

Introduction

Throughout history, the book as a medium underwent multiple changes, even ignoring the earliest forms of written communication like clay tablets, papyrus scrolls or cave paintings. From the first handwritten codices, the book developed towards a mass-produced industrialized combination of cultural object and commercial commodity all the way to e-books readable on a computer screen, a smartphone or a tablet computer. Seemingly everything changed: the structure and the layout of writing, the shape, the materiality and the power application of production, which turned from manual labour to steam power and eventually to electricity. Even though the differences between cuneiform writing on clay tablets and, say, an English novel on an e-reader are staggering, it needs to be stressed that most transitions in the development of those book forms were more defined by continuity rather than clear and decisive breaks. Depending on the respective definitions, it could be argued that it is accurate then to speak of 'evolutions' rather than 'revolutions'.¹

Developments towards a more digital-orientated society and a growing acceptance by readers of electronic publications may foster the assumption that the book is again in a transitional phase. These observations fuelled discussions about whether the printed book is an obsolete medium headed towards extinction. Heidi Brayman Hackel, for example, even argues that this is the reason for many scholars to turn to book history.² There is no denying that the discipline cannot ignore digital publishing, even though its beginning, under the name of 'analytical bibliography,' was based on the material aspects of (early printed) books. Don F. McKenzie famously stated as early as 1985 that "there is no evading the challenge" posed by defining text as "verbal, visual, oral, and numeric data, in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films,

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- 1 For a more detailed discussion concerning these terms in media studies, see Matthias Bickenbach, "Medienevolution - Begriff oder Metapher? Überlegungen zur Form der Mediengeschichte," *Die Medien der Geschichte: Historizität und Medialität in interdisziplinärer Perspektive*, eds Fabio Crivellari and Sven Grampp (Konstanz, 2004), 109–136.
 - 2 Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge, 2005), 15–16.

videos, and any computer-stored information, everything in fact from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography.”³

Though it is hardly imaginable that McKenzie could foresee the importance and the huge impact the internet and world wide web would play just 15 years later, he was certainly aware of what a huge challenge that would be. In the early stages of the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, he already voiced concerns as series editor about the planned seventh, and final, volume which was supposed to cover the years 1914–2000. When it was finally published in 2019, the editors summarized McKenzie’s concerns in their introduction: he worried about the “imprecise terms of references” and stressed the fact that the book shares more and more functions with other media. He also pointed out the vast amount of archival resources for the time frame and saw a weakening of the premises of a national history due to technological developments and a multinational publishing industry.⁴

If one accepts that digital publishing has to be addressed by book history, one way to approach the question of a possible transition is to isolate earlier patterns that determined the transitional phases of the book in history as well as the acceptance of the new form. Such patterns can shed light on more recent developments in the digital age.

The Death of the Printed Book?

Predicting the death of the printed book is not a recent phenomenon. Among the earliest comments about the possible end of the book date back as far as the late nineteenth century.⁵ More serious considerations about the possible end of

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- 3 Don F. McKenzie, “The Book as an Expressive Form,” *The Panizzi Lectures, 1985: Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London 1986), 1–20, 3.
 - 4 Andrew Nash, Claire Squires and I. R. Willison, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume VII: The Twentieth Century and Beyond*, eds Andrew Nash, Claire Squires and I. R. Willison (Cambridge, 2019), 1–38, 1.
 - 5 Adriaan van der Weel, *Changing our Textual Minds: Towards a Digital Order of Knowledge* (Manchester, 2011), 211–213. Van der Weel refers to Octave Uzanne, who published an article in *Scribner’s Magazine* titled “The End of Books” in August 1894. Uzanne’s prediction about the obsolescence of the book is based on the new technology of phonography.

the book were voiced in the now classic *L'Apparition du Livre* (1958)⁶ in which Lucien Febvre stated that “its future is no longer certain, threatened as it is by new inventions based on different principles.”⁷ Four years later, in 1962, Marshall McLuhan was already talking about an ‘electronic age’ that would be the end of the so-called *Gutenberg Galaxy*:

In the electronic age which succeeds the typographic and mechanical era of the past five hundred years, we encounter new shapes and structures of human interdependence and of expression that are ‘oral’ in form even when the components of the situation may be non-verbal.⁸

In his monograph, McLuhan argued that the electronic age will lead towards a development from visual culture, shaped by typography and individualism, towards an oral culture with a social organization he termed ‘global village.’

In the 1990s, the progress of technology, especially the development and improvement of personal computers and desktop publishing software, led to a renaissance of the discussion of the relevance of the physical book. Geoffrey Nunberg’s 1996 compilation, *The Future of the Book*, offers a vivid portrait of the concerns about the printed book. One of the articles that specifically addresses the possible end of the book, “Material Matters”⁹ by Paul Duguid, elaborates on the ideas of ‘supersession’ (“this will kill that”¹⁰) and ‘liberation’ (“information wants to be free”¹¹ and must not be limited to and because of its carrier). Ultimately, Duguid finds faults in both of these approaches and concludes that the book will not become outdated anytime soon if people will “not permit the burial of what yet has useful life.”¹² In other words, as long as the printed book will not have competitors which offer superior qualities to perform their functions, it is unlikely that this system of communication, which has been serving Western culture for centuries, will be superseded by other technologies. However, he does imply that it might happen eventually.

6 Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre*, Paris, 1958. In the following, the English translation will be used: Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800* (London, 1997), 10.

7 Febvre and Martin, *Coming of the Book*, 10.

8 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, 1962), 3.

9 Paul Duguid, “Material Matters: The Past and Futurology of the Book,” *The Future of the Book*, ed. Geoffrey Nunberg (Berkeley, 1996), 63–101.

10 Duguid, “Material Matters,” 65.

11 Duguid, “Material Matters,” 73.

12 Duguid, “Material Matters,” 90.

Opinions like these are growing in number. In his monograph *The Book is Dead: Long Live the Book* (2007),¹³ Sherman Young even goes one step further and declares that books are no longer dying but are already dead. Young fosters his assumption with the allegedly vast superiority and omnipresence of other media competing for attention: “Look around next time you’re on a bus or train and count how many books are being read. Compare that number with the tally of (mostly white) headphones dangling out of ears.”¹⁴ After this impressionistic assessment, Young concludes that the cultural impact of books has become, more or less, insignificant compared to popular music, television, Hollywood movies or the internet. Although he tries to support his assumptions with sales figures of books, comparing them to the ratings of soap operas or spectators of sport events, his approach cannot be labelled as methodologically adequate. He elaborates on the competition between texts and music and live events as entertainment, rather than the printed book with new ways to offer textual information beyond mere entertaining functions. In other words, he does not question the future of the book but rather the future of reading. Furthermore, it is revealing to note Young’s definition of a book. In his opinion, it is mainly the entertaining content that the object ‘book’ contains, and it is not to be confused with the object itself.¹⁵ He even declares the materiality of the book as the main reason for the book’s ultimate demise: “The book is dead because the book trade is about selling objects, not ideas.”¹⁶

Jeff Gomez argues in the same direction in his monograph *Print is Dead* (2008)¹⁷:

While print is not dead, it is undoubtedly sickening. Newspaper readership has been in decline for years, magazines are also in trouble, and trade publishing (the selling of novels and non-fiction books to adults primarily for entertainment), has not seen any substantial growth in years. More and more people are turning away from traditional methods of reading, turning instead to their computers and the Internet for information and entertainment. Whether this comes in the form of getting news online, reading a

13 Sherman Young, *The Book is Dead: Long Live the Book* (Sydney, 2007).

14 Young, *The Book is Dead*, 5.

15 Young, *The Book is Dead*, 10.

16 Young, *The Book is Dead*, 10. Ironically, even though the author keeps predicting the death of the printed book, his publishing house refused to offer his text in an electronic format for years. It is now available in Kindle format. On his website *The Book is Dead* <<http://shermanyoung.wordpress.com>> (accessed: 03.07.2019), he offers “a blog about a book about books.” The latest entry is from March 2015.

17 Jeff Gomez, *Print is Dead: Books in Our Digital Age* (London, 2008).

blog, or contributing to a wiki, the general population is shifting away from print consumption, heading instead to increasingly digital lives.¹⁸

Gomez and Young attribute the ‘death’ of the printed word not only to the growing importance of digital technologies, but also to the ever-growing media competition in general. They both assume that new entertainment technologies will replace the printed book by taking over the same or similar functions that the printed word has been performing for centuries. However, it is also alluded to that some specific book functions, such as being a symbolic object, are less important in “our digital age,” as Gomez’ title puts it.

Even though the argumentations of Young’s and Gomez’ monographs may at times remind one of the literary and arts sections of newspapers rather than academic contributions, they at least indicate a strong awareness of change in book culture in general. Around the same time, a concept called the ‘Gutenberg Parenthesis’ (2010), formulated by Lars Ole Sauerberg and elaborated by Tom Pettitt, was focussing on the effects of the so-called ‘print culture.’¹⁹ It claimed that the age of the printed book (for convenience, its time frame is roughly set to 1500–2000 for the western culture and consequently ignores the first fifty years of printing in Europe) has significantly dominated and defined our cultural understanding, but that it merely was an interruption of oral culture and is being challenged by digital culture today:

This new revolution started in the 20th century with sound recording and film, moved next to television and radio and today takes the form of the internet. [...] There is a common theme when people consider these changes – that they are not simply something new but also the end of something old. Today, Pettitt sees these changes as a challenge to print and the book.²⁰

Even though the Gutenberg Parenthesis had no clear predictions concerning the implications of digital culture on printed books, it indicates that the book as an everyday object, with sheets of paper bound or glued together in codex form as a carrier of typographic signs, will become gradually less important.

18 Gomez, *Print is Dead*, 3.

19 For a discussion of the term ‘print culture,’ see, for example, Joseph A. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality and Bibliographical Method* (Toronto, 2003).

20 *The Gutenberg Parenthesis: Oral Tradition and Digital Technologies*. <<https://commforum.mit.edu/the-gutenberg-parenthesis-oral-tradition-and-digital-technologies-29e1a4fde271>> (accessed: 04.12.2019).

The Book as an Evolutionary Process?

In the late 1990s, librarian Frederick G. Kilgour had a different approach. He discussed evolutionary developments of the book in his *Evolution of the Book* (1998):

[O]ver the last five thousand years there have been four transformations of the 'book' in which each manifestation has differed from its predecessors in shape and structure. The successive, sometimes overlapping, forms were the clay tablet inscribed with a stylus (2500 B.C.–A.D. 100), the papyrus roll written on with brush or pen (2000 B.C.–A.D. 700), the codex, originally inscribed with pen (A.D. 100), and the electronic book, currently in the process of innovation. There have also been three major transformations in method and power application in reproducing the codex: machine printing from cast type, powered by human muscle (1455–1814); nonhuman power driving both presses and typesetting machines (1814–1970); and computer-driven photocomposition combined with offset printing (1970–).²¹

The intriguing aspect of Kilgour's approach is that he tries to analyse the 'evolution of the book' with ideas borrowed from a theory about organic evolution from Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould (1972).²² According to this theory, species in paleontological time endured over a long period of time with no or only minor modifications interrupted by sudden bursts of change indicated by the punctuations. Similarly, Kilgour claims that the evolution of the book underwent a comparable development and witnessed seven so-called punctuations of equilibria: 1) the clay tablet around 2500 BC, 2) the papyrus roll around 2000 BC, 3) the codex form around 150 AD, 4) the printing press in Europe around 1450, 5) steam power application to printing in the industrial age, 6) Offset-printing in the 1970s and finally 7) the e-book, interestingly dated with the year 2000 as the last punctuation.²³

The term 'punctuation' in Kilgour's theory implies a rather decisive break from previous conditions. Indeed, Eldredge and Gould's theory does suggest fast developments during punctuations. However, one must take into consideration that their theory discusses geological time frames spanning millions of years. Kilgour's work 'only' looks at 5,000 years of the history of the book. The term 'fast' needs to be seen in relation to this.

21 Frederick G. Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book* (New York, 1998), 3–4.

22 Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism," *Models in Paleobotany*, ed. T. J. M. Schopf (San Francisco, 1972), 82–115.

23 Kilgour, *Evolution of the Book*, 5.

Kilgour offers five concurrent elements that are, in his opinion, necessary preconditions for each of the major innovations of the book:

1. societal need for information,
2. technological knowledge and experience,
3. organizational experience and capability,
4. the capability of integrating a new form into existing information systems,
5. economic viability.²⁴

Unfortunately, he does not elaborate further on these conditions in detail. Especially “organizational experience and capability” seems vague. When he later lists these conditions again to attempt a prediction about his last punctuation, that is the electronic book, he even rewrites these preconditions as “users’ needs, adequate technology, new organizations, successful integration with existing systems, and cost effectiveness.”²⁵

Kilgour’s ideas and elaborations are tempting because they seem so straightforward and almost simple. Indeed, his arguments seem, at times, flawed. The question remains: how relevant, for the history of the book, is a comparison with biological evolution? Further, the inclusion of clay tablets in his work (Kilgour boldly titles a chapter “Incunables on Clay”) reveals his rather unspecific definition of ‘book.’ Overall, his approach is a simplification of complex procedures; the difficult mixture of sociocultural and economic features and aspects make the medium ‘book’ difficult to analyse. If one takes into consideration that, for example, the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*-series spans seven volumes with thousands of pages, it seems somewhat naïve to offer a monograph that attempts to illustrate and discuss the complete evolution of written communication on a mere 180 pages. Consequently, a review of Kilgour’s monograph concluded with the notion that, before the electronic book will be successfully introduced, “one hopes that someone will write a more successful brief account of the book’s evolution.”²⁶ Kilgour’s attempt shows the dangers involved when discussing the development of the book over long time spans. To prevent similar criticism, this study avoids Kilgour’s main pitfalls by looking at the transitional phases only and therefore focussing on much smaller time units. It will also use

24 Kilgour, *Evolution of the Book*, 5–6.

25 Kilgour, *Evolution of the Book*, 9.

26 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, rev., “Frederick G. Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book*, New York, 1998,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 30 (2000), 635–636, 636.

the concept of book value categories as a theoretical framework to help explain these transitions without neglecting sociocultural aspects.

The Book

Obituaries for the printed book like the ones presented above come and go. Most of these hypotheses have, to some extent, valid arguments and should not be entirely neglected. Nevertheless, all of them, until now, have one crucial flaw: they were and still seem premature. One of the main weaknesses these predictions and hypotheses have seems to be the lack of a proper definition of what is actually meant by ‘book.’ If definitions are offered, they are usually rather restrictive or seem wanting due to impreciseness, just like Young’s statement that a book is in essence the text, not the material. His definition is either naïve, ill-informed or meant to be provocative. Even more provocative was William Mitchell’s now famous statement that for most people, books are primarily “tree flakes encased in dead cow” and thereby ridiculing the importance of the material aspects as well as the willingness to pay for those objects.²⁷ For centuries, however, books have been complex objects carrying more than just information. Indeed, the materiality that makes up books performs further functions itself and must not be underestimated. Several physical aspects seem as vital for the existence of the book as the content itself. In fact, sometimes, certain books may perform functions for which the content is essentially irrelevant.

Glaister’s *Glossary of the Book* from 1979 defines the book as follows:

For statistical purposes the British book trade assumes that a book is a publication costing sixpence or more. Other countries define a book as containing a minimum number of pages, but have not agreed on a standard number. At a UNESCO conference in 1950, a book was defined as “a non-periodical literary publication containing forty-nine or more pages, not counting the covers.”²⁸

At first glance, it seems somewhat ironic, if not even tongue in cheek, that a subject-specific dictionary labelled *Glossary of the Book* seems so unhelpful and vague for defining “book.” This, however, might have been the intention. As Martyn Lyons concluded: “[D]efining the book itself is a risky operation.”²⁹

27 William J. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 56.

28 Geoffrey Ashall Glaister, *Glossary of the Book: Terms Used in Papermaking, Printing, Bookbinding and Publishing with Notes on Illuminated Manuscripts and Private Presses*, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), 37.

29 Martyn Lyons, *Books: A Living History* (London, 2011), 12.

Glaister's definition, however, reveals more than a cursory glance might detect: as is mentioned right at the beginning, this definition is intended, and therefore practical, for statistical purposes for the book trade. Therefore, in the most basic sense a book is something that is produced to be sold on the market. This reveals the book as a commodity. The latter part of his definition refers to the form of the book (number of pages, covers). And, finally, it demarcates the book from published commodities like newspapers and magazines (non-periodical).

Possibly the most helpful definition is offered by Leslie Howsam writing in her *Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*. Introducing readers to the concept of book studies, she argues that the book, from the perspective of a book historian, is a) a text b) a material object c) a cultural transaction and d) an experience.³⁰ Based on the text and the materiality, the book can experience different developments in cultural transactions and experiences. Even though books in codex form may have the same features in, say, structure and form, the functions vary according to the content: a dictionary and a novel may have the same dimensions and number of pages. Both objects would be adequately described by the *Oxford English Dictionary*-definition for book: "A portable volume consisting of a series of written, printed, or illustrated pages bound together for ease of reading."³¹ Still, both are entirely different objects, in function as well as in usage. This is already noticed in everyday parlance, because a novel is "read" and a dictionary is "used." The term 'book' is too simple and almost too dangerous because it will lead to imprecise conclusions. To avoid such simplifications, it is necessary to think of books as rather diverse publications in their various genres, or categories of publication as will be discussed below.

Publishing

Material books as published texts are characterized by their dual nature as cultural object and commercial commodity. Fixed book price systems like Britain's now defunct 'Net Book Agreement' or the German 'Buchpreisbindung' stress the special status of this commodity. Similarly, the reduced value-added tax (VAT) rate on printed books in Germany or no VAT whatsoever in Great Britain show, at least from the point of view of publishers, booksellers and governments, that

30 Leslie Howsam, "The Study of Book History," *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (Cambridge, 2015), 1–13, 4–6.

31 "book, n.," *OED Online*, March 2014 <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21412>> (accessed: 04.12.2019).

“books are different.”³² But despite its special status, the implications of the book also being a commercial commodity has gained significantly more weight since the introduction of the printing press as it became almost a mass-produced commodity in comparison to the unique character of the manuscript.³³ Therefore, the book market changed completely as the bespoke trade turned to a trade on speculation. Even in times when publishers did not exist per se, their functions and tasks did.

A helpful step towards a more distinguished approach to the question how different publishing categories might evolve is offered by Rachel Malik in “Horizons of the Publishable” (2008).³⁴ Malik starts her essay by lamenting that there is no adequate definition of ‘publishing’ available, which would allow a full analysis of the act of publishing itself. While discussing the three main roles of publishers (gatekeeper, mediator between author and reader, publicity agent), she comes to the conclusion that ‘publishing’ needs to be redefined and adapted to every period, every cultural environment and every “category of publication.”³⁵ Unfortunately, Malik does not focus on digital publishing. Overall, however, her essay is a valuable contribution towards a better understanding of the changes of the book focussing on specific publishing categories, albeit a contribution that initiates a more laborious approach to analyse it adequately.

In his monograph *Content Machine* (2013),³⁶ Michael Bhaskar offers a theory of publishing that tries to capture the essence of publishing and is further applicable to early printed books as well as to digital publishing. In order to achieve this, he breaks down the tasks of publishing into the four steps framing and modelling as well as filtering and amplification.³⁷ Frames refer to the forms in which the publications are released (for example, paperback, hardcover, e-book), models address the incentive of the publisher to produce the

32 A discussion about the book’s special status offers Alison Baverstock, *Are Books Different? Marketing in the Book Trade* (London, 1993). It is noteworthy that customers of electronic publications had to pay the full value-added tax rate for a long time.

33 The term ‘mass production’ for the output of early printing presses would be an anachronism as it refers to the production of goods with automated processes since the late nineteenth century.

34 Rachel Malik, “Horizons of the Publishable: Publishing in/as Literary Studies,” *English Literary History*, 75 (2008), 707–735.

35 Malik, “Horizons of the Publishable,” 713.

36 Michael Bhaskar, *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (New York, 2013).

37 Bhaskar, *Content Machine*, 6, 79–102, 137–165.

publication in the first place (for example, financial gain or enlightenment), filtering refers to the selective progress and amplification includes marketing strategies to increase the desirability of the publication. Bhaskar concludes that “[this approach] allows us to view digital and analogue media on a spectrum rather than unbridgeable islands, to see how not only do highly divergent forms of published material all require delivery systems but how those systems present works in different ways.”³⁸

Adriaan van der Weel further argued that the function of the publisher to filter and select (sometimes referred to as “gatekeeping”³⁹) can be seen as an “unintended corollary” resulting from economic constraints.⁴⁰ Depending on the time frame and the publishing category, these implications may be more or less pronounced. But even if economic reasoning is less important (or even unimportant), it remains a fact that the creation and production of texts, physical or digital, still needs considerable investment of time and money. Since the production of physical books is more expensive than mere digital texts (i.e. content only), it is important to observe the shifting values attributed to the various aspects of books, both material and immaterial.

Robert Darnton suggested in his influential essay “What is the History of Books?” (1982)⁴¹ that it is the publisher in collaboration with the author who starts the life cycle of the book. Darnton, propelled by the chaotic interdisciplinarity of the history of the book, created a circuit with several nodes which the book in its life cycle passes:

[The Communications Circuit] runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit, because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition.⁴²

Initially, Darnton stated that his model, with a few alterations, could be applied to all periods of the printed book. In a later article, however, he clarified that the model is only useful “during the period of technological stability that stretched

38 Bhaskar, *Content Machine*, 88.

39 For the aspect of gatekeeping in publishing, see, for example, Lewis A. Coser, “Publishers as Gatekeepers of Ideas,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 421 (1975), 14–22.

40 Adriaan van der Weel, “The Communications Circuit Revisited,” *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis*, 8 (2001), 13–25, 20.

41 Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” *Daedalus*, 111.3 (1982), 65–83.

42 Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” 67.

from 1500 to 1800.”⁴³ The bibliographers Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker welcomed Darnton’s attempt to illustrate the life-cycle of the book and offered an updated model from the bibliographer’s, rather than the historian’s, perspective. In their “New Model for the Study of the Book” (1993),⁴⁴ the decision to publish a text, rather than the physical production of it, is the start of the life cycle of a book:

The decision to publish, not the creation of the text, is, then, the first step in the creation of a book. The nature of the text and, in some but not all instances, the intention of the author are factors in this decision, but other forces control it that have little to do with the intrinsic merit of the text.⁴⁵

By this change, the relevance of the publisher is stressed even more. The importance of the stage of publishing suggests the need to pay close attention to it when discussing the transitional phases of the book in history, especially the current one. The growth of digital publishing is undeniably creating ruptures in traditional publishing. After all, the idea of the publisher has been shaped by paper books for centuries. The traditional model of the value chain, where the publisher is ‘adding value’ by selecting, developing and marketing the text as well as investing in the physical production of the book, is of limited use when gauging the value of digital publications. Adriaan van der Weel even predicts a “value network rather than a ‘value chain.’”⁴⁶ Will publishers lose power? Will other agents in the life cycle of a book become more important? It seems necessary to re-evaluate how publications gain value when content is no longer bound to one specific container. Equally important, it is essential to analyse what is valued by book users.

In 2001, van der Weel briefly assessed the gatekeeping function of publishers: “In retrospect, it is possible to recognise that the role of the publisher has been edging in that direction for a long time. Especially since the nineteenth century the publisher’s role as gatekeeper – to guarantee quality – has gained increasing significance.”⁴⁷ However, in his concluding remarks he predicts a

43 Robert Darnton, “‘What is the History of Books?’ Revisited,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 4.3 (2007), 495–508, 504.

44 Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, “A New Model for the Study of the Book,” *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London, 1993), 5–43.

45 Adams and Barker, “A New Model for the Study of the Book,” 18.

46 Adriaan van der Weel, “Van waardeketen naar waardeweb,” *Schakels in de keten van het boek: Boeketje boekwetenschap II*, eds Arianne Baggerman et al. (Amsterdam, 2012), 29–35. These terms will be discussed in chapter 1.

47 Van der Weel, “Communications Circuit Revisited,” 20.

diminishing power of the publisher as gatekeeper. He argues that, in the digital age, other institutions or factors like peer reviews may sufficiently take over this function.⁴⁸

The stage of publishing affected changes in the form, format, production and layout of all publishing categories as physical objects. This does not render the remaining stages in the life cycle of the book unimportant. Changes within the manufacture, distribution and reception processes are all contributing towards the changes of publications overall. However, it can be argued that the publishers had to assess the overall situation. This could change with digital publishing; other forces might be of more importance in the digital world. This all depends on how book users will regard the different values that are inherent in books.

Structure

This book starts with a detailed discussion of the terms ‘value’ and ‘added value,’ primarily based on concepts offered by Karl Marx, Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu. It continues with a brief overview of the aspects of ‘acceptance’ and ‘preference’ before it addresses the functions of books as a medium and as symbolic objects. Afterwards, the connection between values and the book is discussed. The chapter introduces the concept of the value chain of publishing and discusses its advantages and weaknesses. It concludes with the notion that basically three main values are important concerning the book: economic, content and symbolic value. Economic value refers to the idea that a book is an object that was produced to be sold and remains a commodity after it has been purchased. Content value refers to the function of the book as a container of content with various purposes, for example, education or entertainment. Symbolic value, finally, addresses the idea that books can be signs themselves and therefore stand for certain convictions or beliefs of the owner who displays these books. These different values are extensively introduced and elaborated on with examples to form the overall basis of this study. They help us understand the prevalent factors that shaped the acceptance of new production methods within the book market. Depending on the sociocultural circumstances and the publishing category, the degree of importance of these values is shifting. These changes of value perception will help understand the acceptance of new technological possibilities in book production.

48 Van der Weel, “Communications Circuit Revisited,” 24.

Since the introduction of the printing press, the book market has turned from a relatively bespoke trade in manuscript production, where the number and often also the identity of buyers were generally known, to a risky business on speculation with an unknown and highly unpredictable market. The perspective of the publisher raises the question of the value of the product and how that value can be maintained or even enhanced (usually called ‘added values’) to incentivize the purchase of the commodity. Book buyers, on the other hand, express acceptance by paying money for the new commodity.

John Thompson discusses the value chain of publishing in his *Merchants of Culture* (2010, revised in 2012)⁴⁹ to illustrate which stages in publishing ‘add value’ to the book. Using the same terminology, he also elaborates on how publications might benefit from different potential advantages of the digital revolution and analyses some categories of publications which are more or less amenable for each of these values.⁵⁰ While traditional novels, for instance, mainly have the advantage of ease of access, reference works basically unfold their whole potential in a digital environment with the possibility to combine multimedia, searchability and intertextuality. Unfortunately, Thompson does not offer a definition of ‘added value’ and fails to explain what exactly is added to what. Nevertheless, his approach implies that certain possible advantages of new technologies in textual transmission and reception might be the impetus for the complete acceptance of the new form of the medium as the primary form.

After chapter 1, these book value categories are applied to two prevalent eras in which book production witnessed vital changes: the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both chapters will predominantly focus on English book production. Even though there are general tendencies that overlap with other countries and cultures at that time, England has a unique history and development of its book culture. Chapter 2 (“The Gutenberg Age”) addresses the first decades after the introduction of the printing press in Europe, which immensely altered the stage of manufacture and transformed the book into an almost mass-produced object. The chapter starts with a concise survey of the introduction of printing in Europe before some basic considerations for the book trade in England are introduced. Afterwards, it provides a profound analysis of England’s early printing presses with a focus on William Caxton’s oeuvre as a printer-publisher⁵¹ and the work

49 John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, 2010; 2nd ed. 2012).

50 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 312–368.

51 Though the term ‘publisher’ is, strictly seen, an anachronism, this study will use the term nonetheless for people or institutions taking over the main functions of publishers

of his successor Wynkyn de Worde, along with his main competitor Richard Pynson. In contrast to Westminster's and London's successful printing presses, the following part is dedicated to the failure of early presses in England and concentrates on the provinces St Albans, Oxford and Cambridge. Whereas St Albans represents a small city, which nonetheless was famous for its book production,⁵² Oxford and Cambridge represent cities with universities, institutions with a high demand for texts. Their failures are therefore equally important to find answers for the eventual success of the printed book in England. The final part of this chapter offers arguments on why the printed book was accepted as a successor of the manuscript, despite the fact that not every value category could be translated onto the new medium. A key to this question lies in a shift of the book value categories and how printers evaluated what was important for their customers. Using the value categories introduced in chapter 1, this chapter concludes with how early printers in England had reacted to the changed needs of their customers with the new technology for book production at their disposal.

The time frame for this chapter is 1470–1535 with necessary occasional transgressions.⁵³ 1470 roughly stands for the date that William Caxton acquired the knowledge of the art of printing in Cologne. 1535 denotes the death of Wynkyn de Worde, which symbolizes the end of the second generation of printers in England and, according to Henry Robert Plomer, “marks the second milestone on the highway of English printing.”⁵⁴ This date also coincides with the downfall of Papal supremacy in England, which affected English textual production. Further, due to this limitation, the impact of the Act of Supremacy of 1534 by Henry VIII on the English book trade, which effectively exposed English printers to continental competition, does not need to be considered in this chapter. It is generally accepted that by the 1530s, the printed book had been established as a new medium with its own characteristics and had mostly replaced the handwritten book, albeit not everywhere and in all textual productions. The

in modern times, that is the choice of texts to be printed and financing their production as well as marketing.

- 52 “St Albans had been a major centre of manuscript production for centuries.” John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd ed. (London, 2006), 18.
- 53 For example, the short introduction of the spread of printing in Europe will also address changes in the 1450s and before. Several important issues concerning the development of the book as a medium happened after the 1530s due to the upheavals of the Reformation.
- 54 Henry Robert Plomer, *Wynkyn de Worde & His Contemporaries from the Death of Caxton to 1535: A Chapter in English Printing* (London, 1925), 7.

discussed time frame can therefore be labelled as the ‘transitional phase’ from manuscript to printed book.

Chapter 3 is situated in the midst of the industrial age and discusses implications on all stages of the life cycle of the book. During the industrialization, the book trade witnessed developments which Geoffrey Nunberg called “delayed consequences of the printing press.”⁵⁵ However, the industrial age did not only affect the British book market with technological advancements like Stanhope’s, and later Koenig’s, press, improved ways of papermaking, stereotype plates and type-casting machines. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain also witnessed further sociocultural developments: apart from the multiplied production abilities of the above-mentioned inventions, railways and canal systems greatly improved trade connections,⁵⁶ the novel as a genre reached its golden age in the literary world, newspapers became more and more important and, due to enhanced education and the emancipation of the working classes, a new readership emerged.⁵⁷ The phenomenon of the so-called three-decker novel, which shaped book culture in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, is a telling example and serves as a case study which illustrates that the form of the book was also steered by economic interests of publishers and other influential institutions. In this case, commercial lending libraries, especially Charles Mudie’s “Select Library” were a vital factor that will be discussed in detail before the chapter closes with a concluding analysis using the book value categories.

Analysing these two eras with the book value categories yields distinctive patterns that may help us understand transitional phases of the book. Chapter 4 is different from the preceding two chapters as it is only partially historical. Furthermore, changes in publishing throughout the digital age are so drastic and reveal more discontinuities rather than continuities. Therefore, the aim of chapter 4 is to address current transitional aspects in our so-called “digital age” and point out the breaks within the publishing industry. It will start with a very brief overview of the development of digital publishing and will set the actual starting date at the year 2000, which not only symbolizes a new millennium but also signifies a time when the internet became omnipresent. It also refers to two famous online publishing experiments by bestselling US author Stephen King.

55 Geoffrey Nunberg, “Introduction,” *The Future of the Book*, ed. Geoffrey Nunberg (Berkeley, 1996), 1–20, 10.

56 Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 2009), 121–130. Briggs and Burke also comment on the social implications of these inventions.

57 Feather, *History of British Publishing*, 71–96.

Both experiments shed light on the reasons why digital publishing could not take over then. During the last two decades it also became apparent that the global book industry was (and is) more and more influenced and even shaped by technology companies like Google, Amazon and Apple. Therefore, this chapter focusses on the year 2011 with the introduction of Apple's tablet computer, the iPad. Using statistical analyses offered by the *Futurebook Digital Census* before and after the iPad introduction, this chapter shows the impact new technology can have. Points of reference in this chapter will be the years 2000 and 2011.

This investigation concludes with a discussion about the found patterns during the transitional phases of the physical book and the relevance of the book value categories for both production and reception. It will also point out continuities as well as breaks from the patterns found in the historical chapters. It will be shown that the book had, to some degree, developed towards a more convenient medium: primarily, easier access and cheaper to acquire. Further, the transitional phases were characterized by either conscious or unconscious imitations of the previous form of the medium (for example, distinctive manuscript characteristics in incunables or "turn the page"-features in digital books). These imitations suggest continuity. Whether this was necessary or added by producers to ensure acceptance by book users is a matter of speculation. After having gauged the acceptance of innovations and the book value categories in two historical chapters, the study discusses looks at breaks and continuities of patterns in acceptance in the digital age.

Approach of This Study

Media changes seldom offer clear-cut boundaries but are rather characterized by transitional phases. Therefore, it is necessary not to overestimate periodizations in such analyses. A fixed boundary between the transition from manuscript to the printed book, for example, would be, to some degree, untidy (chronologically, commercially, materially and socially).⁵⁸ Indeed, handwritten documents continued to be created after the introduction of the printing press and are still being created in the twenty-first century. The fact that printed matter did not completely replace handwritten texts at once supports Rudolf Stöber's theory of media evolution: "[The theory shows that] new media are not a consequence of technical inventions, but derive from a two-stage process of inventing and 'social institutionalizing' these new technologies. The process of 'social institutionalization'

58 David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order* (Cambridge, 2004), 12.

changes the media themselves.”⁵⁹ In other words, technological advancements alone do not suffice to trigger media evolutions. This change depends essentially on the social conditions and the need for information and communicating it. Indeed, as this investigation will show, a delay of implementing new technologies in book production in the fifteenth, nineteenth and twenty-first centuries can be observed.

This study deals with various distinct and quite different eras to try to locate patterns in acceptance of new book production methods and trace similar developments in current impulses of digital publishing. It will rely on up-to-date, secondary literature and apply the book value categories to come to convincing conclusions. The scope of this study is macroscopic and consequently bound to be superficial in some regards. However, its findings offer valuable insights and can contribute to prospective case studies concerning the acceptance of different book forms in different sociocultural contexts. Considering the huge differences of the individual chapters, the question remains whether this will lead to solid, convincing answers. Roger Chartier, for example, expressed his scepticism about macroscopic research, but still stressed the benefits of such a comparative approach:

Contrary to the claims of historians in search of legitimacy, the backward glance is of little help in predicting what the future will bring. Because it is comparative, however, that backward glance can enable us to measure more accurately the changes that are revolutionizing our relations with written culture.⁶⁰

It is not the intention of this investigation to predict the future of our book culture. Assessing and understanding the current situation is challenging enough. There is no question that it is problematic to compare today’s transformation of the written word with any other media change, simply because it has not yet come to completion. Digital publishing has not substituted all the functions of printed publications, and it remains to be seen whether it will do so. According to Tom Pettitt, Western culture is just on its way out of the parenthesis. The outcome is yet unclear. However, this study shares the optimistic view of Peter Shillingsburg who firmly believes that “[c]ertainty is not and never was an option [...]. Despair is not inherent in the discovery of uncertainty. The discipline of verification is

59 Rudolf Stöber, “What Media Evolution Is: A Theoretical Approach to the History of New Media,” *European Journal of Communication*, 19 (2004), 483–505, 484–485.

60 Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia, 1995), 5.

compatible with acknowledgment of fallibility.⁶¹ In other words: just because some questions are unlikely to offer certain and clear results, it does not mean that one should not employ them.

It has oftentimes been discussed whether the ‘digital revolution’ can be compared to the ‘printing revolution.’ In their introduction to a compilation on print culture studies dedicated to Elizabeth Eisenstein, the authors explained the continuing relevance of Eisenstein’s *Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (PPAC) precisely because of the similar impact of both the Gutenberg and digital age:

[. . .] our present proximity to a media revolution and the wake of the dot.com crash allow us to understand better the apparently uncontrolled agency of media and how their technological platforms operate as intellectual, cultural, political, and economic catalysts than could scholars encountering Eisenstein’s work in the pre-Internet-explosion world of 1979. What has perhaps contributed most to PPAC’s [*Printing Press as an Agent of Change*] continuing vitality and frequent application – especially to trends and phenomena not explicitly rooted in the western European Renaissance and Enlightenment – is undoubtedly its interdisciplinarity.⁶²

According to this optimistic view, it is the interdisciplinary character of both Eisenstein’s work and book studies in general that provides the impetus for on-going comparisons for two very different time frames. In fact, this study will not only allow us to explore the current media change, but current developments might also help us understand the previous ones even more by offering a different angle. We know the printed book. We were literally surrounded by print products all our lives and we take them for granted. But for book users in the fifteenth century, the printed book was new, just like the tablet computers and their different possibilities were for the generations that were born before the twenty-first century.

61 Peter L. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (Cambridge, 2007), 198.

62 Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist and Eleanor F. Shevlin, “Introduction,” *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, eds Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist and Eleanor F. Shevlin (Amherst, 2007), 1–12, 9–10.

