The Gateway
to the Eectronic Book

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Throughout history, the evolution of the book has been marked by changes that have redefined both form and uses of this cultural object. Today, we witness a key stage with the progressive implementation of the e-book in our society. The new format raises questions about its visual settings that influence the illustration and design 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 define new gateways to knowledge.

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. This way, 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 availing of its prestige and stability are not so long. This is true, especially if we consider the chronology in the history of books as exposed followingly, along with the development of covers and other preceding systems to protect and identify the text.

During the fourth millenium BC, Mesopotamian clay tablets were kept in pots and baskets to which a label, also made of clay, could be attached, containing information on the document. Later on, in the third millenium BC, tablets were replaced by the roll developed in Egypt due 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 *capsa* or *scrinium*. A label could be added to one end of the roll, containing the information to identify it. Curiously, it was wax tablets used for note-taking what inspired the next book format: the handwritten codex. It was first used around 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, many of them began to be decorated with graphic motifs, with the application of diverse techniques like embossing or stamping.[1] 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 metal movable type printing press.[2] Initially, the printed book imitated in form and aspect the medieval handwritten codex, with the intention of matching the quality of its precedessor. 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 fifteenth 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 images on the cover. The texts and illustrations that had traditionally been placed on the title page were re-positioned on the book covers.[3] Apart from protecting the book, the cover was used to transmit the textual information that allowed identifying the volume, along with an illustration related to the content. As a consequence of a more literate society that counted now with a larger number of readers, as compared to preceding historic times, the cover was used to carry a set of rhetorical arguments destined to seduce the buyer of the book. This way, such surface was defined with a persuasive function, which printed book covers still have today. However, the arrival of the electronic book and its progressive introduction in the twenty-first century mean a turning point in the evolution of the vehicle of culture (Fig. 1).

Since its arrival, the electronic book has been posing different questions in the editorial sphere. These questions have been subsequently transferred 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 Chapter: The Design and Publishing of the Digital Book.

In it, several experts like designer Carin Goldberg and designer and editor Craig Mod reflected on the future of the book and its visual configuration. In Craig Mod's website there are indispensable essays for the agents participating in digital edition.[4] On its part, the conference *El libro digital ilustrado: pasos hacia nuevos paradigmas* (The Illustrated Digital Book: Steps To New Paradigms) organised by the Observatorio de la Ilustración Gráfica (Observatory on Graphic Illustration) in December 2012 in Madrid, also hosted talks and project presentations by illustrators and experts of the publishing sector.[5] In Valencia, during June 2013 took place Ilustrafic. *I Congreso Internacional de Ilustración, Arte y Cultura Visual* (Ilustrafic. I International Congress on Illustration, Art and Visual Culture). The new possibilities that technology offers were very present in all the themes developed. This way, the book *Abierto todo el día. Los cuadernos de Isidro Ferrer y Pep Carrió* (Open All Day. The Notebooks of Isidro Ferrer & Pep Carrió) stood out. This is a project directed by the research team Unit Experimental, Interactive Publishing. In this project, both printed and digital media converge in perfect harmony.

The electronic title page

The title page of electronic books 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 there is no binding. 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 exhibiting the book covers up on shelves. These channels shall be immanent to the electronic nature of new books. Now the web environment serves them as a display, and as a trait inherited from bookshops, we can see a reduced image, meaning, the digital title page that acompanies the data of the book that we want to buy. The paths and customs that grant access to the book are also different in this media, and this can also facilitate the path to visual proposals matching these practices.

All this poses the redefinition of the surface that is the gateway granting access to the electronic book. We consider more accurate to refer to it as title page instead of cover (Fig. 2). Its function in digital publications has been object of reflection for design and publishing practitioners. Paul Buckley, vicepresident and executive creative director of the publish-

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[1] Among the first decorations appearing in codex covers the degree of ornamentations displays great variety. Worth of notice are Bizantine binding from the High Middle Ages, which included gems, enamels and ivory, gold or silver relieves. As time went by, diverse binding styles were defined, mainly influenced by artistic trends of each era.

[2] Before Gutenberg's printing press, printing books with movable types was already known in Asia. In the eleventh century, Pi Sheng, was already considered the father of the printing press in China. He devised a system to print texts with movable fired clay types. From the twelve century on, wooden types were preferred, while metal ones were especially developed in Korea between the thirteen century and the fifteen century. However, such progress did not spread like Gutenberg's innovations did.

[3] In colloquial language it is recurring to find as synonyms the terms title page and cover. It is also erroneous, since in the printed book, the cover is the surface protecting it. The title page is, as mentioned, one of the inside pages that usually contains the title and name of the author.

[4] http://craigmod.com

[5] Its conference videos can be found in the Observatorio de la Ilustración Gráfica website: http://observatoriodelailustracion.org/category/actividades/

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Buckley quoted in MORAIS, B.: "Has Kindle killed the Book Cover?". *The Atlantic*, (16/04/2012). [Online]. http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/04/has-kindle-killed-the-book-cover/255935/

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GONZÁLEZ MIRANDA, ELENA: "La portada del libro electrónico" (The Electronic Book Cover). *Foroalfa*, (01/03/2013). [Online]. http://foroalfa.org/articulos/la-portada-del-libro-electronico

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This is a concept clearly inspired in Alan Kay's *desk metaphor*, which he developed in 1970 as computers interface. It is explained in detail in: CRESTANI, FABIO et al.: "Appearance and Functionality of Electronic Books. Lessons from The Visual Book and Hyper-TextBook Projects". *International Journal on Digital Libraries*, Volume 6, Nº 2 (April 2006), pp. 192-209. [Online]. http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00799-004-0113-9 (Search date: 01/03/2012).

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CORDÓN, JOSÉ ANTONIO: *La revolución del libro electrónico* (The Electronic Book Revolution), Barcelona, UOC, 2011, p. 20.

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The title pages mentioned in the text that follows this categorisation were analysed with Semiotics-based methodology, in order to explore the function of illustration in digital title pages. The analysis and conclusions of this study were gathered in the paper "El papel de la ilustración en la portada del libro electrónico" (The Role of Illustration in Electronic Book Covers), by José Antonio Morlesín Mellado, author of this article. It was presented on June 21st, 2013 in *Ilustrafic. I Congreso Internacional de Ilustración, Arte y Cultura Visual* (Ilustrafic. First International Congress on Illustration, Art and Visual Culture).

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The concept of *two-media message* has been proposed and developed by Abraham Moles and Joan Costa in several of their studies. We recommend consulting: MOLES, ABRAHAM: "Las técnicas de la ilustración. ¿Cómo colocar imágenes en un conjunto?" (Illustration Techniques. How to Place Images). In: COSTA, J. (dir.) *Grafismo funcional* (Functional Graphism), Barcelona, Ceac, 1990, pp. 155-175.

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GODIN, SETH: "Why aren't there words on the cover of our books?" (2011). [Online]. http://www.thedominoproject.com/2011/02/why-arent-there-words-on-the-cover-of-our-books.html (Search date: 30/05/2013).

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http://quijote.bne.es/libro.html

ing house Penguin Books, believes that "whether it's a hard copy or a digital copy, it's still going to have a cover".[6] Designer and publisher Craig Mod does not share such opinion, since he dares to confirm the "death" of the cover in this format, announcing a future, hypotetical alternative, different from the current one, and which will have a different function, "Whatever it's replaced with, however, will not serve the same purpose as the covers with which we've grown up".[7] Finally, in the Design and Communicaton forum Foroalfa, Elena González Miranda, lecturer of Graphic Design in the *Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea* (University of the Basque Country), reflects on digital title pages, pointing out that "the visual solution that allows to identify each publication must answer other approaches, and other graphic indicators, different from those of the printed version". She adds that "there may be a significant widespread change in the evolution of the concept of a book's title page, or the system to identify it".[8]

For the time being, the printed format still influences considerably the visual configuration of the electronic book. Having the two formats living side to side in the publishing market causes most of the title pages for electronic books to be a digital transposition of the printed cover. Replicating a previous format is not unknown in the history of the book; it brings us to the embryonic phase of the printing press. When in the fifteenth century Gutenberg embarked upon the adventure of printing, he did not propose a new concept of a book with an innovative morphology.

He concentrated his efforts in imitating the look of handwritten books, to compete with a convention already accepted and well rooted in society.

Skeuomorph is a concept used with growing frequence in the area of computer applications, to name the process of imitation by a new system of a preceding one, with the purpose of facilitating the user its intuitive usage, thus applying mental models that they already know. Thus, in the case of electronic books, skeuomorph could be compared to book metaphor.[9] This is, the digital imitation of the qualities of the printed book, such as the action of browsing the pages of a book, the composition of a two-page spread open on the axis of a virtual spine, the distribution of works on equally virtual shelves (as it can be seen in the interface of some electronic reading applications), or the digital version of the printed cover. All of it allows the user to handle the book keeping a link with the paper format. All these books that follow the path of the printed media are also known as homothetic books.[10]

The constant transformation of digital edition allows new book access concepts to emerge. Two of the prevailing title page concepts in the market are

explained followingly. On the one hand, title pages linked to printed books, on the other hand, those which make use of the new graphic, communicative possibilities that the digital environment offers to Illustration and Graphic Design.[11]

Electronic title pages influenced by the printed cover

The prevailing factor to include a title page inspired by the printed copy is an inclination to imitate traditional books, which most publishing houses do. In many cases this is due to the fact that 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 a graphic coherence which helps identifying the book. In essence, the two-media message of the cover is reproduced, comprised by image and text.[12]

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.[13]

Other proposals adjust the title page to achieve optimum visibility and legibility in diverse electronic reading devices, at the reduced sizes that they will be presented in websites and reading interfaces. For instance, font size may be increased, to achieve legibility in reduced title pages. This way, it may be hugely important in an exclusively typographic design, which letters may acquire remarkedly iconic attributes. An example of adaptation of the printed cover to the digital title page can be the publication *Senderos de Investigación en Diseño Gráfico* (Research Paths in Graphic Design). In the title page design it was chosen to simplify the illustration, also using bold lines in it, aiming at a better identification in all types of screens and at reduced dimensions (Fig. 4).

Lastly, the online application Interactive Quixote of the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (National Library of Spain) offers an interface that developes skeuomorph resources, thus accentuating the book metaphor. The digitalisation of the first edition of *Don Quixote* has been enriched with qualities of the paper book, such as a cover that opens by clicking on it, synchronised sound and animation as pages are turned, along with interactive, multimedia elements that shorten the distance with traditional books.[14]

Electronic title pages that explore the digital media

This section includes examples of those proposals transcending the two-media message of printed covers. They do not only comprise a fixed image and text; they explore the communicative ability that new technologies lend electronic books. This is the case of the novel Daylight Saving (La noche que nunca acaba), published in 2012. The cover shows a photographic reproduction of a women swimming. The version designed to advertise the book online has an interactive operation, since when the cursor goes over it, it produces a series of ripples that distort the illustration, as though it were made of water. Also, a counter shows the time since it was launched (before such date, it counted down to its launch). These animations, interactive elements are not part of the book that is sold, they are only included in the online promotional image. This is an interesting alternative to the use of a digital cover outside the book, put at the service of the product's advertising.

Books distributed as independent software applications for digital reading, for tablets and smartphones, are, according to Craig Mod, a different experience from the books we know.[15] These publications make the most of technology by using all sorts of interactive, multimedia elements, also highlighting their most playful and didactic features. This explains why it should not come as a surprise that it is precisely children's literature the one making the most of this format. Since they are autonomous applications, the gateway to these books is arguably the icon of the application itself, which may also give way to a title page, a space to introduce the book. An example of it is Alice for the iPad, distributed by Atomic Antelope in 2010. Both in the icon as in the inner title page of the application it displayed illustrations by John Tenniel for the edition of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.The 1865 edition. The illustrations for the icon and the title page are not the same. On its part, the book Our Choice, written by Al Gore and published by Push Pop Press in 2011, counts with an app version for diverse Apple devices. When opened, the landscape-format title page that covers the entire screen shows a representation of the globe in motion, which displays the user's location in the planet.

The cover as the book's presentation is also present in online publications such as Touche!, by illustrator Riki Blanco, published in 2012 which won the *I Premio Internacional del libro animado interactivo en español Paula Benavides* (First International Prize of Interactive animated book in Spanish Paula Benavides).[16] In its landscape-format title page, an animated illustration shows a man resuscitating a heart to the synchronised sound of this action (Fig. 5).

It is obvious that the digital media is a fertile ground for graphic experimentation. For quite some time now, designer Carin Goldberg, in her role as a teacher, proposes her students the design of alternatives to the usual title page. The proposals in which a video precedes the text in the book shall be highlighted. This interesting experiment goes beyond the borders of the title page concept. It brings its graphic components, along with its functions of identification and persuasion to the audiovisual media.[17] This refers us to booktrailers, a format for book promotion taken from the realm of cinema, in which a brief video serves as an advance of a film before it premiers. As we can see, technology allows diluting some of the limits inherited from printed edition. This happens not only in its visual aspect. Customs and the way we read go through an interesting transformation. Far from the usual linearity of printed texts, reading in digital media allows moving constantly between one media to another, thus giving way to an augmented or enriched reading. An interesting example can be found in the book *Abierto todo el día. Los cuadernos de Isidro Ferrer y Pep Carrió* (Open All Day. The Notebooks of Isidro Ferrer & Pep Carrió), developed by the research team Unit, from the *Universitat Politècnica de València* (Polytechnic University of Valencia) (Fig. 6). This book published in print is completed by a computer application that grants access to widely diverse contents, such as video, augmented reality, etc.[18] Transmedia narrative is another concept linked to this way to navigate through information, to use the words of writer Javier Celaya, it is "a story told in different ways across different platforms, with the participation of readers".[19] Literary projects such as We Tell Stories, sponsored by Penguin Books, explore the potential of such kind of narratives in electronic media.[20] At this point, it is pertinent to quote philosopher Walter Benjamin reflecting in 1934 on a change in literary paradigm, when he pointed out that "there were not always novels in the past, and not always there will be". He added that "we are in the midst of a vast process in which literary forms are being melted down".[21] If we bring his words to our days, in our historical context they acquire a revealing meaning, thanks to the current evolution of reading in electronic media. Precisely the new literary forms favoured by technology can develop paths in which new title pages will be shaped, or that will lead to new models to access knowledge.

The keys to the gateway (to the electronic book)

Throughout history, books have undergone many a transformation. Its own genealogy confirms the mutable character of its elements, from

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AIGA/NY: *The Next Chapter: The Design and Publishing of the Digital Book*. (14/03/2012). [Online]. http://vimeo.com/38511140

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http://www.conaculta.gob.mx/librointeractivo/touche.swf

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Some of these works developed by her students are available in the video that registered the event *The Next Chapter: The Design and Publishing of the Digital Book*: http://vimeo.com/38511140

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The book is linked to the interactive exhibition *Pensar con las manos. Pep Carrió & Isidro Ferrer* (Thinking with Their Hands. Pep Carrió & Isidro Ferrer). It was shown in the Josep Renau Exhibition Hall of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the *Universitat Politécnica de València* (Polytechnic University of Valencia) from May 31st to July 5th, 2013.

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CELAYA, JAVIER: "Tendencias digitales en el mundo del libro" (Digital Trends in the World of Books). In: VV. AA.: *Libros electrónicos y contenidos digitales en la sociedad del conocimiento. Mercado, servicios y derechos* (Electronic Books and Digital Contents in the Society of Knowledge. Market, Services and Rights), Madrid, Pirámide, 2012, pp. 54.

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http://www.wetellstories.co.uk

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BENJAMIN, WALTER: "El autor como productor" (The Author as Producer). In: BENJAMIN, WALTER: *Tentativas sobre Brecht (Iluminaciones 3)* [Understanding Brecht (Illuminations 3)],Madrid, Taurus, 1975, pp. 120-121.

clay tablets, its most primitive antecessor, to the sudden arrival of electronic books, which has meant a new step in its evolution. This transformation is not alien to Illustration and Graphic Design as disciplines participating in the visual configuration of this cultural object. Nowadays, as a consequence of the coexistence of the printed format and the digital one, most title pages of electronic books are influenced by its paper predecessor. However, as it has been mentioned, the very idiosincrasy of the digital format is quite different from that of the printed book. Indubitably, specific graphic proposals will have to be designed, to suit this type of book. Currently Visual Communication practitioners are researching the possibilities of adapting the title page to the digital environment, in experiments with moving image, sound, interactivity, etc. All these are factors that can augment the rhetoric, communicative capacities of such surface. Thanks to experimentation in the digital field, the keys to the gateway to those books yet to come are in the hands of illustrators and designers.

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