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# Digital Books and Flying Cars

Brantley, Peter

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peter brantley  
internet archive  
san francisco ca

# Digital Books and Flying Cars

*DPLA / Michigan / 2012*

*According to a short preface, the text had been taken from a folio edition, undated.*

concept of  
an “organizational field”  
(defined)

often complex groups or  
sets of actors involved.

*Oddly, the preface was unsigned.*

stable industry > stable network  
(and vice versa)

for both organizations  
and people

*She checked the copyright page*

Disruption of key fundamentals –  
book production and distribution –

even creates conflicts emerging  
from redefinition of old assets:  
a backward lens.

*and found that the original hardcover had been a textbook,*

good example:  
digital rights for backlist titles

rights to the latent rents  
were never arbitrated

*Plays of Ford, Webster, Toumeur and Wharfinger,*

confusing enough issue to be a  
major component of GBS proposal  
(*"Author-Publisher Procedures"*) ...  
attempting to draw a "bright line"

*published by The Lectern Press, Berkeley, California, back in 1957.*

as old content is re-commoditized, and  
new content emerges through different  
channels,

conflict emerges among existing niches  
authors | agents | publishers | retailers



*She poured herself half a tumbler of Jack Daniels*

Outcome:

Rosetta, Wylie v. Random House

HarperCollins v. Open Road

*(the Paranoids having left them a fresh bottle the evening before)*

digital transform permits fundamental  
shift in corporate control of publishing.

*and called the L. A. library.*

Imagine home 3-d printable  
aerocar templates on torrents,  
competing with existing cars.

*They checked, but didn't have the hardcover.*

Fundamental turmoil yields frenetic efforts to build a new market stasis-

Locate primary “axis of competition”:

product | pricing | services

*They could look it up on inter-library loan for her.*

deep technology shifts ...

usually remove the ability  
to focus on a single axis.

*"Wait," she said, having just got an idea,*

firms able to exploit new opportunities in  
organizational networks gain supremacy.

e.g. the Amazon Kindle

*"the publisher's up in Berkeley. Maybe I'll try them directly."*

org fields that have become disrupted  
are naturally subject to the formation  
of newly emergent breakthroughs.

(a la the Amazon Kindle)

*She found the Lectern Press in a small office building on Shattuck Avenue.*

org network components –  
e.g. services and standards –

wind up being hijacked,  
suborned by new firms



*They didn't have Plays of Ford, Webster, Tourneur and Wharfinger on the premises,*

EPUB -> EPUB<sub>3</sub> in order to compete vs. Apple/ Android apps, only to see EPUB<sub>3</sub> adopted as a foundation for proprietary enhancements.

*but did take her check for \$12.50,*

Boutique book formats:

tech platforms want optimal hardware fit,  
book designers want to maximize artistry.

*Cf.* Msft and browser standards

*gave her the address of their warehouse in Oakland*

loss of control of format standards that would otherwise buttress competition.

No MP3 for books.

*and a receipt to show the people there.*

publishers attempt to re-assert control of market pricing and distribution channels as they steadily lose control over new product production.

agency pricing ...

*By the time she'd collected the book, it was afternoon.*

Apple and Amazon represent something new: comprehensive, proprietary consumer-facing content distribution platforms.

*She skimmed through to find the line that had brought her all the way up here.*

“Agency pricing” cannot disrupt this.

Nothing publishers can do to re-direct  
the new dynamics of publishing.

*And in the leaf-fractured sunlight, froze.*

Any effort to leverage previous  
network mechanics only serves to  
create unintended consequences

*No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow,*

Obvious example – Libraries.

due to potential loss of revenue  
publishers are very reluctant to  
provide ebooks to libraries.



*ran the couplet,*

exercising one remaining factor:  
disallowing distribution of books  
but ...

*Who once has crossed the lusts of Angela.*

this permits Amazon to innovate  
in library lending practices through  
Prime subscriptions.

*"No," she protested aloud. "*

Basically, the problem for libraries is exactly the problem for publishers –

technologically induced displacement of prior relationships in the network.

“Hold Hands”, wickenden, Flickr



*'Who's once been set his tryst with Trystero.'*

in organizational fields like publishing  
that have had a long period of stability  
implicit rules formed to govern action

*The penciled note in the paperback had mentioned a variant.*

whenever (inevitably) conflict arises,  
the bluffs are not called, and warfare  
is usually avoided.

(consider *e.g.* Wylie v. Random House –  
agent and publisher worked it out)

*But the paperback was supposed to be a straight reprint of the book she now held.*

one can see this in technology:

patents are *usually* cross licensed -  
not worth divisive outright wars if  
players hold equivalent hands.

*Puzzled, she saw that this edition also had a footnote:*

widespread lawsuits typically signal  
a breakdown in normative practices  
within an organizational field

(this would *never* happen to a research university ... )



*According only to the Quarto edition (1687).*

as in today's mobile phone tech wars,  
one day AG and AAP are best friends,  
the next they are suing each other

*The earlier Folio has a lead inserted where the closing line should have been.*

*author / agent / publisher / retailer*

the central publishing industry  
possessed a self-referential set  
of linear interactions of actors

*Then where, Oedipa wondered,*

digital transformation replaces roles with functions which can be located anywhere.

e.g.: no typists or typing pools now – everyone enters text into machines.

*does the paperback I bought at Zapf's get off with its "Trystero" line?*

as industry, publishing is lucky  
it has laid claim to an obvious  
higher-goal:

disseminating information

*Was there yet another edition,*

this reference point acts to  
reduce friction, mitigating  
damage from rent seeking  
(or it did)

*besides the Quarto, Folio, and "Whitechapel" fragment?*

but networks break when powerful  
new entrants encounter a previously  
stable field disrupted by technology.

*The editor's preface, signed this time,*

It is this “asteroid from outer space” characteristic that makes publishing raw and exposed for the first time in decades

*by one Emory Bortz, professor of English at Cal, mentioned none.*

- Apple
- Amazon
- Google
- Facebook



*She spent nearly an hour more,*

Not concerned with historical relationships,  
seeking profit in disruption, and with a *wildly*  
different understanding of their competition.

*searching through all the footnotes,*

Out-of-field (technology) disruption entails radical change in the org. field's participants and ultimately products.

*finding nothing.*

Transmedia and interactive ebooks are examples of technology-enabled arts that the old industry couldn't accommodate.

*"In the text that I go along with personally," said Bortz,*

Absorbing external disrupting agents into prior business relationships is not feasible; those networks are long gone.

*"that other couplet has the last line suppressed."*

Attempts to re-gain control by  
exercising the levers of the past  
generates unanticipated outcomes.

*The book in the Vatican is only an obscene parody.*

The locus of relationships  
for corporate control has  
fundamentally shifted.

*The ending 'Who has once crossed the lusts of Angelo'*

The distinction for entrant firms is that they are monetizing traffic, ultimately to drive the purchase of other goods.

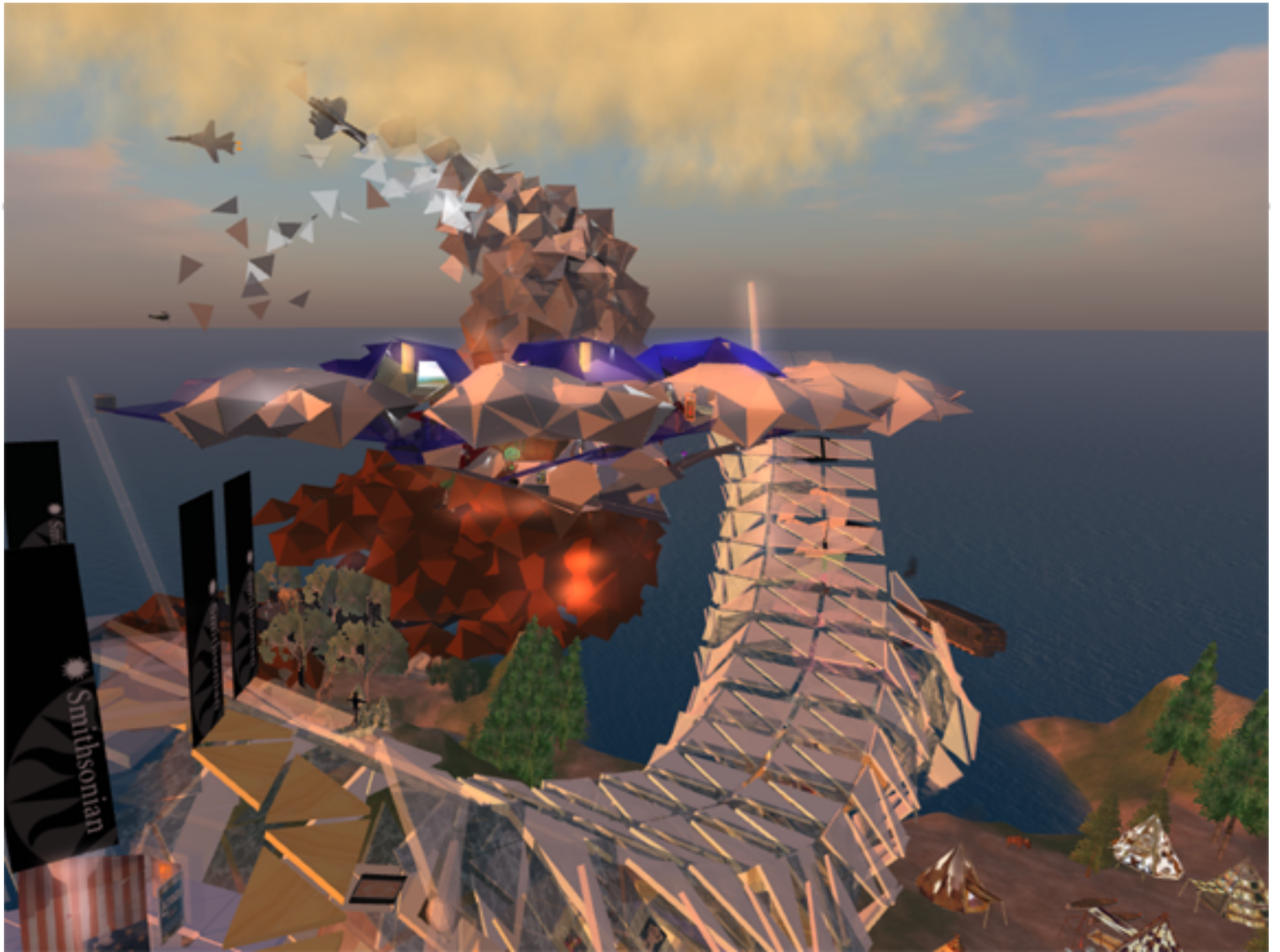
*was put in by the printer of the 1687 Quarto.*

We cannot reclaim a stability that existed in a network among firms that no longer exists.



*The 'Whitechapel' version is corrupt."*

Instead of responding to publishers, think about how to generate community profit from the disruption in existing networks.



Thanks.

peter brantley

director, bookserver project  
internet archive

@naypinya (twitter, gmail)

The Crying of Lot49  
- Thomas Pynchon, 1963

*He that we last as Thurn and Taxis knew*

*Now recks no lord but the stiletto's Thorn,*

*And Tacit lies the Gold once-knotted horn.*

*No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow,*

*Who's once been set his tryst with Trystero.*