

Paper (only in our) dreams?

Many newspapers and magazines have closed shop in these last few months. Writing about digital communication on a six-monthly magazine is certainly risky: by the time you read these words, the world of printed newspapers may be completely changed forever!

But we don't think this will happen...

The funeral of printed paper has loomed on the horizon several times since Gutenberg freed communication from the golden retreat of scribes.

Dictatorships have burned books and newspapers that resisted to their violent conformism. The advent of the radio first and of television later should have wiped away books and newspapers. But ideas printed on paper have always resurfaced, contributing to the widespread of modernity and culture.

The diffusion in the use of the web has certainly put newspapers to a difficult test, but we feel that the problem lies more in their 19th-century structure than in principle: the two types of media are not antithetic but rather complementary. Indeed, if the web allows spreading a piece of news in "real time" (free and on a worldwide level); the newspaper offers instruments that allow to delve into the news item, and these are fundamental for the comprehension and assessment of the news itself. As Hans Nijenhuis, former editor of the Dutch newspaper Ncr Next, summarizes: "News is free, but information is not".

And what about books? How will they be able to fend off the attack by e-books?

Being able to place in one's pocket an object that collects and allows the reading of hundreds of books is certainly an alluring proposal. But in this case, too, we really cannot believe in the end of paper. Those who love reading books surely cannot deny themselves the pleasure of browsing through a bookstore looking for a casual or pre-ordained "encounter" with such a stimulating means of knowledge, one that often heralds important ideas. Magic moments whose image becomes one with the light material essence of the book itself. How could we, in our memories, identify a reading companion that is "digitally" amassed with a hundred others...?

Well, this is certainly a rather romantic consideration of the issue. But reasonable support of the improbable end of paper comes to us right from the web, when they tell us that Google (undisputed pioneer of innovative enterprises) is on the one hand collecting books from the entire world in order to make them available to everyone in digital format, and on the other, has made an agreement with On Demand Books to supply a printed version of books that do not have copyrights at the price of eight dollars each! This guarantees the survival for paper, and, for us, it ensures that the traditional pleasure of reading will go on and on.

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