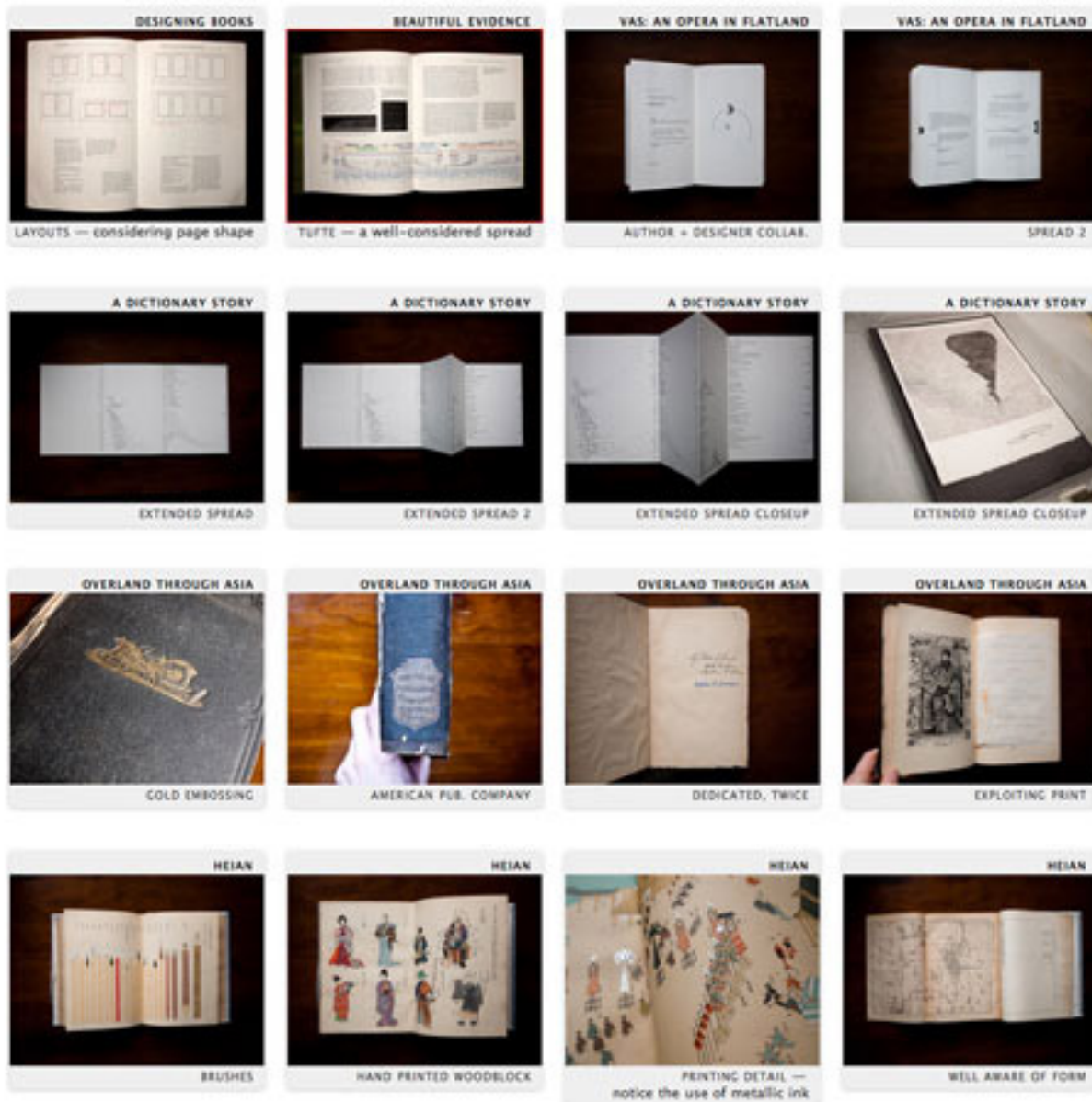


Former Book Designer Says Good Riddance to Print

Written by Nick Bilton



A recent blog post by Craig Mod, a self-titled computer programmer, book designer and book

publisher, offers a thoughtful and distinctive perspective on the move of books from paper to interactive devices like Apple's iPad.

Mr. Mod summarizes his argument in the subtitle of his post: *"Print is dying. Digital is surging. Everyone is confused. Good riddance."*

Mr. Mod divides content broadly into two categories: content where the form is important, such as poetry or text with graphics, and content where form is divorced from layout, which he says applies to most novels and non-fiction.

This kind of thinking makes a key point: instead of arguing about pixels versus paper, as many book lovers tend to do, it is more useful to focus on whether the technology is a good match for the content.

Under Mr. Mod's analysis, the common paperback and many other physical books are disposable. He writes, *"Once we dump this weight, we can prune our increasingly obsolete network of distribution. As physicality disappears, so, too, does the need to fly dead trees around the world."*

As someone who long reaped a paycheck from the sale of books, Mr. Mod isn't looking at the transition with any form of glee. Instead, he argues that it doesn't really matter which vessel we choose to read on, since the content will always be king. He writes, "For too long, the act of printing something in and of itself has been placed on too high a pedestal. The true value of an object lies in what it says, not its mere existence."

When I've written in the past about the changing landscape of the print world, I usually get a raft of angry comments stating that print will never go away or that books will have to be pried away from a reader's cold dead hands.

In anticipation of such commentary, Mr. Mod's argument is highly respectful of people's love of the physicality of holding and touching a book. In comparison, sitting upright at a computer screen does not offer this "maternal embrace." Yet devices like Amazon.com's Kindle and Apple's iPhone and iPad are getting closer to that intimate experience.

Mr. Mod also discusses the need to push the boundaries of how we interact with content on these devices. Apples's iBookstore, for example, takes the book metaphors too literally in a digital setting and doesn't innovate enough given the tools at hand. *"The metaphor of flipping pages already feels boring and forced on the iPhone. I suspect it will feel even more so on the iPad. The flow of content no longer has to be chunked into 'page' sized bites."*

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For hundreds of years, we've been consuming information on static pages, and for the most part, this content has been presented with a beginning, middle and end. Nonlinear, digital platforms will prompt a new range of thinking about stories and how to tell them.

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