

Sydney Wilberton

3/20/15

English 122

Back to the Book

Description: Back to the Book is a research initiative that poses the question: “How and why have digital and analog literatures diverged as material practices within an increasingly digital institutional framework of literary production and consumption in America and Europe?” It works to show how paper based literature and electronic based literature are two different mediums that accomplish different things but can be brought together to create new format of literature entirely, reinventing the book and the way that people read and analyze literature. The initiative claims that technology based literature is not replacing paper based literature, but rather converging to create a new, original, mixture of the two that compliment each other to create a richer reading experience.

Research context: This research initiative is specifically relevant to publishing groups, both digital and print. It evaluates why predictions of digitization replacing print media completely have not come true in the past two decades in the Western world. This study is particularly relevant as print publishers search for different potential markets to fill in order to remain current.

Technical Analysis: This research initiative is based online through a wordpress site, and is funded by the Dutch Research Council, which funds over five thousand different research

projects at universities around the world. The project focuses on “book-altering and book art, typographic fiction, and personal zines” to support their hypothesis that “The mediasphere of the present is too prolific and multidimensional for one medium to succeed or replace another” (Taken from the initiative wordpress site). The initiative proposes the concepts of materiality, hybridity, singularity, and authenticity to analyze what they name “analog literature”.

Evaluation of Opportunities: A major goal of this project is evaluating the steps publishers are taking to deliver literature in more ways than the traditional bound novel. Where even in the printed form publishers are taking literature in new directions, the online medium offers so many more ways to experience literature. The BacktotheBook initiative maintains that there is something about literature that cannot be delivered through any other means than printed paper. Although many of the experimental works detailed in the project are no longer recognizable in the traditional sense of being a book, in the example of *The Familiar*, they are told better through the rethinking of a book bound in chapters and covers.

Summary: Technology has changed the way books are produced but does not render them obsolete - this project focuses on why that is, and why predictions that technology would replace all books has not come true. It focuses on how digitalization has enhanced paper literature in new ways and examines the transformation that has taken place in literature during the last twenty years. It explores the relational process of media divergence, which

is defined as “the refashioning of older media technologies as alternative channels alongside newer media technologies.”

Resources for further study: <https://backbooks.wordpress.com/>