



Blossom

BOOK HOUSE

in 2027

*A journey in finding the future of a second hand book store
in an era of e-books*

Peter James published his novel 'Host' on two floppy disks in 1993.

But he was ill-prepared for the **"venomous backlash"** that would follow.

Journalists and fellow writers berated and condemned him; **one reporter even dragged a PC and a generator out to the beach to demonstrate the ridiculousness** of this new form of reading.

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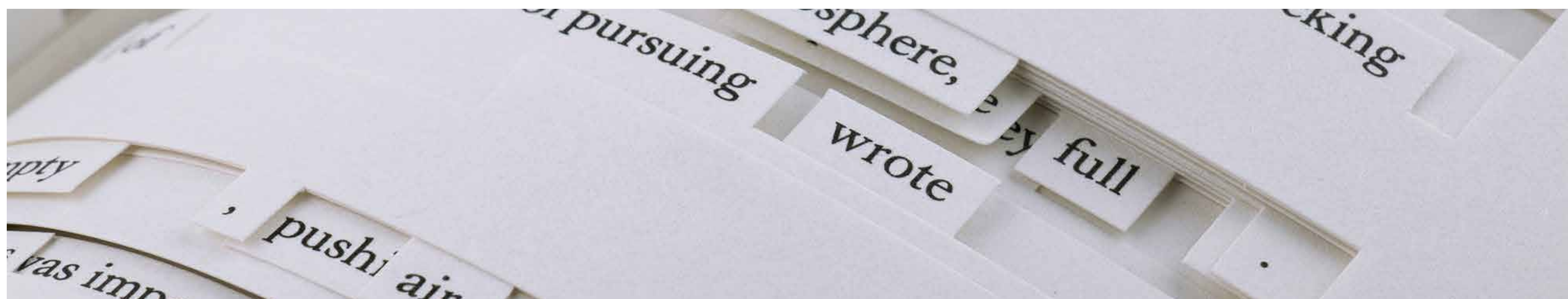
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Overview

This project is the result of my end of fifth semester examination charette at Srishti Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Bangalore, while pursuing my undergraduate degree in Design.

Through this charette, we were prompted look at the rise in machine intervention at workplaces by picking up a specific workplace and observing the changing patterns at the said workplace.

We were then asked to conform a stance on the various man-machine possibilities of the future and speculate a final vision for the chosen workplace in ten years from now.

Considering Various *Workplaces*

I naturally started by thinking about various workplaces that could be analysed for the project.

Various factors were considered - accessibility, scope for intervention and alignment to specifications mentioned in the brief.

1. *Udupi Restaurant*

Pros : Interesting customer/worker dynamics.

Cons : Their busy work process and my lack of any connections in any establishes restaurants might lead to some *accessibility issues* and hinder a true analysis.

2. *Lakshmi Timber Depot*

Pros : Extreme scope for machine intervention as *their methodologies are dated and obsolete*.

Cons : Might constitute as an *“easy choice”* on my end. Their future, ten years form now, is possibly some timber depots ten years ago.

3. *Apple Bengaluru Office*

Pros : Would be interesting to understand the working inside the office of possibly the *biggest tech company in the world*.

Cons : Might face *problems of accessibility* and permissions. The entire *system* might overwhelm me with its *magnitude*.

4. *CitySproutz Event Management*

Pros : Don't have an office. All their work happens through networking/online tools. So from that point of view they're *already working in futuristic ways of collaboration* and it could be interesting to speculate a future for such a firm.

Cons : Primarily *based out of Mumbai*. Our brief called for us to find a workplace in Bangalore.

5. *Srishti Library*

Pros : The oncoming *era of E-books* provides for an interesting opportunity to envision the future of libraries.

Cons : The *workforce involved is pretty minimal* and work cycles are relatively small.

6. *Blossoms Book Store*

Pros : Same, as for Libraries.

Cons : Relatively *smaller workforce*, but better than libraries; same goes about the work cycles.

Final Workplace

Further deliberation by weighing in various factors of feasibility and completion of the project within the given time line of the project, led me to decide my final workplace.

Alongside is the rationale that led me to it.

I finally decided on going for *Blossom Book Store*.

I'm a *avid book reader myself* and felt like that could further boost my insights and analysis.

Besides, the fact that in the face of an *era of E-books*, the very idea of (second hand) book stores might become obsolete, added an extra layer of challenge for me to not only speculate the future of the workers there, but *the future of the work itself*, as well.

The system by itself wasn't that elaborate for me to be overwhelmed by it, and *the key problem* - making sure the book store indeed has a future, ten years from now - was both *interesting and challenging enough*.

Pre Research

After deciding on my final workplace I got to doing a bit of data collection about it through various *online means*.

The following are the results of that research.

- ***Blossom Book Store*** or ***Blossoms*** as it is commonly called, was started in **2001** by a former engineer, Mr. ***Mayi Gowda***.
- Mr. Gowda originates from a small village in Karnataka. He cited his interest in reading books and a small book business he operated in his home village as the reasons for leaving his IT job and starting this business.
- The original store was a 200 sq. ft. establishment on ***MG Road***, which has now grown to a **3500 sq. ft. store** in the same area.
- The stores hosts a collection of around **2,00,000 books** and is the ***largest*** independent bookstore in India.
- ***In 2011***, owing to stiff competition from online stores, Blossoms too ***entered the online market*** but closed down the online store after two years due to a poor response.
- Blossoms has a ***tumblr account*** by the name, ***'overheardatblossoms'***. It posts collection of short snippets of conversation that customers overheard at Blossoms.

Site Visit & Employee Interview

On *31st October 2017*, I visited the store for an *on-site analysis* and in the hopes of *interviewing an employee*. I'd called them the earlier night and informed about my visit and luckily they agreed to letting me interview them as well.

On the day of the visit I was unable to find Mr. Gowda himself. But the head cashier, Mr. Mukund, seemed more than happy to talk to me.

Alongside are some key parts of the *transcription* of my conversation with him.

- **Mukund :** The store started about 17 years ago. It has two branches. The Church Street branch is about two years old.
About 70% of the books are used/second hand, the other 30% are new. New books are sourced from the publishers while the old books are collected from various vendors across the country. We also have a 'Buy Back' scheme wherein we buy books from our customers at half the rates they bought it from us. That's about it I guess, do you have any questions I can help you with?
- **Nitish :** How many employees work here, in total?
Mukund : *Eleven....*
- **Nitish :** I read somewhere you started on *online store*, what happened to it?
Mukund : We didn't get a great response so we *had to close it*.
- **Nitish :** Do you provide any delivery services within Bangalore?
Mukund : Yes, *for bulk orders. We deliver it ourselves.*
- **Nitish :** What is the typical work cycle old?
Mukund : Like I said old books are sourced from various vendors across the country and we keep getting them regularly as part of our 'buy back' scheme. The books are then checked for their quality and priced based on the quality, their rarity and the demand. We shelve them then based on the existing shelf categories and that's about it.
- **Nitish :** What about the new books?
Mukund : New books are bought directly from publishers. We then enter them into our inventory software. Shelf them based on categories and that's it for them.
- **Nitish :** Can you tell me more about this software?
Mukund : It's essentially an *inventory software by LogicSoft*. It is primarily aimed at keeping *inventory, maintaining databases and also allows for some basic analytics* as well.
- **Nitish :** What are some of the problems you face as workers, here?
Mukund : Maintenance is a big issue. People pick up the book from somewhere and drop them off somewhere else. Finding books, then, becomes a big problem. Even otherwise, searching for books is a problem because of such a large collection. Also some people occasionally ask for reading suggestions/recommendations, but we can't seem to give the best suggestions, so that is another area of problem.
- **Nitish :** Are there any risks/problems to the business itself?
Mukund : Because of e-books and all that, our business is going down. Also competition from online stores is another issue.
- **Nitish :** What other ways do you plan on expanding your business to?
Mukund : We're certainly going to try our hands on running off our online store. And we're also getting into *merchandises*, etc.

Product Cycles at Blossoms

Alongside are an essential description of the work cycles for new and used books at Blossoms. The information has been extracted from the employee interview.

New

Old

Books are bought directly from book publishers.

Inventoried into the central software/database.

They are then shelved in to pre-categorised shelves.

Sale of books.

Sourced from various vendors across the country. Bought as part of their 'Buy Back' scheme from customers.

Quality check conducted to look for any missing pages and miscellaneous damages.

Books are then priced based on the quality, rarity and the demand of the title.

They are then shelved in to pre-categorised shelves.

Sale of books.

Prominent *Workplaces* *Problems* at Blossoms

Alongside are some of the key employee issues/problems as they emerged from interviewing Mukund at Blossoms.

Maintenance

"People pick up the book from one place and drop it off somewhere else. It becomes very difficult for us to then find the books again."

Searching Books

"We house over 2,00,000 books - new and used combined - it's a serious headache finding a particular title in this collection.

To add to that - our old books are not even entered into the software, so we don't even know if a certain title is available or not."

Suggesting Books

"Some people occasionally ask for reading suggestions/recommendations, we try as far as possible based on the genre they tell us but we can't seem to give the best advice because most workers here are themselves not avid readers. so that is another area of problem."

Key *Areas of Inquiry*

The following is a brief list of key questions I am hoping to answer through the scope of this project.

My further research and exploration, therefore, has been targeted as such.

1. Will printed books exist in the future?
2. What do trends suggest about the future for e-books?
3. How will e-books change in the future?
4. What is it that make a certain category of readers still prefer printed/physical books?
5. What are the various ways that libraries/book stores adapting to these trends?

Secondary Research – *What Does the Future Hold for the Reading Industry?*

I referred to various articles online to understand the different schools of thoughts that run for the future of reading.

In the following pages, are the key insights obtained from these readings.

‘5 Key Trends in the book Market’

By : Sophie McNeill
November 2015

- In 2015, 72% Americans read a book in any format. Out of this **63% in print and 27% in e-book** format.
- Young Adults (aged 18-29) more likely than elders to read books.
- Average number of books read in an year are greater for women (14 in an year) as compared to men (only 9).
- **Trade publishing revenue down by 1.4%** from 2014 to 2015.
- **20% rise in number of indie bookstores.**
- **50% Americans own a hand-held reading device** like a tablet/e-book reader.

BBC future : ‘Are Printed Books Really Disappearing?’

By : Rachel Nuwer
25 January 2016

- “If printed books become a thing of the past, it may affect how we think.”
- Peter James published his novel ‘Host’ in 1993 in two floppy disks. Faced popular backlash.
- **“In 1992, I spoke to CEOs at probably five of the seven major publishing companies, and they all said ‘This has nothing to do with us. People will never read on screens’,”** says Robert Stein, founder of the Institute for the Future of the Book and co-founder of Voyager and the Criterion Collection.
- In 2007 Amazon released Kindle.
- **2008-2010 - e-books sales up by 1260%.**
- 2011 - popular book publishers declare bankruptcy.
- In the past few years **e-book sales have plateaued around 30%.**
- This **number will go up as e-book technologies advance.**
- Onset of a **‘social reading experiment’** bought on by e-books - distances between writers and readers will be blurred - they can digitally interact to discuss any line of the book.
- **Idea of individual reading might become obsolete** for the generations to come.
- **Books, however, themselves might not disappear completely. They will continue to exist as an artform.**
- But the locus of intellectual discourse will shift away from print.
- **The eventual and total demise of print, is, however, inevitable.**
- It will get harder and harder to understand why anyone would print something that’s **heavy, hard to ship and not customisable.**

‘Why I still love printed books.’

By : Lev Raphael
4 September 2017

- **Production Quality :** E-books with illustrations and maps could get a little wonky. Not the case with printed books.
- **Physical Presence :** “Tend to forget I have a specific e-book, printed books are clearly visible in print form.”
- **Nostalgic Value :** Memories/Experiences of various libraries in childhood and bookstores across the world.
- **Immersion :** “Feel more attentive to a book than an e-book.”
- **Experience :** Smell, Feel and Weight of a book.

‘Why Printed Books will Never Die.’

By : Josh Catone
16 January 2017

- “There’s something about holding a book and **the visceral act of turning the page.**”
- **Physical Beauty/Paratexts** : Book covers, printed illustrations.
- **E-books are only good for people who only care about contents, have vision problems, or are ashamed of what they are reading.**
- “For people who truly love reading, only print can satisfy.”
- **Books have provenance**, a history : “40 year old metro ticket falling out a book...”
- **Printed books are collectible.** “You don’t own an e-book, you’re merely paying for the right to access it.”
- “Having a book on shelf is like having a print by one of my favourite artists.”
- **Printed books might have a similar futur like vinyl records.**
- Nostalgia
- **Not a zero sum game** : Printed books don’t have to disappear for e-books to flourish, and e-books don’t have to be the only choice.
Maybe it’s just that simple.

‘What will become of the paper book?’

By : Michael Agresta
8 May 2012

- Books will be cheaper and more easily accessible.
 - **Hypertext, Embedded Video and other undreamt of technologies will give rise to new narrative possibilities.**
 - What works for printed books :
 - smell, feel, weight.
 - **the culture of book loaning/lending.**
 - **trophy collection of books (for me and other to see)**
 - **marginalia**
 - Printed book will eventually loose value as traditional vessels for text and information.
 - **Other qualities will gain importance - role in literal history, inimitable design possibilities, potential for physical beauty.**
 - Paratexts : Illustrations, book covers, type-settings, etc.
- Gérard Genette writes about paratexts in ‘Paratext : Thresholds of Interpretation’,
“[A]lthough we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book.”
- One of literature’s greatest themes has been itself.
 - **Writers will gain access to speculative art market for printed books.**

An Overview of the System in 2027 – *A Macro Approach*

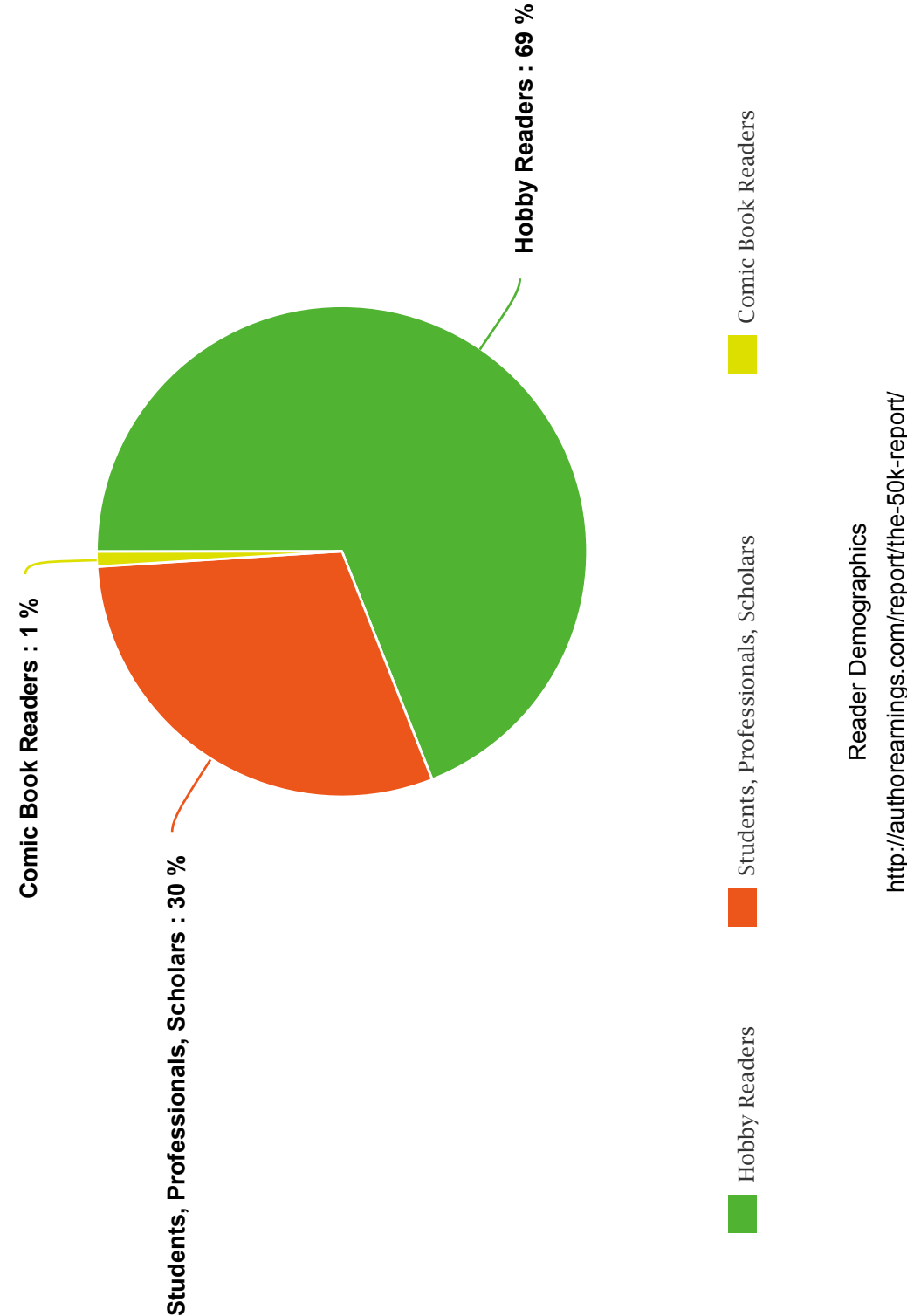
In this section I'll attempt to shower a little light on what I think the system might look like in 2027 for the reading industry.

I will begin by listing all the possible stakeholders and then move to speculating how their personal interests will change till 2027.

Stakeholders/Actors

1. Readers :
 - Students
 - Professionals
 - Scholars
 - Hobby Readers
 - Comic Books Readers
2. Distributors/Sellers :
 - Bookstore Franchises
 - Indie Bookstores
 - Online distributors of e-books
3. Writers
4. Publishers

Readers



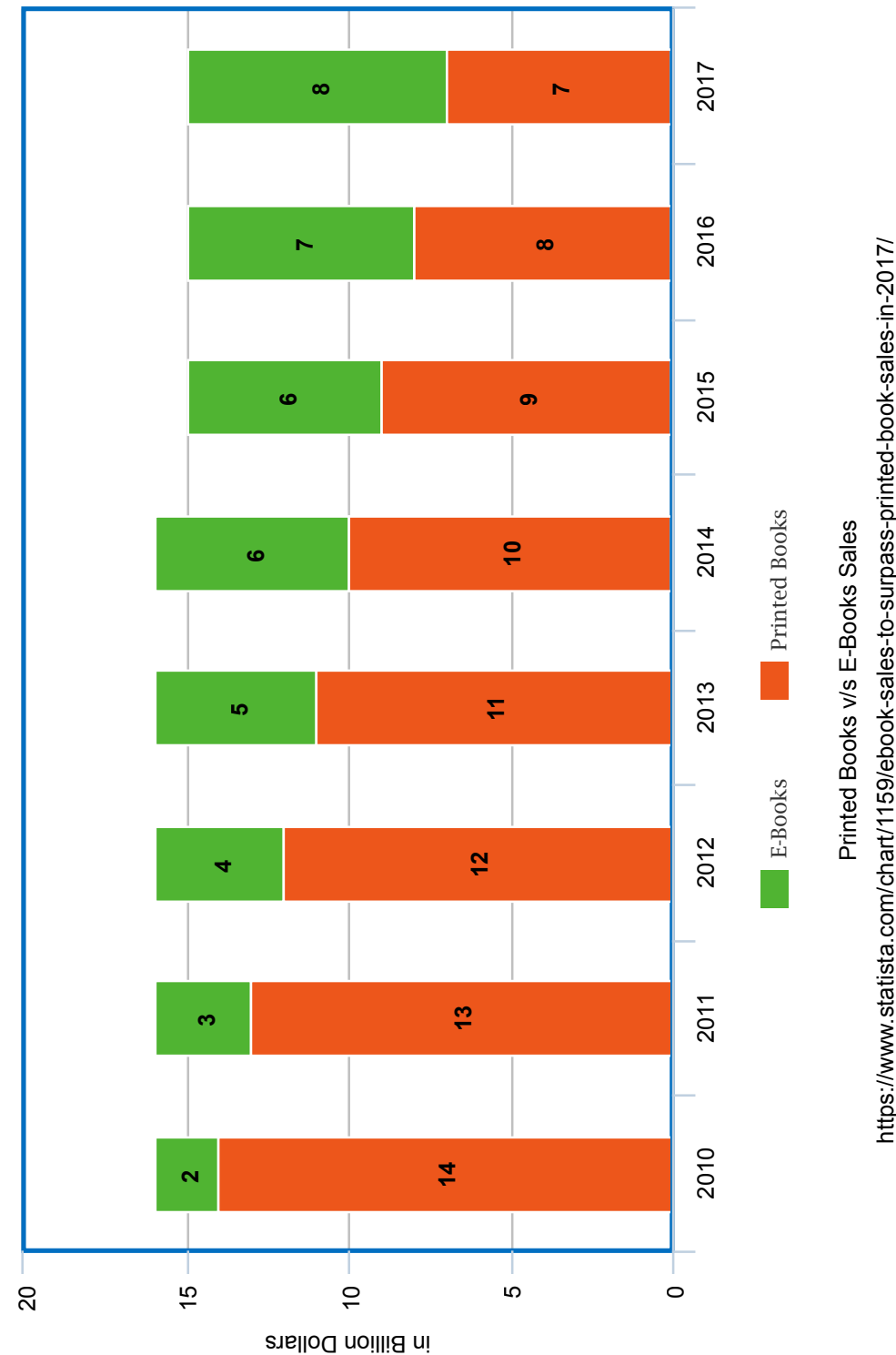
The following is a pie-chart of the percentages of various kinds of readers that make up our entire reader force.

Some of these categories might overlap for a given reader, for example a school student might also be a comic book reader, but **our aim is to categorise and group the various purposes that drive book reading more so than the readers themselves.**

It is my **hypothesis** that **the user preference** (between e-books and physical books) is not constant across all purchases. **For a given purchase, the purpose of the purchase is more consequential.**

<i>Students</i>	<i>Professionals</i>	<i>Scholars</i>
<p>Students at various levels of education, that are buying textbooks solely for academic purposes.</p> <p>E-learning is already a reality. Scientists/Designers alike predict a future for children without any textbooks.</p> <p>Heavy school-bags would become things of past. Their school benches would have inbuilt screens with all the educational material and they'll use the same to write their notes and exams.</p> <p>These will be synced to another e-slate at their homes for them to learn/revise their learnings.</p> <p>Teachers will grade their tests sitting and home and can keep a constant track of their progress.</p> <p>The students will also be able to use this interface to communicate to their teachers and help clear any doubts.</p> <p>The trade-offs with cost in terms of one time investment will be low when compared to long term educational costs in terms of the textbooks the children buy in the long run of their education.</p>	<p>Working Adults.</p> <p>They have a sole content based relationships with books.</p> <p>For this class I hardly think making the switch to e-books would be a big wonder.</p> <p>Chances are they'll already be owning an e-book reading device and for reasons of convenience and easy access they'll go for e-books.</p>	<p>Teachers, university professors, educational professionals, scientists, et al.</p> <p>For the same reasons as working adults/professionals - for them too I predict a future with e-books.</p> <p>This category is a personal confessor of hoarding thousands of books at a time.</p> <p>E-books will enable them to save space, in addition to providing them with powerful annotation and research tools.</p>
<i>Comic Book Readers</i>	<i>Hobby Readers</i>	
<p>This particular class in particular has had a loyal following, which has only grown in the past few years due to the advent of live action cinematic releases.</p> <p>So one possibility is certainly that the industry of printed comics might stay strong or even grow.</p> <p>But an equally probable outcome is that it might dissolve entirely. The advent of interactive comics, enabled by audio and snippets of animations, could cause a shift in reading patterns.</p>	<p>This is the only class of readers that has stayed loyal to the media of printed books and the only one to show any signs of hope to continue to do so in the future.</p> <p>But the practice might change from a functional to an aesthetic-al one.</p> <p>Reading printed books won't be for the experience of knowing the contents but as exercising an art-form.</p>	

Distributors



The following is a comparative bar graph of e-book sales v/s printed book sales.

The numbers seem to have given their verdict about the future of printed books.

But **contradictory statistics exist showing physical book store sales staying static and the number of indie book stores rising at a steady 20%.**

Let's unpack why that could be.

The following is a bar graph of constituent percentages of book stores sales and how they've changed through the years.

Statistics might suggest that bookstore sales to be static but a simple glance at overall bookstore sales is not enough for us to speculate a future. We have to read between the lines to see the further components of these sales and the trends within them.

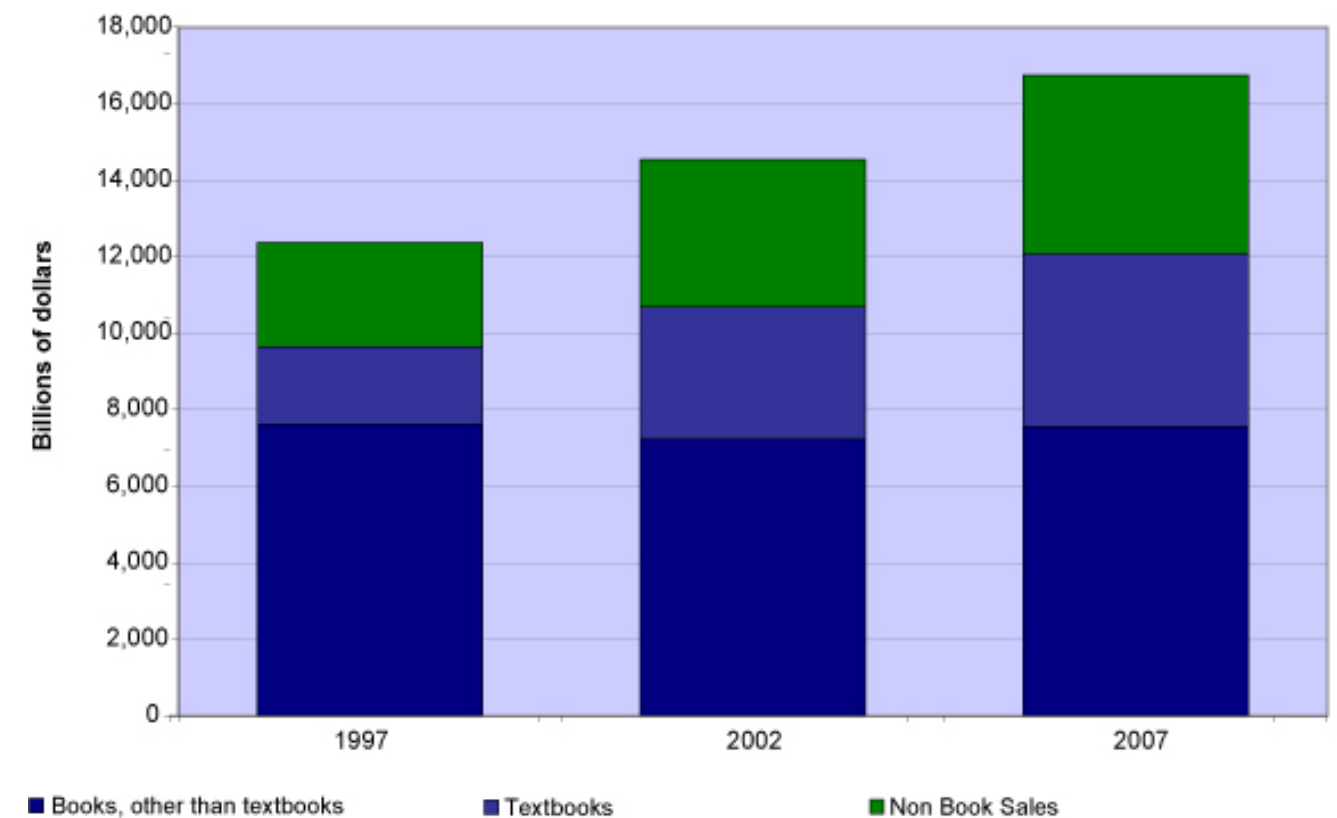
This data is a bit dated (**Amazon released Kindle in 2008 and e-book sales rose by 1260% from 2008-2010**) but regardless descriptive of the trend.

1. The trends clearly suggest that **printed book sales have plateaued and will clearly go down** in the coming years as e-books find more acceptability.
2. The **increased sales from textbooks cannot be relied upon** for reasons stated in the previous page. The future of education has no seats for print and it can be comfortably said that sales from textbooks will eventually die out.
3. **Non-book sales seem to be growing**, and this market is here to stay. Regardless of how the readers might consume the media/contents of a fiction, the cult itself will always continue to buy the merchandise in one form or the other.

So the reality is that book stores will continue to rely upon non-book sales for sustenance. But **the question is, is it truly a book store that sells everything but books?**

Book Store Sales – Book Sales vs. Non Book Sales

Retail book store sales of books are separated out in this chart from their sales of all other items.



SOURCE: These data come from three years worth of *Economic Census* reports titled "Retail Trade: Industry Series: Product Line Statistics by Kind of Business for the United States." The *Economic Census* is produced by the U.S. Census Bureau and may be accessed online. A link to the source material is provided at the bottom of this blog post.

Publishers

As e-book sales keep rising, the ***business of publishing will undergo a ground-up change. Small print-houses could entirely vanish whereas the Big Five might shift to the e-book business.***

Amazon will stay at the help with its Kindle and its large collection of e-books, but many more e-reading devices will be trying to give it tough competition.

The trend has been beautifully surmised in these lines :

“It will get harder and harder to understand why anyone would print something that’s ***heavy, hard to ship and not customisable.***”

Rahcel Nuwer
(BBC future : Will printed book disappear entirely?)

Writers

Primarily - ***writers are only concerned with one thing - to get their works read!***

The medium would hardly be of any significance.

Besides, an era of ***e-reading would mean easy publishing of their works and access to a wider audience.***

Technologies like ***hypertext, embedded video and other undreamed of technologies will give rise to new narrative possibilities.*** Like always - creators will race towards finding ever new ways to utilize these.

But still, ***a small school of writers exists who’re not only concerned with the content of a book, but the entire art that the packaging of the content has become - the book itself.***

These writers are increasingly gaining more control over the paratexts that are associated to a book to the minutest of the detail.

Michael Agresta correctly identifies this trend in her article ‘What will become of the printed book’,

“

When we speak of illustrations, book covers, typesetting, and other features specific to a given print edition, we’re analysing what the French theorist Gérard Genette calls ***“paratexts.”*** In Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, he writes, ***“[A]lthough we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present,*** to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book.”

Recently, ***several young writers have further cultivated paratextual elements*** like punctuation, typesetting, and binding as arenas of authorial expression. Dave Eggers prints body text on the cover of his book; Mark Z. Danielewski uses colored, upside-down, and Braille fonts; Salvador Plascencia crosses out words and blacks over whole columns of text. Laurence Sterne’s 1759 novel Tristram Shandy, with its blank, black, and marbled pages, stands as an early precedent for these sorts of explorations.

Such groups could continue to foster and promote the printed media for some time; and albeit to some success as well, though how long, one can only wonder.

Final *Position*

This is my final position on the future of (second hand) book stores through the purview of Blossom Book Store.

The stance is solely based on the alignment of my individual moral and ethical compass.

But the position itself has been observed only after thoroughly understanding the trends and what the future pragmatically provides for, and trying to steer that in a desirable direction for the Blossoms business and its work force.

All the trends seem to point in the same direction - ***print is going away***. Maybe not in ten years, but soon. Thus for a book store, the steps they take right now (or in 10 years) have to be targeted for a longer sustenance.

We do know for sure that ***there is business in cult merchandise***, enough to keep the book stores going; but I can only imagine what'd happen if everyone chooses to boycott something that holds such ***massive importance to the literal history***. Lucky for the book stores, there are many more who echo my lament. We have the statistics to prove the same. So there's your audience.

But one has to treat the practice more carefully. It is no more to be considered a functional vessel of text, but an art-form in exercise. ***The focus has to shift from 'books' to 'reading'***.

At the same time, efforts have to be made to gradually ***cater to the changing audience*** and through honest & meaningful design interventions, come up with ways for books and e-books to exist together.

The space itself has to undergo a change of identity from a storehouse of books to a cultural centre that practices that art of reading, writing and information sharing.

Vision for 2027

With the principles mentioned in the previous page as guidelines for a long term future plan - the following are some of my recommendations for Blossoms for a ten year time-line in mind.

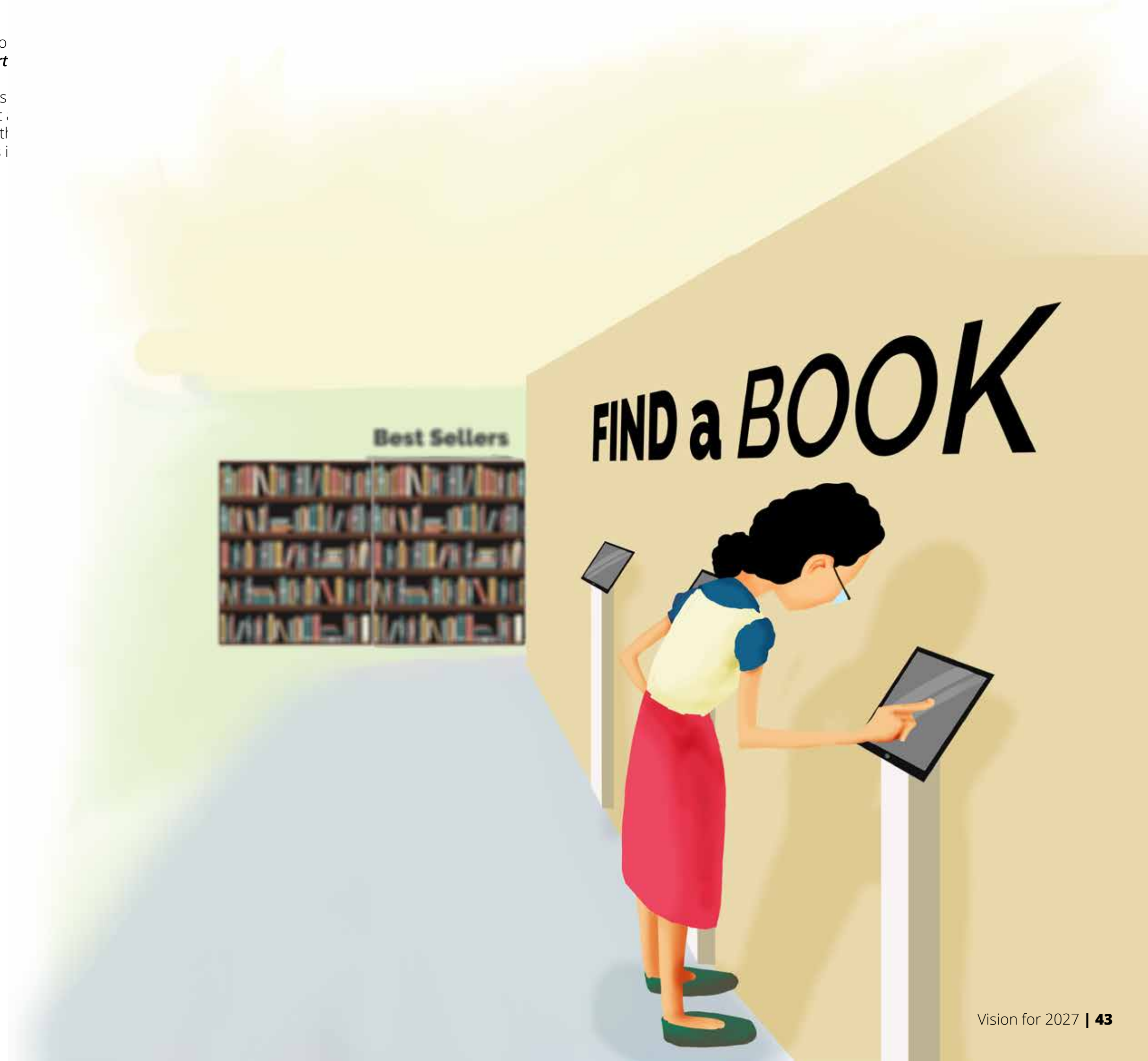
The recommendations have been made keeping in mind the technical and economical constraints for feasibility as well as the execution times required to bring aboard these changes.

Prominent *Workplace* *Issues*

I will begin by addressing the prominent workplace issues as identified in a previous section of this booklet.

This problem could be solved by a **Book' Zone/Port**

This could be as a tablet/ipad that shows the genre you like, the rate a few titles in your genre, and you titles.



Maintenance & Searching Books

Sorting this problem has to begin by an inventory for second hand books, in addition to new books as well, on a central DBMS (Database Management System).

RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) and BLE (Blue-tooth Low Energy) technologies are becoming better and cheaper by the day.

RFID sensor as thin as a business card and as small as the size of a chewing gum, are a reality now.

RFID sensors are coming out with ever wider ranges and ever accurate distance detection.

In somewhat ten years, I visualise a future for bookstores wherein by the virtue of each book having an RFID tag attached to it and the entire store mounted with a few RFID trackers - book management would become a problem of the past.

Finding books would simply mean entering the title on an central interface which points you exactly to where a book is.

And ***solving the problem of customers dropping off books in different sections would mean a weekly maintenance round of the store guided by the interface, informing where to pick up books from and where to drop them off.***



Transforming *Identity*

Now I will move to some of the recommendations I have for the store itself and try to equally draw focus on the changing roles of the work force as well.

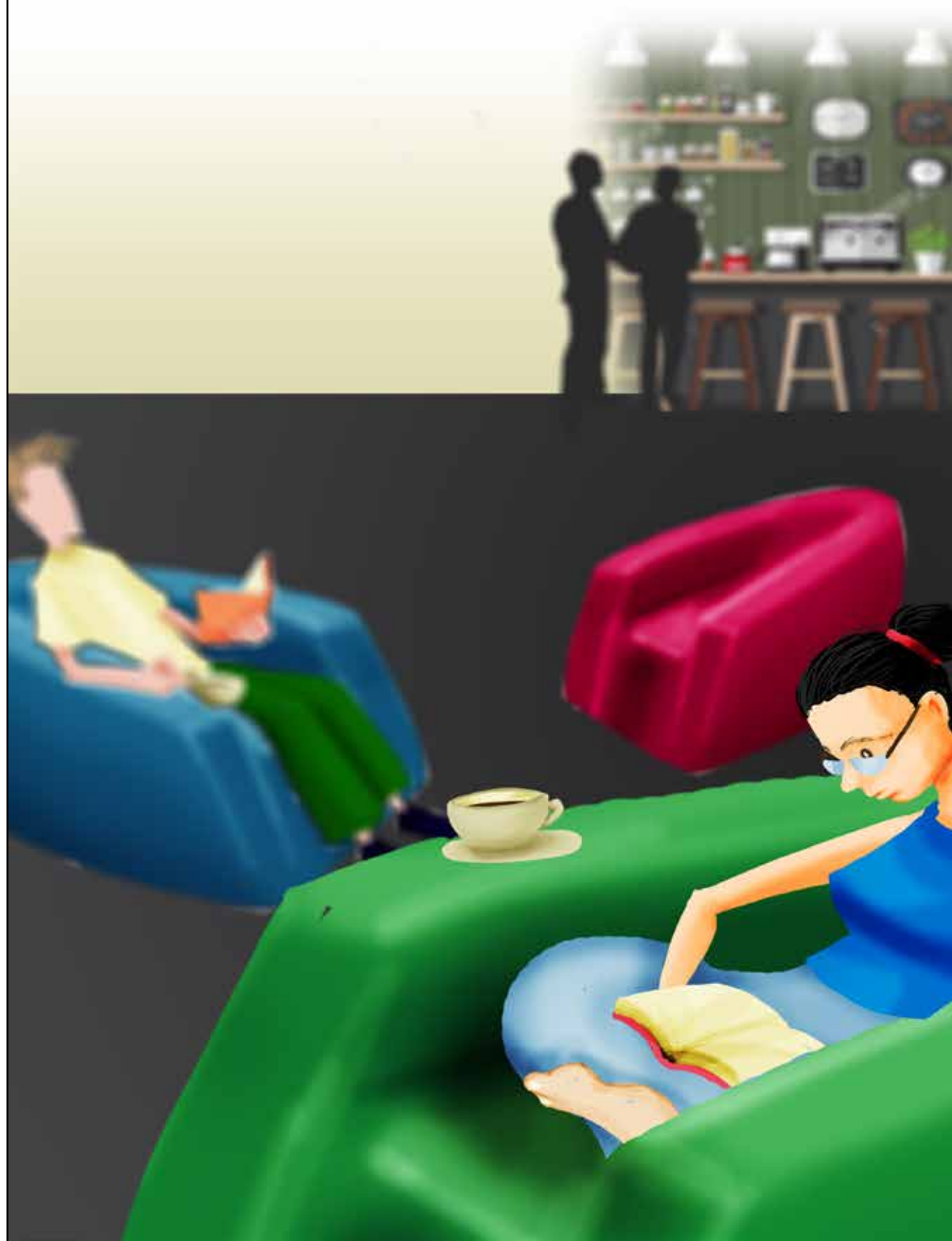
Centre of Reading

Provisions have to be provided for in-house reading.

The space has to promote reading books and discussing about them. It has to work towards helping readers find like minded readers.

It has to ***grow as a place where people not only come to buy books, but also to spend time reading them.***

This will offer secondary ways for Blossoms to monetise the space itself.



Centre of Writing

Along with reading, the place has to promote writing as well.

It has to emerge as a local hub to promote writers and provide for writers an ***easy means to put their work out to the world and access to a regular and appreciative audience.***



Centre of Information Sharing

This section mainly pertains to the audience who have a sole 'just-business' approach to books.

They regard books as information carrying devices and if information is presented to them in a better manner they'll go for the alternative.

Therefore, efforts have to be made to cater to this audience as well.

Simple **interventions like internet accessing devices** can be employed with free access to otherwise paid journal/article hosting portals for a minimal one time cost or as part of long term membership based fees.

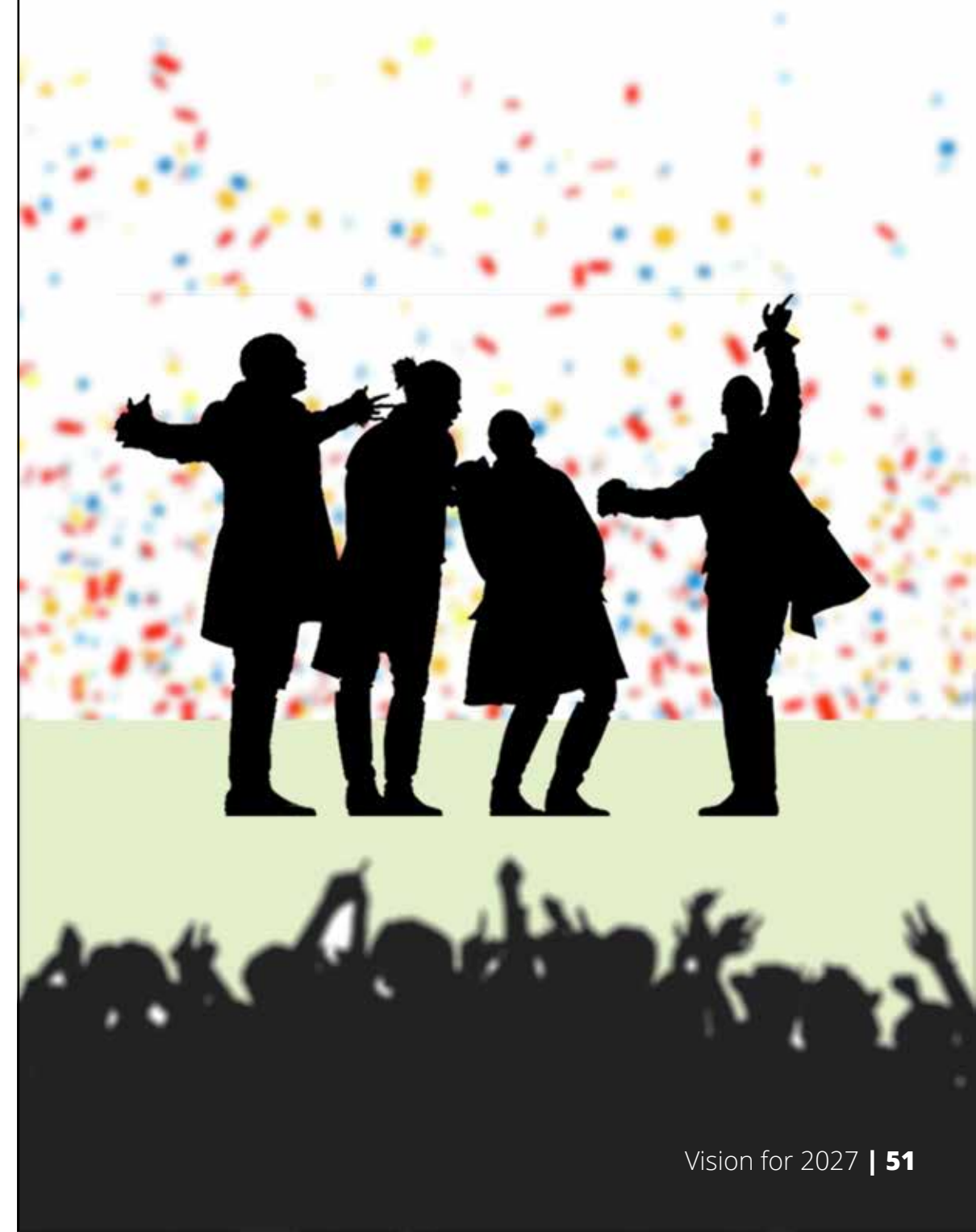
Emphasis will have to be made to **promote a mix media style of research** combining online resources and physical books on site.



Centre of Performance Art

Forms of performance arts - like poetry, theatre and narrations - are an integral part to the literary domain.

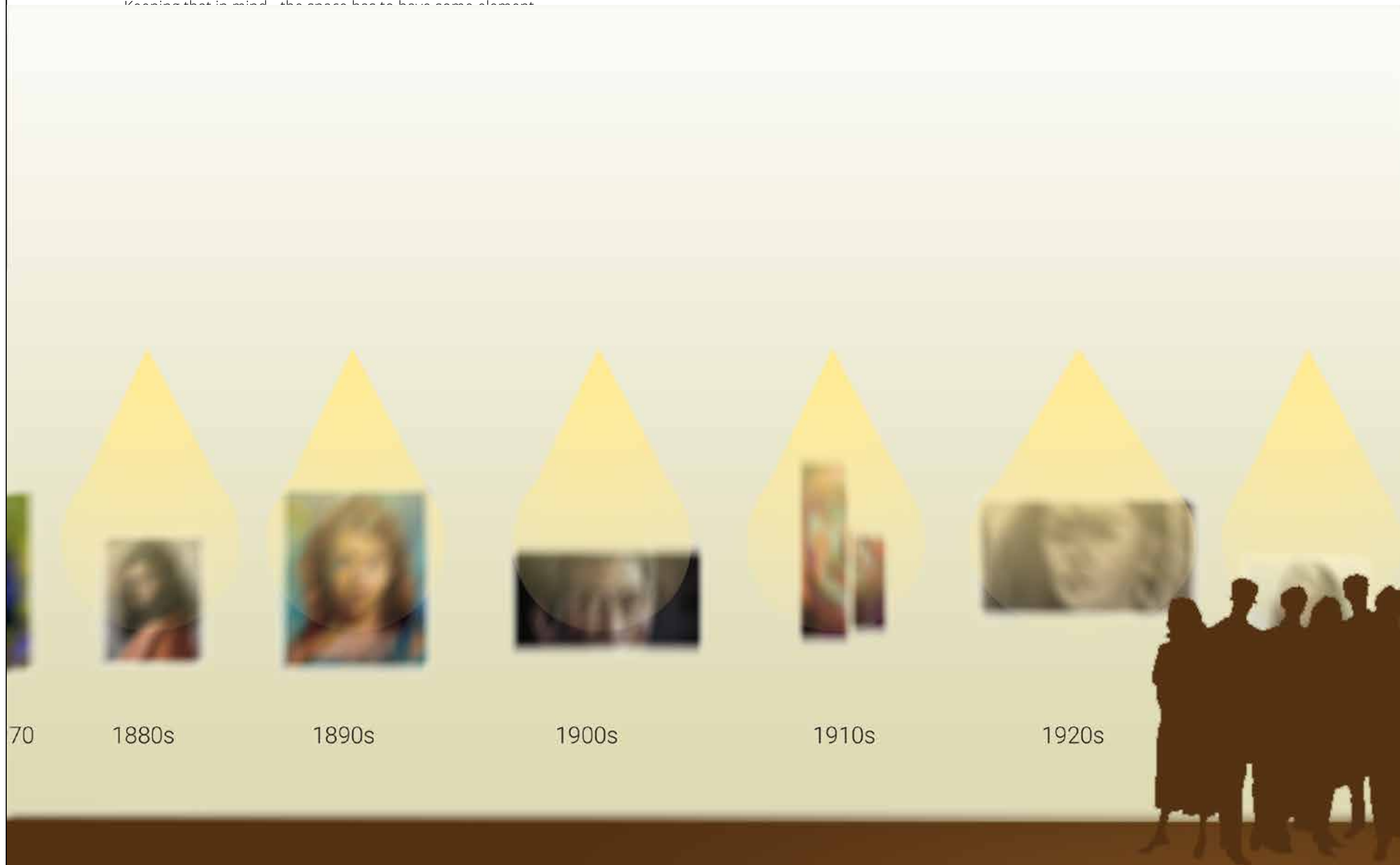
They also share the traditional value that printed books represent, thus **promoting such forms of performance arts would imply promoting the roots of literature in the print media.**



Museum of *Literal History*

Print has a ***rich history*** which forms a large part of the celebration of the media by the loyalists.

Keeping that in mind, the space has to have some element



Final *Reflection* & Afterthoughts

I have to begin by saying that the project had a bit of a shaky start. I was quite ardent on finalizing on a workplace that wasn't a traditional office space like IT offices. And being an avid reader myself, the idea of speculating the future of the reading industry seemed exciting.

But it didn't go down too well for me.

I am certainly ***quite happy with my research and my understanding of the macro system*** ten years down the line. But I ***failed on two*** (and albeit) ***primary objectives*** of the project - first, to focus our future speculation on the workforce or work-practices of the chosen place; and second, to speculate in terms of man-machine combinations.

I attribute this failure to two key factors. One would be ***lack of time*** - I certainly feel my process was alright and had I been given one more week, I would've been able to target/present some recommendations in a manner that fits the requirement of the project. The other would be the ***nature of my workplace*** - it was a challenge for me to simultaneously think about technological advancements and trying to keep intact an archaic business such as that of printed books.

Acknowledgement

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Nothing is learnt if
everything works perfectly.

For learning to take place,
failure must occur.

: *Don Norman*
The Design of Everyday
Things

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