Reception Study in the U.S., 1985-2012

In the U.S. the field of reception study, encompassing scholarship in literary studies, cultural and media studies, and the history of the book, has grown substantially in both scope and volume over the last twenty-five years. There are now three scholarly journals devoted exclusively to research on audience, reading, and reception: *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History; Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy;* and (in the U.S. and Britain) *Classical Receptions Journal.* In 2005, the Reception Study Society was founded as a national organization to promote research in response-and-reception study and critical exchange among scholars through a biennial conference and publication of the society's journal, *Reception.* Additionally, panels and sessions devoted to reception are now a regular part of the program at a number of leading regional and national meetings, including the annual Modern Language Association Convention and the American Literature Association Conference. Over the last ten years there has been especially notable growth in the number of books devoted entirely or in part to questions about reading practices, audience formation, and reception. Indeed, the past two years alone have witnessed the publication of over four dozen monographs and edited volumes in literary criticism, cultural/media studies, and the history of the book treating reception in both its historical and contemporary manifestations. These developments make clear that reception study in the U.S. is not only alive and well but is thriving and expanding to a degree that is both exciting and salutary.

Reception study itself emerged in the U.S. in the 1980s, partly as an outgrowth of reader-response criticism, which itself developed in the 1970s in opposition to the prevailing New Criticism, particularly the latter's treatment of devices and structures "in" texts as purely objective essences and its dismissal of readers' responses as a mere "affective fallacy." Response and reception theorists claim, by contrast, that readers' practices reflect and are influenced by psychological, socio-historical, and/or cultural factors, not the nature of the text itself. In both theory and practice, reader-response criticism in the 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in literary studies, tended to take, as Steven Mailloux has pointed out, one of two forms: psychological versions, as embodied especially in the work of David Bleich and Norman Holland, and social approaches, exemplified by Jonathan Culler, Inge Crosman (Winters), Susan Suleiman, Elizabeth Freund, Peter Rabinowitz, and the early Stanley Fish, among others, many of whom were influenced by the new reader-oriented criticism from Europe, particularly Wolfgang Iser's *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading* and Umberto Eco's *The Role of the Reader.*

Psychological approaches tended to theorize and study response and interpretation as private, psychodynamic activities in which an individual's encounter with a text enabled her to understand herself. Bleich said, for example, that the text's aesthetics "do not matter" (2004, 309) because interpretation invariably reveals the personality of the reader. Social approaches, which employed – or at least claimed to employ –
"models based on intersubjective categories and strategies shared by members of a group" (Mailloux 1982, 40), also included feminist reader-response criticism by Judith Fetterly, Elizabeth Flynn, and Patrocinio Schweikart, who preserve the subjectivity or autonomy of the reader but claim she can resist patriarchal positioning and both identify with and remain independent of feminine authors and texts.

Largely because of two outside factors that came into play amidst the larger "turn toward history" in literary studies in the U.S., social approaches were transformed into what would become reception study. One entailed the first availability of English translations of Hans Robert Jauss's work on the "aesthetics of reception," in which Jauss emphasized the relation between readers' activities and the changing historical contexts and "horizons of expectations" in which they operate. In the influential essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" (incorporated in Toward an Aesthetic of Reception 1982), Jauss argued that the interpretation of a text, especially an ancient one, involves a dialog in which the text poses a question to which readers provide an answer. This dialog requires readers to break with their conventions and grasp those of the author's perspective. Readers thereby mediate between their own time or perspective and that of the alien text or author in a process that enables them to respond to a text in terms of its original historical context as well as their own. A second factor in the development of reception theory involved the increasing attention to readers and audiences within the emerging field of the history of the book, particularly as influenced by the scholarship of Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton, who demonstrated the need for and value in examining what readers from various times and places in the past actually did with books and other reading materials.

Stanley Fish defended reader-response criticism at first but subsequently helped develop reception study because of these influences. In the early "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" (1970), he claimed that reading is a temporal process whereby the reader constructs and reconstructs interpretations that reveal to the reader the kind of text he or she is experiencing. Influenced by Jauss and Iser, Fish abandoned the "essentialist" assumption that competent readers discover one "deep structure" or generic type because that assumption did not enable him to explain why some readers interpret a text one way and others interpret it another. In this later work, he grants that multiple interpretive practices result from the contextual indeterminacies of a text, as Iser and Jauss say; however, he considers the reader's conventions, not the indeterminacies of the text, the authoritative basis of a text's interpretation. He maintains, moreover, that readers who share conventions participate in what he terms an "interpretive community" – groups of scholars who accept and apply a common strategy and on that basis determine the validity of the reader's interpretation.

For example, in "Transmuting the Lump" (1986), Fish explains why in 1942 critics faulted books XI and XII of Milton's Paradise Lost but in 1979 hailed them as the poem's exemplary books. C.S. Lewis, who in 1942 dismissed the two books as didactic, argued that the poem is not a theological work but a great aesthetic work, as its plot indicates. Emerging in the late 1940s, the New Criticism preserved this notion of the work's aesthetic autonomy as well as the unifying notion of organic form, which led Geoffrey Hartmann and others to make Christian mythology or God's vision the center of the poem, which, in turn, made the first ten books just like the last two. Consequently, by the late 1970s, the last two books were considered the poem's center, and the remaining books were reread in terms of them.
As this account incisively demonstrates, the notion of an interpretive community, which Fish articulated most notably in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), describes the changing historical conditions explaining why some critics interpret a work one way and others interpret it another way. Mailloux also says that different readers produce different interpretations and even different texts because diverse rhetorical conventions govern their interpretive practices. He also claims that the rhetorical practices of a community or discipline justify or limit the reader's interpretive practice (*Rhetorical Power*, 1989). In a related manner, Toby Miller has argued that literary discourse, rooted in institutional practices, evolves distinct historical apparatuses of diverse schools or interpretive communities. Such discourses constitute normal or "civil" subjects or, in literary contexts, reading practices rather than oppositional or subversive agents. Although Fish and Mailloux both believe that the reader chooses the community governing his or her interpretive practices, the significance of their work lies in the way it helped open the study of reception and response to broad historical and cultural analyses.

These theoretical turns have been followed by other developments within reception theory. One has involved the recent re-theorizing of genre and genre categories. Contrary to the traditional conception of genre as a property of individual texts or a category of features shared by particular groups of texts, several reception theorists have argued that genres are interpretive conventions, which readers use to constitute texts as belonging to particular categories or regimes of discourse (e.g. Frow 2006; Machor 2011). Understanding that genre, as John Frow asserts, "is the category we [as readers] impute to texts, and under different circumstances these imputations may change" enables us to see that "genre is not a property of a text but a function of reading;" that is, it is "an interpretive process called into being." From a reception-study perspective, therefore, concern over "questions of genre […] should not be with matters of taxonomy […] but rather with questions of use: 'What models of classification are there, and how have people made use of them in particular circumstances?'" (2006, 101-102: 55).

Another development has involved a theoretical distinction, which has frequently been an unstated component of reception-study practice, between two models of the relation between texts and the interpretive work of readers. That is, largely influenced by early reader-response criticism, most reception study critics and scholars subscribe to what can be called an interactive or "transactional" theory, which posits reading and interpretation as an exchange or interaction between the work a reader does on a text and the impact of the text on a reader, owing to its inherent properties, structures, gaps, and other characteristics that exist before reading begins. However, a second view, based on the problematics of the interactive/transactional model (see Mailloux 1989), has posited a strong anti-essentialist position, which holds that readers and audiences, by operating within specific historical and contextual interpretive communities – or what Tony Bennett terms "reading formations" – totally constitute texts through acts of interpretation. While the second view addresses the conundrums posed by the interactive model of distinguishing between inherent textual elements and interpretive activities, the anti-essentialist position has in turn led to other questions, including the issue of interpretive change. That is, if readers – or more accurately, read-

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1 This interactive model is at the core of Iser's theory of textual gaps and reader interface, while the term *transactional*, as a way of theorizing reader-text relations, was first proposed by Rosenblatt.
ing formations – are totally in charge, how can we account for changes in the historical shapes of interpretive communities and the rise of new ones? Two answers have been offered by reception theorists. One is that interpretive communities are themselves inherent engines of change; the other is that interpretive and communal change results because of overlapping and interaction among various reading formations and because most readers simultaneously inhabit more than one interpretive community.²

It would be inaccurate, however, to demarcate these last two developments as field-shaping iterations of reception theory, both within literary study and in the field as a whole. Instead, more important developments in reception study, particularly over the last twenty-five years, have come within cultural and media studies.

An interest in audience has long been a significant component of media and mass communication studies since its inception in the 1930s and 1940s, when behaviorist and market-driven research sought to investigate the impact of mass media on their target audiences. This emphasis upon effects took a new turn in the wake of the work of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and the Frankfurt School, which critiqued the older form of effects study for its political naiveté. As we have pointed out elsewhere, The Frankfurt School theorized media communication as the politically inflected work of the “culture industry,” which imposed upon and reinforced in its (largely working-class) audience the ideology of the dominant culture. Emphasizing the power exerted over the audience by the culture industry, from films and television to advertising and music, this interrogation of mass media as conduits of commodification and ideological dominance […] also served as the initial paradigm of audience analysis within the newly developing field of cultural studies. (Machor and Goldstein 2001, 204)

In the late 1970s and 1980s, however, this critical effects model came under fire, first in Britain through the work of Raymond Williams, David Morley, Charlotte Brundson, and Stuart Hall, and then in the U.S. and elsewhere from John Fiske, Ien Ang, Lawrence Grossberg, and Janice Radway, who criticized effects studies for theorizing the audience as passive “dupes” and ignoring the role of political and cultural factors at work on the reception side of the communication conduit. These theorists maintained that viewing, reading, and listening need to be understood as “an active process of ‘production in use’” in which the responses of audiences are “always culturally activated within specific contexts and local histories” (Machor and Goldstein 2001, 205). As a result of this new active-audience theory, scholars began to examine the reception activities of specific groups of viewers and readers and the role of these audiences in shaping the meaning and impact of texts and media. Consequently, from the mid-to-late 1980s onward, cultural studies scholars in the U.S. and elsewhere have increasingly focused on the role of interpretive responses (both individual and communal) in the experiences of television and film viewers (e.g. Staiger 1992; Brown 1994; Cooper 1999) and engaged in research based on ethnographic studies of reception using interviews, questionnaires, and other data to provide “thick” descriptions of the active work that audiences do on particular media texts (e.g. Lee and Cho 1990; Boyarin 1991; Cruz and Lewis 1994; Hay, Grossberg, and Wartella 1996). A number of researchers have attended specifically to the roles that race, class, and gender played in this reception activity (e.g. Radway 1984; Press 1991; Stacey 1994; Bobo 1995; and more recently Sweeney 2010), while others turned to an examination of

² For the first of these arguments, see Fish (1987); for the second, see Machor (1998).
fandom as a form of active audience responses (e.g. Fiske 1989; Helen Taylor 1989; Bacon-Smith 1992; Lewis 1992; Harrington and Bielby 1995). Such work has become central to reception-oriented audience analysis within cultural studies over the last ten to fifteen years, as scholars have extended this research to include studies of fandom and internet chat rooms and blogs (e.g. Hellevik and Busse 2006; Bury 2008), film reception and spectator deviance (Staiger 2000), the reception of juvenile fiction and film (e.g. Morey 2012), cross-cultural receptions (e.g. Amaya 2010), and in a few cases even historical responses to popular media (e.g. Cavicchi 2011; Razlogova 2011).

Within literary criticism, reception study as a practice has followed a somewhat different set of trajectories in examining audiences, reading, and interpretation of texts within specific historical and cultural contexts. One pathway has led to studies that examine reception histories of elite and professional readers, from literary artists to academics, and the changing contours of their interpretations and axiologies of texts and writers, while connecting these interpretive communities to the changing socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which they developed (e.g. Johnson 1996; Kolbrener 1997; Goldstein 2001; Kallendorf 2007; Goldstein 2009). Other scholars have looked outside these communities to examine a wide variety of readers and reception events in the culture at large. At times, such work has involved mapping out historically specific reading formations and the shared (and varied) strategies of interpretive communities (e.g. Allen 1991; Machor 2011). Still other reception critics have investigated the changes over time in the reception histories of individual writers' oeuvres (e.g. Gary Taylor 1989; Bautz 2007; John 2011) or the response patterns that marked the reception of a particular writer's work or a particular genre in a specific period (e.g. Buckingham 1993; Roemer 2003; Haskin 2007; Shohet 2010). There has also been a growing critical attention, particularly over the last decade, to the ways gender, race, ethnicity, and class have come into play in the way texts have been received (e.g. Banks 1993; Thompson 1996; Templin 2008; Gonzalez 2008; Wilkes 2010), while methodological developments have included the increasing incorporation of response data in fan letters as an important index to popular reception trends and patterns (e.g. Satterwhite 2011; Blair 2012). Reception study practice in literary criticism and history has thereby branched out into a variety of areas that has given it a breadth and richness matching that of reception analysis in cultural studies.

The third area in which reception study has come to play a key role is in the history of the book and its more recent "progeny," the history of reading, and these areas also have their own history and profile. An interest in readers and audiences had been a long-standing feature of book history, going back at least to Richard Altick's watershed study The English Common Reader (1957). However, the subsequent development of reception-and-reader-oriented study within the history of the book, unlike its counterparts in literary and cultural studies, was not driven by a substantial body of theory or by precisely the same factors that helped shape reception

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3 An important component of some of this research has been the concept, borrowed from Michel de Certeau, of textual "pouching" as a form of active audience reception (cf. especially Jenkins 1992). It should be noted, however, that active-audience theory has also been challenged by some as a form of "pointless populism" or "radical contextualism" (cf. for example Seaman 1992; Ang 1996).

4 For differing perspectives on the relationship between the history of the book and the history of reading as research fields, see Anderson and Sauer (2002) and Jackson (2005a).
study in those two other areas. Rather, book historians’ interest in reception has largely grown from the field’s long-established recognition that the engagement between readers and various forms of print has always been a historically specific phenomenon and that different audiences in different contexts responded to books in varying ways. Nonetheless, there have been several more specific theoretical and methodological premises that have played a role in the work of book historians. One is their emphasis on the need to examine “common” or “typical” readers, usually defined as “any reader who did not read books for a living” (Rose 1992, 51). Another involved an issue over broad historical trends in reading. Regarding the second, Roger Chartier has argued, building on the earlier theory of Rolf Engelsing, that from the eleventh to the sixteenth century reading changed from oral and public to private and visual, and that from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century it changed from an intensive, public, social practice to an extensive, private, solitary practice. Intensive social reading, often familial or communal, entailed repeated reading and study of a few important texts, such as the Bible or the almanac, whereas in extensive, private reading, individuals would consume many texts, often reading each only once (Chartier 1994, 1-24). Other book historians, however, have challenged this sweeping distinction by carefully examining the practices of individual readers of the past, which can be deciphered from diaries, letters, and other written commentaries. For example, Robert Darnton showed that the reading practices of Jean Ranson, an ordinary individual who lived in the late 1700s and wrote about ordinary life, undermines the broad schema by which reading changed from intensive to extensive. Examining a dossier of fifty-nine letters that Ranson wrote to Frédéric-Cedric Ostervald, his teacher, Darnton says that Ranson asked about the health of “his friend” Jean-Jacques Rousseau and requested good copies of his novels and, after his death, as much biographical information as possible. Moreover, Ranson repeatedly reread the novels as guides to his life, including his treatment of his wife and the education of his children. That other French readers followed a similar reading regimen indicates, Darton has argued, that intensive reading lasted longer than the broad historical heuristic had posited. A parallel argument has been made by John Brewer in his study of the intensive reading practices of Anna Larpent, whose late 18th- and early 19th-century diaries indicate that “intensive’ and ‘extensive’ reading were complementary, not incompatible” (1996, 244).

Although historians of reading in the U.S. have largely abandoned the intensive/extensive dichotomy as a diachronic paradigm of reading, many have continued the methodology, first developed by Darnton and by Carlo Ginzburg in his ground-breaking The Cheese and the Worms (1980), of meticulously reconstructing the practices of individual readers from the past (e.g. Sherman 1994, Sharpe 2000, Scott 2002, Stabile 2008), while other book historians, in a manner similar to the scholarship of reception-oriented critics in literary studies, have looked at a single work’s reception by a variety of elite and common readers (e.g. Huot 1993, Jackson 1999, LeFavour 2004). Taking a broader approach, a number of book historians have increasingly turned their attention to developing a historical sociology of reading, which has focused on print consumption, literacy, audience access, and reading communities (including those of minorities and subalterns), thereby shedding substantial light on who read, why they read, what they read, and under what conditions in the past (e.g. Zboray 1993; Johanningsmeier 1997; McHenry 2002; Long 2003; Rubin 2007; Brown 2007; Sicherman 2010). But while such scholarship has revealed much about
how readers from previous eras used and viewed print matter, it discloses little about the way historical readers processed texts and the role and shape of specific interpretive strategies in historical patterns of reception. Over the last ten to fifteen years, however, several historians of reading in the U.S. have begun to examine such practices by supplementing data gleaned from letters, diaries, and commonplace books with traces of responses preserved in marginalia. Parallel to a degree, the recent work of reception studies in literary criticism, these historians have begun to reveal more about the dynamics of reader engagement with print and the interpretive strategies by which historical readers made sense of texts (e.g. Rose 2001; Jackson 2005b; Zboray and Zboray 2006; Foreman 2009).

Interestingly, amid such developments in practice, reception study in the history of the book and reading in the U.S. also has been marked by something of a theoretical – or more accurately, a methodological – controversy regarding one of its key concepts: the heuristic of the "common" reader. This development has entailed questions and debates about whether letters, diaries, and marginalia provide unmediated, unproblematic indices to the experiences of "common" or "typical" readers and whether the reception activities of readers who recorded their responses are in any way representative of or common to the mass of readers who never did so. Such questions raise the issue as to whether the "common reader" is an elusive phantom, forever slipping between the cracks in the archive but somehow leaving recoverable traces, or a theoretical fiction that is nonetheless necessary to the work of historians of reading.

Though this overview might seem to suggest that clear distinctions obtain among the theories and practices of reception study in the three fields of literary criticism, cultural studies, and the history of the book in the U.S., several developments already noted – e.g. the use of fan responses in cultural studies and literary criticism; the growing attention to historically specific interpretive strategies of readers by both literary critics and historians of reading – indicate that a degree of overlapping and cross-pollination has characterized scholarship among these fields. The same is true, in part, for a recent, intriguing development within reception study practice, and a brief look at it is warranted, both because of a new direction it may signal for reception study and because of a theoretical question this work implicitly raises about the nature of reception study as a critical field.

Although reception theorists in literary and cultural studies have long argued that reception is itself a form of production, this new scholarship is reversing that trajectory by exploring acts of textual production as forms of reception. For example, Janet Staiger has examined the way director Robert Aldrich and screenwriter A.I. Bezzerides adapted Mickey Spillane’s novel *Kiss Me Deadly* into their 1955 film of the same title. Reading that adaptation as an interpretation of Spillane’s hard-boiled detective narrative within the context of Cold War ideology, Staiger finds Aldrich and Bezzerides using the film as a transcoded response to the politics of McCarthyism and as a critique of the climate of repression that characterized 1950s U.S. culture (Staiger 2008). A second instance of this kind of reorientation comes in Janice Radway’s recent work on a slightly more contemporary subject: the hand-made zines produced by teenage American girls in the 1990s and at the turn of the last century. Radway’s new work focuses on the way such acts of production function as sites of protest in

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5 For critiques within this controversy cf. for example Raymond (2003, 190); Price (2004, 312-13); Jackson (2005b, 38); Rubin (2007, 253); Loveman (2008, 13).
response to forms of mass culture and their political ideologies. For Radway, moreover, that protest, manifested in the contents and shapes of teenage zines, operates as a form of response to the representations of gender, and particularly of young women, in popular magazines, in music videos, and on the internet (Radway 2008).

Two other examples of this turn have come in scholarship within the history of the book and its intersection with literary studies: Barbara Hochman's investigation of the reprinting and cultural repositioning of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* after the Civil War and Ellen Garvey's examination of scrapbooks made by late-19th- and early 20th-century readers – both black and white – and the various activities of response that enabled the production of those scrapbooks and informed their use.

Hochman's *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution* (2011) explores the ways in which Stowe's controversial and widely-read novel was reprinted and repackaged after the Civil War. Looking at both paratextual materials that accompanied new editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and editorial deletions and other modifications made to Stowe's novel, Hochman has found that such developments not only encouraged distinctive forms of reader response but also constituted a reinterpretation of the cultural significances ascribed to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself. In particular, editorial changes designed to adapt *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for "young folks" at that time embodied a series of cultural transformations: the consolidation of class divisions, shifting gender norms, changing theories of child development, and altered racial politics. These developments were intertwined with textualized reinterpretations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – and the receptions these new editions received – so as to become factors in the ideology and policies that enabled racial segregation in postbellum America.

In a different vein, Garvey's *Writing with Scissors* (2012) provides a fascinating look at late 19th- and early 20th-century scrapbooks and scrapbook-making as an avenue for discovering historically specific forms of reading practices. Garvey reveals how some scrapbook makers used their compilations, often composed of clippings from newspapers and magazines, as a way to demarcate and remember reading experiences and to reshape their encounters with print culture. Such reshaping was especially present in scrapbooks compiled by African Americans after the Civil War. Gleaning both black and white newspapers for information about black people, African Americans produced extensive compilations that sometimes took up dozens or even hundreds of volumes. In the process they created artifacts that reveal some of the ways African American readers used the generally hostile and even dangerous white newspapers to assert a place in the public sphere's arena of discourse – sometimes by interrogating it as a hostile witness, sometimes by saving it as evidence, and sometimes by critiquing it. Thus, while white newspapers scissored black identity out of print, often denying its significance, African Americans scissored it back into their scrapbooks, reading against the grain of white mass culture.

Whether this new scholarship signals the start of an ongoing trend or a stage in further turns in reception study practice is unclear at this point, but one upshot is the question it tacitly poses about exactly what reception study entails. For if such acts of production constitute at the same time acts of reception, the question is, what exactly differentiates the two? That is, where does production end and reception begin? This is no idle query. After all, almost all texts are constructed in response to some other textual activity or discursive cultural practice. Moreover, most cultural practices
themselves can be identified as acts of reception within a particular socio-cultural and historical context. In light of that recognition, does any analysis of cultural production become, ipso facto, a form of reception study? What, in other words, differentiates reception study from cultural studies or book history or literary studies as a whole? Or does reception study embrace, to one degree or another, all of these areas?

We do not raise these questions as a prelude to providing answers nor as a platform to argue for or against a particular way of responding to such queries. Rather, our purpose is to offer a possible springboard to future discussion and debate about the ongoing, productive ways through which reception study in literary and cultural studies, the history of the book, and the points of intersection among those three fields might move. For such considerations lead to questions about where reception study stands and where it might, and might need, to go in the U.S. and elsewhere in the next decade.

One direction that reception theory could productively take involves exploring the work of theorists who recently have come into prominence for its potential relations to and insights for reception theory and practice. For example, in what ways might the theories of Alain Badiou be integrated into reception theory, perhaps to the point where Badiou's work might provide a pathway for reception theorists to pursue? Or suppose we consider Slavoj Žižek's theoretical investigations of contingency and hegemony or his conception of the "ridiculous sublime"? Are there implications for reception theory in Žižek's work in these and other areas? Or might reception theorists pick up on and further explore Jack Bratich's recent consideration of Antonio Negri's concepts of "ontological terrains" and "constituted power" for the way they relate to – and problematize – active audience theory, as well as other segments of reception theory?

One reason for thinking about new theoretical directions for reception study is that innovative developments in theory can have a significant impact on practice. But irrespective of that potential, it is worth considering where reception study practice might go in the future, or more specifically what previously neglected or under-explored areas it might turn its attention to. How might reception study shed light on discourses and discursive practices as they relate, for instance, to a broad range of under-explored genres, from 19th-century African American periodicals and children's literature to contemporary graphic novels and slam poetry? What fresh understanding can reception studies bring to some of the new social media – not only internet fan chat rooms, which have received some recent attention, but also Facebook, Twitter, and online video gaming? And suppose reception study scholars explored what happens to interpretive communities and response activities when novels are read on Kindles?

We raise these possibilities, not to chart out a specific terrain for future explorations in reception studies or even to urge scholars and researchers to turn their attention to them, but to offer them as both potential avenues to consider and as an indication of the many possibilities for the future growth of reception theory and practice. For while reception study has grown substantially and come into increasing prominence in the U.S., especially over the last fifteen years, there are also many reasons to be excited about its future expansion and influence in literary and cultural studies and in the history of the book over the next decades.
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