

The four ways Alessandro Ludovico's
Post-Digital Print: The Mutations of publishing since 1849,
has danced with and twisted my enquiry.

INTRODUCTION - about the book by skimming the book

Published in 2012, *Post-digital print* is a book by researcher and visual artist Alessandro Ludovico. As the title states, the book explores the entangled relationship between print and digital publishing through a historical recollection of how the medium has evolved.

Ludovico does this while simultaneously referencing multiple printing techniques, mediums, and projects that allow the reader to further connect with the text and Ludovico's arguments.

Just as I interpret Ludovico's text as a recollection of events crossed referenced by examples, I am going to analyse the relationship between this reference and my work "How do we experience {*digital*} text" by recalling the changes and impacts it has caused in my project. Particularly I want to highlight how there have been conflicts, but also intersection and agreements.

CHAPTER 1 - Starting at the conclusion

Post digital print: a future scenario

My first interaction with this reference was by reading its ending.

Some of the biggest intakes from this section where:

- 1- Digital as content and quantity of information. While print, more than the carrier, is also the display.
- 2- E publishing has become as simple and accessible as traditional publishing, but its power lies in the ability of integrating multiple media. Print's value is in its physical qualities of paper.
- 3- The future of post-digital print is its ability to generate hybrid forms, no longer differentiated as print or digital publications.

From these three points it was interesting how Ludovico constantly compares and defines one from what the other isn't, but concludes by proposing that the future of both mediums is in a symbiosis relationship. What resonated the most is how digital isn't associated with display. It is in this recurring statement that I find a tension with my work. The root of my project has been on how hard it is to engage with digital texts because of the active nature of the medium. Early on I referenced Kenneth Goldsmith's concept *Material Quality of Language* to highlight how

other graphic elements, media and text that is placed next to content in a website, or a social media platform, affects how a text is read. As such, when engaging with Post-digital Print my enquiry was: How can design help slow down {and/or} focus digital reading engagement?

To explore this I used the instagram grid and display as a starting point to iterate different ways we can engage with long bodies of text in a cellphone screen format. Through these exercises I was engaging with some type of layout immerse within platforms. Therefore, the reference prompted me to further focus on the role of digital layouts and graphic displays, tweaking my enquiry to: How can GCD be used to explore graphic languages for digital publishing that help slow down {and/or} focus online reading?

CHAPTER 2: Reflowability - sacrificing layout

The New York Public Library's Insta-Novels project became a reference that supported my position on the importance of display as one of the main characteristics of digital publishing. The NYPL reformatted literary pieces and poems into Instagram stories with the intend of catering content to a social-media-user audience. Using this reference as a starting point, I intended to respond to Ludovico. At the same time, I looked into previous sections of the book to identify how Ludovico has expanded on this dichotomy of "printed pro display - digital pro content" scenario.

"Reflowability: mobile style in reading and writing" became a key section of the reference. During this chapter, Ludovico contextualises the growing acceptance and relevance of online reading, particular on a mobile medium, by putting forward japanese *keitai* mobile phone novels as an example of such. However, the author argues that electronic publishing is inherently linked with "reflowability", understood as surrendering control regarding the formatting and layout of content. Even though I found myself partially agreeing with this statement, previous iterations and references I engaged with have helped me built my position towards a more guided online reading experience. This made me question what graphic elements become essential inside digital platforms, a question that lead me to look into online reading behaviours.

Information overload has become a direct consequence of unformatted, sporadical content, and as a response skimming has become a coping mechanism. With this in mind, my graphic iterations became linked to how digital layouts, wireframes, can respond to skimming behaviour. By doing this, my iterations became editing and content exercise, where the intention of working with long bodies of text within mobile formats was lost.

Through this practice I realise that, not only was the format not favouring these types of content, but Ludovico's concept of reflowability not only applied to the text's formless character, but its ability to change its syntax within a given platform. In this case, a new writing style that lives within a phone format and simultaneously inspires {more} engagement.

CHAPTER 3: flexible-constraints for digital publishing

Post-Digital Print pushed my position to a middle ground. On one hand, digital media undoubtedly has a reflexible character, on the other, the layout of text is imperative to have engagement. Ludovico argues that this forced simplification of the content (predefined layout), becomes a requirement for rendering the content "naked" so that it may later be dynamically 'dressed up' at will. Even though this becomes an answer for inclusivity, as it allows users to customise content to their needs, there lays an opportunity for designers to guide how to display such texts. My enquiry shifted again towards: How can GCD explore reflexible layouts for digital publishing?

In order to explore these enquiry I looked into that makes traditional print layouts engaging.
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CHAPTER 4: hybrid interactions, back to print

Just like I had started from the back of the book, I have upended my enquiry and my initial intention. By looking into physical publishing for answers for how to create flexible layouts in e-publishing, I have started to explore how print can have these fluid, sporadic interactions that characterise digital publishing. These conclusions from the studio work have made me reconsider what Ludovico explores at the end of Post-digital print. How can I explore hybrid interaction between both medium? How can print feed from digital publishing and visa versa?
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