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The Magic of Reading: iPad, Book, and Kindle

Posted on **October 1, 2010** by **Admin**

Editorial By Jeffrey Barlow



Having been an enthusiastic user of the Kindle, if not of Amazon's restrictive usage policies, I have written several times upon the advantages—and the disadvantages—of the appliance [1]. I have now had an opportunity to read upon the iPad and here compare the two experiences.

There are limitations to this review. I focus here entirely upon the question of using the iPad as an electronic reader. To use the iPad solely as an electronic reader neglects all of its multitudinous other potential uses. Mine will let me look up Chinese characters, take dictation and quickly and largely accurately translate that speech into text, sooth me with a visit to a virtual koi pond, bring up Google maps, serve as a flashlight and let me read my email, all in gorgeous color on a screen much larger than my first computer, the supposedly-portable Kaypro. Every time I visit the iTunes App store, I find some new use for the iPad demanding an immediate download, though I confess my disappointment in not learning to play the saxophone in the last several weeks as I had hoped I would, with the aid of the Saxophone App.

Another limitation of my experience is that it is limited solely to the software which is packaged with the iPad, plus a downloaded App from Amazon.com©, amazonkindle [2]. There may be numerous better Apps in development and doubtless there will be some quick system upgrades which will solve some of my objections as well.

I used the iPad to read one of the books reviewed in this issue: Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows*. I relied upon my trusty Kindle in reading the other, Dan Chaon's *Eagerly Await Your Reply*.

This is perhaps an unfair review. To review the iPad with only the experience of reading one book risks attributing to it, problems which are due to my own unfamiliarity with the device, and perhaps not inherent to it.

As for all of these problems, surely one concern of any electronic reading device is the learning

curve required to use it. Most of us are intimately familiar with the use of a book [3], and we would certainly like to learn to use any electronic replacements for it in at least a few moments, and we would like it good-to-go out of the box, not following additional electronic developments.

With these caveats, let us begin. First, for me, as probably for most readers, the question of text legibility is very high on my list of desiderata. The iPad lets me select not only my own font size but also my text and background color, though the choices are somewhat limited. Nonetheless, if this was the only factor in selecting between the two, the winner is easily the iPad, because of its gorgeous large screen.

With a few moments use, however, an important limitation becomes obvious: The iPad is heavier than all but the weightiest of books, and far more so than the Kindle which is lighter than even many paperbacks. Even carrying the iPad in my Man Bag is a noticeable burden. I often even forget that my Kindle is in it. Advantage, Kindle.

The controls of the iPad, however, are very easy to manipulate. One swipe of the finger and the “page” changes just like a real book, though much faster. The image reforms even as the page is turning and there are no ghost images or lags as some readers say they experience on the Kindle. The iPad, unlike the Kindle, can be held in landscape format making reading even easier. All controls are touch controlled in the familiar iPhone format, and presumably can ultimately be updated.

The Kindle controls initially struck me as clunky. There are several buttons which creak when depressed and do not seem to have any positive positions so that I sometimes fail to depress them sufficiently far, leading to a fatiguing sort of press that again, calls forth the plastic creaking sound. The question of text availability may be an important one for many readers. Although there are comparatively few formatted for the iPad at present, with the Kindle App, you have access to the entire Amazon.com© library. A reader can download a book on to his or her computer at Amazon or via the iPad with the appropriate account, just as on the Kindle. The App also permits you, as with the iPhone and the iPod, to hop between appliances, returning to the last page read each time, assuming that you have wireless access.

The battery usage seems more than adequate on both machines, so much so that I forget to charge sometimes after days of intermittent use and have to quickly do so. In each case access to a USB is all that is required. I find it convenient that the iPad uses the same familiar cord as does my iPhone and many other Apple devices, unlike the Kindle which requires a very small plug at the device end, somewhat like a miniature fire wire cable, which it may be for all I am aware.

The iPad immediately strikes the user as artfully designed and pretty in a functional sort of way, while the Kindle creaks when handled and seems designed to ultimately be recyclable. Of course, it now costs only \$139.00 and the iPad begins at \$499.00 and can easily be pushed over a thousand with additional memory and a few of those lovely Apple add-ons.

However, for all of these virtues, considered solely as a reading appliance, there are several real problems that make the iPad not quite ready for prime time, for me at least. These are probably issues that will largely face those making academic use of the machine.

For me, the really critical function of the Kindle is that I can underline text by manipulating a nib, not always an easy process but one I have easily gotten used to. These underlinings can be saved to a text file in most cases. (Some authors limit the total amount of underlining, presumably so as to limit possible piracy, with the end result that I often do not review their book.) These text files can be moved to my desktop and enable me to quickly cut and paste extended quotations from the text rather than laboriously hammering them in on a keyboard.

This distinction became really clear to me in writing the two reviews for this issue. Charon's book yielded a large text file with hundreds of underlined sections, but Carr's required reading the text while typing it in.

The iPad has a similar function, up to a point. A drag of the finger theoretically will place a pleasing yellow highlight over selected text, or, all too frequently several drags of the finger. Sometimes the drag will activate another command and the entire text will pop into some alternative function. Other times the placement of the finger accomplishes nothing; the screen simply refuses to respond. And then, providing that all of this has finally been accomplished, a menu will open up a few words of the highlights in a small central screen which requires scrolling through them to find the one you want; another finger stab (and another screen smudge) and you are taken back to your original highlighted text.

Despite the apparent clumsiness of the Kindle nib, it is an easy winner relative to the repeated motions and the dexterity required to manipulate the iPad, motions sometimes wasted when the screen just will not respond as ordered.

The final problem, however, is that there is not an apparent way to move the highlights off the iPad onto my computer; it cannot be reread and cut and pasted. I have found reviewing these text files in my Kindle or on my desktop are a wonderful way to quickly remind myself of even the details of a text underlined on the Kindle. The iPad is a non-starter in that regard.

I suppose that I now have three categories of books in my reading: books to be shared, which must necessarily be hard copy as the various e-book licenses are otherwise too restrictive; books to be read for review; these must be read on a kindle so that I can save text files of direct quotations; books to be read in color because of graphics or plates. In short, the iPad seems at present to be an adequate substitute for the coffee-table format.

It is difficult to say which of these problems are truly results of Amazon.com's formatting of the text, its App, or the iPad itself. I suppose we will have to wait for some system updates to the iPad to find out.

In the meantime, however, it is back to the Kindle for books I intend to review in *Interface*. My Man Bag contains a Kindle for reading and my iPad for all the other things it will do, and two cell phones; but that is another review.

Endnotes

[1] See: To George Orwell: It's the Kindle Baby, it's the Kindle!

At <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2009/04/article.php?id=68>; To George Orwell, II; Is It 1984 yet?

At: <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2009/05/article.php?id=71> and An Educator Reconsiders the Kindle at: <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2009/09/article.php?id=129>

[2] Go to: http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html/ref=kcp_ipad_mkt_lnd?docId=1000490441 for additional information.

[3] For those readers who are not, I recommend a quick visit to "The Medieval Help Desk," A Danish imagining of the problems presented to initial readers of the Book and to the early adopters who helped them at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueO0o8Bwsml>

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ONE THOUGHT ON "THE MAGIC OF READING: IPAD, BOOK, AND KINDLE"

Pablo Giza

on **January 30, 2014 at 6:15 PM** said:

naturally like your web-site however you need to test the spelling on quite a few of your posts. Several of them are rife with spelling problems and I in finding it very troublesome to inform the reality on the other hand I

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