The Future of Reading: The Importance of Preserving Hybrid Collections in the Digital Age

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Introduction: Libraries in Transition

From storehouse to gateway

From "P-Books" to "E-Books"

- 21% of Americans have read an e-book in the last year

- Percentage of e-reader owners went from 10% in Dec. 11 to 19% in Jan. 12

- At the end of 2011, 42 of USA Today's top 50 bestsellers sold more e-copies than paper copies

- Amazon announced in 2011 that its e-book sales had surpassed its print sales

- In 2010, academic libraries added more e-books (32 million) than print books (27 million)

From "P-Books" to "E-Books"

- E-books are increasingly replacing print texts, not just supplementing them
- This could have major repercussions for the future of reading and intellectual life

Reading & Neuroplasticity

- Reading is not natural to the human brain
- Humans developed the ability to read due to neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to adapt and rewire itself
- The human brain is much more adaptive and malleable than previously thought.
- The brain "rewires" itself as it engages in various activities or uses technologies
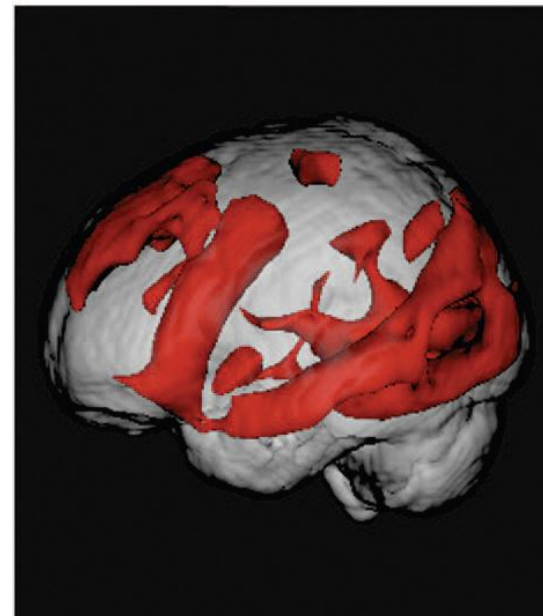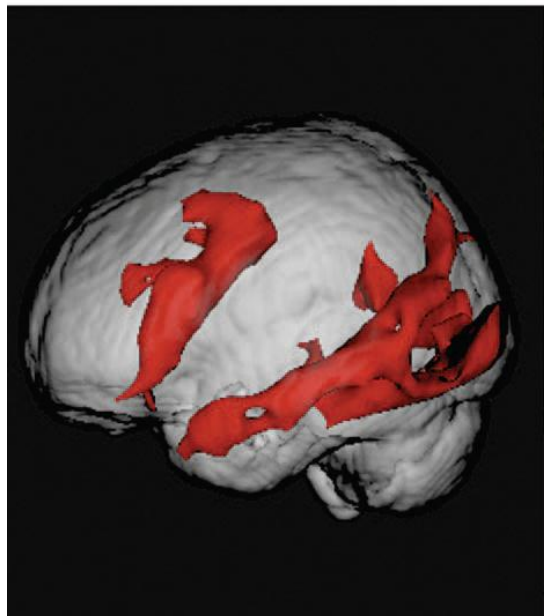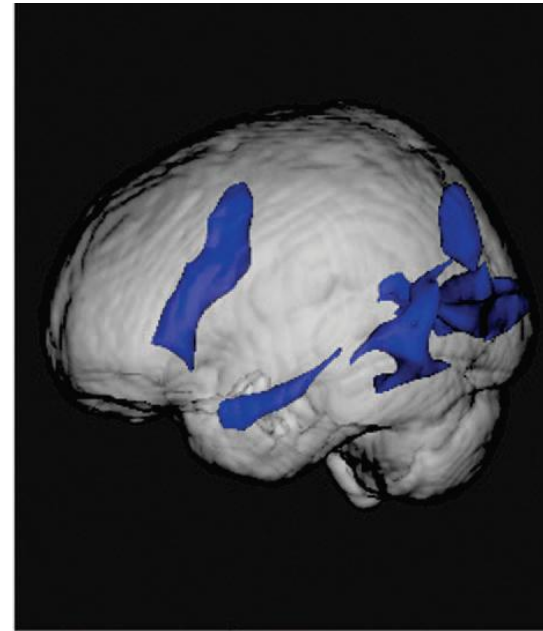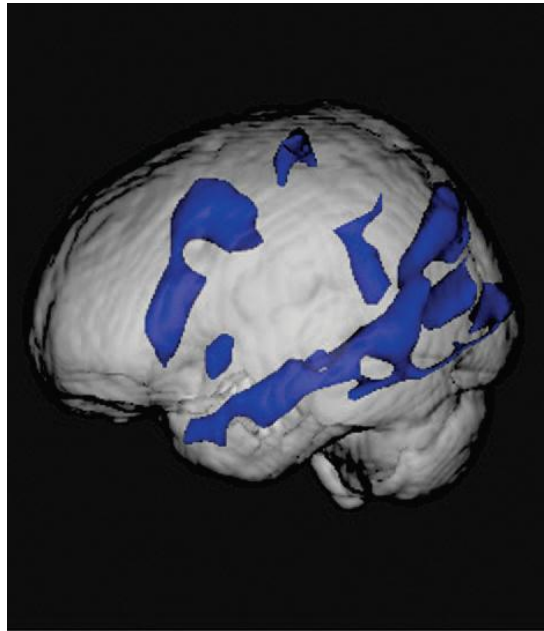
Reading & Neuroplasticity

- The more one reads, the more deeply the neural pathways that facilitate reading take hold

- The opposite is also true

Print Reading vs. E-Reading

- Reading off a screen is NOT the same as reading off a printed page

- The human brain responds differently to screen-based reading than to print reading

"Your Brain on Google"

Source: Gary W. Small, et.al., "Your Brain on Google: Patterns of Cerebral Activation during Internet Searching", *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 17 (2), February 2009.

Print Reading vs. E-Reading

- The more your brain rewires itself to accommodate screen reading, the harder it becomes to read off a printed page

"Deep" Print Reading is . . .

- Fixed
- Linear
- Solitary
- In-depth
- Requires focused, sustained attention

Online Reading is . . .

- Nonlinear (hyperlinks, etc.)

- Malleable

- Rapid decision making/filtering

- Visual ability/pattern recognition

- Immediate

- Interactive

Online Reading . . . (cont.)

- Impatience/desire for immediate gratification

- Need for constant stimulation

- Distractions/multitasking

- Absorbing information in small bits

- Browsing or skimming (F-shaped pattern - Nielsen)

F-Shaped Reading Pattern
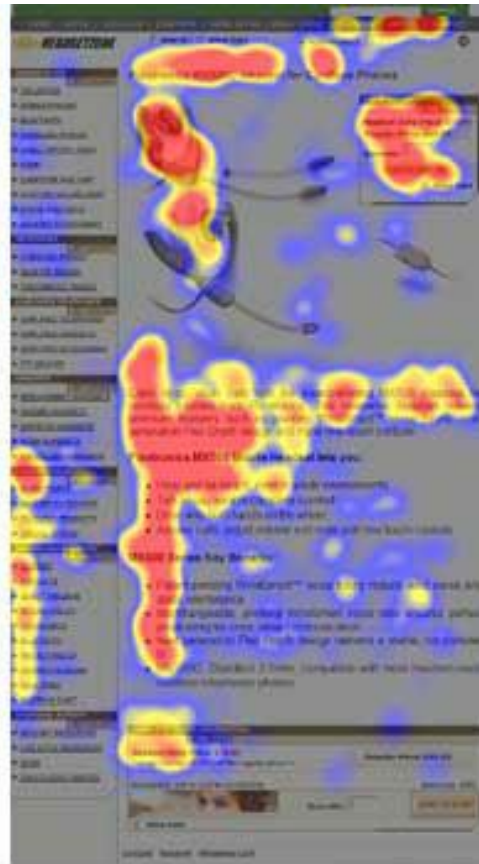
Source: "F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content", Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, April 17, 2006. http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html.

Print Reading vs. E-Reading (cont.)

- Print reading fosters analytical thinking, focus, attention, reflection, in-depth conceptual knowledge and greater long-term retention of information

- Online reading fosters immediate problem solving, multitasking, visual pattern recognition and short-term rapid assimilation of information

Consequences

- If we entirely give up "deep" print reading for screen reading, we risk losing not just a format but a culture and a way of thinking

- We would gain vastly greater access to information in return for the ability to turn that information into knowledge

What About E-Readers?

- Conflicting studies on effectiveness of e-readers vs. print books

- E-reader/e-book sales have boosted the publishing industry in recent years

- Most readers of e-books tend to read print as well (among the heaviest readers)

- Unlikely that e-readers are a long-term solution

What About E-Readers (cont.)?

- Dedicated e-readers (Kindle, Nook) vs. multipurpose devices (iPad, Laptop)

- Only 41% of readers of e-books used dedicated e-reading devices (42% used computers)

- Multipurpose devices bring a variety of distractions

- Multipurpose devices tend to supplant dedicated devices (iPhone/digital camera)

The Future of Reading

- From 2002-2008, the percentage of 18-24 year olds who read a book of their own accord declined from 52% to 50.7%

- In 2010, the average 15-19 year old spent 2 hrs., 17 min. watching TV; over 55 minutes using computers/video games; and 7 minutes per day reading

The Future of Reading (cont.)

- Deep, print-based reading is not likely to disappear entirely. However, it is likely to become the exclusive property of an elite "reading class".

The Reading Class

- "The era of mass reading, which lasted from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century in northwestern Europe and North America, was the anomaly. We are now seeing such reading return to its former social base: a self-perpetuating minority that we shall call the reading class."

(Griswold, et. al., 2005)

The Reading Class (cont.)

- Having deep reading confined to a small elite threatens to have major long-term social, economic and political consequences

- With many physical bookstores likely to disappear due to the spread of e-reading, only libraries will be able to provide those outside the "reading class" with the means to gain entrance to it.

What can Libraries do: Preserve Hybrid Collections

- Turning back the clock is NOT the answer
- Hybrid collections: Maintaining some print materials along with access to electronic resources
- Maintain space to facilitate deep reading
- Understand which format works better for which purpose
- Libraries that combine the virtues of both print and electronic

Why Hybrid Collections

- Not everything is online
- Preserve advantages of print monographs
- Some users still prefer print
- Publisher/copyright restrictions

Why Hybrid Collections (cont.)

- Enable broader access to "reading class"

- Preserve culture of deep reading and print literacy

Why Hybrid Collections

- If we give up print reading for the sake of e-books, we risk marginalizing an entire way of thinking

- If libraries don't safeguard deep reading and make it available to the general public, then who will?

Questions?

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