

Conclusion

Whenever the book was on the threshold of a new development, there was seldom a shortage of scepticism from the side of reception. When the printing press allowed a speedy creation (or rather multiplication) of books and texts on a bigger scale than ever before, this development completely changed the production of books and gradually replaced handwritten books. But this innovation was not immediately accepted by everyone. Nor was it hailed as a long-awaited means of speedy text multiplication. Some contemporary comments, especially from the clergy, stress that this new technology was also viewed critically. Despite all the features now deemed vital for print culture, it was also claimed that these texts were not trustworthy. Trustworthiness could only be achieved by handwritten texts.⁸⁶³ An often-quoted passage that stresses this sentiment is the notorious warning by Abbot Johannes Trithemius in his *In Praise of Scribes*:

Who is ignorant of the difference between writing and printing? A manuscript, written on parchment, can last a thousand years. How long will print, this thing of paper last? It is quite a lot if it can last two hundred years in a volume of paper. [The Scribe] should copy the usable prints and thereby give them longevity, since otherwise they would not last long. In so doing, the scribe grants stability to unstable writings.⁸⁶⁴

From a modern perspective, it seems obvious that Trithemius confuses the materiality of the book with the means of production. His main argument seems to be the assumption that printed books are primarily paper books, whereas manuscripts use parchment as their writing support. Trithemius' main concern seems to be the limited lifespan of paper which makes archiving writings unstable. Of course, one could easily counterargue that, even by that time, paper manuscripts had existed for centuries and that printers also used parchment for *de luxe* editions. 500 years after this statement, the predictions about the limited lifespan of paper books seem inaccurate, too. Trithemius' praise for the scribe, however, does reveal a very important notion: the concept of the book was not only connected to its form and content, but also to its materiality; and materiality could signify trustworthiness. The printed book and the printing business were

863 Müller, "Der Körper des Buches," 207.

864 Johannes Trithemius, *De Laude Scriptorium* (Mainz, 1494). Translation from Jan-Dirk Müller, "The Body and the Book: The Media Transition from Script to Print," *The Book History Reader*, eds David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2nd ed. (London 2015), 182–189, 184.

new, and both seemed to replace long-established ways of textual transmission, a key element in clerical life. Therefore, it is not surprising that mechanical reproduction did create distrust. In 1482, the Bishop of Freising ordered a comparison of each printed copy of a liturgical text with the handwritten original, one by one. And Fillipo di Strata, a Dominican monk, working as a scribe in the monastery of San Cipriano in the fifteenth century remarked in a letter to Nicolò Marcello, then Doge of Venice: “Est virgo hec penna, meretrix est stampificata” [“the pen is a virgin, the printing press a whore”]⁸⁶⁵ and thus criticized the new means of book production, not only because they potentially facilitated the speedy multiplication of corrupt texts, but also because this was mainly driven by profit-oriented intentions. Distrust of the printed book allegedly went so far that some book users had printed books hand-copied by a scribe to get a manuscript again, just to make sure they had a trustworthy book.

Still, these examples are just individual reports that do not reflect the actual acceptance of the printed book in Europe in the fifteenth century. Alexandra Walsham and Julia Crick even claim that the artificial and modern distinction between manuscripts and early printed books is partly institutionalized due to the separation of manuscript and rare book reading rooms in libraries.⁸⁶⁶ Several other examples suggest that the printed book was seen much less sceptically by other users: scholars and compilers often put books together from printed and handwritten pages, obviously regarding them as equal and trustworthy objects.⁸⁶⁷ And readers in the fifteenth century treated printed books just like manuscripts, reading with pen in hand, leaving comments in the margin, augmenting and adapting the text whenever they felt like it. Printed books were gladly accepted and even preferred by book users, not only because of the cheaper prices. Renaissance Humanism, for example, relied on the inherent features of print like standardization and typographical fixity that at the same time also shaped the printed book. The printing press undoubtedly was also an effective instrument for the Protestant Reformation throughout the sixteenth century, which effectively used the technology for the first media event:

An authoritative estimate suggests that something in the region of 10,000 pamphlet editions issued from the presses of German-speaking lands between 1520 and 1530.

865 Fillipo di Strata, *Letters*, Venice Marc. Lat III 170, fol 1r. Quoted in Walsham and Crick, “Introduction: Script, Print and History,” 20.

866 Walsham and Crick, “Introduction: Script, Print and History,” 4.

867 Pettegree, *Book in the Renaissance*, 16–17.

Of these almost three-quarters appeared between 1520 and 1526, the high point of the pamphlet exchanges stimulated by Luther's reform movement.⁸⁶⁸

The overall fast spread of printing presses in Europe and their economic success signify a fast acceptance of the innovation in book production. Even though there were certain functions where the manuscript was still preferred, for example, presentation copies for patrons, the advantages of printing, predominantly in the shape of reduced prices and textual stability, added enough value to the new product that its acceptance was rather quick.

Similar reasons apply to the acceptance of innovative production methods and power application during the industrial age: a bigger market necessitated larger editions which in turn required faster production. But scepticism existed as well. In the nineteenth century, limited acceptance on the side of production slowed down the establishment of industrialized book production. Innovations like stereotype plates and printing machines took decades until they were implemented in book production. Since jobs in the industry were threatened by these innovations, for example, typesetters and compositors, active opposition was feared. It is thanks to the newspaper and magazine industry that these technologies were invented and improved, since they, in contrast to the book publishing business, could almost immediately profit from these innovations. A final factor that shaped the context of acceptance, and was particular for Britain in the nineteenth century, was the established three-volume novel format and the success of circulating libraries. This successful system perpetuated an obsolete and artificially expensive book format for decades and hindered adoption of cheaper publications.

Innovations will only assert themselves if they are accepted by the majority. And these developments are influenced by the different book value categories this study suggests. The critical responses in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries to the new book production methods are similar and yet different to the scepticism that accompanied the early stages of the digital revolution in book publishing. Books in the twenty-first century are still symbolically charged objects in many cultures, and this symbolic value is, to a large degree, inherent to its materiality. The transition to digital text would mean not only a change within production and power application but would, for the first time since the physical change from scroll to codex, mean a decisive transformation in the overall structure of a book including the disappearance of materiality. This change would be more drastic than any previous one in the history of the book. This might

868 Andrew Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 98–99.

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partially explain why opposition against a complete transition to e-books and e-readers still exists. Arguments against such a scenario reach from profanities like inferior haptic features, user-unfriendly control, unsuitable to be read on the beach or, rather ironically, in well-lit places, or simply because of the dependence on electricity. Peter Shillingsburg admits that “the electronic representation of print literature to be undertaken in the twenty-first century will significantly alter what we understand textuality to be.”⁸⁶⁹ Other approaches to this subject even see a development towards a decline in democratic structures despite the fact that the digitization of textual distribution promises the opposite: if information, at one point, will be distributed only in a digital form, societies without internet access or people unable or unwilling to use digital technology will not only be discriminated but also excluded from social, cultural and political participation.⁸⁷⁰ A digital-only culture would also be very vulnerable to attempts of censorship. Concerns like these might also be a reason for a hesitation towards a life that is predominantly or exclusively shaped by digitality. China, for example, limits publishing as well as accessing content online and further uses the internet to monitor individuals.⁸⁷¹

Whether innovations in the publishing industry will succeed depends on several factors and is seldom a monocausal development. In 2010, the publishing community saw itself already at a pivotal moment anticipating a viable digital business “[. . .] built on reality and opportunity, rather than hype and hope.”⁸⁷² Ten years later, however, digital publishing, though firmly established in publishing, has not replaced printed books, certainly not in every publishing category. Even though in some publishing categories, for example academic papers, a preference for digital is growing, the current mood about the dominant publication form of the future is one of uncertainty, as chapter 4 displayed.

Several instances in the history of the book are labelled as revolutionary. It has oftentimes been insinuated that these instances are comparable since they are readily connected or juxtaposed in order to discuss and explain similarities and developments. This study has shown that there are limitations to such attempts.

869 Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google*, 3.

870 Jim Macnamara, *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* (New York, 2010), 60–65.

871 Elizabeth C. Economy, “The Great Firewall of China: Xi Jinping’s Internet Shutdown,” *The Guardian*, 29 June 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jun/29/the-great-firewall-of-china-xi-jinpings-internet-shutdown>> (accessed: 15 March 2020).

872 *FutureBook Census 2010*, 3.

Patterns of developments from the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries witness rather strong breaks with the digital age.

Gutenberg Age

The introduction of the printing press in Europe resulted in the book becoming a full-fledged commercial commodity. In the long run, the printed book also became an almost mass-produced object. Books were no longer unique but existed in hundreds of nearly identical copies. It was no longer a unique piece of manufactured art and thus lost a vital component of its aura, prestige and trustworthiness. However, incunables retained certain characteristics of uniqueness.

With the economic need to find new readers, printers had to adapt their publishing policies to meet the demand of a larger market that was at least partially interested in other texts than the aristocracy, scholars or clerics. Hence, it was an economic necessity to create new publishing categories for a bigger market. In England, William Caxton was a printer in the early years of the transitional phase from manuscript to print. His biography shaped the profile of his book business. He was a man interested in literature and translations. Apart from the occasional jobbing printing, he primarily focused on established texts, sometimes in a new translation, either by one of his patrons or by himself. Caxton's successor Wynkyn de Worde also needed to adapt the policy of his business only 15 years after Caxton started it in Westminster. The overall circumstances changed and de Worde's non-English background further closed opportunities for him that had helped Caxton. He also had to cope with much stronger competition in England. He successfully adapted, mainly by focussing on grammars, but also partially by catering to a new customer base that was interested not only in medieval authors like Lydgate and Chaucer, but also in contemporary English authors as well. His ample use of woodcuts and title-pages also shows his sense of business: he implemented illustrations to attract more customers and used the title-page as an advertisement tool. This illustrates the economic necessity of printers to add value to the books in the light of growing competition.

It might be argued that from the earliest days of printing in England, the symbolic value of the printed book was of utmost importance to make readers accept the printed book. Some scholars argue that this is illustrated by the early attempts to imitate manuscript features. It is uncontested that these similarities do exist. But since those characteristics were features of books in general in the fifteenth century, one cannot conclude that early printers decided against omitting these manuscript-specific elements. After a few decades, however, printers understood

that most of these attempts proved to be uneconomic and had to be dropped to remain commercially healthy. In any case, content value gained in importance. The growing market of readers demanded a more versatile production of literary texts. Since only print runs of at least 300–500 were viable, printers had to assess their market in order to succeed economically.

Industrial Age

The impetus of the various developments of book production during the nineteenth century is mainly based on severe restrictions of profitability of the book trade. Assessing the number of customers for a text remained a difficult task and an assessment gone awry often meant bankruptcy. Ironically, this led to a continuing strategy to print smaller editions and at the same time to technological developments, making it less costly to reprint editions if the success of the first edition assured a good sale of the reprint. Nevertheless, printing from stereotype plates remained to be used for texts which had been regarded as steady sellers. The inferior quality of prints from stereotypes, therefore, also signified a less valuable text as it was produced many times in contrast to the then rising genre of the novel. Novels were mainly printed from type material because it was difficult to estimate the buying public, and thus it was safer to reset entire novels than to create plates for books that might not sell. This only changed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The age of industrialization saw even more effective book production methods and larger print runs, which resulted in an even greater devaluation of the individual copy of an edition in comparison with the introduction of the printing press. Consequently, it faced problems similar to the fifteenth century. Technological developments increased the production possibilities that again were only viable if the market was expanded. This was mainly accomplished by the establishment of the novel as a publishing category. The century was also marked by the further rise of the middle classes and their urge for social distinction. To no small extent was this done with literature and the format it was offered in, as the British example of Charles Mudie's "Select Library" and the three-decker novels has shown. The content and, apparently, even more so the material aspects of novels were charged with symbolic value, impracticality notwithstanding. This unique case shows that external factors may well interrupt seemingly logical developments in technological progress. Due to Mudie's strict moral convictions and his economic shrewdness, the three-decker itself symbolized Victorian values like dignity, restraint and morality, which helped Mudie's success. This hindered efforts towards less expensive books for decades, since

both publishers and circulating libraries profited from this established system. Because of the acceptance context, it was an outdated publishing format that was preferred, especially for novels.

In the late nineteenth century, however, technical advances created other lucrative solutions for publishers. Affordable books in large editions for more and more people was the decisive incentive for most publishers to focus on the production of inexpensive books: cheaper books for new readers. Overall, the value of materiality lost significance. Despite individual movements against it (most prominently William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement), the deterioration of material quality was accepted, and the new aspects of the book were established. The Public Libraries Act in 1850 was based on the idea of offering public knowledge and education. Consequently, the Victorian age witnessed the rise of a culture of autodidacticism and self-help. Affordable books were the best tool to satisfy this need for self-education of the working classes. The availability of texts was the most important factor. The cheap production of books was a tolerated loss of symbolic and economic value. Content value drove the desire to own books.

Digital Age

From 2010 to 2019, the market for digital publications fluctuated. In 2013, the trend seemed to suggest the growing importance of digital works. This trend first decelerated, then stagnated. In 2015, printed books saw their first rise in sales since 2007, the year of the introduction of Amazon's Kindle in the US. Current developments, however, yet again show a further increase in the acceptance of the e-book. Readers are still sceptical about the loss of materiality. E-books may offer many advantages, predominantly in convenience, but the lack of symbolic value seems to be one of the main drawbacks in this development. Even though Thompson labels these potential advantages as values, they can only be described as such if the majority of readers accept these new possibilities and regards them as sufficient to tolerate the loss of other qualities inherent in the printed book.

No added value, however, changes the fact that e-books almost exclusively rely on content value. The economic value for readers is not available. Purchasing an e-book means buying a licence to read the digitally reproduced text on a reading device. Neither the intellectual property of the text nor a physical product is being purchased. Re-selling the book is impossible. Lending e-books to friends and family, on the other hand, is possible, depending on the e-book system. Symbolic value in e-books can only exist within the text. Established authors or novels, for example, have symbolic value as an inherent quality, even without

materiality. Added to that, the reading devices themselves might further offer symbolic value: protection covers for tablet computers and dedicated e-readers are sometimes designed to mimic the aesthetics of luxurious bindings. In 2010, Adriaan van der Weel further hinted at the possibility that social networks might be used to overcome the lack of symbolic value for e-books. It remains to be seen whether digital interaction in social networks like this will adequately replace the filled library shelves. After all, if this can be considered symbolic value, it only takes place online and will therefore only be recognized by people that use the same networks. It seems more likely though that now, ten years after van der Weel's argument, readers regard symbolic value functions of printed books as less important. The digital book may not have replaced the printed book overall, but it has become an important part of the publishing industry. Digital publishing is accepted, but which format is preferred is too much dependent on the publisher, the publishing category as well as manifold sociocultural conditions.

Even in the twenty-first century, the accurate assessment of the economic viability of a new text can still be hazardous. In his monograph *The Long Tail* (2006),⁸⁷³ Chris Anderson claims, for example, that about 98 per cent of new publications in the United States of America in print are not profitable and need to be cross-subsidized.⁸⁷⁴ Anderson gives no sources for his figure and it should consequently be taken with caution. Miha Kovač, however, points out that if Anderson is right, even to some extent, it is striking that all developments towards cheaper book production did not help to make smaller print runs profitable.⁸⁷⁵ The possibility to distribute and sell new texts without creating a physical product should then minimize the risk of economic failure. However, the current changes in publishing books in a digital format progressed differently. The introduction of the printing press and the subsequent developments towards printing from stereotype plates were specifically designed for book production. The technical requirements to sell books in a digital format had been developed long before publishers saw a potential further enhancement of publishing. No shortage of raw material had been the incentive to try to establish digital publishing. In fact, producing books has never been cheaper than in the twenty-first century. Book prices are at an all-time low. They are far from being the

873 Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More* (New York, 2006).

874 Anderson, *The Long Tail*, 6–7.

875 Miha Kovač, "The End of Codex and the Disintegration of the Communication Circuit of the Book," *Logos: Journal of the World Publishing Community*, 22.1 (2011), 12–24, 17.

luxury commodity that they once were. It is telling to see that during the early developments in the digital age, the publishing industry initially even refrained from using digital technologies altogether to sell their commodities. In the long run, however, it was eventually deemed to be a lost opportunity if they did not make use of the accelerating developments of gadgets like tablet computers or e-readers.

If current statistics are to be believed, the step towards focussing on digital publishing was, economically speaking, the right choice. After an initial scepticism by readers, digital texts have become a vital part of the publishing industry. According to a statement from Amazon, for example, they had sold more e-books than printed books in the USA in 2011. Eight years later, it can cautiously be argued that this (if it has been a true statement and not just a marketing strategy) was a passing craze. Readers were curious about the new technologies, Amazon fought for the market of e-books and offered relatively cheap e-readers to counter the attention Apple's iPad garnered. Whether those devices will lead to consequential changes in reading habits is still to be seen. Undoubtedly, technology will not stand still: reading devices may improve in the coming years and some obstacles which still prevent some readers from using them might soon vanish. But nearly ten years after the introduction of the iPad, the printed book has not been killed by its alleged successors.

Predictions about the developments and acceptance of new technologies must be regarded with caution. One of the most famous faulty predictions concerning technology came from Ken Olson, co-founder of Digital Equipment Corporation, who doubted as late as 1977 the relevance of computers both for individuals and as a business opportunity in the form of personal computers.⁸⁷⁶ In the early years of the new millennium, however, a computer with internet connection could virtually be found in every household in the Western world. Another example are netbooks (light, small and inexpensive laptops), that were seen as the future of computers. Though there were increasingly popular from 2007 onwards, their market suffered immensely around 2011, the year Apple's tablet computer was introduced. By 2013, most producers discontinued production of netbooks.⁸⁷⁷

876 Jack Scholfield, "Ken Olson Obituary," *The Guardian*, 9 February 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/feb/09/ken-olson-obituary>> (accessed: 15 March 2020). The famous quote "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home" is, however, slightly taken out of context, as he was referring to computers that control houses.

877 Charles Arthur, "Sayonara, Netbooks," *The Guardian*, 31 December 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/dec/31/netbooks-dead-2013>> (accessed: 15 March 2020).

Continuing debates about the possible supersession of the printed book by e-books point out that books, for many people, are more than just the text. Books fulfil several functions, depending on the respective field of publishing. Whether digital books will eventually replace (or displace)⁸⁷⁸ printed books may also depend on further technological innovation. Available reading devices are already showing huge improvements compared with their predecessors. Digital storage space will grow, display technology and software may evolve to further meet the demands of readers, making acceptance and preference more likely.

In the twenty-first century, the book has become an affordable everyday object. Owning books is no longer special, partially because of the aspects of mass production: if the scarcity of a commodity enhances its value, then the abundance devalues it. The differentiation of hardcover books and paperback editions played a similar role (it probably still does), but with e-books, the format of the cheap (mass-market) paperback may slowly vanish. After all, price differences of hardcover and paperback editions are not based on higher production costs but rather on novelty. Trade publishers usually release their new novels in hardcover first. Prices for an e-book edition are, more often than not, somewhere between the price of the hardcover edition and the eventual published paperback edition.

A bought book does not necessarily equal a book that is actually being read. Consequently, statistics that indicate a rise in the sale of books do not mean a general increase in reading. The desire to own physical books might not only be connected to the functions of the content value, but also to its symbolic value and, in some instances, even the economic value. With digital texts, both values are almost completely excluded. If digital publishing will rise again, this might, at first glance, signify more interest in the content value and at the same time less importance of symbolic value. The peak of e-book sales in 2013, however, does not state that those digital texts were actually read. This is inherent in what John Thompson labels the ‘added value’ of ‘accessibility’ and what Adriaan van der Weel explains with his idea of the ‘universal machine’ that works in a global network: the convenient and almost too easy way to gain access to digital texts may entice owners of e-readers or tablet computers to spontaneously carry out a purchase on the spur of the moment.

878 For a short overview of the different concepts of replacement and displacement, see William Uricchio, “Replacement, Displacement, and Obsolescence in the Digital Age,” *Cultures of Obsolescence: History, Materiality, and the Digital Age*, eds Babette Bärbel Tischleder and Sarah L. Wasserman (New York, 2015), 97–109.

For publishers, digital publishing might take away the possibility to use their publications to embed certain characteristics of the publishing house. With the physical aspects of their commodity removed, all that is left of their products is the digital representation of the text. As a consequence, typography seems to be the last element the publisher can use to integrate at least a minimum amount of publishing house conventions. Most e-readers, however, are equipped with a limited number of founts that can also be changed in size. Some publishers, like Alfred A. Knopf, are famous for adding elements like “A Note on the Type,” elaborating on the typeface of the respective novel. In some e-book systems, Knopf loses the opportunity to add value with this feature in digital publishing. It remains to be seen whether readers will deem flexibility concerning choice of type face and type size more important than trusting the typographic style chosen by the publishing house.⁸⁷⁹

Prognosis?

Above all, publishers must now accept that theirs is an industry dependent upon the ability to produce what the end-user wants rather than what the publisher can give to them.⁸⁸⁰

-Bill Martin and Xuemei Tian

We tend to overestimate technological change in the short run but fail to acknowledge its potential for the future. It is not rare that introductions of innovative technologies are readily hailed as revolutionary (especially by technophile groups). When, however, revolutionary consequences fail to show up immediately, we are quick to dismiss those predictions as a hoax, only to find out later that the innovation did lead to important changes, albeit much slower than anticipated. Technological innovation is seldom defined by the technology itself but it is rather socially constructed.⁸⁸¹ While the telephone, for instance, was invented in 1876, universal usage of this technology as we know it today was

879 Further ideas about typography are offered in Simon Rosenberg, “The Appearance of Writing and its (Disappearing?) Authority,” *Powerful Pages: The Authority of Text*, ed. Erika Herrmann (Leiden, 2016), 60–66. Open Access: <<https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/42722/Rosenberg.pdf>> (accessed: 08.12.2019).

880 William J. Martin and Xuemei Tian, *Books, Bytes, and Business: The Promise of Digital Publishing* (Farnham, Surrey, 2010), 2–3.

881 W. Russell Neuman, “Theories of Media Evolution,” *Media, Technology, and Society: Theories of Media Evolution*, ed. W. Russell Neuman (Ann Arbor, 2010), 1–21, 2.

only achieved more than 70 years later. The initial idea of the telephone technology was broadcasting speeches and concerts.⁸⁸²

When comparing the introduction of the printing press and the technological developments during the industrialization, four patterns become visible:

1. The acceptance of innovations in book production was rarely imminent. Hindrances came not only from the side of reception but also from the side of production.
2. New possibilities to produce and distribute texts were initially used to produce older established texts. Afterwards, the new possibilities triggered a development of new texts, sometimes leading to new genres altogether.
3. New forms of production initially tend to imitate their predecessors. These imitations might be practical or purely cosmetic in character without actual functional need. Further, these imitations might be conscious or unconscious.
4. The symbolic value of the newly produced medium is initially lower compared to its predecessor.

As tempting as it is to use these patterns to draw conclusions and formulate prognoses for the further development of e-books and digital publishing in general, it is a dangerous undertaking. Too much depends on further developments in all factors of the publishing industry. One unexpected development might render the whole prognosis useless. Between the first ideas of this study and the eventual completion, trends for digital publishing shifted every few years. It is also telling that in early drafts of some chapters of this study, social networks like MySpace or Google+ played a significant role. By the year 2020, both networks were either discontinued (Google+) or changed fundamentally since their inceptions and no longer function the way they were initially intended. Prognoses that use arguments based on these networks would have made these predictions almost useless.

The printed book and its industry seem to be in good shape. The physical book in codex form is not just a means to store information, even though this might be its primary function. It is also a cultural good as well as a social and symbolic object. E-books and e-readers alike have certainly been accepted, but they are not always preferred for reading. This indicates that they have not fully replaced all functions of physical books. What needs to be taken into consideration, however, is the difference between generations: recent sociological studies show that the younger generation may be less interested in traditional

882 Neuman, "Theories of Media Evolution," 3.

status symbols like cars and so on. Electronic gadgets, on the other hand, seem much more appealing. A case in point would be Apple products. Their iPhones and iPads continue to have a strong customer base, releases of new products constantly result in masses waiting in front of stores to be one of the earliest owners of the latest iPhone/iPad-generation. In that case, the symbolic value of the individual physical book would move to the chosen container for digital publications. If this development keeps progressing, it might be just a matter of one or two generations until downloading a novel or textbook to a tablet computer is always preferred compared to a visit to a book shop or library. After all, the latter was unimaginable for most people 200 years ago.

It is indisputable that technology plays a vital part in society today:

In cultures of technology, then, cultural praxis and expression are centred on technology. Technology becomes the overarching value that sets the agenda for all spheres of society. Technology becomes teleology, the ultimate goal and the unquestioned positive value - and all who question this value are considered technophobic and backwards striving, resisting the progress of technological advancement and development.⁸⁸³

Whether this assessment is applicable to digital technologies designed to read texts remains to be seen. Printed books themselves still carry values that are held dear by readers and are not offered in electronic texts. From today's perspective, one of three scenarios will happen: 1) e-books will completely replace printed books, 2) e-books will become extinct or 3) both forms will co-exist.

- 1) Reading culture witnesses a shift of values comparable to the music industry: rather than quality and symbolic value, customers value convenience. This would be in accordance with the patterns found in this investigation. In that case, Thompson's list of 'added values' is a good indicator of what might be regarded as valuable for customers of texts. If so, compared to the music industry, the introduction of the paperback would be the equivalent of the introduction of the CD, inasmuch as it offered greater portability and thus convenience. This scenario, however, also requires what Mats Björkin has established for the motion picture industry: since a digital file is neither scarce nor physically tangible, a re-recognition of the relationship between economic transaction and the event (in this case the pleasure of reading rather than the pleasure of watching a movie) is necessary, and

883 Göran Bolin, "Introduction: Cultural Technologies in Cultures of Technology," *Cultural Technologies: The Shaping of Culture in Media and Society*, ed. Göran Bolin (London, 2012), 1-15, 3.

not just with the individual physical object. In other words, the content and especially the act of reading (as incorporated cultural capital) must be valued enough in itself to encourage readers to purchase a digital file.⁸⁸⁴ In any case, the year 2020 offers all the preconditions for Kilgour's e-book-punctuation as suggested in his *Evolution of the Book*:⁸⁸⁵ the users' needs for textual information is constantly growing, technology has vastly improved compared to the late 1990s, existing systems have been successfully integrated and costs for both publishers and readers are acceptable.

- 2) The scenario that e-books will be merely a passing craze seems to be unlikely. As the statistics over the last two decades have shown, e-books have been well-established, especially in English-speaking countries. Even though some optimistic predictions about the importance of digital publishing have been indeed too optimistic, it is still hard to argue against the fact that e-books are firmly established in publishing. Apart from that, technology may be improved and offered for less money and the acceptance of the new way of reading is perceptible.
- 3) The third scenario is the one that this study proposes based on its findings. Rather than a supersession of the printed book by e-books (or an absolute disappearance of it), the digital age introduced a new medium for textual information that will, for the time being, coexist alongside the printed book. As Thompson has argued, some publishing categories are more amenable to digital possibilities than others. Despite the obvious gain in convenience in a digital format, other values for some publications will be held high. The printed book might follow the development of the stereo LP in the music industry: from dominant medium, to obsolete medium as such, to highly esteemed collector's item. LPs are mainly bought and used by audiophiles. To this day, however, it seems rather unlikely that the printed book will only be cherished and owned by bibliophiles in the future. As Ken Liu puts it: "Ultimately, new technologies succeed because they bring advantages that we could not even conceive of under the old technologies, but some of the benefits of the old technologies will never be replicated in the new."⁸⁸⁶ Further technological improvements might enable further possibilities which may

884 Mats Björkin, "Peer-to-Peer File-Sharing Systems: Files, Objects, Distribution," *Cultural Technologies: The Shaping of Culture in Media and Society*, ed. Göran Bolin (London, 2012), 51–63, 53.

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

886 Liu, "When E-Books are the Only 'Books,'" 124.

trigger a vital impulse for digital publishing. This would be, however, mere speculation.

In any case, to ask if the printed book will be replaced by e-books might be the wrong approach. The question should rather be what publishing categories will be preferred in digital form? Indeed, reference works like the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Dictionary of National Biography* have transformed in their online environment to full-fledged databases with so many possibilities the printed book could never offer. Consequently, the Oxford University Press doubts that the third edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* will ever appear in printed form.⁸⁸⁷ Texts that need to be read linearly, however, hardly profit from digital possibilities and are even devalued by still unsatisfactory reading devices and the manifold potential sources of distraction. At least for these publications, the printed book, with its limited abilities for distraction, might continue offering value for a much larger market, precisely because reading always needs a certain amount of attention. The competition in what sociology calls ‘attention economy’ by media like video, music or video games might be a real danger to texts, handwritten, printed or digital. However, only handwritten and printed texts prevent readers from being easily distracted by multimedia applications. From the perspective of digital texts, this is one of the most prevalent disadvantages of the printed text, whereas it may well be the most obvious advantage for a text that needs to be carefully studied in order to entertain or inform. If people are not willing to offer attention to reading a text, the whole text becomes useless and consequently the content value of the book as well, no matter in which form or shape. In Germany, according to the latest statistics offered by the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels in their annual publication *Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen*, this does not seem to be a mere dystopian prognosis for the distant future. Asked about their leisure activities, “reading books” is in fourteenth place with approximately 18 per cent stating “regularly” and 28 per cent “occasionally.” The list is led by “watching TV” (84 and 13 per cent), “listening to radio” (62 and 23 per cent) and “surfing the internet” (58 and 20 per cent).⁸⁸⁸ Over the years, “reading a book” regularly decreased in importance in the category leisure activities. Even though the numbers were steady the last ten years with approximately

887 Jamieson, “*Oxford English Dictionary* ‘Will Not Be Printed Again.’” The article quotes a spokesperson of the Oxford University Press who states that a print version is not ruled out in case there will be sufficient demand.

888 Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (ed.), *Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2019* (Frankfurt, 2019), 33.

18 per cent, “watching TV” manifests itself as the most popular leisure activity and especially the huge growth of using computer and internet (only 27 and 29 per cent for the year 2010)⁸⁸⁹ seems indicative of the digital age. A recent study from the British National Literacy Trust confirms a decline in both daily reading and reading enjoyment for children and young people.⁸⁹⁰

Even worse, the “Stavanger Declaration on the Future of Reading” raises concerns about reading from screen. In a meta-study from 2014 to 2018, conducted by COST E-READ, that included 54 studies with over 170,000 participants, the overall result was that the transition from paper to digital poses problems and is not neutral. “Readers are more likely to be overconfident about their comprehension abilities when reading digitally than when reading print, in particular when under time pressure, leading to more skimming and less concentration on reading matter.”⁸⁹¹ Surprisingly, the study also reveals that the generations labelled as “digital natives” suffer the most from these consequences. The Stavanger Declaration is far from demonizing reading on screens. However, it stresses the dangers of a complete acceptance and preference of digital reading material. It urges schools and libraries to keep encouraging students to read *paper* books. If further studies should confirm the results by E-READ, this would lead to active opposition which would make it harder for digital books to become the preferred medium. If schools focus on using print materials, this would oppose Siegfried Schmidt’s third aspect of ‘medium,’ the social-systemic component, which stresses the relevance of educational institutions’ support of new mediums. Further, if the Stavanger Declaration is right, digital texts cannot fulfil all functions that printed matter serve, so according to Kilgour’s theory of the evolution of the book, the “capability of integrating a new form into existing information systems,” is at least only partially warranted.

The previous chapters looked at specific case studies to show the usefulness of book value categories. The Gutenberg Age chapter focussed more on production

889 Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (ed.), *Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2011* (Frankfurt, 2011), 22.

890 Of roughly 57,000 participants between the ages of nine and 18, merely 53 per cent stated they enjoy reading and only 25.8 per cent state that they read daily in their free time. “Children and Young People’s Reading in 2019,” *National Literacy Trust*, March 2020 <<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2019/>> (accessed: 19 March 2020).

891 “The Stavanger Declaration on the Future of Reading,” Stavanger, 2019 <<https://ereadcost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/StavangerDeclaration.pdf>> (accessed: 15 March 2020).

and the Industrial Age chapter paid closer attention to distribution and reception. Since the digital age seems to be primarily about content value, it would be intriguing to pay closer attention to the reception part. Statistics like the *Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen* or the studies performed by COST E-READ and the National Literacy Trust are a first step. The book value categories are shaped by socialization. Therefore, research on applications used for teaching to read might find helpful results that lead to a further understanding of the recent development in digital publishing.

