



# *Masterclass*

## *a Transbook event*

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# Creating print and digital works: limitations and challenges

When asked: "Are you print or digital?", speakers answered "both". These artists have quickly caught on to the new developments made possible by transmedia formats – developments which are only at their beginning and raise a host of creative, technical and economic issues in a sector still shy about exploring the new possibilities. This masterclass was an opportunity to review examples of titles and look at pitfalls and solutions when navigating between formats.

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**Étienne Mineur** co-founder and creative director of Éditions Volumiques **FRANCE**

**Julie Stephen Chheng** illustrator and designer **FRANCE**

**Ajubel** illustrator and designer **SPAIN**

**Ben Newman** illustrator **UNITED KINGDOM**

**James Wilson** head of the digital R&D department at Nobrow **ROYAUME UNI**



Digital publishing is a “huge new market”, believes Ajubel, but due to its complexity, illustrators are scared to take the plunge. They must get involved, however, said the Cuban artist, to offer readers high-quality digital creations and offset the massive but mediocre offer currently found online.

## HYBRID FORMATS...

How does format influence the creation of a book and how a story is told? Étienne Mineur and Julie Stephen Cheng answered this question by examining the book as an object. Books have long been structured according to strict rules modelled on how we write, read and even think. The two artists are trying to change how this structure shapes book formats, be they print and/or digital. The book as object is a starting point that inspires the stories it contains, showing that yes, format shapes the story.

Les Éditions Volumiques first explored the possibilities offered by paper, creating books that fold and unfold like mazes, incorporate sound or have automatically turning pages; others resemble video or board games that the reader manipulates or hits. Hybrid formats start with a printed book which migrates to a digital format on a tablet or smartphone, making the book “connected”. The reading experience is more interactive and straddles the divide between playing and reading.

## ...AND FORMAT-TO-FORMAT ADAPTATION

Ben Newman and James Wilson took a different approach: to adapt the print title *Professor Astro Cat's Frontiers of Space* into an app, they needed to adapt the content as well. Their objective was twofold: create a new digital experience with an animated version of the character, and use the interactive nature of the app to get children interested in space.

The app needs to offer something completely different from the book: the child is at the centre of the experience, and chooses a personalised avatar. The book's pages, which contain too much information, are not reproduced as is, to prevent them from being unreadable on a tablet. Instead, they are divided into sections of information on which one zooms in with user-friendly navigation. Animation brings static pages to life and the tactile, interactive approach turns the passive consumption of printed information into active learning: readers play games to earn points and medals, advance to higher levels and win sections of a rocket they eventually assemble and use to fly to space. Children navigate the book freely but games and rocket building are incentives and rewards for learning and reading. Sounds accompany the reader as they work their way through the book without disrupting their concentration on the story.

Ben Newman kept certain parameters of digital publishing in mind when creating the new Professor Astrocat adventure in case the book is converted into an app, leaving room to re-think illustrations and add new importance to minor characters or illustrations that actually create the dimensions of the app. In this case, digital shapes print.

## CREATIVE HURDLES

Hybrid formats expand creative potential but bring together two unrelated worlds with very different economies. Etienne Mineur believes that the production of enhanced e-books associates the drawbacks of both print and e-publishing, and certain technical glitches make it hard to see clearly what direction a project will take.

These creations also involve an iterative process and a lot of back-and-forth between illustrator-authors, developers and testers. Sometimes, notes Ajubel, there are communication and comprehension issues between developers and illustrators. To prevent misunderstandings, each animated component needs to be described with the greatest precision so that the developer can stick to what the illustrator wants. It is a monumental task, like animation, which requires drawing characters from every angle and expression without distorting the original art.

It took five people six months of work to develop the Professor Astrocat app. App design is very expensive; several types of professionals are necessary, which raises questions about the initial economic model.

## ECONOMIC MODEL

Making apps is currently unprofitable: developing one is very expensive and consumers are still not ready to buy an app that costs more than €1 or 2. Éditions Volumiques have taken a paradoxical path to even things out: the company sells the book – the least expensive format to manufacture – and gives away the related app, the most expensive one.

Distribution is another problem. Once an app is constructed and put online, the biggest hurdle is making it stand out from a huge offer of existing apps, according to Ajubel. Likewise, book retailers are sometimes uncomfortable with hybrid publications, these connected objects that are hard to classify among their paper book selection and need to be explained to readers.

Julie Stephen Chheng finances her work via multiple sources. She divides her time between literary projects and her career as a freelance graphic designer, which gives her financial independence. For projects such as *La Pluie à Midi* she applies to various French organisations for funding, including the SCAM, the SACD Beaumarchais, the CNL and CNC Nouveaux Médias. Her most recent project, *Les aventures du petit train postal*, was made possible through crowdfunding. Artist residencies in France and abroad are another way Ms Chheng is able to develop new creative projects.



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