The battle to define the future of the book in the digital world

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Abstract

Commercial publishing interests are presenting the future of the book in the digital world through the promotion of e-book reading appliances and software. Implicit in this is a very complex and problematic agenda that re-establishes the book as a digital cultural artifact within a context of intellectual property rights management enforced by hardware and software systems. With the convergence of different types of content into a common digital bit-stream, developments in industries such as music are establishing precedents that may define our view of digital books. At the same time we find scholars exploring the ways in which the digital medium can enhance the traditional communication functions of the printed work, moving far beyond literal translations of the pages of printed books into the digital world. This paper examines competing visions for the future of the book in the digital environment, with particular attention to questions about the social implications of controls over intellectual property, such as continuity of cultural memory.

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The book-oriented library, where it survives in defiance of the digital shift, tends to take on the aspect of a temple for this sort of focused, old-fashioned study and contemplation. For instance, Book Mountain, a recently completed library in the Netherlands, proudly emphasizes paper books. Matthew Battles, who since publishing his history of libraries has become a principal at Harvard’s forward-looking metaLAB, believes that the future of libraries must be decided not by nostalgic scholars or librarians hoping to save their jobs, but in conversation with communities. “Librarians, scholars, policy makers all have to be part of that dialogue, but it must embrace a civic context, not the institutional context,” he says. “Future Crimes is the Must Read Book of the Year. Endlessly fascinating, genuinely instructive, and truly frightening. Be warned: Once you pick it up, you won’t put it down. Mr. Marc Goodman’s book Future Crimes brings our global dialogue on safety and security to the next level by exploring how potential criminals are exploiting new and emerging technologies for their nefarious purposes. It provides a futuristic perspective grounded on current case studies. Future Crime is an essential read for law enforcers, corporations and the community alike. Goodman takes us behind the computer screen to a dark world where Crime Inc. flourishes at our expense. When the criminal mind conceives “what if” it is only a matter of time before its dream becomes our nightmare.