



NEW FORMS OF WRITING AND READING REQUIRE NEW EDITION MODELS

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I. Reading, technology, market

The cyclical surveys on the performance of the publishing market periodically update us on the evolution of the relationship between book and digital book. As the Guardian remembers, UK market data released by the Nielsen Observatory in March 2017 show an increase in the sale of paper books, and a fall - in sales trends for the second consecutive year - in the development of eBook. Towards the recovery of paper is the production dedicated to the smallest (for Nielsen only 4% of that market is digital, compared to a 50% of the narrative) but the important news is that, despite falling and rising, both paper and digital are healthy. The eBook market, according to some commentators who are now declining for paperback, has gone from 18% in 2012 to 25% in 2015 and 26% in 2016. As the writer has repeatedly argued, therefore, we are not in the face of a struggle between a paper book and a digital book, but to an editorial ecosystem that is year-rounded and living with dynamic relationships between the parties. Another interesting fact is the preference of multifunctional readers such as tablets, at the expense of read-only readers like e-readers.

And from this point, we have to start to understand an often-overlooked aspect when dealing with the theme of the scholastic use of the digital books: their continuous evolution. In fact, as far as the paper book is concerned, it can be said that the book form is the same for a long time, not just as it can be said for digital books. This is for one and the same reason linked to the rapidly evolving digital systems, on the one hand, and on the other, for material and structural reasons, affecting the differences between formats, business strategies of key players on the market, responses and preferences of users, the resistances of some key sectors of the education sector and of the cultural environments in general, the policies implemented by governments and the choices of educative and training institutions.

For example, how many are aware - in the publishing, business, school and university world - of the potentials offered by so-called (digitally) increased books, enhanced books? Who has network experience knows that 'reading' is a practice that no longer has to do with linear reading of written texts: the same changes in the web - of its technologies, infrastructures and its social uses - have become used to us to a normal relationship with content made of text, images, sounds, videos, interactive elements, etc. On newspapers that invest more in hybrid forms of information production, we find articles that use interactive information, videos, and sounds for a long time. If you are thinking of not considering the paper model as the only one, the information has always been served with available supports depending on the historical moment: printed paper with text and then images, radio equipment, movie films, television, digital technologies and web. Books are progressively happening something like this: not just static texts and images, but a collection of content, streams, media forms, and different languages. This clearly implies a change in production practices and in the same conceptualization of 'writing', which increasingly becomes more complex.

Already in 2010, after the launch of the first iPad and with the opening of the store to developers, there were those who questioned the type of relationship between the book and the app. Alice for the iPad, a first interactive reworking of Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, made it hard for readers, authors, publishers, and experts to reflect on the potential of a reading boosted by elements traditionally alien to the reading practices themselves, or anyway associated with other media and media forms. There are those

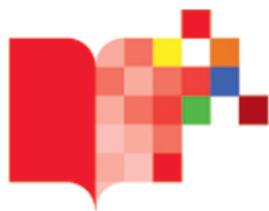


who talked about the "pop-up book of the 21st-century", those who reinvent the book, who are still mere endless spectacles to themselves (see here, here and here). The choice of Carroll's Alice was not casual, because it is probably the story that most easily - without too much resistance and, conversely, with curiosity - could be associated with the novelty and strangeness of the new type of reading proposed. The page format is not streaked, in Alice: the reader can browse the fifty-two pages of the book-app, interacting with twenty animated scenes, each taken directly from the original book and made 'active' through touch interface and gravity exploitation and motion sensors of the device. Someone tried to see in Alice nothing more than a game (almost the games were not serious!), Pointing out the distance from the literary model, yet in that app it's still the text to make it a master. If we think, we call 'books' also pop-up books, for the same reason. Moving the hands and the tablet takes on the original images of Alice: rotating the ceilings, falling and rolling objects, the protagonist changes size as in the movies, but we are always and still within the frame of the page, a typographical cage which starts to be shaken and made more fluid by the material support that makes it possible. Chris Stevens, co-creator of the app, said he chose to preserve narration and aesthetics traditionally associated with Alice's imagination, recalling that the craft that made the product possible is as important as the technology behind it (and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was born as an original handwritten product, now available here).

The close relationship between the materiality of the support and the associated media type does not seem trivial or secondary: technology has always worked as an infrastructure that can provide openness and constraint: valid for writing, printing, photography and cinema, as well as for music and digital ecosystems. It is in the possibilities inherent in the shades of openings and constraints that have played for thousands of years the game of social construction of communicative practices: producers and consumers have always negotiated and chose what was possible, sometimes privileging this or that possibility, sometimes sacrificing potential left unexpressed. This trend is also true of most eBooks in circulation today, often nothing more than 'traditional' books - that is, conceived, designed and written for the fruition we have been used by paper support - transposed in digital ('book' and not 'eBook', as is properly claimed by many parties).

Compared to what happened in other sectors, such as the music or the television, digitization of the publishing world and its products was less rapid. What is surely now fully digitized is, however, the whole process of editorial production: books have long been files that are stored and can be released quite quickly in the form of digital books or printed copies on paper. Files produced by authors and edited by publishers in digital form. What has happened in recent years to an industry - such as publishing - already very dependent on digitization but undoubtedly resilient? One answer was that of Chris Stevens, "Dad" of Alice for the iPad, but also CEO of the Atomic Antelope digital publishing company, was already responding a few years ago, pointing to the lack of attention of most publishers for digital versions of their catalogs. According to Stevens, the slowness of advances in typographical care of digital books results from aesthetic and cultural resistance of publishers based on the veneration of the printed page. It will be said that many readers share this attitude, and most of the time the recent increase in paper book sales is interpreted through the lens of the unique aesthetic of the printed book. It is true, however, that readers, as the story of the last ten years shows, have been more curious than publishers and more inclined to experience the advantages and disadvantages of digital reading, even if they were traditional books in their electronic version. Pushing the readers was probably also the lowest cost of digital books compared to their paper version: for a voracious reader, in fact, even a small savings on each purchased book can guarantee the purchase of other books (and we limit ourselves here to evoke the desire to practice reading without being judged, which has contributed to the fortune of some erotic and pornosoft bestsellers of the last few years).

On this issue, the United States lawsuit against Apple and five large publishing groups (Hachette Book Group, Lagardere, HarperCollins Publishers, part of News Corp, Penguin Group, Simon & Schuster, Cbs and Macmillan, part of Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrinck), condemned definitively in 2016 for setting up a cartel with the aim of forcing Amazon to raise prices for digital books. Since the end of 2009, Apple has begun to put pressure on publishers to prepare the ground in view of their entry into the e-book market: the Amazon-eBook model sold at a maximum of \$ 9.99, affordable for readers - not was well-



watched by many publishers, who succeeded with Steve Jobs's help to dramatically increase digital book prices, in some cases for more than fifty percent on a single title.

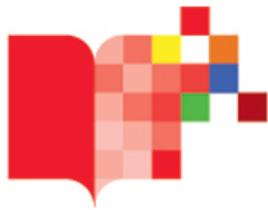
Another famous legal case related to digital books also saw the acquittal of Google, denounced by the Authors Guild, the oldest and numerous American authors' association, for alleged copyright infringement through the Google Books service. In 2004, Google had created a project to create a huge digital library through scanning more than twenty million books and was sued for copyright infringement not only by the Authors Guild but also by the Association of American Publishers, the most influential association of US publishers. With the latter, the Mountain View Company came to an agreement in 2012, winning two degrees of judgment in class action standing by the Authors Guild. For judges, the Google project is one of the activities to be considered fair use, and therefore legitimate use of content from which it also derives a "public benefit" for the company (the Google Books search engine does not show ads but just a link to buy books through various online stores, without percentage for Google itself). By creating digital versions of books where it's possible to search, Google makes available variable length sections in agreement with the authors (and completely free versions for non-copyrighted texts). Several US libraries - including the New York Public Library and the Columbia and Columbia University libraries - took part in the Google Library Project, also because not a few of the books scanned by Google were and are out of date for a long time.

The economic factor has also been regularly recalled by several commentators to explain the resistance of many publishers: the lack of adequate investments on the digital side would also be due to the lower profit margins on digital sales of books. Stevens and others argue that the very poor quality of many eBooks is based on the practice of outsourcing followed by many publishers: the digital book is conceived as a mere computing issue to be solved by outsourcing, often downward. There are so many digital books produced by programmers and developers (though not internal to publishers), characterized by unprofessional, hasty, and approximate designs and layouts. The most conservative and resilient actors accomplish the classic prophecy that is self-proclaimed: it would not make sense to invest in digital reading because it is a forcible practice, and because digital books are dysfunctional and aesthetically unpleasant objects. While it is true that programmers are not necessarily designers, recent history shows that the best digital products are often those of publishers who have made innovation a strategic business choice.

2. Opening and immersion in practices

In the social media history, the discourses of 'aesthetic-cultural resistance', however coveted by romance, have almost always been ideologically hostile to the change and the experimentation of new roads and new paths. We are here to remind ourselves of the hostility of a few exponents of the intellectual and cultural world towards the introduction of the typewriter, seen as the emblem of typographical mechanization capable of destroying the unity of word and speech, but preserved by manuscript. Of all, it is enough to cite Heidegger's invitations (taken from Derrida) for their symbolic strength: for the German philosopher the typewriter degraded the word by reducing it to a mere means of transport, a tool of commerce and communication. The device, snatching the word into the "essential domain of the hand," even allowed to conceal the manuscript writing and therefore the 'character', making all men look like. In such a view, the initial hostility towards the first typewritten letters is not seen as a normal reaction of distrust to something that is still unknown, but as a spy of the 'truth' hidden in the rejection of a depersonalizing technology. The codes of good manners, also changing in time and space, have ended up defeating Heidegger and owning the typed letters that they previously refused, reminding us among other things that even the typewriter - such as the pen of goose, the smartphone or the touchscreen of a smartphone - comes into the dominion of the hand and helps to redefine it.

Returning to digital books, and then trying to blow up the romantic ideological moods of the various aesthetic speeches, one wonders to what extent is the market today, trying to better frame some editorial choices. For example, if the distribution of a paper book alone affects about 55-60% of the cover price, because most publishers have not invested immediately in a digital market where the stores retain a lot more of advantageous 30%? One answer lies in selling mechanisms: as digital sell less than paper copies, digital books with their lower cover price are seen by the publisher as risky products. Resistance and open



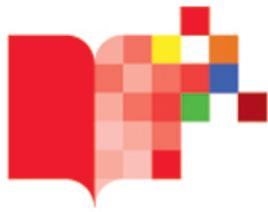
hostility towards digital takes shape in editorial policies that are far from beneficial for the reader: publishing houses that do not produce digital books, others that overly increase the price of electronic editions to encourage copying paper printers, and others who plan to release digital books only months after the release and distribution of paper versions. There have been many times the paradox of digital copies of the same book sold at considerably higher prices than those of paper copies.

Behind the ups and downs of the digital market of books over the past two years, there are choices, editorial policies and mechanisms that are not just about technical formats or technical shortcomings, as well as those who hastily titled "Farewell to the Digital Player". Similar choices, policies and mechanisms work in the editorial sector traditionally devoted to the academic and university world.

However, some of the overwhelming need to fully exploit the potential of digital reading has come in recent years also by the political decision maker, with some early timid directives of the MIUR concerning the Digital School Editorial and the direct involvement of the Associations of Publishers, and the 2013 Decree (full text and attachments here) devoted to "times and ways of switching from paper to e-book". Optional adoption of textbooks, or even non-adoption, has allowed leaders and teachers to decide independently whether to adopt texts produced by specialized editorial staff or to use other educational content. For some years, then, it is possible to adopt traditional paper books and digital content edited by editors in the Education sector, use digital texts and content made available on the network in free mode (OER, content with Creative Commons licenses), or use materials and contents produced by the same teachers or people who are interested in the school sector. If, from the legislative point of view, some courageous steps (albeit with some contradiction) have been made, what can really encourage the experimentation and exploration of the opportunities offered by digital platforms? What can be of help is surely a full and mature teacher's awareness, which can only go from a personal opening and curiosity path. If you are limited to following opportunistically the sirens of journalists and scholars who decree the death of digital books every time data shows a decline in sales, it does not make a good service to the profession being exercised, as well as to the people from whom that service depend. Only the real knowledge of the possibilities offered by the digital book - obtained through practice and thus through reading and fruition (and sometimes production) not extemporaneous - can lead to really conscious and useful choices. True, there are differences between formats, media, and software environments that make digital reading a reality, as there is a multitude of actors that pushes to impress this or that direction on the market. However, the difficulty of these situations has to be experienced and understood, and not rejected because it is too complex. The risk, otherwise, is to end up like Heidegger in front of the typewriter.

Reading digital books, trying to get used to digital reading, both linear and complex texts, does not mean using different tools to do the same things but living the cognitive and bodily space created by digital reading. If any communication space associated with the new media actually inscribes us in a precise environment of interaction with content and continual translation of those, then digital reading means acting and thinking digital. One can have an idea of unpublished paths open to the flexibility and constraints offered by digital reading environments only if they are immersed in them, without having to create fictitious absolutist oppositions between paper reading and digital reading. If enhanced books look something too cautious - neither books, nor games, nor apps - is perhaps because we still have little experience of other reading, and we continue to think in old patterns.

Traditional patterns are definitely useful, but not rarely are the lenses we look at and filter reality in a neutral way. For example, some of the 'scientific' researches of the last few years to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of digital reading in memorizing and understanding processes would be according to some scholars built on a background of misunderstanding: the data thus shows no presumed intrinsic nature of digital devices (among others, many and often very different), but nothing but the consequences of the expectations of the readers themselves (and the researchers who conducted those inquiries). In other words, our reading habits and our beliefs are closely related to the perception we have of interaction environments. Some research has revealed that students who perceive paper as being more suitable for "learning effortlessly" and screens as "quick reading of short texts, news, email, and notes" are the same that they tend to believe they can quickly read any text on screen with negative results in confirmation tests. Conversely, other research has shown that students already accustomed to a complex interaction



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with digital content show better results in selecting, filtering, and managing relevant information than those using digital spaces solely for news and chat.

For teachers and for those doing the same, the same thing happens more or less the same thing: not so much about the 'teaching reality' associated with digital environments is the result of very partial visions and the superficial use of the devices available to them. They are the most active and comfortable teachers in the different reading environments - analogue and digital - to be more aware and effective even in the didactic practices they implement. For example, only a teacher who knows what digital reading means may be thinking of creating paths where students not only read but also carefully create texts and digital books. These are complex cognitive actions that not only cannot be understood but cannot be imagined by anyone who has ever done it and does not experience it.

The differences between Kindle, Kobo and eBooks, between closed formats and open formats, between embedded multimedia content and content outside the digital book are things that only make clear to those who use these environments. The opportunities offered by networks such as MLOL School are more easily perceived if you have digital reading experience, or at least curiosity and not closeness to the subject: digital lending and open digital library become then more interesting terms, and the same concept enhanced reading seems less obscure. With Heidegger's peace of mind and his (in) understanding of the typewriter as an in-meaning and "no sign" device, poor reading that resumes today in those who still do not want to see opportunities unfold by different reading environments. If there is a possibility of enrichment of school-based reading practices, this resides in the effort and experience of a teacher, executive, digital animator or student - is open to experimentation and immersion in the deep spaces of digital reading.