

Introduction: Revealing the Reader

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK DEMONSTRATE THAT AN interest in the material history of print culture inevitably leads us to the question of readers. How well can we understand the past, present and future of print without examining the uses to which it is put? This question serves not only to remind us of the primacy of the economic relationship between readers, writers and publishers, but draws attention to the variety of cultural, social, political and interpersonal roles that reading has played and continues to play.

This special section of *Australian Humanities Review* brings together a number of papers presented at the *Revealing The Reader* symposium, hosted by Monash University's Centre for the Book in 2012. The symposium brought together scholars with a shared interest in contemporary and historical reading practices, with the aim of showcasing current research and research methods in this rapidly-expanding field. By including perspectives from book history, literary studies, print-culture research, digital humanities and creative writing, the symposium provided a forum for discussion and debate on the state and future of reading research.

The Centre for the Book is comprised of scholars whose expertise is print-culture research. Established in 1982, the Centre is interdisciplinary and theoretically

hybridising. It encourages scholars and students to explore book history and print culture in all forms: in all historical periods; high-culture, pop-culture and everything in between; the multiple materialities of manuscript and print communication; print culture's relationship to politics, including contemporary cultural policy; the book industries, both in Australia and internationally; social formations of reading and book audiences; the book's increasingly intertwined relationship with other media platforms; book futures, including digital-codex hybrids; Web 2.0 book phenomena and the digital literary sphere.

We are particularly pleased that this collection of essays brings the diversity of perspectives represented at the symposium to a wider humanities readership. Participants, and the authors of the articles in this issue, were invited to reflect on the possibilities, challenges and politics of reading research. From large-scale data sets created by social-reading software, to the intimate and partial record of one woman's reading activities, library records, and contemporary reading events, the essays introduce the field of reading research and indicate a number of areas of further inquiry. At the heart of all these essays is the question of methodology: how we find evidence of the presence of the reader, and what that evidence tells us about their engagement with books is the topic motivating this collection.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by the peer reviewers for each of these articles, and to thank them for their time and generosity. We thank Russell Smith and Monique Rooney for the opportunity to bring these papers to a wide audience. We would also like to thank our co-editor, Rosalind McFarlane, who has managed the publication of these papers with skill, patience and admirable attention to detail.