# 10 Futurology

## What we can expect

*\*Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will Be, Will Be)\**, is also the never ending question for the electronic publishing of art books.[^doris] In art books we try to describe, show, analyze and collect works of art. These works can be made of everything, but more often than not they deal with tactile objects, paintings, drawings, sculptures, etc. In many books these works are reproduced and discussed. But writing itself is also an art form and the mutual interaction between texts and tactile objects becomes more and more integrated. In the 20s and 30s of the previous century collages became very popular. Here texts, newspaper clippings, photographs and any other expressions, mostly on a paper substrate were put together to obtain a new artwork. In an electronic environment we transcend this collage technique into a new substrate: the pixel screen. Now, an enormous range of novel opportunities for creative expression becomes possible.

As we showed above in this guide, the act of gluing, dissecting and endlessly reorganizing enables us to create new works that can express themselves differently in different technological environments as well as being tailored to the readers' desire of the moment of consumption. Electronic publishing becomes like a gigantic fruit salad bar, where the end user is able to or fill her own plate or to make a choice between prepared combinations of hardware, platforms and content, both online and offline. This not the same as blending all ingredients into one smoothie, which is an end phase from where no way back is possible. Below, we discuss some actual trends, though as we have seen over the past years the predictive power of fashion and hype is limited. [![Bloglink](images/dpt\_blog\_verwijzing.png)](http://digitalpublishingtoolkit.org/?p=921 "Link to blog post: Book review. The end of ebooks. 20 visionaries on the future of digital reading. ")

## Reading technology

Changes seem dependent on genre, just as hard- and software dependencies. We have to take the intrinsic limitations of the latter two into account. Reading novels or other linear texts on e-readers is already a big success. Publishers report an ever increasing sales of e-versions, that will surpass the sales of paper publications.[^books] The open question is still: are those books and articles read from screen or downloaded and print on paper? On the many self-publishing sites and websites of official publishers we see millions of publications. But again, are all these works read sequentially like a detective or browsed/scrolled? How to handle an anthology with hundreds of poems? And how much content is merely consumed by bots and search engines? The stats won't tell us.

Also we see saturation in the market of e-readers. Early birds like Sony are ending their efforts. This might be a result of the conflation of e-readers and the larger screen sizes of smartphones. Reading from a large smartphone becomes quite feasible. Typically, the big consumer electronics companies, stop developing e-readers in a market that is already mature and leave further advances to intermediates like Kobo.com. That is to say, hardware improvements are more or less on a plateau level and the real challenge will be the usages, which means the reading software, of ebooks. Browsing, annotating, sharing and quoting demands further software developments to mimic the versatility of paper books.

This goes without saying the intrinsic technological developments into color e-paper screens, flexible screens and the continuing improvement of screen resolution Ultra High resolution (aka 4K) will certainly become something like Exa High in due course.

Also the big issue of reading from screen vs. print-on-demand remains an open question.[^vanc] Again, it very much depends on the genre. Recent research shows that in the actual state of the arts, students prefer paper above screens in the process of preparing for tests.[^stoop] In the field of educational texts a new mixture arises, where paper textbooks and electronic examples, image, audio, and film collections and tests are written/developed in close collaboration. Also here textbooks loaded with pictures in fields like clinical medicine and art history will deviate from textbooks on theology and literature studies. Experiments will take a long time as evaluating educational courses takes many years. Even when paper publications will celebrate their return, (portable) electronic devices will be used for search and meta-tagging purposes, and to comment on the content and debate the larger discourse (with or without a functioning recommendation economy).

Nevertheless, advantages and disadvantages will remain the same on the level of affordability and portability of whole libraries vs. independence from electricity and visual-tactile advantages of paper books. Related to this is the cloud hype, a development that completely relies on the availability of electricity and a dense and fast Internet infrastructure as well as the consistency of the host's services and platforms. Not to mention the 'anti-terrorist' filters of 'citizen friendly' governments.

## Reading culture

Apart from the concerns expressed above, we have to review the culture of reading again. The present culture is that a person gets or buys a book and that is it. Now, more and more we are drifting to subscription models where the content as well as the software needed for consuming that content becomes unstable.

Cost pressure that now chases us in the direction of cheaper ebooks might result in a dangerous dependency on a livelong financial contract.[^way]

People living in poor, closed or financially weak countries might need a stable stock of material next to the unstable Internet structure and related censorship.

A major point in the present day discussion is the question of literacy. Nicolas Carr scared the world with his book *\*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains\** and on many Internet forums and in many journals and magazines the discussions about multi-tasking, the use of tablets in (primary) schools and the loss of reading skills amongst young people are vivid. Will we master the technology or become slaves? We simply don't know yet. On one hand, people in many countries are still trained reading long texts and this competency might be influenced. On the other hand, millions and millions of people from an illiterate background in non-Western countries get superb reading and writing skills by the use of mobile phones and tablets. On top of that in the Islamic world we know a strong oral tradition, which is presently reflected in the avalanche of (often political of religious) video messages. Hence, in our project scope where we deal with arts and design we have to consider an increasing mixture of various medial productions. The accent now is more and more on short texts and the integration of short videos. Nothing and nobody can forecast if in a more mature technological environment the tides will turn and, next to other expressions, long written story telling will as well as well printed picture books will become fashionable again.

Other ways of dealing with texts allow a more interactive relationship between reader and text. Not only in the sense of adding audio and video, but also leaving the reader the choice of entry into the text, setting out an individual reader path per person.

On the level of popularity and commerce we have to realize that the increasing -advertising driven- use of statistics, such as Facebook's like will highly influence the choice of our readers who have too many options to fill their spare time.

## Publishing culture

As mentioned earlier, the subscription model is becoming the hegemonic model for the coming period. This will pertain to kind of products including books. However, here again we deal with a great variety. Big scholarly repositories such as JSTOR are different from ecommerce platforms such as Amazon. Listening to relatively short music tracks (mostly less than 10 minutes) via Spotify is different than reading relatively long texts (mostly longer than one hour). We will likely switch from individual product retail to a rental/subscription model, with the distribution models of music and text converging. The book publishing industry can learn a lot from its music brothers and sisters, also in terms of book tours, live performances and automatic ways to capture who is reading what, and where.

Given the great number of increasingly more powerful software writers and artist will try and disseminate their works more by who self-publish. However, at a certain point of overproduction, new intermediates, that is to say, publishers will pay a role again.

For the publishers themselves it means that they more than ever must target to become the aggregator then the one time off producer. Sale platforms like Amazon become so large that they disable themselves to become coherent sources.

Publishing always had in essence an editorial kernel. Unfortunately over the years it became more and more an industry of too many standardized products, where commercial short term objectives are the rue. With the advent of many self-publishing, vanity press, publishers that also rent out editorial services such as language brushing-up the 'art' and craftsmanship of publishing will re-establish itself in prioritizing content, in its multimedia clothing, as linchpin between the creative artist and writer and the receptive reader, watcher, consumer.

Our Toolkit intends to be a helpful step in this direction.

[^doris]: This saying, by written by the Jay Livingston and Ray Evans became world famous when Doris Day sang it the song in the Hitchcock film *\*The Man Who Knew Too Much \**(1956), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azxoVRTwlNg.

[^books]: Digital sales outstrip bricks and mortar in US, http://www.thebookseller.com/news/digital-sales-outstrip-bricks-and-mortar-us.

[^vanc]: Take for example the 528 pages (10,8 x 17,48 cm) thick anthology *\*What will be / Ce qui sera / Lo que será \** Almanac of the international surrealist movement, with more than 170 contributors from 25 countries. Essays, poems, images, manifestoes, a debate on surrealist editions, chronology of 50 years of surrealism 1964-2014. Downloading such a book is problematic because you need a complete structured index and advanced search option. Printing it locally is almost impossible given the small fixed page size. Buying it at lulu.com gives you a POD on standard glossy paper, which is certainly not in line with the surrealist tradition.

[^stoop]: Judith Stoop, Paulien Kreutzer, and Joost Kircz. 'Reading and Learning from Screens versus Print: a study in changing habits. Part 1 – reading long information rich texts'. *\*New Library World\**. Vol. 114, Issue 7/8, pp. 284-300, 2013. Copy of final accepted draft: http://www.kra.nl/Website/Artikelen/NLW-Reading-Learning-part1-acceptedversion.pdf. Part 2 – comparing different text structures on paper and on screen. *\*New Library World\**. Vol. 114, Issue 9/10, pp. 371-383, 2013. Copy of final accepted draft: http://www.kra.nl/Website/Artikelen/NLW-Reading-Learning-part2-acceptedversion.pdf.

[^way]: A related example is the notorious instability of the Web as such. The big international science publisher has a contract with the Dutch Royal Library for a complete backup of its electronic collections. But the same library has, with many others, digital preservation as a spearhead in its policy. The private charity that maintains the Wayback Machine: http://archive.org/web/ that act as a carbon copy of the Internet is a gem, but what happens in case of major catastrophes?