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

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Abstract

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

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The Future Book Forum is the world's largest gathering of book publishers and printers, exploring the best new ideas for innovation and growth. Enabled by Canon, the event is fast and inspiring, practical and collaborative. Over the last 4 years we set out an ambitious journey, to define a better future for the book. Whilst we all recognise that digital technologies have fundamentally transformed lives and industries, we also recognised that it can also enhance the physical world. Making real things – in our case, books – even more personal, intelligent and useful. We started by creating a