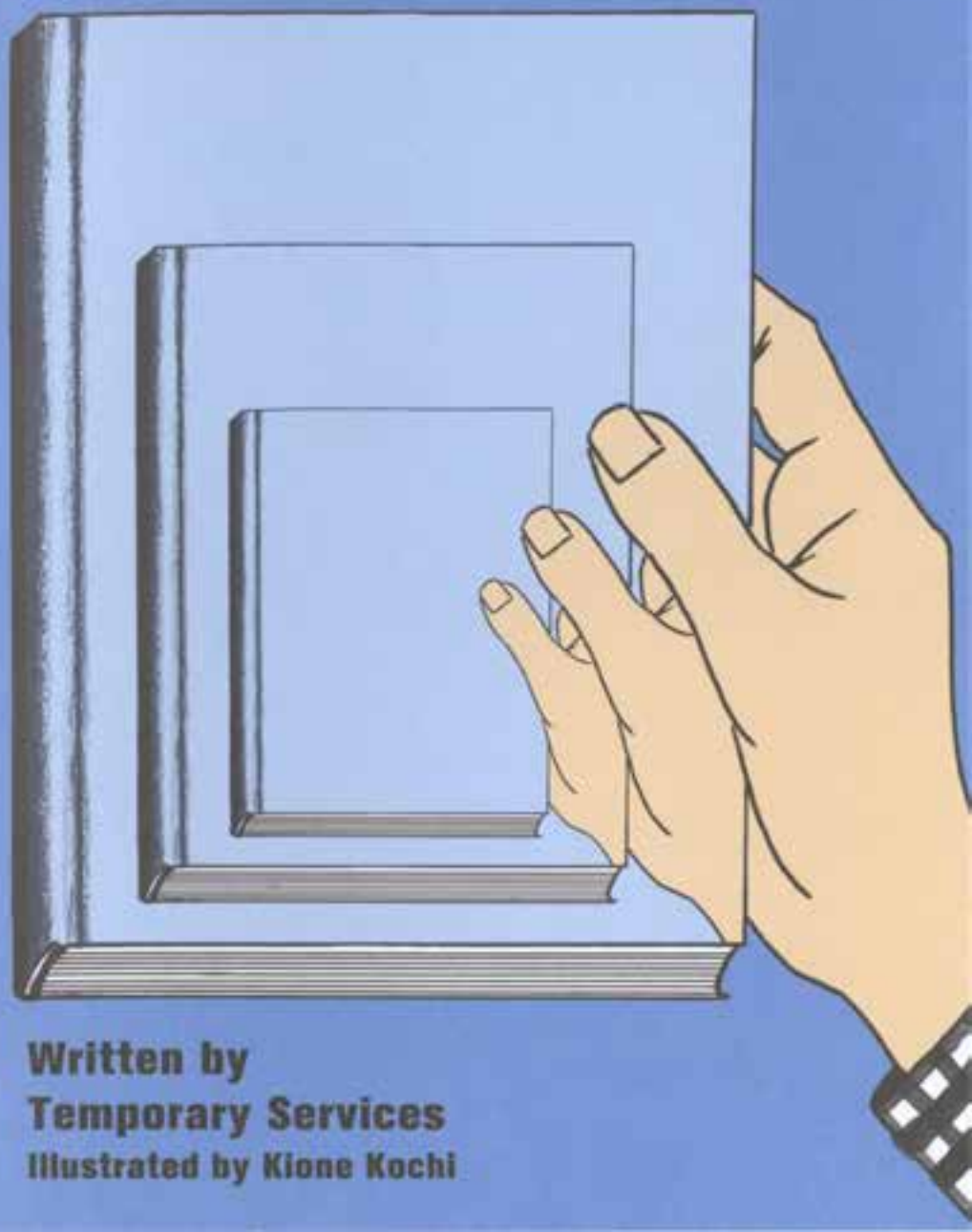


Publishing in the Realm of Plant Fibers and Electrons



Written by
Temporary Services
Illustrated by Kione Kochi

TEMPORARY SERVICES



BRETT BLOOM



MARC FISCHER

PUBLISHING IN THE REALM OF PLANT FIBERS AND ELECTRONS

by Temporary Services

Temporary Services has been actively thinking about, making, talking about, selling, and giving away publications for over 16 years. We have written or said things in interviews and lectures about our publishing, but we have never sat down to craft a long-form essay about our efforts and where they fit in the larger world of artist books, artist publishing and book making. This booklet is an attempt to articulate our ideas about publishing, particularly in light of the current post-digital¹ environment.

Publishing is central to everything we do as an artist group. We have been publishing since Temporary Services began in the winter of 1998. We have made over 100 publications in the form of books, booklets, poster-booklets, posters, and newspapers. Temporary Services has had as many as seven members in the past, but up until recently, we were a group of three people for most of our history. Salem Collo-Julien, who was involved with Temporary Services and our publishing imprint Half Letter Press since 2002, left the group and business in July of 2014. Temporary Services is now composed of two people: Brett Bloom and Marc Fischer.

Our experiences before Temporary Services contributed to our interest in self-publishing. We each brought different backgrounds that impacted our work together.

Marc Fischer published a fanzine titled Primary Concern (1987-91) while in high school and college. Primary Concern focused on underground music, commentary, and politics at a time when 'zine publishing was thriving around specific music genres like heavy metal and hardcore punk, that the mainstream music press did not care about. Primary Concern featured multiple interviews with bands, and cultural and activist subjects, in each issue and had print runs in the low hundreds, similar to early Temporary Services booklets. Issues of Primary Concern were locally distributed through direct sales at concerts, and consignment with record stores. Tower Records, under the direction of their chief 'zine buyer Doug Biggert, was extraordinary at distributing 'zines at their many stores, and helped Primary Concern spread to much of the United States, with a couple copies sent to approximately fifty different Tower Records stores.

1. The term "post-digital" marks a distinct development in print and digital culture. The term comes from Alessandro Ludovico's book *Post-Digital Print*, where he states: "In this post-digital age, digital technology is no longer a revolutionary phenomenon but a normal part of everyday life. The mutation of music and film into bits and bytes, downloads and streams is now taken for granted. For the world of book and magazine publishing however, this transformation has only just begun."

Distribution of Primary Concern was also far-reaching due to the massive and international network that existed around underground music at the time. 'Zine editors reviewed each others' publications, resulting in a steady stream of mail orders from all over the world—each containing a letter, a couple dollars in cash or stamps, or another 'zine in trade. Many of those mail orders turned into pen pal friendships, which sometimes resulted in face-to-face meetups. Primary Concern was added to a list of free resources for prisoners, which caused a flood of letters from prisoners and generated a number of new friendships. One of the people Marc met around this time was Angelo who, about 12 years later, collaborated with Temporary Services on the project *Prisoners' Inventions*. Angelo illustrated various contraptions and tools invented by fellow prisoners in order to survive the harsh realities of prison life. In most American prisons, prisoners do not have internet access and publications are a particularly important source of information and ideas.

Before founding Temporary Services, Brett Bloom was organizing a series of public initiatives called *Dispensing with Formalities* (DwF) from 1998-2002. DwF utilized free newspaper dispensers—the kind made of molded plastic—to distribute work in cities and towns including Chicago, Champaign/Urbana (Illinois), Selfoss (Iceland), Helsinki, Copenhagen and Geneva. The dispensers distributed art works—made in multiple or mass produced—by groups, individuals and organizations. Curious passersby took thousands of books, booklets, videotapes, fliers, and pamphlets home. Two of the early contributions to the project were screen printed posters urging people to join Adbusters' first International Buy Nothing Day, and handmade bars of soap with handcuff keys embedded in them, made by Michael Piazza and incarcerated youth.²

Marc contributed to DwF in Chicago from the beginning, as well as several later iterations in Copenhagen and Urbana. This was where collaborative work began between Brett and Marc. Marc made a series of free booklets for DwF, which contained collected images and clip art from phone books, advertisements, free papers and other print sources, accompanied by questionnaires that he wrote. We wanted to take our ideas outside the narrow ranges of age, race and class that we were seeing in gallery audiences. From collaborating on DwF, we gained a lot of experience and collected useful observations about how passersby interact with creative work in shared city spaces. We saw that our ideas often did not need an art context to be legible and that viewers could understand our work without knowing that we were artists. This cemented our desire to experiment with finding compelling ways to distribute our work and ideas, and this spirit continues after 16 years of working together.

We try to make a publication to accompany every exhibition, event, initiative, or project that we create or participate in. We also make stand-alone booklets when we want to investigate a topic, write about a peer's work, or conduct an interview with someone we admire. From the beginning, we've seen our publications as a form of taking responsibility for our ideas and their circulation.

2. Michael Piazza (1955 - 2006) was a pioneering Chicago-based, socially engaged artist, and a mentor to Temporary Services.

A limited audience attended the things we were organizing in the first year of our existence. We were just starting to organize exhibitions, and trying to find and build a community. Many of the projects were ephemeral or event-based, and making a booklet was a way of creating a paper trail, which may be the only tactile thing left at the end of our work. When people wanted to write about our work, the booklets provided information that helped critics get the basics right. Where other people would stop at the level of making a free postcard or a stack of one-page press releases, we created something more substantial. As the booklets increased in length—usually they were no more than 40 pages—it was clear how much the audiences appreciated these takeaways; they became an expected component of our work: a Temporary Services show without a free booklet is a rare occurrence. Even when we participate in group shows that include some kind of brochure by the curator or institution, we publish a separate free Temporary Services booklet. The booklet is a small gift to the audience for making the effort to attend.

Free publications helped circulate our work beyond the community of socially and politically engaged artists that were active in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Chicago. Our early publications were simple outlines with short texts giving some basic introductions to our work. They were more like catalogs than the informative resources that they have evolved into. We did not have the experience then to fully understand the complicated social system that we were building. This publication further articulates those aspects of our publishing. (See our **DISTRIBUTION MAP** on pages 10 and 11 for a visualization of this system.)

The initial print runs of our publications—around 200 copies each—provided copies for visitors to our storefront space in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago. Surplus copies from each printing lingered for months or years after completion of the exhibition or project and were given away to people who were interested. For the first five years of our existence, we gave everything away for free; we distributed thousands of booklets and made many of them available at no cost as PDFs.



We learned early on of the power of handing a stack of publications to potential collaborators, fellow travelers, and curators who might include our work in an exhibition or public initiative. The booklets transmit our values and our aesthetic concerns in one of the most



powerful and direct ways we can think of. It is more substantial than handing a business card or a scrap of paper with a URL scrawled on it. Both carry very little weight physically and symbolically. They hardly even exist as gestures because of their commonality and lack of invested meaning. A business card or URL is easy to lose and comes with a slight apology or nonchalance that makes them easy to dismiss.

A lot more resources and effort go into the print run of a publication than that of a business card. Multiple printing processes may be at work in a single booklet, and a stack of publications could span the course of ten years. Placing one's publications in someone else's hands feels substantial. No extra steps are needed to access the material: there are no URLs to type and no webpages to navigate. Of course the recipient can choose not to be invested in the gesture and the gift, but in our experience it nearly always makes people happy to get our materials.

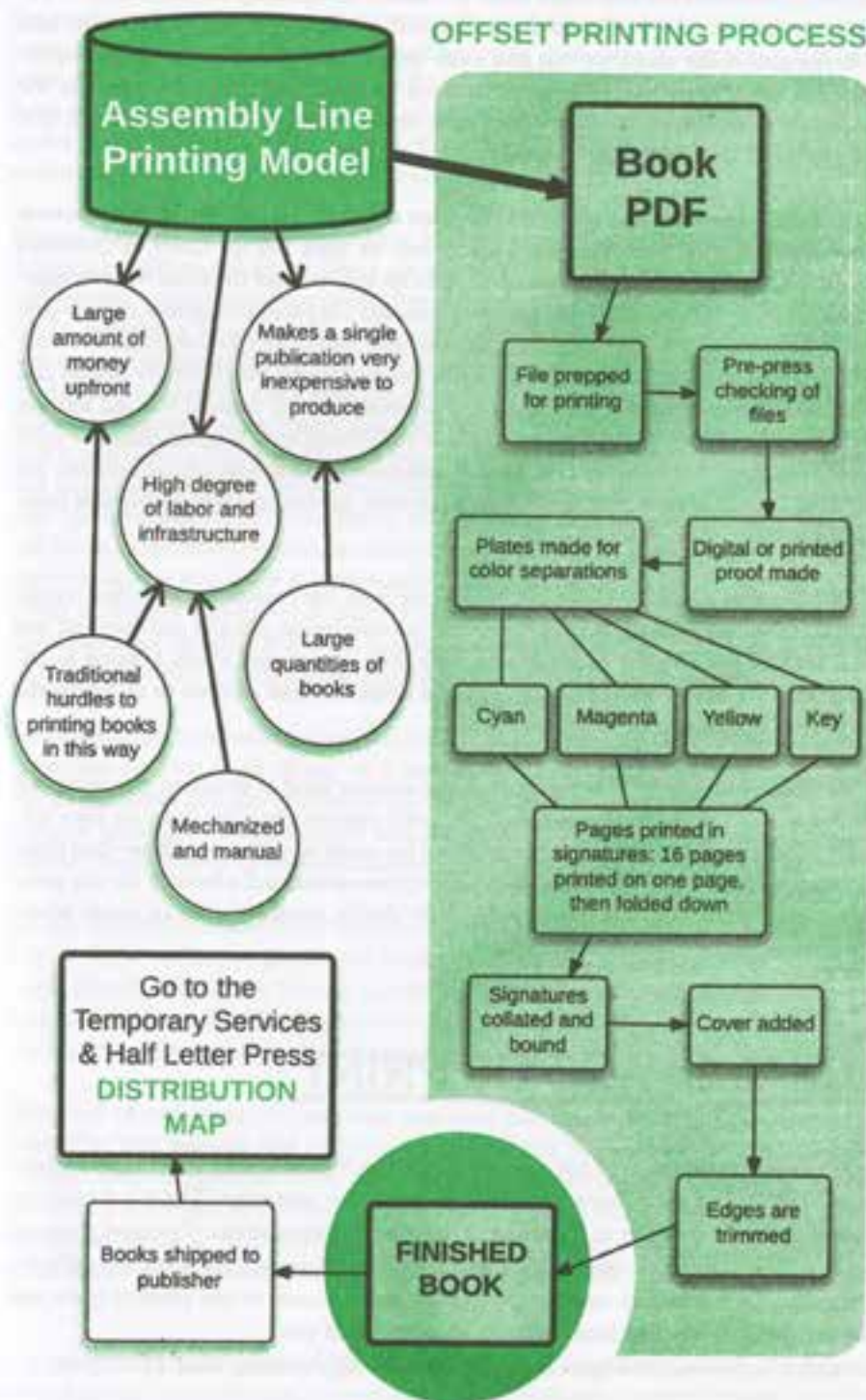
When Temporary Services started, every project was self-initiated and largely self-funded. Gradually we began to receive

invitations to participate in exhibitions or projects with various host institutions, public organizations, and independent curators with better resources. We started getting budgets—often small—to produce our work. With these fully or partially funded exhibitions came larger audiences and longer exhibition durations. To produce enough free booklets for each show, we had to start making them in larger quantities. Our first venture into offset printing came with the exhibit "Critical Mass" in 2002, curated by Stephanie Smith at the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago. We worked with a local Anarchist press named Black Dog (now defunct) to print nearly a thousand copies of *Into the Gray*, a collection of essays by G.W. Sok, then vocalist for the Dutch band The Ex. We have included a diagram of the offset printing process for those who are not intimately familiar with it.

This booklet led us to a strategy we still employ: to use funded exhibitions to create a print surplus. We may only need five hundred copies of a free booklet to last the run of an

ASSEMBLY LINE PRINTING MODEL (opposite page): This flowchart shows a standard industrial method of printing. We put it in here for those who may not be familiar with how it works. We use many different ways of printing to make our books, but this is the one we use the most.

OFFSET PRINTING PROCESS



exhibit, but it often does not cost much more to increase the quantity and make a thousand copies. Once the plates are made and the press is rolling, the biggest expenses are ink and paper. At the end of the show, we can give away those extras at a different exhibit—perhaps one that is not as well-funded—or we can sell them and use the proceeds to pay for self-funded publications, or to cover other costs associated with our creative work (for example, web-hosting and storage space rental).

It took us a while to realize that selling our booklets might be a good idea. We had become so accustomed to giving everything away that when we took *Into the Gray* to Quimby's Bookstore in Chicago, we proposed that the copies be stacked near the front door alongside the piles of other free publications. The shop manager Liz Mason suggested that we price them at a dollar each. If they were free, she said, they would be taken away just because they were free. On a shelf, the booklet would be displayed for a much longer period and was more likely to find readers that were truly interested in the content. We still sell our publications at Quimby's Books; they now have a little Temporary Services shelf. We offer many different titles for people to choose from and slowly selling low-priced booklets has yielded small chunks of money at fairly regular intervals, producing an economy that helps sustain our publishing practice.

Temporary Services started working in Chicago, far from the country's art market centers on the coasts. We had no interest in participating in commercial galleries and fairs and had to find a way for our ideas to move around with little money and effort. Making publications of our artwork, writing, photographs, and other material allowed us to bypass the gatekeeping of the art market and power centers.

We wanted to collaborate with others in building another kind of structure that takes care of more people and replaces the top-down, protected enclave. Over the years we have collaborated with hundreds of people and publishing has made sure that our ideas—and those of our collaborators—find larger audiences. Self-representation and advocacy for our peers has been a healthy alternative to the capitalist, individualist, market-driven art world where artists are managed by galleries and handlers.

SOCIAL SPACE OF PRINT

Print does have a number of unique characteristics which are yet to be superseded by anything else. The first of these characteristics is the way print uses space. The space taken up by printed materials, whether in the shape of document folders, stacks of printed pages on a table, or a library of shelves filled with books, is real and physical. This is entirely different from something existing only on a screen, since it relates directly to our physical space, and to a sensorial perception developed over [...] thousands of years.

—Alessandro Ludivico, *Post-Digital Print-The Mutation Of Publishing Since 1894*, p. 66

Printed materials actively inhabit our spaces and exist as social entities. Books are the end

result of a complex process where materials are amassed, processed and transformed, and the content is slowly shaped with machine and human labor to ultimately interact with the hands, brain, nose, and emotional states of a reader. Books simultaneously consume and create space in obvious and subtle ways. They carry their material origins with them even when transformed into the book form. That trees—those creatures that help us breathe—form the bodies of the books, registers with us, if not in a fully conscious manner. This makes books inherently social and tangibly ecological, always having a potential of social exchange: they are a social-spatial currency.

Printed materials can demarcate a space in alignment with its interior design, architecture, furnishing, fashion, and its use. There are spaces that present a limited range of publications and actively exclude certain content. For example, at an anarchist info shop, there will be books, pamphlets, posters, and t-shirts that are geared towards people who use the space. The printed materials in such a space not only have multiple values ascribed to them but can be used to transmit one's values to other in the same room. The body language of visitors and occupants when interacting with printed material may signal that they are a part of this community. If you spend more time in one section and disregard others, you display that you understand the difference between subcategories such as "anarcho-primitivism" and "queering anarchism." Familiarity with the material demonstrates one's membership, and builds nominal trust amongst other users of the space. It is easy to see when someone does not belong to a space. A person may enter an infoshop, or a religious bookstore, and if they do not see themselves in relation to the contents of the space, they will take a quick glance, and exit rapidly. Their body language tells us they are uncomfortable or uninterested, and cannot find a resting place from which to descend into the mental space of books.

We make printed material for many situations. Sometimes our publications go to specific spaces like an artist book library or a zine festival. The publications rely on these spaces and their visitors and users for in-person encounters. They comingle with the other publications, gaining or losing strength and meaning depending on their location, attendees' interests, and a variety of immeasurable nuanced interactions.

We are interested in accidental encounters with publications. In 2001 we organized *The Library Project* where we placed 100 books by artists and authors on the shelves of Chicago's Harold Washington Library Center—the city's largest public library—without the institution's permission. The books were added throughout the building, not just in the art section, to enable unexpected browsing experiences.

This kind of experience is becoming rare, now that online feeds of information can be tailored to our interests and complex algorithms can predict our shopping preferences. Curated blogs devoted to books and publishing sometimes offer surprising suggestions of material we might be interested in, but this is never as rich as finding a gem at a good bookstore, library or archive. Seeing a few scanned pages on a screen is hardly an indicator of the entire book's worth. The internet has a very hard time replicating or compensating

DISTRIBUTION MAP (next page): This is a visualization of the distribution of our publications in digital and printed formats. It shows the social and professional networks we are a part of and the spaces where productive or accidental encounters with our publishing are possible.

Publication Pre-print Process

PDF
generated for
print
circulation

Reprinted
publications

Publication printed (print
runs have ranged
from 200 -
18,000)

Distribution for
sales

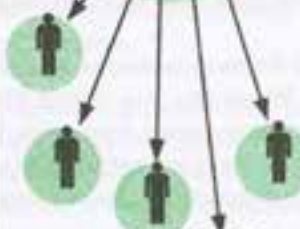
Anagram -
our European
distributor

Copies
sold or
sent to
libraries

- Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
- Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection, Flaxman Library, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- Museum of Modern Art Library, NY
- Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago

Placed in
stores in UK,
France, and
Germany

200 to
10,000 copies
given away
during public
exhibitions of
our work



Booklet Clouds:
exhibitions of our
booklets in large
hanging clusters

Direct
distribution to
stores

Copies sent to
independent artist
run spaces, and
book centers

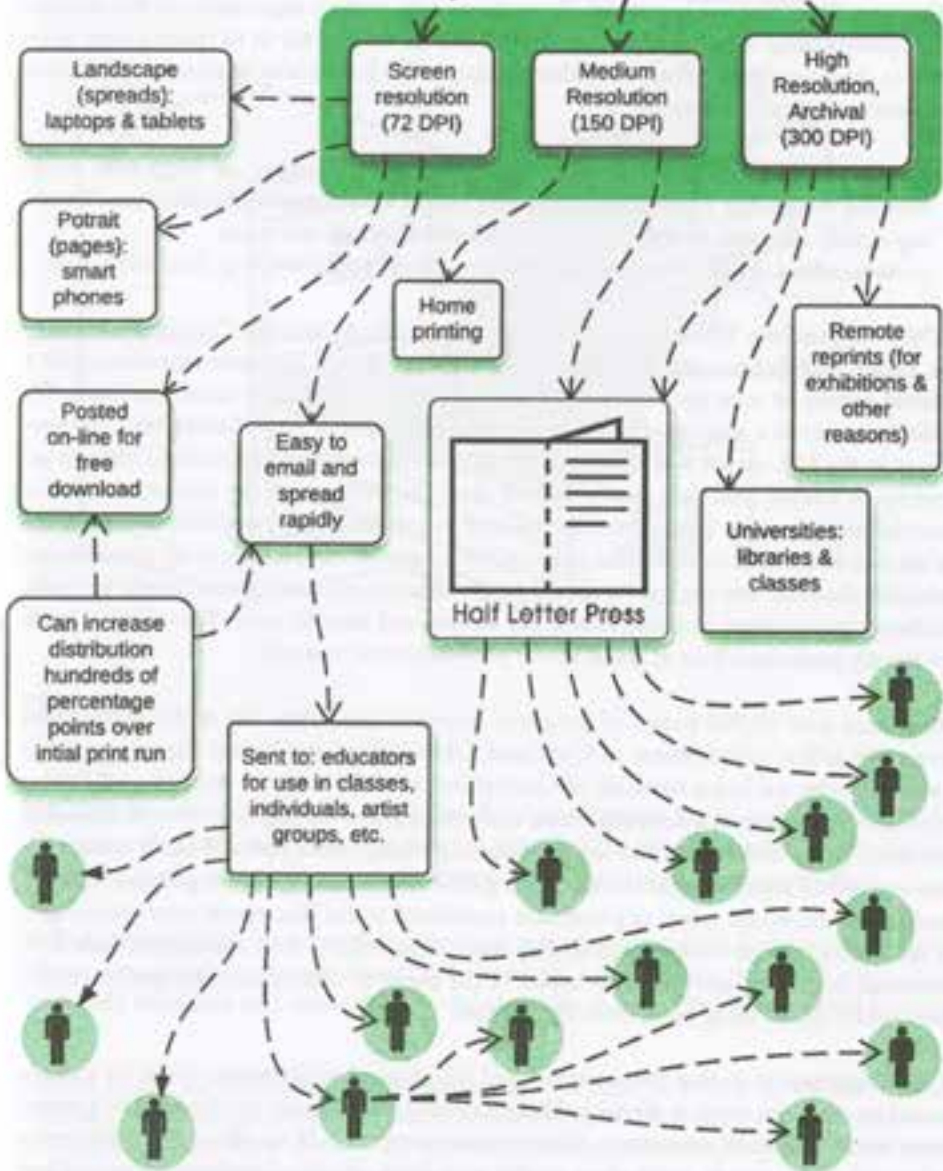
- BAS, Istanbul
- Bill and George, Newtown, Australia
- Booklet, Tokyo
- CNEAI, Chattou, Paris
- Salford Zine Library, Manchester

Book
fairs & zine
fests

- Chicago Zine Fest
- LA Art Book Fair
- Miss Read: The Berlin Art Book Fair, Berlin
- NY Art Book Fair

- Center For Land Use Interpretation, LA
- Lugemik, Tallinn, Estonia
- Printed Matter, NY
- Pro QM, Berlin
- Red Emma's, Baltimore
- Quimby's, Chicago
- X Marks the Bökship, London

PDFs generated for electronic circulation



for what it loses to physical spaces. Scrolling up and down and clicking back and forth doesn't engage one's body nearly as much as a physical and sensorial trip to a physical space for books.

By 2004, we had published enough booklets to present our publications as a strong component of exhibitions on our work. By 2006, there were enough Temporary Services books and booklets, as well as other printed ephemera, to make publishing the entire focus of our participation in an exhibit ("Transmission" at Villa Arson, in Nice, France, March 18 - June 4, 2006). Since then we have exhibited our publications numerous times, often in the form of a hanging "cloud" where booklets and books are suspended from the ceiling with string. This installation method allows for an easy reading experience by the viewers. When participating in exhibitions that do not have the budget for us to create a new project or to ship something larger, a booklet installation has been a way to create a substantive presentation within these limits.

Another important characteristic of paper is the 'repeatability' of traditional print. Reading a magazine or a book means being part of a community of customers all reading exactly the same content, so they can all share a single reference.

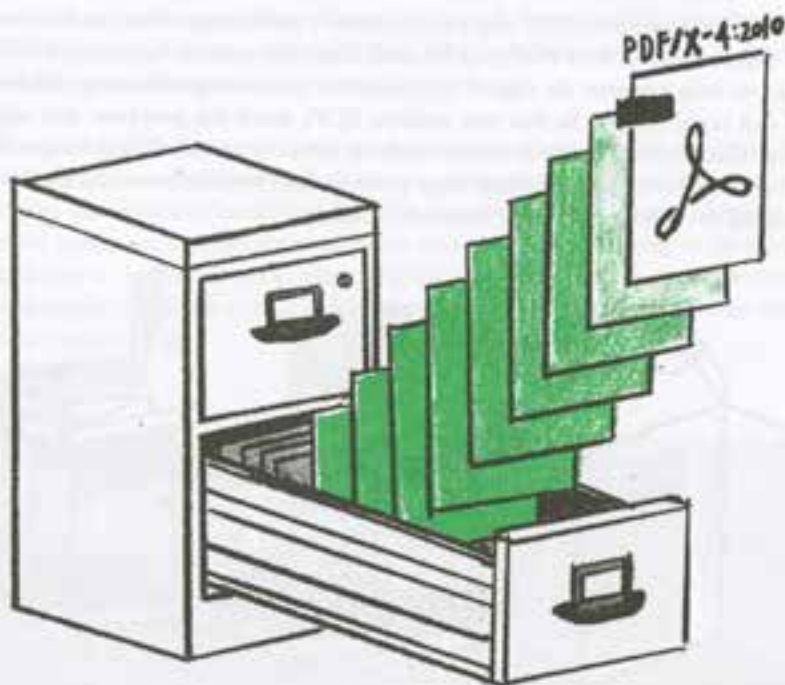
—Alessandro Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print-The Mutation Of Publishing Since 1894*, p. 66

In 2009 we printed a 40-page newspaper called Art Work: A National Conversation About Art, Labor, And Economics. It included writings, illustrations, personal reflections, and a selected history of artist projects in the United States that dealt with economic issues. We made the paper as a response to the global economic crisis in 2008. Severe bank deregulations in the U.S. meant that toxic mortgages and risky investments received little to no scrutiny or control and they finally helped cause the collapse of the market and major financial institutions in September. The collapse had an immediate and devastating impact on the arts in the U.S. and our own practice. We wanted to have a large-scale conversation about the situation and the pain it caused (and continues to cause). Many people lost jobs, teaching opportunities, funding, exhibition venues, and sales of work. The collapse made the already precarious lives of artists in the U.S. even more unstable.

We printed over 18,000 copies of the paper in several print runs. We used a show at the alternative gallery called Spaces in Cleveland, Ohio to fund and launch the project. After several months, we had a network of connections in all 50 states in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. We used Spaces as a shipping center and sent stacks of the paper to over 98 cities, big and small, to the addresses where artists of varying backgrounds met and made communities—including artist-run spaces, non-profit galleries, university galleries, galleries inside of bookstores, and studio spaces of prominent established artists. Recipients were encouraged to disassemble the newspapers and display them as an exhibit with a design of their own invention. Some cut apart multiple copies of the paper to make enormous patterned displays, while others hung pages from clotheslines.

It was important to us that the paper reached the physical, social spaces where its content would resonate the most. A digital publication could not replicate the power that a newspaper has in accidental encounters. Digital versions were a back up after print copies were exhausted, and a way to easily share copies with large groups of students when teachers

wanted to assign the paper in their classes. We experimented for the first time with providing different kinds of digital versions of the newspaper: we made a PDF at the highest resolution for people to download and reprint, a PDF that was easy to read for visually impaired people, a formatted PDF that was easy to photocopy for classes, and a very rudimentary epub. At present, the newspaper is out of print and while it is cheap to produce them, it doesn't make fiscal sense to start the presses again for less than a thousand copies. Until there is demand for more paper copies, this publication can be read and downloaded at www.artandwork.us.



PDFs

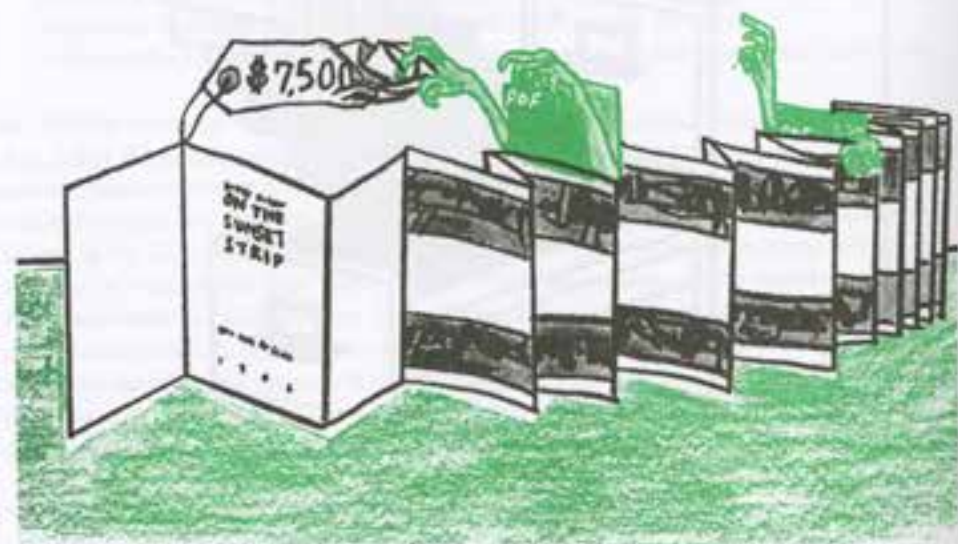
The PDF is a format that was developed for documents to move easily across operating system platforms and devices; it was not intended for viewing on any single device.³ Because of this compatibility, we prefer making our digital publications as PDFs.

PDFs have amplified our printing in surprising and significant ways. Early on in our publishing, we would photocopy about 200 copies of a publication at a local print shop. We would then fold and staple them by hand to save money. One photocopied booklet,

³ Adobe created the PDF format in 1990, releasing it to the public in 1993. It was an effort that was made by a private company, public education institutions, and a broad range of people who would benefit from an open shared format. PDF Reference, sixth edition, *Adobe Portable Document Format, Version 1.7*, Adobe Systems Incorporated, November 2006.

Why The Exhibit Was Cancelled,⁴ was first printed in 2001. Interest in this booklet exceeded our expectations and once a PDF was placed on our website, it was downloaded thousands of times. In 2012, over a decade after the first printing, curator Lauren van Haften-Schick featured the booklet in a traveling exhibit titled "Canceled: Alternative Manifestations and Productive Failures." Funding from this exhibition was used to make another thousand copies of this booklet—this time using offset printing. It's ironic that the number of people who have seen the booklet *Why The Exhibit Was Cancelled* far exceeds the number of people that would have attended the exhibit itself.

We enjoy the ways in which a PDF can amplify modest publishing efforts, and we are interested in other aspects of how PDFs can be used. There are archival formats of PDFs that are intended to help preserve the digital documents as computing technology undergoes significant and rapid change. In this way, archival PDFs avoid the problems that apps or ebooks have, where current versions do not work on older (or newer) digital devices. PDFs are flexible and can be enlarged to create large print books. They can be used with software that reads aloud to dyslexic or visually impaired persons.



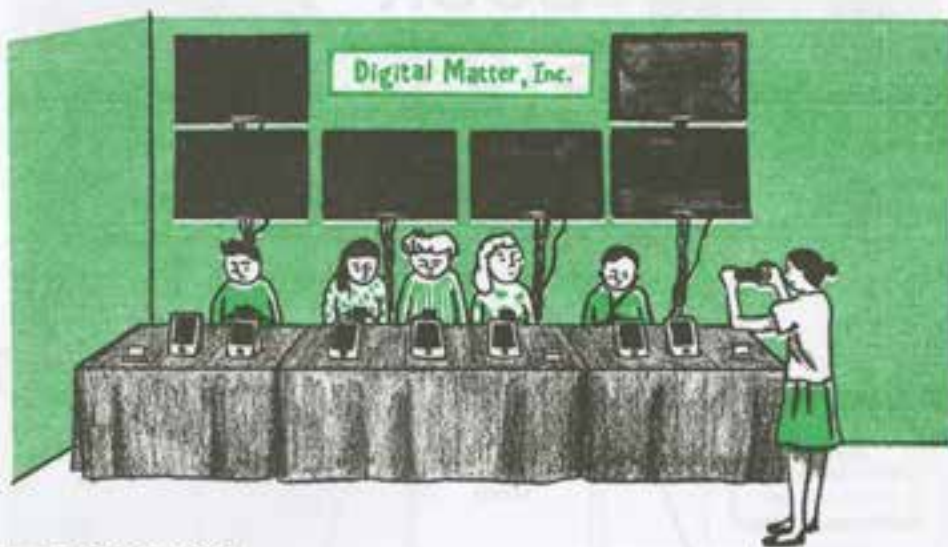
Using a common digital scanner to pirate a rare artist book, or any other book, can give it a new life. A PDF can become an undead version of the book and proliferate endlessly—ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE! A PDF can also promote and help restore interest in the work of authors and publishers that may no longer be alive or in business, and therefore are unable to keep their works and pages available for new readers. An undead PDF can also break down the gate keeping of rare book dealers, academic firewalls, and those whose

4. This booklet shares correspondence between an artist and a curator concerning an exhibit. When it becomes clear that the artist's work is not understood, cannot be presented as originally discussed, and might even be censored, the artist cancels the show. The booklet is often used in classes to discuss some of the difficult, abusive political situations people commonly face when trying to get their artwork out into the world.

approach creates exclusivity and scarcity. Pirating an expensive book will not diminish the value of the printed original. By setting its ideas free into the commons, more people will be able to access, assess and enjoy the material.

We prefer books to PDFs, but if we cannot find or afford a book, a PDF will suffice. A PDF is not as "alive" as the book from which it is ripped. Its flesh is barely there, clinging to this world; it needs the body of an electronic host to inhabit. We encourage you to find rare books in state and school library systems, to check them out, copy them and unleash them into the world of the living! We welcome transgressions of copyright and control that exist to only protect monetary benefits. Art and ideas should be free flowing; no one should have the right to keep them hoarded away for private enjoyment at the expense of a more full, open, robust, and democratic discourse.

We see making PDF copies of books as an extension of our publishing efforts. With minimal effort, we can distribute and share our publications, and build audiences. Having made over one hundred books and booklets, it is impossible to keep everything in print and we'd rather use our resources to make new things. It is freeing to be able to create digital access to our older work, reprinting the past only when there is a strong demand. Approximately two thirds of our publications are currently available for free download at temporarieservices.org.

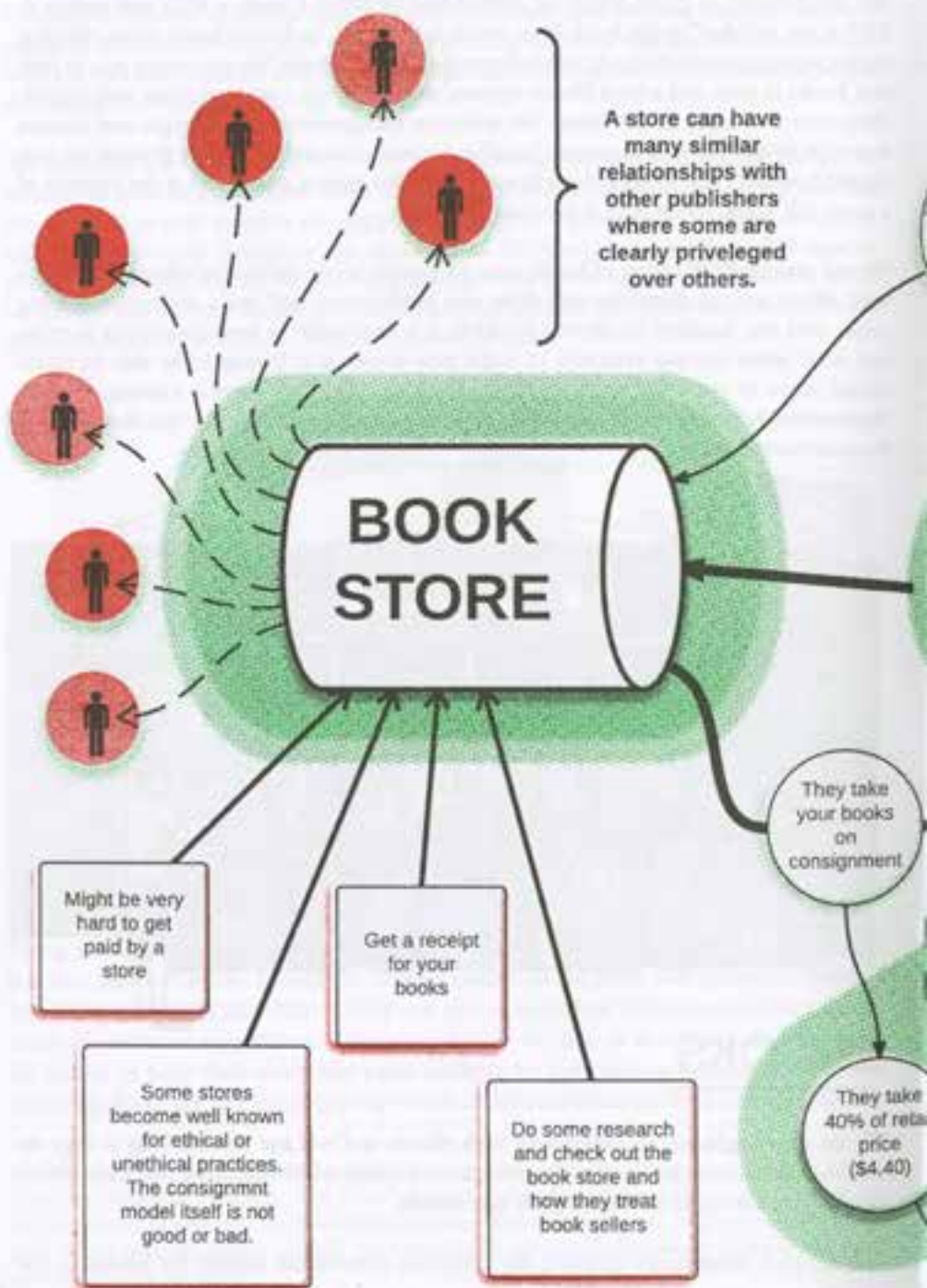


EBOOKS

We are now beginning to experiment with ebooks and will use them as long as they are easy to make and can be circulated widely across multiple platforms. Since this is not always the case, we also make PDFs alongside our ebooks.

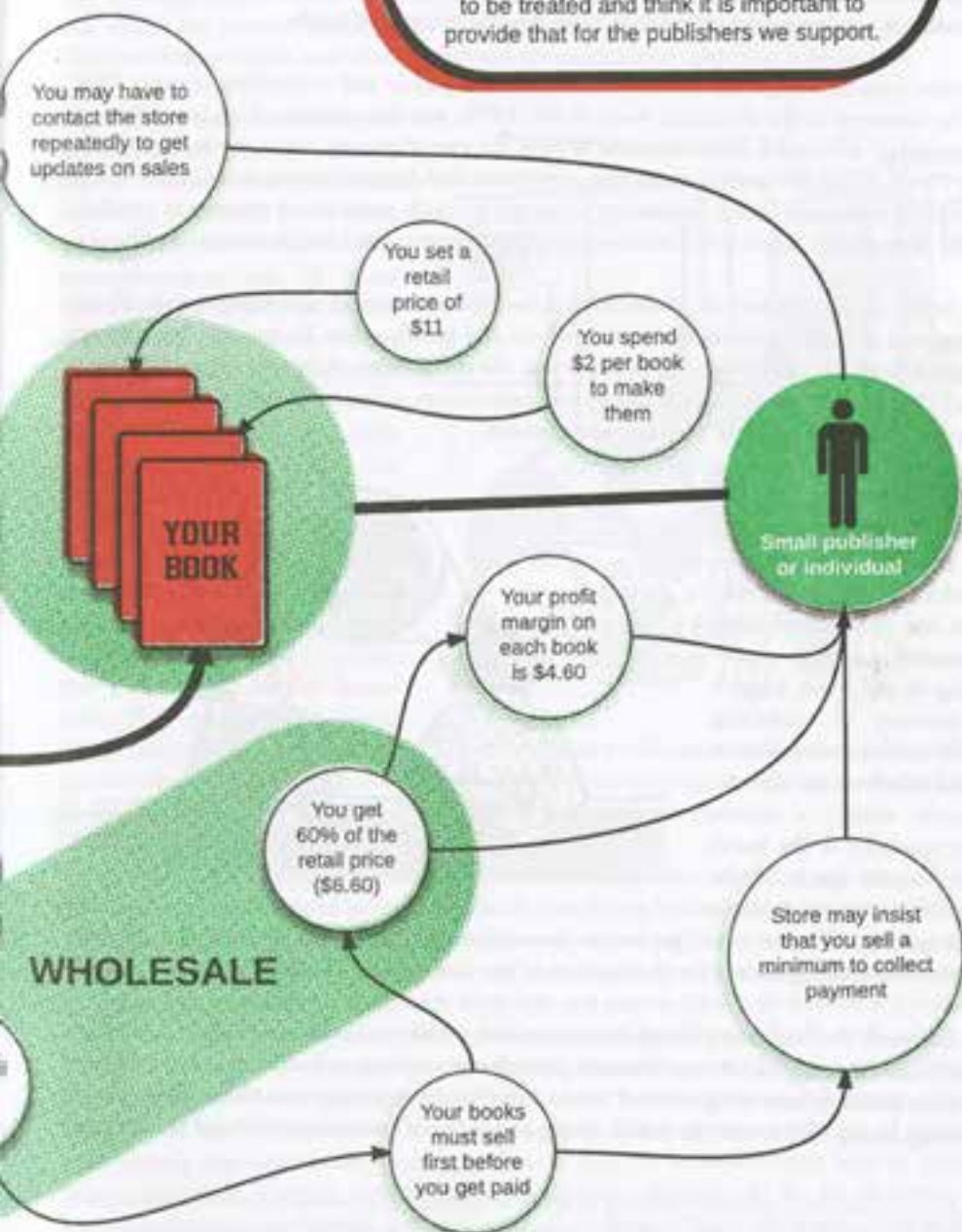
Ebooks have dramatically changed the corporate commercial market for books. In the

CONSIGNMENT: Agreement to pay for goods on



ce they are sold

We often have this relationship with the stores that sell our publications. At Half Letter Press we pay people up front for their books and support people and their publishing right away. This is how we prefer to be treated and think it is important to provide that for the publishers we support.



hands of the wrong people, ebooks make books and publishing antisocial. This is most glaringly obvious in the situations where business models use proprietary platforms for distribution—for example, Apple's iTunes store or Google's Play store—and Digital Rights Management (DRM) to control how ebooks are seen and by which devices. It is troubling that books bought in one store for one operating platform cannot travel to another platform and reader. Imagine buying a CD or record and then needing a player of a specific brand to be able to listen to it. Sharing a book with a friend becomes difficult or outright impossible. The kinds of friendships one could make around sharing books are severely curtailed if you are trying to circulate these specific formats of books.

Ebooks were not originally conceived of in such a greedy and controlling manner. One of the inventors of the electronic book in the 1970s, was the visionary founder of Project Gutenberg,⁵ Michael S. Hart. Practical devices for everyday users came much later in the late 1990s. It was not until recently that companies like Apple, Amazon and Google made restrictive stores and ebook formats to try to get as much control and revenue as possible, while dramatically limiting the historical, social and community-building aspects of books.

We bring up the deficiencies of ebooks, not because we romanticize printed books. There are aspects of digital publishing that we rely on and greatly enjoy. Rather, it is because we disagree with the rush to get rid of paper and the many years of the declaration: "print is dead". We want to point out the places and experiences where using ebooks and reading electronic documents are a deep impoverishment.

It is impossible for ebooks to evoke memories of physical location of a book's content. With an ebook, you cannot have those moments when something in the book triggers a memory of something from earlier, with a distinct recall of where (or approximately where) a certain text appeared in the book. The mental space of the reader is an utter abyss.

One quickly falls into it and get lost in the millions of links to almost everything in the world—everything, except for the location of the idea you are looking for.

In our work for Temporary Services, and beyond, we like to write essays about art, urban space, activist struggles, obscure histories, parenthood, ecology, and underground culture. It is often useful to have a big stack of books and magazines sitting next to us when we are writing. Being able to see the books, being reminded of what they hold and the feelings



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associated with reading their contents, more readily triggers the physical memories of ideas in books. To have a physical, embodied sense of how much reading and research we have done, is far more helpful than staring at a screen with a list of files.

Many people like being able to carry hundreds of books with them on a single lightweight device. While this is very convenient—particularly on trains and airplanes—it also places the hundreds of books under a very fragile condition. The device can run out of power, be stolen, dropped in water, or incur any number of damages both external and internal that can hinder (or prevent) reading, like a broken screen. Books do not have these problems. They are a more stable and reliable platform for storing and retrieving information.

Once there was a visual display of all people's interests via the covers of books and periodicals on buses and trains. In its place, now we see tablets, ereaders, and smartphones—a sea of bland metal and plastic gadgets. Ebooks dramatically decrease the chance of having a social experience that is possible with physical books. Much has been made of middle aged moms reading books like *Fifty Shades of Grey* "secretly" on their tablets or ereaders, hiding their erotic fantasies in public settings. While ebooks may allow people to feel more comfortable reading taboo content in public, this concealment has its downsides. Two people, who might enjoy comparing notes or discussing a book, will not talk and meet when one bystander cannot clearly see what the other is reading. It is easier to imagine a discussion happening about the brand of ereader than what is being read on the device.



Visualize an artist book fair or zine fest that is made up entirely of tablets and other digital devices. Imagine dozens of authors and publishers sitting behind tables, showing off their wares by making little swiping motions across a screen until their index fingertips grow calluses. Books engage our senses in a way that digital devices cannot. Recently made books activate our sense of smell with their inks and papers. It's fun to share new publications at book fairs and tell visitors that a publication still has that new book smell, which is a fresh bouquet of inks, paper, adhesive, and other fragrant aspects of publishing. Different papers, cover stocks and bindings feel different in our hands and across our fingers. Some bring a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction to hold. Our memories of the joy of reading a particularly important book are often tied up in how the book felt when held, or closed upon completion. There is something inherently more satisfying in the act of closing a book—hearing and feeling the soft exhalation of air from between the pages—than com-

ing to the end of a digital book, which either gives you an approximated page number (based on the type size) or a percentage of how much you have completed.



The surprise of finding a book that you didn't know you had to have is something that is greatly diminished, if not outright eliminated, by shopping in proprietary stores. Algorithms in on-line bookstores show you books similar to the one you are browsing that other readers have bought. This may be helpful, but it also makes assumptions about who you are that take away accidental encounters based on the many interests not recorded in their database.

Are the great ebook librarians going to will their ereaders to their grandchildren when they die? We should remember some of the other outcomes of format changes in recent history. How many people are able to read the files they stored on floppy disks and zip disks from the 1980s and 90s?

ECOLOGY

There is no easy choice between books and ereaders when confronted with concerns about their ecological impacts. Many claims have been made in both directions, but they are usually quite limited in applicability as they fail to either give a nuanced analysis or informed overview. Most of the processes of making print or digital books is either hidden from us, or difficult to access. Like any human activity, there is a continuum—from ethical ways of making books to what can only be described as an outright criminal practice. Conflict minerals—those like coltan that are ascertained under duress of war or in slave-like conditions—are often harvested in ways that leave entire landscapes toxic or destroyed. We have yet to see an ereader company properly compensating workers for their labor and sourcing materials in ways that do not coerce people to destroy their landbase. The company Fair Phone addresses similar issues with the production of smartphones. The makers of the Fair Phone pay workers a decent wage, source rare earth minerals from ethical companies, and have an overall process that they make as transparent as possible to customers. This gives us a sense of what an ethically produced tablet or ereader could look like. Their efforts are welcomed, but they are not changing consumer behavior on a mass scale and creating a shift away from the brutal ways in which the majority of electronic devices are made.

As objects, books are pretty damn resilient. With a little care, they can easily last for over one hundred years. They don't expire, rot, or require charging and they don't change operating systems. They contain no toxic chemicals and rare earth elements. They don't turn



If you walk or bike to a local library and borrow books...

You have the lowest impact!



If you read 3-4 books a year on an e-reader...

The environmental cost of your e-reader is likely to be greater than the cost of making 3-4 paper books. The same is applicable if you upgrade to a newer model before reading ~100 books on your current device.



If you drive to a bookstore and buy a brand new book...

You have the highest impact!

In addition to the CO₂ emissions from driving a car, transportation of books to a retail store also results in carbon emissions. Furthermore, if the book is not shared with others, the per capita carbon footprint from its purchase will be greater.

unfashionable because of their size, and they don't become throwaway items without extreme negligence. As a form, books are partially resistant to consumer culture's mandate to constantly upgrade to newer models. Furthermore, books can be made in ethical ways. We are using forest certified paper and soy inks⁶ with our Risograph for many of the booklets made during the Chicago presentation of *Publishing Clearing House* at Sullivan Galleries for the show "A Proximity of Consciousness: A Lived Practice," curated by Mary Jane Jacob and Kate Zeller. We also try to use leftover paper from printers, closeout paper from flea markets, and other stock that has been sourced secondhand. We do not always succeed; we sometimes print on new paper with processes that are not the most environmentally friendly.

Badly written, poorly edited and crudely designed books, or books made to cash in on fads (which will almost immediately fade from interest upon release) are examples of abusive

6. We feel the need to insert a note of caution when talking about soy inks. We learned from a printer that soy inks are not as ideal as we might think. The soy is an organic substance, but to get it to dry, some nasty chemicals are added to it. We have not been able to find a formula for the ink that RISO makes for their Risograph duplicators. We were also told that flax-based inks are much more environmentally friendly than soy, as they dry on their own. However, they are a lot more expensive.

The Cost of an Ereader



and wasteful publishing. Given the amount of energy needed to read and distribute ebooks (not to mention the costs of manufacturing readers), it's hard to tell if cutting printing costs by making unnecessary books into ebooks is a true reduction in environmental impact.

We have seen printed books treated in shockingly disposable ways. This was particularly glaring at an American Library Association (ALA) conference. Rather than pay the shipping to return excess copies of new books at the end of a conference, some publishers just dumped large piles of books on the ground at their booth and placed a "Free" sign next to

ILLUSTRATION REFERENCES:

- 1) Goleman, Daniel, and Gregory Norris. "How Green Is My iPad?" *The New York Times*. 04 Apr. 2010.
- 2) Lowman, Stephen. "Environmental Impact of E-books vs. Paper Books." *Political Bookworm*. *The Washington Post*. 22 Apr. 2010. Web. 16 Aug. 2014.
- 3) "Conflict Minerals." *Enough, Enough Project*. n.d. Web. 16 Aug. 2014. www.enoughproject.org/conflict/eastern_congolconflict-minerals.

them when they had to leave the event. Like many of the construction materials that were used to create the booths themselves, the books also wound up in a dumpster. At least in Chicago, there is a store devoted to used and remaindered books that sometimes buys ALA Conference leftovers. This saves the books from the waste heap, but the secondary market probably doesn't do much for the book's author.

Roger Cohen of the *New York Times* describes remaindered books as, "printed books that are no longer selling well and whose remaining unsold copies are being liquidated by the publisher at greatly reduced prices. While the publisher takes a loss on the sales of these books, they are able to make some money off the sale and clear out space in the warehouses."⁷ Eventually even stores that focus on used or remaindered books give up. Many non-profit social ventures, like Open Books in Chicago who promote literacy, sell donated used books to fund their programs. Thrift stores and library sales are filled with used books. Unlike a used computer or electronic device, it's easy to test them out and see if they work.

HALF LETTER PRESS AND OUR REASONS FOR RUNNING IT

We founded Half Letter Press in December of 2008. The press name refers to the format of our books and booklets, which are one half of a letter size (8 1/2" x 11") sheet of paper. Thanks to the insistence of former President Ronald Reagan, letter-size paper is the standard size in America. It is a common, cheap, and easy paper to work with.

We use Half Letter Press to publish perfect-bound book-length works by ourselves and other authors. Before Half Letter Press, we made two full-length books with other publishers (*Prisoners' Inventions*, White Walls, 2003, and *Group Work*, Printed Matter, 2007). Both experiences were positive but the quantity of books printed felt like something we could make and sell on our own. In 2007, we received grants from Art Matters and CEC Artslink and found ourselves with enough money to publish a full-length, perfect-bound, offset book (*Public Phenomena*, 2008). We could have used the money to pay another publisher that values our work and help them print and distribute the book, but we chose to do it ourselves. We created a publishing imprint and web store to take care of printing and distribution. It is managed by the two of us, with some outside help from time to time. We have published six books to date under Half Letter Press; sometimes we design the books and sometimes we work with an outside designer.

Temporary Services has always been self-organized; we are neither a not-for-profit, nor an incorporated entity, nor any other officially registered status for that matter. We created Half Letter Press as a Limited Liability Corporation to deal with any income, taxes, and other operational fees and to establish it as a platform to make and sell not only our past booklets, but also future publications. In addition to our own, we distribute the work of

7. Cohen, Roger. "Book Notes," *The New York Times*. 7 Aug. 1991.

friends and other self-publishing allies through Half Letter Press' web store. When we have an opportunity to table at book fairs and other events, we bring publications by our peers to sell alongside our own work.

Publishing after the "paperless revolution" (the internet failed to kill off the printed page and therefore the revolution did not actually occur, but its impact on paper and printing is evident) requires a new set of skills, approaches and attitudes in being a book maker. It means crafting a variegated approach to how you create, publish, distribute, and build a social eco-system around your efforts. We craft publish, which means that we take a level of care that reflects a deep commitment to getting our books out in the world, in appropriate ways, to the people who want or benefit from them. This involves having a long haul approach to supporting our publications, and finding ways to distribute books long after they are printed. Our distribution remains limited, but we do not send books to remainder land when someone decides they have run their course and are not worth storing or continuing to promote. We actively work to rescue uncirculated books that other publishers have put in storage when we think that they are titles our audiences would appreciate.

The work we do tends to leverage the resources and privileges we have in a way that extends them to other people. Beginning in 2003 until the last member of our group left in around 2009, Temporary Services co-ran an experimental cultural center on Chicago's far north side called Mess Hall. We like making lists that take responsibility for our ideas and generate discussion. The keyholders at Mess Hall made a list, in 2007, inspired by the concise format and power of the Black Panthers' ten demands. This is Mess Hall's list:

We demand cultural spaces run by the people who use them.

We create the space to remix categories, experiment, and learn what we do not already know.

Mess Hall explodes the myth of scarcity. Everyone is capable of sharing something.

The surplus of our societies should be creatively redistributed at every level of production and consumption.

Social interaction generates culture!

We embrace creativity as an action without thought of profit.

We demand spaces that promote generosity.

Mess Hall insists on a climate of mutual trust and respect—for ourselves and those who enter our space.

No money is exchanged inside Mess Hall. Surfing on surplus, we do not charge admission or ask for donations.

Mess Hall functions without hierarchy or forced unity.

This was the precursor to the list we made for Half Letter Press. In 2008 we used posters, bookmarks, and our website to share the core values of Half Letter Press.

Half Letter Press strives to build an art practice that:

Makes the distinction between art and other forms of creativity irrelevant

Builds and depends upon mutually supportive relationships

Tests ideas without waiting for permission or invitation

Champions the work of those who are frequently excluded, under-recognized, marginal, non-commercial, experimental, and/or socially and politically provocative

Puts money and cultural capital back into the work of other artists and self-publishers

Makes opportunities from large museums and institutions more inclusive by bringing lesser-known artists in through collaborations or advocacy

Insists that artists who achieve success devote more time and energy to creating supportive social and economic infrastructures for others

Over the past couple of years, we have slowly started articulating criteria for evaluating Socially Engaged Art (the more reductive, digestible term we intensely dislike is Social Practice). In the race to promote this work (see the curator Nato Thompson) or tear it down (see the critic Claire Bishop), very little effort has been made to distinguish between art that truly empowers and work that merely uses the aesthetics of social inclusion to make empty spectacles, corporate and governmental propaganda, and MFA programs that do not lead to employment. This led us to generate a set of questions, which we encourage you to test out in your own experiences of art:

Does the work empower more people than just the authors of the work?

Does the work foster egalitarian relationships, access to resources, a shift in thinking, or surplus for a larger group of people?

Does the work abate competition, abusive power and class structures, or other barriers typically found in gallery or museum settings?

Does the work seek broader audiences than just those educated about and familiar with contemporary art?

Does the work trigger a collective imagination that can dream of other possible worlds while it understands the current one with eyes wide open?

Does the work hold the name of one person, but include the creativity and labor of many uncredited others, or does it make its own creation clear and easy to understand?

These are also the kind of concerns we have ourselves of our publishing practice and consider who we make books and booklets with, how we want to treat the people that work on our publications, whose work we want to distribute at events and in our web store, and who we want to use to sell our books.

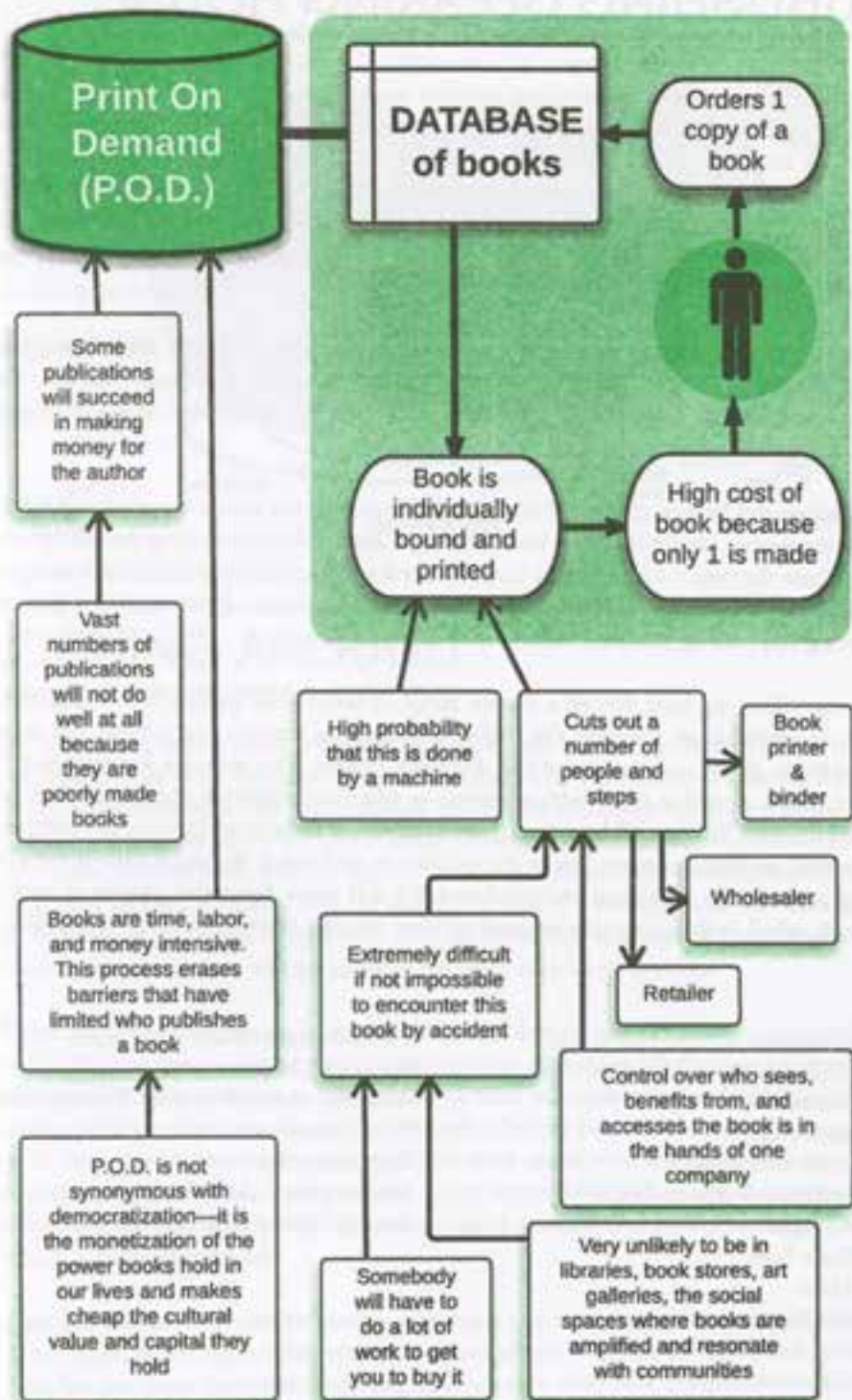
We try to treat other publishers as we like to be treated by stores and distributors. For this reason we prefer to pay people for the books we sell upfront rather than taking them on consignment and making people wait months or years to be paid. We also like to exchange stock with other publishers—letting them sell our books while we try to sell theirs, each keeping the money from what we sell and restocking with each other as needed.

Books and booklets make great bartering tools and it does not come as a surprise that many self-publishers, or artists that make books, have wonderful home libraries of publications they have accumulated from trades. When people let us stay at their homes, we commonly bring the books we have made as a gift in appreciation for their generosity. These books can join libraries that can then be enjoyed by future guests. While no one has a complete set of Temporary Services publications, many longtime friends have dozens of different titles—a result of gifts given over many years.

People often ask us about Print on Demand (POD), which are books that are printed as needed, made to order, and often in smaller quantities than in offset printing. There are a number of reasons why we don't make publications using POD and typically won't distribute and sell books that others have made using this model.

Since many of our booklets are initially given away for free during exhibits, we make 1000 copies or more of an offset printed booklet, and plan to make at least 300 copies of Risograph-printed booklets. Making 600 copies of a POD booklet through the company Lulu can cost almost five times more than ordering 1000 copies of the same publication at an offset printing company. In order to make money on a POD booklet (especially when selling wholesale to shops and distributors), something that we might price at \$4.00 when offset printed, would have to be sold for about \$9.00. This makes POD books and booklets a poor value for readers. It is very hard to sell a book at \$45.00 when it feels like it should have been \$25.00. Unless the author doesn't care to profit from sales of their POD book at a retail store, it is difficult to place a POD book at a retailer without increasing the price. It is likely that this is one reason we rarely encounter POD books in stores.

POD books often have a generic quality due to the limited number of paper options, cover treatments, and publication sizes. While cheap web-based offset printers are also able to charge low prices by offering limited customization, just about any internet-based offset printer gives publishers a whole lot more paper options than POD services. Working directly with a local printer or self-printing on a copier or Risograph allows for limitless custom paper choices that will give your books a more specific feel. We encourage new publishers to give serious consideration to the model of printing they choose and to not emulate POD because it is currently fashionable within the artist book community.



PUBLISHING CLEARING HOUSE

Strangely, in our 16 years of working together, we had never done a project that was just focused on making publications. When people find out that we run Half Letter Press, they often ask us where our press is located—we have to tell them that we actually work with other printers to make everything. While we probably won't be making offset printed and perfect bound books in our own facility any time soon, we have purchased our own Risograph duplicator (a.k.a. RISO) and a booklet stapling and folding machine—both of which were used to make parts of this booklet.

Publishing Clearing House is an initiative that will be a temporary, fully functioning print shop. Temporary Services—with Kione Kochi, Kristian Johansson, and Leah Mackin—will work with invited collaborators to produce new booklets and printed works during the run of the show, sharing and launching publications.

In banking and finance, clearing denotes all activities from the time a commitment is made for a transaction until it is settled. In Publishing Clearing House, clearing denotes all activities from the time a commitment to an author is made, until the publication is designed, printed, stapled, folded and distributed. Making a clearing is also about creating a space for meeting and making processes visible, open and transparent.

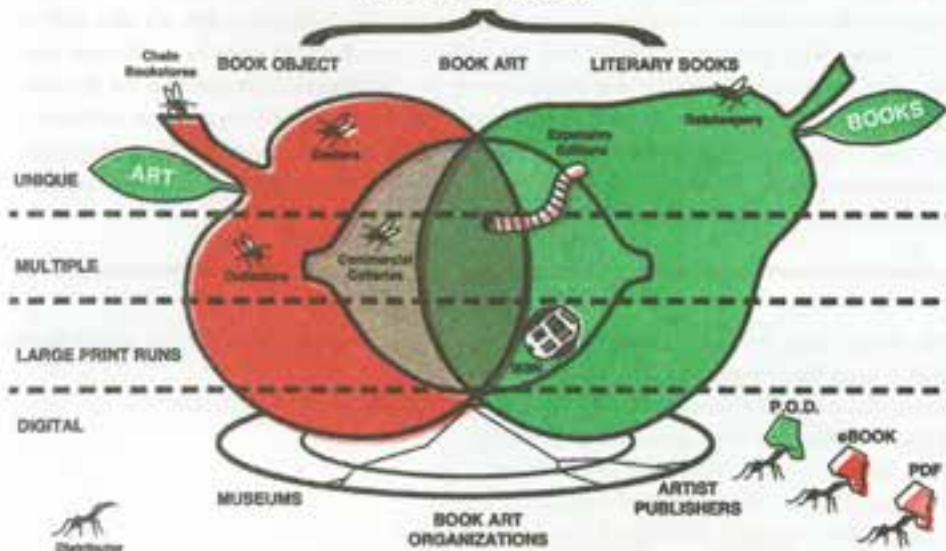
For this effort, we have invited a diverse range of individuals, groups, and organizations with an emphasis on Chicago, the Midwest, and artists, activists and authors not always included in the conversations of the dominant culture. This includes juveniles and the incarcerated, as well as those who represent or articulate narratives counter to dominant cultural norms. Visitors will be able to meet members of Temporary Services and some collaborating authors on many days of the exhibition, and watch the mechanics of the print shop as works are developed and produced. We will make the entire process of making a book, which is always socially engaged in some manner, more visible than it usually is.

Publications by the following individuals, teams, groups, and organizations:

Oscar Arriola
Cultural ReProducers
Tracy Drake & Sharon Irish
Marc Fischer
Melinda Fries
Wes Janz
Kaitlin Kostus
Nicolas Lampert
Dylan Miner
Stephen Perkins

Prison Neighborhood Art Project
Project NIA
Anthony Rayson (South Chicago ABC Zine Distro)
Temporary Services
Madison Mutual Drift
George Wietor / Issue Press

ARTIST BOOKS



LOOKING AROUND

The burgeoning international community of artist book publishing has become incredibly complicated as more and more people are engaged in this culture. It makes a singular vantage point from which to understand all this activity extremely daunting. The diagram above is our take on Clive Philpot's earlier version that no longer resonates with the culture that has unfolded, and the urgency, volume, technological change, and aesthetic exploration we have witnessed over the past 10-15 years. We are convinced that this culture will continue to grow and be pushed in directions that our diagram cannot anticipate. We welcome this uncertainty and are eager to see what others will develop.

"There has been an explosion in artist book publishing around the world in the past few years." This has been a routine mantra one hears at gatherings of artist bookmakers and publishers. We agree with this sentiment and we have definitely witnessed this ourselves. It leaves us with important questions about the role of artists' books in shaping contemporary artistic discourse, and the kinds of support this work could receive. The excitement about self-publishing also comes during a time when many brick and mortar bookstores are closing, and the cost of shipping has seen a massive increase (international shipping from the U.S. is through the roof).

Artists' book fairs have been increasing in number and fill some of the distribution holes left by closed book stores. Non-stop promotion of artists' books on the web via social media has put these publications on our screens more than ever. Distribution still has a long way to go; posting pictures of books you like and sharing them on social media isn't

the same as buying them and showing hard copies to your friends. Publishing, particularly on the scale of making booklets, can be exhilarating and contagious, but it's also only as richly rewarding and meaningful as you are willing to make it. It remains to be seen how the people who are trying out self-publishing today will shape their practice for the long haul. We would like to encourage the exploration of not just their own creative publishing, but also of the ways this activity can be used to build up and strengthen the community around these printed forms. We want to suggest efforts that benefit many others and find new audiences to be challenged by publications.

We would like to thank the following people and organizations for their work and generous support of *Publishing Clearing House*:

Kione Kochi—illustrations, installation, printing and general collaboration

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Mike Smith at Mission Press

Flow charts throughout the booklet are by Temporary Services. Cover and interior illustrations are by Kione Kochi.

STATENS KUNSTFOND

Machines and hand work in making this publication:

1. Risograph EZ 390 U, green, crimson and black ink, Publishing Clearing House
2. Offset printing, Mission Press, Chicago
3. Cutting machine, Mission Press, Chicago
4. Scoring machine, Mission Press, Chicago
5. Hand folded cover, Publishing Clearing House
6. Multi Bookletmaster MB-60 (stapling only), Publishing Clearing House
7. Hand folded booklet, Publishing Clearing House

COLLABORATORS



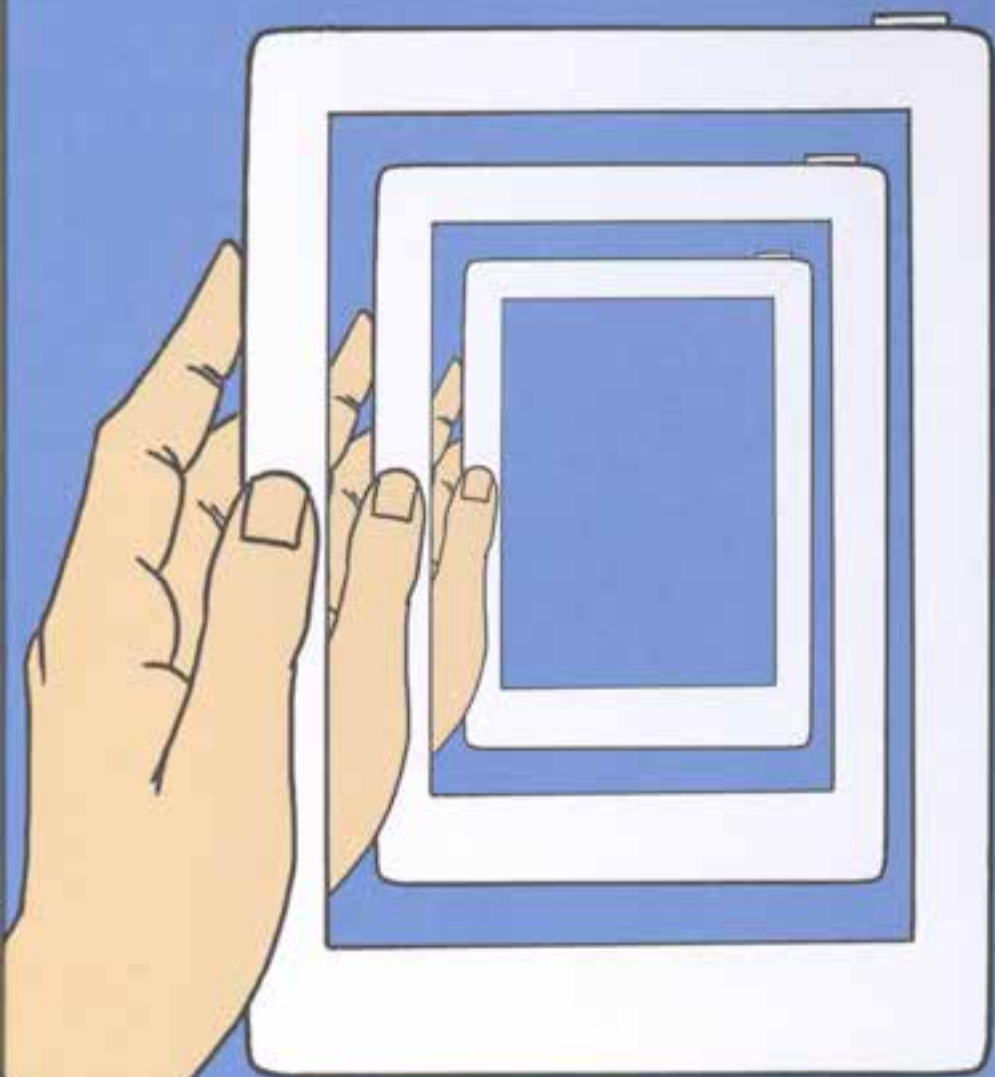
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