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Paper Proposal: Material Cultures Conference

Bindings: Digital Literature and the Materiality of the Book

“In the next century there will be no more books”, wrote Lyotard in 1983¹, adding his voice to those of numerous other influential thinkers and writers, all prophesying the demise of print in the face of information technology. “What if”, wrote Derrida “the Book was only, in all senses of the word, an *epoch* of Being (an epoch coming to an end ... an end which would multiply, like a final illness, like the garrulous and tenacious hypermnesia of certain moribunds, books about the dead book)?”² Despite such proclamations, however, the fact is that the early twenty-first century has not so much seen the end of the book as a diversity of extensive and ambitious attempts to re-imagine the form.

This project and its stakes are of central importance in two fields of contemporary practice, which may otherwise seem almost diametrically opposed, namely digital literature and artists’ books. Digital textuality plays upon notions of immateriality to reconfigure the book, while artists’ books self-consciously explore the material properties that conventional reading practices have conditioned us to ignore. Drawing on numerous examples, and attempting to draw out the links between parallel developments in these forms, this paper raises two inter-related questions: it asks how the form of the book has impacted on the way in which the possibilities of digital textuality have been imagined, and conversely, it asks how contemporary developments in digital textuality have impacted on the material and cultural logic of the book.

¹ Lyotard, J-F. *The Differend*, 1983 p. xv.

² Derrida, J. ‘Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book’ *Writing and Difference*, 2001 p. 94.

