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Material culture of books as historical and design objects: experiences of the past, of the present and for the future

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Abstract This article examines how the book, as a practical, aesthetic, and symbolic artifact, has been affected and influenced by technological, behavioral, social, cultural, and economic changes. These changes have consequences on production, development, marketing, and consumption. The text discusses the evolution of this relationship over time, its current state and potential future trends. It emphasizes the historical significance and design of the book, considering it a crucial object associated with knowledge and human freedom.

Keywords Koselleck, Darnton, Material Culture, History of book.

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Cultura material do livro enquanto objeto histórico e de design: experiências do passado, do presente e para o futuro

Resumo *Este artigo analisa como o livro, enquanto artefato prático, estético e simbólico, foi afetado e influenciado por mudanças tecnológicas, comportamentais, sociais, culturais e econômicas. Trazendo consequências na produção, desenvolvimento, comercialização e consumo. O texto aborda a evolução dessa relação ao longo do tempo, sua situação atual e possíveis tendências futuras. Destaca-se a importância histórica e o design do livro, considerando-o um objeto crucial associado ao conhecimento e à liberdade humana.*

Palavras-chave Koselleck, Darnton, Cultura Material, História do Livro.

Cultura material del libro como objeto histórico y de diseño: experiencias del pasado, del presente y del futuro

Resumen *Este artículo analiza cómo el libro, como artefacto práctico, estético y simbólico, se vio afectado e influenciado por cambios tecnológicos, comportamentales, sociales, culturales y económicos. Trayendo consecuencias a la producción, desarrollo, comercialización y consumo. El texto aborda la evolución de esta relación a lo largo del tiempo, su situación actual y posibles tendencias futuras. Se resalta la importancia histórica y el diseño del libro, considerándolo un objeto crucial asociado al conocimiento y la libertad humana.*

Palabras clave Koselleck, Darnton, Cultura material, Historia del libro.

Introduction

The relationship between humanity and the artifact called book is fascinating, due to the time in which it has already existed, as well as its important changes throughout history, because of its transformations: technology, production, marketing, consumption, use and meaning.

Thus, among the various facets of this relationship between humanity and the book, that of material culture can be highlighted as the focus of this article, since it brings with it social, economic, cultural and meaning aspects, that go beyond the cost of production and acquisition, or only of one or another aspect involving the artifact.

This relationship ends up involving all the aforementioned aspects, even in different degrees of intensity, from person to person, or compared to numerous social groups in different temporalities or geographical spaces.

Therefore, we can understand that the book is one of the most successful cases in the transmission of knowledge (which can be considered a form of the meaning of individuals or groups), since it unites images and words, in such a way that facilitates communication to ensure the understanding of information, precisely because of this gathering (Santaella, 2018).

And since the book is an object or artifact inserted in societies for centuries, it is important that it is analyzed and can receive reflections on its importance in material culture, so that we can understand how such a relationship between artifact and humanity occurs. This is necessary, given that the human species is the only one capable of producing instruments and objects to use in its activities, as well as promoting values for their creations (Dohmann, 2013).

According to Darnton (2010), the book is one of the most evident and important media ever developed by humanity, which is used since the creation of writing for the dissemination and perpetuation of knowledge. Given that with the appearance of writing the records of humanity began aiming at the transmission of information. Among the possible analyses related to the relationship between humanity and the book, one that is worth mentioning is the one proposed by Chartier (1998), which deals with the act of reading, contemplating the gesture, goals and handling of the artifact, passing through the dematerialization of it, for the digital environment and cyberspace, also characterized as a cultural practice.

Nonetheless, this article presents reflections, provocations and information, related to the relationship between humanity and the book, more broadly, in an attempt to exemplify and theorize how the relationship happens between reading habits and the relationship of use and consumption of books for adults.

In addition, it will be possible to verify the use of a temporal organization for the information, divided into three facets, or three-dimensional, as Ricoeur (2007) recalls, that we owe this chronological order to Saint Augustine (354-430).

The experience of the past

The book, according to Hansen (2019), has had numerous definitions from different points of view, since it is considered a complex object and involves a tangle of possibilities depending on the purpose of such definition. But still, it is possible to understand the book as an artifact, to consider it “not as a natural but an artificial, material and symbolic object” (Hansen, p. 07, 2019).

The book, therefore, has a series of relationships to which it is subject throughout history, from its creation to contemporary times, in the different forms it existed, in objectives and importance, according to each time in which it has been present. In addition to its relations with areas of human development, that contributed to the changes through which it has gone through the years. Thus, in this idea of correlations, it is essential to explain some other aspects intrinsically linked to the book, such as design, semiotics, the reader, history and a more recent one, the publishing market, as it is known today. It is necessary, then, to define the concepts mentioned above. It is possible to find several definitions for design, either by the Latin origin of the word “designare” (Cardoso, 2004), or even its immediate meaning that relates it as a project, in free translation. But something that deserves attention is the reason why it exists, which is, in its purpose, to solve a problem, whether practical, aesthetic or symbolic, subtly corroborating the concepts elaborated by Löbach (2001), who establishes the concept of practical, aesthetic and symbolic functions for any design object. Meanwhile, semiotics brings the conductive wire to the constructive articulation process of a system of meaning, which is the science that studies the formulation of the meaning of things to someone somewhere, at some point, whether objects, concepts, or forms of understanding. This way, it is possible to understand design results as carriers of meanings, which integrate message communication processes (NIEMEYER, 2007).

The reader, according to the Instituto Pró Livro (2019), in the research *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil* (Portraits of Reading in Brazil), about the reading habits of the adult Brazilian population, defines the reader as the person who read, entirely or in parts, at least one book in a short time. But it is still possible to bring a broader definition, in the sense that it is someone who reads written texts to themselves, mentally, or to someone else, aloud.

And yet, the concept of the editorial market is understood as the set of actors involved in the creation and development of the book, as well as its production, marketing and consumption itself. Thus, it is possible to list writers, readers, designers, illustrators, reviewers, publishers, printing companies, bookstores, stationery stores, institutions, schools, universities and government, as actors involved in the book process. And from a set of concepts that permeates the book, there is still an area that initially could not be part of this discussion, but which is of fundamental importance for

this article, which is history itself, an area of knowledge that deals precisely with the ways of telling what happened, to enable others to understand at what point something is, and how far can people reach.

History will be defined from the material culture related specifically to the book, considering that it is the point of convergence of this article, since “it is one of the most vital fields of the human sciences. Perhaps its success expresses a fascination with a world we’ve lost, now that the internet makes printed paper seem archaic” (Darnton, p. 10, 2010).

Knowledge is one of the most important features of humanity, being transmitted by generations, once orally and afterward, by more than two millennia, through handwritten or printed artifacts that could store it to conserve the information (Lyons, 2011). Thus, how knowledge is stored and transmitted between people over time is of utmost importance. Considering the book as a recognized instrument of storage and diffusion of knowledge and wisdom, this artifact was and is one of the most used objects by humanity throughout history for this purpose.

As Hallewell (2017) states, the book serves as a subsidy or matter for the literary expression of cultural and ideological issues throughout history. Therefore, it ends up undergoing the influence of graphic aspects, which consist of the fusion between aesthetics and available production technology, as well as raw materials (this for physical books) used in this construction.

The practice of the present

It can also be highlighted that the book is characterized as an artificial and symbolic object. Artificial because it brings together a series of raw materials in its composition and undergoes industrial processes. Symbolic because it contains information that serves someone, for some purpose, in a determined geographic and temporal context, bringing the vastness of interpretations and utilities (Hansen, 2019). This way, a correlation can be brought with the concept of space of experience and horizon of expectation, brought by Koselleck (2014), in which, in longer periods spaces of experience occur, as with the use of books by clerics and nobility and, subsequently, with the popularization through movable type and printing. This ends up generating the possible horizons of expectations regarding what the book artifact will be, based on the lived experience, initially by individuals and thereafter by large groups.

Thus, throughout its history and evolution, starting with papyri, animal leather rolls, the invention of paper and the use of the codex, the book is an artifact that has experienced transformations. Either because of the format, the way of production, which for centuries was the domain of the church, small groups of royalty or the European aristocracy, or even the access to information in the language of each location (Lyons, 2011). And finally, digital books, the ones with the greatest appeal, possibility and

practicality of being stored and accessed from a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet, all of which are virtual realities (Martins, 2016).

The reported changes brought with them a series of transformations in the way people relate to the book, since there is a specific gesture for each format used for storing texts, as well as the very meaning of the object, according to its size, subject and materials used (Tschichold, 2007). This brings to mind the place occupied by the artifact and where it is handled (library, bookstore, public, private, physical, digital).

Thus, it is possible to make a relationship of meaning to the book, since before the person who handles and interacts with it, there is the generation of experience and the establishment of connections beyond what is tangible. Therefore, the book, for all the aspects mentioned, can be seen as a sign, since it generates meaning for someone in each context. In this way, this idea can be corroborated with the concepts brought by Santaella (2018), in which the author brings a series of concepts and applications related to the sign, such as its use to symbolize a concept or specific aspects, such as authority, law, among other possibilities.

Moving forward, it is possible to understand that the transformations that occurred in the way of storing information and relating to the artifacts that carry knowledge generated new forms of meaning for the book, both for users and for the companies that produce and professionals who develop them. Thus, authors, readers, designers, typographers, printing companies, publishers, stores (physical and online), and other actors who may be involved in the book process, as an artifact that has value and is part of the so-called material culture, as points out Cardoso (2016), establish distinct connections with people, who are influenced by cultural, social, political and economic aspects.

In addition, the book brings with it the ability to produce sensations, establish and promote the imagination, through the contents prepared and placed in detail on its pages. This also occurs through the graphic design project, layout and choice of colors, typography, images and graphic elements that will be part of the artifact, especially its edition, as it is commonly called in the editorial environment (Hendel, 2006).

In this way, it is also important to think about the materials and manufacturing processes of the artifact, as these aspects will all highly influence the interaction and consequent result of what one had contact with in the book. Vision, touch, smell, cognition are all affected by the characteristics of the book (Martins Filho, 2008). Even if the sensations are not the same in digital books, it is possible to understand that the experience of interaction (contact, meanings and the way of reading) can lead us to, at least, imagine such sensations.

From the above, simultaneously with the constant changes which the book has been subject to throughout human history (from the technical, technological, social, use and commercial perspectives), it is evident the need to understand how reading habits and the relationship between the use and consumption of books for adults happen, which can influence

the future of the artifact, and aspects that surround it, as well as its meaning for people, based on the concepts of material culture.

The expectations of the future

Technological and procedural advances have modified how editorial design is interacted with, whether when it comes to producing or consuming. Thus, in the current context, to think about the perspectives of the future, it is evident again, the focus of this work, is on the effects that these changes have brought in the interaction and meaning with the artifact. In addition to more latent and faster evidence of the development of mobile devices that allow viewing and reading books and other editorial materials digitally.

The first e-reader (device for reading digital books, e-books) was launched in 1999 in Palo Alto, California under the name of Rocket eBook, without expression or immediate impact on the universe to which the book belongs, but with effects that were perceived during the first two decades of the 21st century. And already in 2001, Nokia brought to the market the first smartphone, the Nokia 9210.

In 2005, the ePub format (File format for digital publications, widely adopted by platforms and reading devices) for publishing e-books was born. The more common format is paid e-books and it was already used by Amazon, which in 2007 launched its e-reader called Kindle, a device that revolutionized the market and the way interaction takes place, considering that it is the most popular on the market at the moment.

In 2010, Apple launched the iPad, a device that also brought a revolution to users and markets, such as publishing, consoles, digital games etc. And when this article is written, the offer of devices such as e-readers, tablets and smartphones is immense with different brands and models, which makes the challenge of publications increasingly interesting, as well as the task of understanding the multiple possibilities of interaction and meaning of the book.

Large publishers and digital stores such as Amazon (FLATSCHART, 2014), Saraiva, Cultura, among others, already have a considerable range of digital books in their collection of titles, but this does not happen in small and medium publishers with more than a decade in the publishing market. This worry often happens due to the way publishers are conducted, how copyright contracts are drawn up and, sometimes, the fear of piracy is what stops the opening of new fields through digital books.

Even with these concerns, several small publishing labels have been investing in new means of publication, as well as independent authors, making the prospects for the future better than the current 5% that digital books occupy in the Brazilian publishing market, according to the Câmara Brasileira do Livro (CBL, 2013), while other markets have more significant shares, as will be presented below.

How books currently exist and how they are read are part of the continuous development that has been taking place in their historical path. Therefore, it is natural that with technological advances there are worries, but several examples can be seen that had an initial rejection or fear, but which over the years have contributed considerably to current advances, especially in the propagation of knowledge, such as the invention of the Gutenberg press, the steam press by Frederic Koenig (1814), the Linotype (1884) (Freire, 2009), the telegraph by Samuel Morse (1844) (Ferreira, 2003), the computer, the internet and, more recently, mobile devices such as e-readers, tablets and smartphones.

Observing the new generations of readers, those who were born connected, or even previous generations who have seen the need to keep up with the behavioral and market changes caused by the advent of such technologies, it is clear that the book has experienced several of these changes that have made it more and more digital, giving rise to the digital book product, which will be called e-book from now on, as it is the most used nomenclature in the publishing market. The e-book has mobile devices as the main protagonists of its rise (Flatschart, 2014).

With mobile technologies, it is possible to observe and follow more closely these changes in the relationship with the book through these new generations of readers. Readers of generations “Y” and “Z” (People born between 1981-1996 and 1997-2010, respectively), are digital natives, were born with new technologies incorporated, accustomed to mobile technologies, performing multiple tasks simultaneously and on different devices (Oliveira, 2009), what Jenkins (2009, p. 43) decided to call “media convergence, which consists of changing the media industry’s relationships between technologies, markets, genres and audiences”.

With the new technologies, interactive interfaces for the screens also came, in which the individual can actively access desired functions and information and no longer passively, as in the traditional mass media. In this scenario, the individual becomes the driver of the content and thus the interaction with any type of information or interface becomes increasingly dynamic.

To meet the new demands of consumers of information, connected at all times, the media undergo a continuous cycle of adaptation and/or evolution when a new format emerges. This process had a profound impact with the dawn of the internet, then mobile devices, and finally apps. Reformulating the construction and presentation of information from paper to digital media has become a fundamental process for the world of editorial design. Such information has had a direct impact on the way of composing and distributing the contents of e-books, such as typography, image, grid and what will be the forms of interface and possibilities of interaction that users will have access to make their experience more interesting and satisfying.

The passage from the printed book to the digital one has great implications not only in the format and space of the printed page but in all the

experiences that previously existed around the “traditional” book, such as touch, smell, weight, color and type of paper, the possibility of taking notes, colored and black and white pages, etc. The book, as an important instrument for recording our history and culture, raises the will and interest in the e-book as an object of study and analysis by several authors such as (Horie, 2012), (Flatschart, 2014), (Procópio, 2010; 2014). Such authors write about technology and market changes and their impact on the interaction between readers, authors and publishers, following a path focused on market and technical aspects.

Following this analysis, they fail to address aspects of the user experience when interacting with the interface and elements of the digital book, and neither do they deal with the physical book or the artifact in a broad way. Thus, there is an unexplored gap, which is the central area of interest in this study. The digital book on the tablet screen, delimited by a frame, suggests that we have a plan similar to that of the printed page. Your pages seem to behave like physical pages and your graphics are similar. However, this idea is far from correct when looking at how interaction happens in a printed book compared to an e-book (MOD, 2010). In this sense, graphic characteristics related to layouts such as typography, image and grid, influence how the reader interacts with the e-book and this happens differently from the printed book.

Methodological procedures and presentation of results

The present research is established upon an approach called interpretivism, which starts from the principle of investigating the existing reality from the perspective of social construction that is configured especially from language as a basic substrate, without thereby exhausting its meanings or explaining phenomena definitively (Lincoln; Cuba, 2005).

And based on this scientific epistemology, a qualitative approach was adopted, with the application of an online survey with a series of questions related to reading habits and the relationship between the use and consumption of books by adults, to understand how this relationship is configured, and how it can affect or influence the future of the artifact and, consequently, the various aspects that surround it, as brought previously in this article (Creswell, 2010).

The form was built from sections, which aimed to obtain information related to socioeconomic aspects, reading habits, types of books consumed, as well as specific issues related to physical and digital books. To understand how each part of this relationship is configured for the public that participated in the research, and also to obtain a sample that can reflect people who have the habit of reading and consuming books.

The questionnaire remained online through the Google Forms platform between 04/01/2022 and 04/25/2022 and was shared and sent to various groups on the internet (readers, reading clubs, designers, editors,

layout designers, teachers etc.) and contacts by email, from adults aged 18 and over, residing in Brazil, with 62 valid participations.

Among the aspects that stand out, it is possible to start with the predominant age of the participants, with 51.6% between 18 and 30 years old. The survey also shows that women are the majority, 62.9% and that concerning the number of books read per year, people who have the habit of reading 3 to 6 books per year represent 38.7% of the public. As for the predominant language, it was found that Portuguese prevails at 98.4%, with English second, at 43.5%. Related to the most read subjects, among 36 options, Fantasy stood out, with 46.8%, Science Fiction, with 41.9% and Romance, preferred by 38.7%. It was also asked if the number of pages influences the willingness and mood to read, for 54.8% it does not impact the experience and habit, but for 41.9% it does. Which may give some indications and influences on consumption and habits.

Related to where, when and why they read, most of the reading time takes place in the bedroom, with 93.5%, followed by the living room, with 62.9%. And the night period stands out, with 72.6% and free time (weekends, holidays and nights), with 56.5%. Regarding why they read, leisure appears with 88.7% and acquiring knowledge was indicated by 74.2% of people.

Regarding what they consider most important when choosing a book, its subject was the top choice, with 91.9%, followed by authorship, with 40.3%. In addition, 90.3%, when looking for a new book, vary between known authors and new possibilities.

About aspects that are characterized in material culture, that is, in the relationship between the object and the person, besides this relationship with the group or society of the context where the person is established, questions were asked about where the books are kept. The three places that stand out are the bedroom (22.6%), the living room (19.4%) and the office (14.5%), all with the indication of being placed on open shelves, that is, which can be seen by the people who responded to the survey, as well as by others who visit or interact for some reason with these spaces.

It is interesting to note that, at the end of reading a book, for 93.5% of people, the subsequent action is to keep the artifact, to remain with it and, consequently, to expose it according to the information previously brought, which brings another strong aspect of material culture, that of belonging, of possession of the object.

Regarding the type of book, between physical and digital, according to different objectives, such as work/study versus leisure, there is still a preference for physical books. Being 64.5% (work/study), and 77.4% (leisure). While the digital book, in the respective options, is preferred by 35.5% and 16.1%. This also brings interesting information about the possibility of possession, more evident, than the physical book provides.

In the aspects of structure and composition of the book, there are also differences as to what motivates someone's decision when it comes to physical and digital books. Considering that in physical books, the cover is the main aspect for the choice, with 85.5%, followed by the content, with

77.4%, then the title, being 62.9% and the type of paper in the core (inner part of the book, the pages themselves), being important for 53.5% of the public.

And in the digital book, the most important aspect is the content, with 89.6% of the preferences, followed by the title, with 52.1%, the cover appears as the third most important aspect, with 37.5%, and then authorship, with 35.4%. This may indicate that, as the digital book is stored on a mobile device, in a digital file, the cover is a less relevant aspect, as it will not be exposed, unlike the physical book, which usually, like other objects, captures people's gaze and attention, for its shape, colors and structure, that is, for its composition.

In this way, it is interesting to think about how such information makes explicit the relationship, habits and potential of the artifact and material culture since the book has been analyzed throughout the text, in addition to its practical function, passing through aesthetic and symbolic aspects, characteristics that are part of Design Theories (Löbach, 2001), Semiotics (Santaella, 2018), Material Culture (Cardoso, 2016), History of Books (Danrton, 2010); (Lyons, 2011), and also, when dealing with temporalities, experiences and expectations (Pomian, 1993); (Koselleck, 2014); (Danrton, 2010).

Final considerations

Taking the aforementioned into account, this article delves into the intricate connections between the book as an artifact, its materiality, and people's usage and consumption habits. It does so by examining three temporalities, which provide insights into the historical context and development of the book, its current state, and the potential future scenarios that may unfold.

In this regard, two key theories are presented to bolster the construction of these ideas. The first theory revolves around the three temporalities—past, present, and future—drawing inspiration from Danrton's (2010) inquiries, which challenge conventional perspectives. Meanwhile, the second theory, inspired by Koselleck's (2014) concepts of the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation," highlights how the past and present have been characterized by the former, until a certain point where a shift occurs towards the formation of expectations regarding the present and the yet-to-be-realized future.

The notion of this conceptual shift can be understood through the lens of the phenomena of firstness, secondness, and thirdness (Niemeyer, 2007), derived from Semiotics. These phenomena encompass the processes of perceiving and comprehending what we encounter through our senses, and subsequently articulating our understanding of them. Although this process is often imperceptible due to its rapid, natural, and conditioned nature, it intricately intertwines the three temporalities and the concepts of space of experience and horizon of expectation.

Therefore, the culmination of these ideas, concepts, and information leads us to conclude that material culture, with the book at its center, is profoundly influenced by the physical aspects and the myriad of elements that shape people's relationship with the object. Moreover, this influence extends to professionals in the book development sector, companies, and the entire market, aspects that have not been exhaustively explored in this present discussion but undoubtedly play a significant role in shaping the very essence of the artifact. Additionally, the social, technological, economic, and cultural characteristics inherent to humanity, transcending temporal boundaries, further contribute to the intricate tapestry of the book's existence. These multifaceted influences provide fertile ground for further exploration and study, focusing on specific areas of inquiry.

Consequently, a genuine concern is raised, calling upon future researchers to delve deeper into the study and explore the implications brought about by each space of experience that has already unfolded, as well as the possibilities and expectations the future holds for the book as an artifact.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the dynamic nature of the book as an artifact within the broader context of a rapidly evolving technological landscape. The advent of digital platforms, e-readers, and online publishing has introduced new dimensions to the book's materiality and consumption patterns. The digital realm offers unique opportunities for interaction, accessibility, and dissemination of knowledge, challenging traditional notions of the physical book. As such, understanding the interplay between traditional and digital formats, as well as the evolving preferences and behaviors of readers in this digital age, becomes crucial for comprehending the book's future trajectory.

Additionally, exploring the socio-cultural significance of the book as a symbol of knowledge and freedom uncovers deeper layers of its meaning. Beyond its utilitarian function as a vessel of information, the book has served as a catalyst for intellectual, artistic, and societal revolutions throughout history. Its presence in educational institutions, libraries, and private collections not only reflects the acquisition and transmission of knowledge but also shapes individual and collective identities. Therefore, further research should delve into the intricate relationship between the book, culture, and power dynamics, examining how its symbolic value resonates across different cultural contexts and influences social structures and discourses.

In conclusion, the study of the book as a material artifact requires a comprehensive exploration of its historical roots, current manifestations, and potential futures. By considering the interplay between temporalities, the concept of space of experience and horizon of expectation, and the multifaceted influences of technology, society, and culture, we can gain a deeper understanding of the book's significance as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon. This understanding, in turn, provides a solid foundation for continued research and inquiry into the complex and ever-evolving world of the book.

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