Chapter 9

From Illustration to Gamification of the Book:
Re-Developing Aesthetics in Publishing,
Re-Inventing Taste in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on the aesthetic-artistic identity of the book nowadays with the aim to discuss patterns of publishing, and more specifically of the aesthetics in publishing. The chapter takes as key elements that A. the values and strategies of our age are in use for centuries, and B. the aesthetic identity of the book is still essential in its production, promotion and marketing. After a short overview of the publishing industry nowadays, the past of the publishing activity since Renaissance is studied so as to provide, through common features and values, a theoretical background and explanation of publishing strategies. Thereafter, patterns of illustration of the printed book and of gamification/use of multimedia in publishing are provided; the illustration chain is proposed as part of the publishing one. Conclusions regarding the proposed methodological framework and the opportunities of the publishing industry may enlighten issues and challenges of our era and offer to the publishing studies a specific point of view.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a changing world, innovation, globalization and convergence seem to be among the bedrocks of the publishing industry; even though, these have to be recognized as old values of publishing, going hand in hand with the publishers’ aim to widen the reading audience and augment sales as well as to improve the book both as content and as physical object. In that context, the past of the publishing activity since Renaissance ought to be studied in order to provide, through common features and values, a theoretical background. The chapter focuses on the transformations (mainly due to information technologies) of the book in the digital, [even better hybrid era due to co-existence of printed with electronic/virtual material], with the aim to discuss and exhibit patterns of publishing, and more specifically issues re-

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garding the aesthetic identity of the book in its evolution. The field of publishing studies is obviously interdisciplinary, a “marvelous blend of theories” according to Greco et al (2013), thus in the chapter publishing studies, history of the book, art history and media communication offer to the provision of the methodological framework and historic background so as to explain the current trends.

Initially a short overview of the publishing industry nowadays is provided. Thereafter, challenges and values are discussed and studied since the invention of printing in Renaissance; the chapter takes as key elements that A. values of our age -such as globalization, convergence, democratization, access to information, innovation, discoverability- are in use since the invention of printing, and B. the aesthetics of the book are essential in the development, promotion and marketing of the titles as well as in the cultivation of taste. It is obvious that we cannot always refer to the book as physical object, since its materiality is constantly changing and lost when reading on ebooks, tablets, iphones etc (Phillips, 2014). Thus, its aesthetic identity, being always of significance, is in turn re-created or re-invented by new means.

Thereafter, the chapter focuses on the role and function of book illustration and of the artistic identity of the book from Renaissance till nowadays investigating issues of gamification (the use of games in publishing for achieving the engagement of the reader) and of the use of new media technologies that alter the book as it was known redefining at the same time patterns of reading, writing, thinking, communicating. In that context the illustration chain of Renaissance and the Baroque as part of the publishing chain is re-developed for the publishing activity nowadays taking into consideration the new impact of new technologies. Gamification and the use of new media technologies, considered as successful ways to reach readers, are related with A. the use of pictures/images in the text having both aesthetic and utilitarian impact, B. promotion and marketing of the book, C. participation of the reader. In that framework, certain questions are raised regarding not only their impact on the aesthetic identity of the book but also on the tools for their description, explanation and discussion. The provision of a methodological framework for the aesthetics of the book can also be recognized among the aims of this chapter.

2. THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY IN A CHANGING ERA

Mergers and acquisitions of publishing houses have definitely changed issues of the publishing activity during the last decades leading not only to the dominance of large publishing companies and conglomerations but also to the essential role of bestsellers’ methods and innovative promotion strategies in a rather hard competitive framework. Even though, competition and innovation have always gone hand in hand in the publishing activity. At the same time, new information and communication technologies are constantly transforming the publishing activity and the book itself as it was known for centuries, altering thus the publishing value chain by re-defining the roles of the publisher, editor, agent, bookseller (Thompson, 2010; Clark & Phillips, 2014; Smith 2013; Greco et al, 2013; Miller, 2007; Kist, 2008). It seems that “new” aspects of value are added to the publishing chain (Tian and Martin, 2013; Breede, 2008). As self-publishing and the open access movement emerged, the role of the publisher was and is under question; even though, publishers are extremely adaptable exploiting in every era the opportunities provided by technology and often managing to turn problems into challenges – and this seems to be the case nowadays.

Additionally, electronic bookstores are developing new consuming and reading cultures exploiting at the same time strategies and tactics of the past, such as pre-orders (Miller, 2007). Online sales have introduced features such as “personalized” recommendations, customer reviews, ease of access to old