



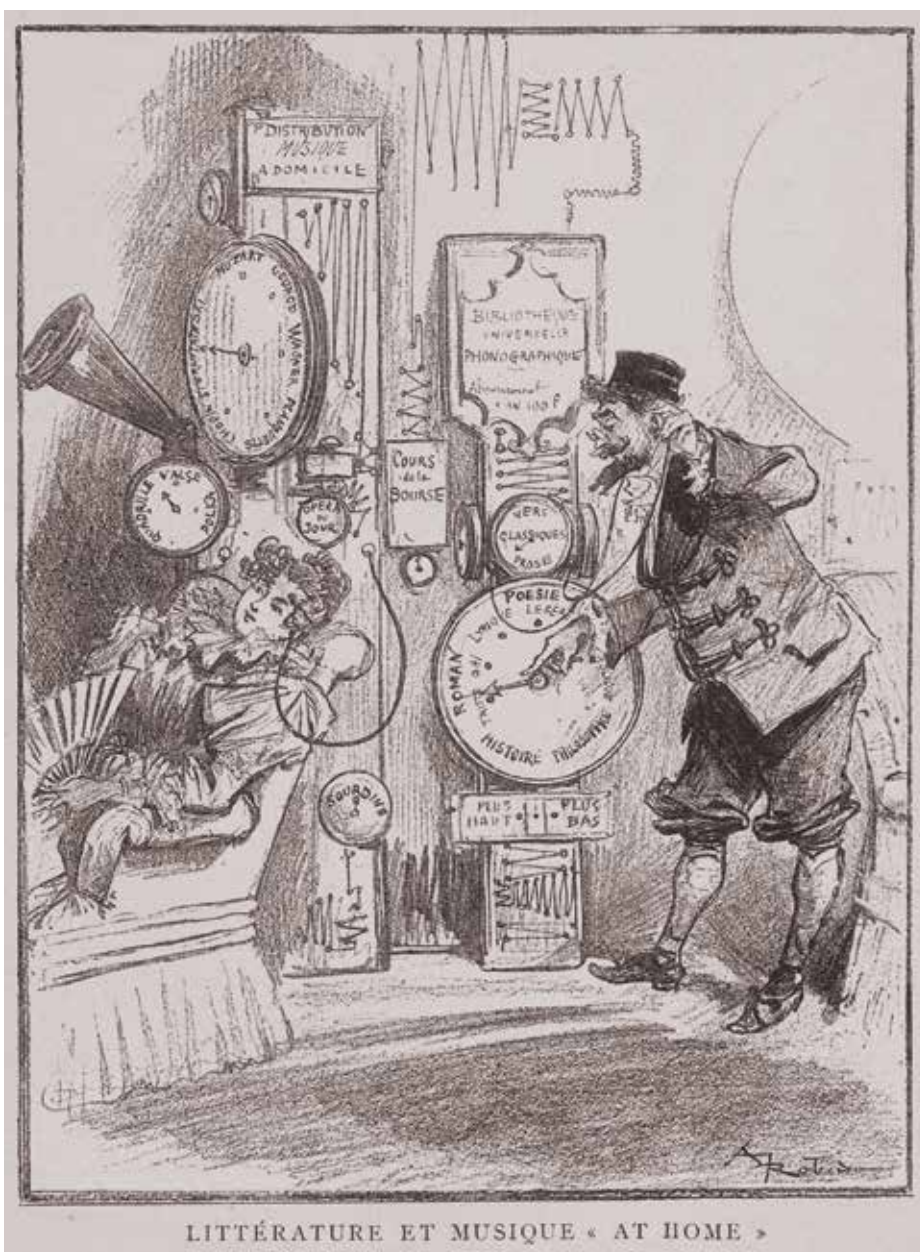
Yapp is a magazine created by the 2012-2013 Book and Digital Media Studies master's students at Leiden University.

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A futuristic vision of the changing mediascape of the nineteenth century as elaborated by Octave Uzanne and Albert Robida in their illustrated story *La Fin des Livres*, originally published in France in the collection *Contes pour les Bibliophiles* (1894). Illustration by Albert Robida.

If print is dead, anything is possible

Book review

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Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894, by Alessandro Ludovico, Eindhoven: Onomatopée 77, 2012.

Clotheslines, seams in stockings, books and jobs are all obsolete.

– Marshall McLuhan, 1965

Book readers beware, your beloved medium is on a fast decline. It shall go the way of the vinyl record, of the film stock before. Release your ink and paper fetishes upon the all mighty touchscreen, for it is illuminated from within. Pay your tithes to Google, Amazon, and Apple. They know iYou, and they know what iYou want. Depth and complexity shall be placed upon the altar, and entertaining real-time updates born from the ash. *Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice.*

Such apocalyptic visions and premature obituaries are what Alessandro Ludovico seeks to demystify in *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894*. Ludovico is not amongst the evangelicals of either side of the pixel versus paper debate, but rather a practitioner of print publishing and an activist for Internet-based networked communities. It is this dual role that leads him to search for strategies and alternatives for the publishing world through investigating hybrid forms, or those that utilize the best of what both digital and print can offer. Looking at historical media prophecies, strategies of underground publishing, and the critical and innovative works of contemporary media artists, he makes a strong case that progress in publishing does not lead to an inevitable supersession of one media over the other, but is rather an opportunity to reimagine the role of text within the needs of the current moment.

So what exactly is post-digital print? Personally, I have to admit to finding the oft-used prefix “post” somewhat nauseating as it often seems synonymous with “the movement is confused”. In this case, however, I believe that it works well by implying the question “How does print continue?” This is a political question. As Ludovico consistently points out, much is at stake: in-depth and long-form journalism, physical bookstores, independent publishers, obscure and experimental writers, and, on a larger scale, collective memory and the control of knowledge. Print is indeed being transformed by increased digitization,

but it is up to publishers to adjust to the changing role of paper. For example, Ludovico sees an opportunity in the prospect that cheap printed material such as paperbacks and daily newspapers may indeed go completely digital. *The Quick Brown*, a dynamic work of art by Jonathan Puckey, illustrates the struggle printed newspapers face with staying relevant. Puckey has created software that regularly checks the Fox News website and highlights any changes in the material, showing that many of its headlines are published before the story has been verified in order to grab the reader's divided attention. Could printed newspapers shift roles to complement their web-based content with longer articles and more critical analysis of "yesterday's news?" Likewise, readers may grab a Kindle when heading for the beach or the train to dig into the latest bestseller, but this may allow room for printed books to become valuable material objects, thus sparking innovation in design as well as content.

Hybridization is another characteristic of post-digital print, meaning that future publications may not be completely digital or completely analog, but will contain qualities of both. Throughout the book, Ludovico analyses the salient characteristics of digital and print to strategize ways in which they can join forces and benefit future readers. Digitization implies speed, mass accessibility, and searchability, as well as enabling updates and customization. Print brings to the table tactility, experienced users, credibility, stability, and according to Ludovico, is 'the very best "interface" ever designed'. More so, hybridization can mean using digital networks to promote and distribute printed forms. Ludovico points to a quote by Surrealist theorist and artist André Breton: 'One publishes to find comrades!'. Avant-garde artists and zine makers have been utilizing networks to spread their ideas long before the Internet was conceived. *Post-Digital Print* is, in a way, a fascinating chronicle that proves one thing: people who have something to say will find a way to say it, using whatever means necessary or available. He emphasizes that, historically, the success of underground publishing projects depended on utilizing the technology and networks of the time (sympathetic printers, mimeography, the postal service, photocopying, CD-roms, etc.) to further their interests and find like-minded souls. It is in this spirit that independent publishers can use the Internet to increase accessibility to their works, collaborate with other publishers, and utilize print-on-demand technology to decrease printing and distribution costs. The book itself makes use of hybrid possibilities, printed through traditional offset means, print-on-demand, and uploaded as a PDF file to peer-to-peer exchange sites. Even the cover design emphasizes its hybrid status, as the matte cover is layered with glossy fingerprint smears, mimicking the touchscreen of an e-reader.

Alessandro Ludovico has been involved in publishing for the last twenty years and is the editor-in-chief of *Neural* magazine. He is also a member of Mag.net, the Electronic Cultural Publishers Network. His interests and experiences

in publishing have led to collaborations with the hacker artist Paolo Cirio and the artist couple UBERMORGEN, most notably in the projects *GWEI - Google Will Eat Itself* and *Amazon Noir*, the latter involving software designed to exploit Amazon's "Search Inside the Book" feature in order to obtain and save copyrighted books as PDF files. I include this short biography because it is by narrating his own story that Ludovico's writing shines. His personal accounts of establishing collaborative networks are especially interesting and useful for anyone intending to go down a similar path.

This book is not perfect. The blurred line between personal narrative and academic text is problematic at times, especially when observations and historical assumptions are described as facts, without citation. Likewise his writing style is very accessible but could have benefited from more thorough proofing. That being said, this work is a wonderful resource. For those interested in the "pixel or print" debate currently happening in the publishing industry, it highlights that a prescriptive attitude on either side is neither useful for the survival of the industry nor the reader at large. For those interested in media arts, the book showcases a large number of artists reflecting on our changing attitudes towards text and technology, both historically and in the current time. Moreover, it's a useful do-it-yourself guide for publishers, writers, and all those interested in sharing and archiving cultural heritage. Finally, it prefaces the larger discussion into how technological shifts in the cultural sectors are changing political options and reshaping daily communication. In any case, since the book is available online as a free PDF, there's no reason not to take a closer look. Just Google it!