



Typography and Education

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Print, Screen and Hybrid Self Publishing

Joost Bottema, Merz Akademie, Stuttgart, Germany
joost.bottema@merz-akademie.de

Abstract: Authors are self-designing and self-publishing texts as long as human beings read and write. Tools like typewriters and copy machines gave an impulse to the genre. Since the internet the possibilities multiplied, and now almost everybody is in some way a publishing author. Design-wise however, not all opportunities are taken. On the contrary, most of the many publication platforms, with their standards and limitations, just limit possibilities of visual articulation. This is a plea to reconsider print on paper, not as replacement but as part the publication process. In many ways, print and screen turn out to be mutual beneficial, especially within the field of self-publishing.

Key words: *Print design, Screen design, Self Publishing, Hybrid Publishing, Browsers.*

1. Screen and print publications have different advantages

Starting in the 1990s, printed books, magazines and the like, generally lost popularity. As a medium print it was, compared to the (then) new ones, seen as static, not-up-to-the-minute and associated with an ancient old and a maybe too-easy-understandable design-manufacturing-process ('everybody can cut and paste type'). However, more recently, some sort of printed publications, especially the ones where character and a distinctive design is involved, are treated with 'old' respect again.

Some of this respect is due to alarming discoveries in digital media. Contrary to the 'everlasting' paper, what you see on a screen is basically gone as soon as the screen is closed (or out of power-supply), and often, over time, stays gone: the content or customized settings might have been changed, or the program or app by which the information was generated is 'not longer supported'. The device itself might also be out of date or expired. While authors and designers generally are wondering (and are utterly worried) if their e-books, their blogs and other publications are seriously still readable in 10 or 20 years (even their text messages and postings in social media might be vanished sooner or later), something printed on paper proves to be surprisingly durable: books, printed 1500 years ago are still readable and independent from a valid operation system or any 'reading device' (apart from the eyes).

Besides durability, many printed publications acquired new respect for their uniqueness (for example expressed in 'exclusive', limited and/or refined editions), a rich and customized design, clear ordering of pages, smell, signs of aging, for appearing within their own borders and on their own material (not the one of the device on which it is displayed), in general, their being something with a certain weight and gravity.

Furthermore, a self published printed book or fanzine or pamphlet is free from rules set by companies who own the electronic platforms. 'They' allow you to publish without charge, but also allow themselves to place advertising beside or inside your personal messages, use the

data otherwise or submit restrictions about its content - and ultimately destine, or at least limit considerably, how it looks.

This would plead definitively to move back to print - but that of course would be too easy a conclusion, as of course there are still many arguments left to pipe text to a screen. Doing so, text can be reached by a world wide audience, interlinked, animated, updated, adjusted, commented, and so on. The text can also be customized by editors and/or readers to special wishes, and vary in appearance. All of these aspects were part of the appeal of the new media in the beginning and can still full fill their promise. So, because print and screen publications clearly complement each other, it seems obvious to look for hybrid-ways of publishing - to take the best of both worlds.

2. Composing and displaying text according classic principles

The 'rich design' of expressive text compositions is rooted in a long tradition. From the 1920s onward illustrious typographers/artists like Piet Zwart, Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, Max Bill and Karl Gerstner proposed and/or adhering successive theories, like new typography, elemental typography, functional typography and integral typography. First these 'rules' generally described restrictions in the first place ("less decoration!", "less variation!"), later they proclaimed more freedom. Since the 1960s typographers finally pick their position between restriction and freedom themselves. Gerstner famously characterizes this as: "The designers freedom lies not in the margin of a task but at its very centre. Only then is the typographer free to perform as an artist when he understands and considers all the parts of the job in hand. And every solution he finds on this basis will be an integral one, will achieve a unity between language and type, between form and content." The unity he mentioned has to be "reached in different phrases, each successor including its predecessor."

What is happening, when you compile a text message? Just to refresh our memory: different signs, different letters become a word. Different words become a sentence. Ultimately all

independent design-problems and -functions are integrated as well. While this may be also true for 'bad' and 'flat' design, in my interpretation an example of successful and interesting integrated design is a whole where parts are still distinguishable as parts. It is a building package, carefully delivered to be logically re-assembled by the perceiver. The way of 'packaging', the way of delivering should contain big or small surprises and/or steer attention towards certain details, or subtly, or blandly, take position. Obviously this routine of carefully assembling and delivering well articulated visual information is wonderfully and superiorly achieved by classical media in countless examples. Now, especially since formatting languages like css and javascript enable designers to overcome the initial coarseness of browsers and give more control over appearance, storing and distributing text on a screen, the old qualities are also extended to new media. 'The designers freedom' can be even multiplied by using the possibility of defining endless variables. 'The rules' can be set and/or fine tuned by settings of the parameters in the code. The classic lessons about rhythm, movement, gravity, contrast are not only applicable in new media, but can be applied in more advanced ways. The 'succession of phrases' can now proceed in a real succession of time. Type can finally move, change shape, be adjusted on the fly, exchanged and so on.

In typography, the whole is always, and famously, more than the sum of its parts.

With the right settings, the computer 'only' helps to find the most optimal 'whole' and/or produce as many variations of it as wished. The machinery can manage a catalogue of variations efficiently. Because it is faster, and more stubborn in pursuing and repeating a task than any human, the chance of surprising us, is considerably bigger. Thus, 'integral' screen design can be easily created electronically within classical typographical conventions.

So, the classic philosophies for creating 'good typography' and 'interesting texts' are implementable on both platforms, and, remarkably, the computer is even able to realize old ideals under ultimate conditions. In terms of design and writing, print and screen are complement-able. When author/designers don't want to loose the old qualities of print and

neither wish to miss the advantages of the screen, it is clearly an option to bring the two platforms together. As both media represent completely different technics (printers, printing presses, plates, ink, paper vs servers, code, chips, light) there is some tuning to be done.

3. What to do with Adobe

Of course, old design strategies can be used for screen design exclusively. Nobody will stop you from doing so, but in case you choose the option of hybrid publishing, you can benefit not only from the general advantages of something printed as mentioned above, but from a hybrid way of designing as well. And for this matter, not the old system ideally supports the new, but vice versa: the procedural character of screen design can be adapted for print.

Typographers these days often mainly use programs like InDesign and Illustrator to visualize their ideas and actually create their projects all together. These systems do exactly what they promise, but comes with some disadvantages as well. After years of working with Adobe software, you might have the feeling of loosing touch with your work. The characteristics and qualities of these programs are great and clever but also omni present. Creating, for example, a layout in InDesign can be metaphorically compared with being captured on the courtyard of the massive InDesign building. You are allowed to create shapes and drag and drop there all over the, tiled or untiled, floor, or "canvas". Time and again you try to look inside the building through its windows but they of course are only dialogue windows by which you can communicate the way your design should be further given shape, a process taking place somewhere deep inside the building. Sure enough, your movements and your dialogue with the program results in an appealing designed file, which emerges like a miracle on the canvas of your Adobe temple, but after a while it becomes hard to distinguish the part you designed and the part that happened behind its blinded windows - the part the program was taking care off. Somehow, the result almost always looks nice, sometimes even spectacular, but it often has suspiciously many similarities with other spectacular designs, produced with the same software, made by other designers. The other Adobe programs tend to generate the

same 'finished' feeling. What does it actually mean to use this kind of software as the main, or even only set of tools? What does it mean when almost all colleagues are going through the same procedures? Are the outcomes still as 'integral' as Karl Gerstner wished them to be?

4. Taming wild software

Designing an online publication can be an intimidating experience as well. If you want to avoid the ready made formats of Facebook, Twitter and blogging software (and which self respected typographer is actually truly happy to see his/her carefully articulated messages squeezed in a uniform appearance?), and agree with me that software like Dreamweaver is also too much of a blackbox, you have to deal with some naked formatting- and programming languages themselves, and steer web browsers (or other applications which retrieve, present and travers information on a screen). As a start, these technics can 'stare at you like a wild animal', full of expectation and/or arrogance, waiting to be tamed, demanding instructions - but the flip side is the plain principle of how you can do that: most of the projects can basically consist of one single 'text' or code file. The concept of one file is a wonderful simplification (compared with the Adobe-process described above) without losing any potential. Somehow the feeling must be similar with journalists and writers who, till the 1980s, were typing (hammering) their stories and articles on their typewriters. The typewriter was capable of giving order, rhythm and shape to thoughts which previously had been floating around in their mind. The machine was enhancing their input, doing something with it they weren't capable of themselves. It was however not taking over much initiative, it kept on commanding control over everything it did. Writing on a typewriter is like, lets see, riding an old jeep, in contrast to, I suppose, the self riding car which Adobe software often tries to facilitate (not to mention the ready made formats of blogging-software and (other) social media). You can ask yourself how pleasant software is, which commands attention continuously. Sure it is confronting and surely takes some extra effort. Therefore, you are feeling directly in touch with the result. The mistakes the screen displays, are yours, so are the successful solutions. A browser might be a "building" too, but way more transparent:

through a back door, (the 'tools' or 'developer' sections) everyone can step in and see what is happening. If necessary, it shows exactly, step by step, how it interprets your code file. Instead of being captured inside an Adobe environment, this is - a little imaginary - like taming and commanding a wild horse (which you might steer to places beyond your imagination).

5. Out of the canvas

The fact that code writing basically can take place in any simple text processor and that it is happening outside the browser is not only metaphorically interesting, it literary gives the most direct thinkable control over the final design. Because what you do actively (writing code) and passively (seeing the result generated on a screen) you are first forced to use imagination and later able to judge yourself more objectively as your design shows up in a different frame, on at least a slightly different moment. Besides of this, the setting or changing of rules in a script often relate to changes throughout the entire publication, whereas your activities on canvas level only results in local effects, which enforces your acts as a designer (and/or writer) considerably.

The detachment between (describing) the rules and (seeing) the result must, on the other hand, feel familiar. Parts (but only parts) of the Adobe software also allow rules in the form of style sheets and batch processing and so on. More generally, designers tend to think in a procedural way anyway. First they create a design concept (including research and planning) and then they (or somebody else) realizes the design. Related to this approach I consider designers as flexible thinkers, and like to compare the profession with that of other puppet masters such as architects (they mostly don't build buildings themselves), composers (they let others perform), cooks when they write books with recipes - and other encoders (of rules, procedures and content). The browser is, so to speak, your puppet theater. Steering-the-browser comes much closer to your instincts as a designer than manipulating-things-and-move-them-around-on-a-canvas.

Again, the way the browser is to steer, and the flexible characteristics of its output are

appealing. But what to do with all of that, if you want an output on paper?

6. Conquering the two headed dragon

Every typographer knows the importance of details. A small shift in line distance, a different version of the font, it doesn't take much to destroy the overall look. In the process of adapting a printed version to the screen or vice versa, such 'drama' seems almost unavoidable. This is one of the reasons why many of the examples of co-existency of print and online publications feel a little 'arranged'. A printed medium can offer an 'online version' (often accessible via a QR-code). Every browser has a print option and therefore every website already is in some way hybrid. However, each browser also has its own peculiarities and each will print the same webpage in different sizes and/or order, and for example, you don't want to print the print-button itself. Furthermore there are issues with color- and font and measurement-settings to be solved. In practice, a printed webpage is often completely stripped from its original typographical characteristics. Newspapers, magazines and books have achieved more success, but still the screen- and paper version are clearly manufactured with different tools, even by different experts. Pre-made downloadable PDFs suffering similar alienation from the 'mother screen' of which they, in my ideal world, are supposed to be 'one' with. In all these examples the same content is designed twice, and often the offspring suffers from compromises.

Generally however there is the option to prepare the print option with more care. CSS '@print'-settings can be used, or, even better, software like mPDF, which makes the PDF output as controllable as any of the possible browser windows: an average site has to deal with uncertain proportions and sizes of the final screen anyway. A browser can be recognized by the code and the input can accordingly be adjusted. Even if this might be the painstaking part of the exercise, the adjusting to paper is all that there is to do. Why not treat the PDF (and its fixed (paper)size) simply as another of these to-be-adjusted-possibilities?

7. Conclusion

In an hybrid publication environment, the loose and ever changeable character of the planned webpage is reflected in a (customized) paper output, and the screen version should at least benefit from the ancient old experiences in visual communication. Maybe it is best to avoid the concept of adaptation at all. Simply replace the two heads of common multi media dragons with only one. Generating print and screen can become synthesized into one hybrid system. The two 'outlets' should be the famous two sides of a coin: in an ideal hybrid publication, the qualities of both paper and screen are used. The software is steered according to ancient design principles. The paper version is treated as just another, if somewhat particular, screen. The designer is, with a more procedural approach, freed from the limitations of the fixed canvas.

Reference

Karl Gerstner, *Designing Programmes*, 1964