

The Many Futures of the Book

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This article juxtaposes the idea of the book in the traditional academic context to the book's latest technological manifestation as e-reader that uses E-Ink technology, mimics the clarity of a printed book, and offers wireless connectivity. It considers the implications of connectivity for a new network readership, for the publishing industry, for the author-reader relationship, and for the very idea of authorship. The premise is that bound up with the changes that the object-book undergoes are our deeply held conceptions of subjectivity and agency

Keywords: publishing / e-book / e-reader / reading culture / network readership / authorship

The future of the book is the blurb.
(Marshall McLuhan)

That books endure suggests we endure, our inner tale not writ in the
water of e-ink.
(John Updike)

Academic criticism has rarely dwelled on the material media of literature. However, recently some of the conversation concerning literature has shifted the focus from contents to the material side. This is due to the perception of digital culture as a threat to print culture and books in general. Already in 1967, Derrida, in *Of Grammatology* (6), proclaimed “the end of the book and the beginning of writing”—which did not literally mean the end of the book, but the end of the neo-Hegelian model of the total book, the book of absolute knowledge. In 1994, Sven Birkerts, in *The Gutenberg Elegies* (5), pessimistically concluded that with the death of the book “all the old assumptions [were] under siege.” In the age of Web 2.0, when new technical platforms are available, it is interesting to reflect on the future of the book as object and idea. This essay juxtaposes the idea of the book in the traditional academic context, as the standard medium for the storage and dissemination of academic discourse, to the book's latest technological manifestation as e-reader that uses E-Ink technology, mimics the clarity of a printed book, and, contrary to some previous unsuccessful attempts, offers wireless connectivity. Connectivity is likely to significantly challenge

the prominence of the conventional book, an object that is superbly designed, extremely functional, infinitely useful, and passionately beloved. In the following sections the essay considers the implications of connectivity for a new network readership, for the publishing industry, for the author-reader relationship, and for the very idea of authorship. The essay's premise is that bound up with the changes that the object-book undergoes are our deeply held conceptions of subjectivity and agency.

E-books and e-readers: untangling the polysemic bundle

There seems to be an inherent ambiguity in any definition of the “book,” a term that has come to designate not only the text (work or *opus*), but also the form or the physical object that supports it. In his essay “The Book to Come” Derrida (Derrida, *Paper* 4–18) reminds us that the Greek word *biblion* has not always meant “book” or even “work.” *Biblos* was in fact the internal bark of the papyrus, so it would only designate “writing paper” and not book or *opus*; similarly the Latin word *liber* originally, before obtaining the meaning “book,” designated only the living part of the bark. Derrida goes on to argue that in our desire to grant the term “book” more specificity we should avoid conflating the history of the book with a particular mode of writing, since systems of writing can be extremely heterogeneous. Moreover, he warns against conflating the question of the book with that of the technologies of printing—a valuable observation in light of the revolutionary impact of the digital revolution on such technologies—and against the danger of conflating the book with its virtual or material supports. The question open to debate for Derrida, and still at the core of any investigation of the book and its future, is whether the “thing” called book is compatible with the new electronic technologies. In order to start addressing this question it might be worth dwelling briefly on what “bookness” means. In his “Whatness of Bookness” (1996), Philip Smith defined “bookness” as:

The qualities which have to do with a book. In its simplest meaning the term covers the packaging of multiple planes held together in fixed or variable sequence by some kind of hinging mechanism, support, or container, associated with a visual/verbal content called a text. The term should not strictly speaking include pre-codex carriers of text such as the scroll or the clay tablet, in fact nothing on a single leaf or planar surface such as a TV screen, poster or hand-bill. (Smith)

However, Smith acknowledges that such a definition is “being stretched to include forms which carry a digitalized or electronic text such as a CD,

a hard disk or a microchip.” Questions of definitions temporarily aside, the history of e-book readers and their pre-figuration in works of (science-)fiction is a fascinating one. The names of Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Stanislaw Lem, and Arthur Clark come to mind, but one should also consider the PADD (Personal Access Display Devices) featured in various *Star Trek* episodes and the e-newspaper in Spielberg’s *Minority Report* (2002) reminiscent of the “Daily Prophet” in *Harry Potter*. The fascination with machines as alternatives to codex and other traditional forms of representation was also typical of avant-garde poets and artists. As Ben Ehrenreich (see Ehrenreich) reminds us, in a 1913 manifesto, Filippo Marinetti called for “a typographic revolution directed against the idiotic and nauseating concepts of the outdated and conventional book.” Similar aspirations were voiced by modernists such as Stein, Joyce, Pound, and by the American poet, book dealer, and radical organizer Robert Carlton Brown. Brown’s (29) proposal was: “A simple reading machine which I can carry or move around, attach to any old electric light plug and read hundred thousand word novels if I want to, and I want to.”

We have to wait until 1945 to have what the book historian Robert Darnton (see Darnton) identifies as the precursor of the e-book, “a clunking machine known as Memex” designed by the American engineer Vannevar Bush. E-readers first appeared on the market in 1989 when Franklin introduced the Bookman designed to read the Bible. It was followed by Sony’s Data Discman in 1990, which, due to its price of \$550, never caught on outside Japan, but paved the way to the age of PDAs, devices such as the SoftBook, the Rocket eBook (1998), and the eBookMan (1999). Their main problem, poor resolution, was addressed by Sony’s LIBRIe (2003), which, for the first time, employed a technology called “electronic ink.” Matters changed dramatically with the launch of Amazon’s Kindle First Generation in November 2007. With the Kindle, the e-reader went wireless. The downside was that by purchasing a Kindle one agreed to use the Digital Restriction Management (DRM) system, which made it impossible to move e-books to another device or a computer. Apple became Amazon’s competitor in earnest in April 2010 with the launch of the Apple iPad, not just an e-reader but, as the Wikipedia entry describes it, “a tablet computer ... particularly marketed for consumption of media such as books and periodicals, movies, music, and games, and for general web and e-mail access” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I-pad>). Contrary to the Kindle, its display screen is in colour and, most importantly, it overcomes the limitation that each e-reader can only display books in its own proprietary format. The newest arrival in the Amazon versus Apple market race is the Kindle Fire (November 2011), which comes provided with a color

touchscreen for web, movies, music, apps, games, reading, and free cloud storage for all Amazon content.

One should note that the publishing industry has been rather slow in catching up with the technological revolution in e-readers and tablet devices described above, as if hoping that by ignoring it, it would simply go away. The next section addresses the issues related to the future of publishing by presenting current challenges and possible future scenarios.

The future of publishing

The main reason for publishers' hesitancy in embracing the potentialities of the digital revolution has been fear; fear that they would face the same financial woes suffered by the music industry when peer-to-peer sharing sites like Napster came along. However, a potential threat could turn into a fruitful opportunity if only publishers learned from the semi-disastrous experience of the record labels, which initially tried to shut down the new technology by heavy-handed legal tactics only to make songs eventually available online for a reasonable price, which resulted in consumers flocking to services such as Apple's iTunes. Not surprisingly an intense debate is currently raging among publishers and book retailers regarding their role in a not too distant future when the majority of their products will be delivered not on paper but over the Internet, to consumers who read them "on the move" and on new, attractive, (paper-like) screens. Devising the most suitable business model in order to serve the needs of such readers is not only crucial to the survival of the whole industry, but also bound to affect the way in which the "thing" called book will develop. In one of the most lucid articles on the future of publishing, Ken Auletta reminds us that publishers' current woes are nothing new:

Publishing exists in a continual state of forecasting its own demise; at one major house, there is a running joke that the second book published on the Gutenberg press was about the death of the publishing business. (Auletta)

According to the Amazon's vice-president Russ Grandinetti, book publishers should not make "the same mistake the railroad companies made more than a century ago: thinking they were in the train business rather than the transportation business" (*ibid.*). To thrive, he believes, "publishers have to reimagine the book as multimedia entertainment." Grandinetti's railroad companies example is a reference to Ted Levitt's 1960 article, "Marketing Myopia," in which Levitt called on marketers to shift from a product-centered to a customer-centered paradigm by showing how railroad compa-

nies failed to see that they were in the transportation business. Similarly, Brian O’Leary (see O’Leary) argues that publishers should not fall prey of a sort of “container myopia” and use the tools available (as well as the ones yet to develop) to make containers an output of digital workflows, not the source of content in those workflows. This is a fundamental change in approach and, in O’Leary’s view, the only way to compete in a digital-first, content-abundant universe. Some publishers have followed Grandinetti’s and O’Leary’s advice; Simon & Schuster in particular have been working with a multimedia partner since 2009 to release several “vooks,” which intersperse videos throughout electronic text that can be read, and viewed, online or on an iPhone or iPod Touch. Authors’ reactions to the possibilities opened by the new technology have been disparate. Some, like the popular romance writer Jude Deveraux, love experimenting with the vook platform and envision new versions of books enhanced by music or even perfume “to use all the senses” (Rich). Deveraux’s aspiration can already be realized thanks to Booktrack, a technology that creates synchronized soundtracks for e-books in order to boost the reader’s imagination and engagement. (<http://www.booktrack.com/about.do>). As for the sense of smell, an aerosol e-book enhancer allows readers to have the best of both worlds and enjoy reading e-books without giving up the smell of the paper book (<http://smellofbooks.com/>). Despite such “imagination enhancement” potential some authors are adamant that the new editions should not replace the traditional book and would never allow videos to substitute for prose. As the novelist Walter Mosley put it:

Reading is one of the few experiences we have outside of relationships in which our cognitive abilities grow ... and our cognitive abilities actually go backwards when we’re watching television or doing stuff on computers. (Qtd. in Rich)

I will return to the issue of reading as an exclusively book-related experience; in the meantime it is worth stressing that although publishers are increasingly interested in multimedia projects, in the hope that consumers are willing to pay more for the added features, such attempts remain marginal within the publishing mainstream, so much so that the most interesting examples are confined to the academic and experimental fringes. The major hurdle to overcome for any player in the publishing industry is to re-think the whole issue of authors’ royalties and copyright in light of the new technological potential. According to Marc Aronson (see Aronson), this could lead to a new model for calculating permission costs in e-books as well as in print. For e-books Aronson proposes that instead of paying permission fees upfront based on estimated print runs, book creators would pay according to a periodic accounting of downloads.

I agree with Aronson when he identifies the need for re-thinking copyright as the key issue facing publishers, but I would emphasize that the necessity to solve such a familiar problem (debated for decades within artistic and legal circles) is now a matter of considerable urgency. The potential of networked digital culture expressed in new forms of cultural and scholarly production such as remixing, reusing, peer-to-peer networking, and working across multiple media is massive, but it can be seriously hampered by draconian anti-piracy laws (see SOPA) and code controls embedded in new technologies.

One of the most visible and immediate repercussions of the success of e-books and e-book readers on the publishing industry has been the demise of the bookstore; popular chains such as Borders have disappeared from the high street, and sales of books—both paperbacks and hardcopies—are decreasing. In contrast, the sales of e-book readers have tripled in 2011. Faced by such challenges the future of paper-book publishing, according to Jane Friedman, former publishing executive and now e-media professor at the University of Cincinnati, appears bleak. For Friedman, “[p]aper books will become talismans, souvenirs, collectors’ items, or something that ‘paper sniffers’ will insist on buying.” She does not “buy into all the sentimentalism for paper books, but there will be a cabal of those types—just enough people to ensure that paper books are an enthusiast or niche product, much like vinyl” (Katz).

Not all share Friedman’s bleak vision. Seth Godin, the American entrepreneur, author, and public speaker, purports a more optimistic perspective. For Godin, the demise of the old book retailer model—traditionally characterized by limited shelf space—is an opportunity for publishers to profit from a world with infinite book-shelf space. In an inspiring talk for the Independent Book Publishers Association, (download at http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2010/07/the-new-dynamics-of-book-publishing.html) Godin invites publishers to embrace technological change and to become “true builders of communities of readers who share similar interests,” leaders in creating community events, and “tribe makers.” What Godin proposes is for publishers to get to know (and create) their readers so well that their current business model is turned upside down: publishers need to find the right writers for their readers and not the opposite as it happens now! One obvious negative implication of Godin’s vision is what in media discourse is called “echo chamber effect,” a situation in which information and ideas are amplified or reinforced by transmission inside an “enclosed” space made of like-minded people. The new emphasis on the reader is welcome, and digitalization certainly increases the social, “networked”—as I will discuss below—potential of

the book, but the echo chamber effect represents a serious risk of excessive homogeneity.

Nevertheless, some independent publishers are following Godin's advice. Hyperink, for example, is a publisher of digital books targeted to specific niche audiences. It does not select from books that are submitted by authors, but finds topics that are in demand through analysis of Google search trends and then seeks out authors for those topics. Also interesting is the independent press Hol Art Books (<http://www.holartbooks.com/about/>). Its founder Greg Albers' vision of the art book of the future, is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrMMhjZWf-I>. Albers is not alone in speculating about the future of publishing. In fact, a lot of (e)ink is spilled about this topic, however the recently published *Book: A Futurist's Manifesto: A Collection of Essays from the Bleeding Edge of Publishing* (2011) by Hugh McGuire and Brian O'Leary is distinctive in that, contrary to other (abstract) interventions, it aims to be a handbook for anyone starting a publishing house today. The editors consider the digital transformation as more than a change in format, as stated in the book's introduction:

The move to digital is not just a format shift, but a fundamental restructuring of the universe of publishing. This restructuring will touch every part of a publishing enterprise—or at least most publishing enterprises. Shifting to digital formats is 'part one' of this changing universe;'part two' is what happens once everything is digital. This is the big, exciting unknown. (Webb)

The big “exciting unknown” will be characterized by the “digital-native disruption,” which happens when all new books are e-books read on digital devices and connected to the Internet. It is then that, according to McGuire, major changes will occur in the following areas: the speed of the publishing process, the reader's engagement with content, linking in and out of books, layers of context added to books, and the webification of books. When asked what the publishing landscape will look like in five years, one of McGuire's predictions is that “the distinction between what you can do with an ebook and what you can do with a website *will disappear* (and it will seem strange that it ever existed).” (Webb)

This point is particularly interesting in light of my initial Derridean question whether the “thing” called book is compatible with the new electronic technologies. This “thing,” in McGuire's vision, is destined to disappear. As he argued in a previous intervention (see McGuire), the battle between e-books and print books is a false one because it “only scratches the surface of what the move to digital books really means.” What it is worth speculating upon is “the real, though as-yet unknown, value that comes with books being truly digital; not the phony, unconnected digital

of our current understanding of ‘ebooks’” (McGuire). In such a perspective e-books represent merely a strategy for the publishing business to “ignore the terror of a totally unknown business landscape, and concentrate on one that looks at least similar in structure” (McGuire). As the next section shows, it is likely that the “as-yet unknown” value of the book derives from the role that the networked reader is going to play.

Network readership

Similarly to e-readers, prophetically anticipated in works of science fiction, when it comes to present discussions of the relationship between the book and the network, some artistic precedents come to mind, especially the collaboratively authored *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, initiated by Daniel Spoerri in 1962 and still in process, or *The Big Book* by Alison Knowles (1964–67), a porous environment that situated itself in the then communication networks of telephone directories. Nowadays, authors can connect with readers in a number of previously unimaginable ways. Amazon is at the forefront of innovation with the launch, in August 2011, of its @author program, which allows readers to ask questions directly from their Kindles while reading a book (the question is sent to the author’s Twitter account as well as to his or her home page at Amazon). The aim is to create a reader community that establishes a relationship with authors directly with no need of publishers to work as intermediaries. Crucially, as Megan Garber points out, @author

is also an insight into a book culture that is increasingly author-driven. It’s commodifying the charisma of the authors who sell material on its platforms ... @Author suggests ... the engaged author, the accessible author, the ongoing author. (And also: the self-marketing author). (Garber)

As a consequence, Garber acutely observes, authorship is “not just about creation, but about influence more diffusively” (Garber). It remains to be seen how many prominent authors are interested in the “always available” type of interaction with readers. Some like Margaret Atwood have already experimented with the potentialities of social networks like Twitter by participating in “1book140,” the world’s largest virtual book-reading club, hosted by Jeff Howe, the journalism professor who coined the term “crowdsourcing” in 2006 (see Ingram). And J. K. Rowling has launched a website called Pottermore (www.pottermore.com/) not only to promote and, after years of opposition, sell her *Harry Potter* books in electronic format directly to consumers, but also to interact with her legions of fans. As Matthew Ingram

has noted, the “whole idea of the ‘book’ is being disrupted” and made more social by a flourishing of open communities (Ingram). The most popular are: aNobii, BookGlutton, Goodreads, Unbound (where authors pitch their ideas directly to readers who can pledge their support to make the book happen), or Longreads (dedicated to helping people find and share the best long-form stories on the web). “Not long ago,” Ingram reflects,

authors were being pushed to try Twitter and other social tools solely for promotional and marketing-related purposes, but in the future they may choose to actually reach out to their readers and engage with them as they read and digest a book. Could we be looking at the future of authorship? (Ingram)

Before I go any further in exploring the future of authorship it is worth noting that blogs have been laying the foundation for this kind of contemporary networked author/reader experience for over a decade and that Wikipedia is a consolidated example of how the digital affects authorship by creating a system that allows collective edits in real-time. The digital certainly posits some fascinating questions about the nature of authorship and audience as one thinks more broadly about digital books as opposed to print books. For example, what are reader expectations about updating published work? Is the author ever really “finished” with a book in a world of electronic distribution? Is the author enjoying the freedom that Edgar Allan Poe was hoping for in his essay “Anastatic Printing”? In that piece Poe looked optimistically toward the advent of new information technologies that would democratize the publishing process, freeing the author from the “magazine prison-house” and allowing him to “arrange his pages to suit himself” (Poe 230). Or is the author enjoying less freedom, having been reduced to the status of commodity? As Garber points out:

[Amazon’s]@Author represents yet another step in ... the personalbrandification of the publishing business. ... The identity of the author herself — as defined and measured and bolstered by her ability to create a community around her content — is, here, itself a kind of product. (Garber)

This shift has significant consequences as far the book itself is concerned:

because once a book stops being a product, a thing-in-itself that is defined and evaluated according to that very thingyness ... it also, just a little bit, stops being a book. Already we’re seeing new, largely tablet-driven publishing platforms challenging and transforming our assumptions about what a book is and can be; already we’re seeing publishing platforms that emphasize authors’ fan communities as value propositions unto themselves. (Ibid.)

The shift also affects “the digital commodification of authorship that takes place by way of community and conversation. That whole death of the author business? Digital platforms, with Amazon leading the charge, are bringing the poor guy back to life” (ibid.). The “poor guy” might have been brought back to life, as Garber writes, however one cannot help wondering whether s/he has been given a clean bill of health or not. Could it be that the abundance of communication channels—Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr feeds, Amazon pages, podcasts, livechats, personal blogs, etc.—has weakened authorship, rendering it so diluted to become a shadow of its former self? And is the book that results from the public process of engagement with its readership not merely an anesthetized, commercial outcome of a communal endeavor? As often is the case with digital technologies, opposing views regarding their liberating and/or constraining potential coexist, thus increasing the ambiguity but also, admittedly, the excitement for future scenarios. Craig Mod, wisely, invites us to think about the future of the book by understanding the links among all the changes it is undergoing. “So intertwined,” he writes, “are our words and images and platforms, that to consider individual parts of the publishing process in isolation is to miss transformative connections” (Mod). Some of the most interesting transformative connections are established precisely between technical platforms and scholarship, as the next section aims to demonstrate.

Bookless Scholarship

Most of the emphasis in discussions surrounding the future of the book falls on the impact of digital developments on book marketing rather than on the practice of writing itself and/or (academic) scholarship. But some interesting observations are starting to emerge. Barry Turner, writing in the 2010 edition of *The Writer's Handbook*, attempts to predict how the digital environment may affect the practice of writing in the coming years:

Those of us who make any sort of living from writing will have to get used to a whole new way of reaching out to readers. Start with the novel. Most fiction comes in king-sized packages. ... Publishers demand a product that looks value for money. ... But all will be different when we get into e-books. There will be no obvious advantage in stretching out a novel because size will not be immediately apparent. ... Expect the short story to make a comeback. (Qtd. in Picot)

However, the changes ushered in by the digital revolution stretch well beyond the confines of literary genres or size mentioned by Turner. One could dwell at length on significant examples of multimedia innovation in literature

that go back much further than Vooks and the iPad—the genesis of electronic literature as a literary form and an academic field can be traced to the 1989 work by Michael Joyce, *afternoon: a story*—but this would go beyond the scope of this essay. And yet one particular work stands out as emblematic of the revolution mentioned above, namely *Inanimate Alice* (2009), a transmedia novel by digital artist Chris Joseph and novelist Kate Pullinger. According to the project’s homepage, *Inanimate Alice* is Born-digital, i.e. “written first for and specifically to be read and viewed from the screen”; Interactive, i.e. requiring user action to drive the story forward; Multimedia, i.e. using text, images, music, sound effects, puzzles, and games to illustrate and enhance the narrative; A Novel, i.e. a reading-from-the-screen experience for the “always on” generation; and Episodic, i.e. composed of chapters that are self-contained stories (<http://www.inanimatealice.com/about.html>).

Needless to say, for some literary purists *Inanimate Alice*, with its dismembered linearity and flashing multimedia images, while making the most of the electronic advances of our visual and aural culture, also represents a too radical departure from the kind of literary work that requires immersive reading in an inner silence in order to promote contemplation and imagination. If current trends continue, predicts George Steiner, the joy that comes from attending to a demanding text, mastering the grammar, memorizing and concentrating, “may once more become the practice of an elite, of a mandarinat of silences” (qtd. in Salwak). Familiar arguments regarding the distinctive distracting potential of contemporary Internet culture should, however, be considered from a broader historical perspective. As Cathy Davidson (see Davidson) reminds us, distraction has a long history, which encompasses all four great Information Ages in human history. Also, instead of lamenting declining attention-spans, we should identify the very real social, economic, and geopolitical causes that make bookish “attention” or deep reading such a struggle. As Nicholas Dames put it, paraphrasing Raymond Williams:

The question isn’t whether ephemeral, fragmented consumption of text or images is a drug of choice for many; it’s what social conditions make such a drug necessary—ways of life that produce no satisfactions, only a momentarily appeasable itch for sensation. . . . We should beware being sidetracked by issues like attention spans—fuzzy, ill-defined issues ripe for self-satisfied laments—from the main problems facing us. (Dames)

In the words of David Brooks:

The Internet-versus-books debate is conducted on the supposition that the medium is the message. But sometimes the medium is just the medium. What matters is the way people think about themselves while engaged in the two activities. A

person who becomes a citizen of the literary world enters a hierarchical universe ... It could be that the real debate will not be books versus the Internet but how to build an Internet counterculture that will better attract people to serious learning. (Brooks)

I fully agree with Brooks: serious learning and electronic texts are not incompatible. A whole new (e)scholarship has in fact emerged from the vision of intellectuals such as Michael Hart, founder of Project Gutenberg (1971), the first producer of free e-books, which paved the way for e-readers and e-books (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>), and Robert Darnton, the historian who has been advocating the production of scholarly books on the Internet since 1999. Darnton envisioned an electronic book project that would subject manuscripts to the same scholarly critique as work submitted to traditional publishers. Crucially, these works could also be designed in new ways to take advantage of the flexibility of the electronic medium. Darnton's proposal has been realized in the form of Gutenberg-e (<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/>), a collaborative project of Columbia University Press and the American Historical Association. More recently, another historian, Tim Hitchcock, while celebrating the death of the book and the new freedom derived from breaking the book's "intellectual shackles," admits that new challenges lie ahead:

[W]e are confronted by a profound intellectual challenge that addresses the very nature of the historical discipline. This transition from the "book" to something new fundamentally undercuts what we do more generally as "historians." When you start to unpick the nature of the historical discipline, it is tied up with the technologies of the printed page and the book in ways that are powerful and determining. (Hitchcock)

So, Hitchcock concludes: "[I]f, as historians, we are to avoid going the way of the book, we need to separate out what we think history is designed to achieve, and to create a scholarly technology that delivers it." (Ibid.) History is not the only discipline "tied up with the technologies of the printed page," as Hitchcock puts it; in fact, attempts to design new scholarly technologies are springing up in several academic fields. In this context it is worth mentioning the Culture Machine Liquid Books series (Open Humanities Press). The term "liquid" refers to the fact that such books are open and free for anyone, anywhere, to read, and, most importantly, users can continually help compose, add to, annotate, tag, edit, translate, remix, reformat, reinvent, and reuse content, or produce alternative parallel versions. In the words of Gary Hall, one of the project's initiators,

it is hoped that a variety of interesting and challenging questions will be raised: for ideas of the book, academic authorship, the proper name, attribution, publication, citation, accreditation, fair use, quality control, peer-review, copyright, intellectual property, and content creation. (Hall, “Fluid” 37)

Another innovative example is *Hacking the Academy. A Book Crowdsourced in One Week* (2010) by Dan Cohen and Tom Scheinfeldt. During one week in 2010, Cohen and Scheinfeldt asked for online contributions to a collectively produced volume that would explore how the academy might be reformed using digital media and technology. The process of creating the edited volume itself was meant to be a commentary on established practices of scholarly communication, with submissions coming in through multiple channels—blogs, Twitter, and email—and in multiple formats. Interactivity was also encouraged, in that contributors had the possibility to speak directly to each other. The collection was published in printed form, but, as the editors stress in the Introduction,

this is but *one form* of a project called *Hacking the Academy*. The website . . . will continue host a much larger and more diverse version of the work, including themes and genres missing from the print edition. If this book is static, the overall project is anything but. (Cohen and Scheinfeldt)

In fact, anyone is encouraged to contribute “to the ongoing conversation about how we can hack the academy together.” Similarly to the publishing business, which, as mentioned above, for several years ignored the digital revolution in the hope that it would go away, the world of academia has been slow in catching up with the potentialities of e-learning/teaching and e-scholarship.

However, there are signs that things are changing. For example, South Korea plans to digitize its entire elementary and secondary school curriculum by 2015, and some American colleges are already handing out iPod Touches, iPads, Kindles, or Nooks, preloaded with textbooks and other curricular materials to their students. Maybe it’s time, as the educational author Marc Prensky has provocatively proposed, “to go much further: to actually ban nonelectronic books on campus” (Prensky). As the American historian David A. Bell predicted in a seminal essay from 2005, “scholarship is fast moving toward a bookless future,” what matters “is not to damn or to praise the eclipse of the paper book or the digital complication of its future, but to ensure that it happens in the right way, and to minimize the risks” (Bell). Bell’s hopes hinged upon the advent of a new technology comparable to the original Gutenberg revolution, “a computer that looks and feels exactly like a book.” Before the Kindle Fire and the

Apple iPad appeared on the market in 2011, most e-readers manufacturers had produced devices that desperately tried to behave and feel exactly like a printed book, and e-books themselves have been marketed as “super books,” an extension of the Gutenberg era. As Kathleen Sweeney has observed, “e-books are still in simulacra stage, referencing the original like silent films referenced live theatre until film found its own voice” (Sweeney). Maybe, to paraphrase the title of Kristina Bjoran’s piece, it is time to rethink e-books, to push them away from their current ontological condition of “paper-doppelgangers,” as “E-books shouldn’t just be a facsimile of what they may one day replace. With all the technology they’re riding on, e-books have the potential to take the narrative experience to new heights” (Bjoran). Along similar lines Gary Hall, in his *Digitize this Book*, laments the permanence of what he calls “papercentrism” (Hall, *Digitize* 59–61, 89, 152–53), meaning that printed books are the yardsticks against which all claims to the categories of “book” and “reading” are measured. Not surprisingly, anything digital inevitably comes up short. Ironically, as long as they are called “e-books,” the pre-eminence of their paper counterparts is constantly reaffirmed.

In sum, what we are currently witnessing is a paradoxical situation, already described by Derrida in *Paper Machine*, where the book seems continuously displaced, disrupted, marginalized while, on the other hand, there is “a constant reinvestment in the book project, in the book of the world ... in the absolute book” (Derrida, *Paper* 15). This, according to Derrida,

re-creates the temptation that is figured by the World Wide Web as the ubiquitous Book ... the World Book finally achieved in its onto-theological dream, even though what it does is to repeat the end of that book as to-come. (Ibid.)

It is exactly in this perspective that one should consider such phenomena as Google’s dream to digitize every book ever published and to create a universal digital library—a dream that, so far, has found solid obstacles in the legal reality.

In conclusion, as this essay has tried to demonstrate, the nostalgically framed questions surrounding the death of the printed book are a symptom of deep felt anxieties regarding more complex issues such as the evolution of human communication, the implications of technological controls on our ability to manage intellectual discourse, the emergence of new business models in the publishing industry, the subversion of established power relationships among publishers, readers, and authors, and, finally, the disruption of all cultural practices, consumer expectations, and legal frameworks related to the codex tradition. Personally, I believe that printed books and e-books will coexist for a long time, since, as Derrida noted, the

history of the book is one that comprises a multiplicity of models, which means that “there will ... be, as always, the coexistence and structural survival of past models at the moment when genesis gives rise to new possibilities” (Derrida, *Paper* 16). The book has many futures ahead, as many as the various hybrid forms it is going to evolve into. Some such forms, as it has been predominantly the case so far, will aspire to be literal translations of the printed page into its digital representation, while others are going to develop into multimedia art forms connected to the World Wide Web. In any case they will all be part of a complex media system, which includes not only social, economic, and cultural issues but also the authors’ and the readers’/viewers’ collective perspectives, dreams, and aspirations.

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Mnoge prihodnosti knjige

Ključne besede: založništvo / e-knjiga / bralnik / bralna kultura / mrežno bralstvo / avtorstvo

Literarna veda se je le redko ukvarjala z materialnim nosilcem literature, vendar pa so v zadnjem času nekatere literarne razprave premestile poudarek z vsebine na materialnost literature. To je posledica občutka, da digitalna kultura predstavlja grožnjo za kulturo tiska in knjige na splošno. Že leta 1967 je Derrida v knjigi *O gramatologiji* razglasil »konec knjige in začetek pisanja« – kar pa ni pomenilo konca knjige. Leta 1994 je Sven Birkerts v *The Gutenberg Elegies* pesimistično sklenil, da smrt knjige pomeni »obleganje vseh starih prepričanj«. V dobi Spleta 2.0, ko se govoric kaže v različnih knjigi podobnih oblikah (blogi, vikiji itn.) in so na voljo nove tehnične platforme, je zanimivo premisliti vprašanje o prihodnosti knjige kot objekta in ideje.

Referat sooči idejo knjige v tradicionalnem akademskem kontekstu, tj. kot standardni medij za hranjenje in razširjanje raziskovalnega diskurza, z zadnjo tehnično manifestacijo knjige kot »Kindla«, tj. e-knjižno napravo, ki jo je predstavil ustanovitelj Amazona Jeff Bezos. »Kindlov« šestpalčni ekran je tako velik kot knjiga z mehкими platnicami, uporablja najsoodobnejšo tehniko e-črnila, ki simulira razločnost natisnjene knjige in – v nasprotju z zgodnejšimi neuspešnimi e-knjigami – ponuja možnost brezžične povezave. Možnost povezave z omrežji bo najbrž izzvala prednost konvencionalne knjige, predmeta, ki je prekrasno oblikovan, zelo funkcionalen in neskončno uporaben ter tudi strastno ljubljen. Besedilo razpravlja o implikacijah povezljivosti za novo »omreženo bralstvo«, za založniško industrijo, za odnos avtor-bralec in za idejo avtorstva, in izhaja iz prepričanja, da so sodobne spremembe v objektu-knjigi povezane z našimi temeljnimi pojmi subjektivnosti in delovanja.

Marec 2012