

The advent of the digital era has generated new modes of textual production, enabling freer communication between authors, publishers, booksellers and readers, and offering the potential to decentralize the publishing industry and strengthen literary communities. In the past few decades, scholars have analyzed the impact of new media on reading practices, and some fear that the shift to the digital realm will have adverse consequences for literary culture.[v] While the changes precipitated by new technology do alter the ways that books are produced and consumed, and the modes through which people communicate about texts, these developments are extensions of existing literary practices. They constitute a reinvigoration of traditional activities and modes of reading, and an expansion of the ability of individuals to interact with and communicate about books.

The structure of the printed book shapes the way in which we create and disseminate knowledge in the Western world and make sense of the world around us. The transition of the text to the digital era has not eradicated that structure; it has applied it to a new medium, conferring it with new capabilities. The view expressed by critics such as Roger Chartier and Jay David Bolter that the transition from print to digital represents a shift from a material to an immaterial state neglects to take into consideration the materiality of the digital text: the metal and plastic machines that are necessary to its existence locate it within a particular socio-historical milieu. While the paratextual elements that are associated with the printed book are altered in the digital realm, the material presence of the text persists, and new paratexts are made possible by the digital format.

The Internet offers many new opportunities for authors to work collaboratively, and to share their texts with an expanded audience. Technology that enables self-publishing and promotion alter the nature of the profession by facilitating a more personal connection between authors and their readers, and allowing writers to circumvent the challenges involved in traditional modes of publishing. In many ways, the shift towards a more collaborative form of authorship encouraged by the digital era is a return to the conception of the profession dominant prior to the invention of the printing press, in which each writer, scribe and reader who interacted with a text was configured as one of its creators. Authors such as Lawrence Lessig and Cory Doctorow assert that knowledge and creative works should be reclaimed as a public good, and are endeavouring to create a new literary commons on the Internet, but others, such as Robert Darnton, maintain that the right of authors to preserve the rights to their work should take precedence over public access to information and literature. Publishers are currently experimenting with new modes of accreditation and remuneration for authors, and the tenets governing concepts of ownership over intellectual property are shifting in the virtual realm.

The implementation of digital technologies is also necessitating new collaboration between publishers; as organizations incorporate new media and processes into their business practices, they are recognizing the efficacy of pooling their resources and forging new partnerships. The implementation of print-on-demand technologies and the development of digital texts and readers provide the potential to decelerate the trend towards globalization and amalgamation that

defined the industry over the second half of the twentieth century, enabling independent presses and bookstores to compete more effectively with large corporations. A more localized industry would offer consumers access to a wider variety of titles, in more physical locations. If they can be successfully incorporated into business practices, these new technologies could create a more diverse literary industry in the years to come.

Digital technologies are enhancing the abilities of individuals to communicate about books, not only in the virtual realm, but in face-to-face interactions as well. Publishers like Coach House Press and booksellers like Jason Rovito are exploring these new opportunities, and the full potential of ways in which new technologies may augment the cultivation of literary communities has not yet been explored. The Internet provides a new forum for the organization of traditional literary activities, such as storytelling and bookclubs, and provides a new arena for literary criticism and dialogue. Publishers and booksellers are recognizing the value in using blogs and websites to gather the opinions of readers and publicize texts, making the Internet a valuable new form of communication between the actors in the communications circuit. The multimedia capabilities provided by digital technologies that bestow texts with audio and visual facilities are enabling new modes of textual interaction, and recuperating the oral performance of reading popular prior to the print era.

While the digitization of texts does provide an opportunity for more texts to be accessed from a wider variety of physical locations, the transfer to a digital state poses new problems relating to accessing and preserving texts. In order to consume

a digital text, a reader must have access to the Internet and an eReader, which is still quite costly. The majority of texts being digitized are being produced in the Western world and written in English. In addition, the rate of supersession is high in the digital realm; hardware and software updates are already rendering digital files created within the past decade inaccessible. There are many unique and advantageous prospects offered by new digital technologies, but there are considerable hazards associated with digitization as well, and these risks must be taken into consideration as the industry moves forward.

The incorporation of new technologies into the existing system of textual production require new modes of understanding, and the literary community is currently engaged in a process of incorporating new media into established reading practices. The extent to which the public will embrace new technologies has yet to be seen, but those technologies are already providing new modes of communication and interaction that have enhanced aspects of literary culture, and encouraged a revival of collaborative practices of writing and performing texts. New technologies are transforming the traditional relationships between producers and consumers in the publishing industry, and have the potential to produce a renewed level of diversity and collaboration within the industry.

ENDNOTES

[i] Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances and Audiences From Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1995),
Bolter, Jay David, *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext and the History of Writing* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, 1991).

[ii] Brad Stone, "Amazon Erases Orwell Books From Kindle." *New York Times* 17 July 2009. Digital Ed.

[iii] Bobbie Johnson, "Amazon Kindle users surprised by 'Big Brother' move." *The Guardian* 17 July 2009. Digital Ed.

[iv] Roger Chartier writes that "against the relations of contiguity established in the print objects, [the electronic text enables] the free composition of infinitely manipulable fragments" (*Forms* 18).

[v] Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994),
Sherman Young, *The Book Is Dead: Long Live the Book* (Sydney: U of New South Wales P, 2007).

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