

Book as URL

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hugh mcguire

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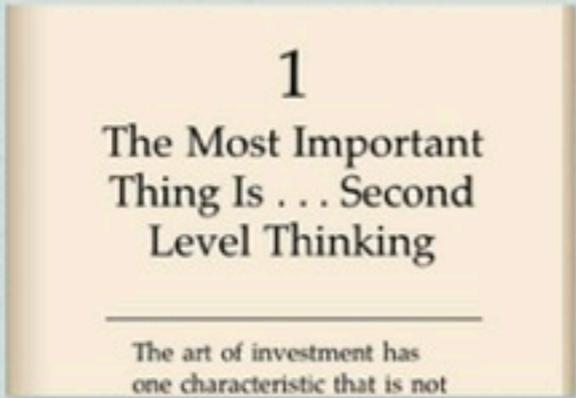
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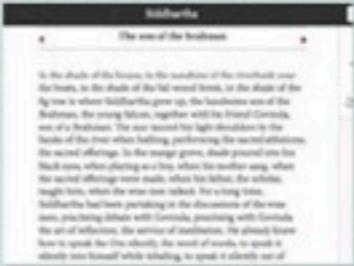
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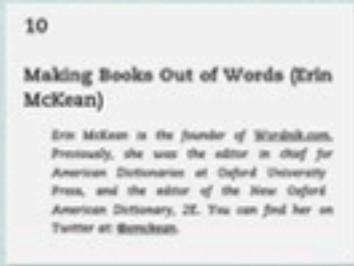
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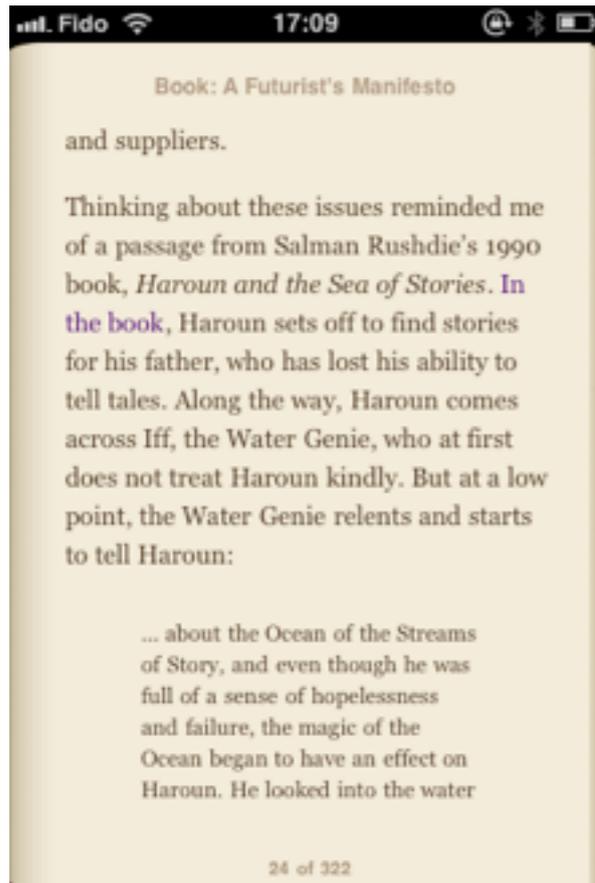
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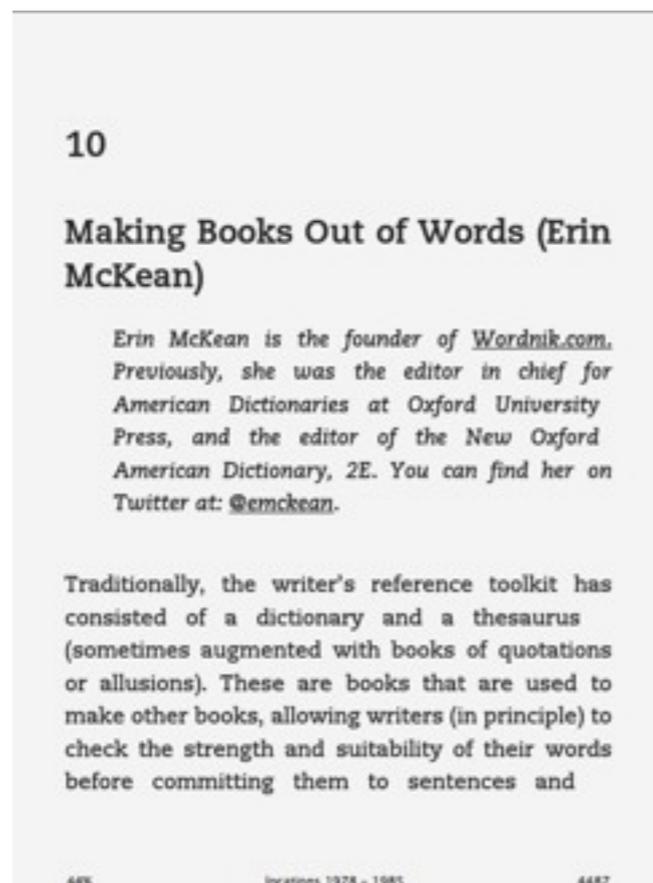
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82 part one. The Setup: Approaches to the Digital...

- Content without well-defined form (Formless Content, Fig. 1 7.1)
- Content with well-defined form (Definite Content, Fig. 2 7.2)

Formless Content can be divorced from layout, reflowed into different formats, and not lose any intrinsic meaning. Most novels and works of nonfiction are Formless.

When Danielle Steele sits at her computer, she doesn't think much about how the text will look when printed. She thinks about the story as a waterfall of text, as something that can be poured into any container. (Actually, she probably just thinks awkward and sexy things, but awkward and sexy things without regard for final form.)

Content with form—Definite Content—is almost totally the opposite of Formless Content. Most texts composed with images, charts, graphs, or poetry fall under this umbrella. It may be reflowable, but depending on how it is reflowed, inherent meaning and quality of the text may shift.

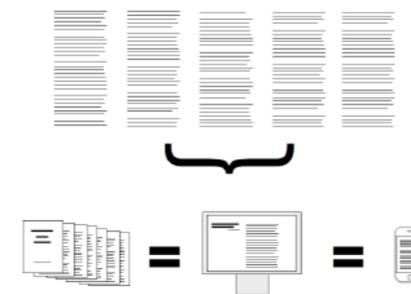


Figure 7.1. Formless Content—Retains meaning in any container

Designing Books in the Digital Age 83

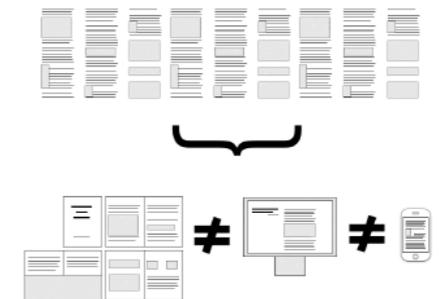


Figure 7.2. Definite Content—Shifts with the container

You can be sure that author Mark Z. Danielewski is well aware of the final form of his next novel. His content is so Definite it is actually impossible to digitize and retain all of the original meaning. *Only Revolutions*, a book loathed by many, forces readers to flip between the stories of two characters. The start of each story is printed at opposite ends of the book.

Working in concert with the author, a designer may imbue Formless Content with additional meaning in layout. The final combination of design and text becomes Definite Content.

Edward Tufte provides an extreme and ubiquitous contemporary example of Definite Content. Love him or hate him, you have to admit that Tufte is a rare combination of author and designer, completely obsessed with final form, meaning, and perfection in layout (see Fig. 3 7.3).

In the context of the book as an object, the key difference between Formless and Definite Content is the interaction between the content and the page. Formless Content doesn't see the page or its boundaries; Definite

- Dashboard
- Text**
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- Add New Front Matter
- Add New Back Matter
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Sample Book Front Matter Chapters Back Matter Part

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Dedication	You		Published	Edit — Delete
Epigraph	You		Published	Edit — Delete
Author's Preface	You		Published	Edit — Delete
Foreword	You		Published	Edit — Delete
Introduction	You		Published	Edit — Delete
Add Front Matter				

General Styles Tests	Author	Comments	Status	Edit — Delete	Export
A Chapter with Long, <i>Uninterrupted</i> Text	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
A Chapter With Text and Simple Headings	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
Standard Layout and Styles Test Page	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
Add Chapter					

Chapter Heading/Metadata Tests	Author	Comments	Status	Edit — Delete	Export
Chapter with Chapter Author Name	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
Chapter with Subtitle	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
Chapter with Subtitle + Author	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
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Add Chapter					

Footnotes, Pullquotes, Textboxes, Images	Author	Comments	Status	Edit — Delete	Export
Footnotes, Links, Pullquotes	You		Published	Edit — Delete	
Textboxes	You		Published	Edit — Delete	

Manage Themes

6

Chapter with Subtitle + Author
 This is a subtitle for this chapter
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 + **Author**
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Luther
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You must know, then, that the above-named gentleman whenever he was at leisure (which was mostly all the year round) gave himself up to reading books of chivalry with such ardour and avidity that he almost entirely neglected the pursuit of his field-sports, and even the management of his property; and to such a pitch did his eagerness and infatuation go that he sold many an acre of tillageland to buy books of chivalry to read, and brought home as many of them as he could get. But of all there were none he liked so well as those of the famous Feliciano de Silva's composi-

Chapter 3

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eat. "I would gladly eat a bit of something," said Don Quixote, "for I feel it would come very seasonably." The day happened to be a Friday, and in the whole inn there was nothing but some pieces of the fish they call in Castile "abadejo," in Andalusia "bacallao," and in some places "curadillo," and in others "troutlet;" so they asked him if he thought he could eat troutlet, for there was no other fish to give him. "If there be troutlets enough," said Don Quixote, "they will be the same thing as a trout; for it is all one to me whether I am given eight reals in small change or a piece of eight; moreover, it may be that these troutlets are like veal, which is better than beef, or kid, which is better than goat. But whatever it be let it come quickly, for the burden and pressure of arms cannot be borne without support to the inside." They laid a table for him at the door of the inn for the sake of the air, and the host brought him a portion of ill-soaked and worse cooked stockfish, and a piece of bread as black and mouldy as his own armour; but a laughable sight it was to see him eating, for having his helmet on and the beaver up, he could not with his own hands put anything into his mouth unless some one else placed it there, and this service one of the ladies rendered him. But to give him anything to drink was impossible, or would have been so had not the landlord bored a reed, and putting one end in his mouth poured the wine into him through the other; all which he bore with patience rather than sever the ribbons of his helmet.

While this was going on there came up to the inn a sowgelder, who, as he approached, sounded his reed pipe four or five times, and thereby completely convinced Don Quixote that he was in some famous castle, and that they were regaling him with music, and that the stockfish was trout, the bread the whitest, the wenches ladies, and the landlord the castellan of the castle; and consequently he held that his enterprise and sally had been to some purpose. But still it distressed him to think he had not been dubbed a knight, for it was plain to him he could not lawfully engage in any adventure without receiving the order of knighthood.

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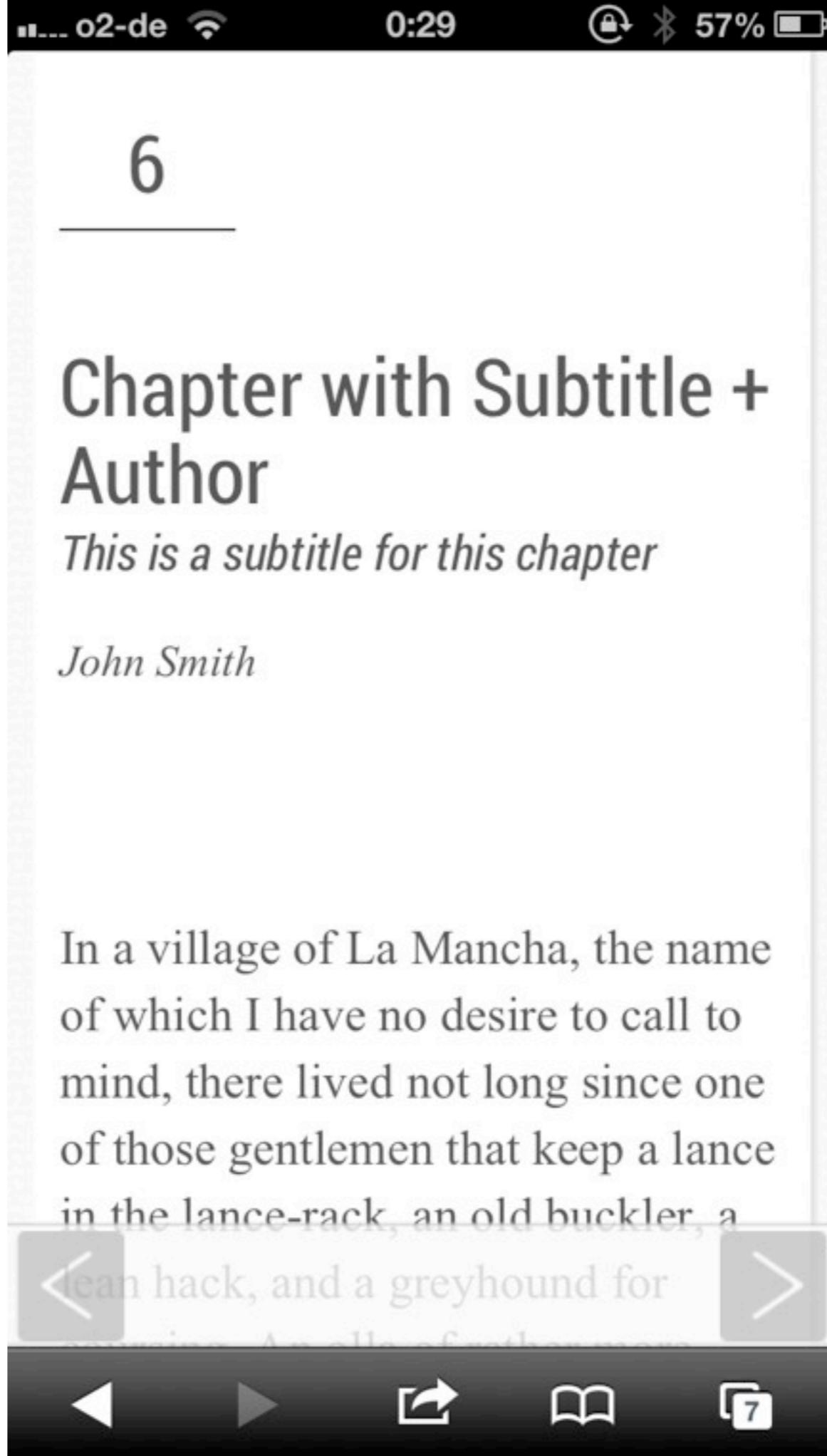
Home



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Tablets & Smartphones



A proposal:
10 Recommendations?
Dreams?
Ideas?
for
the Book as URL

1. Every book should have a persistent URL, something like:

<http://publisher.com/isbn/title-by-author>

2. Every book should live as structured data online.

3. Every book should make ONIX-like top-level metadata available through an open API, eg:

- cover image
- title
- author
- descriptions (one line, 50 words, unlimited)
- keywords
- pub date
- BISG categories
- etc.

so far so good...
actually HarperCollins, Pearson, and
Random House have apis that do
this kind of stuff ...

4. Every book URL should pull in additional "external" metadata -- through APIs from external services, eg:

- reviews from "official" sources + review URL
- reviews from readers (goodreads, facebook, twitter)
- data from libraries/librarians
- external "about the book" URLs (wikipedia etc)
- external "about the author" URLs (wikipedia, author's web site, etc.)

5. The book should aggregate the conversation about the book:

- pull in highlights & comments from open annotation systems (eg Readmill ... and others who open their data up)... ideally linked to the occurrence in the text.

6. Allow porous web access to the book:

- modelled on NYTimes paywall (and Google Books) ... allow links into the content itself, and readers the ability to read X% before paying.

7. Enable linking from one book to another book

- even more ideally, with links to the text in those books
(which can be built if those books have APIs).

8. Real time analytics in the back-end

- what is popular & with whom

9. Expose all Tables of Contents and Indexes (in structured format) to the web

- while we are at it, expose: lists of tables, figures, images
- and expose those tables, figures, images as well

10. Provide API access to all of this

Is this hard?

Not if you use a good web-
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repository

Not if you use a good web-
based content
management system/
repository

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