The Gateway to the Electronic Book

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Throughout history, the evolution of the book has been marked by changes that have redefined both form and function as cultural and social objects. Today, we witness a key stage with the progressive implementation of the e-book in our society. The new format modifies the visual and ideological settings that influence the design and sign of its covers. The digital transposition of the printed book’s features is a common practice in the publishing field. However, recent progress in digital publishing make it possible to design and develop new book cover formats.

Illustration, electronic book, title page, editorial design, graphic design.

The book’s evolution and its identification and protection systems

The current form of the book is the fruit of a long evolution. Each new format came as well with a way to protect it and identify it. Thus, the material media for literature and their design have substantially changed along history. Today we are witnessing this transformation.

Precisely the arrival of the electronic book has questioned the survival of the printed book, and the transfer of the formal features of the media from paper to digital. The printed format, as a container and vehicle of knowledge, is solidly established in our society. However, the five centuries of its predominance, witnessed by its prestige and stability, are not as long as we think. This is true, especially if we consider the chronology of the history of books as exposed following along with the development of covers and other protective means that have contributed to their survival. During the four millennium BC, Mesopotamian clay tablets were kept in pots and baskets to which a label, instead of the caption, was attached to the abundance of the papyrus plant they were made of. Greek and Roman cultures adopted this book format, that was kept in leather cases or boxes that received the name of cuirass or armonia. A label could be added to the end of the roll code, identifying it clearly. Curiously, it was a label used for note-taking what inspired the next book format: the handwritten codex. It was not only a new medium, influenced by the first century AD. This type of book was protected by the covers that it was bound to, which were usually lined with leather. Soon, the covers began to be decorated with graphic motifs, with the application of diverse techniques like embossing or stamping.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg took a significant step forward in the evolution of the book by making possible its mechanical reproduction, thanks to the invention of the movable metal type printing press. Initially, the printed book was used in the form and aspect the medieval handwritten codex, with the intention of matching the edition to its predecessor. However, the new format progressively incorporated its own features, such as the inner page that was called title page. Its use goes back to the end of the sixteenth century and it contained the information that identified the book. Decorative illustrations were frequently added to it. Many of them represented architectural façades, which lent books all the attributes of a genuine gateway to knowledge. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the progress in the Graphic Arts field favored printing the book. However, in electronic book, the protective function is carried out by the e-reader. The book does not need a cover, since it is not made of paper and it is not bound. On the other hand, the sales and promotion channels for e-books diverge from the usual ones for printed edition. Persuading the Buyer will have to find new, different paths with regards to exhibit the book covers up on shelves. These channels shall be immanent to the electronic nature of new media. However, the book’s form, architecture, and its progressive introduction in the twenty-first century mean a turning point in the evolution of the electronic book. Once its arrival, the electronic book has been posing different questions in the editorial sphere. These questions can also be extended to the areas of Illustration and Graphic Design. Recently, several events and publications have tackled the evolution of the visual components of the electronic book from the Visual Communication perspective. In 2012, the professional Design association AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts) held in New York the conference The Next Chap- ter of the Digital Book. In it, several experts like designer Carol Goldberg and designer and editor Craig Mod reflected on the future of the book and its visual representations. Craig Mod’s website there are indispensable essays for the agents participating in digital edition. On the other hand, in Spain, the Observatory of the Electronic Book (Observatorio de la Lectura Electrónica) in the University of the Basque Country. He is currently developing PhD on book cover de-
finitions thanks to a PhD grant of the Basque Government. Be- fore his academic work he developed projects as an illus- trator and designer for a number of organisations.

The electronic title page

The title page of an electronic book is a relevant example of the transformation process in the anatomy of the book, motivated by the emergence of the digital format. The cover is a characteristic element of the printed book. It has the functions of identifying the book, protecting it and persuading the reader. However, in the electronic book, the protective function is carried out by the e-reader. The book does not need a cover, since it is not made of paper and it is not bound. On the other hand, the sales and promotion channels for e-books diverge from the usual ones for printed edition. Persuading the Buyer will have to find new, different paths with regards to exhibit the book covers up on shelves. These channels shall be immanent to the electronic nature of new media. However, the book’s form, architecture, and its progressive introduction in the twenty-first century mean a turning point in the evolution of the electronic book. Once its arrival, the electronic book has been posing different questions in the editorial sphere. These questions can also be extended to the areas of Illustration and Graphic Design.
Electronic title pages influenced by the printed cover

The prevailing factor to include a title page inspired by the paper book to include in electronic books, which is a common practice in the publishing industry, is the representativeness of the digital environment for illustration and Graphic Design.13

Electronic title pages that explore the digital media

This section includes examples of those proposals that seek to make use of digital forms of expression and visualization in the design of electronic book covers. They do not only comprise a fixed image and text, they explore the communicative ability that these techniques have to offer. We present a case study of the novel Day Saving (A noche roja nunca acaba), published in 2012. The cover shows a pictorial visual that opens to a landscape-format book. In essence, the two-media message of the cover is reproduced, comprised by image and text.14 However, this message may produce variations in which one of the two elements is omitted. Such is the case of the publishing venture The Domino Project, sponsored by Amazon. The person responsible for it, Seth Godin, bets for text-less title pages (Fig. 3). He states that, online, that surface is already paired up with title, author and other data that are separately presented, so it would be redundant to include them in the title page. Therefore, in web platforms dedicated to selling and buying books, the title page would be equivalent to a computer application’s icon.15

Other proposals adjust the title page to achieve optimum visibility and legibility in diverse electronic reading devices, at the reduced sizes that will be presented in websites and reading interfaces. The font size may be increased to achieve legibility in reduced title pages. This way, it may be highly important in an exclusively typographic title page to adapt the font size to the size of the screen, a factor that may affect readability. An example of adaptation of the printed cover to the digital title page can be the publication of interview conducted by John Tienel for the edition of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (The 1865 edition. This book aims to mirror the visual of Alice in the film, distributed by Warner Bros. instead of Disney).16 The new format is similar to the film, which the same book is published in paper and in a digital version, and the latter is subject to the first. Thus, the title pages on both editions tend to keep the identity system to identify it”.8

The design and publishing of the digital content to identify it”.8

The design and publishing of the digital content

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The following article focuses on the origin, development and impact of a limited edition series of posters created by the artist Mark Brooks for a visual identity project commissioned by a Barcelona-based retail-clothing company. The brand’s name would be written with maximum simplicity and synthesis of shapes: 

**Star Grid Poster**

**Nacho Clemente**
Graduated in Fine Arts, Universitat de Barcelona. Today he teaches Graphic Design at the Escola d’Art i Superior de Disseny “Serra i Abella”.

**The brand’s visual identity**

With this project, initiated in 2009, Mark Brooks admitted yet one of the most difficult communications of his career. He had to develop the visual identity and brand image for a new clothing company that would be opening its stores all over the world, as well as selling through their online stores.

The main difficulty was to begin a project for which no brief had been given. “The client was very clear: Brooks, that is how we acknowledge Brooks, and “that is so much more difficult than starting off from a much more defined commission”. The client had trusted him completely, giving him the green light to establish both the values of the brand and the aesthetics related to the visual communication of the business. As we will see, this fostered the development of a highly personal work, completely related to his outlook of the world, reflecting his own, his cultural interests, even his social concerns.

During the first phase, the new brand name had to be defined. Extensive lists were drawn up with possible names that were then filtered at reflecting its geographical origin, since both design and production would take place in Barcelona, as well as its cosmopolitan spirit. Finally, the chosen name was SantaMonica, which on the one hand referred to the final stretch of ‘Les Rambles’, the emblematic promenade of Barcelona linking Cami
dunya Square, in the city centre, with the sea, on the other hand, it pointed at a coastal city of Los Angeles. Mark Brooks had travelled to Santa Monica, coming back with fond memories of his visit. The sea, its light, the sun, the good climate... it all reminded him of Barcelona. The particular ring to its name had seduced him too, which makes us conclude that beyond the logical conceptual justification of the chosen name “Santa Monica” with its “sought after geographical ambiguity, there was a clear aesthetic motivation behind it, and why not? For the viewer, however, it is still of interest. In this case, Brooks focused his attention on an element that has become a popular icon in the city of Barcelona, the tower, he decided to experiment with its geometry. Brooks focused his attention on an element that has been reproduced using a unique, labour-intensive half-tone pattern, which was hand-made through the repetition of a star-shaped module.

**About the author**

Mark Brooks is a graphic designer and art director born in Barcelona, that works both in his home city and in New York. Born to a Spanish mother and an American father, he acknowledges the influence of both European and North American cultures. He is an alert designer who pays meticulous attention to detail in his work. His projects go from maximum simplicity and synthesis of shapes -“less is more.” to the virtuous approach that is typical of the artisan master bent on gaining complete control over the aesthetic possibilities of the elements that they work with.

The pattern was called Star Grid, in a retail-clothing company based in Barcelona. It is comprised by a series of images in black and white, based upon the simplification of photographic portraits of well-known people, real or fictional that were reproduced using a unique, labour-intensive half-tone pattern, which was hand-made through the repetition of a star-shaped module.

**The pattern was called Star Grid**

**Nacho Clemente**