Content

Selected essays on Technology, Creativity, Copyright, and the Future of the Future

by Cory Doctorow

Tachyon Publications, 2008. 224pp. £12.50.

The name of Cory Doctorow will be familiar to many who take an interest in all things related to life on the Web and information freedom in particular. He is perhaps best known for being co-editor of the technology website Boing Boing (a site that my work Web filter was sufficiently concerned about a few years ago that I had to explain to my manager what I was up to).

"Content" is a collection of his work from 2001 to 2007 broadly covering the topics of copyright, Digital Rights Management (DRM) and the impact of the Internet. It combines mostly short pieces published in the physical and virtual presses. The book is an easy and often entertaining read.

There are some great essays here. Doctorow makes discussion of copyright far more palatable than is often the case. There are thought-provoking pieces on eBooks, online tagging and the roots of wikipedia (remember Everything2?). The case for reducing the restrictions placed on sharing of digital content through DRM, licensing and legal wrangling is well made.

The book does suffer from the way it has been assembled. A number of the essays are repetitious with topics and examples just gently reshuffled. In some cases there is a feeling of shifting audiences with the degree of background knowledge assumed varying. The book also faces the same issue as any work dealing with current technology in being instantly out of date. There is no mention of Spotify. Plenty of Wikipedia editorial argumentation remains just around the corner. Pirate Bay is not yet a political party and so on.

I would love to read a book of new material by Doctorow on the topic. I will definitely be looking out more recent articles and watching a few recordings of him speaking on YouTube. In line with his ideas on content Doctorow has made the full text of this book available online (note that the URL may trigger Web filters, though the content is fine). I would be happy to recommend dipping into it in this fashion, though I am less sure that it merits a physical purchase. Read Chapter 10 (Giving it away) to see why Doctorow would be more than happy with that conclusion.

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Books in the Digital Age

The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States

by John Thompson

Polity Press, 2006 480pp. £19.99

I was interested in reviewing this book because of my changing role at work. Having moved from subject librarian to digital assets, I am keen to get my hands on anything that will help with the transition. Although somewhat daunted by the size of the volume, just over 400 pages long, not exactly made for beach reading…, and the close typeset makes skim (or dipping in) reading near impossible! Having said that, once read it was so informative that these concerns became minor irritations as I grappled with understanding an industry that was new to me.

As an industry, publishing has been changing as technological advances allow the mechanisation of many of the technical processes involved in publishing. The changes are considered from the industry itself, from academia and for society at large. Thompson is in a good place to comment, as he was Director of Polity Press and is both academic and practitioner. However there is not that much around that allows you to get a useful overview and review what is happening (and what may happen) in that industry. This books goes a long way to dealing with that void. Although repetitive in parts, the volume is well arranged and thought through, and constitutes the first major study of book publishing.

There are four parts to the book: the publishing business; the field of academic publishing; the field of higher education publishing and the digital revolution. Complemented by over 60 tables and figures, it seeks to provide a summary of the large-scale changes that have affected the industry since the early 1980s. Of interest to academic librarians is the decline of the scholarly monographs market

Of specific interest to UKeiG members is the section on the digital revolution and more directly the chapter on the hidden revolution: reinventing the life cycle of the book. This