

A Fish-Eyed View of eBooks and eReading

A Talk Given by Tom Peters at the Annual Meeting

South Central Regional Library Council

Cooperstown, NY

October 28, 2011

The Revolution in eBooks and eReading



What Revolution?

- Mobile Devices
- Bookselling
- Publishing
- Reading
- Authorship



Preliminary Questions



Will this revolution last?

What are the opportunities and risks for libraries?



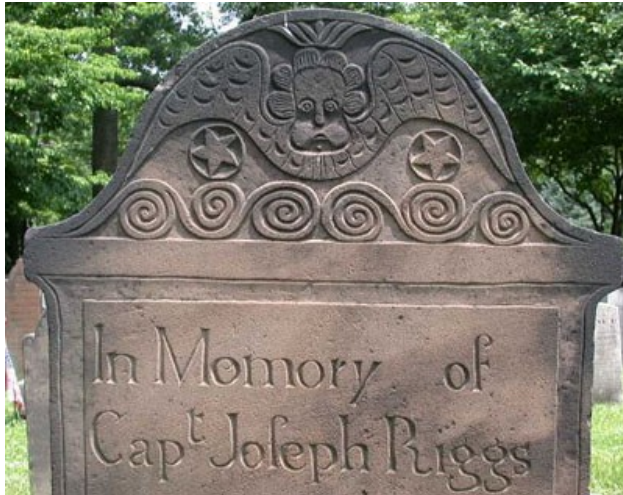
Revolutionary Fits and Starts

- Seventies:
Paperless Office
- Late Nineties:
Failed eBook Coup
- 2001:
Segway

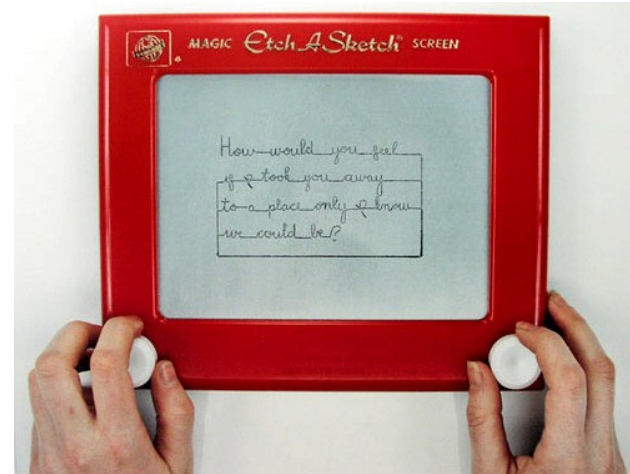


Texts and Text-Bearing Devices

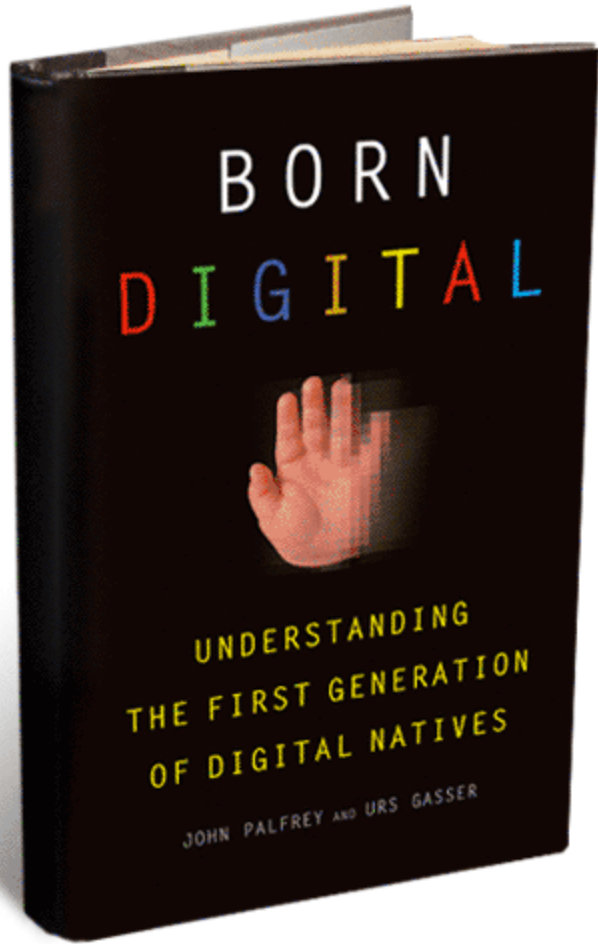
- Static



- Dynamic



Objects and Experiences



Revolutions Beget The Settling Old Scores

- “The first thing we do,
let’s kill all the lawyers.”
 - King Henry VI, Act IV, Scene II
- Many publishers never really liked the library lending model.
- Many tech companies ignore libraries and the library lending model.

It's Complicated



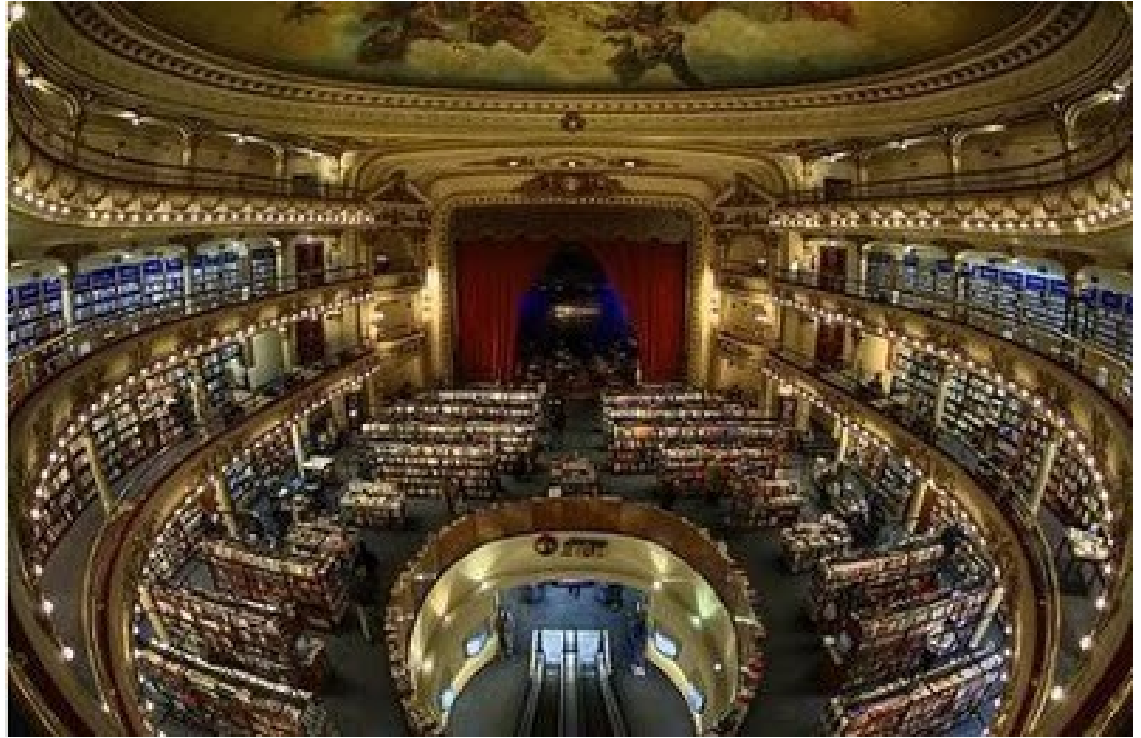
Follow the Money



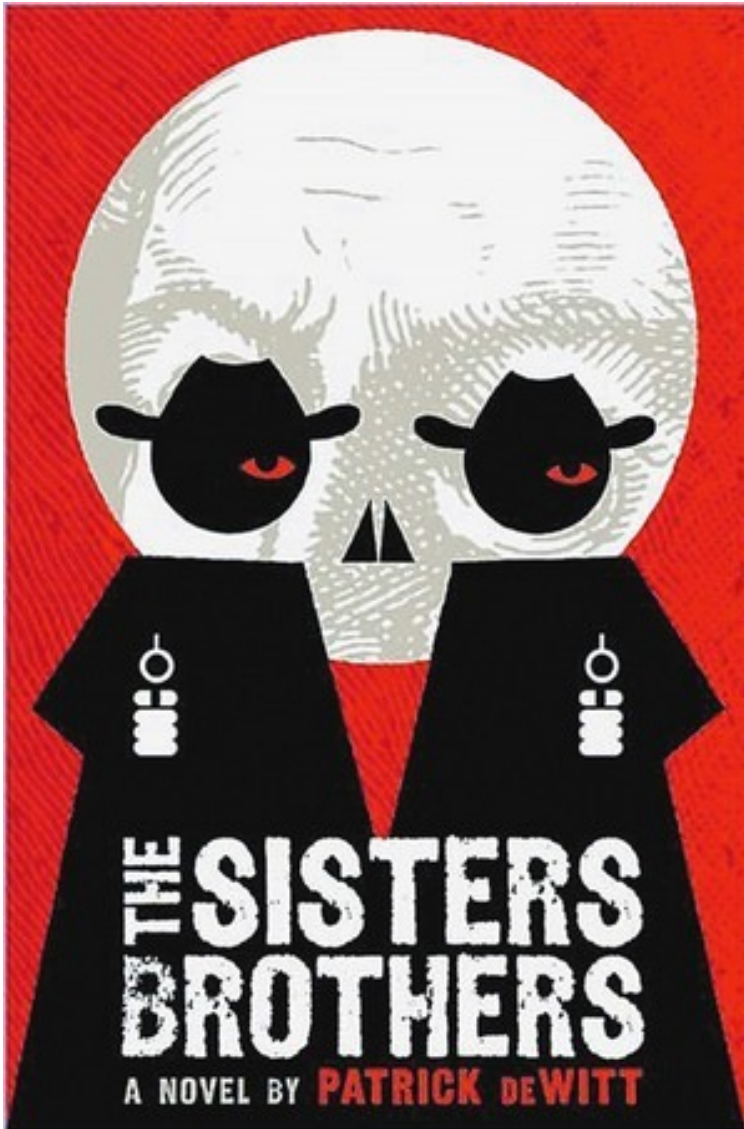
Fish-Eyed Views

More details
when close.

Only large
distant objects
are visible.



A Tale of One Reading Experience



- First noticed as Man Booker Prize finalist
- Read Amazon reviews and comments
- \$9.99 Kindle Edition
- Delivered in a min.
- Read in three days.
- Not at local public lib.
- One copy (overdue) at my academic library

Situational Reading

1. School
2. Work
3. Avocational
(Reading for Pleasure)
4. Incidental



Let's Focus on Avocational Readers

- In any given year, a slight majority of adult Americans claim to have read anything for pleasure (i.e., not related to work or school)
- 50.2 % of adult Americans (approx. 113 million) engaged in literary reading in 2008.
 - Source: NEA Report, “Reading on the Rise” (January 2009). Available as free PDF file at <http://www.nea.gov/pub/pubLit.php>

Soup to Nuts Approach

- From search, discovery, and selection ... to all the value extraction and additions the reader wishes to make.



eReading is a Complete Thing

- Content
- Reading Device
- Distribution
- Human eReader
- Process, with Outcomes
(short-term and long-term)

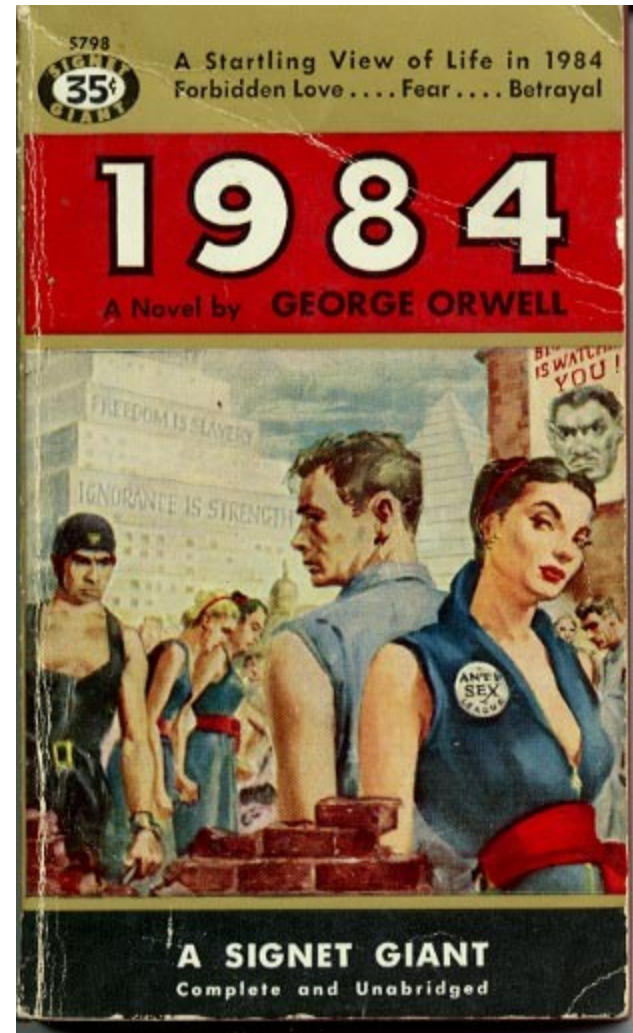
Reading as Sensation

- **Visual Reading:** printed on paper or digital
- **Auditory Reading:** analog or digital, prepackaged, downloadable, or streaming
- **Tactile Reading:** braille (printed or digital)

- **Olfactory Reading:** e.g., Olfactory Web
<http://www.downloadsquad.com/2009/04/08/weird-wednesday-whatever-happened-to-the-olfactory-web/>
- **Gustatory Reading:** Devouring a Good Book
<http://www.books2eat.com>

Consider the Stakeholders

- Authors
- Agents, Rights Holders, etc.
- Publishers
- Distributors
- Booksellers
- Librarians
- Library vendors
- IT companies
- Readers



Stakeholders, Distilled

1. Authors

2. Readers

- “The only really necessary people in the publishing process now are the writer and the reader...Everyone who stands between those two has both risk and opportunity.”
 - Amazon executive Russell Grandinetti, quoted in the NYT http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/17/technology/amazon-rewrites-the-rules-of-book-publishing.html?_r=2

Consider All PP ICE Devices

- PP ICE = Personal, Portable Information, Communication, Entertainment
 - Mobile Phones
 - Dedicated eReading Devices
 - Portable Music/Media Players
 - Netbooks
 - Tablet Devices
 - Portable Gaming Devices
 - Devices for Kids



Left to Their Own Devices

- No organizational control.
- No dominant device.
- Designed for individualization.
- Info experiences (reading, viewing, listening), entertainment, communication, and content creation exist cheek-by-jowl on the same device.

Possible Changes in the Reading Experience

- More worthwhile integration of media into the reading experience.
- Different genres.
- Decline in sustained reading and sustained argument?

Will eReading be More Communal?



- Kobo Pulse

– <http://mashable.com/2011/09/27/kobos-pulse/>

What to Do?

- Painting, mowing, and shoveling snow produce immediate, discernible results.
- Libraries need to undertake “murky work” for continued success in the eReading era.



Must We Reinvent the Wheel?

- Could we design a better portable device?
- Can we reconceptualize copyright?



Libraries and the Device Business

- If eReading on portable devices becomes the dominate way to read, should libraries lend eReading devices?
 - Libraries always have been in the device business (printed books, periodicals, microfilm, CD's, DVD's, etc.)
 - If libraries got out of the “container” business, we could concentrate on content and information services.
 - However, a sizable percentage of the reading public may lack the money, knowledge, or patience to own and operate their own personal, portable eReading devices.
 - If libraries lend devices, how to overcome the intensely personal relationships people have with their portable devices?

eCollections: Does Size Matter?

- What factors will drive people to collections of ebooks?
 - Size of collection
 - Ease of use
 - Price (free is good)
 - Browsability
 - Compatibility with the plethora of devices
 - Quality selection principles and practices
 - Local and/or niche interest collections

Goodbye, Big 6

- Won't sell/negotiate eBooks to Libraries:
 - Macmillan
 - Simon & Schuster
- 26 Bottles of Beer on the Wall:
 - HarperCollins
- Will sell/negotiate eBooks to Libraries:
 - Penguin
 - Random House
 - Hachette Book Group

eBooks Disruptive to the Big 6?

- Currently about 20 % of revenue.
 - Currently about 25 % of sales.
 - May reach 80% in three years.
- <http://www.idealog.com/blog/is-an-80-ebook-world-for-straight-text-really-in-sight>

Hello, Big 3?

- Amazon
- Apple
- Kobo

– <http://www.idealogy.com/blog/kobos-new-deals-propel-them-into-the-top-tier-of-global-ebook-competitors>

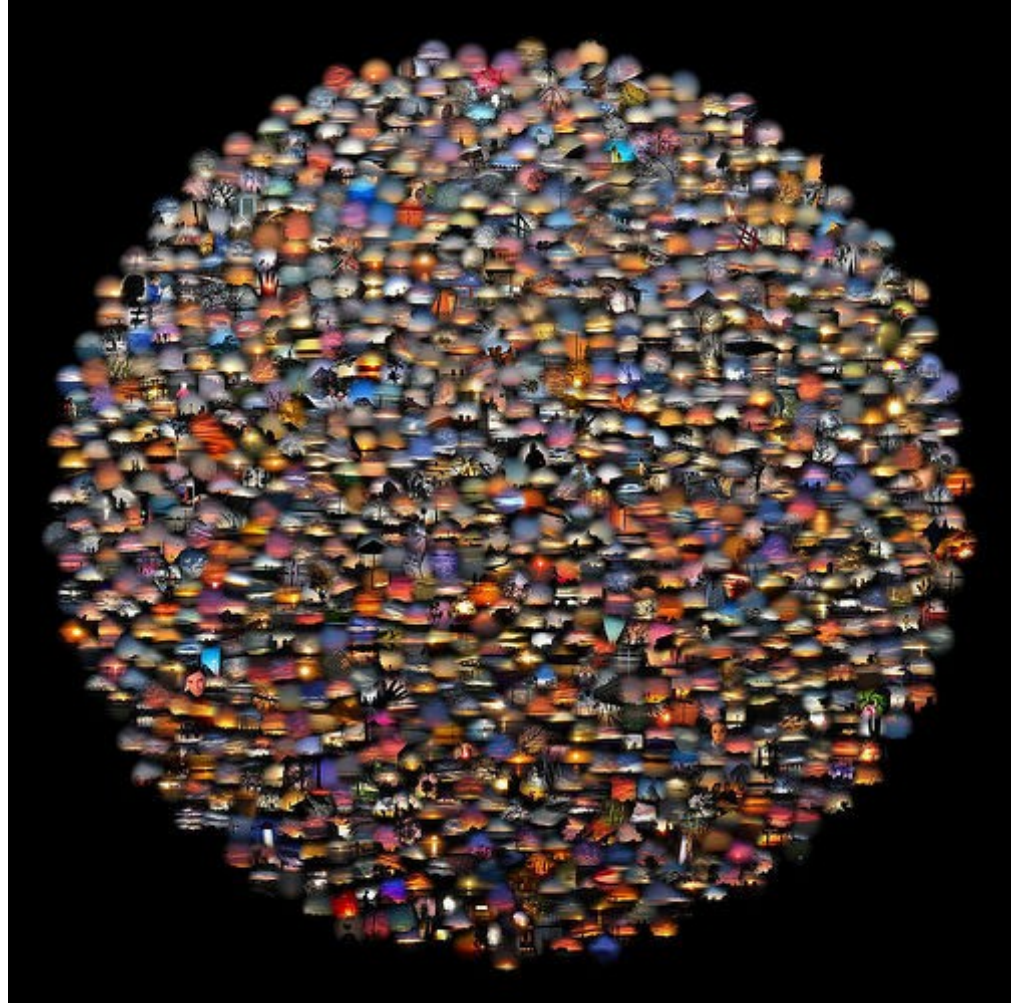
Portable eReading for Pleasure in the U.S.: Now a 4-Horse Race?

1. Amazon Kindle
2. Apple iPad
3. Barnes & Noble
Nook Color
4. Google Books



Or, Here Comes Everybody!

- Rapid rise in indie publishing



Who and What is at Risk?

If portable eReading for pleasure becomes an unbundled, commercial enterprise serving individual readers, the at-risk groups include:

- Bookstores
- Libraries
- Have Nots
- Students, Scholars, and Researchers
- Voracious Readers

Tempus Fugit

- Uptake of eReading in the U.S. is faster than expected.
- Device and distribution markets are solidifying quickly.
- eReader behavior and preferences are changing rapidly.
- Smartphones and tablets rule.



What Should Librarians Do?

1. Assert the value of Public Good information institutions
2. Re-educate Publishers about how libraries add to a healthy culture of reading
3. Strengthen alliances with Readers and Authors
4. Develop a New Lending Model for the eReading era.

Specifically...

- **Individually, Libraries must:**
 - Become actively engaged in market developments
 - Continue experimenting with devices and services that support portable eReading for all.
- **Collectively, Libraries must:**
 - eReader Bill of Rights
 - Federal legislation to protect and promote the library lending model for digital content.

National Discussions & Action

- COSLA Study (first half of 2010)

http://www.cosla.org/documents/COSLA270_Report_Final1.pdf

- OITP eBook TF (first half of 2011)

<http://connect.ala.org/node/117993>

- Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/dpla>

COSLA Report on Portable eReading and Public Libraries

1. Consolidate/leverage Pub Lib purchasing power
2. Consolidated access point for Pub Lib content
3. Develop a device certification process
4. Document how Pub Lib use contributes to a culture of reading (and book buying)
5. Help local authors. Support self-publishing
6. More leadership about reading's future
7. Pub Libs as labs for new reading experiences

The Russian Doll Question

- **At what level to act?**
 - Individual libraries
 - Regional systems/consortia
 - Statewide
 - Nationally
 - ALA
 - DPLA
 - Internationally
 - All of the above



Beyond Shelf Browsing

- Hunt Library at NCSU (opening Jan. 2013)
 - Automated Book Delivery System
 - Virtual Browsing
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7q9u865SVk>
- Skimmy Dipping
 - Quickly perform intertextual eBrowsing
 - Dip at will into a given book or article

New Forms of Online Browsing

- WebGL Bookcase
 - <http://workshop.chromeexperiments.com/bookcase>



Better Mobile Access to Local Content

- Biblion app from the New York Public Library
 - <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/biblion/worldsfair/>



Beyond Fear and Loathing

- Be mindful of all stakeholders, but continue to align ourselves with readers and authors.
- Plan and act in ways that affirm our core values (hint: the printed book should not be one of our core values).
- Seize the opportunities to serve our communities.

Legislation to the Rescue?

- California Reader Privacy Act
 - <https://www.eff.org/press/archives/2011/10/03>

Litigation to the Rescue?

- Authors Guild et al. versus HathiTrust
 - <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/13/business/media/authors-sue-to-remove-books-from-digital-archive.html>

Culture and Society Trump Technology and Economics

- Technology is more than “just a tool”
 - Block that meme!
- When tech succeeds, it recedes.

Lest We (and They) Forget...

- Most libraries are public good social and cultural institutions.
- Libraries serve:
 - Readers
 - Have Nots
 - Will Nots
 - Everyone who wants to use the library

Lest We (and They) Forget (2)

- Digital content has the pure potential to become an absolutely non-rivalrous public good.
 - Unlimited number of perfect copies available to everyone, anytime, anywhere
 - One person's use of digital content does not preclude others from accessing that content (in theory)

The Future of eReading

- Muscular and vibrant
- Not precious, tenuous, and tentative
- “Read at whim! Read at whim!”
 - Randall Jarrell, *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket: Essays and Fables* (1962)

Thank You for Your Time and Attention

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