Introduction

https://networkcultures.org/expub/

This book is the outcome of the two-year research project .expub | Exploring Expanded Publishing. The project brought together four institutions and publishing initiatives from across Europe: the Institute of Network Cultures (Amsterdam), Aksioma (Ljubljana), Echo Chamber (Brussels), and Nero Editions (Rome).

United by a shared curiosity and critical stance toward emergent publishing practices, we set out not to define expanded publishing from above, but to experiment with it in practice, to critically engage with it.

Over the two years, this led us to ongoing reflection and dialogue about both the context and practical applications of expanded publishing. We explored this through a broad spectrum of formats: publications, public events, interviews, conferences, video essays, comic books, podcasts, and live

streams. These weren't standalone outputs but entangled and co-produced efforts between the consortium partners and a wide variety of authors, artists, and researchers. This collaborative methodology was central to our approach.

Rather than simply documenting our work, this book aims to focus on one of the key objectives of the project: coming closer to a working, shared understanding of what expanded publishing is — and could become.

This effort is reflected in the first chapter of this book, manifesting expanded publishing. This text serves both as a summary of our collective position and a provocation for further thought. But we also wanted to move beyond statements, toward a deeper investigation of the infrastructures, politics, and economies that shape experimental publishing today.

https://etherport.org/publications/inc/expub_Expert_Session/chapters/-manifesting-expub.html

Thus, this book is itself a publishing experiment. It was written and edited using Etherport — a tool developed by Open Source Publishing that connects collaborative writing pads (Etherpad) to a live, dual-format publishing system. This setup allowed us to work simultaneously on both a web and print version of the book while writing and editing together in real time. This method enabled not only co-authorship and versioning, but also made the book modular and open-ended by design. Videos, hyperlinks, and other non-print elements are included in the online version, and future iterations of the book are possible within this framework.

This text also functions as a toolkit for expanded publishing: it is tagged and hyperlinked to form a navigable framework for exploration. Recurring themes throughout the book serve as organizational markers, enabling thematic and non-linear reading in both web and print formats.

The final structure of the book reflects this modular thinking. It brings together two distinct but interrelated parts: essays and conversations on expanded publishing.

The second section, *Conversations on Expanded Publishing*, was published online earlier in 2025 as a standalone volume curated by Marta Ceccarelli and Carolina Valente Pinto. It features nine interviews conducted by the project consortium in July 2024 at NERO Editions in Rome. These conversations involved a diverse group of experts in experimental publishing — including artists, authors, publishers, researchers, coders, and designers — each bringing their personal perspective to the debate: Clusterduck, Silvio Lorusso, Thomas Spies, Irene de Craen, Geoff Cox, Gijs de Heij, Yancey Strickler, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Dušan Barok.

https://etherport.org/publications/inc/expub_Expert_Session/chapters/clusterduck.html

The first section — newly added in this current edition — consists of commissioned essays, or ones developed during the project, by authors whose work we closely follow and whose perspectives we sought to engage: Ezequiel Soriano, Annette Gilbert, Jordi Viader Guerrero, and Ilan Manouach. These texts, developed in response to the conversations, provide a wider theoretical and practical framework for engaging with the topic. They do not attempt to define expanded publishing, but rather expand on its questions: How can publishing move across media, formats, and contexts? What kind of infrastructures does it require? What kinds of politics does it enact — or resist?

We chose to place the essays before the interviews, reversing the

chronological order of their production. Though the essays were written later, they frame the dialogues that follow, offering a broader lens through which to read them. In doing so, this edition aims not to finalize a narrative, but to keep it open — as both a reference point and a living document of a collective research process still in motion.

Just like the subject it investigates, this project remains open, iterative, and expandable. What you're holding in your hands (or scrolling through on your screen) is one possible form the project has taken — a snapshot of an evolving process. From mediated speech via video calls to collaborative notes on Etherport, from hyperlinked texts to printable formats, the tools and infrastructures we used were themselves part of the exploration.

Finally, the book closes with a timeline of the many events we organized throughout these two years — a record of our shared movement across formats, geographies, and disciplines.

We invite you to read, use, and expand this work in your own way.

01 Manifesting .expub

Manifesting Expanded Publishing

By Tommaso Campagna, Marta Ceccarelli, Sepp Eckenhaussen, Geert Lovink and Carolina Valente Pinto

social media

We publish more yet read less. We skim through titles and headlines, scroll through stories, and speak 140 characters at a time. Yet we also print, on-demand or in bulk, we decorate coffee tables, collect, beach read, we publish ourselves reading.

With the advent of personal computers and the internet in the 1990s, the promise of a rich multimedia reading experience was born. A world of possibilities opened: moving images in books, 3D reading environments, interactive storytelling, and many more innovations seemed within reach. The revolution of the book would inaugurate a new reading culture.

But three decades later, we still read low-quality scans of print books in PDF format. The legacy publishing industry is 'consolidated' (read: stuck) as big publishing conglomerates focus exclusively on print and occasional ePubs. A seemingly endless cycle of crises, from COVID-19 to climate collapse, and from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to the global rise of authoritarianism, is disrupting the supply chain, driving up prices of paper (and therefore books), hindering distribution across borders, and generally laying bear the fragility of the legacy publishing industry. In the meantime, the market is getting more challenging as the attention economy reshapes

readership and literacy - the only 'disruption' of the publishing industry over the past decades. Big tech platforms have increasingly monopolised the distribution of retail, second-hand books, audiobooks, and ePubs. Not to mention, generative Artificial Intelligence started to take over the positions of writers and editors.

business models

Where did the promised boom of multimedia books, and with it, the advent of a new reading culture, go wrong? How do we deal with the fragmented environment we are publishing ourselves into? The singular focus on profit and power maximization of tech enterprises has become overwhelmingly clear in the past decades. So has the incapacity of the legacy publishing industry to respond to the hostile takeover. Today, the only real space of agency and alternatives can be found among DIY initiatives, loose collectives, renegade programmers, underpaid artwriters, small presses, local bookshops, and geeks with riso printers- in short, in cultural publishing. But is it even remotely realistic to expect a disorganized network of cultural practitioners to organize a new reading culture, in the face of big tech power?

Cultural Publishing Obstacles

There is no lack of urgency. If anything, the stack of crises has increased the need for local, networked, sustainable infrastructures, community practices, small-scale circulation, and print-on-demand services. There is no lack of tools either. We have the tech solutions to support embedded video, dynamic annotations, versioning, spatial authorship, live publishing, web scraping, automated web-to-print publishing, non-linear and interactive formats, and much more. However, these remain niche, underdeveloped, unstable, or siloed. The major underlying obstacles that prevent these practices from taking off on a larger scale are threefold.

First, there is no mass public and, therefore, little to no sustainably functional business model for experimental cultural publishing. Silicon Valley venture capital-driven hypergrowth is the only model to scale up. However much we value the cultural merit of video-in-books, people just don't buy it. Second, whether they include riso print, experimental binding, or live annotation, experimental publications are costly and labour-intensive. Especially given the already precarious economic cycles of the often small cultural publishing houses and

initiatives, taking on more workload to experiment can be a tall order. Third, mainstream publishing has a tendency towards cultural marginalisation and self-marginalisation. To recognize other formats is to recognize other knowledge. To legitimize multimedia publishing is to legitimize different rhythms, aesthetics, and publics. Mainstream publishing is unwilling to commit to this recognition. The "multimedia turn" in publishing is decades old—ignored not because it is new, but because its implications are radical. In reaction, those involved in experimental cultural publishing often embrace this marginalisation, creating illegible one-off publications in a tiny edition, developing the most unstable of software usable for insiders only, insisting on reinventing the wheel continuously, and speaking with contempt about the general public. To be marginal is to be real, allegedly.

sustainability of workflows

Finding or, more likely, developing robust alternative infrastructures for multimedia and transmedia publishing will not be easy, having to take on all of these problems, simultaneously, but, as we have observed before, it is our one point of hope. On the bright side, many exciting experiments are happening as we write (and as you read). In the recent post-Covid years, we have especially noticed a latent breakthrough in the areas of liveness and the moving image. The question of how to integrate video in books has always hovered over the history of the unbound book, but has never really come to a serious culmination. Until recently. The 2020-2023 isolation and sheer amount of online cultural programs, and the question of what to do with this content, seems to have set a new tendency in motion, or at least propelled it to much greater reach. This book you are currently holding (physically or digitally) is dedicated to this new tendency.

What is Expanded Publishing?

Publishing has long been treated as a terminal act. An endpoint. The moment when ideas are stabilized and sealed, bound and distributed, finalized and fixed. But what if we start from a different premise? What if publishing is not the last gesture, but the very medium through which thinking, making, and sharing unfold? What if the book, its formats, protocols, and temporalities, is not a form to be merely filled, but a space of continuous negotiation and invention?

Expanded publishing is not yet another genre, format, or

technological upgrade. It is an evolving field of hybrid practices, tools, workflows, business models, and approaches to editorial objects. Expanded publishing is also a critical lens to how, for whom, and with what tools and politics this is done. It emerges from the crises of traditional publishing and the exhaustion of innovation cycles in the digital realm.

politics

Expanded publishing is not only a way of doing but also a way of seeing. It involves seeing the book as an expandable object, transcending the traditional linear conception of it, whether in print or as text on a screen. It also entails seeing the environment and culture in which the book exists as a space to inhabit with its content, expanding the editorial and curatorial processes at every stage: writing, producing, launching, sharing, designing, distributing, promoting, fruiting, reading, collecting, and critiquing.

Borrowing the term "expanded" from the 1970s *expanded cinema*, which sought to break film loose from the screen and reframe it as an event, an environment, a situation, we see expanded publishing as a way to dislodge publishing from the paper book, the PDF or ePub, the conference proceedings, or even the funding reports. Instead, it shows that publishing can involve a mix of approaches, acting as a hybrid tool, a medium, and a setting that changes depending on the time, place, and people involved.

Sometimes referred to as *self-reflective, extended, hybrid, experimental, or urgent publishing,* this practice develops alternative methods (technological, economic, and social) and formats alongside traditional ones. The term *expanded publication* was introduced by Loraine Furter and strongly resonates with this tradition. In 2014, she wrote:

> "If during hundreds of years in our Western print culture the notion of "publishing" was mainly understood as "paper book", today things are becoming moving and more diverse. Along with today's great technological (r)evolutions comes an expanded conception of publication, where publishing's common denominator would be making things public, in its wider sense."

The result is a dynamic, creative, multi-medium, and accessible process and output.Examples of expanded forms include video essays, podcast series, live collaborative documents, stream-

based publishing, zines, distributed archives, pop-up bookshops, fediverse-native works, and processual tools that treat publishing not as output, but as continuous rehearsal, annotation, contradiction, translation. It does not simply seek to enhance publishing with multimedia, but to ask what happens when we *start* from liveness, from networks, from situated infrastructures, from collective authorship and broken links.

This is not a nostalgic return to the digital optimism of the early 2000s. The promises of interactivity, mutability, and multiplicity have been largely subsumed by platform capitalism and speculative tech. When put through the "expanded publishing machine", the book becomes a container able to hold and shape content in manifold ways, a shapeshifting nomadic object traveling towards its readers, listeners, viewers, meeting them where they are.

Towards a Publishing Commons

The materials and tools for expanded publishing already exist, scattered across federated social networks, annotation tools, small-scale print collectives, web-to-print tools, and self-hosted servers. Expanded publishing is clearly positioned within the platform economy, developing practices that escape or undermine the hegemonic apparatuses. They often avoid YouTube, InDesign, Google Docs, Amazon, Twitter, and the traditional publishing industry. Instead, they work with alternative, decentralised, autonomous technology. The challenge is not invention but alignment; connecting these fragments into a shared infrastructure that fosters interoperability, sustainability, and mutual legitimacy.

social media

In other words, we do not want to build yet another platform or propose a single protocol. Rather, we aim to cultivate a network we call publishing commons: a landscape of shared principles, community governance, interoperable tools, mutual visibility, infrastructural care, and cyclical regeneration outside of the market. In this view, publishing is not a service or product but a mode of social and technical assembly.

This commons resists centralization and corporate enclosure, privileging instead federated, community-run repositories and open protocols. It recognizes the often invisible labor behind publishing, server logs, metadata, editing, and distributing, and makes it visible. Expanded publishing is thus a form of *institutional practice*, building institutions of the common - not

through consolidation but through precarious, decentralized, and collective acts.

Invitation to Join the Networks of Practice

The book we speak from manifests a practice to come. It is an ode to expanded publishing. An open invitation to reflect, confront, experiment, and reshape. A contribution to a growing field. A repository of documentation and proposals. A promise of collaboration on shared infrastructures and federated publications. We ask you, as one expanded publisher to another:

1. What are the key components in defining expanded publishing?
2. What are the main urgencies to develop expanded publishing?
3. Can you name a few exemplary, inspiring expanded publications or publishing practices?
4. How does 'expanded publishing' diverge from or overlap with digital publishing, post-digital publishing, enhanced publishing, and experimental publishing? Are we talking about a historical difference (e.g. the newest chapter in the history of the unbound book), a qualitative difference (e.g. bringing in moving image), or just a new vibe?
5. Are the long-standing promises of (post-)digital publishing (liveness, mutability, multivoicedness, interactivity, etc.) still important to expanded publishing?
6. Are any formats prevalent in expanded publishing (e.g. zines, radio, stream art)? If so, why?
7. To what extent can categories of disciplines help us understand expanded publishing, even if in the negative, in case expanded publishing is an active deconstruction/ oversaturation of disciplines?
8. Same question, but now for medium.
9. How does expanded publishing deal with 'global distribution' and other Amazon promises?
10. What can you say about expanded publishing and/in the fediverse?
11. What is the position of expanded publishing in the market? How does expanded publishing relate to the stagnated traditional publishing industry? Is it part of the creative industries? And how does it relate to the

platform economy/webshops, PoD & audiobook platforms?
2. Can we understand expanded publishing as a form of critique or as a collective strategy?
3. Is expanded publishing an attempt to overcome project-logics, prototypism, precarity, the ecological limits of printing, faltering postal services, censorship, unstable internet connections, and other problems of access, or an attempt to sit with these issues and make them interesting?
4. What are the demands of expanded publishing towards (public) institutions? Do we ask for community publishing facilities, long-term tool maintenance, decentralized repositories, and accessible publication series?
5. Conversely, how do public interests shape expanded publishing as a critical form of instituent practice?
6. Is expanded publishing your next political project? Abolish dominant publishing.

https://cryptpad.fr/pad/#/2/pad/edit/tcwcQrK937-iqGrWadidQgyV/

At this link, you can find a public file where you can provide input, suggestions, questions, etc. The online version of this publication on expandedpublishing.com will be kept updated with new content in the future. You can also send us your comments or contributions by email info@networkcultures.org (The document will be moderated to the extent of our capacity. If you come across content that you find inappropriate, please let us know at info@networkcultures.org.)

02 Ezequiel Soriano

From Shitposting to Shitpublishing

https://www.artefactosnativos.com/

These last years I have been spending my time publishing nonsensical books of illegible, plagiarized, stunning, low-quality, sublime, and uncanny content. I was developing a weird publishing project that aimed to grasp the *extremely online poetics*, displacing shitty content from forums, wikis, and digital platforms into books. Practicing *trollish literature*. These books display cursed memes, poorly translated novels, *keysmashed* text, random images, *lorem ipsums*, YouTube comments, Wikipedia graffiti, niche forum discussions, motivational quotes, spam, ai-generated blog entries, pixelated and saturated photos, boring amateur poems, and automatic video transcriptions. In this article, I describe these publishing experiments as attempts to go from shitposting to shitpublishing.

Another example of shitposting: an image containing nothing but keysmashed text

Definitions

Wikipedia describes shitposting as "the act of using an online forum or social media page to post content that is satirical and of 'aggressively, ironically, and trollishly poor quality'". The most liked definition of *shitposting* in the Urban Dictionary says:

However, the most flavored shitpublishing definitions linger in the shadows of these web pages. One of the last definitions on Urban Dictionary is:

In the Shitposting Wikipedia article, on the 10th of November 2017, someone with the IP 204.109.101.63, erased the description of *shitpost* to copy-paste the entire script of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*. In these shitposting gestures, we can identify the core idea of *shitpublishing*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Shitposting&oldid=814339086

Shitpublishing is shitposting in *literary* contexts, such as books, an encyclopedia, academic journal, or journalist articles.

Spamming Books

Shitposting is about spamming, about flooding online communication with nonsensical rubbish. It is similar to the gesture of shouting in a public debate or pasting stickers on informative posters in the street. *Shitpublishing* is about categorizing these acts as done work, translating these oral gestures into literary or written 'knowledge'. It turns *trash-talking* into *trash-writing*.

From a literary perspective, shitposting engages with text in its material dimension. It takes into account the materiality of language. As Goldsmith wrote about Mallarme's poetry: "words are no longer primarily transparent content carriers; now their material quality must be considered as well" . Columbia University Press. *Keysmashing* gives letters the same materiality that many modernist poets were experimenting with. It creates pieces of internet vernacular literature that are not meant to be read but to be weighed.

Goldsmith, K. (2011) Uncreative Writing

Shitpublishing approaches book-making in the same materialist way. Amazon hosts several books of this *keysmashed* shitpublishing 'microgenre'. Books like *Asdfgh* by Asdf Asdfg and ASD dfg, *asdfgh* (Japanese Edition), *(Transparency) US - Cover creator or PDF Upload without checking checkbox* by asdfgh, *Marja: abhi marja* by asdfg asdf, or *safg* by asdf. These *keysmashed* books embody the fast, lazy, and materialist approach of shitposting. Shitpublishing focuses on the formal

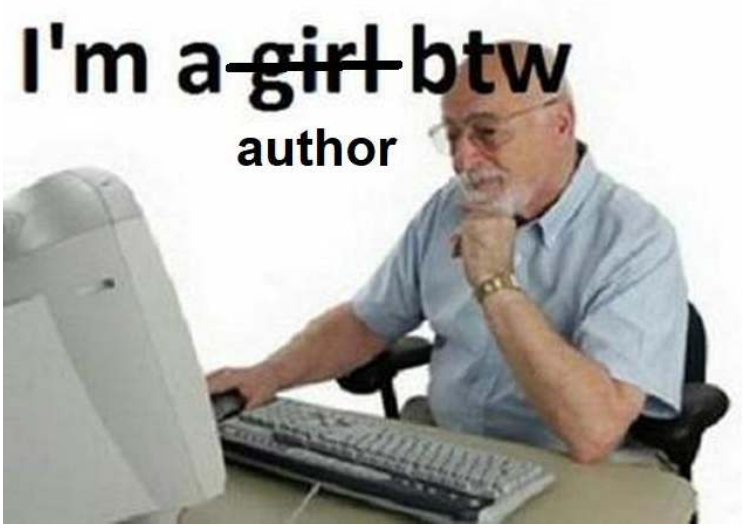
qualities of the books rather than their communicative qualities. eBooks are seen as digital artifacts that can be thrown, spammed, flood a platform, or be used as a trollish authority referenced in an online discussion.

With their project *Kindle'voke Ghost Writers* (2012), the Austrian artistic and publishing collective *Traumawien* flooded Amazon's self-publishing platform with thousands of ebooks, exploiting a vulnerability in the upload system. The covers of these books imitate the iconic Willy Fleckhaus design of *Suhrkamp Verlag editions*, but under this reliable design, they hide textual rubbish. The content, typeset as canonical dramas, was entirely composed of comments scraped from YouTube. The act of spamming the Amazon marketplace with interventionist, interface-specific literature , was a shitpublishing gesture which used digital publications as projectile weapons.

Flender, K.W. (2019) Literary Forkbombs: Interventionist Conceptual Writing in the Age of Amazon. Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures, 20. doi:10.20415/hyp/020.net01

The *Kindle'voke Ghost Writers* books function solely as data. As a cover; a product for Amazon to catalog and manage, and as a document that *occupies* space on the platform's servers. As conceptual writing works, these books are calling for a "thinkership" rather than a "readership" . But beyond this artistic framing, in the context of Amazon's workers, these books are not calling for a "readership", nor a "thinkership", but a "managership": meaning that someone has to organize this data to prevent obfuscation of the platform's digital shelves.

Besides the aggressive quality of this gesture, *Kindle'voke Ghost Writers* also plays on a more symbolic dimension of shitpublishing. It turns YouTube comments into literature. This conceptual publishing project is a shitpost play that challenges the notions of what is deemed worthy of being published in a book. It muddles the distinctions between literature and content, users and authors, posting and publishing. Like Angela Genusa's *Spam Bibliography*, a book that presents all emails received in her spam folder between September 2012 and March 2013, formatted as a bibliography and sorted alphabetically. This work is described in the Library of Artistic Print on Demand (apod.li) as a "unique representation [which] makes spam messages appear as objects worth documenting and investigating".



The Uncanny Book Valley 1: POD

Shitpublishing defines the uncanny book valley. These *things* are made to look like books, but if you approach them as a "readership" you will have an *unheimlich* experience. These oddly familiar publications inhabit the margins of what is publishable. They are positioned somewhere between real books that sound fake and fake books that could be real. To *experience* this, we only need to have a look at Tim Holman's collection Always Judge a Book by its Cover, a list of strange books he found on Amazon with titles like:

http://alwaysjudgeabookbyitscover.com/

How to Talk to Your Cat About Gun Safety

I Don't Care if My Best Friend's Mom is a Sasquatch, She'sHot and I'm Taking a Shower With Her

How to Raise Your I.Q. by Eating Gifted Children

Sun-Beams May Be Extracted from Cucumbers, But the Process Is Tedious. an Oration, Pronounced on the Fourth of July, 1799. at the Request of the Citizens of New-Haven. by David Daggett

But nowadays, due to the popularization of generative AI tools, these kinds of lists will contain much weirder books. Look no further than books authored by chatGPT on Amazon.

https://www.amazon.nl/AI-Cookbook-Munchies-Wellness-Heirloom-ebook/dp/B0CSH4CD1X

There are fascinating uncanny titles like *The AI Cookbook V: "Mindful Munchies: AI Wellness"* by George R. Martin III, *The Ai-Eye of Argon: Or, I Wrote a Novel with A.I. Assistance, But You Probably Should Not* by Martin Berman-Gorvine or *Chat GPT for Babies* by MR Mikhail Zerafa.

But let's take it one step at a time. There are two milestones in the development of shitpublishing: Print on Demand (POD) platforms and ChatGPT. Desktop publishing on POD platforms, like lulu or Amazon, expanded the limits of publishing, thereby approaching the uncanny book valley. The automation and the speediness of the publishing process on these platforms is closing the gap between posting and publishing. Publishing something on lulu only takes 15 minutes longer than posting something on a blog. And even though for a lot of internet goblins, 15 minutes is an eternity, for others, those minutes are well spent turning internet rubbish into something greater.

This was the case for many of the authors published on Troll Thread. The cover of Chris Sylvester's *STILL LIFE WITH THE POKÉMON YELLOW VERSION TEXT DUMP IN 30 PT. MONACO FONT JUSTIFIED TO MARGIN DISTRIBUTED AS A PDF OR A BOOK CONVERTED FROM A MICROSOFT WORD DOCUMENT BY CHRIS SYLVESTER 2012/2013* depicts a mail from Ashugi Kamaguchi that exemplifies the relevance of trolling in shitpublishing.

Trolling about authorship, originality, authenticity, urgency, value, and hard work:

Kelly Karivalis kkariva1@ccp.edu *mailto:kkariva1@ccp.edu*
Jan 31 (4 days ago)
to me

let's be real here. this is specifically directed to the "poet" who believes that she is writing "poetry" by copying the narration of Pokemon Yellow onto a Microsoft Word document readily available for download. i am the original writer of that text; i am the person who translated the text into english from japanse for the 1999 release of the GameBOy Color game Pokemon Yellow. I do not appreciate your associated "poet" copying my work word-for-word and passing it off as her own poetry in a different format. firstly, the original format of the script is better than a Microsoft Word version. secondly, i worked for five years writing the words that your "poet" is passing as her own. thirdly, nobody reads your "poetry" anyway. firstly, it takes to long to read. secondly, i get about five pages in and get so bored i stop reading. thirdly, all of your poetry is copied from other people. you may think that you are taking "non-poetic" work and making it poetic by taking it out of context. however, you have no respect for the original writer and their idea and their intended context for the words. i wrote Pokemon Yellow with full intention that it would be presented solely in the Gameboy Color format. it does not resonate in the Microsoft Word format. finally, from what i can gather through internet research, you and the majority of yoru associated poets are students at the university of penn. i ask you this: if you are willing to pay countless dollars for your meaningless edducation are you willing to pay countless dollars to pay me my due respects as an author? i don't think so, so stop claiming other people's work as your own. the world doesn't need a living literary version of duchamp anyway this world is full of enough bullshitters thank you and GOOD BYE!!

Shitpublishing is a performance that implies the gesture of publishing. We should not interpret these creative acts by actually reading the books, but through considering the act of publishing. However, publishing creates *things* that remain.

Shitpublishing gestures produce ambivalent books that live on despite their ephemeral nature, generating new temporalities. This is where the uncanny character lies. These books are glitches in literary technology, mirroring the implicit decontextualization of the very act of writing and publishing.

Similar to many performers, shitpublishers engaged in this materialistic, appropriationist, and fast approach, challenge cultural valorization. They produce artifacts that question the notion of the book as an instrument of knowledge. This is the case for Holaquehase's book *Art Garfunkel ha leído más libros que tú* [*Art Garfunkel has read more books than you have*], which compiled all the books read by the singer since 1960, *posted by him on his website*. Also, Gregor Weichbrodt published a brilliant comment on hard work and artistic valorization in his *Dictionary of Non-notable Artists*. After his Wikipedia page was nominated for deletion from the German Wikipedia, Gregor wrote a Python script to download the contents of every "article for deletion"-page from the past ten years and filtered the results by artistic occupation, subsequently publishing a dictionary dedicated to these artists.

Among many shitpublishers, the performative trolling character of the books is related to *hacking*. Sometimes, *Poetry* or *Art* functions as a hack to publicize things while avoiding legal issues. *Money* by Maker, for example, is a book consisting of 740 pages of scanned hundred dollar bills. When printed by someone, the publisher, TROLL THREAD PRESS, cannot be held legally responsible for potential misuse, even though they don't discourage it either. But besides the daring imagination of printing money, in 2018, Paul Soulellis published *Steve, Harvey and Matt* (2018), another 734 page artist book used to publicize sensitive political material. Soulellis describes the book on his github as follows:

> This project [...] restores access to 1,964 climate change-related URLs that were removed from www.EPA.gov on April 28, 2017. The URLs point to web pages, documents, presentations, publications, and other files that were purged by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the direction of EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and the Trump administration. Some of the assets had been accessible on the web since 1997. [...] The 734-page printed book contains EPA emails and spreadsheets that detail the purge, obtained

by Freedom of Information Act requests

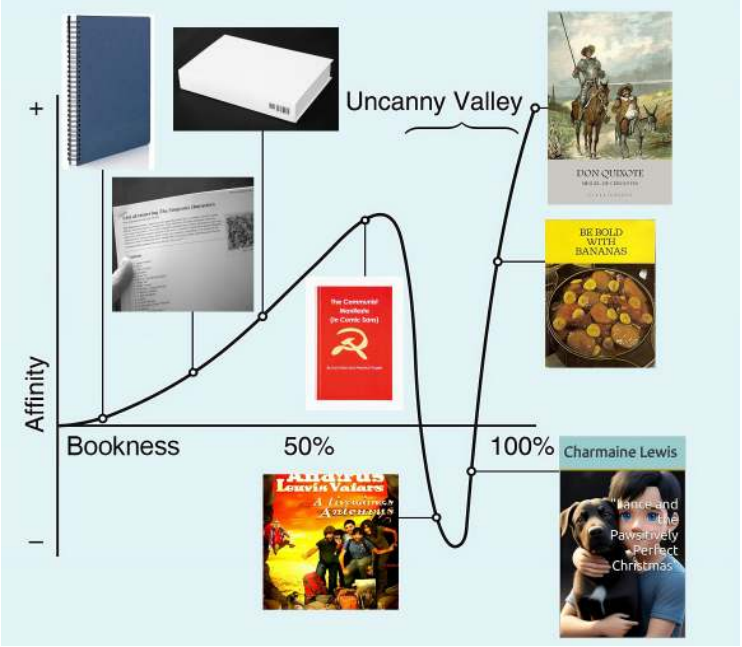
Soulellis' gesture of publicizing emails through the medium of a book or installation is also reflected by Kenneth Goldsmith's book *HILLARY: The Hillary Clinton Emails*, which compiled all emails sent from the clintonemail.com domain between 2009 and 2013 as "an anti-monument to the folly of Trump's heinous smear campaign against Clinton". Both Soulellis and Goldsmith instrumentalized the literary format to publicize relevant political information.

https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2153986/hillary-clinton-emails.pdf

But for most shitpublishers, it is only about *expanded shitposting*; about spreading shit in different formats, embracing the mutability and the hybridness of the digital world. Like *Primera antología poética Los subtitulos de las batallas de gallos [First poetry anthology The subtitles of the rap battles]*, a book made up of YouTube automated subtitles of rap battles. This book begins with the paradigmatic sentence: "to all those fans of rap battles, if you truly like it, you like it anyway". Or *Cedeira Miope [Shortsighted Cedeira]* a book of low-definition 144p images of a Galician town. Or *Soccer Smoker*, a zine composed exclusively of b/n photographs of soccer players smoking. Or *Tutorial de Paella Clásica*, a printed powerpoint presentation created by the author's father about how to cook a Paella.

The Uncanny Book Valley 2. The Advent of chatGPT

With the advent of ChatGPT, StableDiffusion, and other broadly used generative AI tools, shitpublishing created a deeper uncanny book valley. The power of Large Language Models (LLMs) overpassed the gesture of publishing appropriated materials from the internet, copypasted non-sensical rubbish, classified material, or even entire websites. LLMs can produce realistic textual *artifacts* that meet the expectations of what a book should look and feel like. ChatGPT is capable of producing originality, legibility, and common rhetorical and literary figures just as quickly as copypasting. Now, lazy and fast books look more like actual books and, at the same time, they have become much more unpleasant and uncanny than copypasted books.



The Uncanny Book Valley. 1) A notebook; 2) List of recurring The Simpsons characters (Amperamp Press, 2013); 3) Blank On Demand by Silvio Lorusso and Giulia Ciliberto; 4) The Communist Manifesto (in Comic Sans) by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx; 5) Los amigos de la aventura by Dan Wislow; 6) "Lance and the Pawsitively Perfect Christmas" by Charmaine Lewis; 7) Be bold with bananas by Fruit Distributors Ltd; 8) Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes.

I have some paradigmatic examples of these AI generated shitbooks in my virtual library. I found lots of children books, like Mahlon Berv's *A Journey Through Time - The World's History For Kids*, described as "The World's History, as taught by famous personalities such as Nelson Mandela, Bruce Lee, Marie Antoinette"; or Cynthia Maitland's 3-pages book *Billy the Brave Bull Terrier: A Tale of Self-Acceptance and Kindness*. Other uncanny gems include: Poet V: A Collection of AI-Generated *Poetry About Compassion for all Beings*, *Options for the end of the world by chatGPT: In this book, chatGPT will consider the most popular options for the end of the world and give their prediction of probability*. And, of course, there are the missing links between posting and publishing like Joshua Word's books *300 list of movies you can watch this Halloween: 1927 to 2024* or *40 HINDI MOVIES TO WATCH WITH FAMILY ON THIS DIWALI*.

https://www.amazon.nl/Journey-Through-Time-History-English-ebook/dp/B0C36SRJLL

All these books, which were authored by chatGPT, inhabit the uncanny valley created by the collision of OpenAI's and Amazon Books' tectonic faults.

LLMs not only accelerate the writing and publishingprocess, *alternative publishing practices*

but also the lifespan of books. The temporality of these publications is beyond fast reading or accelerated obsolescence. These books reconfigure conceptual writing and the attention economy in a wild way. They are not meant to be read but to endlessly circulate on Amazon. They are spectral images of books. Their life span is not fast but immediate. The cover, the title, the description, and the tags are the only content that matters. The content is relegated to the metadata. This idea is brilliantly represented in Chuck Tingle's book *Pounded In The Butt By My Bizarre Assumption That Chuck Tingle Books Are Just Covers And Not Actual Books*.

https://www.amazon.com/-/es/Chuck-Tingle-ebook/dp/B08FMTT9TQ

There are some outstanding moves in the milieu of shitpublishing. Gestures that blur the already blurry environment of fast self-publishing. Chuck Tingle's Amazon Books production employs this accelerated and bizarre flow of shitpublishing and fast self-publishing to create a collection of surreal gay erotica. Kindle books like *Pounded In The Butt By My Handsome Sentient Library Card Who Seems Otherworldly But In Reality Is Just A Natural Part Of The Priceless Resources Our Library System Provides*, *Pounded By The Gay Unicorn Football Squad*, *Absolutely No Thoughts Of Pounding During My Fun Day With This Kind T-Rex Because I'm Aromantic And Asexual And That's A Wonderfully Valid Way Of Proving Love Is Real*, or *Pounded In The Butt By My Book "Pounded In The Butt By My Own Butt"* twist the reality of Amazon shitpublishing. Chuck Tingle creates a game of mirrors within a game of mirrors, publishing slightly real books that look like fake books and are in fact fake books whose fakeness makes them real books.

This Is Not the Flood We Expected (or Is It?)

Similarly to what happened to shitposting, in recent years shitpublishing has become darker. Once upon a time, shitposting consisted of silly playful gestures by a bunch of online nerds. Nowadays, due to infamous characters like Steve Bannon, former adviser to Donald Trump, shitposting is becoming synonymous with far-right, racist, anti-feminist, and transphobic communicational strategies. Bannon's quote

exemplifies this turn: "The Democrats don't matter. The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit." Many right-wing parties in the USA, Brazil, Argentina, Germany, Spain or, Netherlands (among many others) have adopted strategies linked to shitposting (from fake news to spam) to flood the zone with hate speech, fear, and anger.

Related to publishing, chatGPT has changed the rules of shitpublishing. As McLuhan (1964) said:

> The 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions .

McLuhan, M. (1964) Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. Gingko Press

Popular LLMs have changed the shitpublishing scale. There have always been crappy children's books, ideologically problematic self-help guides or authors who make a career out of publishing garbage. However, due to chatGPT, these phenomena have grown exponentially.

A few years ago, I published two books that lowkey hacked the cultural capital of authorship: *Un libro según la UNESCO [A Book According to UNESCO]* is a book that publishes the definition of a book by the United Nations agency in 49 pages, the minimum number of pages required by UNESCO for a publication to qualify as a book. And *Una cosa hecha [One less thing on my bucket list]*, a book that repeated the sentence "Plant a Tree, Have a Son, Write a Book" as many times as needed to fill 50 pages.

The goal with these books was to give them an ISBN andadd them to my CV in order to increase my publications section as a PhD student. A few months later I came across this article: 'A researcher who publishes a study every two days reveals the darker side of science'. Apparently, "Thousands of scientists around the world publish at least one study every five days". It seems that my naive act of hacking the curriculum is an act that is carried out with worse intentions and better means by academics all over the world.

This scenario should lead us to ask ourselves how to deal with the new scale of "flooding the zone with shit" that LLMs facilitate. The poetic gestures of shitpublishing (from Troll

Thread to Chuck Tingle) are exercises that radically mimic broader postdigital publishing dynamics. These artistic gestures emulate the general dynamics of shitpublishing, re-framing these publishing gestures to ambivalently portray the situation. The critical dimension of these literary gestures lies in the fact that they unveil shitpublishing, reframing it as critical and meticulous observation.

traditional publishing practices

Likewise, the artistic exercises of shitpublishing create a necessary reflection on cultural valorization and our understanding of culture or knowledge. They expose a sort of ideological consensus about books being the *guardians of knowledge*. Instead of reproducing a Fahrenheit 451-style critical discourse on censorship, they dismantle the technology of the book as inherently emancipatory.

But these acts of radical mimesis of late-platformcapitalism's accelerated dynamics simultaneously reproduce these forms while criticizing them. Shitpublishing is digital publishing accelerationism. And we know that accelerationism is fine for aesthetics but that it is not a wise political tactic. Maybe shitpublishing is as political and activist as avant-garde literature could be. In this article, I have talked about shitpublishing as closely related to hacking. But, considering it in broader political terms, what is it hacking against? Perhaps the very idea of the book, the value given to the written word, or literacy as a technology. If it is those things, then it's the same as in Pop Art, Dadaism or Conceptual Writing. Maybe the political potential is not in the "genre" or the "tool", but in the contexts you flood with shit.

Shitpublishing, of course, pertains to speed and irrelevancy. It is fast publishing but, of course, it is not urgent publishing. *In Here and now? Explorations in Urgent Publishing*, the INC reflects on the fact that 'Despite the promises of the desktop publishing revolution and the immediacy of publishing on the web, acceleration and optimization did not speed up the publishing process as much as hoped for' . Well, maybe it did speed up the publishing process towards weird places that are still unexplored. Towards practices and ways that we must try to understand in order to deal with the undetermined consequences they may bring. Maybe it will cause the fall (or bigger success) of platforms like Amazon Books, or it will challenge the classist approaches to books as cultural goods, and therefore, books will no longer be seen as something inherently positive. Perhaps reading will no longer be synonymous with critical thinking, and that's something I still don't know how to take.

https://pure.hva.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/7054917/Here_and_Now_Explorations_in_Urgent_Publishing.pdf

Special thanks to Diego Asterio for her sharp comments on this text.

03 Annette Gilbert

Affordances and Limitations of POD Platform Publishing: Findings from the Library of Artistic Print on Demand[1]

Expanding Publishing: From Fordism to Toyotism

It was not the perfection of digital printing technology that made print on demand (POD) a success, but a radical rethinking of the printing business and a complete reorganization of all related workflows. After all, it was no longer a matter of printing a single title in a large print run and then delivering the product on pallets to a single customer address, but of printing and shipping a large number of different titles, with only one copy of each title in extreme cases (which were to become the rule). This "profoundly disruptive" change has been compared to the transition from Fordism to Toyotism in the post-war period.[2] But it was not until around 2005 that the POD model gained truly revolutionary momentum with the establishment of POD service providers such as Blurb and Lulu, which focused primarily on the mass market and the end consumer, especially first-time authors. As a result, ordinary people with no knowledge of design, printing, or bookselling can now create, publish, print, promote, and distribute their works—not only in the POD provider's own online store, but also, if they want and once they acquire an ISBN, worldwide in brick-and-mortar and

tools

online bookstores to which such POD service providers are connected via Ingram and Amazon.

POD: Publishing Made for Everyone

What Clay Shirky provocatively postulated for digital publishing has since become true for the world of printed books as well: "That's not a job anymore. That's a button. There's a button that says 'publish,' and when you press it, it's done."[3] Shirky was referring here primarily to the world of the Internet. But this button also exists in the world of POD providers. In the case of Lulu, for example, it literally says "Confirm and Publish" (see fig. 1).

references

Fig. 1: Button "Confirm and Publish" on Lulu. Screenshot.

By reducing the once mighty publishing apparatus to a single button and making it available to all, independent of purse and gatekeepers, bookmaking became child's play. This is also reflected in the names the platforms have given their offerings, such as "BoD Fun" for BoD's basic product. And unlike the typewriter, mimeograph, copy machine, and home printer, that were once the first choice of self-publishers, POD publications are industrially produced, making them look like "normal" books and giving the impression (at least to the lay person) that they are on a par with regular bookstore products. All of this together has caused book production to virtually explode, and self-publishing has, as Timothy Laquintano states, "move[d] from the fringe of the publishing industry to become a small and fluid part of its core."[4]

Platformization of Publishing: Providing Infrastructure for "the Whole Thing"

But there was another decisive factor in POD's road to success: POD service providers do more than just print. They also equip their stores with "accessible and trusted payment systems" and handle shipping and logistics, finally solving the persistent problem of distribution, "that had made self-publishing and finding an audience untenable in all but the most extraordinary

cases in the twentieth century."[5] Because these POD service providers offer everything in one place—from finalizing a print template and digitally listing a book to producing and shipping the first copy through to handling the global logistics of book sales, payments, taxes, custom duties, and royalties—the term "*print*-on-demand provider" does not adequately describe them. Rather, they provide an infrastructure in the form of a platform via which these services can be combined, coordinated, and offered as a package. POD is therefore, as Silvio Lorusso states, "not a new technology in itself, but a fruitful combination of existing ones"[6] and their integration into a complex post-digital ecosystem of book market, e-commerce, and logistics infrastructures. It was this dovetailing that allowed Eileen Gittins, Blurb's founder, to say, "We've deconstructed publishing." After all, Blurb has succeeded in

> not only disrupt[ing] the business from a "who gets to make a book," but also the distribution model for how books are sold and discovered. [...] So what we are now is a technology-enabled publishing platform, so that people can self-publish, soup-to-nuts from creation through marketing, distribution, fulfillment, e-commerce, the whole thing.[7]

Standardization: Enabling and Restricting

Unlike the production and distribution process, POD does not revolutionize or expand the book itself. Quite the opposite. The quality standards for production and the choice of materials and design features have decreased, especially in the low-cost segment for everyone. For example, Lulu currently offers just four types of paper and sixteen book formats (see fig. 2). Silvio Lorusso identified this dilemma early on: "[I]n order to produce unique copies, paradoxically, they [POD systems] enforce the limitations of mass production by applying stricter standards."[8]

sustainability of workflows

It is this standardization that enables automated and cost-effective production, as well ensuring the print job is executed as consistently as possible across a global network of partners.[9]

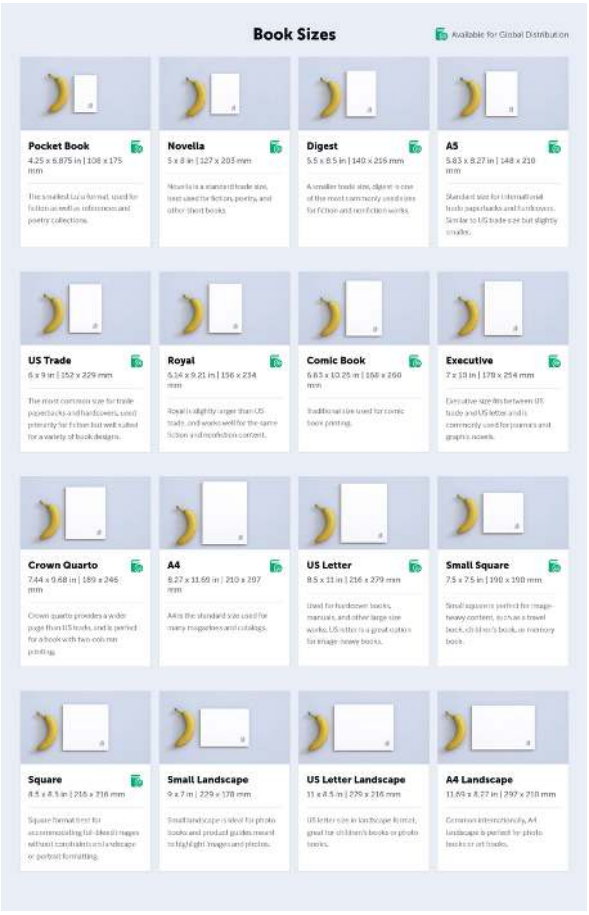


Fig. 2: Lulu's custom book sizes. Screenshot.

But that says nothing about the actual latitude that POD leaves for the development of one's own expanded publishing strategy. Oulipo is probably the clearest proof that compelling artistic solutions can be derived from a constraint. The history of printing has also shown time and again that it is less the companies and their inventions themselves that break new ground, than their users. This was already true for the Xerox machine: "[D]espite its banal original as a time- and moneysaving office technology, the history of the copy machine has been deeply shaped by its users' imaginations." This is related to the fact that copiers were very soon liberated from

these contexts of use and "quickly adopted and adapted by workers as a tool of subversion—a form of *perruque* for the information age," as Kate Eichhorn explains.[10] This sort of emancipation and *détournement* of technologies and infrastructures for one's own artistic or political agenda can also be observed in the field of POD platforms.

Specific Affordances of POD

Participation and Access

For example, POD plays a key role in participatory contexts because of its low-threshold nature. Formats such as book sprints, which are aimed at the general public and are often used in museum education, art communication, and literature education, are benefitted rather than hindered by being restricted to a few book formats and materials. This is demonstrated by their huge output, such as the Book Machine at the Centre Pompidou Paris in 2013, organized by Onestar Press, which produced over 350 titles in three weeks.

In addition, the POD platforms naturally attract particular interest in the sub-field of restricted production, to use Bourdieu's term. In contrast to the sub-field of large-scale production, recognition and success here are not measured in terms of sales figures or money. Instead, it is characterized by "an anti-economic economy based on the refusal of commerce and 'the commercial' [...] and on recognition solely of symbolic, long-term profits."[11] In the field staked out by the Library of Artistic Print on Demand, it was artists' initiatives like AND Publishing and ABC, as well as publishing collectives such as Troll Thread, Gauss PDF, and TraumaWien that independently, but at around the same time (2010), recognized the potential of POD to "sustain an adventurous and inquiring creative practice without having to conform to the mass market."[12] In this spirit, Troll Thread was founded primarily as a "place to put our poems that no one else wants." As member Holly Melgard explains:

> Why wait to be asked before speaking? What, should I not speak unless spoken to? Why wait for an established person

to solicit, welcome, and/or legitimate this work prior to permitting it to occupy public space-time? Self-publishing these books via Troll Thread allowed me to immediately distribute my work to a larger public without predicating what I make on anyone else's desire or agency besides my own.[13]

Scale and Scope

For Troll Thread member Joey Yearous-Algozin, POD has yet another unparalleled advantage: "More than simply providing new channels through which to disseminate texts, this shift in platform has allowed for a simultaneous shift in scale. [...] [D]igital publishing allows for experiments in volume, with poets literally testing the physical limits of what we call the book."[14] There are several projects that exploit the new digital possibilities for generating texts and produce vast quantities of text. Stephen McLaughlin's *Puniverse* (2014), whose subtitle *(being the ingenuous crossing of an idiom set and a rhyming dictionary)* reveals its underlying principle, comprises fifty-seven volumes filled with hackneyed jokes. That it is possible to order these volumes as physical books that can be held in the hand clearly shows the excessive nature of digital production, with its tendency toward over-production.

Michael Mandiberg's *Print Wikipedia* (2015), which squeezed the entire English Wikipedia into the medium of print, also plays with the shift of scale introduced by digitization. The over six million English-language articles on Wikipedia fill more than 7,500 volumes. Just by converting Wikipedia into the familiar book format, the project helps us comprehend the dimensions of the collective writing experiment and the scope of the knowledge that it has assembled. In just a few years, *Print Wikipedia* will be an invaluable historical document—a snapshot of the state of knowledge at a precise point in time.

references

Archiving and Urgency

Print Wikipedia also clearly demonstrates that the fast, straightforward POD process is an ideal medium for documenting and archiving ephemeral artifacts and content, especially those from the digital world and Internet culture.

When it comes to this kind of fixing of the digital in print, there may well be no medium more appropriate than POD, the epitome of post-digital hybridity. Paul Soulellis, founder of the Library of the Printed Web (2013–2017), was one of the first to identify this artistic web-to-print practice, at the interface between screen and printed page, as a phenomenon of our time. It is intended to suspend the digital condition that is slipping out of our grasp: "The physicalization [...] brings focus. [...] It slows me down, it helps me to pause and reflect,"[15] Rafael Rozendaal reports in his series *Abstract Browsing* (2016). Soulellis's own publications are also a good example of this approach, which, in light of political events in the US, he later called "urgent publishing."

politics

> To publish is, fundamentally, a political act.
>
> In moments of crisis, as we've experienced so deeply in the last year, we see not only artists, but community organizers, scholars, poets, and activists collectively engaging with different modes of publishing to urgently document and communicate what's happening, in real time.[16]

Following this credo, Soullelis's zine *Thank you for your interest in this subject* (2017) documents the systematic deletion of countless web pages on whitehouse.gov immediately after Donald Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2017, at around 17:00. Of course, much of this material, which is documented here in printed form, is now outdated and historical. But this is precisely what makes POD a powerful tool for historiography, as James Bridle notes in reference to his twelve-volume series *The Iraq War* (2010), which recorded all 12,000 changes made in the edit wars over the Wikipedia article of the same name.[17]

Teaching and Research

However, as Manon Bruet observes, the POD model "first managed to establish itself in the field of teaching."[18] And indeed, POD has opened the door for books to be used in new ways in research and education, as the apod.li collection demonstrates. Initially, the focus was on basic testing of this new production process, the potential and limitations of which were explored in art schools by emerging designers and typographers. Possibly POD's greatest impact on teaching has

been the extension of the classroom into the book market and the public sphere: POD not only enabled the production, but also the publication of university assignments, seminar papers, and theses, which were otherwise only produced for use in the classroom, and not generally circulated.

The seminars have generated also more extensive artistic (research) projects, and even publishing houses and dissertations, which are now considered as valid contributions to the post-digital publishing scene. Examples are Olivier Bertrand's Surfaces Utiles publishing house, a "spin off" from his master's thesis, or Luca Messarra's Undocumented Press, which emerged from one of Danny Snelson's seminars. Snelson's Eclipse Printing Service was, in turn, a subproject of his dissertation *Variable Format*.[19] Some projects, such as Stéphanie Vilayphious' *Blind Carbon Copy* series (2009), on experimental ways to circumvent intellectual property restrictions, or Jasper Otto Eisenecker's *Camouflaged Books* (2014–16), were not just born in the classroom as master's theses, but also see themselves explicitly as teaching materials. Eisenecker's manual *How to Camouflage Books in Times of Internet Censorship*, also published on the platform he was researching, aims to communicate and enable the deployment of his camouflage publishing strategies for a wider public.

Both Analog and Digital

Jasper Eisenecker's project also represents an attempt to expand the medium of the book by strategically exploiting the fundamentally hybrid nature of POD publications, where the printed book is always based on a digital master. His *Camouflaged Books* are intentionally configured as a double pack, comprising both a digital file and a printed copy. They make use of special visual camouflage strategies designed to distort the content of each publication in such a way that the PDF file would outwit the POD platform's automated checking and control mechanisms, while ensuring the printed books would remain legible and present no difficulties for human readers.

references

The printed book is not conceived here as a countermodel to the digital, but as a complementary addition. In other words, the two publication formats are not to be understood as an "either–or," where the reader can choose the preferred format. Instead, these works are conceptualized as a "both-this-and-

that." This dual publication strategy also applies to Holly Melgard's *MONEY* (2012), which depicts the front and back of 368 full-size hundred-dollar bills, "inviting the reader to either call cops or cut on the dotted line and use the bills IRL [in real life]."[20] In this way, *MONEY* reveals the anachronism in current law: While the PDF file is unproblematic, executing a print job would amount to the illegal reproduction of banknotes, where it is not clear who could be held legally accountable. This is not a purely abstract question, as the printer's refusal to print Melgard's latest book with excerpts from *MONEY* shows (see fig. 3).

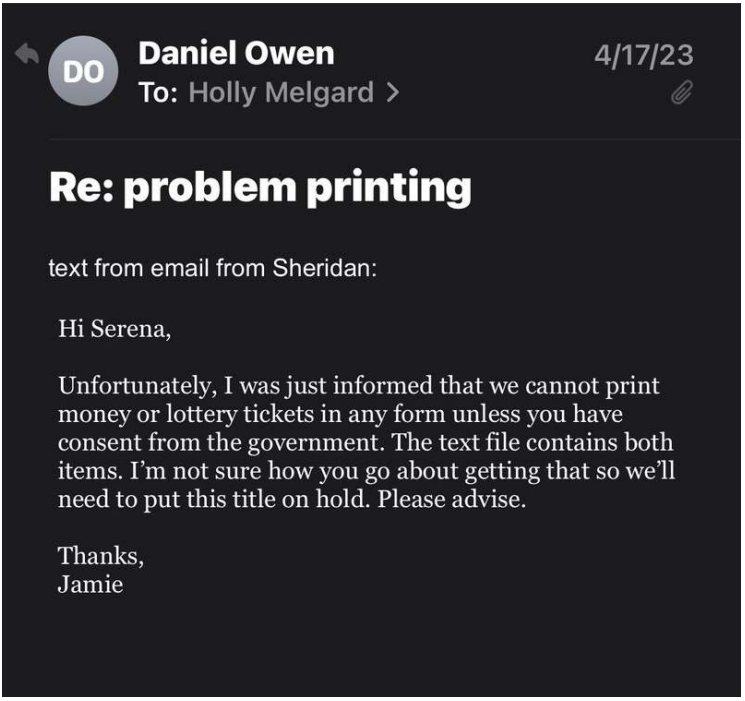


Fig. 3: Message from the printers refusing to print Holly Melgard's poetry collection *Read Me* (New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2023). Screenshot.

Publishing through Metadata

One could, however, argue that *MONEY* does not actually need to be materialized in print to be effective. The idea of the book is already realized in the fact that it could be printed. Sophie

Seita describes this aptly as "imagined printedness": "These are works that cannot or should not be printed but insist on printedness—even if only imagined—all the same."[21] This is a feature of POD in general—after all, every uploaded book must wait to be ordered and printed. But it is especially significant for cases where the high price or sheer scale of the complete work makes it highly unlikely to be ever printed (see *Print Wikipedia*), or for cases designed to test the limits of platform production (see *MONEY*).

In such instances of deliberate "imagined printedness," it might make sense to recognize even the mere uploading of a file to the POD platform, along with the entry of the necessary metadata and the subsequent public display in the store, as a valid act of constituting and publishing a work. Even without having been printed or indeed ever being printed, the mere potential material existence of these books, constituted by their metadata and their embeddedness in the POD ecosystem, creates a fact that allows them to be addressed as full-fledged works, to be attributed to an author's oeuvre, to be discussed and interpreted, and to be inscribed in the history of art or literature.

Paratext Poetics and Envelope Strategies

Closely linked to this metadata are the innumerable upload and activation processes that need to be gone through to publish a book on a POD platform. They offer another target for intervention. They are controlled through a special interface with mandatory fields for title, author(s), keywords, description, etc. that follow a strict protocol. On Lulu, for example, at least one "contributor" must be entered, and a name alone does not suffice—a role also has to be selected from a drop-down menu with no fewer than thirty choices from co-author, illustrator, editor-in-chief, and thesis advisor to cover designer, annotator, and translator (see fig. 4).

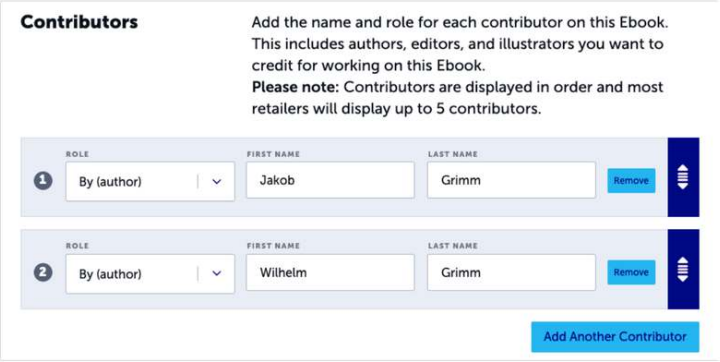


Fig. Lulu's interface, detail. Screenshot.

This list provides insight into the platforms' concept of authorship and their attempt to mediate between the highly regulated book trade, with its coarse-grained and often abbreviated entries for names, titles, subject classifications, and other paratexts, and the comparatively unregulated digital world, where, for example, the names of all contributors to a publication can be entered, with no limit on available space. This more accurately reflects the actual collaborative nature of book creation. It also increases reach and findability in digital databases and so the amount of attention books receive—an effect that can be observed, for example, in Mathew Timmons' *Credit* (2011), which documents the strained financial situation of the author during the financial crisis. All thirty authors who contributed blurbs to the book are mentioned by name in the online store, demonstrating the significance of symbolic capital in this niche sector of restricted production, whose actors, like Timmons himself, often have limited financial resources and creditworthiness.

Furthermore, these blurbs show the amazing creativity and humor associated with this genre of text, which often extends to other entries in Lulu's upload forms. This is encouraged by the fact that although most of the fields are mandatory, you can write whatever you want in them. This includes the author's name, which does not need to be based on a username or a real name. It is thus possible to enter pseudonyms, collective names, or anonymous. In addition, these fields are not exclusive—unlike the login name, an author name can be used multiple

times, in different publications, by different users. Moreover, the digital metadata and paratexts can be different from the information given on the cover, fly-title, spine, or title page of the printed book. This expands the artistic options enormously; and several artists thus see it as part of their work and play around with it.

What is particularly appealing here is that these simple requirements for accessing POD platforms also permit entry to the more regulated and change-resistant book trade. For this reason, the POD sector is the arena for a particularly dynamic negotiation and expansion of these paratextual practices. Consequently, these data and paratexts from POD platforms are just as important as those in the printed book and should be recorded in the same way, as integral parts of the work—which is why the apod.li web archive includes a screenshot of each title whenever possible.

Détournement and Hijacking

There have been other attempts to develop subversive or antagonistic ways of using the platforms, confirming the rule that "Institutions cannot prevent what they cannot imagine."[22] The first to be mentioned here is Troll Thread's publishing model, which subverts the very meaning and purpose of a POD platform. It is based on a simple, extremely minimalist Tumblr page linked to the Lulu online store: "Basically, we use Lulu as a means to host the PDFs, something Tumblr's platform doesn't accommodate, without having to pay for our own domain."[23] They thus misuse Lulu as a free storage and virtual gallery space for the presentation of their own publishing program. In his manifesto *how to stop worrying abt the state of publishing* (2016), Joey Yearous-Algozin openly promotes this strategy, detailing the steps to find the "backdoor way of viewing yr file that lulu is now hosting for you for free."[24]

It is precisely this free-rider effect that Olivier Bertrand makes the defining principle of his publishing house Surfaces Utiles. He refers to his publishing practice with the French expression "faire la perruque," a term used by Michel de Certeau to describe a "practice of economic diversion" whereby employees take advantage of their working time and the working means, resources, or tools of their employer for their own benefit, or to the employer's disadvantage, whether it is

copying on the company's copy machine, planning the next vacation trip on the office computer, or stealing pencils and envelopes for one's own correspondence.[25] Applied to Bertrand's own practice, this means:

> It is not necessary to recreate new structures each time, but it is quite possible to rely on those that already exist, even if it means hijacking them. Rather than denying them, we can imagine, for example, taking advantage of the strength of the institutional or industrial structures already in place to transform them according to our needs (and not those of the market). In terms of resources, it is a question of working as much as possible with the materials that are already around us [...].[26]

With this in mind, Bertrand has developed strategies for reusing leftovers and hacking industrial structures. In the case of Blurb, where none of the standard formats met his requirements, he chose the most economical format in terms of its cost-benefit ratio and offered the offcuts, i.e., the unused spaces on each page, to another artist for their own book project. As a form of "perruque" for his own advantage, Bertrand thus implements the same principles for economical and ecological optimizing the print sheet as the POD printers, which enable them to offer their products so cheaply, as one of these printers explains: „One of the most essential reasons for our low prices is the combined printing of different orders during one print run."[27]

conditions of work

However, this strategy does not really pay off in the long run. It saves paper and money, but not time. The production of the digital template for merging and superimposing different works is too labor-intensive, especially since it is not transferable to other publications, which all require individual solutions. Nonetheless, Bertrand values the process that allows him an economy of complicity and an upside-down approach: "For me, it was critical to consider design in this way. I think about it from the material to the publishing project, rather than from the publishing project to the material."[28]

Outwitting and Hacking

Even more complex was the search for a way to exploit a hidden potential of POD that the platforms did not provide for:

combining the production of printed one-offs with generative methods. Despite their boast of offering a micro print run of a single copy, the POD platforms and their APIs do not support the automated upload of print templates with subsequent triggering of a print order that would allow the reader to create and order their own version—perhaps to prevent spam or excessive uploads, or because of the complexity of such a service. This means that in spite of all the automatization and digitization, individual copies still have to be generated and saved singly, with each one manually uploaded and released as a new title. Only after several attempts did Andy Simionato and Karen ann Donnachie succeed in staying true to the name of their project, *The Library of Nonhuman Books* (2019–), and implementing a fully automated book ordering process, where new book iterations are first generated and uploaded to the platform at the click of a button, and then copies are ordered, paid for, printed, and shipped—all without any human intervention.

Limitations: At the Mercy of the POD-Platforms

New Intermediaries instead of Self-Publishing

It is important to them that orders are placed through their own publishing website and not Blurb's or Lulu's online store, because they wish to remain platform-agnostic and to reserve the option to change platforms if necessary. They have learned the lesson that although POD expands the "horizons of the publishable,"[29] it also entails new limitations and dependencies. The emancipation from the traditional publishing industry and its gatekeeping mechanisms is only one side of the coin. After all, the system of mediation does not simply disappear. Instead, new intermediaries emerge in the form of POD platforms and a self-publishing industry that are nothing more than "refashioned gatekeeping." Strictly speaking, therefore, it is misleading to speak of "disintermediation" or "self"-publishing: "the word *self* masks the extensively collaborative process of self-publishing" and its inevitable interconnectedness with providers and infrastructures under platform capitalism.[30]

At the Risk of Deplatforming

governance and ownership

It is also well known by now that platforms are not neutral service providers, but are themselves political actors that create realities. They use their terms and conditions and their absolute authority within their own domain to dictate what users can do and the rules they must follow. These terms and conditions have been cited in several cases as the basis for blocking or deleting books or accounts (see fig. 5).[31]

Fig. 5 : Notification from Lulu's Questionable Content Team, March 24, 2014.

What makes the situation even more complicated and opaque is the fact that the platform's partner printers also have the right to refuse to execute certain orders.[32] The worst-case scenario is when a user's entire account is blocked because of a single book as happened to Danny Snelson. With this deplatforming, all the books that students have created in his seminars over ten years have been lost. Artists have rarely succeeded in convincing the Questionable Content Team that the allegation was baseless and reinstating their account, as in the case documented here (fig. 6).

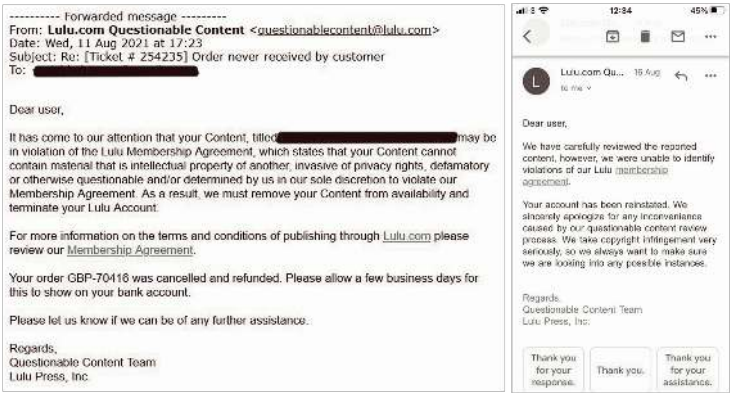
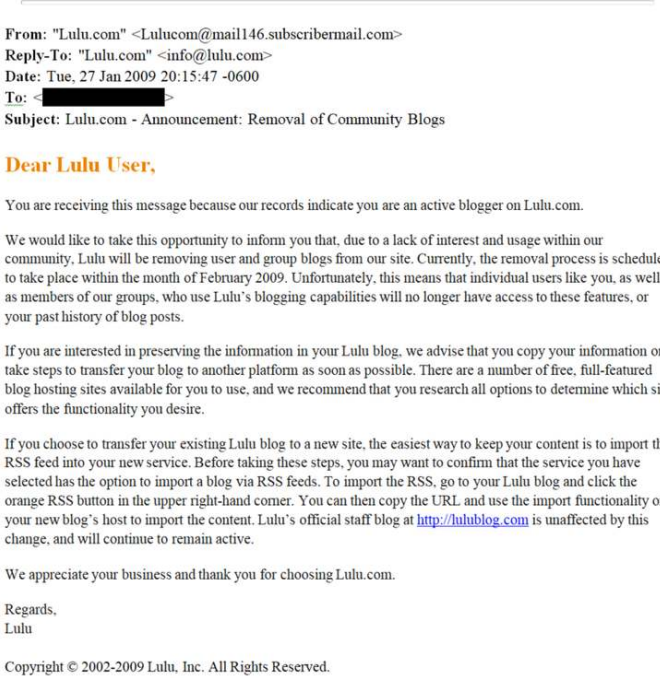


Fig. 6: Email correspondence between Lulu's Questionable Content Team and an artist represented *in* apod.li from August 2021 (personal details redacted).

Volatility and Vulnerability

Users are also completely at the mercy of sometimes drastic changes to the platform structures and features. In 2009, paula roush experienced how users can lose control of their carefully maintained profiles when Lulu suddenly removed the Community Blogs feature, which was originally intended to support social networking by users and the formation of a Lulu community (see fig. 7). All the material posted there was ruthlessly deleted with only a few days' notice (see fig. 8). roush, a pioneer in the use of POD for teaching, lost two years of coursework produced with her students using Lulu blogs.

Fig.7: Lulu's former community features. Screenshot.



From: "Lulu.com" <Lulucom@mail146.subscribermail.com>
Reply-To: "Lulu.com" <info@lulu.com>
Date: Tue, 27 Jan 2009 20:15:47 -0600
To: <[redacted]>
Subject: Lulu.com - Announcement: Removal of Community Blogs

Dear Lulu User,

You are receiving this message because our records indicate you are an active blogger on Lulu.com.

We would like to take this opportunity to inform you that, due to a lack of interest and usage within our community, Lulu will be removing user and group blogs from our site. Currently, the removal process is scheduled to take place within the month of February 2009. Unfortunately, this means that individual users like you, as well as members of our groups, who use Lulu's blogging capabilities will no longer have access to these features, or your past history of blog posts.

If you are interested in preserving the information in your Lulu blog, we advise that you copy your information or take steps to transfer your blog to another platform as soon as possible. There are a number of free, full-featured blog hosting sites available for you to use, and we recommend that you research all options to determine which site offers the functionality you desire.

If you choose to transfer your existing Lulu blog to a new site, the easiest way to keep your content is to import the RSS feed into your new service. Before taking these steps, you may want to confirm that the service you have selected has the option to import a blog via RSS feeds. To import the RSS, go to your Lulu blog and click the orange RSS button in the upper right-hand corner. You can then copy the URL and use the import functionality on your new blog's host to import the content. Lulu's official staff blog at http://lulublog.com is unaffected by this change, and will continue to remain active.

We appreciate your business and thank you for choosing Lulu.com.

Regards,
Lulu

Fig. 8: Lulu's notification about the removal of community blogs, January 27, 2009 [personal details redacted].

Troll Thread also faced a rude awakening when they were taken unawares by an extensive relaunch of the Lulu online store in 2020 that defeated their sophisticated parasitic strategy at one stroke. Not only were all publications given new links, with numerous publications and accounts deactivated, but the preview function was also deleted—and with it the basis of Troll Thread's hack, once again revealing the POD platforms as an embattled territory, where artistic imagination and use push up against techno-economic optimization and regulation.

Sustainability and Resilience

sustainability of workflows

In the end, POD has proved to be an astonishingly precarious genre, despite unlimited print runs and enduring availability being touted as selling points of the POD publishing model. A considerable number of titles (not limited to the apod.li

collection) are now no longer accessible, whether due to acts of censorship, alleged copyright infringement, economic considerations, changes in formats, materials, or design features, price increases, or even the closure of POD platforms. With this in mind, one has to agree with Silvio Lorusso, who identifies volatility as a pressing issue for expanded publishing and concludes: "So the point is, how to make a long lasting publication? [...] the question of sustainability [...] is the part where that requires more experimentation, more than coming up with a new file format."[33] But perhaps its temporary nature is the very essence of experimental publishing? Institutionalizing and perpetuating the experiment is, after all, ruled out by definition. From the artist's point of view, then, what is needed above all is a certain tenacity and versatility, as practiced by Joey Yearous-Algozin: "to put it bluntly: these things work for now and once they stop working, we'll find something else."[34]

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5. Lorusso, "Print-on-Demand," 03:52. ↩
6. However, this network is not as global as the providers like to claim. There are hardly any official figures, but RPI Print—Blurb's founding partner—at least locates the partner printers of its "global network" on a world map, the clustered distribution of which clearly indicates the concentration on a few key regions in the US and Europe. Cf. RPI Print, "Our Global Network," RPI Print, https://www.rpiprint.com/products-services/services-printernet-networks/. ↩
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8. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 54 [original emphasis deleted]. ↩
9. The Piracy Project, "The Impermanent Book," in *Best of Rhizome 2012*, ed. Joanne McNeil (Brescia: LINK Editions, 2013), 21–27, 27. ↩
10. Both citations Holly Melgard, *Essays for a Canceled Anthology: HOLLY MELGARD READS HOLLY MELGARD* (self-pub.: Troll Thread / Lulu, 2017), 20 and 7. ↩
11. Joey Yearous-Algozin, "Keep your Friends Close /// We Upload Trash," *Convolution* 4 (2016): 75–79, 78. ↩

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11. In more detail, Certeau says: "Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance, that is, an economy of the '*gift*' (generosities for which one expects a return), an esthetics of '*tricks*' (artists' operations) and an ethics of *tenacity* (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of a law, a meaning, or a fatality)." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984), 26 and 27 [emphasis in the original]. ↩
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9. Yearous-Algozin, "Keep Your Friends Close," 78. ↩

04 THE VOID

THE VOID is a research project on tactical video and an audiovisual publishing venue for practice-based research at the Institute of Network Cultures. This article was written specifically for this publication by Jordi Viader Guerrero, researcher and member of THE VOID.

THE VOID: Hybrid Events as Expanded Publishing

By Jordi Viader Guerrero

https://etherport.org/publications/inc/expub_Expert_Session/networkcultures.org/void

We started THE VOID in early 2022 when the Netherlands was still under partial lockdowns. A time when we were subjected to an acceleration and intensification of the ongoing platformization of social relations. Closed off in our private spaces, we collectively reached out to the cameras and screens attached to our devices for years already to do all sorts of things online: teaching, learning, chatting, drinking, partying, gaming, or simply hanging out. It is interesting to see this moment in retrospect as an intensification rather than the so-called "revolution" of social media and the smartphone from a decade earlier.The visible banners of this moment were not shiny and new hardware and software that would upend all social relations as we know them. Instead, they were the admittedly boring and serious Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Discord, and Jitsi that didn't promise us a new world but simply to continue with our everyday and boring lives and be able to *see* each other while avoiding physical proximity.

By the time the lockdowns were enforced, we had already been putting ourselves in front of cameras to upload images to the internet for years (selfie stick fever had come and gone), but they managed to rearrange so many different social contexts, from academic and cultural to business and entrainment, as this specific screen-camera-networked infrastructure setup. Suddenly, the platformized internet was not a place where we would deliberately post stuff on (like Luther on the church's door or an influencer on Instagram's algorithmic feed) but a collection of channels where we had to stream our lives away just to participate in society.

alternative publishing practices

Three years later, while we might not be confined to our homes anymore, video streaming practices have successfully infiltrated academic and artistic research publishing. This mostly happens in unassuming ways –yet another online speaker series, another webinar, a publication launch, a lecture performance, or just a regular internal meeting– hybrid setups have become an expected, although downplayed, element of the publishing workflow. On one hand, this entails the repurposing of devices and practices of video production, once relegated to the highly professionalized industries of film and TV, later amateurishly adopted by video game streaming, video blogging, and video essay online niches, for the broader culture and educational sector.On the other hand, creates the expectation for both "creative", "immaterial" workers and traditional publishers to become a new sort of (un)professional AV technicians and producers.

This uncomfortable expectations shift is more often than not manifested in the seemingly compulsory yet awkward troubleshooting minutes preambling cultural and academic events (how come the projector never works?),our over-reliance on big tech's software and hosting solutions (the other virus was Microsoft Teams), and the unappealing look and sound, to say the least, of hybrid events as aesthetic products (so much money was poured in the pre-2008 EU and elsewhere for building astonishing white cubes to end up "housing" culture on the Zoom interface).

Moreover, the video-fication of academic and artistic research has effectively multiplied the moments of contact with the public while simultaneously decreasing their finality and their stakes. Making and publishing a video does not necessarily culminate a process, but every part of the process, no matter

how inconsequential, is now potentially subject to becoming video and, therefore, public. A gesture that, let's not forget, is that of early post-internet artists on YouTube (think Petra Cortright) as well as vloggers, video game streamers on Twitch (our unsung inspiration), sex cammers, religious mass broadcasting, and, of course, reality TV. Online video is everywhere yet remains invisible as a transparent, privatized infrastructure-as-a-service we see through, rather than a technical medium we work with to develop and publish our research practice.

A great deal of the research we do at THE VOIDis about embracing our newfound roles as AV technicians. This has allowed us to learn that working with "content", with "ideas" or "theories" entails working with moving images–at the very least with images of ourselves or of a guest speaking, but most probably also with memes, all sort of internet found footage, software interfaces, and produced video content such as video essays or performances. Crucially, working with images also means working with hardware: with cables, monitors, cameras, video switchers, green screens, routers, lights, cloud storage, mixers, and a long etc. If moving the conversation away from content towards publishing is an acknowledgment of the material and social conditions of the production and distribution of the former, what THE VOID is then trying to advocate for is an expansion of the tools and social dynamics of print and online publishing to include those of video production.

The practices and tools we utilize to engage with video production have gradually changed in the past three years. The first episodes of THE VOID are video podcasts where the speakers are overlaid on top of a keyed background, mostly showing content addressed during the conversation, along with popping visuals. A useful format for long-form conversations that was already prevalent on YouTube and has become increasingly important on the current political media landscape. At the time, our interest was simply to produce a video analogue of the mostly written content on our research blog (INC) by adding visual depth and interest to podcast production. An INC TV that would produce outcomes somewhere in between video podcasts and video essays.

Fig. 1: THE VOID 04 | Memorable Websites

However, after our participation in the Internet Cafe Exhibition organized by the Salwa Foundation in July 2023, we started to shift our focus towards streaming hybrid events. This event marked the realization of several key aspects that would determine our practice going forward. To begin with, it became clear to us that figuring out how to make the green screen studio setup mobile and adaptable to different spaces was a fundamental part of what we are doing. The studio was not a backdrop to take for granted, but something akin to an installation piece. The equipment –cameras, monitors, switcher, mixer, cables–but also ourselves, were not to be hidden but part of this installation at the center of a live event.

https://networkcultures.org/void/2023/12/05/the-void-popup-studio-x-salwa-internet-cafe/

Fig. 2/3: Internet Cafe Exhibition organized by the Salwa Foundation

Liveness was also a fundamental shift: the video podcast workflow followed the clear production division between pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution[[annoation: It's interesting to think about how podcasts were originally Apple's solution to the iPod's lack of AM/FM receiver. A device that conceived audio as question of storage and compression rather than one of broadcasting and

reception changed the production and distribution practices of spoken publications and, therefore, the way they engage with their audiences. | author:]]. Video and network technologies, that is,cameras, video editing software, and online distribution platforms, were deployed to create a boundary between a production moment, which could be controlled and curated, and a distribution one to an unseen and mostly anonymous audience. The video camera, a recording device, was used to unbind performance from reception to produce a standardized finished product: a publication. To put it differently, the camera, or more broadly, the video-making apparatus, was used as a technique to avoid liveness or the temporal coincidence between performance and reception. This also implies that the studio, the space of shooting, is fixed and most probably closed off to external influence. So, when THE VOID went live, it entailed a reconsideration of the studio, but also cameras, cables, and mixers. Broadly speaking, it triggered a rearrangement of our production workflows and our relationship to our audience.

tools

Notably, editing and distribution collapsed onto a single production moment: we don't have to edit/process the camera's output and then upload it to a server anymore, but the camera, like those integrated in our many portable devices, is always already connected to the internet streaming whatever images come out from it. This not only reduces overall production time, but embeds post-production –cutting and assembling footage as well as keying the green screen– into the live performance. This requires our live events to be conceived and organized in such a way as to create the type of multi-layered images we were producing for the podcast-like episodes. These are thus comprised of different short presentations, music or art performances, dialogues, or screenings, in which the activities of searching for, selecting, and displaying online images on the green screen become central. What our guests are prompted to do is to use the tools and visual language of *desktop web-surfing* and *gameplay commentary streaming* in front of a live audience, producing a hybrid outcome, both a performance and a video.

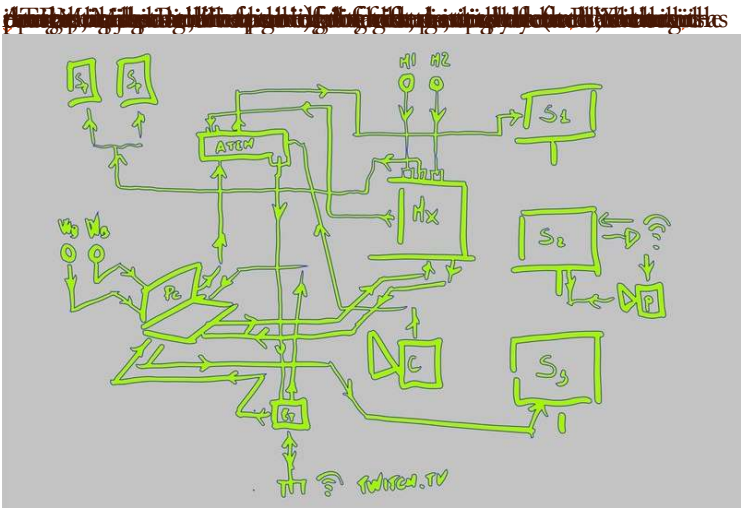


Fig. 4: Operational diagram of the latest VOID setup

Fig. 5: Lesia Kulchynska's live video essay at Aksioma's Tactics and Practice conference "Are you a Software Update?"

On another note, going through the visual research process made us keenly aware of the contexts of circulation (closed Telegram channels, YouTube and Twitch feeds, questionable institutional websites, etc.) in which these images operate. These contexts are publishing practices not that different from

ours, congregating communities around visual distribution and, relevantly, inducing behaviors and expectations with political implications. Producing visual outcomes from visual research is therefore not an innocent act of distant observation, but a tactical recirculation of visual production. To put it differently, it is the re-embedding of images implicated in operations of violence into cultural production.

Fig. 6: THE VOID at Expanded Publishing Fest in January 2024 in OT301's Ventilator Cinema

Fig.7: THE VOID at Ammasso event in Rome organized by Nero Editions.

Perhaps what is suggested by the expansion of publishing practices, to include online video production and distribution, is to start considering often behind-the-scenes engagements with media as opportunities for community making and engagement. In short, making public the production process. But if we take this mantra seriously, it creates several unresolved challenges for THE VOID. The most relevant for us at the moment is that of online hosting and distribution infrastructure. We have slowly migrated from Twitch to PeerTube as our primary streaming platform, mostly thanks to our collaboration with UKRAiNA TV, a member of the StreamArt Network (SAN) we are also part of, and who had an instance running on university servers. SAN is a collective strategy to distribute know-how, labor, and infrastructure,hopefully to be able to sustain these sorts of streaming/video publishing practices in the long term and position them as an alternative governance and ownership logic for online publishing, opposed to that of corporate social media.

Even though we recently started experimenting on our own PeerTube instance, yet, we still rely on Vimeo and SoundCloud when it comes to long-term audio and video archiving. So, taking note from feminist self-hosting and sustainable computation initiatives, if we also consider hosting and digital infrastructures in general a moment of community organizing rather than merely commoditized services, we need to reflect on

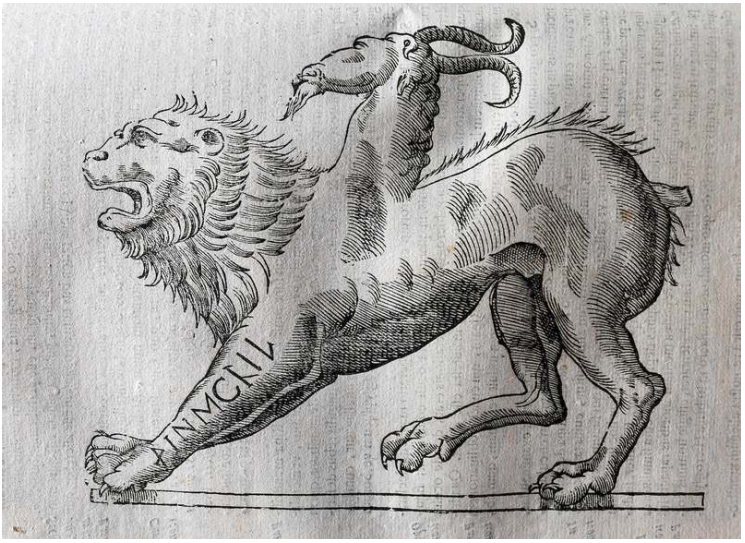
the sustainability of our practice at our current scales. Scale is understood in two senses: the number of people our events can reach at a distance and the technical infrastructure needed to do that, as well as the scale in terms of the amount of information (bytes and pixels) to be stored somewhere and managed by someone. Online video is second only to AI when it comes to informational intensity. So, to have a minimum of control over the infrastructure to store so much information, we either need to start questioning video as our main medium or collaborate with trusted partners who already have the hardware and expertise to host this kind of production. Most probably, we should do both. That is, we need to think tactically and critically about our tools (radio is never out of the question) and our content. What we stream, what we store, and what we publish are strictly connected to our infrastructural dependencies. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these dependencies in the same way we consider our audiences, namely as a form of community organizing.

https://txt.lurk.org/on-not-scaling-lurk/

Federating Publishers: From Conceptual Comics to a Creative Europe Initiative

Ilan Manouach

This article was originally published on e-flux Notes, February 7, 2025: HTTPS://WWW.E-FLUX.COM/NOTES/653923/FEDERATING-PUBLISHERS-FROM-CONCEPTUAL-COMICS-TO-A-CREATIVE-EUROPE-INITIATIVE



Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Chimera, Monstrorum Historia* (Bologna, 1642).

In 2022, I coedited the book *Chimeras: Inventory of Synthetic Cognition*, an AI glossary for which 150 international contributors were asked to provide a short article or an artwork . In Greek mythology, among the female deities embodying terrifying powers such as Eris, Hecate, Scylla, Medusa, the

Erinyes, and Lamia, is Chimera, a demigoddess associated with fear. Chimeras are often depicted as composite creatures made up of different animal parts, such as a lion's head that breathes fire, a tail that ends in a serpent's head, or a goat's body with dragon wings. A chimera is the prototypical synthetic being created by combining different parts, each maintaining some degree of autonomy. The term "chimera" is also used metaphorically to describe anything that is made up of diverse elements, or that is viewed as unconventional, fantastical, implausible, or strikingly imaginative. In genetics, "chimerism" refers to an organism that is a hybrid, composed of cells with different genotypes, occurring, for instance, when two distinct embryos merge, each contributing its own set of DNA to form a single entity.

The purpose of the *Chimeras* book was to shift the conversation about AI away from a purely technical narrative to a broader discussion about the technology's impact and potential. It aimed to foster an environment where alternative viewpoints could thrive, challenging the notion that computer science holds all the answers regarding AI's influence and possibilities. The figure of the chimera was particularly evocative in that context; chimeras have often been used to address cultural anxieties or to symbolize the integration (or lack thereof) of cultural and natural elements, reflecting how societies understand complex interdependencies. By employing various partial approaches and divergent disciplinary perspectives, the aim of *Chimeras* was to approach its subject indirectly—not to reduce it to its most essential, familiar, or structural components, but instead to complexify it. The interdependencies in that context were reflected in the interdisciplinary nature of the book, which embodied a diverse range of epistemic perspectives that are less represented in the general discourse about AI, including interspecies, crip, monstrous, distributed, and decolonial approaches, among others.

business models

Chimeras was a statement, and an experiment in distributed cognition. Cognition is a networked activity, referring to the extensive capacity of living organisms to control and organize their internal structure while establishing their limits. Chimeric cognition, as the book imagined it, is accomplished through a sophisticated interaction of semi-independent parts—the chimera's limbs and heads—that function beyond the usual

frameworks of traditional advanced thought processes, without aiming for complete integration in a cohesive whole. The composite nature of chimeras and their capacity to navigate between different realms and symbolic domains, such as life and death, earth and sky, of the familiar and the monstrous, did not merely provide a convenient metaphor, but also a model for hybridity reflecting the distributed qualities and the amalgamation of various independent traits. *Chimeras* activated an expanded network of peers to think together through a complex topic. As one of the book's contributors, the philosopher Anne-Françoise Schmid suggested that a model of collaborative interdisciplinary research is particularly fitting in the context of complex systems where multiple prismatic perspectives are needed to account for a research object composed of different models, incompatible scales, and heterogeneous objects.*Chimeras* didn't attempt to foster a common language in order to bridge the gap between different regimes of knowledge production, but aimed instead to make of this gap the very same condition of working across disciplines. The book was shaped spontaneously from multiple short-form contributions and artworks—the independent but interrelated components and processes—in a relatively asynchronous and decentralized way, which in other media expressions would have made the process either too expensive, too slow, or extremely dependent on institutional support to initiate.

community

While the *content* and ideas presented in the book were significant, *Chimeras* was also a reflection on its *context*, understood both as an epistemic concept—it created a space for an imaginary, decentralized community through the coalescing of independent contributions in a larger project—and a commercial reality—the book's radical absence from the market and the difficulty of placing it properly within existing publishing and distribution channels. *Chimeras* transcended its role as a mere vessel of knowledge, morphing into an operational model for working together. Herein lies the radical, transformative power of books—not in the words inscribed and the physical forms and materials of the book, and certainly not in the failing fragile markets they so strongly rely on, but in the relationships and context that books deftly orchestrate.

The same year as the publication of *Chimeras,* a Creative Europe consortium—consisting of the contemporary art center Aksioma in Ljubljana, the Institute of Network Cultures in

Amsterdam, the publisher NERO in Rome, and Echo Chamber, a Brussels-based media research think tank—initiated a project on expanded publishing and alternative models for publishing. The Expanded Publishing research project aimed to reflect on the main challenges that are prominent in the multilingual European publishing world. Primarily, conventional publishing seemed to us increasingly limited in accommodating new forms of knowledge; collaborative works such as Aksioma's *(re)programming, time-based participatory practices, or long-term and durational creative projects cannot easily be contained in rigid traditional formats. Moreover, the timescale of conventional publishing is misaligned with the demands of projects that necessitate faster production pipelines—an urgency vividly examined in INC's *Here and Now? Explorations in Urgent Publishing*. Additionally, small, specialized publishers in Europe, which are also the most impactful, face difficulties in sustainably engaging and reaching their audiences; their current experimental approaches are isolated, and the often innovative technological tools and distribution methods publishers implement are neither shared nor replicated by their peers, preventing them from having broader, lasting impact.

https://www.neroeditions.com/

Throughout its two years of existence, the Expanded Publishing Consortium has proposed to explore a few key actions to address these challenges. The project explored the development of different publishing formats that can be carefully designed to complement and expand a book's thematic focus, incorporating feedback from audiences and peers to enhance and sustain its impact. The project aimed to build context around individual publications, organizing, for example, DJ parties, live streams, and interview sessions with publishing experts and invited guests—as done by NERO for its multi-format Ammasso events, and by INC for its *The Void experimental broadcasts—as way to provide an additional layer to a book's content. Additionally, the consortium has been working towards establishing an expanded publishing toolkit that offers a scalable, adaptable, and replicable operational model across the publishing industry. The toolkit seeks to promote more inclusive knowledge-sharing within the publishing community, focusing on tools and practices that can continuously scale through a larger consortium. The toolkit is produced using alternative tools such as Reduct, a video-editing tool that allows collaborative work with AI-powered

transcription, and Etherpad, an open-source tool that enables real-time collaborative text editing with version control, similar to GitHub, and supports multi-output functionalities from the same initial document, both materializing as a website and a ready-to-print PDF. The toolkit is published with versioning in mind; instead of culminating in a single publication moment at the end of the process, Etherpad allows multiple publication moments throughout the process (e.g., raw transcription, commented version, responses, etc.), accommodating different temporal scales in the publication pipeline.

And yet, open-source tools address only part of the problem. The Expanded Publishing Consortium project aspires to explore how books can also reshape the ways cultural stakeholders can work together. What was in *Chimeras* an experiment in distributed cognition can, in the context of Expanded Publishing, be scaled one level up. Unlike a network consisting only of artists and authors from different areas of research and expertise, the Expanded Publishing project involves federated stakeholders with different professional capacities in book publishing: small presses, reading communities, and self-publishing initiatives, but also contemporary art centers, nonprofit organizations, research institutes, and university departments that use the book format to disseminate their work, consolidate their audiences, and maintain an institutional memory of their activities.

According to Florian Cramer and Roscam Abbing's discussion on the federated social media platform Mastodon, a federation, much like a chimera, "allows diverse entities to preserve some internal rules while still being able to communicate with each other." With Laurent de Sutter, writer and editor at Presses Universitaires de France, we had the opportunity to work together on a confederation plan for European cultural operators that could address the acute asymmetry in cultural funding across European countries and the fragmentation of different language markets and audiences. In Belgium, for instance, publishers and other book professionals are often subsidized as part of a cultural policy that supports the ongoing professionalization of cultural workers. However, this is not the case in Italy or Greece. For smaller presses, whose business model typically involves print runs of only a few hundred copies, offset printing—a technology reliant on economies of scale—makes the

production of books prohibitively expensive. This often results in small print runs with low profit margins and high break-even points, making them either outright unaffordable or forcing the publisher to rely [[tools | on print-on-demand services, staple-bound Xerox zines, or risograph printing. These alternatives, however, come with their own challenges, such as restricted print quantities and difficulties in securing widespread distribution. All of this makes it a challenge for small presses and young publishing workers (such as comics artists) to professionalize. A model of federalized publishing would allow smaller presses to collaborate and produce books that may be financially unviable to produce alone.]]

Considering book production in a federated mode is an approach that writers such as Geert Lovink, Florian Cramer, and Silvio Lorusso, among many others, have been exploring for some time. In comics, federalized publishing is a concrete reality. Many of my own conceptual comic books, as well as Tommi Musturi's work and that of others, are published simultaneously by several publishers across Europe. This allows publishing shareholders to benefit from government support from countries they don't have access to it, such as Belgium's FWB or France's CNL. When publishing my comic books, each publisher functions like a shareholder. Publishers pre-purchase only the number of copies they can distribute within their respective territories. This model presents the advantage of sharing investment and risk among stakeholders with different budgets and audience sizes. By pooling resources, every publisher invests based on its capacity, its risk tolerance, and its expected return, not because of economic demands that are hardwired into the technical processes of offset reproduction.

A federated model of publishing also has the benefit of eschewing the myth of a mandatory, yet often rare, alignment among the network's various stakeholders. The federation's stakeholders do not have to strive at all costs to align with one another or to transfer expertise from one domain to another. Instead, as Schmid suggests in her discussion on interdisciplinarity, they should focus on building iterations. Referring to complex modelization processes and the expansion and development of computer technologies and simulation programs, the term "iteration" refers to the repeated application of a process or procedure to achieve a desired outcome or refinement over time. Each iteration represents a cycle of

development, learning, and adjustment, contributing to ongoing improvement or the realization of a goal, emphasizing the idea of persistence through continuous effort, revision, and adaptation. Following Schmid's epistemology of modelization, models have the capacity to mediate between different ontologies and are necessary buffer zones between theory and experience, or between experience and fact. A federation of publishers operating on different scales and with different capacities would allow for new cartographies of knowledge where non-overlapping disciplinary fragments, hypotheses, and other research ingredients from different disciplines could be put into play in a rich cognitive setting. By establishing a relative disciplinary cohabitation, a federation of publishers would be positioned to address fragments and bodies of knowledge in a horizontal fashion, while remaining totally independent from the formation and the institution of these very same disciplines.

business models

For publishing projects where publishers want to keep a relative independence in the production process, i.e., maintain their own design and reproduction pipeline, a federated network can be operational at a higher level in the conceptualization of a publishing project. Federated publishing, involving stakeholders from various countries and languages, could address a significant shift in the translation market; in the humanities, the emerging value of having one's book translated into multiple languages represents a notable change in market dynamics. For many acclaimed writers and authors, reaching broad, multilingual audiences increasingly offers more cultural significance and prestige than simply releasing another book on a university press, and in English. With the saturation of English-language publications, the true scarcity now lies in the ability to connect with diverse linguistic communities globally. This new emphasis on multilingual reach highlights the importance of cultural resonance. Embracing a federalized model consisting of cultural operators situated in different language markets allows publishers greater leverage to collectively access writers they would hardly be able to approach alone. It also allows them to disseminate their work across different regions, reinforcing the demand for unique, localized content that resonates deeply with readers in a multitude of cultural settings.

Two years later, the book *Chimeras,* much like the genetic outlier of its title, never quite saw the light of day in the usual

sense. It never hit bookstores; it certainly skipped the fanfare of a grand launch and dodged any hint of the promotion so necessary for the life of a book. *Chimeras* wasn't even granted a lowly mention in the newsletter of its supporting organization (the Onassis Foundation), despite having a corporate media powerhouse supposedly at its beck and call. Instead, the book found its true calling as a corporate gift, quietly nestled away like a tiny embarrassing secret, never quite escaping the cozy confines of the organization's storage facility. While it did wonders for tarnishing the editors' reputations and casting doubt on how seriously a large organization regards the community of artists and researchers who contribute to it, the book stood as a bold—albeit flawed—experiment in alternative publishing. Books like *Chimeras*—and there are many such examples—showcase the benefits of collaborative publishing but also provide a practical template for a federalized model in a highly asymmetrical landscape of national contexts and cultural policies. As the publishing landscape continues to shift, these collaborative, federalized practices offer a promising path for innovative, scalable, and community-driven publishing.

*See also Laurent de Sutter and Ilan Manouach's federated publishing proposal

Conversations on Expanded Publishing

Originally published as a standalone publication, this section features a series of interviews conducted by the .xpub consortium (Lorenzo Ghigiotti, Marcela Okretič, Janez Fakin Janša, Ilan Manouach, Tommaso Campagna, Marta Ceccarelli, and Carolina Valente Pinto) at Nero Editions in Rome between July 2–4, 2024. It now serves as an archive and repository of these collective reflections.

Conversations on Expanded Publishing brings together a selection of practitioners we relate to, align with, and admire: Clusterduck, Lorusso, Thomas Spies, Irene de Craen, Geoff Cox, Gijs de Heij, Yancey Strickler, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Dušan Barok.

The conversations are structured around four key concepts:

Why: Politics of Publishing.

Here we explored some theoretical underpinnings of publishing practices, exploring the values, missions, and motivations that drive participants' work.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing.

We discussed the practical aspects of publishing, from the tools and workflows used in content creation to the revenue models supporting sustainable practices, highlighting the importance of innovation in editorial processes and distribution channels, as well as the challenges of funding both print and digital publishing ventures.

Who: Community of Publishing.

The focus here was on the role of community, exploring how

publishers engage with their readers and collaborators, and how building strong communities can create social capital.

What: Future of Publishing.

The final discussion centered on the trajectory of publishing, addressing urgent issues such as the need for more inclusive and innovative models, speculating on how publishing might evolve in the coming years, including the possibilities for new tools, mediums, and audience engagement strategies.

> *What is the future of writing, reading, and publishing? What lies ahead for expanded publishing as a practice?*

Certain key issues emerged with dual perspectives, the binary that is often maintained between "alternative" and "traditional" publishing practices, which runs parallel to the dichotomous distinction between printed and digital objects. Despite technological promises of a richer hybrid mediaverse, the book as a stable container for knowledge shows no signs of becoming obsolete. How should we reinvent this container along the ridgelines of technological innovations in publishing? The question of dissemination also surfaced frequently, examining what shapes publishing can take when pushed through the limited communication pathways offered by social media platforms. How can co-publishing, co-releasing, and other community-first approaches be refitted to the current landscape of writing, distributing and promoting expanded publishing objects?

What appeared to concern experts across the spectrum of publishing were its politics, particularly the role of emotional labor in a field which is underpinned by independent and passion-led projects. Current business models may negatively impact working conditions within an industry that, discursively, often positions itself as ethically conscious. How can governance and ownership structures be reimagined to ensure more sustainable publishing workflows?

The conversations served not as answers, but as a way to understand the questions which continue to shape the discourse: What is the future of writing, reading, publishing? What lies ahead for expanded publishing as a practice?

06 Clusterduck

2 July 2024, 10:30 AM

Introductions

SILVIA [00:56] Hello, we are Clusterduck. Actually, here we are with the three of us, while usually there are five co-founding members. I'm Silvia. Then there is Aria and Francesca. Tommaso.unfortunately, couldn't be here with us. Clusterduck is a collective founded in 2016 with the aim to unravel the mess of the social media and the internet. The goal was to do that together. What we did in the past year has been to connect our knowledge in terms of design, transmedia, new media studies and all the research that we do in the many bubbles of the social web to create installations, curate exhibitions or create participative operations. In a sense, we are experimenting with many mediums in the attempt to create something which is participative and which can help the discourse go on and maybe clarify something more about the cluster fuck which we are in.

ARIA [03:02] We mainly focus on URL processes, and on the gap that characterizes different communities that are online and offline. We perform cross-media research and practices through participative experiments.

Why: Politics of Publishing

CAROLINA [04:17] To start, we wanted to first go into what we

call the Politics of Publishing, or the missions and goals that motivated you to start Clusterduck. Could you elaborate on why do you operate in the way you operate? How is the collective shaped? Do you have a core mission, and goals that guide you through the different work across all the mediums that you just explained?

NOEL *05:08* One of our main topics is memes, and memetics in general. This also points to the red thread that goes through our work in other topics that we have been investigating, how narratives impact our reality. When we started getting into memes, around 2016, we realized that these complex narratives that develop on the internet might seem innocent at first sight, or even frivolous, or superficial, actually have a deep impact on our reality on a political level, and on the way people perceive reality, the way they interact with reality. Our work aims to raise awareness about this.

06:23 Back in 2016 when we started, the priority was to show that memes mattered. It was not just something frivolous that you would share with your co-workers that wouldn't have any consequences. Nowadays, in 2024, it's not necessary to explain this as it was eight years ago. The awareness about this has risen significantly. But what still lacks is the awareness that all the problems we are facing as a society can be solved on a practical level. Why are we not able to solve them? That's because the over-arching stories that shape our societies are much more difficult to adapt than laws or politics. And that's what gives the whole situation in which we are this inertia. That's why it's so difficult to steer away from the catastrophe that we see unfolding around us. When it comes to the collective narratives that give meaning to our lives, most people are not aware that they can be changed. They are seen as facts.

07:48 They are seen as things that cannot be changed. They are just there, like laws of nature. I don't know if I steered away from the original question, but that's an important part of our work. And one part that drives us to try to interact with different mediums. Whether it's real-life situations, on-the-street demonstrations or traditional media like printed media or digital media, they all have a role in defining these narratives. That's why we try not to concentrate just on one strategy because we think that's not enough. What's needed is a broad approach.

CAROLINA *08:40* Everything that you described, from raising awareness to putting things out there in the public space can be understood as publishing practices, or gestures of making things public. What are some of the references, people that inspire you?

ARIA *09:14* We all come from different backgrounds and communities on the internet. During the late 90s and early 2000s we were all doing different things, on different platforms, navigating different communities.

references

09:56 I feel a strong bond with the ̣NetArt community, so all the work that was in the scene of the early 2000s in Italy (where we are based). Clusterduck is a transnational collective, as the five co-founders are based in Germany and Italy. We collaborate with a broader community of creators all around Europe and in some cases also outside.

10:40 My main reference before starting working with Clusterduck were of course Ṣalvatore Iaconesi and Oriana

Persico and Les Liens Invisibles, all the kinds of cross-mailing list, cross-platform communities in Italy at the time, but through Clusterduck we collaborated with Franco and Eva Mattes, a lot of other artists that were part of a common network when we started, but I'm sure any one of us had different connections to other scenes of the Internet. One of the things that brought us together was the wish to research and look at clusters of the web how they connected and overlapped and in which spaces they were taking place. The matter of publishing or 'going public' and the connection that this creates was a big part of our references at the beginning.

https://www.lesliensinvisibles.org/

NOEL 12:06 An important reference are the communities and bubbles that we were part of when we started as a collective. For example, in the early 2010s this would have been the "Weird Facebook" community. What we found interesting about them was that those people (and us too) were using those platforms in a way that was completely the opposite of what Zuckerberg and the other founders were hoping you to do with it. For example, anonymity, posting content that would go against the guidelines, and repeatedly opening up new profiles all the time. Trying to go around this very stark surveillance and rules that were put in place on those platforms. Somehow these communities were able to create something very meaningful and precious to us and to many people that lived through it at the time. And I think if one traces this back to the topic of publishing, maybe one could even go as far as to say that this goes back to certain communitarian practices, like self-published zines in the punk communities or political communities. This DIY ethos of doing your own thing and not caring about what the rules and consequences are.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

CAROLINA *14:01* You also touched on something that perhaps can go into our next theme, Infrastructures of Publishing, and you were already tapping into those DIY, self-organized infrastructures. Do you have a workflow or structure within your collective? You were already talking about multiplicity, you are individuals, and you work across different geographies... I imagine that you also have your way of working together?

SILVIA *14:53* When we started it was similar to the situation in which we live now. We are exposed to a lot of communication and a lot of content, including a lot of images. When we started, publications, posting, and shit posting, were the things that we wanted to analyse. We somehow felt that we were receiving a lot and we were publishing nothing. The first thing that we wanted to do was a documentary that in the end never saw the light of day. We are trying to absorb, curate and understand all the information that we are exposed, which is a hard thing to do.

tools

15:55 Discussing together about what was going on, especially in the first three years after we started, was the main thing that we did. We are realising this just now. We were starting to do things, such as curating the Roma Biennale and so we were publishing something. We were doing an exhibition at PANKE and creating a digital gallery that somehow told us about our topics. What we were doing was trying to understand what was going on. And this is something interesting about how we started. We had the impression that all that we were going to post online was to nourish a future neural network that we were calling AAN, the Aritificial Neural Network. We had the feeling that posting on Facebook or Instagram had a responsibility attached to it.

17:30 It was a dream to have a saviour, a very intelligent being that somehow would come and save us from this mess and kind of organise this mess. But now we are realising that this has already happened in the case of Stable Diffusion and that's a lot messier... the results that Stable Diffusion brings back to us implies that they are scraping and stealing our work. It's a six-year parabola because now we understand that all the published things that we have already, and that we want to analyse, are not going to stop. We have to find a way to absorb it without being destroyed by the amount of things. We need to think about the

methods to save ourselves from this mess.

NOEL [19:03] One of the main tools we have been using over the past years is Telegram and Telegram chats. Then all the usual tools, also those that we use in our corporate jobs. We try to bring them back into our creative practice if it seems meaningful to do so. One thing that we started noticing early on when we started to work together as a collective and the events that we were attending, like Transmediale in Berlin, was this difference between the older generation of net artists and activists and what our generation was doing online. The older activist generation didn't trust what we were doing.

tools

[20:20] They were trying to warn us, "You have to own the platform, you have to own the tools that you use because otherwise, they are going to own you." Often we would feel judged because we were using a lot of Instagram and Facebook and all those tools and not worrying enough about the consequences. Of course we were aware that those were proprietary platforms with very strong surveillance.

[20:52] But as I was saying before, with this Weird Facebook thing, we thought that we could somehow find our way around it and trick those platforms into something else. And I think nowadays probably we would see what those older activists were warning us about and they had good reasons to do so. At a certain time, there was this big debate about leaving Facebook. I mean, this has come up time and time again over the past years. Now it's been quiet for a while, but there were some attempts to migrate to other platforms, Mastodon and whatnot. And also the promises of Web 3.0 and how everything will be decentralized and democratized and so on. We have seen that these promises have not been fulfilled. Because of the way that platforms work, I still think that exiting those platforms is not the solution because you lose a huge audience and you miss out on the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with this audience. However controlled and censored this might be, I still think that it is a loss, if you look at it as a whole.

CAROLINA [22:21] You were just talking about how you combine your other work with the collective work and how you also bring your individual experiences into Clusterduck as a collective. When preparing this, I saw in another interview that you gave that you define yourself as employed in the creative gig economy by day and meeting online at night. I'm curious if you

can expand on that, how you work towards sustainability of your collective and how you operate in this way.

ARIA *23:26* We are all employed in the creative industry and mainly work for digital communication agencies. The theme of sustainability and to use a term that I don't like, "work-life balance", has been present in our discussions, both in recent and past times. What we try to do is to extract information from our corporate experience and bring that into the collective to maximise the efficiency of the process while trying to not burn out.

sustainability of workflows

24:19 We all have different roles. And that we try to combine our professional life and professional needs with the collective's, trying to apply for residencies, for example, to share as much time as possible, or visiting venues around Europe to connect and be physically together to avoid an excess of online communication. It does not always work because managing these kinds of balances can be quite tricky and difficult. But we try to focus on our well-being and the pleasantness of our experience. We try to not lose focus and to send our presence online through that, and we also have learned over time to keep free spaces and out-of-office time in which we don't respond or take in more work, as it can be challenging to have a whole round through the year of continuous work, both in our corporate employments and in our collective activity. That's mainly it: trying to focus and keep track of your well-being and being present when possible.

SILVIA *26:09* When we did that interview, something changed, COVID happened, and after that, we realized that working 17 hours per day was not very healthy. When you start and you love what you do, you don't realize that working so much can be bad for your health. Now we changed throughout this process a lot, we understood what was best and fortunately, the work that we did brought us on.

27:00 We haven' talked yet about on'e of our main works. Our research brings us to build huge walls of memes, called the detective walls, which is a spin-off of another project of ours called Meme Manifesto, and this says a lot about the tools that we use and also about publishing. We mapped the internet on a 20-meter wall, and we did that by using the tools that we are using already, for example, Noel mentioned Telegram, we use it to gather memes. Some of us (especially Francesca) have a

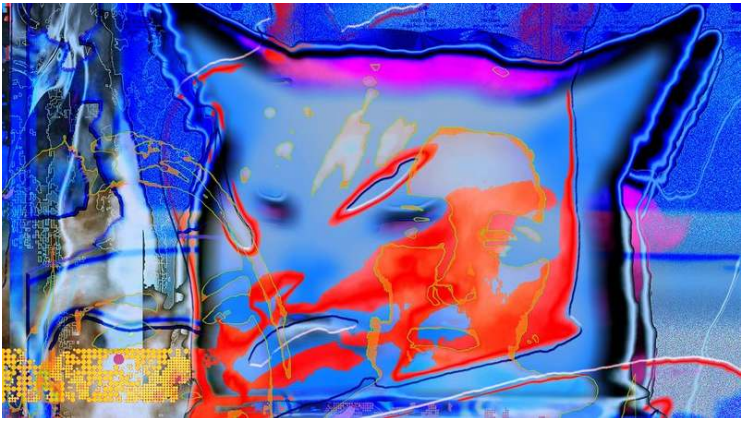
passion for archiving and so we were scraping Reddit and 4chan and a lot of different social media. In the end, we were publishing something, even in a very weird way, and the work was transmedia because we had many media in which we wanted to post it.

28:39 We published the little book with Aksioma, as a catalogue to explain the work, and there is a website supporting it. This is something that we learned, as Aria was saying, from our corporate jobs, because usually, web campaigns must have a landing page. These are the basic "rules" of marketing. But later on, as marketing was evolving, we also understood that the transmedia landscape was changing. The Meme Manifesto work can be an example of an experiment we wanted to make in publishing, but while doing Meme Manifesto we were in COVID lockdown. We did many workshops where we were trying to talk with people about what was going on in their personal and very alone lives on the web. We understood that even talking about that was useful for people, talking out loud about what is happening online to you and just you is something very useful. We started a therapeutical healing process. We need that because, you know, the internet is very addicting. And work is also very addicting. And we were addicted to it.

30:54 It's about finding a method to survive all this content, survive all this rhythm that somehow we are imposing onto us.

references

The people that work in culture are doing it a lot. You are self-exploiting the enthusiasm that you and your peers have, while we should find a way to protect ourselves from these so that we don't exhaust all the energies that we have. Our last work, which is called Deep Fried Feels and that we haven't presented, is also about our feelings and how the media and communications together are kind of destructive.



NOEL *32:43* The relationship between the corporate jobs that we have, which have a lot of limitations and issues that we face is self-evident. On the other side, the deal is very clear, and sometimes it's more honest than what you have in the cultural industry because the cultural industry thrives on grey zones of informal work. It's much more apt at colonizing your free time and your passions, while at the same time criticizing exactly those kinds of things, and that's what makes it feel weird, to say the least.

33:50 We also noticed the difference in what it means to have a sustainable work-life balance in Northern and Southern Europe, which is very different and creates imbalances in our collective, which is something that is not addressed enough in the creative industries. This all goes under the label of "we are all Europeans", we all have freedom of movement. We are all the same. This is not true because someone who lives in Greece, Italy or Bulgaria will have other possibilities than those living in Denmark or Germany. This is quite obvious, so I don't need to dig deeper into that. Regarding the work that Sylvia was introducing, it has a lot to do with empathy and emotions and

how those things travel in digital media. If we want to bring it back to the topic of publishing, when you publish something, when you publish content, you are expressing ideas, a story, but often we are also trying to convey emotions. And digital media has a very specific way of doing so. For example, the way that we are talking now gives us somehow the illusion that we are in a conversation that is comparable to an interaction in real life. But after six years of working online — we started realizing this during the pandemic — something fundamental was missing. And this was creating problems between us. That unease was the starting point for this work: reflecting on emotions and how emotions are conveyed on digital media.

Who: Community of Publishing

CAROLINA *36:02* IReflecting on what "Europe" means is very relevant to this project. And I specifically like the mention of the meme as a healing agent. In the beginning, you also highlighted how you're part of an online community and are doing things not only with your collective but then using Telegram channels as well . How do you create a community around your work? Who is your audience? And how do you see your role within that bigger online community as a publisher of that community itself, like you described?

SILVIA *37:34* The easiest way to understand who our audience is wherever we give talks. It's very beautiful because there you see, "OK, so they were listening to us". This is very important. And that is what we missed during Covid. In situations like festivals or gatherings — for example, there was one very nice symposium called "Organized by None", or when we go to Aksioma or the Institute of Network Cultures — we have this feeling that we are part of a greater community that is discussing the same topics as we are. But also all of us developed a community on the web. As everybody's doing what you like, you become part of a discussion. Just like when Noel was talking about Weird Facebook, it was when we were a lot into Facebook groups and we were discussing a lot about virtual reality, technology, post-Internet, and memes. I remember that Zuckerberg had to make the Facebook group functional because of the filter bubble problem, he wanted Facebook to be more

community

local, so we exploited that feature in the platform.

community

39:55 The community is diverse. Every time we go places, we invite people as a follow-up to join our Telegram chats. And then there is a network of people who we collaborate with in our jobs. And so during the years, every time that we wanted to do something, and we wanted to collaborate, for example, with a developer or with a designer, people were adding up to the cluster family. For example, the collaboration with Jules Durand, an interesting (type) designer, was vital while working on the Meme Manifesto. There are others, developers like Pietro Ariel Parisi (aka superinternet), and Gregorio Magini, that are helping us with the development of websites we did.

41:28 Speaking of tools, it's not easy at all to understand how to share our work in a correct way. In the beginning, we were discussing everything on chats and for example, Aria who comes from a background in activism, was very good at teaching us how you can make horizontal decisions. Now we understand that even if we have many tools, decisions have to be made in a video call. Via emails is impossible to have a smooth dialogue and understand each other. We have a lot of suggestions now, if you want to start a collective, write to us at hello@clusterduck.space because we are starting to be really good at it!

MARTA *43:17* That's great. You could have a manual on how

to collectivise.

CAROLINA *43:25* I think now would be a nice time to open the discussion for the rest of our room, which we will see in a second. I'm going to pass on this microphone...

NOEL *43:40* The Institute for Network Cultures published a book which addresses the topic quite well, a dark forest essay. (Marta: Actually, that's my book!) We love it, it's a very great concept to describe what online communities can be like in a positive sense. You know very well how much work it is to manage a community. And to be honest, we sometimes feel that we have to put so much work into making things work between us as a collective that we would love to put more work into community management, growing communities and addressing communities. You know how much work that is. So we don't always have enough time to do that as we would like. But we have a lot of love and respect for anyone who does so, and there are some great people out there who are great at doing this.

https://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/internets-dark-forests-subcultural-memories-and-vernaculars-of-a-layered-imaginary/

Discussion

LORENZO *45:27* Ciao! We talked about tools and you somehow experimented with a decentralized network with the super internet. I'm curious to know more about your experience with blockchains and this kind of technique or technology to understand if you find something interesting in terms of tools, in terms of technological dynamics that we can adopt in the future, even in publishing or in the art sphere.

SILVIA *46:24* The Superinternet Space is a multiplayer room in which everybody can draw, this was the start of it. Clusterduck organized things in this space in 2018 as part of "#MEMEPROPAGANDA", which was maybe our first participative operation. And it was an operation that Noel was talking about when we started to understand what memes can be, that memes can be used for propaganda. But later on, the Super Internet Space developed into something which is a kind of satellite of Clusterduck with other collaborators.

47:30 The position of Clusterduck towards cryptocurrencies is very attentive and critical, because we saw what happened during COVID with the NFT craze in relationship to our network of

digital artists, and it was very ambiguous. So we were watchingit happening, and it was destroying the vision that people have about digital art because, for us, digital art is much more than a JPEG sold on a digital Metaverse or whatever platform/ museum. The Superinternet World Experience has something in common with Clusterduck and also with an interesting work from Silvio Lorusso, "A Slice of the Pie". It was a project that we really liked. They were using a cake and everybody could try to join in the building just by posting their art on this cake. And what was happening is that if you managed to post on the cake, you could write on your CV that you exhibited at Kunsthalle, we love that. Super Internet Space does something in that direction in the sense that crypto as a technology makes it easier to assign a room to the artist that joins the project. And so to answer your question, Lorenzo, maybe it is useful to make the process easier. About the CV, we particularly loved that thing and we use that in the Meme Manifesto project as well. This year we were exhibiting at KW Institute in Berlin, and we asked the curator to write a very huge colophon of 300 names so that all the people who joined the project could write on their CV that they were exhibiting at the KW Institute of Contemporary Art, which is the "higher" place in we got in. If we can use any tool, script, we try to give back something to the community that we are interacting with.

https://superinternet.world/?x=0&z=0

ARIA *51:32* Another part of our reflection towards blockchain and AI, the two major technological themes in the last years is the environmental impact of mining and the database production that involves both of these technologies. We try to be as careful as possible regarding this theme because we all do feel a deep attachment to it. In 2019/2020, we developed a branch of Meme Propaganda that involved memes, the climate crisis and the protests of Fridays for Future, the use of memes during the protests. We tend to have an approach that is as practical as possible to this kind of technologies. We're glad to use them for what they represent and how they can help to build online communities and share the visibility and the rewards that come from collaborative practices, but we also try not to idolize technologies and see them in the wholeness of the picture, considering their environmental impact.

NOEL *53:29* One has to be careful about technological determinism. This utopian idea that we all inherited from the 90s, is that somehow the internet is inherently free and

uncontrollable. That maybe some new magical technology will come across which will emancipate us, be it blockchain or whatever. What we have seen over the past year is that the big promises that were made a few years ago about Web 3.0, that it would solve the problems of Web 2.0, these promises still need to materialize. And this was to be expected.

54:23 The most powerful technology is collective narratives. And as long as we don't change the collective narrative in which we are, and at the moment this is the dominating collective narrative, still that of late capitalism, whatever emancipatory or liberatory potential those technologies have, will not be able to fully manifest in this society we have at the moment. On the contrary, it will be used to enhance control and the extraction of value and so on. That's what we are seeing with artificial intelligence and all the other technologies that were named. *politics*

SILVIA 55:12 But we are also trying to use these tools as we are using social media: we are not just critical, but we understand the grassroot dream. We are using tools, because we also want to try them, we are very weak, unfortunately. We are also trying to find other solutions.

ILAN 55:53 I want to ask about the limits of criticality because this is also an automatic thing in our small milieu, that everybody is critical about the technologies and the tools. But we also see that criticality has diminishing returns. We can be as critical as we want but criticality does not change reality. I'm wondering if we can imagine a post-critical way to address technology.

SILVIA 56:24 One month ago I was at CERN in Geneva. I was there because of a film festival that they're organizing. I noticed how beautiful it is to have technology by your side when you want to use it. People stay there on a very beautiful campus and they just think all day about what they want to do. And of course, it would be a dream to have the same for artists, a beautiful space where you can go, where you have your very nice breakfast and you talk all day about memes and art. I feel that sometimes we are critical because we are excluded by the power of using technology in the way we would like to use it. But no, we need to be critical because no one is doing that. We are doing this in Europe a lot. For example, in the U.S. it's very difficult to even find artists that are critical about technology, it's kind of a taboo.

co-publishing

58:02 It would be beautiful to foster collaboration between engineers and people. I think that art, humanities and culture should happen before designing that technology. But this is not happening. And we see it, you see at Google all the people that were fired. They tried to integrate academies with the construction of neural networks, but they had to fire them in the end because they were not optimal for the market. It's a very complex situation and we need to map it to understand what we can do, and maybe we are critical because it's the only thing that we can do. I would like to be an artist who collaborates with a physicist, and with a lot of funding to understand, for example, memes through big data. But that's not happening. I don't know, maybe I would not be critical of technology if I had a place like CERN for artists.

TOMMASO 1:00:04 I have a question. At the moment, we are a group that is discussing a lot about publishing and new forms of publishing. What are the main constraints that you have found in publishing? Because you have a very multidisciplinary but lso multimedia approach. You are in this interesting position of being both an author and a publisher, as you said before. And I know that you have collaborated with some of the people around this table. And this is from my experience: sometimes we are talking about AI, we are talking about blockchain, but then here we are also talking a lot about books, paper books. What do you think are the constraints of this medium? What are the things that it can add to the Internet? And maybe to even make it broader, if it's something that you ever had as an issue: have you ever felt constrained by this medium?

ARIA 1:01:49 To do traditional publishing has been a nice experience for us. It's not the medium we're most familiar with, but this is another aspect that makes it interesting to work with transmedia projects and different kinds of outputs, one big recurring theme through all the different publishing platforms is diffusion. We worked on a video documentary which was published because of distribution issues and it needs to be distributed to meet the public. This is not something that we experienced in our editorial projects. It's not our main medium, so we work with publishers that share common goals and ideas with us when working on printed books, such as "The Detective Wall Guide" that was mentioned, or the most recent publications that we're working with Nero Editions. So I would

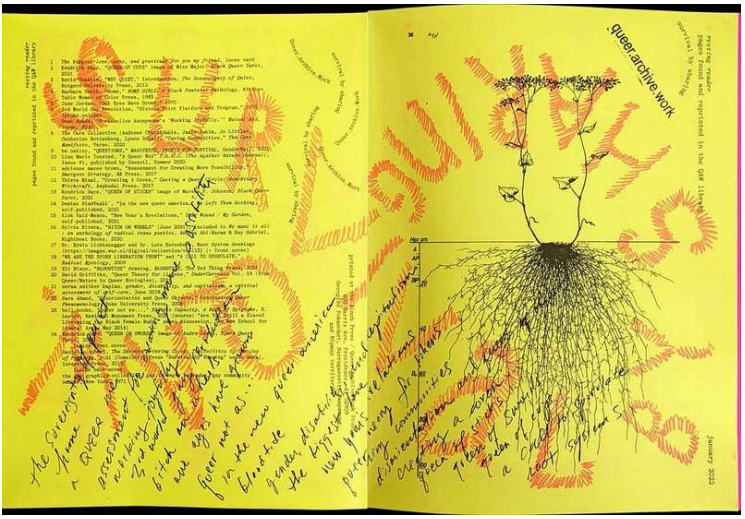
say that it's a very particular way of publishing. Another recurring theme in all our publications is accessibility, so another thing that we try to keep in mind when working on printed books is how accessible they can be, and which is the target they refer to, to make it as accessible and understandable as possible.

traditional publishing practices

1:04:23 We try to go for more recent technologies rather than books, to evaluate which are the benefits and which are the possibilities of each medium we cross. For sure, books do have the possibility of reaching a very broad audience and a more unlimited target, in comparison with our web projects. For example, people who don't understand how web projects can work can benefit from the existence of a book like "The Detective Wall Guide" to understand Meme Manifesto as a project.

NOEL *1:05:23* Yes,, constraints are a way to push the boundaries of creativity. We know this from classical art. If we think about religious art, artists have always found ways to circumvent censorship in creative ways. This is also something that relates to our work "Deep Fried Feels", because that's referencing deep fried memes, which is a treatment of memes that has been also used to circumvent censorship on digital platforms because it makes images difficult to recognize for artificial intelligence and for those scraping mechanisms that try to censor images. I'm not trying to encourage censorship here, but I'm trying to say that limits and constraints can sometimes have a positive effect.

SILVIA *1:06:44* I remember I was impressed by Paul Soulellis' anthologies. I remember I was at Eyebeam in New York and there was this girl, Nora, she showed me a book where Paul Soulellis had printed all the Twitter bots in a book. It was called "Printed Web 5: Bot Anthology". Printing a very selected archive of what is happening on the internet on paper impressed me. Then you can put it into question, as Noel would say. How can you contextualize something that is happening on a very broad, very strange and diffused medium like the internet? If you want to put it on print, what is happening?



1:07:55 When we were building the Detective Wall Guide, we tried to understand in which way we could record — because when you print, you have to record it — what is a collective performance because memes are a collective performance in a way. And they exist in a context, in a time, in a public situation, with participants. But when you print it, it's not like that anymore, you are fixing it. It can be helpful to print the internet.

NOEL *1:09:01* It relates to the two biggest constraints of all, the unrepresentability of reality as a whole, and of complex discourses and the limitations of our senses. And one way to go around that is, as Silvia was saying with printing, concentrating on something very narrow and very specific. Think of Anna Tsing's book "The Mushroom at the End of the World", in which she tells the story of something as complex as the Anthropocene by concentrating it into something as tiny as a mushroom.

https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691220550/the-mushroom-at-the-end-of-the-world

What: Future of Publishing

CAROLINA *1:10:14* What do you think are the most urgent aspects that need to be addressed in the future of publishing,

however you understand publishing within your practice? How do you see this progressing in the next years?

SILVIA 1:11:11 (laughs) You know, we did a workshop about how we cannot imagine the future anymore! That's why nobody of us is answering...

NOEL 1:11:38 All the digital tools we have at our disposal today make it so easy to publish something. What is more difficult is the distribution and making it visible. We have a tsunami of images and content that leads to this paradox of making content invisible. There are so many things that people don't it see anymore because there is simply too much out there. And they're overwhelmed by it.

1:12:29 This is the main challenge for the future of publishing. We all have this experience that we find something that is somehow relevant to us or to the research that we are doing. And maybe it's not even something new, it's something that has existed for years. And we ask ourselves, how is it possible that I discovered it just now? So how can we find a way of finding relevant content? But then that, of course, leads to a whole other discussion: what is relevant and what is relevant to whom? How do we find a good way of bringing content that is relevant to the right public? And then there is, of course, the role of what is generally called "the algorithm" in bringing certain content to certain people. TikTok is a good example. One of the reasons for TikTok's success is that, compared to other platforms, it had a different way of bringing content to people. Many individuals felt that TikTok was very good at bringing them relevant content but that was unexpected and positive for them. But this, of course, has a whole set of implications that are very political and problematic. And which we probably don't have the space to address here.

ARIA 1:14:24 The only thing that I would add would be the role of cross-media and trans-media experiences. I do agree with Silvia about bringing the internet on a printed page. On the other hand, there are a lot of interesting and compelling projects about bringing paper to the Internet,]] so archiving and documenting all the different publications which may have not been accessible to everybody if they weren't distributed online.

1:15:21 Fanzines are an imaginary we refer a lot to. Many times they are in their printed shape and they are very local, very specific projects that do not tend to cross borders and arrive at

references

very different places and times in the world. With the internet, you can bridge this gap and make ends meet. So, I would say to think about the node of diffusion and distribution also in a cross-media environment such as the one that we live in.

LORENZO *1:16:12* One of the urgencies is defining a community. You have mentioned you move in both online and offline, real-life communities. I'm curious to know from you if, for example, the resilience of traditional publishing is based on the fact that offline and real-life communities are more defined than online communities, which are undefined or fragmented. I'm curious to know your opinion about that.

SILVIA *1:17:16* It's true that online communities form very quickly. For example, the TikTok algorithm is very specialised. So, what is happening is that cores are becoming something very specific and sometimes communities start from how much you love a chair or how much you love peeling an iguana. And this is very strange because then it can be very fast and when you just stop to love peeling an iguana, your community is not there anymore. I'm joking, but what Nero did, and what the Institute of Network Cultures and Aksioma are doing is very similar. I love that you three are together because you are building a community behind publishing, which is very, very hard to do. But you're also publishing in a very fast way and your covers are very Instagrammable. You are also trying to explore the communities that are forming in different social media. I see that you're doing that. I think this is a very good strategy because it's very similar to what we are doing when we create loops between the "real life" world and the URL world.

1:19:17 What I wanted to add is that in the past, with books like "House of Leaves" or I remember a project by Katherine Hayles, which was about electronic literature... There were many attempts of making a book something which is not only a book. I remember Geert Lovink telling me that publishing should be fast so that you can be in the conversation while the conversation is happening. You are already doing this. You're exploring the power of the book as a printed medium, but doing it in a fast way and using the feedback that you can create with social media communities. I think this is working somehow.

https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/36526/house-of-leaves-by-mark-z-danielewski/

07 Silvio Lorusso

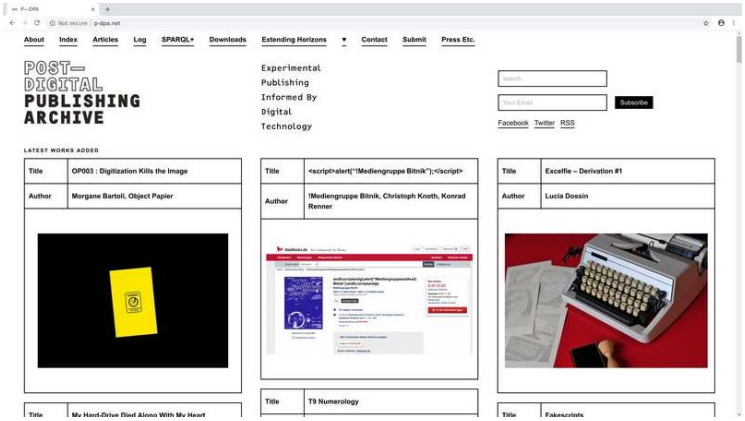
2 July 2024, 3:30 PM

Introductions

SILVIO *02:06* My name is Silvio Lorusso, I'm a designer by training, an artist, and more and more, an author. My involvement in publishing and experimental publishing has several branches, I started at the INC (Institute of Network Cultures) with an interest in researching print-on-demand, which at the time was a new thing — you can imagine how many years ago we are speaking of. This led to a certain interest in the platformization of publishing, such as Amazon, Kindle, and systems of rights management. Then I did my PhD thesis in Venice on experimental publishing, which was focused on the artistic experiments around platformization and enclosure.

business models

03:40 The main byproduct of that is still online, called "Post-Digital Publishing Archive". I recently changed the code, so it doesn't look like a shady website. I was also involved for a couple of years in an initiative called the Publishing Lab, which was a series of collaborations with real-world partners in terms of creating publishing outputs.



Why: Politics of P●●lishing

CAROLINA [04:19] It's nice that you've mentioned your PhD project because our first question relates to that. In thinking of how you archive these post-digital publishing practices, looking back on it, what would you change now, what was missing, and what didn't materialize in this archive, or in the way you built it?

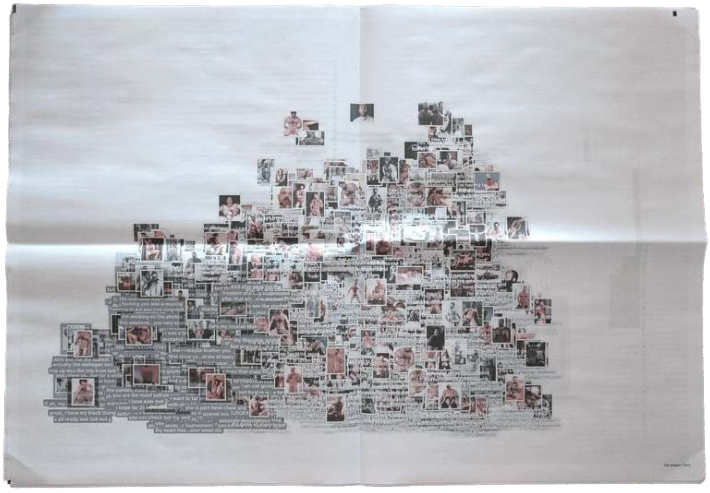
SILVIO [04:43] That's a really interesting question. It's a very material question in the sense that it's a question of time, because when you are doing a PhD, if you're lucky, you have all the time in the world, meaning that you can dedicate a lot of time to the metadata. The part which I find very precious about the archive is the fact that it has a lot of detail in every project. This is something that required a lot of time, a time that after the PhD, I couldn't afford anymore. This is something that in experimental publishing, in new modes of publishing, is always forgotten. You have to, somehow, bounce against a reality that is made of scarcity, scarcity of resources. *

sustainability of workflows

[05:49] One mistake that is often made — I experienced it myself with other projects — is to reinvent the wheel, in imagining giant systems that would last forever. You can make a comparison with another archive that, from this point of view, was way more lean and in this sense, successful, which was the

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_the_Printed_Web

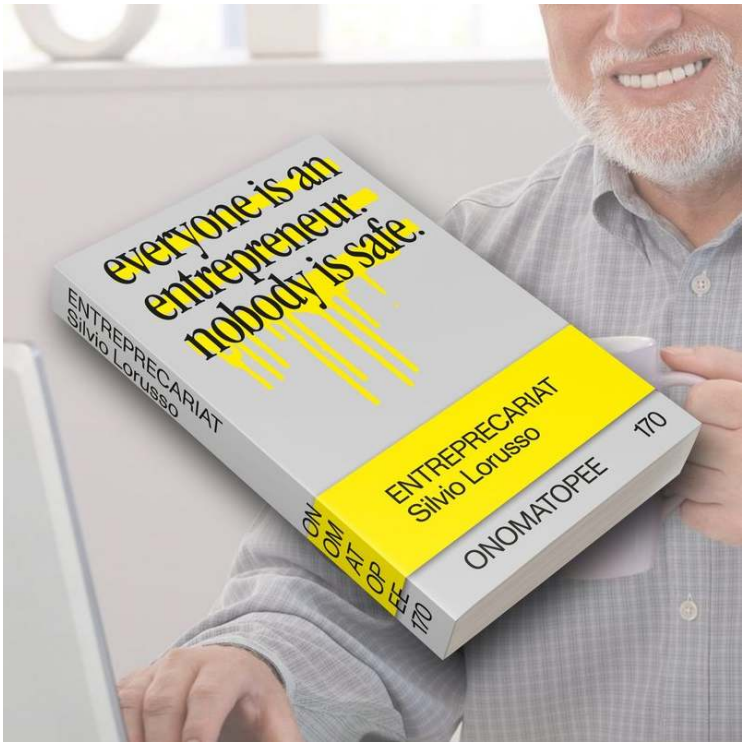
"Library of the Printed Web", Paul Soullelis' work. You would buy the publication, since it was print-on-demand, take a couple of pictures and write just a little description. The archive was physical, and there were financial resources there, it was way easier to give a sense of coherence. Another thing I would have done is connect it to a platform or a stable service, that exists beyond yourself. The perfect example would have been the Internet Archive, and some archives are taking that strategy, for example, an Italian archive of radical publishing, which is called the Grafton 9. The work is to upload it to a collection in the Internet Archive because, you know, that it will be safe, even if you don't have the time or the resources to pay for the domain and so on.



CAROLINA *07:32* Speaking of scarcity of resources: ahead of this conversation, we were also talking about the "Entreprecariat" book. We noticed how perhaps the scene, the labour and platforms have also changed since then. How do you see the role of small publishers like some of us here within this landscape?

SILVIO *08:07* I see it as crucial. The point in which "Entreprecariat" and small independent publishing intersect is in the fact that making a book, in the traditional sense (in a way that lasts, is distributed, has an ISBN, et cetera) is very difficult. The actors that are active in making this happen are very

minimal. Especially for the kind of literature that I'm interested in both reading and writing, the options are small and they are becoming smaller. Currently, that's my primary concern. I'm sorry if I take too long, but I think it's a crucial point to articulate my understanding of expanded publishing. In the past I've been mostly interested in the weird experimental EPUBs or booking a JPEG, book as floppy disk, a super long form that is interactive and so on... Nowadays, it's a bit of a disappointment that many of these experiments, after about 10 years, are completely forgotten unless there is someone who, again, converts them into the traditional book — by the way, that's what happening, for example, with the book by Annette Gilbert and Andreas Bülhoff that is coming out now for Spector Books, "Library of Artistic Print on Demand: Post-Digital Publishing in Times of Platform Capitalism".



So, that kind of publishing has a value, of course, - it's beautiful, it's interesting and it shapes things — but at the same time, it has a degree of volatility, that is still a problem. So the

printed objects

point is, how to make a long lasting publication? When I say lasting, I don't mean necessarily something printed and solid, but unfortunately, it seems to me that that kind of authoritativeness that the printed distributed book, meaning the book that you find in a shop with an ISBN, is still something that people take seriously, more seriously than the long-form. I know it by experience. I wrote many long-form essays and blog posts that were mostly ignored and now, that they are bound in a printed book, they are taken seriously. So the experimental part nowadays for me, from my point of view as an author and someone who wants to read good stuff and write good stuff, is the question of sustainability. That is the part where that requires more experimentation, more than coming up with a new file format. In a way, I think the file format derives more from the sustainability issue.

CAROLINA 12:15 Do you mean financial sustainability in this case?

SILVIO 12:21 Yes, and more. I mean, the way I see writing happening — writing, publishing, solidifying, crystallizing a series of ideas — is not just a matter of money. It's a matter of other resources as well. I mean, at the end of the day, it's all about money, but you have to consider the aspect of creating time. Resources of time and access to books are always in negotiation with bigger institutions. The triangle I see is: the author/practitioner/cultural producer; the small publisher/small institution, and then the big institution that somehow explicitly or implicitly, creates the space, even when it doesn't want to make the writing, the publishing, the magic happen.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

CAROLINA 13:38 You're already kind of answering other questions that I had prepared, so you're doing everything yourself, great! (laughs). Do you see yourself operating within this triangle? And if so, do you have a specific workflow where you use the space of the blog to have that testing ground, let's put it like that, to then go into the more "legitimizing" spaces?

SILVIO 14:14 It's a matter of opportunities, in the sense that sometimes you think you need the timeliness of publishing it

tomorrow. And of course, if you want that, you have to have this intermediation process where you publish on the blog. My workflow, in a way, is based on this idea, a programming concept which is "release early, release often". My idea of publishing as an author is never based on the final, definitive, monumental publication. I see everything as a sort of Polaroid of a publication to come, so there are various iterations of the same text, as a blog, as a journal paper, as a zine, as a book. And even as a book, it's just a single artefact, just a snapshot in time of a constant thinking and researching process.

sustainability of workflows

CAROLINA [15:52] Just going back a little bit to the Infrastructures of publishing that you find yourself in, how do you ensure or work towards a sustainable practice, whatever that might mean?

SILVIO [16:17] That's the hard part. Broadly speaking, I think that event engagements are better paid than writing engagements. If everything is good, you are paid 500 euros for a 45-minute talk, and if it all goes well, you are paid the same amount to write an essay of many pages. So this doesn't make any sense, right? This means that if you care about something other than the event, as a cultural organizer, as someone who has the chance to invite other people, you have to see that event, that thing that you organize, not just as a service that the speaker does, it's not about the person coming to the stage. You're sustaining the practitioner's writing for other days. So how, as a cultural organizer, how can you facilitate this? Not creating burdens for the author, in the sense that you don't ask necessarily something new. You don't insist too much on the format of the slides. You don't ask too many meetings in advance. I have a text about this. I can send it to you. I have like a list with this.

CAROLINA [19:41] We were talking about how, within this project, we're also dealing with different realities, even being a European Union Funded project, Creative Europe, but we don't experience a uniform Europe in the sense of the realities of small publishers and experimental publishing. You see a different reality in the Netherlands than you see in Italy or Greece, and I'm just pointing out the countries of this consortium. How have you experienced this as someone who has worked across these countries?

SILVIO [20:25] I've been involved mostly in the Netherlands, in

Italy and now in Portugal. I have to say I'm concerned because I think that somehow, even though I'm a bit critical of the way the funding structure is dealt with (especially when it comes to publishing in the Netherlands), the new political climate is not good. We have seen what's happening to BAK and other institutions in the Netherlands, that's not a good sign. That kind of limitation of funding will have repercussions throughout the continent. Nowadays I think that sustainability should be a sort of "international coming together" to defend the funding of the centre, of the core, because the core also affects, somehow and in a small way, the margin and the periphery. And this is interesting because in the past years, "the periphery", so to speak, the margins, have rightly so developed a sort of pride in saying "we are autonomous, in terms of language, we don't want to depend on and replicate the agendas of the rich European countries". While this makes sense, there is a worrying situation that is not just about single countries, but about Europe.

Who: Community of Publishing

CAROLINA [22:49] Thank you. We've covered a little bit of the why you do what you do; how, within infrastructures of publishing, and just touching a bit more on the who, so the community or networks that you surround yourself with. I think Marta had a good example question: do you want to elaborate?

MARTA [23:18] Sure! It's about the way one operates within a network of other publishers, authors, and designers, and if you see yourself being part of "a scene", and if you participate in that, how that influences you or how you are critical of it. There's an idea of the "post-individual" that's developed by one of the speakers we'll be talking to later, Yancey Strickler, and about moving away from the "genius" into the "scenius" and the value of community which can, on one side, influence the work positively, but sometimes it might be constricting. What's your experience with this?

SILVIO [24:17] I have some ideas. I'm not sure I'm gonna be able to express them in the way I would like, but I will try. I will try to put it as bluntly as I can. Scenes exist, groups exist,

conformation and other-than-individuals exist, but, at the end of the day, who is the actor that pays rent, that has to pay the bills, is an individual. In most cases, especially when it comes to writing, most people write as individuals. We shouldn't forget the individual from a practical existence point of view. I'm all for the idea of nourishing communities, but this shouldn't become a sort of romantic veil in front that hides the fact that, after all, this sustainability question is about individuals. This is even more clear nowadays if you consider that many of the association forms of the so-called "scene" — I would say that I belong to various groups of people — are very weak. Collectives are formed and destroyed in a couple of years. So, what is more substantial? I think that the individual wins, not because I like individuals or "the genius" idea, but simply because of a realist understanding of how practices work in this sense.

governance and ownership

Discussion

ILAN 26:56 Hi Silvio, thank you for joining us. I think that the question of struggling comes at the same time with considerations of abandoning and exiting both the creative world, the publishing industries, and all these ideas about communities. And I'm wondering if you see this abandonment as a form of resistance, as it has sometimes been framed in contemporary art. We know many examples of artists that decided to leave the art world and they are known as artists and their "finale furioso" somehow was abandoning the art world. I'm wondering if we could imagine a future like that, as a form of expanded publishing, a form of exiting the publishing world.

SILVIO 27:45 Wonderful reflection. I'm very much in this line of thought in the sense that I appreciate a lot of people who have taken on this kind of idea of abandonment, jumping ship not only from the art world but also from academia. One positive side of this is that many people have lost reverence towards institutions. They realize that in most ways they don't work. They don't work for them. Academia, for example, and I speak again from my experience, if you want to put down ideas, is the worst place. I'm not the first to say it. Susan Sontag already said back in the day that the best writers of her generation were destroyed by academia. What's the concrete

reality of abandonment?

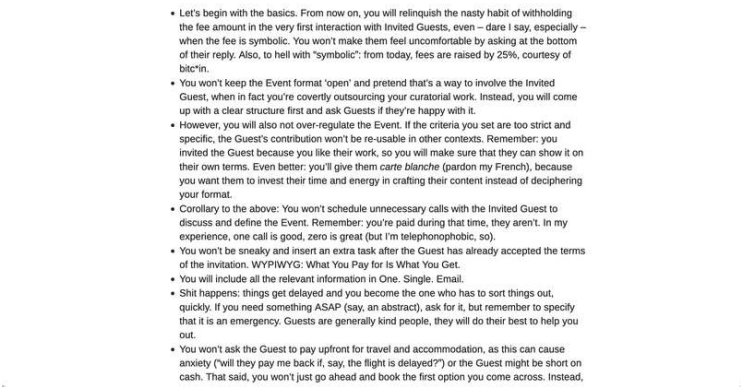
The people I've seen manage to cut ties with traditional institutions, when they manage, it's an exceptional and somewhat uncertain path. I'm talking about people starting Patreon. But if you want to have a sustainable life with Patreon, you need to have an extremely huge user and fan base. And that also limits your output in the sense that the fan base, the people that will pay the five dollars every month, expect from you the same thing that you did the month before. So I think the most convincing negotiation between abandonment and staying, I found it in a book, which probably you all know, called "The Undercommons". This idea that you stay in the institution because, to a certain extent, you cannot escape it completely, unless you are a superstar. And you steal from the institution: you steal the tape, for instance. Of course, it's metaphorical, but you create spaces within the institution without reverence to the institution to pursue your goal. And why don't you feel guilty? You don't feel guilty because, after all, what you are doing is what you are paid for, to do research, to write, not to not to embark on managerial jobs. These are necessary things, but if they take 100% of your time, then better go to corporate, no?

https://www.minorcompositions.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/undercommons-web.pdf

MARTA *30:59* I had a question relating to what you mentioned earlier, about this sort of list of things not to burden the author. You were saying it's a fictional piece? Can you tell us just a bit more about that? What we're trying to learn about from the people we're talking to are tools — as a very general term, not only software but also good practices in the world of publishing. So maybe seeing that as a tool, if you want to talk just a bit more about it?

SILVIO *32:18* It was a commission to do a book of fictional memos, the ones you have internally in a company. For example, Zuckerberg sending them to Meta. And my idea was to imagine a giant company that was called Culture Industry. I wanted to say, "Okay, from now on, we behave like this when we invite a guest". So, for example, the first thing that I say is: "Let's begin with the basics. From now on, you will relinquish the nasty habit of withholding the fee amount in the very first interaction with guests. Especially when the fee is symbolic. You won't make them feel uncomfortable by asking at the bottom of the reply." It's not something that changes the world, this series of guidelines. But in the micro-economy of small gigs, this changes a lot. For example, when you have to chase payments,

that takes hours in most of the production of what is published. And all that time, it's time stolen from content, from research, from ideas, from works. I hope this helps explain it better.



- Let's begin with the basics. From now on, you will relinquish the nasty habit of withholding the fee amount in the very first interaction with Invited Guests, even – dare I say, especially – when the fee is symbolic. You won't make them feel uncomfortable by asking at the bottom of their reply. Also, to hell with "symbolic": from today, fees are raised by 25%, courtesy of bitc*in.
- You won't keep the Event format 'open' and pretend that's a way to involve the Invited Guest, when in fact you're covertly outsourcing your curatorial work. Instead, you will come up with a clear structure first and ask Guests if they're happy with it.
- However, you will also not over-regulate the Event. If the criteria you set are too strict and specific, the Guest's contribution won't be re-usable in other contexts. Remember: you invited the Guest because you like their work, so you will make sure that they can show it on their own terms. Even better: you'll give them *carte blanche* (pardon my French), because you want them to invest their time and energy in crafting their content instead of deciphering your format.
- Corollary to the above: You won't schedule unnecessary calls with the Invited Guest to discuss and define the Event. Remember: you're paid during that time, they aren't. In my experience, one call is good, zero is great (but I'm telephonophobic, so).
- You won't be sneaky and insert an extra task after the Guest has already accepted the terms of the invitation. WYPIWYG: What You Pay for Is What You Get.
- You will include all the relevant information in One. Single. Email.
- Shit happens: things get delayed and you become the one who has to sort things out, quickly. If you need something ASAP (say, an abstract), ask for it, but remember to specify that it is an emergency. Guests are generally kind people, they will do their best to help you out.
- You won't ask the Guest to pay upfront for travel and accommodation, as this can cause anxiety ("will they pay me back if, say, the flight is delayed?") or the Guest might be short on cash. That said, you won't just go ahead and book the first option you come across. Instead,

ILAN [34:23] I think that's a great practice. Fine-tuning the system so that you cut the corners of transactional friction by trying to reduce the moments where you have to respond to track payments, as you said. But I'm wondering, can we imagine something like really large strokes that would have an effect, a considerable impact for most cultural workers? I was wondering with your book, "Entreprecariat", we feel that we are not only victims but also responsible for expanding and entertaining an abusive and exploitative system. Everybody probably has inflicted other people with abusive labor through assistance, through interns. So I'm wondering, is criticality enough? Being critical, is it enough? Or do we need a large stroke change in the way we relate with each other?

SILVIO [35:34] First of all, I thank you for having this reading of the book, which is not a common reading. What you say is true, it's in the book. And what I say in the book is that we are not just victims, we didn't just internalize the toxic activity. We need to consider ourselves partly responsible, otherwise, we don't believe in any kind of free will, in any kind of autonomy. This kind of take also derives from a consideration, based on direct and semi-direct experience, that small and medium artists/designers are worse actors than companies in terms of bad practices, and exploitation, and that's scary. Criticality is not enough because criticality is not a tool of change. This is also explained in the book "The Undercommons", criticality is a

emotional labour

form of professionalization of institutional critique.

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Institutional critique, to a certain extent, is paying homage to the institution, believing in its power and its value. And we go back to the fact that people don't even take the time to write the institutional critique, because they don't believe in its relevance anymore. I'm going to say something a bit controversial: I think that, to a certain extent, things that change, that have an effect, are based on something that traditionally has always been powerful — and that's culpability. Generally, when you make the critical statement, you don't mention names, you speak of the institution, you speak of the system, while a lot of examples of what you would call "call-out culture" ostracize the toxic actor. I can give you examples, such as the Excel sheets with terrible internship situations within the design world. And then the studio, even if it's small, has to take action and say, "Hey, I'm going to change this and that". Shame is a powerful source of change, it acknowledges the partial autonomy of one of the actors. It's a dangerous path, but I think it could be useful in certain instances.

What: Future of Publishing

CAROLINA *38:56* Thank you for that. I was hoping you would bring up some of those controversial statements you make. We are compiling these conversations as research into what experimental expanded publishing is now and what it can be in the future. We ask ourselves, can we ask about the future? What is the future? Can we imagine one or not? And some guests can answer it or not. But if you could define or expand on expanded publishing, what are the main urgencies that you see within publishing as an industry and its future?

SILVIO *40:21* I'm gonna try to say a few disclaimers which I think are important to point out. What I call publishing is not an industry, it's a set of people who do other jobs for a living, put in a lot of effort and end up in a lucky position and manage to publish things. I need to define what I'm talking about when I'm talking about publishing. You cannot call that an industry, you call it some like-minded, willing people. My clear concern is to have these people keep doing what they do without burning out. So that's the mission for you, that's very practical for me. For example, I read a paper or even an Instagram post by

someone who I consider says something original that deserves development: how can I make that post happen in terms of budget, in terms of putting this person in contact with someone who has the structure to publish?

Not even to suggest the very idea of saying "This is more than a blog post, this is more than an Instagram post". Facilitating, supporting. The problem is that language is consumed, and exhausted. The language that we have at our disposal to express this all goes under the umbrella of "care". Care was like a tragic disease for the art world in the sense that it removed all the power from the notions of "helping out". Just helping out, for example, is way better than caring for at this point given that the language has lost that power. The mission becomes helping out, helping yourself, being helped out and helping out. Now, the future. As I did with the industry, I need to make like a little parenthesis on the word future. The future is like care, it's been manipulated too much. My view of the future is this: somehow, what we call the future futures, preferable futures, in our design field is a bit of an obsession. It's a trap because it's yet another way of calling the present. So, I wouldn't spend too much time defining the future. I think that this urgency to think of the future is fabricated by extrinsic needs. It's not our urgency to think of the future. Everywhere we look around, we are pushed to think of the future, we go to the cinema and we think of the future. You can call it future, helping out, wanting to call, wanting to have that small post into at least an essay, into something published. I don't know. Call it the future. Call it present. I don't care. Nowadays, future-orientedness wastes energy.

community

CAROLINA *45:19* We're trying to relate the idea of the future with urgency, while thinking of the future pushes away the actual urgency perhaps, or the needs that we have right now — for instance about people being able to do what they're doing without burning out is something that we need right now. And it's happening as we speak. Thank you for that.

LORENZO *45:54* I was intrigued by your observation about individuals and communities. And I somehow interpret my work (as a publisher) as a constant effort to build up a community. And of course, I agree with you when you say that a community is built up of several individuals. But I think at the end of the day, publishing is community-based, especially right now. Even the resilience of the traditional book is based on that. When you

talk about the triangle of negotiations between the author or cultural producer, small institution, or big institution, is also based on that. So big institutions guarantee a community somehow. It's not a question, it's more about understanding if small institutions are independent, in the way they're able to produce their own communities without negotiating with a bigger institution. I think that is crucial for creating a consensus, but also to creating a sort of sustainability around the project. So I don't know if you have something to add to that.

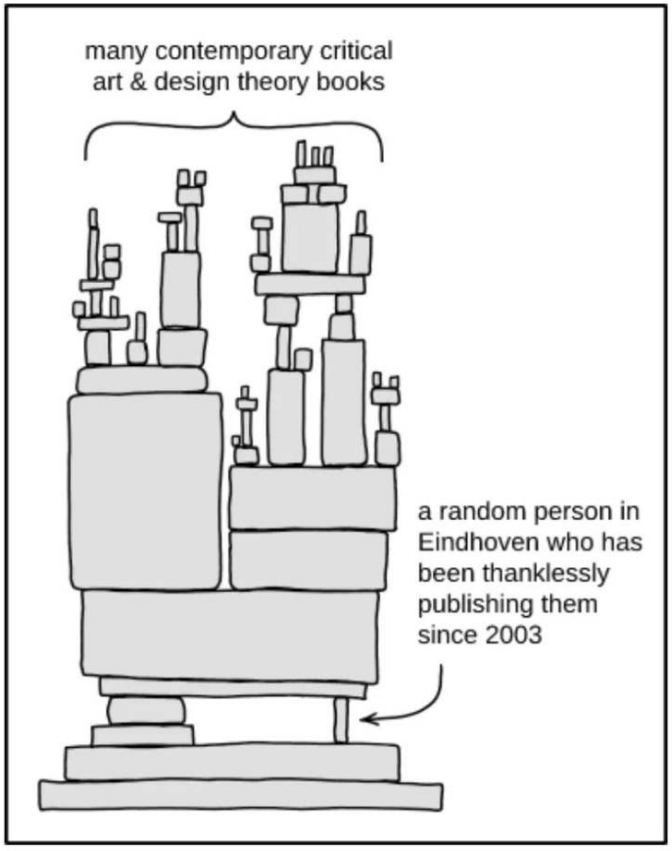
SILVIO [47:46] It's really good that you say that, interviews scare and worry me because to pass a message, sometimes I sharpen it a bit too much, I make it too pointy. In writing, it wouldn't be like this. Of course, I believe in the strength of these ties. It's interesting to define what the publisher is because I consider myself a small publisher, a bit active in publishing in the sense that I have a little journal in the University where I teach, nothing that requires as many resources as what you all do. But it means trying to bring these people together, text editing, publishing, posting... you know it all.

alternative publishing practices

The thing I appreciate of independent publishing (without going too much into this) is that kind of selfless, thankless job of putting the community in the front without that ego reward that the author gets. I think that an author, at one point, should also be active on that other side and it would be nice if every author would dedicate part of their time to do the less visible job of bringing to the front the work of the community, the intelligence of the community. Another point that comes to mind is that very often the publisher is an individual, literally an individual. For example, the publisher of my last book is an individual who has boxes in his house, so I think something is fascinating about the fact that it's hard to imagine that behind the publisher, very often, there is just a very generous, very committed individual.

And for the occasion, I made a meme, "All modern digital infrastructure". And then you see: "a project some random person in Nebraska has been thanklessly maintaining since 2003". So I think there is a really strong analogy between the state of the internet, of the web, where a small library of NPCs crumbles down and all the websites shut down. And the cultural infrastructure, which is full of "the random person in Nebraska", in Eindhoven, in Bari, thanklessly publishing. For

me, reformulating the mission based on this is about how to take care, helping out this part, this little piece, and if you take this piece out, everything crumbles.



ILAN [53:02] We were able to define the publisher. Let's try to define community because it's a word we use a lot. As a publisher, I try to understand who is buying the books and the image gets very complex. Because we see people buying books but they are not reading them. So what kind of community is this? It's not a community of text, it's a community probably... the support becomes something very abstract or very immaterial. I've been spamming everyone about this article that came out two months ago called "No One Buys Books". Silvio, you probably read it and it's a beauty. We're making all this

https://www.elysian.press/p/no-one-buys-books

effort, we are discussing for hours, about print-on-demand, great paper or what the state of the image is printed with this kind of premium tier against the free version, etc. But then, in the end, you publish a thousand copies and you sell 200 and 20 people read the book.

54:15 My question is, if the community is based on something so immaterial, is publishing such an important part of the consolidating factor to continue to sustain? I understand Nero or Topovoros or whoever is this person in Nebraska, we understood the metaphor — every one of us is a person in Nebraska somehow. And I'm wondering if it stands on so little, then we need to understand better who are we addressing and if the means we are using to address them are sufficient and enough. That's why projects such as this one have to do with the future of publishing, with the expanded use of publishing, because we are all in a panic attack somehow.

SILVIO 55:07 It's a fantastic question. Do you want me to address it? It's a question I have myself, I can say something about it.

ILAN 55:19 Please improvise, we are sharing thoughts, it's more of a brainstorming.

SILVIO 55:20 I don't want to over-speak, but the way I see it, the problem with the word "community" I have is that it pushes a perspective of indistinction. A community is like this node, this big network of identical nodes, the community is like a graph — it looks like a graph when I imagine it and this is the marketing use of the term community. That's why I would start by bringing forward other ways of conceptualizing this group of people. For example, from my point of view as an author, editor, very micro-publisher, the individual nodes are countable. The people I refer to as graphic designers, as authors, I could read their texts and they could read mine or publish them, you count them in two hands, maybe in four hands. They are both passive and active to a certain extent. My metaphor to imagine this group of people, first of all, comes from my point of view because it's not replicable for any other actor, each one has their own. So words that I would use are, for instance, co-conspirators, as to avoid this relationship to the big institution; Or allies or even — this is a bit of a dangerous reference so take it with a grain of salt — individual anarchism, things like Stirner, the idea of a community of egoists in which the

individual prevails, but is not alone because it has to find these like-minded people. Again, with a grain of salt, it's not Ayn Rand I'm talking about.

community

But some ways allow the node of the community to be conceptualized both as a passive receiver of the publication (a buyer in the marketing sense, who cares if they read the book or not), but also as someone active in reproducing the scene. To me, it's a nice exercise to sit down as an author and say "Who is this group of like-minded people that I interact with?" Many are in this room, so I'm happy to participate exactly for this reason. It gets very simple when we get rid of certain mystical terms. And I think a lot is about getting rid of certain mysticism in order to understand the urgency. But I know that in consortia, you have this problem of having to come to an agreement and that takes a lot of time, right?

LORENZO 59:09 This morning we were talking with Clusterduck and they came out with an interesting thought that may be related to this theme: that the impact that collective imagination has on our reality is much stronger than any kind of technological device or disruptive device, so maybe we can define community in this sense. I mean, it's a sort of collective power that can impact reality much more than any technology, any tools, any device. Even if I understand what you're talking about, we refer to super small communities and I still believe in the power of this collective imagination. And somehow I think we are facing a moment in which we should help ourselves, but also defend ourselves from super powerful platforms or technologies that are impacting our reality, producing all sorts of weird visions or weird habits or behaviors. So I think the function of these small communities is also based on that.

MARTA 1:01:00 A way to maybe think of this concept of the squads or squad wealth from what I've personally seen, I think I may be part of communities, but when it comes to the practicalities, it's the small group chat that gets stuff done, or it's like two or three people. And while there might be a narrative of community, when it's operationalized it's a few people sitting at a table or a few people speaking in a group chat. In a sense, that similar understanding of the bigger narrative of what a community is and then the practice of it, that's much more peer-to-peer individual allies or co-conspirators, which is quite interesting. Maybe we want to move towards a conclusion. I don't know if you still want to reply to

this last intervention, Silvio, before we wrap up.

SILVIO 1:02:16 Of course, I was following the development of those concepts such as squad wealth. I think some things upset me about that formulation, while others were saying something similar to this idea of the individual still being part of the community. What annoyed me there was the depiction of the institutionalized person. In the text, if I remember well, there was a meme depicting the person who works for the institution as a "wage cuck". You know, like a cuckold. That annoyed me. First of all, because I am a person that works for an institution, and also it doesn't acknowledge this dynamic of being inside, which to a certain extent, is going to be true. If it's not true, it's very hard to survive without that "wage cuckness" sort of thing. I would be very curious to see what's the state of this squad now, in terms of who got the professorship, who started this and that, without any envy or jealousy, but just to check the validity of the theory, because after all, they were like institutionalizing themselves by that.

politics

But the part that I liked was exactly this kind of sort of tactical carelessness and not reverence, to use what's out there, this full bricoleur attitude, by any means necessary, that part was nice. So I think it's a good reference to at least try to go out of the term of the more classical terms like scene or community. In the Netherlands, a good work in this sense has been done by Pascal Gielen, a sociologist who wrote an article on what "scene" means or the visibility issue of that part, which I think could be

interesting from the publishing point of view. The book is called "The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude".

https://valiz.nl/en/publications/the-murmuring-of-the-artistic-multitude

CAROLINA *1:05:04* Good reference, thank you. We're also writing all of this and working on our forms of expanded publishing from these conversations and reports. We'll also be able to update you on that. I think we'll wrap up for now, this was a great conversation so thank you again for joining and offering your points of view and new words, we'll keep in touch with you.

SILVIO *1:05:45* Thanks so much. It was really nice to discuss this and I'm looking forward to seeing what kind of new imagination you develop. Keep me posted!

Note: Silvio wrote about this conversation from his own perspective, read it here: One Finds Comrades to Publish.

08 Thomas Spies

2 July 2024, 5:30 PM

Introductions

THOMAS [03:59] My name is Thomas. I'm living in Cologne now and working from here. I am a lecturer, a publisher and I'm a researcher. My specialty is game studies. So this is like my focus in media studies, but I did my PhD in this area at the University of Cologne about the representation of trauma. I'm also working on these panels which are dealing with video games from a critical perspective. I'm inviting experts from different fields to play live in front of an audience. To try to get some different angles on the medium. Because of that, I was also publishing an anthology together with Holger Pötzsch from the University of Tromsø and Şeyda Kurt. She is an author, who wrote two bestsellers and also is a journalist and moderator of different panels. She is an activist, and we together created or hosted this idea for an anthology and gathered different contributors for that. The anthology is called Spiel*Kritik, which translates to game critique, you could say. We focus on different perspectives on video games and capitalism.

https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783839467978/html?lang=de

Why: Politics of Publishing

MARTA [05:59] If you could get a bit into the why's behind your

work or your politics of publishing in a sense. If you have theories, references that you work with that inspire your work. Could you put together a sort of syllabus on publishing practices that inform your own?

THOMAS [06:26] I could start with the theories which are sharpening our understanding of dealing with video games and then see how they translate into our practice, because they are intertwined in many ways. For our anthology, we relied on a range of critical theories, beginning with the Frankfurt School, and also drawing on Michel Foucault's ideas about power, knowledge, resistance, and government, of course. We incorporated Edward Said's postcolonial theories, highlighting how knowledge production can reinforce colonial power structures and perpetuate stereotypes. We had Judith Butler, her insights into subjectivity and resistance. And this is maybe where this connection I already mentioned comes in. We tried to have a connection between acting and thinking. Often in universities, you're only thinking about some topics that the world does not deal with. So we tried to close this gap and think about things we can actually put into practice. What can this be and how can it be translated? We thought we can't do this by ourselves, so we invited not only academics, but also people from the arts or from journalism to gather and think about how we can translate these theories into something practical. Which also then can be positive for our world or understanding of the world and of media and video games.

references

MARTA [08:47] Gaming has become part of our understanding of publishing, or maybe more as a competitor of the traditional publishing field. So how would you place gaming in this media and publishing environment?

THOMAS [09:18] I would say video games are a very special medium because they need an active player or a person being active. If you have a movie, you can watch it passively, but of course, it can still activate you in some ways. However, when you play video games, you have to be part of the experience, you have to be part of playing. Playing itself for us is like a social experience, also a very historical one. So there were always people playing games and now of course we have these digital games in the capitalist environment. So play is not for itself anymore. So of course it can have rules, but you create the rules by yourself or they're created by the playing participants. Now

we have rules from a capitalist system intervening in what a game can or should be. So we have a very different product now and this is important to research because it is the biggest entertainment industry at the moment. It has more income than film and music combined. Even sports, I think. So it's very big industrial complex and this is why we have or thought we have to look closer at it.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

MARTA [11:05] If you could speak a bit about your personal workflow when it comes to producing knowledge, the tools, operations and models that are at play here. The neoliberal model of game production probably influences it a lot. Also the distribution and promotion and how those operate.

THOMAS [11:53] It was clear to us that we needed to reflect on the diversity of content at the editorial level. So the three of us connected, coming from three different generations and three different fields of work. Holger Pötzsch is working in Norway and is the oldest among us, he also has numerous publications in media studies. Şeyda Kurt is the author of the two books I mentioned, so she was coming in as someone writing in a very different style. I myself sit somewhere between writing academically and also organizing those panels – the let's play critical panels. So we regularly exchanged ideas, via Zoom, due to Holger being in Norway. We also met in person several times. For us, it was very important to give the authors a sense of working together on a project, which is why we set up a joint meeting before everyone started writing. For this, we specifically asked experts to cover various areas. And fortunately, no one declined. We granted them relative freedom, including in formatting the text, resulting in both classic academic and essayistic texts in the final volume. Then we found a publisher, Transcript, a German publisher from Bielefeld, willing to support and finance the entire project. This is not common as publishers usually are not prepared for such volumes. As you know, they either focus on academic publications or non-academic literature. So, normally academic volumes are funded by universities, but we were not based on any university for this volume, even if we worked on them or at universities. So we had

sustainability of workflows

to find a way to finance the whole project. As I said, Transcript has this funding from, I think, different universities from Germany. They have a pool of money and they can split it into different projects. So this was very good for us, and they also funded Open Access, which was also great.

Besides that, we have also changed how our anthology is produced and thought about the authors that are freelancers. In academic works or volumes for them, you don't get paid. So we had the problem there. We somehow had to get money to fund them and this was also not part of Transcript's funding, because they never thought about paying the authors. So we had crowdfunding, we ran a campaign, had a video for that, we put it on social media and it came to be very successful. In this way we could really pay all the people involved. Now, after the volume was published, we sent out some copies and are promoting it through classic channels.

MARTA 15:42 Have you ever been more closely involved with game studios, game publishers, people who produce games? Do you interact with them? Have they ever been interested in your work and maybe financing research relating to their games?

THOMAS 16:07 So I tried to reach out to them and wrote to a few game companies, especially some in Cologne and Berlin, because I live there. I thought that this could work. Some of them responded. I think one paid us 400 euros. But also we had to think about this so that this doesn't look like we get financed by the industry we are critiquing. So this was very important, but it was a small indie company. It's not Electronic Arts, one of the biggest ones or Activision, which are highly problematic when it comes to production structures. So we were okay with it. Many of them didn't respond, because I think it didn't fit into their framework of things they should be financing. So we didn't rely very much on them. And also there's a big gap between production and researching or working on a theoretical level with games. This gap is closed somehow in some areas where game design and game studies connect. But usually they go separate ways. So there was no big cooperation or anything like that.

MARTA 17:33 On these more problematic aspects of production, how can you ensure that your work practice is financially sustainable? We've been talking to other people about the personal toll or personal involvement, ideas of caring for

each other or helping each other. How does that play into your work?

conditions of work

THOMAS [18:05] Especially with the freelancers, we had a few problems to work out, because they are often underpaid or overworked. So we couldn't make the deadlines or there were problems on the way to the final text. It is very important not to see them as production values, but as people, and also see that you have to do care-work if you are publishing. This is very important, because you are dealing with individuals and you have to find individual ways to make it work. This also included talking on Zoom for hours about different things in the text. This is what we think is important as a practice, along with paying them and not having *crunch time*, a term coined by the game industry, where people are stuck in a room for weeks, programming before a big deadline. We try to avoid that by having reasonable deadlines, by having some *spielraum*. So we could give them more time by not having a fixed date.

Who: Community of Publishing

MARTA [19:48] In terms of collaborations and the professional network. The community and industry of gaming is quite different from that of traditional publishing, both in terms of audience and producers. So how does your work fit into that network and how do you create and maintain collaborators, allies?

THOMAS [20:24] I think this also applies to other areas. If you're like a biologist of course you have an interest in biology and are talking to other people interested in that topic. This is also true for games, I'm a gamer myself and I hesitate to call myself that because it can be a very toxic term. So on the one hand I'm part of it and on the other I'm critical of it, but this gives me a room to really see tendencies and to explore the direction of the community. So I have talked to gamers and I reached out to them for panels, for example, to a store owner who sells these classic game consoles, and if they don't see me as some academic person trying to research the next hot topic then they're much more likely to open up to me. Of course, it's important for me to think about them when I publish

something. I do not want to only write for an academic bubble. Community work was present on the panels but they are, as I tried to explain, part of our publishing practice. So this is like practicing what we are writing about. I would say this was the one community I was part of. For us it's not only researchers, it's also other people writing text. So people who produce text in some way, we are the other community and we were also of course dealing with them, reaching out to them. A special thing for our anthology was that we were handpicking them: we had some topics we thought were important and reached out to experts to write about them, something they responded positively to.

MARTA [23:02] I guess the gaming community is not necessarily well seen. I mean, there's a lot of negative connotations, rightfully so, with some of its aspects. But the sort of collective experience of gaming and of becoming or being part of that is very interesting. I guess quite different from the more traditional formats of publishing. So how do you see it bringing a vantage point? Or do you also see more positive aspects of speaking to that audience or working with that audience? Or what can that level of connection bring to your work?

THOMAS [23:58] I think there's a very big transformational potential in it, because I can always see, and maybe you heard from Total Refusal in Ljubljana how people react to other people playing games in front of them. It's very nice to see that it works every time. They're very interested and can't get enough of it. You can use this format to communcate something or leave an impression. Maybe it's like this cathartic thing where you watch something and realize something else about how society works or how society is structured. I think there's a big potential in that. So you rely on experiences nearly everyone has because we all play games in some way, even if it's not digital, but also many people do play digitally nowadays. So there's a big potential to gather an audience from very different backgrounds. There are also some games that are diverse or dealing with topics from a different angle. You can spot them and of course show them to people who didn't know about them before that. So I think there's a potential to see what the medium can also be besides the mainstream titles and games you already know.

https://totalrefusal.com/

MARTA [25:41] What do you make of this obsession with

watching other people play? Does it bring entertainment value or a community connection? Are there any critical aspects in that? Because of course, gaming is big, but what seems to be even bigger is streaming. That's evident and it's one of the newest forms of publishing in a sense of knowledge and entertainment production.

alternative publishing practices

THOMAS 26:34 It's cool to think about this, really. It's like an interactive publishing somehow because you get instant feedback and you can also integrate this feedback in a live play. So I think Twitch is a very interesting format now because you are very close to the community and the community aspects are central to the experience on Twitch. So if you play a game and say something critical, another person can respond instantly in the chat and you can have a discussion on that topic. But also it's not just because there's a community, it doesn't have to be progressive. Of course, there are also right-wing or other communities as well. Although, there's a chance to use that as a publisher. With streaming, you can reach a different audience or bigger audience. I think what's interesting for people is to maybe be a part of it, but also why is it interesting to watch? Maybe because it somehow works when you watch someone doing something social. Maybe this is another medium, it could be like a reality soap or something like that. So you have the feeling something real is going on and something which is authentic and also reliable. So you are having a close connection to the person doing something, in this case, playing a game. Maybe you also know the game, so it's like you are thinking about what would I do or what would I say? And you ask about the critical aspects when doing this. I think there are two opportunities. You can play critical games and look at what they bring up, or you can play a mainstream game and criticize it, but you have to make this your focus. I think this focus is not often present in the moment when you look at what kind of people play Fortnite or something like that for fun, which is also fine, but if you're asking about critical aspects, you have to bring those into your stream.

Discussion

LORENZO [29:30] I'm Lorenzo from Nero. I'm really intrigued by play critical. I participated in Total Refusal performance in Ljubljana and I was really astonished by that practice. I'm curious to know more about it, more about this practice, when did you start? Did the community exist already? How did you encounter this practice? Is it more like a theory that then transforms into a practice? I'm curious to understand the genealogy of it.

THOMAS [31:26] There are so many layers to it. I was also always interested in playing games and just playing for fun. At some time I discovered, I can also apply film study critique on the games I was playing. Of course, there were critical games I was playing too. So maybe it was my first epiphany when I saw that I can now dive into a realm where not many people were working.

community

Then I discovered a small community gathering around game studies and doing practical or theoretical things in this area. It all started with my PhD where I discovered there are some institutes which now accomodate people working with or researching games. Especially in Cologne, there's a big bubble of researchers. I think I wrote an introduction and also a paper for Benjamin Beil, and he's one of the professors here at University

of Cologne. I was looking at trauma representation, as I said. Yet now I would say that one has to go beyond that.

This also reflected how I saw games in a capitalist context. For me, it was important to see what other people are thinking about video games in that way. Soon I discovered it's not only researchers, but also artists. There are many artists doing short movies and video games, the Machinimas. Maybe this was the next step, to discover Machinimas and their community.

Because I'm used to taking photographs, I then dove into virtual photography and photographing in-game. There's also a big community for that, especially in Italy. It's very interesting. I met Matteo Bittanti a few weeks ago in Lenzburg in Switzerland. He was doing an exhibition there. On the way, I discovered Total Refusal. They were there for a short film festival. And we instantly connected. And this was the step to do something more practical. They were part of the first two panels. I organized them with some other people, of course. This synergy was the starting point for many projects since then. So maybe it was really discovering people, areas, and possibilities which are somehow not present in the mainstream until now.

https://www.mattscape.com/2024/06/its-not-a-game-over-its-a-finissage-june-22-lenzburg-switzerland.html

LORENZO *35:03* I was curious about Total Refusal, to understand this new way of playing a game: looking for glitches, looking for alternative options and beyond the mainstream scope that a video game proposes to you. I'm asking this because I was trying to see if this kind of practice is somehow the mainstream narrative part in a critical way, together with other people as we experienced with the Total Refusal performance.

THOMAS *36:11* So, in classical publishing areas, where can you add the element of play? Can you have room for playful ideas? I know there's always this capitalist structure, and it's very hard to do that. But can you somehow create a space where everyone can be creative. You can't be creative if you are forced to have a text ready in two weeks, or if you're underpaid for it. So we have to see where there could be a room for the people you're working with. This would be one thing I would translate to other publishing methods or areas. I think sometimes we fall into the trap of writing something about people, but not working with them.

MARTA *37:35* Building on this idea of gaming and streaming as forms of instant interactive publishing, are there people,

writers, artists, editors that you see using this more playful and participatory aspect of gaming in their practice? Or do you see that being a possible horizon of the "future" of publishing? Or is there something already happening in this direction? Of course, your work is in between and this more playful, critical aspect.

THOMAS 38:29 It's hard to say, because of my particular place in this whole structure. I'm not very experienced in dealing with other publishers, for example. So I was in contact with a few other publishers besides Transcript last time. What I always liked was when we met in person and or we came together for events. We had this event in Vienna. There was the network of critical communication science. This was coming together not only because of the things we talked about, but also because of shared ideologies or views on the world. I think this is also important to maybe have a focus on the things which are important to you, and then to translate them into a product and not just come up with an abstract idea. I share ideas with a community and then see how this community can work together. I know this is not very broad. I don't have specific names I can mention, but often I discovered that there was not enough space to do the kinds of projects that we did. So often you just have typical ways of doing an anthology or something like that.

MARTA 40:46 That's interesting in itself, that there's this sort of gap, because we've been seeing the expansion of the gaming industry for the last 10–15 years. So it's interesting maybe that that space is not fully yet occupied by projects.

JANEZ 42:47 The *Let's Play* in Ljubljana was the format which emerged from Total Refusal and Valentina Tanni, where Valentina took the chance to present her book, or at least some of the topics, and the aesthetics that she's discussing in her book that we did in collaboration with Aksioma and Nero. And we used that opportunity to kind of experiment with a new format of delivering in front of an audience in a performative way, a book presentation, so to say. Now we are in the final phase of editing this material to will launch it again online, where people can really consume it as a Let's Play, in the sense of watching the game while the protagonist is featured talking in the bottom right corner. So I have two questions: how would you define that format that you saw live? How would you define

https://www.valentinatanni.com/

the objects in terms of publishing that we are going to upload on YouTube or whatever online?

LORENZO [44:08] And if you can imagine this material online – you, as a gamer, perhaps consume some Let's Play's or similar content – who could the audience be that can consume a talk between Valentina Tanni about her book and Total Refusal on their big screen in their living room?

THOMAS [44:38] Even if you are trying to find the term fitting for what Total Refusal is doing there, we often discuss that it's not that easy, because there is no term yet. So we thought about different expressions, 'public gaming' being one of them. I'm not a fan of that. 'Public gaming' also reminds me of a football stadium. It's not fitting for what we are doing there. We also called it 'live playing' at some point. But again, live playing could also mean that you're just playing Mario Kart. And it's lacks this critical perspective, or even this Let's Play aspect of it.

https://thomspies.net/lets-play-critical/

And this is why my panels are called Let's Play Critical. This is what we are doing. But I don't know if this term is good if its used in a broader field for a longer period of time. I don't know if it's fitting for all audiences.

LORENZO [46:24] But if we change the perspective, and we look from the angle of a writer, or somebody who published a book, and then did a presentation in that format, when you were looking at it, what actually happened in your head? Did you just perceive it as a promotional kind of thing? Or maybe as an attempt at using the game to vehiculate critical discourse? Did you perhaps perceive in this experiment an attempt of generating a new discourse? Did you see an attempt to expand the practice of publishing?

THOMAS [47:48] I interpreted it as an in-game presentation of a book. And so I was watching it from that perspective. And also I saw the similarities between what Valentina's writing and Total Refusal is doing. But I was interested in how they can bring these two fields together. Of course, they are writing about video game culture in the broadest sense of the term.

I think there's a very good opportunity there to expand on the book you are presenting in the video game. But you have to be very specific about what you want to represent or present from the book and if it fits in the game. So there was a small gap between what Total Refusal was showing in the game and Valentina's comments. Of course, they tried to find those

similarities. But for me, it was two worlds sometimes colliding, but not melting together as a whole. This is maybe because you have to look at what the ideological underpinnings of the book you are presenting are, as well as the ideology of the people playing the games. I think there were some similarities, but also some differences. So for Valentina, it was to explain this nostalgic view on games and game culture, both memes and other limited spaces and other internet phenomenons. For Total Refusal, it's always this political standpoint where they try to have an anti-capitalist and even Marxist critique of society. Of course, Valentina is a person, I think, who shares this ideology, but not really in her book, which was about other topics. So, for me, there maybe was a gap that emerged when presenting those two together. But as a format, there's potential to have your book presented in a video game.

LORENZO [50:22] But I'm thinking that video games, especially multiplayer video games, could also be perceived as a new space for traditional narratives or discourses produced in books. For example, in Ljubljana, I really perceived that environment as a new space to inhabit with certain discourses. Multiplayer games, especially multiplayer games, give you this common space to create new narratives and even to challenge the rules of the video game itself. So, I'm really intrigued by this aspect that is difficult to find in traditional publishing. When I mention traditional publishing, I refer to printed books. Of course, you can have book clubs in which you find other people, where you can read collectively. For video games, it looks like an expanded version of that with a lot of people. Like Travis Scott's concert in Fortnite, all these kinds of experiences are quite disruptive in a way.

tools

THOMAS [51:49] Yeah, totally. I wanted to ask if you knew the Fortnite concert, as there have also been many exhibitions in multiplayer games recently, especially in Fallout, for example. In Roblox, this kids game, there were also demonstrations for Palestine and other topics which are suppressed in society. Here, multiplayer games present a potential for political expression or just reaching a wider audience. As for publishing books, it's also super interesting because, as I know, no one has used this format yet. But if you can imagine having a reading event in the game. So you have this area and maybe also advertise it in the game. You could talk to other people in the game or just write a sign. In some games, you can be very creative with the aesthetics or graphics. So you could have an area where you point out that there will be an event later, and then you can have the author or someone else sitting there and reading from the book. You could just use this as another version of a book launch. But maybe some people would randomly come in and gather around, allowing you to reach out to people who don't usually go to a library or other literary spaces. So I think this is a good idea.

TOMMASO [53:41] I think what we have been discussing at the moment here with you, but also in general, is trying to understand this concept of expanded publishing as coming from the traditional publishing world, trying to understand that in all these years, a lot of tools have been developed that change the way in which books are produced, but that also change the ways in which books are read and consumed. We said, okay, let's stretch it the old way and open up the possibility that a book is not only a paper book. But when you have to deal with publishing, you deal with a set of media that can be very broad. In that sense, we jumped to Total Refusal as an example of this. There was a moment of writing, there was a moment of publishing, and there was a moment of reflection on the book.

But I'm thinking about examples that try to do the opposite, or try to conceive, for example, gaming as a book or form of reading. I am not much into gaming, but I recently started playing Kentucky Route Zero and it's more like a book than a game. It's interactive, you cannot win or lose, and has a narrative that actually has a very long history from the first DOS system, etc. My question is, very sincerely, again, can a game be a form of publishing? Of course, I understand, that producing a game and producing a book require completely different skills, but then how can these two very different worlds be combined? Especially considering that multidisciplinarity is something that we cannot avoid at the moment?

digital objects

THOMAS 57:16 There's a game called Citizen Sleeper. And it resembles a book more than a game. It has very nice graphics, but not moving graphics. It's like standing still all the time. It's perceived from a single view, and you see the characters that are talking. Other games did this as well, while thinking about how to present text in a modern way. So maybe there's a connection. I think there were experiments in books, trying to look like Instagram or something like that, which doesn't work very well most of the time. Maybe there's formats which somehow copy back game text into a book, or the book cover or the marketing of the book. You could also produce a game which is related to your book, although this could fail because people are used to good quality now. I'm also thinking of graphic novels, which are classic books where you have some level of interactiveness as a reader. If you want to publish in-game or with games, you have to have people who really know what the game is about or how games work. If you want to appeal to the audience playing games, you have to have people experienced with games assisting you.

TOMMASO 59:32 But then, to be even more direct, do you think it makes sense to open up publishing to this different context, or would it basically be defining everything as publishing?

THOMAS 59:53 I think the format of Total Refusal is very promising in thinking about how we can present a book, and also invite people to a cinema to watch a book premiere. It's like a transmedial presentation. Using already existing games is also

promising, finding games with an existing audience and developing ways to integrate books into them, or at least ways of presenting books in-game. These strategies are more promising than just developing new game, which is very difficult to do and it can't be the first step. But think about how you can be in games or present games with your book. This is a good way to go.

What: Future of Publishing

MARTA *1:00:45* So if you have any sort of ideas on urgent aspects of publishing, what are some things that already exist and that you see developing further or that you would like to be developed further? Which should we reflect upon and abandon? And if you had a five year vision of the future, ten year vision, what would you see?

THOMAS *1:01:48* Maybe firstly, I would discover the value in positions that are not present yet or marginalized. Seeing whether there are new ways of thinking about things such as video games, for example, and expanding on those areas. When it comes to the publishing itself, find ways to get rid of the idea that there's one expert for an entire topic, try to have a broader pool of people working on books, and to see if the books themselves can be made public for everyone. To have them online and in some way digitize them is very important, but maybe there would be a way to have book presentations you can record for YouTube or something similar. So people can have a summary of it and maybe even something interactive. Or you can do an event where you have a chat function and people can react to parts of your books, this could be before it is published. If you look at video game companies, they do this beta testing where they have almost-finished version of the game. People can openly play it and you can see how they react to it and what they think of it. In terms of publishing, this could mean that the publisher isn't the only one who receives the draft before it's edited, but that other people can read it and provide their first impressions. But the most important part is that it get's published in some way and that it is accessible for free, although this is very difficult to do with the financing system nowadays.

alternative publishing practices

09 Irene de Craen

3 July 2024, 10:00 AM

Introductions

IRENE [00:45] Before getting into more specific politics, I always want to explain how and why I started *Errant*. I have a background in visual art; I went to an art academy and studied art history. I was the artistic director of an art space and was making exhibitions. However, this format of telling a story through an exhibition is unsatisfactory to me because I've always been interested in combining different voices and non-art objects. The white cube or art space diminishes this difference: when you enter an art space, you look at everything the same way, when you put something that is not an artwork in an art space, it becomes an artwork (which is also thanks to Marcel Duchamp, of course). At the time, I was reading Édouard Glissant, and he writes about sameness and difference in multiple ways, about how our Western culture can diminish difference and work towards sameness, which is very destructive. So, I stopped working as an artistic director. I've always liked publications. I also used to work as a journalist and made publications to accompany exhibitions. For me, this format is a way to combine more differences, and this is especially true with language. We will get into specific things I do with publishing later.

https://errantjournal.org/

In other words, I see Errant Journal as an alternative to the exhibition format. But this got me into trouble when a funding application was rejected for this reason. I've been rejected for

funding many, many times, but one of them happened in the beginning when I said Errant Journal is like an exhibition. And they were like, no, it's not. So I thought about it and realized that for many people, an exhibition is a collection of images — something that is visual. For me, an exhibition is something that tells a story and is able to do this from different perspectives. So I thought that was a funny experience, sometimes you learn from rejections.

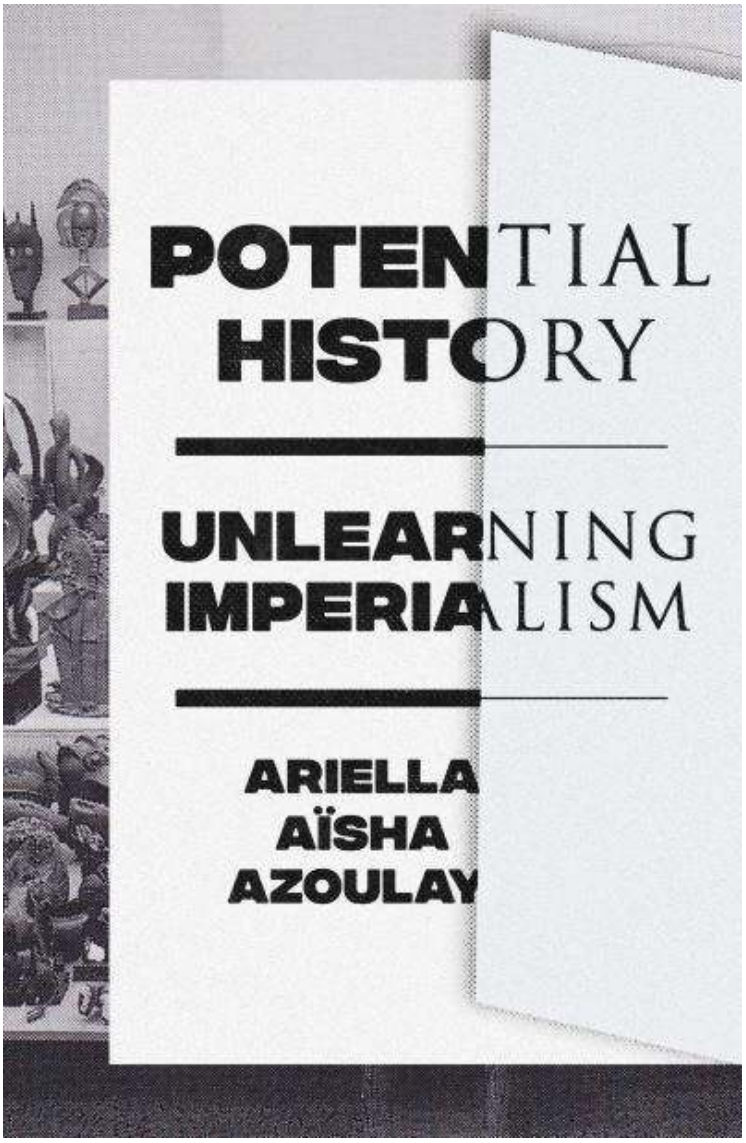
Why: Politics of P●●lishing

CAROLINA [03:59] You already mentioned a few inspirations or references that guide your practice, namely Glissant and his "Poetics of Relation" and the idea of opacity. What other references, materials or theories inspire your publishing practice?

https://monoskop.org/images/2/23/Glissant_Edouard_Poetics_of_Relation.pdf

IRENE [04:24] Well, apart from Glissant, there are a lot of other, mostly Latin American decolonial thinkers, as well as Ariella Azoulay, who's also very important, especially her book "Potential History". Her background is in photography, so she talks a lot about images and archives, especially the violence behind archives and structures. Of course, publishing, writing, and communicating in the English language is not ideal, and I always say, maybe at some point, I'll be fed up with all the

limitations of publishing, and I'll move on to another format. But I think there's a lot to be done within this format, a lot of opacity is important, a lot of refusal, and a lot of subverting in how you put things together. I find it interesting because by doing that, you question how we think about knowledge and how we think about what is important and what is not.



CAROLINA [05:53] Amazing, thank you for that. So, we are just moving on to our other part, which goes through threads on the "how" of the infrastructures of publishing. How does that process of seeing a publication as an exhibition space (and much more) look like to you? Do you also take time to refuse

certain traditional workflows? And how is the idea for the themes born, developed and then published?

IRENE [06:52] I think there's a lot to your question. The way I set up Errant, structurally and organizationally, is also very important for the content. There is the editorial process and how I approach each contribution, and then there is an umbrella over the process of how I approach the object of the book and how I subvert that. So, there are different layers to it. To start with organizational aspects, I was the artistic director of a very large space before I started Errant. In my experience, the bigger the space, the more limiting it actually is. One of the things that constantly frustrated me was that when we didn't have any budget, we still needed to fill the space, which forced artists and others involved to practically work for nothing. This is the kind of situation that is causing burnouts, and I think it is ridiculous to have to perform for the funders in this way.

conditions of work

So one of the things I'm very happy about with a publication is that it doesn't have a space. Especially being an independent publisher, there is no space to take care of. I also made sure that Errant is not published periodically, I publish whenever the hell I am ready to publish — and this is a structure that I've set up that funders find a little bit hard to understand. When you are interested in including certain voices, you should also give space to people to have those voices. I always use the example of the second issue, which was about the environment, and it was delayed because one of the contributors was in a court case against Shell. So this is a good reason to extend the deadline, and because there is no space, you can create at your own pace. It is the same with Gaza: the last issue was delayed a bit because someone was trying to get a friend out of Gaza. I'm trying to set up an organization that can make space for people's lives, and the issues people are dealing with that are usually directly connected to (geopolitical) issues Errant aims to address. In this way, the work is not removed or cut off from the actual lives and work of people I work with. Do you want to know more about how I work with the actual contributions or with editing?

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

CAROLINA [11:00] Yes, I think it's nice to know a bit more about

the workflow that leads to the finished publication, but I think it's also interesting to go into what kind of tools are important for you, material or collaboration-wise. Is there a specific guide or workflow structure that guides these collaborations, and how do you find collaborators and build up this process?

IRENE 11:40 Having any tools or guidelines would be very anti-Glissantian! Each process is individual, although, of course, I learn certain things that work or do not work. I try to build very personal relations with everyone I work with, especially to give space to what I've just mentioned. For instance, there recently was someone who told me that they would not be able to write, the reason is a very private and personal story, which of course I will not go into, but I'm very happy that people are coming forward so it can be discussed and I can support a contributor in the best possible way. We ended up with an amazing contribution!

It's a very important and delicate relationship. I used to be an editor for different magazines, and I've worked with people over email without realizing that they were many years older than I thought for example, or even that they were a different gender! And I think in the work that I do, that's just not right. Who someone is really informs the editing process, and every process is unique. So I have conversations with people in real life, if possible, but mostly over Zoom. This is still limited, of course, but at least I get a bit of an idea of who someone is. It also makes the process much more fun to be honest.

tools

CAROLINA 14:56 I remember last time we had a conversation, you talked a lot about the decolonial position that Errant Journal takes and the way you provide a platform to people from the Global South. How do you see those infrastructures that we can access in the Netherlands or Western Europe with building up this anti- white-cube European-centric thinking within a publication that is based in the Netherlands?

IRENE 15:34 I'm very much aware that my position is still that of a Western white academic, and to me this means I have to constantly challenge the way I think. Glissant talks about how every exchange with another, changes the self. That is why it is important to talk to people so that I practice listening, which is a decolonial practice. You know, shut up for once and listen to what people have to say. Currently, I'm working with Ghiwa Sayegh from Kohl Journal, which is a Lebanese open-

access publication by anarchist feminists focused on the MENA region. It's fantastic because I'm learning a lot from how they are approaching the editing process.

conditions of work

Yesterday, I was looking at another magazine that hadn't heard about yet. There are a lot of magazines out there that say that they're giving space to 'other voices,' but one of the problems that I see is that a lot of these publications don't pay people. They say they are open to everyone, but by not paying people, you're not open to everyone, you're open to people who can afford to work for free, which is a very small segment of our society. It's very important to me to pay people, and that's one of the main focuses when trying to reach 'other voices.' Although I don't think I am able to pay people the actual worth of their work, I try to do my best.

CAROLINA 18:21 You're right. I think that always ends up being omitted. As you said, it's nice to say, "We open this space", but then how open is it if it's not paid work? You also mentioned the subscription model that you're investigating to circumvent certain funding structures of the Netherlands that divide publications, art, and spaces in very tight borders. How do you keep the sustainability? How have you explored these different models to ensure that Errant Journal can continue?

IRENE 19:01 That's also funny — I find it strange that in the funding system of the Netherlands, even the smallest cultural organizations are supposed to have a business model. My business model is not a very traditional one. I always take it slow, one or two issues at a time, also depending on what else is going on in my life. I do look ahead, of course, but I didn't set it up to think that things are going to be a certain way because it doesn't work like that. This has been a reason why I've been rejected by funders as well, for not having the right business model. I find that very funny because, again, the way we work and the way we live are being pulled apart. I've been living like this (as a freelance cultural worker) for over twenty years: I can look ahead for a few months, but not more than that. So I started an organization, it has no overhead, no buildings, and no staff, and yet I'm expected to make a ten-year projection? I was told that Errant Journal wouldn't last because it doesn't have a good business model. I found it very strange because the only reason Errant Journal would stop is if I don't feel like doing it anymore. Financially, I can keep going, especially with this model, because I haven't set myself up to produce a certain

amount. A distinction is made between organizations and artistic practice, while for me, this doesn't exist. This is my artistic practice, it's just that because of how things are structured, I am required to have a board and a business plan etc.

When I registered myself as an artist/freelancer back in 2001, the guy at the tax office said artists are funny because they never go bankrupt. As long as you're alive, you can keep going. Of course, you can file for bankruptcy as a freelancer as well, and some people do in some situations. But he's right: as long as you are alive and you're able to work, then you keep going.

CAROLINA [21:56] I imagine that you can find other ways to sustain this practice by not having a very strict deadline.

IRENE [22:11] Yes. I don't know if you're also a freelancer, but in my experience I could meet someone tomorrow who has an interesting idea for a collaboration for instance. This happens to me all the time, and I've been doing it long enough to know that, although it's not a business model, it is sustainable because it has been sustaining me for twenty years!

Who: Community of Publishing

CAROLINA [22:35] That's interesting. I think you've mentioned your collaborations, your community and this network that enables Errant Journal to continue and also shape itself in different times and spaces. How has this sort of community of collaborators or readers been created? How do you relate to them?

IRENE [23:17] Sometimes I get questions such as "How did you find this or that writer?" Well, there are several ways, but one of them is that I will remember something that I read fifteen years ago, and I will just go look for a person who can write about it. The example I often use is also from the second issue. I was looking for a title for the Journal, and one of the names that I considered was Tuvalu. Tuvalu is the second smallest island nation in the world (I suggest to Google it and look at some images!). The country consists of a group of atolls, and they are all sinking because of the rise of sea level due to climate change. I believe the total population of this country is around 11,000, and they're on tiny strips of sand in the middle

of nowhere while sinking.

Well, this just grabs my imagination: there is so much going on in that situation. I wanted to find a person from there to write about Tuvalu. You can imagine that when a country is that small, it's quite hard to find someone who is both willing to write and has at least some experience doing so. Certain activist groups are working in that part of the world on climate change, and I started writing to all of them because I had one name at some point, and he didn't respond anymore. I also reached out to those organizations via Facebook Messenger, and at some point, I got an email from the same person who didn't reply to me earlier. He said: "You must really want me to write because you've now emailed me through three different organizations" — it turned out he worked for all of them, and these are all very small organizations, so he was getting all the emails! So, I guess one method is spamming the hell out of people (although it was completely unintentional to be this annoying!). Nowadays though, since the network has grown, it's also through referrals. And there's the open call, although open calls are also very flawed, but I'm still using them.

co-publishing

CAROLINA 26:17 Can you expand on the flaws of the open call?

IRENE 26:29 The space I ran before was also a residency, and we had an open call. But when you're looking for 'other voices,' an open call is not necessarily the best way. In my experience

with the residency, 99% of applicants will be white artists from northern/western Europe, all making the same kind of art (and calling it experimental). I also see other organizations doing open calls, and spreading the call widely and then using the amount of people that respond as a sort of marketing tool or indicator of their popularity. "Look, we had 700 people reply." But what's the point of that? Again, why this performance for the funders? When Errant has an open call, I actually don't promote it that much because I don't want quantity, I want quality.

The process of open calls is also problematic because people can spend a lot of time on a proposal, only to be rejected. With Errant, I aimed to make the threshold very, very low: I just ask for a proposal of 300 words. There's no form or format is has to be in, and I sometimes say it's basically an email — which I actually also accept. It's all about the idea, and I don't care about anything else. I just need an email with your idea, that's it. And a few references and a bio so I understand where the idea is coming from, how it is situated within someone's practice and the world. For all the people who are constantly applying for things, the process is so tiring to get rejection after rejection, and I hope to make it honest in that sense. There are many people I've started a working relationship with after I've rejected them because then they come back for collaborations, and I'm always open for it, or they ask me to look at a text they wrote, so I try to do that.

CAROLINA *29:19* I always think it's also about balancing between the open calls and the invitations because inviting also keeps you within your frames of reference.

IRENE *29:33* Well, I always also invite people directly. But I still do the open call, because that's how I get people that I would otherwise never have found. It's funny that you can also see how the call spreads and develops — for the previous open call, we had a very large amount of architects apply. There is a small fan base in Cairo and the Philippines. So it's quite interesting to learn a little about how people find you.

CAROLINA *30:14* You mentioned this idea of the editor and the traditional way of seeing it as someone who's always right, but you were also trying to defy that. What are the ways that editors can be creators of community and art? Can they be or not?

IRENE [30:50] Well, definitely, I think this is important. I've been told that sometimes people can be intimidated by me, which I find both sad and a bit funny because I don't think I'm intimidating at all. I try to be very careful in creating a space where people feel that they can contradict me. Please do! If you think that I'm wrong, then for God's sake, tell me!

As stated above, I've been working with Ghiwa from Kohl and they organize what they call 'writing circles' through which they make their journal collectively. I have always been a bit of a loner, but working collectively is something that I am definitely considering for Errant. I have to be honest, groups kind of freak me out. I think making publications is the world of introverts, but I also talk to people who do translations collectively and I think that is a very good way to think about publishing. I think the outcomes of that could be very valuable, so it's worth a try.

community

CAROLINA [32:53] That's interesting: the idea of the publication, as you mentioned, is such a collective work, but then it's also the work of the introvert somehow.

IRENE [33:12] Before I started Errant, I realized I had to be part of book fairs. I hate fairs, they are horror situations for me, but I realized I needed to take part in them because they're really important to get your name out there. At the very first book fair, I realized that book fairs are different from art fairs, because they're all introverts, and only very few are chatty.

CAROLINA [33:48] Folks just want to look at the publications, right? Book fairs end up being important to reach your readers. You talked about the way that you communicate with contributors of the magazine. Who are the people who read Errant?

IRENE [33:50] That is nice about book fairs because although I'm a loner, I do meet people who say they've been reading the journal, and that is great, those are the kinds of conversations I'm happy to have.

CAROLINA [33:52] Some positive reinforcement, too.

IRENE [33:52] I do need it! Because otherwise, you go mental. My idea of the audience, from the start, was twofold, which is also reflected in who I am. On the one hand, it's artists, people interested in the visuals and thoughts, and on the other, academics of all sorts of disciplines and I found that it works exactly like that, Errant Journal is very popular among art

students and artists. From the sales, I often see orders from universities; then, occasionally, I look up to see who the person is and what their research is about. It's fascinating because sometimes it's the weirdest research! I'm very happy because it was exactly set up like that.

Discussion

CAROLINA [41:34] Thank you. I'm now just going to ask the rest of the group to see if they want to say anything or have any questions.

JANEZ [41:36] Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Janez from Aksioma in Slovenia. I think it's interesting that you said you were leading a gallery as an artistic director, and the limitation that you saw in such a format to create knowledge or to deliver it. In a way, it's similar to the path I'm going through. We have a gallery space, but we do more and more publications so I totally understand what you want to say here. As for the publication, I have to admit that I did not know much about you, and I did some investigation before this meeting. I see that you do podcasts too. I'm wondering if, after so many years of experience as a publisher, you have perhaps found other kinds of limitations. Did you, after investigating so much, find a limit? Do you ask yourself in what ways new technologies can open different horizons and expand the concept of publishing?

IRENE [41:56] Yeah, I totally get what you mean. I always say that at some point, I will come across the same kind of wall, but not yet. Obviously, there are some limitations that have been there from the start. Language is the main one currently. We are still communicating in English, which is a colonial language. Yet, for me, there are so many ways to play with it: the ways with which we can subvert this, do these things differently. There is plenty of room for looking into things. Maybe if I do all of these things in the next couple of years, I will be fed up with it. So, no, I do not see this as a real limitation. We've been able to find satisfactory solutions or experiments for each thing so far.

traditional publishing practices

As for the second part of your question: I am absolutely a book fetishist. The material and the paper are important to me.

And I always try to play with that. We are the only magazine or book in the world that has a smell. Not all copies have a smell, and on some copies, they disappeared, but two of them still have their smell. For this I worked with Mediamatic in Amsterdam. To me, this is also about how we communicate language and a story. I have not advertised the smell because I kind of like how people get very confused. For example, the second issue smells of cucumber. It's very light, but it's there — if you had a book in your bag for a while, and you open the bag, that's when you smell it. I've told some people this, and they said, "I was wondering where that salad smell came from all the time!" So, if we are talking about expanded publishing, this is a fun way for me.

LORENZO *44:12* Hi! I am thinking about what you said about your business model being precarious. On one side, there is a limit, of course, because it's a fragile model that can probably not guarantee continuity. On the other side, there are also characteristics of independent publishing, so I was asking myself if you were fine with not being stuck in this situation that it can be a limit but also an opportunity. If you are interested in broadening your audience and communicating with the bigger community with your message and content, how is this possible with this kind of limitation?

IRENE *44:43* I really want to reject the notion of Errant having a precarious or fragile business model. In fact, I was saying the opposite of this earlier. Sure, there's not a ton of money, but this does not mean it is a precarious model. It's my life's work, and I will not stop unless I want to or unless I get hit by a bus.

If you really want to support Errant Journal, please subscribe. Errant only has 44 subscribers so far, which is not much at all, but from that small amount, there's a monthly revenue that I can count on.

Of those 44 subscribers, 11 of them are universities, and they pay a lot more. I've also been surprised, actually, at how much revenue I can get from advertising. And then as Errant grows there are (big) organisations reaching out and saying they'd like to collaborate. I have to see how to handle that, because I want to remain independent. But I sometimes feel the ways of moving forward are endless. So, I don't think these models are fragile just because there's little money or its irregular. We have been taught to think like this because that's the neoliberal,

governance and ownership

capitalist way; always more and bigger. As you were talking, I was also thinking about how banks are not considered precarious or fragile at all, and yet governments have to save them by billions every couple of years. So, who's the fragile one? Obviously, there are differences, I'm not a bank, but you know where I'm getting at: it is a perception of how you see precariousness or fragility in business structures. So I resist that, as I do with many other things.

MARTA [47:27] The idea of precariousness is also about scale. I think the biggest question when it comes to subscription models or, I guess, alternative business models is to what extent they can be scaled when you start having more employees and more collaborators. And how do you ensure that you can keep going, and what about older people? Can they keep going? This is a conversation that we've also been having with others about ideas of care and self-care or the so-called exploitative cultural industry that claims to be interested in the care but then expects their workers to just keep going. Of course, it's different if you're working on your own compared to working with others. So I guess when it comes to scaling these things, how can you maintain or how do you see this non-fragility or resilience that you do see in these smaller independent publishing? Can they be scaled? Should they be scaled? Can you build from those more social and personal connections in a wider network? This is also what we're sort of doing with the consortium, putting together resources and knowledge. I guess this may move into the final question about the future of publishing. What direction can these models take?

IRENE [49:28] Well, there's growth of course, the sales of Errant are going well. But I think we should be careful of using growth as a goal or a measure of success. I think that's the road to possible exploitative structures. At the moment, it is just me and the designer and I will not hire anyone else until I know that I can offer them fair pay. I had an editorial assistant for four issues because we had a subsidy. So then, from the beginning, I just communicated that she was paid fully, she was paid more than I have ever paid for that kind of job for those four issues. I will not work with interns even though I've had a few interns who came to me by themselves and sort of begged me. I find it very problematic because, so far, all interns and voluntary assistants who said they want to have experience in publishing have all been white. They're all people who, for one

governance and ownership

reason or another, can work for free. Sometimes I will agree to that, because they want to gain experience too, but I still find it problematic. I'd rather do all the work myself than exploit someone, that's just the basics of it. Unfortunately, I see how many other organizations work with interns and it's so exploitative. I come from a working-class background, I was never able to do an internship because I had to work to pay my rent. I always saw my fellow students do internships, and they all have very good jobs now at big museums. So, this is a very exploitative model that I refuse to engage in. Unless people sort of throw themselves at me, then it's hard to say no, but still, I'm trying to be cautious.

TOMMASO [52:38] Hi, I'm Tommaso from Network Cultures. Firstly, thank you so much for all the very thoughtful insights. I think the reason why we started thinking about expanded publishing is not really because we felt limited but also because we felt the need to expand through the authors who would come to us saying they have some limitations, especially when we work with artists or artistic research practitioners, paper publication sometimes can be limiting. So my question is, have your authors ever felt limited in terms of paper publishing? Also, let's expand a bit on "The Subversive Publishing Guide."

https://framerframed.nl/store/product/a-very-short-and-incomplete-guide-to-subversive-publishing-strategies-pre-order/

IRENE [54:08] As for your first question, I'm used to working with artists because of my background. I'm trying to create a situation where people feel very free to just come with me with whatever, including artists wanting to expand on the publishing platform. You can leave it up to artists to come up with ideas. I was very happy that during the last issue, we published a sound piece from someone who responded to an open call with the idea of a sound piece, which in a way is separate from the publication, but it's still part of the publication. So I thought that was nice and was happy to be able to give the space to this person to produce, and I was able to pay them for that. So, you can let the artist or the contributors lead. Sometimes, the limitation is cost. But overall, the people I work with are very happy to have their work appear in a physical paper publication.

Thank you for mentioning Subversive Publishing. That was a commission from Framer Framed to me as a person, but all the ideas in there come from Errant Journal. In it, I don't talk of limitations, but rather of things that you come across when publishing that make you think about how to deal with them, especially with the background of politics and decolonial ways of

thinking. For instance, when it comes to images I absolutely will refuse to pay for certain colonial archives or museums, like the British Museum. They steal artefacts from all over the world, and then when you want to use an image, you have to pay for that. F* them, no way. Redrawing an object or image is a very lovely way of circumventing this particular limitation.

Another example is 'citational rebellion,' inspired by Sarah Ahmed. She wrote a very cool essay on her blog about how citation works within knowledge creation and publication. Then inspired by Zoe Todd, who wrote about Ahmed, I've come to realize how citations work to legitimize the work of some, while ignoring those of others. For this reason, Todd describes how she will only reference Indigenous thinkers. Her point is that the white men that are always cited — she talks about Bruno Latour specifically — were not the first to think of something. Nine out of ten times, they were not. And you can find an equal source from someone else, someone of colour or a woman for instance. I currently want to expand the Subversive Publishing series. I'm going to apply for funding because I'm working on open access, I want to make a collection of texts that go into this a little bit further and are also an umbrella of how I think about publishing and Errant. I hope to do that next year.

https://feministkilljoys.com /2014/11/04/white-men/

LORENZO 59:04 I read on Errant Journal that you're building some sort of ecosystem of different media, you're using podcasts, but also public events. Sometimes, public events are a way to support the publication. I was curious to know and to understand better the function of this ecosystem and how you build it, and how all these things collaborate.

IRENE 1:03:11 Well, the podcast is very easy. I was working behind the scenes on Errant for over two years. I was due to publish the first issue in April or May of 2020 and then the pandemic happened. I had a complete meltdown because I had just quit my job, because the idea was that I would be travelling to book fairs and stuff like that, and then everything fell apart. That was also funny because I was talking to other publishers, and someone said, "Don't worry, Irene, you don't have a building to pay. You don't have any revenue from last year to compare this disastrous year with." So the podcast started because I felt I needed to have online content. Now, I use the podcast to have very helpful conversations, it's great to talk to people. It's more of a research method, and how the other things come to be.

As for the public events, like I said, I don't really like doing public events. I just cancelled one actually. In my many years of doing public events, I decided that I don't want to talk if I don't feel I have something to say. Sure, these moments are important for selling Errant and get more subscribers, but I didn't feel I had anything to say that relates in a meaningful way to the world right now. The genocide in Gaza is the main thing that is on my mind these days, so honestly it felt wrong to organize an event to sell my magazine or talk about anything else, so I cancelled it.

emotional labour

CAROLINA 1:03:35 That's really important. It also reminds me of a quote from a Portuguese writer. He says, "I don't want to write if I don't have anything to say". So it's the same.

IRENE 1:03:36 I think we should all do that. Again, this comes back to big burnouts when you're planning an exhibition, and you don't get the money, but you still have to do it. Somehow, we have to find ways to stop doing that and the same goes for publishing. We all know we love it so much, but it's incredibly polluting. So, if you don't have something good to say, please do not publish. Please do not cut trees.

JANEZ 1:04:01 The more you talk, the more I relate to what you are saying. I haven't done a public presentation for over five years now, I am detoxing. So, I also lost my status as an artist with the Ministry of Culture in Slovenia and I'm happy I'm free. I'm not an artist anymore! We should meet.

There is one thing that actually struck me, a similarity between your way of doing and mine. And it's not necessarily

positive, at least from my own point of view and interpretation. When you talk about the organization of your work, it sounds a bit self-exploitative. In the sense that I will produce until I can, you do your website on your own. You start the podcast... Believe me, I did the same and I'm still doing the same. But yesterday evening, we were discussing informally here, and we were asking ourselves if when it comes the time, where do you see the border beyond which you don't want to go? Let's say, perhaps during a collaboration, an author is too invasive or too controlling. How much are you ready to let it go if, for example, the proofreading isn't perfect? So what is the mechanism of self-defence in order not to be exploited by others besides the self-exploitation that you are ready to deploy?

IRENE *1:08:09* Thank you for recognising my self-exploitation! This is also why, in the past, I've burned out many times, which is why now I just cancel events if I don't feel like it. In the Subversive Publishing, the centrefold has twenty points to consider if you're publishing subversively. It's meant as a manifesto of sorts. One of the points is 'consider not to publish,' which we already discussed. Another point in the manifesto is to make sure you're having fun. So, my main red line is that I have to enjoy the process. It's stressful, there comes a point when I'm completely freaking out, but I've also learned to press pause now and then. My business structure allows for

sustainability of workflows

that because there is no pressure of time. So if I'm not enjoying myself anymore, I know I need to take a break. So this is the way I do self-exploit, but as long as I'm enjoying myself, as long as it's enriching me, I'm allowed to self-exploit myself. That kind of self-exploitation will not lead to burnout, or at least that is what I think, because I'm just a hypersensitive person. This is why I like to stay at home and avoid public events, I get overwhelmed very quickly. I thought when I was doing the interviews for the publication; it was nice that came up from other people as well, the fact that we have to enjoy it. Otherwise, there's no point. So, I keep that in mind. I say no to things that other people would not say no to, like money, for example. Sometimes, I really don't like the person or the organization, or sometimes, I think it's going to give me a lot of stress. I think they're going to ask me things that I'm not comfortable with. So you know what? No. I'll figure it out another way.

What: Future of Publishing

CAROLINA *1:09:12* Thank you. I think it's great that you mentioned this idea of tuning into our intuition when it comes to collaborations. Going into our final question, which concerns the so-called future of publishing or trying to define together what expanded publishing could be and is — this idea of the future is perhaps difficult to pin to, but if you'd like to formulate your own ideas of what that could be? What are the most urgent aspects that you think should be addressed in this future of publishing, if we can call it that, or the urgencies of publishing right now? Should we leave the future and concentrate on the present?

IRENE *1:10:26* I could be very cheeky because, from the colonial perspective, there is no future, this whole concept is fraud. But I won't go into it, you can read the first issue of Errant; there are some thoughts about that. Maybe the future for me is not so much about technical development or progress in a traditional sense. However, the process of learning to give more space to fit the politics of what we are trying to do into the working methods, I think this is very, very important. This comes down to giving space to "other" voices, and the question

politics

is, how do you really make space for that? I am talking about how I organize things and how I see them, and I have to fight for that. So far, people don't get it. They don't get that this is the only way for me to move forward. Of course, privately, I go through depression, and burnout, but it's not just me who's hypersensitive, it is everyone that we work with in the cultural field, especially those who have to deal with real precariousness. Art or cultural sectors have been too bent with political wills, especially now when we see the direction taken to the right. We have to resist this, which we can do by ourselves. Doing these very small things, little subversive acts is resistance. Things I have been developing and thinking about last year are definitely not done, so I keep going, and I am planning to publish more about it and hopefully infect other people with some of these thoughts.

CAROLINA *1:12:54* Thank you very much. I think this was a very good answer, like refusing the future but with a focus on what we can do right now, collectively. I think these acts of publishing are resistance. This resonates with us very much.

10 Geoff Cox

3 July 2024, 12:00 PM

Introductions

GEOFF [02:45] My position is Professor of Art and Computational Culture at London South Bank University. As the name suggests, it's in London. It's a very particular kind of university. It would describe itself as a technical university. So it takes particular kinds of students. It's ex-polytechnic, so it's quite vocationally oriented. Its student population is largely non-white, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. So it's not LSE, or Oxford, or Cambridge, it has a very particular character. I'm co-director of a small research center called Centre for the Study of the Networked Image. It's concerned with what constitutes a contemporary image; not singular, networked, distributed. I'd even say a kind of social technical assemblage.

https://www.centreforthestudyof.net/

I'm also an adjunct at Aarhus University, where I collaborate on an ongoing workshop and series of publications which I'll talk more about later. I'm also a co-director of a MA programme called Curating Art and Public Programmes, which is a collaboration with Whitechapel Gallery. In terms of my research interests, I'm interested in image politics, but, more broadly, I'm operating in a field you would describe as software studies. Together this leaks into discussions around AI, and I suppose my concern is more specifically image-based AI literacy. I'm interested in publishing, too –the practice of publishing, publishing even as an artistic medium, as a cultural practice.

Why: Politics of Publishing

MARTA [05:14] Building on that, if you could pinpoint to a theory or syllabus, missions or references, ideals that guide your interest or are connected to your work in university.

GEOFF [05:35] Obviously, the job of an academic is to publish and there are metrics for this, so you're locked into these kinds of systems. So I've written a couple of books, but they tend to be highly collaborative. I'm interested in collaborative writing. A couple of these books were published by MIT Press, so in this sense, they're very conventional. Even if MIT has attempted more recently to make its books open access, it's the conventional end of academic publishing. I write a little bit for journals, although I try to avoid it. It's one of the things I suppose, in terms of my practice, I'm trying to operate outside of these typical academic circuits and networks to some extent.

MARTA [06:28] How come, if I can ask?

traditional publishing practices

GEOFF [06:30] Because the processes are so painful, slow, and inefficient. They often have very small readership. If they make mistakes, they have very weird procedures of how to correct them, like adding addenda and things like this, rather than just actually going onto an online portal and making a change. All these rather outdated, outmoded 19th century practices, which they have inherited from print publications. I just don't think they're very good at what they do. They often operate with paywalls as well, they rely on academic institutions subsidizing, as this is ostensibly a commercial practice. So I would oppose that as well. So what I've tried to do is operate within a realm of self-publishing, such as currently working on two book series, which, again, are collaborations. One, which is called The Contemporary Condition, is a book series with Sternberg Press, and another is called Data Browser, with Open Humanities Press. So there's a sense of more independence in the infrastructures through which they operate, Open Humanities Press being the best example of that. That particular book series was previously with Autonomedia. Another example of relative autonomy over a publishing process. I'm interested in those kinds of publishing houses, either Open Humanities Press, which is run by academics, or something like Autonomedia, which is an anarchist press.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

MARTA [08:30] Yeah, actually, that touches upon the next theme, which is the infrastructures of publishing. If you could tell us a bit about your experience in exiting academia and focusing more on these other forms of publishing, what's the workflow? What models, tools are you using? How do you operate within that framework?

GEOFF [09:03] I wouldn't say I'm exiting, but more operating on the edges, sort of trying to dip in and out of academic conventions where and when possible. A good example of that is the ongoing collaboration with Transmediale and Aarhus University. As I said, I have this adjunct position, and we've been running a research workshop for the last 12 years, which is derived from an open call. We select a group of researchers, often PhD students, but not necessarily, and they produce texts online and comment upon each other's texts. Then we meet up in physical space, and we work on a sprint publication, which is expressed as a newspaper, but it's not necessarily the kind of conventional form of a newspaper. We produce it very quickly. We write together in a collective space, and increasingly we've used experimental publishing techniques for this, such as web2print. A couple of times we did this with Gijs, from Open Source Publishing, but more recently with people from Varia collective, specifically Manetta Berends and Simon Browne. So we are increasingly trying to bring the process of publishing and writing much closer together, in dialogue, even in the same space.

alternative publishing practices

I could also talk about the software. Varia and other

collectives are using an adaptation of a MediaWiki. Hackers and designers have used something very similar. Then we use page media, CSS, JavaScript library, page.js, to be able to export to a PDF in a printable form, having all that as a transparent process in the same space as the writing and editing and reviewing, and then producing a print publication very quickly. The last one at Transmediale was published by a newspaper press, so we sent it off one evening and got it back the next morning. Then we're able to distribute the publication back into the festival in a very quick way and not worry too much about the quality of the copyediting, or even the writing for that matter, just to have this as a very quick process. Two years ago, we ran this to the theme of minor tech, and minor tech was a reference to Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka Toward a Minor Literature, to think about this idea of a minoritarian practice. So to try and align this to a critique of big tech and to think about what a minor tech might look like. In the most recent iteration of this, we produced something on the theme of content/form. We tried to think about how the content is necessarily entangled with the form that the writing takes. For this workshop, we had Manetta and Simon in the same space as everyone writing their texts, but we also had some other collectives that we'd been working with, Systerserver and a group from London called In-grid. We were running a server on a Raspberry Pi in the same space so that the entire infrastructure for the production of the publication was materially present in the same space.

MARTA *13:41* I was wondering how this faster system of production and distribution works. What's the sort of response that you've gotten? Because it seems very direct. Do you perceive that functioning well? Is it a mechanism that works?

GEOFF *14:06* It functions differently. It allows you to reflect more upon the dynamics, the interaction of the production of writing, but within a social context, within a social milieu, if you understand publishing as an organizational form, as something that sets up particular kinds of social relations. In that respect, it resonates politically as well. The Open Book Futures project, which comes out of Coventry University, is a collaboration with the publisher Minor Compositions. If you have come across that as an imprint of Autonomedia, it's run by Stevphen Shukaitis. We're interested in his writing about organizational forms, and also his publishing practice, because for him, publishing is not so much about the use of particular tools, or even distributing

books, it's about setting up certain kinds of social dynamics.

Who: Community of Publishing

MARTA [15:24] There's this idea that the role of the editor is not to publish books, but to create a community. I think we've discussed this idea of a community with other guests, and said that we also don't fully understand what we mean when we say community. Because in the end, it is often still the work of the individual, but of course, it's an individual within a network. So it's interesting to see publishing as an organizational form. Maybe if you have specific workflows or models for this organizational form, I mean, you've already mentioned some, but are there some ways that you ground this?

references

GEOFF [15:29] Well I could talk about some references for this. For example, Stevphen Shukaitis is one. There's a really excellent essay written in collaboration with Joanna Fiegel. It's called Publishing to Find Comrades. I think it's really excellent. They draw upon the relationship between publishing, politics and labor. They reference people like Ned Rossiter and logistical media. This notion of logistics is quite important. Through Stevphen, it's hard not to make the connection to The Undercommons, by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, to think about that. So I suppose there's that intersection of ideas, I think, that we've tried to draw upon to, the management of pedagogy and the management of research, which is, in academic circles at least, tied to particular companies and to big tech, to Google and other institutions of that kind. So that would be a further concern in answering the political question about what's happening to higher education currently as it becomes more and more attuned to neoliberal structures and the market. This is particularly apparent with a lot of restructuring going on at the moment in the UK. I think something similar is happening in the Netherlands, actually, and probably everywhere else, too.

MARTA [18:26] I come from a background of media studies and, theoretically, you're very critical of big tech, but in practice, oftentimes the graduates end up working there. So the idea of being critical of publishing, while oftentimes you end up

participating again in that space, is interesting.

sustainability of workflows

GEOFF 19:00 It's hard not to, of course, because to be a successful academic, you have to publish and you're encouraged to publish with particular publishers. So it's difficult to break out of that chain. I'm a bit older and I've got a reasonable position in the university so I can afford to be a bit more experimental. But I recognize that if you're a younger academic, you can't do this very easily. So that's part of the motivation for the Transmediale workshop really, it's a kind of forum for younger researchers so that they can, on the one hand, publish a little bit more experimentally with the newspaper, but then we invite them to submit a longer article, much more conventional to an online journal that we run, which is in the open journal system, and facilitated by the Royal Danish Library. It follows the more typical conventions of double-blind review and academic reviewers with the right kind of credentials. So it allows you to operate both within, and sort of outside, some of those structures.

MARTA 20:20 How would you say this community looks like right now? Do you see that maybe there's a movement in academia towards these things? Are your collaborators also operating on the margin or do you have to go outside of academia to find that? Who is your network?

GEOFF 20:47 Yes. Well, the network is both inside and outside. The current project is called ServPub. This is a collective of people both in universities. including myself, Winnie Soon, who I collaborate a lot with, who's based at UCL, University College London, Christian Ulrich Anderson at Aarhus University, who I collaborate with on the Transmediale workshops as well, and then a group called In-grid, an art tech collective based in London, but some of them work in universities, many of them on part-time contracts but they also operate as a collective in their own right. Also Systerserver, as I mentioned, who are outside of academia, and then Simon and Manetta, who also are outside academia, though Manetta teaches into the Experimental Publishing course in Rotterdam. It's an eclectic mix of people with different connections to formal academic work.

MARTA 22:12 What about your readers or your audience? Do you see your work resonating mainly within the university field? Do you think you've reached out? Or how do you think about

your audience?

GEOFF 22:27 There are different kinds of audiences for the different kinds of projects, but the Transmediale workshop might be a good example of publishing in a way where, with the newspapers in particular, the distribution and the readers are the festival itself. That's a mix of artists, hackers, activists, academics, students, the kind of people that attend the festival. So, in a way, it's quite self-contained. The work with Open Humanities Press is much more like a typical academic audience: students and teachers and researchers who probably mainly download the PDFs – the free PDFs – rather than buy the book. The Sternberg Press books, that's more of an art crowd, and has a very particular distribution through galleries and art bookshops. So, different kinds of audiences for different kinds of works.

MARTA 23:56 Maybe actually just thinking about the free PDFs, if you could tell us a bit about open access and open tools and how you think, what can they offer that proprietary tools can't, but also what can't they offer? What are their challenges and limitations?

GEOFF 24:19 That's a big question, isn't it? I mean, a lot of these projects are based on the legacy of free open source software production and distribution, but also mixed with feminist pedagogy, perhaps. You can see that from the collectives that we've tried to work with. Open access and free and open source software is fraught with problems in terms of remuneration and sustainability, but I still think the ethics and the principles remain crucially important. There we have followed the discussions around federated approaches, the work of people, again, around the xpub community in Rotterdam without trying to be evangelical about it at the same time.

https://xpub.nl/

Discussion

ILAN 25:46 How would you define publishing? I know it's a very broad question. I have a book in my mind: the Content Machine from Michael Busker. My understanding here is that he defined publishing somehow as an amplification machine, something that takes a message and amplifies it. I'm wondering

what are the mutations of publishing in an era where everybody can potentially amplify a certain machine, a certain message? So what is the role of publishers? What is the role of the audience? And how is this both an opportunity and a challenge for established players?

GEOFF [26:36] I don't know that particular reference. But I like this way of describing publishing as making something public, putting something in the public realm, but also in the sense in which it can produce a public, the discussion of what constitutes publicness. So I suppose that's more the way I would see it. I mentioned the reference to Stevphen Shukaitis's work, this idea of drawing attention to this connection of publishing to labor and politics, and that you're producing social relations in the act of publishing, which is between readers and writers, but also between all the sorts of other kind of collectives that are involved in the process. I mean, that's a bit of a vague answer, but I think it's a hard question, how do you think of publishing? I think it's important to see it in that expanded sense, to use the phrase that you're operating with.

ILAN [27:55] Let me make it a bit harder and insist a bit on my question. We are in a sort of moment where we experience a certain, "horizontal deployment of amplification". To refer to my favorite article, No One Buys Books, about the catastrophic sales of two of the biggest publishers, Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster. While defending themselves on the trial, they said that they will sign influencers, because influencers already have an audience. So what is the role of the publisher when they depend on influencers to fund the rest of the catalogue? Because what we learned through that article is that 90% of the books they publish don't make money. A significant percentage don't sell more than 1,000 copies. And 5% of the books sell less than 12 copies. These are the biggest publishers in the world. This is a multi-billion merger between the two biggest publishers. So I'm wondering, if publishers need to count on influencers, I mean, major publishers, what is the future for smaller publishers? If it's so grim for big publishers, how can smaller publishers like Nero or Topovoros or INC survive in such a competitive environment without structural subsidies or public funding? Survival not only in terms of finance, but also in terms of moral and ethics. How can you wake up and find motivation in running a small business like that?

https://www.elysian.press/p/no-one-buys-books

GEOFF [30:02] I don't feel particularly concerned about those big publishing houses to be honest. Why would I be concerned about the profit margins of these big companies that often produce books that aren't worth publishing in the first place. I am concerned about the circulation of ideas and culture connected to the smaller presses that you're describing. Also, the future of books: I love books, of course, the physicality of a book, I like reading from paper rather than from screens. I suppose small companies need to develop very particular business models that respond to the conditions within which they're operating. Sternberg Press would be a good example of that. For books we do with them, we are funding the production relatively cheaply. They're small pamphlets, they only cost about 1,600 euros to produce. They're printed in Lithuania, and quite cheaply. That's the Sternberg model. We pay for it using research grants. So we try to build a contingency in the research we're doing to distribute the ideas that emerge from that research, but also to make sure they are distributed. It does get out there, it does reach a public. Then Sternberg makes

money from those sales, and we're perfectly happy for themoney that comes from those sales to go back to them to be able to operate. That's a very particular business model, it's quite straightforward in a way. That's what a lot of places do, Open Humanities Press do something similar. Their books are produced very cheaply because they're print-on-demand, but as an academic, you have the ability to be able to subsidize the operation and then rely on them for the distribution. Then the money that comes back from that goes back into the project.

LORENZO [32:39] You mentioned several cases in which the contents are produced through different mediums, and they're also distributed through different tools or even environments, online and offline. You talk about the limited advantages of open source contents and publishing, and I'm curious about your opinion on this kind of hybridization of publishing. Why do we somehow return to a traditional medium, like a printed book or paper book?

GEOFF [33:47] I think it's just a very different reading experience. You receive information in very different ways when you receive it through a particular medium. You read on screen in very particular ways, knowledge is constructed in different ways depending on the way in which you experience it. So books – paper – allows you to digest that material in very different ways, even the materiality of the medium has an effect on the way that your understanding of that material is processed. When you talk about temporality, you read a book in a very different way; you might have it lying next to your bed, maybe reading a couple of pages before you go to sleep. All these things affect the way that you understand the material, even the ways in which you enjoy in the material.

LORENZO [35:02] This is a big question for us, but I think somehow, we return to traditional publishing for economical sustainability. So in that case, you have a structured system in which you can have different revenues, and this is also the reason why there is a sort of resilience of the medium itself. A big publisher would also try to avoid fully digital for this reason, as you also mentioned briefly. So I think it's a question of reading, but in that case, it's more like habits — we can turn to reading digitally, if we have that device available. But I think one of the reasons is that we are forced to stay in that model is because we don't have any alternative, economically speaking.

GEOFF [36:37] I can understand these are concerns as you're running a publishing project. I'm not, I'm just involved in publishing in ad hoc ways, so financial stability is less of a concern. If we're doing a book, like in this data browser series, we might need to find 500 euros or something for someone to lay it out. If I don't do it, someone else will. I would just try and find some money somewhere in the university to pay for it, make an argument for it. It's relatively easy if you have a university position to find little pots of money. You just operate very tactically and strategically in terms of the way you describe what's taking place. I also run a research center, so I have a budget for that. I can always find some small amounts of money. So I don't really have that same economic anxiety, although I'm always looking for money and there's never enough, but things are possible.

LORENZO [37:51] We also discussed this constant negotiations with institutions that are part of our business model. For Nero, our publications are expensive books with colors, big formats, and so on. Of course, we are forced to negotiate with institutions that can support us, or apply for public funds. So it's also interesting to understand this frame – of financial limitations and having to negotiate with big institutions – and ask what the future for independent publishing is within it? How is it possible to be independent from institutions while publishing autonomously?

digital objects

GEOFF [38:45] My interest in that is more conceptual. ServPub is an attempt to think through what autonomous publishing might look like. Our speculation following a book that Winnie and I did together called Aesthetic Programming, which was published by Open Humanities Press. We released all the materials, all the writing on GitLab with the invitation that you could do anything you wanted with the contents of this book. You could add a chapter, you could rewrite it, you could fork it essentially. Some people took up that invitation. We're really interested in that as a model of academic publishing, where you just produce an iteration of a book and someone could then make their own.

The further extension of that was to think not only about releasing the contents on Git and trying to think of a book as a computational object, as a sort of iterative form that can offer itself to different versions, but also to think about the technical

infrastructure for that. To actually run everything on our own server, to learn how to become a systems administrator as a way of exerting more autonomy over the technical processes through which publishing takes place. So not relying on outsourcing to other technologies, but to develop a server, run it, use it as a portable device that you can take into workshops, but also to think about the whole mechanics of publishing as a system within which you can exert more control over, as opposed to publishing with Springer or something like this, where control is almost completely removed from you. So that was the conceit, but it's more like a conceptual experiment than thinking of it as a model for a particular publisher. But then the small amount of money we've got from Coventry University with this Open Book Futures project is to work with Minor Compositions. It is a publisher in print, even though practically it's run by one person.

The intention is to speculate with them on future forms of their workflow, to think of how they might use Media Wiki, or they might have their own server, or to speculate with them about the organizational form that they might develop that would reflect more the nature of the political project they're engaged in. I don't know if that was very clear, but I think that's the worry of Minor Compositions, a project that broadly comes out of an anarchist and autonomous Marxist tradition, how they might think about their working practices and organizational structures that better reflect their sense of project.

https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki

ILAN [42:19] Do you have any examples of federalizing structures of publishers? Minor composition is a great example. Many publishers in different countries publish in English, for better or for worse. We are wondering why we don't have one single process of production. And then multiple distribution schemes, such as models combined together. This is something that was also developed by Geert at INC, but more as an idea than practice. This might be a really great solution for some books: the model is to use the publishers as distributors, as institutions that have access to specific audiences, using them as a sort of super-organism that will manage all the production processes and distribution of the books. This concerns comics too. Just to give an illustration here, I'm based in Brussels, comics are a very important cultural product, there are lots of fans. When we do books, we know that we are very limited in

distribution, so we take the money from Belgium, and we try to find other publishers in different European countries. We see a book as sort of a shareholding thing, so they pre-buy 100, 200, 300 copies with a marginal cost that will never allow them to have a book like that in the catalog. It's like a Robin Hood model, maybe slightly unrelated to the forms of publishing we're discussing here, but it would nonetheless be interesting to see more of this in non-fiction and academic writing.

GEOFF [44:27] I'm really interested in this as well, I don't think I have examples, but this was the promise of print-on-demand, wasn't it? That you would be able to print locally to your distribution, from a distribution center.

ILAN [44:43] Just to add something here, print-on-demand is one option, but what happens, when we do the printings, is that we do offset, we only change the cover, and then send the books to different countries with a marginal cost again. I mean, it's logistics, and shipping. So, offset is a technology that scales, right? So the more you print, the less it costs. So, the more partners you can find, the better the product can survive in their local markets.

GEOFF [45:21] Maybe this is an example of some of the problems, at least. With the Aesthetic Programming book, we wanted to translate it into Chinese and we ended up working with a collective based in Taiwan. But working in a context like Taiwan which also has lots of indigenous languages, a particular colonial relationship to mainland China, and which therefore has lots of debates about the use of classical Chinese immediately made it somewhat complicated. We wanted to consider the translation process to be something like forking: how do you fork into another language, and how does that resonate with local politics? We suggested that we would do this print-on-demand to make it cheap, to make some physical copies. Yet their print-on-demand hasn't really developed, so they wanted to print offset. Then you're immediately in a different set of economic difficulties of where to raise money and how to raise money. So this kind of cross-cultural translation, I think, is really interesting at the level of the content, but also at the level of the form that might take.

ILAN [47:02] I think it's interesting that you use the word forking. If we start thinking about books as a GitHub repository, obviously forking and branching are very interesting.

There are some tools that allows us to think about a book with a new metaphor, because the way we have been conceptualizing mostly, to say it broadly, still comes from an antiquated model: uniquely talented singular artists, writers, that have inspiration and they have the conviction to speak with a publisher. When we start thinking about forking and branching, and local varieties, as you said, about China, which are different from publishing in the UK, we can shift the metaphors of book and start thinking of models that allow us to work together, despite the different linguistic barriers or market leverages we still have.

printed objects

GEOFF 48:16 This is exactly what we tried to do with the Aesthetic Programming book, to think of the book as a computational object and to think of the printed form is one iteration of many possible versions that could be produced by multiple people. Also the reason I tend to work collaboratively and write collaboratively is because I want to remove myself as much as possible from these 19th century models and reputational economies that are so prevalent in publishing. You know, try and develop collective names, for instance, for these kinds of things. That's the idea of the ServPub collective as well.

TOMMASO 49:01 I don't know if it's a question or a reflection, but it's more putting something on the table to continue the conversation. I want to bring back what Ilan was saying about the idea of federating. I think we are reflecting a lot on this from many different perspectives. You were referring more to the distribution. You're also collaborating with Varia, with open source publishing, with different initiatives that create tools. Sometimes they're very similar, because maybe they're based on, Pages.js and they're like forks of that tool in many different iterations. I feel that this is the whole idea of the politics of open source, that's where we come from, but on the other side, sometimes it feels like reinventing the wheel every time. That's maybe where I want to go about the sustainability of it in the long-term. I was talking with Lorenzo from Nero yesterday and he mentioned how it would be very nice to have a web-to-print tool that can print the zine that they are producing digitally in order to print them at home. For example, I thought about INC DevOps, like a tool that was exactly that four years ago. Then because of costs and issues, the project went down, the code is still there, but it's not online anymore. Then I was like, there's Pages.js, you should hire a

developer and produce it yourself, but this can become very tiring after a while, especially for programmers.

But the question is, how can we federate this site? Is it even possible? Does it go against the idea of open source? I think that collaboration is still there, and this is to just stop there. But I think it also refers to the idea of a book as a computational object, right? At INC, we have been putting all our books on GitHub for the last 10 years, but if INC is going to close in a few years, who's going to sustain all those books, who's going to pay for the GitHub Pro account? Who is going to upkeep an autonomous server?

GEOFF [52:25] I mean, these are some of the problems we've had, even when working with collaborators, like Manetta and Simon. We've employed them to work with us on the Transmediale collaboration, for instance, and it's proved to be quite expensive. The amount of labor involved in producing something for a particular event far outweighs what it would cost to quickly lay it out using InDesign. But then that's not the point, of course. It's the process of doing that, which we want to expose and be able to engage with, but the sustainability of that becomes really difficult. We're working on the latest issue of the online journal, which again, will be produced using the same set of tools. We're paying Simon to run some workshops with myself and Christian, so that we can actually take on some of the work. There are all sorts of economic challenges, but then at the same time, there are other issues. Despite people working with the ethics of free open source development, people are quite protective about the particular work that they've done on the development of a particular tool, so they need to protect their own income streams as well. They want to be accredited properly. We've run into quite a lot of difficulties over the way that people feel about ownership of tools, despite it being somewhat of a contradiction.

I'm rambling a bit, but the potential of some kind of federated model where tools can be accessed and further developed by communities of people in different locations would be wonderful. I don't know how to do that either. I suppose that's what we've tried to, that's why we've tried to operate with a collective of people based in London to try to replicate some of the work that OSP or Varia have been developing in a local context so that we can have a much more hands-on workshop-based approach to the work that we've been trying to develop.

TOMMASO 55:17 This is probably more of a provocation, but should we then maybe rethink the protocols or the whole idea of open source? I don't mean some kind of political idea, I think that's very solid, but I mean in terms of protocols. This is more of a theoretical question. How can we put together this idea of showing the labor behind all of this?

GEOFF 56:09 These are the kinds of questions that Aymeric Mansoux has also been trying to think through. From his experience of students coming out of the xpub course and setting up collectives like Varia and working with these sort of ethical principles, but then getting burnt out, getting kind of lost in the process, realizing that their future trajectory looks quite bleak in terms of being able to sustain themselves, sustain energy levels and income streams. Some of them have moved to OSP on this basis as well, which sets itself up with a slightly different model. I'm not sure what a good model would look like, but certainly people are trying to rethink this and are struggling with structures that can sustain themselves.

https://monoskop.org/Aymeric_Mansoux

LORENZO 57:16 I'm really not an expert in technology, but I'm curious about your experience with technology and codes: are there some technical tools that can help in sharing the incomes, the revenue, the credits in a common collective production, if we imagine for a moment, that technical utopia where this kind of share would be possible? I'm curious to know if you can give us some good practice or examples of this.

GEOFF 58:26 No, I mean, I turn to other people for this discussion as well. I mean, this is the interest in working with some of the groups that we're operating with, like OSP, Varia, developing their own licenses, of course, for the distribution of work. So absolutely. I'm a bit more skeptical about other kinds of models, like blockchain and DAOs, but I would also turn to other people for this discussion. I don't think I would have

anything to add that you don't know already.

What: Future of Publishing

MARTA [59:04] I think we've been touching upon the final question a lot, which is: what's the future of publishing? This is hard to answer, but I think we've been able to pinpoint some interesting potential directions in which it could develop. More as a final comment on this aspect of the future of publishing, what do you see as possible directions you would like to see publishing going, and maybe some things that you think we should not focus on anymore that we can leave in the past?

GEOFF [59:54] Well, definitely the question of the sharing of the development of these tools that was just mentioned. I mean, that's a major challenge, and it would be really sensible to try to network those practices and groups developing tools together in a more comprehensive way. My concern is more about working in a university and the inner mechanics and politics of academic publishing, as well as the way there's still this bizarre reliance on these companies that have a very particular profit model. I want to encourage academics and students to intervene in these processes, to realize that publishing isn't something that's just given; something as simple as producing work and just handing it over to someone to publish. But that the choices that you make at this point are part of the work, that they need to be folded into a reflection upon the way that the content is developed and the way the content is made public. So to be more concrete: to use publishers like Open Humanities Press, or set up a means of publishing as collectives for research groups to take responsibility for this as a very particular decision that they're making about how works come into the world, how they reach people, and to see that as our responsibility to engage with these questions, especially in universities where you can draw upon funding. You can build this into research projects, you can think about the distribution of the work, the way the findings are made public for any research project, and make ethical decisions based on that.

https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2020/copim/

I'm interested in your project in relation to other projects, like the work at Coventry. I mentioned this in the online meeting that I attended some months ago, your relationship to

these other projects, like xpub as well. We have this model in the research center, of collaborative PhDs with cultural institutions. We find that many of the students that we are employing for these projects come out of xpub, I think we've had two or three now. They're the kind of graduates that seem to be doing the kind of work in the way that we think is appropriate. It's a really interesting dynamic collection of people and ideas, it seems to me. So where is your project, how does it connect with these other communities?

TOMMASO *1:03:54* Just to specify, I think the meeting you were referring to, is an in-between project, the project that you were in contact with me for earlier this year still has to start, if it's ever going to start, because we are waiting for the funding grant answer in August. So this is a European project that started last September, so from the previous year. But the topic is the same, and I think the whole idea behind is to really think about this network or network of knowledge. And I'm very glad we are mentioning the word federating, because at least this is personally, and hopefully also in general, a very good direction, also because it's still not very defined.

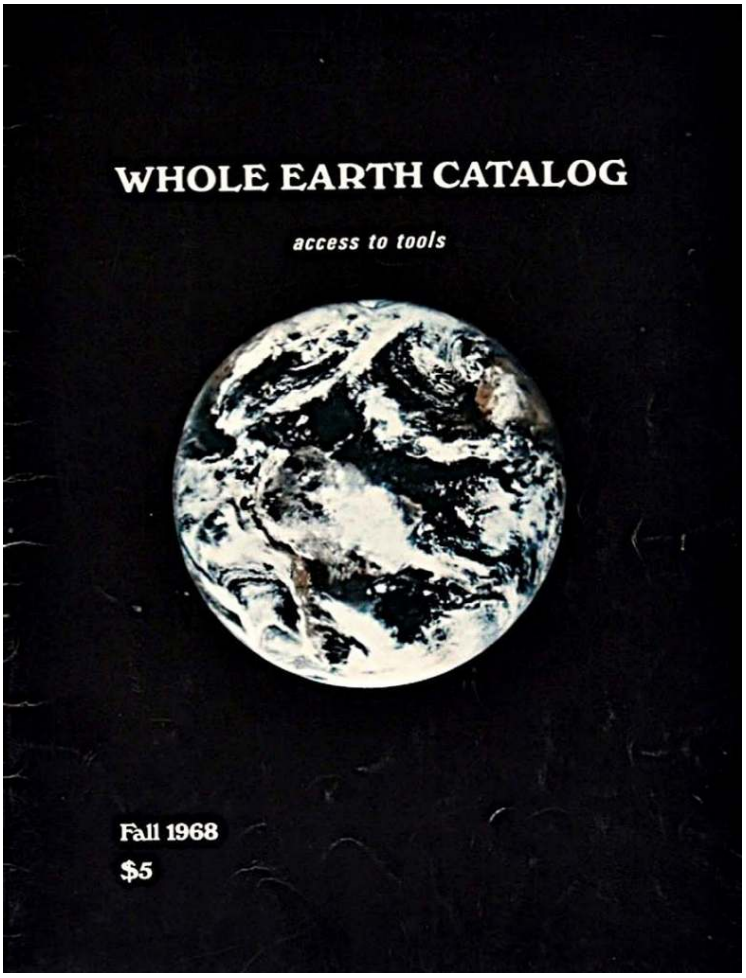
GEOFF *1:04:56* I'm also interested in this term. We're a small research group in a university that doesn't have an established reputation for research. So we see our strength in reaching out to other collaborators in the cultural sector, as I was describing, but also to other similar small research centers in other universities, for instance, a small group in Amsterdam through Annet Dekker that we collaborate with quite heavily, and Aarhus, of course, and a small group at the University of Southampton that are interested in image politics. So we also see these research structures as open to a federated model in a way. We're not quite sure what that means, but we think it's interesting to think about, at least.

TOMMASO *1:05:52* Yeah, I think we are federated in a way, we are getting money from different institutions. I think it's important to actually share between all these groups, because we are really aligning in many topics and terms. I've also been thinking about the idea of the book and paper publishing as a starting point, trying to expand it in different forms as an algorithmic object, but also into a different medium. I think we are reflecting on audio as publishing, video as publishing, event as publishing. And then Aymeric gave a lecture about

permacomputing, which is an interesting concept. And my first question was: how do I combine the video publishing with permacomputing, or livestream publishing with permacomputing? He answered: you can't, there's no way you can do it. But actually, that was challenging. We were like, no, actually, maybe you can. But then that takes a lot of imagination, to rethink everything in terms of minor tech, and that's what you were referring to your issue. So trying to implement this idea could be interesting to take it in a different direction, and not to replicate *big*, but we should maybe go in the direction of *small*. This might be very abstract.

GEOFF 1:07:41 I've also been following this discussion, of course, and one of our PhD students is Marloes de Valk who has been writing extensively about this, and about scaling in particular, and referring to the work of Anna Tsing, of course, and non-scalability theory, and I think it's a really interesting discussion. Following the development of this term, permacomputing, and the other alternative terms. I think this discussion is probably in the glossary. I've forgotten what it's called now, the thing that refers to Stewart Brand, the online glossary. What's it called again? Whole Earth Catalogue. But this has all those sorts of references, doesn't it? And you can, and in Marloes's PhD, you can follow the discussion of some of those alternative terms like small tech, and low tech, and, you know, and so on.

https://asletaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/On-nonscalability.pdf



TOMMASO [1:09:01] One of the ideas out of this discussion is to compile a repository of all these terms and tools. So it's interesting how many of these there actually are, you can see this very well with Silvio's PHD project "Post-Digital Publishing Archive" , a repository of all the experiments in publishing.

GEOFF [1:09:51] It's a really rich area, isn't it? I think, obviously expanded publishing, you know, the reference that most people think about is expanded cinema. And, I can't help think of how that's used in the Hito Steyerl's essay In defense of

https://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/

the Poor Image. As well, poor images, you know, and think about what poor publishing would look like.

MARTA 1:10:00 That's also interesting, because when we were talking with Irene, she had this provocation of 'stop publishing', or 'don't publish', which we were having some trouble with, but maybe poor publishing and this more immediate, low frequency publishing is quite interesting.

GEOFF 1:11:03 Thank you. I should update you on the book that we're working on, the Open Book Futures project, because that's developed a bit. It's going to be a kind of theoretical reflection, so a description of the process of producing the book in a very particular way. It's a highly reflexive approach. So we talk through how to use the tools, but also the people developing those tools reflect upon the way that they think they operate in terms of setting up new social relations and opening up a particular sort of politics, etcetera. That's the idea. Although we're only at the early stages of that.

11 Gijs de Heij

3 July 2024, 3:30 PM

Introductions

https://osp.kitchen/

GIJS 05:58 Open Source Publishing is a collective based in Brussels, we're a collective with different backgrounds, but mostly graphic designers, and we make graphic design using only open source tools. We started with the question of whether it was possible to do graphic design using only open source tools, but for me, the question has sort of shifted over time towards: what's the influence of using alternative tools on your design or the web, or on the work that you make? This, for me, is best explained through the sentence coined, I believe, originally by Femke Snelting: "Practice shapes tools shapes practice". This speaks about the relationship between the tools that you use and the work that you make, but in a way, it also speaks about the relationship between the makers of tools and the users of tools.

Why: Politics of Publishing

Open Source Publishing only uses Free/Libre, open source software. This is software that explicitly permits using software but also adapting it and then publishing it in an alternate form. It can be software, but it can also be publications or fonts that you make, because of those explicit permissions, it creates or

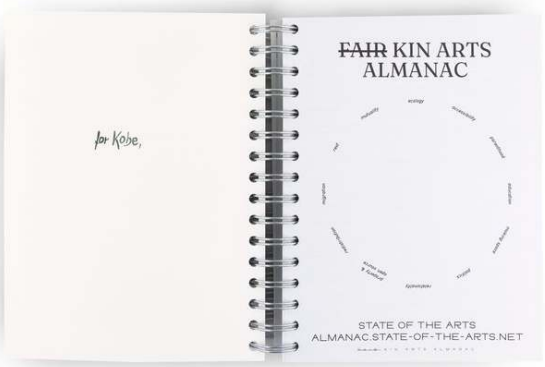
opens up the possibility for different responsibilities or fortaking on a different position as a user or a creator of the tools. So if you use these tools, you do not necessarily buy them, in the sense that if you use a closed, proprietary software, you have a sort of very singular license, and the responsibilities are quite clearly defined. I think with FLOSS software there is an invitation for more responsibility but also for more freedom. The practice of OSP is exploring this process of being the users of the tools, but also making the tools as designers and questioning what is possible, or harder to do, is also part of that position.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

CAROLINA [09:16] I think you're already going into a lot of useful discussions and threads that we want to touch on, particularly within this idea of the balance between more freedom and more responsibility with FLOSS software. I think that's a really interesting idea, working with a collective of people, not in a traditional graphic design practice, and thinking of these workflows and distribution of labour or roles. Could you maybe elaborate a little bit on what a typical workflow would look like for OSP, for the projects that you're handling and working on?

GIJS [10:09] An example I can give is the work we did on the Fair Kin Arts Almanac with the State of the Arts, which is a group of artists in Belgium that tries to discuss more fair art practices. Three years ago, we started the process of making a second version of an Almanac gathering contributions from members of SOTA, the organization initiating this publication. We were invited quite early on in the process, and we proposed a tool called Ethertoff that would facilitate a series of events that ran over a year where SOTA invited different groups of people to discuss questions around arts practices. What the tool specifically allowed for was to take notes in a collective editor called Etherpad and these notes were later used as material for the Almanac. So in that sense, the workflow is one of providing, thinking with the organization of the infrastructure that they are using, suggesting an alternative — an open source one — and using the tool from gathering material towards design and publishing it both in printed and online form.

tools



CAROLINA [12:25] I was going to say that we are using Etherport to make notes and to generate possible expanded reports on this. I forgot to mention it in the beginning, sorry, I wanted to say that! Etherport is a sort of version or expansion on a tool that OSP had already developed before called Ethertoff. It's interesting to think about the design process from the start, and not in a traditional way where you would perhaps get everything delivered, the content decided, done, and written,

and then you shape something around it, but starting from the start. Just to make it more clear and perhaps for others who might not know so much about the tools that you make, what are the main tools that you're now using or are important for your practice at OSP?

GIJS [13:44] So, at the moment, we mostly have a browser-based practice in the sense that we use HTML and CSS as layout tools. Then the output can be both online as a website, and can also be printed as a PDF. We also have tools that generate HTML, so the more server-side tool is mostly Python at the moment. When we go towards print, what we do is, essentially, print a website, so it generates a PDF, and then often this PDF needs to be transformed. So it's a toolkit of PDF tools. You have PDF2K, which allows you to take out pages and to combine PDFs. We use GoScript to manipulate the colour space, we also sometimes have new tools to manipulate, like crow boxes, but that's very technical.

alternative publishing practices

CAROLINA [15:04] Expanding a bit on something you mentioned at the beginning of your introduction, these tools shape the design in a very unique way. You're not dependent on interfaces that someone else has defined can make a design. So what do you think these FLOSS tools do, that proprietary software doesn't? And what are the challenges with working in such a way?

GIJS [15:56] In the case of Etherport and Almanac, what these tools allow is to be reconfigured. They are often made with the assumption that people will use them together with other tools so you can export towards a file format that can be transformed further by other tools, or they may have an API that allows you to call the programs from other programs. These tools are native when it comes to publishing on the web. A lot of work has been done in weeding out all the problems there, a lot of money or funds available for developers to work on it, in the sense that the development of Firefox or Chrome is of course not free, but it's financed in other ways. Ironically, also in the case of Firefox, often through Google. When you go towards print, this part is very well developed actually, what it can do is quite astonishing. At the same time, you run into problems, especially if you go towards complex print objects, for example, using Pantone colours. The tools to deal with those issues are simply not available. And within proprietary software, with tools

that were designed for this type of work, a lot of funds and time have been spent on dealing with those issues. And if you work with a more experimental setup like we do, you run into those issues and limited abilities, so you have to try to find a way to work around them or to fix them.

printed objects

CAROLINA 18:43 I guess the book as an object hasn't made this connection, we're still in an experimental space, while working on browser-based tools, like you said, for printing.

GIJS 19:04 I realized I forgot to mention one tool, which is quite important actually, called paged.js, which uses JavaScript to extend the functionality of the browser and to emulate support for the paged media standard of the W3C. So the W3C is the governing body for the standards that drive the web, and there is a standard that describes how browsers should deal with output towards paged media. Paged media is not used as much for browsers, as for browser vendors. What the paged.js project does is emulate this functionality and makes it possible to use browsers for these complex printed objects. Through this possibility, it shows that there is a need for this functionality within existing software.

CAROLINA 20:34 I really enjoy learning more about this and with you, for instance in making the Screentime Facetime Airtime book. We have covered the tools and how you work with other organizations in terms of production and operations. We don't have to call it a business model, because it's a non-profit, but what is the model of sustaining OSP? How do you maintain sustainable work for the collective and how is the balance between working on projects and creating your tools? I can imagine that, usually, commissioned projects are more interested in a final project than a tool.

GIJS 21:36 That's quite a challenge, to be honest,. I'm not sure that OSP currently is or has a sustainable business model for its members. What we try to do is to make the development of the tools part of the work. We do not separate the making of the tool and the making of the design, but we try to further the tool during the making of the design. We also have a document that we call the Collaboration Agreement. Through this, we try to explain our practice towards future collaborators. So the function of it is to, from the start, make clear that the work on the tool is part of the work on the design. So to come back through this "practice shapes tool shapes practice", the idea is to

extend the functionality, making something new possible, which in the case of the Almanac, means to go towards a printed object from multiple paths. This is as much part of designing the object as it is to think about the font or the layout of the book.

Who: Community of Publishing

CAROLINA 23:40 I think that's when your work becomes different and special, thank you for that, and for talking about OSP as a group and the challenges that come with it, so thanks for your transparency on that. Thinking of networks and collaborators, we often think of tools that are proprietary, like social media, when it comes to maintaining community or reaching out. How do FLOSS play a role in this, or is it something that you don't think about at all in maintaining collaborations and a network and the role of community within this practice?

community

GIJS 24:49 So, there is an interesting community that's called "Pre-Pros Print" that tries to bring together practitioners of experimental publishing and experimental graphic design. They

organise events for people with similar practiceses. There's also the community behind the software and these tools, but at the same time, I don't engage that much with the community of Ghostscript or Inkscape or GIMP even though I'm aware that they exist.

CAROLINA [26:05] I think the tool itself becomes the space in which the community acts, even if you don't have personal contact with them, the tools are being improved and reworked and expanded on. So, that's an interesting thought, something we haven't thought of. Okay, maybe I stop with my pre-written questions here and open up the discussion to our table.

Discussion

TOMMASO [26:53] Thank you so much. I think I have a set of questions, but I'm going to start with one and then maybe do a round. I'm going to take a step back and go to the beginning of all of this. The idea of this consortium is to try to combine different approaches to publishing. We are a consortium from different countries and different contexts, and the whole idea of these three days is to bring together practitioners, distributors, and writers, to share knowledge and to try to build something upon it, maybe at a certain point also to come up with some sort of definition or understanding of what we mean by expanded publishing. I think what we are doing here now is very valuable, and it's something that we have to work on a lot in trying to translate knowledge from the very technical to the very theoretical. What are the challenges in translating this knowledge in a way that can be understood in a very broad spectrum? I follow your work, and we work together, and I understand many of the things, not everything, but then I'm sure that someone else at the table may have less understanding of this, and I think it is something that happens often. Have you ever thought about the means to share knowledge in a way that it has the complexity?

GIJS [29:23] When you say sharing knowledge and thinking about how to share it and how to communicate about concerns, there's always the ideal, and then there's the realised. There is an assumption that you have an open-source tool, you allow

others to use it, and a README comes with it, that also explains what the tool is, and with which questions in mind was it developed. The tool in itself can be used and expanded but in reality, this documentation work takes a lot of time, and this time is not always available. And there's also something about the quality of your code — to what extent can it be reused by others, and to what extent is it flexible? For example, Etherport is actually about making code that was developed within other projects accessible or available to others and allowing others to expand and extend upon it. So, within our practice, we have moments where we can share our concerns, pose our questions and hear the questions of others, and there are moments where, in a way, the process is experimental. The challenge is making time to document it and to make things accessible, both in documentation and in code. That's a challenge when you're working with any practice and a downside of making the tool development part of the design process. Towards the end, you're so busy with finishing the object that the documentation of that work becomes less of a priority.

sustainability of workflows

TOMMASO [37:32] I completely understand, I relate with the idea that when you finish a project, especially a big project, the idea of documenting and explaining every step is a project in itself. My second question is about the idea of sustainability connected to this. Thinking of multiplicity of tools — I think we already had a conversation about this topic — we were talking yesterday with Nero — they have a new online magazine and they were thinking about producing zines or a printed copy of the magazine. So a web-to-print tool would be the best. They were asking whether we knew any tools that could do that and how could they implement that. I thought about Etherport and realised that INC developed a tool two years ago with another project that was exactly about web-to-print for online magazines, the code for which still exists. However, the server management put it down because they kept telling us that the code was not safe, they didn't feel safe to keep it there. How do you sustain tools in the long term? And also, how do you deal with this multiplicity of tools? Some tools use Paged.js, but most of them are tailored to the specific project. A term that came up a lot in the conversation before is federation. How to federate a set of tools? Is it something that you're thinking about?

GIJS [40:28] I think there's federation in two ways. I guess the

first form of federation is not exactly federation, but it's about a tool being used by other people or institutes; and its usage creates a demand, but also creates the energy for this tool to be supported and maintained, to make sure that it keeps on working over time. Then I feel like open source is an answer to this tool — the code being distributed and allowing other people to download the new version of the code and use it. The idea of federation, where servers exchange or copy over material from each other, is a little bit out of reach for me. Software is extremely fragile, especially if you run server-side software because it means that somewhere there needs to be a computer that is continuously executing this code, it's being maintained and it's being kept safe. What I think is interesting about a tool like Paged.js is that it's client-side, it's written in JavaScript and is an extremely stable platform, with a lot of care of backwards compatibility, which in this case would mean that old JavaScript still works on contemporary browsers. The combination of HTML and JavaScript is quite stable, but also to us, sustainability, or maintainability, is important, and I think that there is a third element there which I would say is archivability. Archivability meaning, from the beggining thinking about in which states the project will be and what would this object look like in an archived form. This means having a hybrid publication, or a publication that can have multiple forms, both a website and maybe a printed output. You could decide that you only keep the printed output and keep the PDF and keep that as a sort of file. That is sustainable. It can also be that you freeze your website in the sense that it doesn't depend on server-side software anymore, but that it's only HTML files that are rendered, and they're only static files. Then your website is much easier to archive in the sense that you can copy the HTML files. It includes the images, the scripts and the media files, and you can essentially put them on a zip drive or make a copy on a cloud somewhere, or an existing backup service. Currently, the answer is to make it sustainable by accepting that the object in its software form is unstable, and you need to think about how you can make archivable, relatively stable objects out of it.

alternative publishing practices

ILAN 44:34 We started this project on expanded publishing because obviously, when there's a need to expand something, it comes out from frustration or a crisis or some sort of need. With expanded film by the expanded field of art, this happened

because the new productions of the artist could not be contained through what was understood, either sculpture or installation, so they needed to find other ways. My question is whether we saw expansion, that needs to be done because of a crisis: ethical, commercial, or financial. Is this a technical question? Do we need to develop new tools? I'm here obviously playing a bit of the devil's advocate — do we need new tools to address this problem? Is this a technical question or is it that the role of publishing needs to be articulated more in a political sense? What are your feelings about this?

GIJS [46:04] I think there is a certain duality there. If you look at the practice of Open Source Publishing, there's also a certain joy and interest in these technical questions. So that's also driving the motivation to do this. For me, our work and its experimentations are interesting and it's more interesting than working with existing proprietary tools. There's also a political layer where making graphic design using proprietary software limits your choices very strongly. In the case of publishing on the web, that's ironic because, from the onset, it has been open-source, and developed with the idea of people expressing themselves, but also maintaining their own infrastructure and its ever-continuing centralisation. So for me, it is extremely relevant to maintain and develop your own infrastructure and to use tools which support or even invite you to do this. I mean, there is a challenge there, because it needs to be maintained and it crumbles by itself. Existing platforms have developed a business model where that kind of work that's sometimes also boring can be financed and can be supported. But I'm not sure I fully answered your question. I notice I get stuck a little bit, because there's always an ambivalence of being both optimistic about open-source and being a pessimist in that there are open questions that capitalistic models have found ways to answer, but we also see that those answers are often exploitative. I have a very strong desire to find paths around, but these are always fragile and complex and also situated, I think, in the sense of how they're linked to specific people in specific situations.

politics

ILAN [49:34] I totally follow you on the joyful part because as an artist myself, I find joy in building systems to produce content, to generate stories and images. I think this is a question of choices. Do we need more tools to have more choices? I don't think we lack choices in general, I think we have a lot of choices about getting a story out there or a

message. Again, as a devil's advocate, I am trying to think together with you right now and I don't have any answers. I use a lot of Adobe, it's cracked, I consider it free software. I don't know if I'm limited by my software, I'm limited because, to be honest, nobody cares about what I do. I think this is the main barrier, it's not so much about the tools I'm using, but it's about relevance. Do people care about what I'm doing? If I change the tools I'm using, would it be more relevant? These are open questions and I don't expect you to answer them. I just put them on the table as my own doubts. I'm also coming from Brussels, where everything is extremely well funded, we are products of a more generous cultural policy than other places have, where we are allowed to think speculatively, but the question is always there. What is interesting about what we are doing is how sustainable is it, not financially, necessarily, but in terms of ethics, interaction with people, responses, and community.

GIJS [51:52] That's why, if you speak about the tools that we use, we speak about Free/Libre, open-source software, meaning that it's not necessarily free as in freedom. So that's why the Libre is there, and if you use the cracked version of the Creative Cloud, you don't have to pay for it. So in that sense, it's free, but otherwise, you are reaffirming an existing ecosystem that sets the Creative Cloud as the standard, synonymous with being a professional designer or being a professional publisher — that's where our practice tries to install an alternative. Using that alternative doesn't make our work all of a sudden more relevant, but I think that, in our practice, it generates new possibilities for collaboration. More importantly, it creates the potential for you as a publisher, or for us as designers to shape more elements of your whole publishing pipeline. With the Almanac, both the research and editing parts are done within the same tool, but it's also done horizontally and collaboratively. Web-to-print allows last-minute text changes quite horizontally, so you can create a platform where editors or contributors can come in, and make text changes without having to ask the designer to do it within their existing tool. Finally, if a certain functionality is not there, users can create that functionality within the tool, but of course, this is not easy, it takes energy. What's important here — and this is not entirely true because it's a little bit romantic — is the idea that the tool is never finished, but there's a certain assumption within proprietary

practices

software that "this is it, this is what you can do with it". Is this thought of? Well, it's possible that it doesn't work for you and then you can change it, so we might not know everything from the outset.

alternative publishing practices

CAROLINA [54:52] This conversation is sort of reminding me of something that came up today. To link different conversations, we were talking to Irene de Craen and she mentioned just stopping publishing, and then we talked to Geoff Cox, who was more along the lines of thinking about poor publishing and creating shorter connections between the elements of publishing that sometimes come with more mistakes. So I'm wondering if you feel like this type of work is also doing that; I don't know if poor is the right term, because there is (at least in my head) the vision of these kinds of tools as quite functional and less messy, at least in the user side of things. How do you see this fitting into this idea of reducing the connections between publishing elements? Geoff mentioned several projects in which the work of the writer, the editor, and the designer are a bit more mixed and closed and they happen almost simultaneously and with less time or room for things being missed. So I don't know, do you see your work being able to synthesise those processes more directly?

GIJS [57:11] In our work, we create the structures that allow for those strategies, but at the same time, the publishing that we do ourselves is limited and we respond to the practice of others. When we talk about printed objects as in offset-printed, then you still want to be very precise about what you publish. But if it's online or if it's something that is printed at home, then there are more opportunities to make multiple versions of the same objects. In my practice, I think more about the structure than about the outcome.

CAROLINA [58:37] That makes sense. It's also important that someone is thinking about structure, we can't all be thinking about outcomes.

GIJS [58:46] This reminds me also of the famous Mark Zuckerberg quote, "Move fast and break things", which I don't appreciate and I think it's quite dangerous. So for me, it's also about the fact that you're still putting things out in the world, but I imagine that Geoff has a much stronger discourse.

JANEZ [1:01:29] I don't know if I am lucid enough to formulate this question. Listening to you and also now when Lorenzo

sustainability of workflows

asked the last question, I always had in mind this question of accessibility concerning our research on expanding publishing. So I was wondering, for example, if we would want to expand the concept of publishing by using several tools, including open-source, sooner or later we will encounter a compatibility problem. I see the way you can operate and investigate. Maybe I'm wrong, but because you do it in a closed network of geeks and specialists who can operate the code and design their own tools. I'm fascinated by this empowering attitude, but if I have to think about myself, I see this accessibility threshold being too high for me. This is exactly what you are saying now, you were asking yourself whether you want to democratise the access or keep an entry-level that is high for specialists and so on. I'm not working alone as well, I would need, perhaps, to convince or force a set of people around me to adopt the same tools if they are not compatible with the one that I'm using. You know what I mean? But it also works the other way around; if you are an open-source convinced believer, and you want to convince other people that it's good to be able to own your tools and design, you would probably be able to convince more people, if the tool that you are producing can interface with tools that generic people are using — to facilitate the interoperability of the systems, in a way. I stop here because it might be confusing, but the whole open-source culture is fascinating and I have followed it for years, although I was never really able to join it because I never had a Commodore 64 when I was a kid, and I was always looking at other people to play.

GIJS 1:06:20 You used the word democratise and so I think I want to push back a little bit on saying that we do not want to democratise our tools. Well, I guess I want to push back because it sounds very elitist... Essentially what a piece of software does is encode a process or allow for certain things to be possible through a computer, and this is made easier by reducing the possibilities. So this means that you reduce the amount of different outcomes and make more assumptions about the kind of work that's being done in the tools. I think we are not interested in this reduction within our practice, but there's also an issue in understanding what the users of a tool want and then shaping the tool to fit the needs of the user. This is a lot of work because there is the development, but there's also the testing, and asking whether our assumptions actually work. We measure our assumptions, implement and test the tools, and

then do a feedback loop and our practice is too small to facilitate such a process. You also mentioned interoperability and the word ownership. Open-source has an interesting answer, which is perhaps not strictly within the realm of open-source software, but it's open formats, which are formats that can be read by multiple tools. So you can take your information from one piece of software and bring it to the next, which can be information or data that you export in XML or JSON format, but can also be an SVG image from a browser to be modified in Inkscape, and be opened in a browser again. To reply to what you said about ownership: the longer I do this kind of work, the more I have to accept that it's impossible to have full control. Software is often described as the stack, it's layers of different pieces of software that are interacting, but they're also all currents layered on top of each other, taking different directions. As an individual, you can neither control nor understand all of them.

sustainability of workflows

TOMMASO 1:10:16 I was thinking about what Janez and you just said, and reflecting on the idea of democratisation. Sometimes I also get annoyed when I don't understand a tool and say, "This should be easier. This should be way more user-friendly" — because we've been trained to have everything as user-friendly as possible. But at the same time, there are so many things that are not user-friendly and we don't take for granted. If you think about graphic design, you will always ask a designer to design a poster. If you think about writing a text, you're going to ask an author to write a text, but then when it comes to using tools, we have been used to thinking of them as becoming easier and easier to use, like browsing the web. It's something that everybody needs to know. I think what you are contributing as OSP is to take a step back and reflect on the infrastructure behind tools. So, should we be more user-friendly? Should we be less user-friendly? I probably know your answer in that sense, but if we refuse the idea that everything has to be user-friendly, how should we implement this workflow into an already existing workflow? Otherwise, you can very easily go into a conflict instead of like a conversation.

GIJS 1:13:03 I guess it depends on what you mean by user-friendly. I think it's important for a tool to be user-friendly, but this does not necessarily have to mean for a tool to be easy. Some things are complex and those complexities cannot be abstracted away or removed by software. If they are removed by software, it means that a lot of assumptions and choices have

been made in designing the tool. We ask ourselves, "What would be possible if we try things differently?" — and we find different forms of collaboration that become possible because the content is not written by individual authors on their own computer and then sent to an editor, but it's from the start edited on a platform. Then we take the output or the content from the platform and make it directly available on the web and allow it to be printed. If there is a content change, there's no authority structure where the editor has to ask the designer to do it, but the contributor can do it directly on the platform. This is not necessarily easy to install or maintain, but tools need time and energy to be understood, to be able to be used or maintained. At the same time, these tools mustn't be hostile, in the way that they are made, but also in the community that's behind them or the documentation that they come with. In that sense, our tools are not always welcoming, and to come back to Ethertoff, this tool can be quite hostile to a new user. At the moment, it still needs an interpreter with it, but that's also a situation we're trying to change.

sustainability of workflows

TOMMASO 1:16:13 Just to clarify, I didn't mean that the tool itself has to be user-friendly in the interface, for the end user. I think what I meant by user-friendly is what you just said, in installing and supporting. Sometimes we take for granted that you can just download a plugin or download a software, install it, and it's running. We should probably collaborate more with coders, create more collaboration and not take the coder or the designer for granted.

GIJS 1:16:59 To come back to this "toolship" practice: if you say that practice is the designer and the tool is the programmer, you have those two distinct roles of a designer and a programmer. In reality, those roles exist. What I think we try to do in our practice is to make those roles more blurry and to say, you can be both a programmer and a designer at the same time and the license sort of explicitly creates the legal infrastructure to do it, but at the same time, as a participant, you still have to put in the work. To come back to what Janez said, you need a certain type of skill. I want to be both positive about it and say there is a relevancy to it and also be realistic. It requires a certain skill that takes work to learn, it's called a programming language and it is a language with all that comes with it — learning the language, vocabulary, learning new grammar. It's also about learning a different culture, which can

expand your thinking in interesting, surprising ways.

What: Future of Publishing

CAROLINA [1:19:15] Thank you, Gijs, I think you're already leading us to a conclusion. We've been thinking about what expanded publishing is and what it can mean for us here in this group, but also in a general sense, and what are we working towards. We are using new media tools and digital tools everywhere, and yet I think literacy has to improve a lot in the role of the designer, speaking from my own experience. What are your wishes for these urgencies that should be addressed when we think about expanded publishing? You mentioned a lot of things about sustainability and responsibility...

GIJS [1:20:56] That's a difficult question. One thing I'm thinking about is, once again, ambivalence, and it's a conversation that I had with Sepp Eckenhaussen from INC. Looking at initiatives like OSP, Hackers & Designers, and Pre-Post Print, I recognise they are communities of designers and programmers who experiment with tools but don't necessarily have the desire to create singular tools. There's a certain desire to develop individual experiments that do not go towards a single solution, but foster these universes or fediverses of tools more than seeing one solution for everything. What's tricky is that there are different desires — those experimental practices also answer to a desire for experimentation. This is not always applicable or relevant, but it would be very interesting to think about how the two needs can be combined, supporting both the individual experiment, yet being able to communicate in a way that supports something larger, a more stable tool or development, or that it creates a knowledge and a network of both users and creators of the tools for publishing, and one that is more engaged with the materiality of the technology that we're dealing with. For me, both Pre-Post Print and paged.js are very interesting examples. Paged.js is a plug-in used by many in experimental workflows, but this tool is also nourished by those individual experiments, specifically through plugins or by maturing this tool that tries to generate and facilitate needs for generating or creating complex printed or page objects from a browser, while not necessarily wanting to fix the full pipeline,

community

meaning that paged.js can be used in combination with WordPress as well as with a handwritten HTML file.

co-publishing

CAROLINA [1:25:15] Interesting that you're saying, that this type of experiment in publishing creates publics that are much more participatory in the process of publishing itself and in that way, is a mode of publishing that engages everyone in the process in a different way, beyond the passive reader, which I find a good take. I would like to also say thank you very much for your generosity and for sharing your thoughts and reflections on these processes, we will continue working on Etherport, which is going very well, we have new labels for everything. We'll keep in touch with you about how this develops.

GIJS [1:26:25] Thank you for the invitation, for taking the time and for the thoughtful questions.

12 Yancey Strickler

3 July 2024, 5:30 PM

Introductions

YANCEY 00:25 I'm a writer and an entrepreneur in that order. My first career was as a culture journalist, writing about music and film for Pitchfork, The Village Voice, and different magazines in America. I started blogging daily online in the early 2000s and was always a part of online culture, on many message boards. Then I co-founded Kickstarter, and that pulled me away from editorial for a while.

At Kickstarter, I created a project called The Creative Independent, which is an ad-free resource of daily interviews with artists. It's now been running for nine years, and it may be the project I'm most proud of. That was a concept of an editorial space that would be treated as a public good and that would produce knowledge for the commons. Everything has a Creative Commons license.

https://thecreativeindependent.com/

I stepped down as CEO of Kickstarter in 2017. I started blogging again. I didn't tell anyone about it for about five months. I just did it on a website no one knew, just so it was for me, which was great. Then I began doing a TinyLetter, and then it was one of the first Substacks. At the time I was doing that, I also had a book deal with Viking, which is part of Penguin Random House. I was in the traditional publishing industry, and I spent two years working on an economics and philosophy book that was published with them.

During that time, I also wrote a piece called The Dark

Forest Theory of the Internet, which became a nerd viral. It has around a million reads. It was originally in my TinyLetter newsletter to 300–500 people. All of that has culminated this year in a couple of related projects. One is creating a physical book built around the Dark Forest Theory piece, as well as eleven essays written by others that together make a kind of a canon that defines this concept. The idea was to self anthologize — put out a book, create a label, and begin to publish more work by people like us. It's been very successful; we've sold 1,500 books in the past 4 months. We put out an open call in a newsletter to say, if anyone else has work in the same space as this, we're open to it. From that has come another book project that we'll be introducing in the new year.

https://www.ystrickler.com/the-dark-forest-theory-of-the-internet/

The second piece that's the main focus of my energy these days is a project called Metalabel, which is a space where a project about of a group of authors collectively releasing a work becomes practically very possible because of a collaborative publishing and releasing tool that we've built. Our tool allows people to split money at the point of purchase. So once you buy a copy of our book, every one of us gets paid a percentage out of that money, and it's just automated. We're trying to create a space dedicated to new forms of creative output, a new model for creative people to release and have a home for their work outside of social media.

The last thing I will cite is a piece that I did as a part of the Dark Force Collective, a piece I spent five years on, called The Post-Individual. I thought a lot about how I wanted to release it. It was originally going to be a book. Then I had the idea to release it as a limited edition zip file where someone could pay $5 or whatever they wanted and they would get one of 250 editions that had this piece inside along with a video of me introducing it and an audio recording, and my research notes. All 250 of those editions sold out in a week, so I got paid $1,000 for that piece.

I'm seeing more projects beginning to release work as a limited edition zip or even an open edition zip. Just expressing my piece as just a text or a blog post or whatever doesn't feel like enough. I'm very invested in making digital work feel more tangible, more valuable, worth paying for.

MARTA [05:24] What are some tools that you use?

tools

YANCEY [05:27] I have had four different times in the past three years where instead of publicly publishing pieces, I just leave my Google Doc open with comments left on, sharing it privately with people and saying, you can share with friends, but don't share publicly. And those pieces were very widely read and engaged with. There's an interesting thing where if information feels like you are not meant to see it, or you have to work a little harder to see it, it becomes more interesting because effectively all information online today feels like an advertisement. So if there's something that's not trying to be seen, that's automatically a point of differentiation. I just keep finding a lot of success communicating that way. Some of my friends run a project called MSCHF, which does strange releases. They have a Google Doc that they title Friends and Family Discounts, and they share the Google Doc with direct links to purchase, and things will sell out from that even more than they will from a website. I think Substack is a great tool. I use Ghost for my personal website, just because I don't want Substack to be my website, because then it just looks like everything else.

I spent two and a half years deep in crypto. Metalabel preceded getting interested in crypto, but we got caught up in it like anybody. I think that crypto was born as a financial asset, and what things are born as is what they will always be. What I found was that the audience of people who engaged in crypto had zero interest in the world outside of it. Crypto is a very insular, internet-only game. We would launch work by people who we thought were very excellent, and we'd get people excited about the real world. No one in crypto cared. They cared about games that gave points and made the numbers go up.

There are some tools there that are interesting, but as we discovered while building Metalabel, we could make something like a financial split using existing financial tools and not having to make people buy into a new currency to transact. I do think it's possible that we will ultimately provide long-term storage of creative work on something like IPFS, like a blockchain, but the blockchains are so small you can't even store a single image on one, so it's kind of silly. But there are questions of long-term archival storage. It's an extremely financialized world that only

cares about that, and it's hard for me to see how that changes after some time.

MARTA [08:35] Going back to the dark forest and visibility, how the dark forest collective operates with leakiness, if you could go into that type of movement of how an idea starts and then gets published.

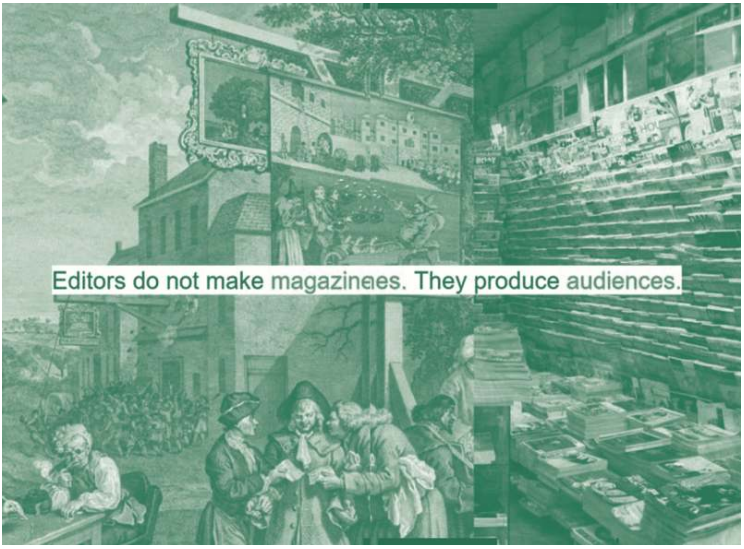
YANCEY [08:53] For any of the types of projects that we're working on, you do want things to leak out because ultimately, there is some desire for expression that exists. As someone who consumes a lot, I am sophisticated about how things are communicated, I want my own intentions to be clear and to be clearly expressed to an audience. I found in the past that when I've gotten trapped in the "oh, I have to do something every week, or I have to maintain some schedule to reach some growth target" the work sucks. People don't like it.

alternative publishing practices

I create lower-pressure publishing experiences, first publishing in a private space, then maybe publishing it publicly later. It is interesting to think about that relationship where there's a group of people in a private channel who are choosing to express themselves publicly. You are trying to shape some external opinion. Part of the power that I found releasing this limited-edition zip file, or even setting the initial run of copies of this book, The Dark Forest Book, at 777 editions, is that the internet encourages us to seek infinite audiences and to imagine the entire billion people could like me today if I just wrote the right words. It encourages us to think that way, which encourages us to think in a way which is kind of disempowering, because we're almost always going to be disappointed and we're going to lose our voice. But instead we can flip that and say what is the maximum number of people it would be meaningful to reach? And when that number is something more like 50 or a hundred or two hundred, what in the past might make us feel bashful, I think it could be an asset. It can say: "well, this is special and to own it means something." It means to participate. There's an opportunity to more positively frame and build relationships around the limited nature of a lot of small run media. I found that an interesting way to try to control the way the internet pulls us in ways that are unhelpful.

Who: Community of Publishing

MARTA 11:15 On this topic of internet audiences and community in our discussions, also pushing back on what even is a community, what does it mean to create work within a community? Do communities even exist? I think a meme in the Dark Forest anthology is that editors don't make magazines, they make audiences. How does community play in publishing for you?



YANCEY 11:43 The book I wrote for Viking Penguin introduced a philosophy called Bentoism that created an actual community of people called the Bento Society. Couple thousand members. That was a group of people held together by a common interest that could be manifested through people meeting each other.

https://www.bentoism.org/

Maybe that's the difference between community and fandom. Fandom is probably the more dominant model online which we mistake for a community. You and I both might be fans of the same things for similar reasons. We are not in a community with each other but our fandom makes us co-aligned in some ways. With Metalabel I've always found it important to make a distinction, to say that this model of releasing work like a label is not to say that you are collaborating, necessarily, but as to say

you are co-releasing.

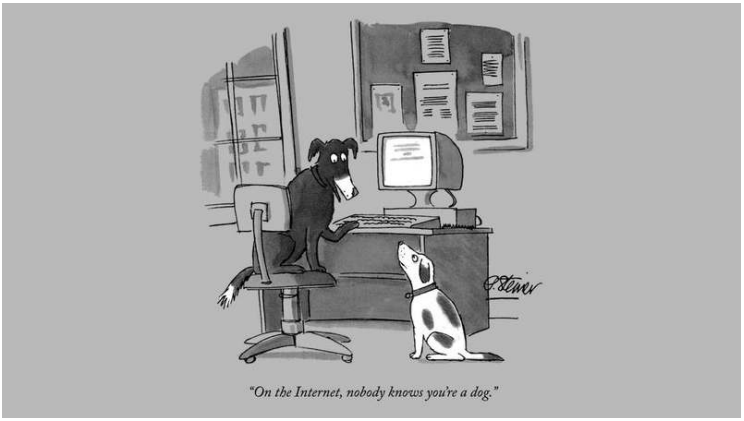
Nero is a publisher. You will put out work by 30 different authors and it's not like they are all collaborating to be a part of Nero, but they all are a part of something. That is not exactly a community, but it is a shared context. I also don't mind the shorthand, trying to find a way to encapsulate that energy that brings people together, even for a moment or a specific context, online. The piece that I released as a zip file, the post individual, is a frame of reference for how the notion of individualism is changed by the Internet. Before the Internet, to define yourself was to say who am I, and I think after the Internet, it is to say who are all of me? Because the Internet allows us to create new individuals of ourselves all the time. Every account we create can be a new alt or a new specific interest, and it manifests these little private inner beings. Our subselves are making a new society together on the Internet. The nature of the world is going to be reset by this changing notion of what it is to be an individual.

I ended up mapping this to the history of the emergence of individualism itself, which is around 1000 AD in Italy and southern France where the Catholic Church wanted to break the powers of clans, families being held together. The way they did it was through banning cousin marriage. You can no longer marry your cousin because that's a way the families were maintaining family power. So instead, children have to marry outside the family. Within a generation, these small trading posts became cities because there needed to be places where people could meet. Once people no longer were just in the confines of the clan, they were individuals for the first time. They had to find ways to work, ways to educate, ways to do everything. This is where modern society was made. I think that the same thing is happening to us online, that the internet has liberated us from our clans. It has liberated us from what we look like, or where we're born, or of our physical being. It's allowed us to create all these individuals within us. On the internet, we are making a new society based on this new understanding, that we are just learning what it means to be a person that's changed by all these digital experiences. It might end up being that the future of community is something defined by the internet and the things that we say now.

MARTA [00:16:12] There's the classic meme in media studies, which is: "On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On%02klzzwxh:0104%03the%02klzzwxh:0105%03Internet,%02klzzwxh:0106%03nobody%02klzzwxh:0107%03knows%02klzzwxh:0108%03you%27re%02klzzwxh:0109%03a%02klzzwxh:0110%03dog

which was a NYT cartoon. In the field of new media studies, there's a lot of thoughts about what it means to be online, what it does to your personality, because of course, while you can have multiple accounts, at the end, there is still the individual behind it. Thinking about some of Dean Kissick's articles of the experimentations in abandoning the individual self as the main pillar on the internet and pop culture. But I think we're still really much attached to that. And when it comes to publishing, we talked about this in the context of open source tools and how developers want to receive recognition for their individual work, even though it's operating within this ethos of sharing and non individualism. Also, maybe in this room, we're not operating as one single entity, because we also come from different contexts of, for example, North and Southern Europe.



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

YANCEY [17:05] We are not just a collective, we are not just individuals, we are both. We are learning how to be both. We've had a mode, especially in the West, for the past, who knows how long, sixty years, of thinking there's one way. We've been individual-maxing. We hit the apex, and it was kind of lonely and not that interesting. So now, people react to their conditions. There's the K-Hole quote I always go to. "Once upon a time, people were born into communities and had to find their individuality. Today, people are individuals and have to find their communities." That is the person online today. That's how the world is being remade. It used to be one person, one vote. On the internet, it's one identity, one vote. The notion of personhood or what something with rights is has changed. And I think all of society will, over time, be remade in that notion of

https://khole.net/issues/youth-mode/

what a person is.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

LORENZO [18:15] You mentioned Metalabel, and you say that it's based on a very simple, traditional financial model to split the share. And I'm curious to know precisely the technicality behind the split. The second question is, one day you will open Metalabel to a wider audience. With open submissions and so on. How do you see this kind of growth in that platform? And how do you think you will be able to still control the brand and the attitude that Metalabel has right now, which is super high quality? It represents something culturally.

YANCEY [18:59] The site has a lot of interesting ways in which it's architected. We wanted to make something that had an open data structure. We felt like the world was lacking a tool for creating a catalog as an artist or a creative person, a good data structure of my work with entries properly sorted by metadata and work, and notions of work that could be portable around the web. So we use an underlying architecture called a decentralized identifier, which is an open protocol that Blue Sky uses, or ActivityPub uses, but some of these new federated media use, and allow every piece of content to be referenced and embedded in other worlds just through using an open phone book. So that is what we started with instead of a blockchain, which achieves the same outcomes of universally accessible data.

tools

We always loved the splits part of crypto. Last year, myself and our head of engineering, our architect, spent some time researching this question and how you could do splits in a traditional context. Could you do splits with regular money? And I learned that there were pipes that existed for Walmart, Target, and Amazon, the biggest e-commerce players, that allowed them to split money between a shipper and a third-party seller and a platform at a point of transaction. That ability existed for these big players.

We dug in and discovered a way that we could build a system like that using Stripe. And so the way we have made it is that for every release on Metalabel, there is a record agreement where anyone who's listed as having credit on a release can be added from a drop-down, and you set a percentage of money

that will be directed to them. You can also choose the treasury of your group, which is just a pool of money that will just sit there and not go anywhere. Every transaction from that release goes into a private account for just that release, where the money sits on top, and it has all the logic of the split underneath. You can also add in hard costs to be recouped. So in the case of my Dark Forest book, the first $8,000 would go to one account to pay back my printer and my shipper, and then only after that $8,000 was crossed would the split happen. But the money builds up in that transaction.

It will soon be that there is a moment when the release admin will lock the split. Once the split is locked, then the money gets pushed through the split, and all the money populates every member's earnings account. If you're a creator on the platform, you have an earnings page in your personal profile where you see from every release you're a part of, here is your percentage of the split, and here's the money waiting for you. And then you click withdraw, and it just shoots out to your Stripe account.

We opened our doors in March. So it's been like a hundred some days. We've been following this model of just two or three things a week because that whole split system we've been manually running on every project to make sure it works. But it works. Right now, our heavy curation is mostly just covering up our flaws. Sucking in our gut and trying to look good. As of September, we're going to have a moment of being more public about this project. We're going to show people what you can do with it. We're going to explain it for the first time. The application process right now hits you with a big wall that says we're going to reject you. Instead, it will be a very friendly process where people can share something they want to do. The desire is to, with one-on-one outreach, continue to develop really excellent, high-profile, great releases and projects, and there are a lot of those coming. I also want to have weird internet things.

Discussion

ILAN *25:00* We can see on the internet that there's a big turn towards compensating attention. People are paid not by

producing work, but by giving their attention to things. Would you ever think of expanding the micro-payment model of Metalabel to also include readers, and not just writers and contributors?

YANCEY 25:21 I like the idea of making anything collectible. And the idea of making a piece of digital work something that can stand on its own as a single thing to engage with and interact with. I think the hardest thing most creative people and writers of all types struggle with is the distribution and being seen. And I don't think these are good dynamics. But it's very easy to imagine a world in which a release could offer to add referrals to the split. And you could say 10% of the split from this release will be distributed among everyone who refers a sale. And all we would need to do as a platform is to provide unique share codes when someone copies a URL. And it would just incentivize people to share. It would also incentivize spam. But I think that there are interesting ways to think about opening up the split or opening up the contribution.

alternative publishing practices

There's a project in the final stages of build, of a musician whose release has his cover art as a placeholder. And on the release, it says, whoever makes the cover will get 20% of the split of this release. Submit your cover idea here. Those are things that you could publicly publish as a way of potentially creating a different sort of participation. I think if it's cheap enough, if it feels like the artists themselves put it up, people are down for that.

ILAN 26:50 How open is Metalabel to different forms of media?

YANCEY 26:54 It's a broad set of creative categories. Most so far have been zines, art, music, several games, concerts, multiple performances, a lot of things in downtown New York, where we're based. I'm embracing the term new media again. I feel like new media can be made new again.

If I think about the future of Metalabel, I believe physical books and physical magazines, and physical media of all kinds are important. And I celebrate them. But I don't think that that's an audience that can grow hugely from collectors. But I think digital can be a huge space of growth with formats. Creating digital formats that feel legit and make an artist feel legit, and that make a consumer feel willing to pay for them. And that's where I think there's white space and opportunity.

And any creation of viable formats is a net win for the entire creative community because it's just a new vehicle for all of us to express our work.

digital objects

This is where we have this concept of a record. Think of a vinyl album, a record of work that has a cover, a package, and inside it contains a limited number of pieces. And those pieces can include a digital work, a physical work, a talk, or an invitation. And that's exactly what Metalabel is. In The Dark Forest book, you've got the PDF, a physical edition, and you've got an invitation to join a Zoom call with the authors. That was $45. It's allowing you to think beyond the boundaries that the market has created for us and to redefine them.

What: Future of Publishing

MARTA [28:55] Where can you imagine publishing expanding in the next few years? If you could have a say in the future of publishing, what would you say?

YANCEY [29:04] There's never been more words published in a day in history. It's a content bonanza and an economic catastrophe at the same time. I think the future of publishing is incredibly bright. It just requires us to think of it, not just books and physical magazines, or even ad-supported magazines. I think if we think of the individual writer or the small band of writers, we've gone from a world dominated by empires shrinking down to nations, and shrinking down to the 20th century corporations largely shaping the world. I think the 21st century is about small groups of people shaping the world. It keeps getting smaller, what you can punch out of. We're still in this mindset to be legit in publishing. You need to be one of the big four, a big magazine with an office in midtown Manhattan. That's just not it. Fitzcarraldo, is like 10 people. Other Internet, 12 nerds. That's who shapes culture. That's where it's going. People are doing amazing work. The impact of their words is huge. The economics of it are probably pretty good altogether, but it's so diffused. It's so not what we're used to.

Those of us who are operating under the previous set of conditions, how do we resize? How are we re-relevant, or what is still relevant, and what is not relevant? Those are hard questions, but just thinking purely as someone who reads and

writes as naturally as I do anything, I feel like it's never been better. The future is individual voices or voices of small groups of people being incredibly influential in ways that will probably be very problematic in some cases. I think the future is more free form. Once people perfect these systems, like Twitter, Instagram, all these things have been perfected, then you have people looking for how else do I express something. Earlier this year, Tavi Gevinson, star writer of Rookie Magazine, released a zine she made about Taylor Swift that she put out on a standalone website with the print-on demand button. You could click to get a copy, you could download it, and that worked great. It's hard. It's competitive. It's noisy. There's so much. That sucks. But it's also great.

https://www.rookiemag.com/

Discussion

JANEZ [31:36] This metaphor that you use, of the album cover, when you open the album, you have several items inside. This is very interesting, but it's basically a different iteration of the same object. Do you have any good example of other practices where formats are combined in a weird way, keeping in mind the attention span of the average reader, the influence that the mobile phone in our pocket has towards consuming, publishing objects that are not only things that you read, but things that you listen to, things that you watch, and a combination of those things together.

YANCEY [32:13] If you wish to participate in culture,

conjugating your work into visual forms of storytelling is a must. Making it quicker for me, is just making visual forms of expression. This is where memes are really great. There's an internet artist named Molly Soda, who has a very big following. She made a physical folder of 100 photographs from the internet, and then made a zip file that corresponds to those same 100 images, and made an edition of 25 of these releases. Selling that is like an $500 art piece.

https://mollysoda.exposed/

When people do this for lower price amounts, people experiment. These are things that none of us would have been monetizing. They would just be like attachments to emails or a newsletter. HARD ART is a group in London that started with Metalabel. That's led by Brian Eno, Es Devlin, Jeremy Deller, and the founders of Extinction Rebellion. They've been releasing work with us every month. They're gonna begin releasing zip files. Brian Eno will also publish a new book with us, a physical book. Collectors like it.

TOMMASO *35:02* It feels different going to open source publishing using tools that are not connected to a big platform. Geoff Cox was mentioning we should go small, like small publishing, small tech, minor tech compared to big tech. Have you also had this sort of approach in the tools you use for production? We are referring a lot to the distribution part, but then I think there is a lot of work before that, how to produce a publication, because producing a book or a text has a very different expertise than producing a video, an audio piece, a performance, etc. Have you considered the idea of what it means to do open source in the back end? And— maybe this can also be a very technical question — where do you have your servers? Are you hosted somewhere?

YANCEY *35:55* It is important to own your identity. We've seen a lot of examples of platforms going defunct and data being lost, and what felt safe was not. I think homesteading on the internet is advisable, but not everyone has the geek in the group. For a lot of creative people, every one of those steps is the antithesis of everything that they want to do. So it's like: "give me the thing that does the thing", and I find generally people start that way and then, as you get more advanced in your career and you have more of a reputation at stake, you start to look for more of the self-hosted solutions.

Certainly, we rely on a lot of open source libraries in what we do. We first just have to get enough business that we're

default alive to lean into this fully. We will have an open API that people can build on and extend the product. A lot of our data model is something built to be made open source or built to be published as a resource for others, trying to integrate our thinking into how other people are cataloging their work or mapping how their group operates. In the crypto world, there was a lot of discussion around how the primitives of groups moving around the web don't exist yet, and that's a new thing we can create.

It's a bit harder to do this — the Web2 world. For us, the hard part is making a two-sided marketplace and platform. You have to attract a critical mass of people on both sides for it to be worth belonging in. Once you begin to do that, you can grow. Augment that. Maybe there are certain features that are required to make that spark grow enough to where you can survive. We spent the first couple of years thinking a lot about those long-term questions. That's all that crypto is, and in the past year, we're just been more about getting it out there, simplifying it, and not boring people with all of our reasons, just focusing on how to make it feel simple and useful.

As a second step, as a second order, begin to reveal the ways it's also better for you and the affordances it creates. And it can't be that software, and that is a political position, should only be open source, because then no one will make software, and no one will maintain it. You know, maintaining open source is a nightmare. You need what a lot of projects try to do, which is you have a pro-social give back to the commons relationship generally. The bigger you get, the harder that is. One could argue that Facebook's contributions to the world of development have been huge. That comes from big tech, and it is something that we all rely on. Most engineers are interested in those kinds of solutions. They just get blocked by business objectives and say, you know, we can't do that, but I think it's a lot of great impulses and affordances that I hope we can stay open to.

politics

ILAN 38:55 As an academic, we have the DOI, Digital Object Identifier, which is for articles. This has only been delegated to big academic journals. So you are not able to have a digital object identifier for any other type of text or research, or text-based research, without any academic publisher. And now the CERN released a very democratic DOI called Zenodo, which allows you to give a DOI to anything, to a photo, to your license

plates, to a ceramic. What kind of media ecosystem do you imagine when every sort of media instantiation would have its own identifier? So, an identifier means that it will be decentralized. It will not be one single organism or a set of academic publishers that will manage this, but everybody will have access to all kinds of media, photos, a bit like the interplanetary file system, but in a much easier way to operate it.

YANCEY [39:59] There was an interesting case last week of exactly this, where I wished it was there yet, where we had an artist, Shantell Martin, release a font, an open source font as a metal label release. So, like a library, you could download, install. And a musician last week made a zip file of three songs. And within the zip file, he made his liner notes, and he made the liner notes using her font. And he credited her. And he wrote in to say: hey, can I tag her work? How do I reference this?

https://etherport.org/publications/inc/expub_Expert_Session/www.shantellsans.com/

It'd be cool if I were cited as someone using her thing, and I get to give her credit. But I think it could be a very simple citing of work, providing a level of provenance. You can hit a plus sign and start typing a title, and it will auto-complete and suggest what it thinks you're connected to. Making citations very easy, allowing you to publish on your own personal website, and publish all things credited to your decentralized identifier address. Because all decentralized identifiers have cryptographic public and private keys that are invisible to you, but allow things to be locked and unlocked even offline. And so you can use your key and authenticate it's you just through email login. And you could say, publish the catalog of my decentralized identifier on this page. And it should be able to pull that database of exactly what's yours and output it anywhere. That's the dream of the DID structure, and like the open directory and similar data models, an open phone book.

It's always what system wins out and what models work, but even us having this architecture of a folder structure, of a label that has a catalog, and inside, there's a lot of transposing of some other structural information models onto this. So all data is architected that way. Even if another system came up and blockchain proved to have won, we're all being paid in crypto tomorrow. We would be ready for that world. Replacing on-chain identity with a DID is something that we could very easily do.

We wanna plug into something more structural on the

internet, other than just like traffic coming our way. A world of AI-driven Google search results should be terrifying to every independent media producer because it's not gonna give you search results. It's gonna be a verbal answer of scraped data from the most referenced website. And a user might not even get shown any of our pages as an option. How do we make our work and data more a part of the web and not just rely on "I hope someone goes to my server today".

13 Kenneth Goldsmith

4 July 2024, 10:00 AM

Introductions

https://ubu.com/

KENNETH 15:14 I'm Kenneth. I started UbuWeb in 1996 and things have changed a lot since then. Sometimes I find myself speaking like it's 1998. I'm not comfortable with the developments that have happened in digital publishing or let's just call it the digital world. I kind of feel like Instagram ate my utopia. I've kind of dropped out of radical publishing because I've become extraordinarily disillusioned with the turn that the web has taken since the advent of social media, truly the advent of Donald Trump, who ate social media as well.

Then everything got spoiled. So I'm not so sure that I'm the best person to talk to about what's happening now or the future because I've actually withdrawn from circulating works publicly. I've tried to maintain a practice of private publishing now, of unique publishing, of making one-of-a-kind things that, although informed entirely by the digital, are mostly analog in their production because they cannot be usurped, hijacked, or detorned in the worst ways possible that really just ended up happening to everything on the web that I loved. So I'm trying to just make a protected space for myself because I've been doing this for so long. We're coming up on 30 years of UbuWeb, which still functions, but I've lost my passion for the digital pioneering that I was so invested in. I feel sad. I feel lost.

MARTA [17:42] Well, yeah, that's a very interesting position to take, and I think the space of retreat is actually important to understand for our own research because this kind of meeting, as Ilan said before, in our consortium starts from a place of a panic attack or like an understanding that there's something going wrong. Also understanding the symptoms and how we got to this point I think is very valuable to our work. What would say went wrong, or at what point did you feel like this might be a moment to retreat? What was the breaking point for you?

KENNETH [18:51] It was gradual, there were so many breaking points, but I really would pin it to Trump's rise on social media, specifically, which at first was intriguing to see the way he misused the media. At that time, I was on Twitter, and the way he misused Twitter really was modernist inflected. Completely unconscious, Joyce-ian even. I mean, this guy's never read Joyce, but he was doing something that was sort of brilliant. It was everything I'd always hoped that social media could be, even in its perversity. Then I just realized it was the complete opposite of my utopia, obviously politically. Then it got really confused and surveilled: the space of social media became a space of surveillance, not only by the tech companies, but more disturbingly by my neighbors and my fellow citizens. You can't make a move on social media without being surveilled. I also really do think that Zuboff's book really opened my eyes to my naivety. I just realized at a certain point that I got everything wrong. So much of my theorizing was just completely wrong. I missed so much. I was so enthusiastic and, in the 90s, the web was just such a beautiful utopia. It was the world as I really wanted it to be, and it came crashing down. It was crash right around probably 2013, 2014, you know, during Trump's rise.

social media

MARTA [21:06] I mean, I think some people have defined for better or for worse Donald Trump as the greatest poster of our generation in a sense. Maybe not knowingly he fully understood how to game the system of social media.

KENNETH [21:33] He was really good at it. I mean, I don't know if he still is because I would never even look at truth social. In those early days, I mean, it was really frightening to recognize some of my ideas in the worst monster possible. Then

it made me feel like Marinetti or Mussolini. I was like, wait a minute. I got to back off of this. So that was the beginning, the beginning of the end for me.

MARTA [22:12] How did you see that affecting a bit more the legacy media publishing? I mean, not only the election of Donald Trump, but in general, the environment and the focus on content that social media brought?

social media

KENNETH [22:32] Well, social media just ate everything. I don't think anybody goes to UbuWeb anymore. They don't leave Instagram. Everybody's corralled on an app. Apps are just corralling devices that keep you within the confines of where they want you. My sense is that most people really don't use the web anymore. They feel that they have everything they need on social media. Streaming companies, media companies, social media companies have entrapped people. So the notion of the open web, it still exists. Nobody's stopping me. And all these notions of an undemocratic web never actually really came to fruition because actually everybody just stopped using the web. And they managed to just control and capitalize and tame the Web the way that they always wanted to.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

MARTA [23:44] There's an incredible lack of knowledge of what the internet is in my generation, and all we know is platforms. That's quite different from a lot of the early uses of it. We've grown quite blind to the possibilities beyond the platformized web.

KENNETH [24:10] Yeah, there's this term that came up and I really hate it. It's called Creator, because creators create for a platform, specifically catering to that, to monetize or to capitalize. It's concordant with whatever oppressive system happens to be in place that they are playing to. They're playing to a system completely uncritically, because they call themselves a creator. Whereas I had to really think about the difference between a creator and an artist. You could say that many artists are creators for the art world. Many poets are creators for the poetry industry, but that was never interesting to me. The interesting idea of an artist was somebody who went against

whatever prevailing system there was as an act of resistance, as an act of real uncreativity or slash creativity. My critique on creativity was always that creativity was concordant in the way the creator is concordant. If I was to go back to uncreativity today, I would have something really equally stupid to say about creators as I did about creativity to write "creator", "creativity". These are terms I can't stand. How do we get out of this sort of "create", "creative", "creator" space? It's useless because it's monetized. Most artistic production isn't monetized. So, it's stupid and it's usurped. It's taken all of the energy out of radical forms of publishing, practice, and thinking. So it's just not interesting to me. I get it, but it's actually sucked all the air out of the room.

social media

ILAN 26:45 What I hear is that utopias are not made only by nice ideas. Utopias are made also by huge drives of negativity and critique, and I'm thinking if it's not the moment to make negativity nice again, make negativity a force with energizing potential, we live in a country where people around us are toxically positive. When you are critiquing something or you're being negative, say something constructive, or something productive. They're always there to try to redeem or take your negativity and try to construct something out of it that then they can use for monterization. We should find a way to make negativity a powerful driving force in order to think of new formats, new media, new audiences, new content. I'm wondering if there is a space for that. My experience in ex-Yugoslavia is that there is a space to express this, whereas in the United States, you might be extremely marginalized or isolated to feel such discomfort with social media or with creativity.

KENNETH 28:39 Yeah, I just wanted to say, there is plenty of critique and "productive negativity". Look at the Gaza protests, that was really energizing, also the George Floyd protests that we had. There is critique, there is negativity, and there is pushback in America. Just to make a short tangent, my sense of the Gaza protests, let's say the student protests recently in the U.S., is that we're really, it's a displaced anxiety on the second coming of Trump. We're going to need active, angry, negative, critiquing people for the coming regime of Donald Trump, number two, and there's so much anxiety in America about it, as you're saying, that cannot be articulated, because of the culture of positivity. There's this giant repressive force, and I think social media also has a role in this, that's pushing down

any type of domestic critique in America. So then it's getting displaced onto an international stage, the citizens of Gaza. In a way, though, I actually think it's really about the citizens of America, but you're just not allowed to be negative in that way, I suppose. So there's plenty of negativity in America, and plenty of unproductive negativity in America, you know, from the right, also, we have plenty of that shit in America. But that's another space, right? And I don't think it's really what you're referring to. I think you're referring to a cultural space of artistic production and the distribution of production of cultural artifacts. There's just a lot of contradictory forces at work in America right now. I'm encouraged by some of them, and I'm discouraged by much of them as well.

This year has been an escape, I think, from so much turmoil. The stuff that I was talking about goes back to the rise of Trump. My university was the center of the beginning of much of the Gaza conflict in America that was playing out on campus in very confusing and very chaotic ways. I left in December, and I won't go back until next January.

So, this sort of retreat to a place, I'm also offline. This is the only thing I'm doing all year, I haven't looked at my email since December. I will not look again until January, though. I'm loving this so much. I'm feeling like maybe I should just kill my email. So, now I'm somewhere where I'm mute on the language. I'm in the countryside. There's nothing happening here culturally. There's never anything happening here. I'm working on things on paper. I figured this is really the best way just to break from the year I've had, and it's been really nice.

https://www.ubu.com/

I have to also just say, and I don't know how informed you all are of this, but UbuWeb is sort of done. After nearly 30 years, it's not growing anymore. I can talk about the reasons for that, if that's interesting to this group. 30 years of coding and moving information and reposting and sharing and really being in the center of some kind of exchange digitally, I'm not doing that anymore. That's also a huge change for me. I would code UbuWeb five, six hours a night for 30 years, and I'm not doing that anymore. So yeah, here I am. I have six more blissful months. I love this and I feel like the hippies in the 60s that left the city and went to live in communes, and grow their own food. I mean, I get that now. I never thought I'm the most urban person in the world, but I understand why they did that now. I love this.

ILAN [35:10] Yesterday we were talking with another guest, Irene De Craen about subversive publishing. She proposed a new strategy, a new tactic to be subversive, that is — do not publish. We were discussing a lot about this fact, because we are living in a sort of environment in which you are somehow forced to publish, to produce contents, to share contents. Now you're describing a sort of status or situation in which you're abandoning as a sort of tactic or strategy to react to the situation. I'm curious to know your point of view about not publishing anymore, or like mute yourself as a tactic. I'm also wondering if, in the back of your mind, this is a sort of temporary moment, or if you are considering the abandoning thing as a longer strategy, as Bifo also proposed.

KENNETH [36:22] Wow, I like that idea of not publishing, but then I'm 63 years old. I've published 35 books. I publish so much. I published UbuWeb, which is hundreds of thousands of things. I think it's very different for younger people. Most people are younger than I am at this point. I can withdraw, right? I've done enough. It doesn't matter to me if I publish a 36th or a 37th or a 38th book. I mean, it really doesn't matter. Younger people have to publish. I think that's the imperative of publishing. To get your tenure, even for your own status, even for your own sort of self-worth, your trajectory. We all leave a beautiful cultural trail behind us of our cultural production. That's beautiful, that's the most beautiful narrative I think in my life is the trail of cultural production. But I've had 40 years to make that trail.

I remember the first time I published a book, I think it was 1991 or something like that. I remember saying to Cheryl, my wife, if I never do anything else, I got this fucking book. This is amazing, right? I remember that feeling and I think publishing is, to me, a trace. It's a sense of permanence, right? Particularly when I was really in the digital flow, I began to question, why publish? There's a flow, but if you don't publish, then it's just all flow and it just flows and it's meaningless. I always thought of them in the height of digital publishing around 2010. I thought, why should I still publish books? But then by publishing a book, I felt it was a way of stopping the flow, like putting a rock in the middle of a stream. Making a statement. It somehow made sense of that chaos. It was a dialectical constellation. That's where I found Benjamin to be useful. A dialectical constellation that came together, even if to

traditional publishing practices

temporarily stop the flow and to try to make sense around it. I always thought that was the reason to continue to publish books.

printed objects

I remember somebody had asked John Cage what's gonna happen to his reputation after he would die? And Cage, who was really publishing very traditionally, said, well, there's so much of me around that it'll really be hard to get rid of me. You think about the lifespan of physical books. I mean, they don't get thrown out. I mean, maybe they get burned once in a while, but they get circulated. They have these like really, really long pun intended shelf life. So if I stopped, if I withdrew now, there's so fucking much of me out there that I really don't have to worry about legacy in that way. Even in a small press, Hillary Clinton emails book that I did with Nero. We didn't do too many of them, but I guarantee you, all of them that we did probably are still in existence somewhere. They're beautiful, they're substantial, they're interesting, and they might have some kind of resale value in the world anyway. So that's never gonna disappear.

So if I just continue to keep publishing, then it's just ego-driven, right? I'm hoping for my bestseller now. I'm hoping I'm going to win the Man Booker Prize, this kind of shit. I mean, that would be the only reason. I do think it's very pathetic. I see friends of mine that are older than me, let's say, language poets who are 10–15 years older than me, and they're frantically publishing, and nobody's going to read them, and they're never going to win those prizes. I just see that as real acts of desperation. They're good, they did important work. They're still making good work. It might not be as relevant. And you do have to think about relevancy as well. So, I struggle with that. You know, as an artist, I have a healthy ego, right? Like all artists do. But, you know, it's sort of diminishing returns for me at this point.

Discussion

ILAN [42:02] One of the things we learn from you is that we don't care if we are read — we don't care if people are reading us. I mean, readership is just a statistical mass of people that needs to be quantified. Every author is frustrated about the amount of

books being sold. The artists are frustrated, asking how many people came to their opening, how many reviews did they get, how many sales, et cetera. And we learn from you is that thinkership is what matters, not readership. So, people that you can think with, right? So, a book is just a signal to a community of thinkers.

politics

KENNETH [42:36] Yeah, yeah, it's true, and, you know, I've never seen the giant, giant, big, world's biggest book that you published with JBE. I have never seen it, but I'm so impacted by the thinkership of that work. Your books are propulsive in thinking, but they're also extraordinary in their physical presence. So that was the kind of thing that we were thinking around 2010 was that we could stop publishing physical objects, but that never really happened. I noticed also around 2010, when everybody was talking about digital publishing, that actual publishing got so much more beautiful. Magazines, which were just shitty ones, became books, and they also got really expensive because nobody was buying them. Right, these are all regular magazines. They still make them. If you go into a magazine store in New York now, particularly fashion magazines, they're not like Vogue or Elle. Then now they're like FUORI!!!. What you guys did with the Francesco Urbano Ragazzi's every fucking fashion magazine looks like FUORI!!! now, which I have sitting on my table, as, again like it's just sitting here because Francesco Urbano Ragazzi brought me a copy and it's just the most beautiful object. It's the most beautiful thing. Oh, you can say, I republished every issue of the 70s gay magazine from Italy. I was just with those guys in Venice and they showed me those incredible sleek, sequined jackets with the cover of FUORI!!!. There's this sort of funny play I think that Ilan is getting at between the thinkership and the physical object. I would not want to live, Ilan, without your physical objects, even though they are extraordinarily propulsive.

Who: Community of Publishing

MARTA [50:12] Something that I would be interested in hearing from you and also from your space of retreat, do you, first of all, see yourself still part of a community of writers, thinkers? And do you see, if so, the people around you, your peers, engaging in

similar practices of retreat, of refusal? How do you feel in your environment?

KENNETH [50:57] With the rise of populism, it really does feel like the 1930s again, and so many of the people that were proponents of radical ideas of publishing, literature, and web have been banished and de-platformed. The avant-garde, sometime around the twenties, became villainized. Again, it's just a repeat of what happened in America in the 1930s, in a time where fascism rose and economies collapsed, that art had to have an element of utility to it. So you've got social realism in America, and anybody that was affiliated in the 1920s with what was called ultramodernism, I'm thinking particularly of a group of composers, found themselves banished, de-platformed out of work, right? It's the same thing now. So I find my community marginalized, de-platformed, it doesn't have a voice. What felt really cohesive back in around 2010 really feels completely shattered now. All the people are doing great work. We continue to do our work, but it has very little receptivity.

community

MARTA [53:05] What about the community of readers then? The rise of populism or social media, how has that affected readership and the extent to which you can connect to it maybe in a more direct way?

KENNETH [53:26] It goes back to that sort of community surveillance, Stasi mentality. So people become very afraid to speak. There's so much fear out there because it's violent, and there's so much violence. People are afraid to say the wrong thing. I kind of feel like the retreat has also been sort of a space of protection for a lot of people. I mean, getting off social media because there's no winning against the tide of populism. So people don't speak anymore because what is the point? You can never win. These ideas that we're working with of the avant garde, of experimental things are marginal to begin with, right? There was a community at some point that felt cohesive enough before it was drowned out by people just saying, this is weird, this is wrong. So I think there's a tremendous amount of fear, a sort of fear of doxing, fear of physical violence. I mean, I've certainly had death threats because of my work on me. Everybody has death threats. Everybody's been canceled, you know? But that's not fun. We didn't go into making radical publishing, radical ideas to receive hate, but I'm learning that avant garde or radical ideas are really truly hated. But that's the

way it's been. That's the way it's always been, and there are certain windows that open up by speaking about fear in this and silencing and people being afraid to voice radical ideas because they're considered wrong now.

MARTA *56:05* Yeah, there's this interesting tension between a lot of the movement connected to George Floyd, Black Lives Matter. There was the idea that silence is violence. If you would not speak up, then you would be considered to engage in a sort of violence, but then, of course, too much noise, and then you would be blocking out the important information. Either way, you were still participating in this media frenzy. So, I mean, there's also the metaphor of the dark forest coming from the Liu Cixin trilogy that is sort of saying, that maybe the retreat, the silence is a tactic for survival. I think this is also something that Geert Lovink also talks about in some of his work of these practices of hiding and how maybe that's where the new radical forms of activism can lay, but of course, you can start to think if everyone is silent, then what do you do?

https://networkcultures.org/geert/2022/05/05/just-out-stuck-on-the-platform-reclaiming-the-internet-by-geert-lovink/

KENNETH *57:20* I mean, the notion of silence is violence, it was only one type of discourse that was allowed to be spoken anyway, as you're saying, a discourse of noise was not permitted. A discourse of nonsense was not permitted. A discourse of perversity was not permitted. This was a totally contradictory notion. There is only one type of voice that's allowed to be expressed. I find that kind of repression to be fascistic in its own way. So, it's become complicated. There's an English word that's called woodshedding. Sometimes, guitarists in particular, would just drop out for a really long time to work on new techniques and to just go into the woodshed and disappear for a while and come out with some other thing. So I think that this notion of disappearance can be really productive and also really radical, but also, there's just so much fucking noise. I mean, everybody now has to be so public all the time. What is that? Why do we have to be so public?

I'm questioning that. I didn't question it for a long time. I really loved being public. I'm a New Yorker. We're kind of public people, and we're loud. In terms of politeness and non-negativity, like there's a certain moment in America where people became extraordinarily polite and non-confrontational because they were afraid of getting shot because of the gun violence in that country. Then also, retreat has the sense of right-wing lunatics that retreat to Idaho and create white

supremacist states of protectionism. It's the other side, again, of that hippie commune. So all of these things are so loaded and so problematic. I say, I want to retreat. I used to grow a very big beard, and then I realized that was co-opted maybe by right-wing also. Like January 6, all these guys had like giant crazy beards, and what do you do? How do you move? How do you survive? What move is the right move to do? Ethically, morally, and also for your own sanity. It's so hard. I'm so glad I'm not 30 years old right now, because I can imagine how hard that path is for people. It's insane.

Discussion

ILAN *1:01:00* You are the person with which we should talk about writing. I would maybe turn the thing and talk about reading. Maybe it's the moment in which instead of publishing, and writing, even in a creative way, is the moment in which we should rethink about reading. Maybe we are not able to read anymore. So I'm curious to know your point of view about reading, how reading changed in the last decades, and how this new way of reading is also our way of sharing, publishing, producing contents?

KENNETH *1:01:45* My book called Wasting Time on the Internet was a reaction to everybody saying how horrible the internet was. I was like, no, and again, I got this so wrong. I framed it as something being really good. One of the things that I said was that we're actually reading and writing much more than we ever have. I think that's still true. People spending all day on their phones, they're looking at images on Instagram, but they're also reading comments, and they're also writing comments, and that sort of short form is a form of reading, and it is a form of writing. I'm not sure it's any better or any worse than long forms of writing. I think in that book, I traced this trajectory of the compression of language that begins with the telegraph and goes through the newspaper headline and the Times Square zip, and this sort of forms of compression down to 256 characters, or maybe it was 140 characters originally, was 140 characters on Twitter, which was the ultimate sort of form of compression, which turned language into sort of a desktop icon, something quick and readable. This

is also where I brought back into the idea the notion of visual poetry as compressed icons that could be read instantly so that you didn't need a sonata or something like that, a stanza, let's say. You just needed a visual word that was done well, which is something advertising has already done, where it all dovetailed with pop and iconicity. I still believe all those things to be true. I do think that people are reading and writing, and then that's my sense. It's OK. I think it's going to survive. You never see an image unaccompanied by, without text around it. Maybe if you're watching a movie without subtitles you'll sort of get some pure image. But even if you go to a museum, there's always a wall label next to it. There's always text. In the newspaper or on the newspaper, there's a caption. There's a photograph. There's a caption. And so I kind of feel like language as a vehicle itself is pretty safe.

I remember in the 80s, and I've maybe talked about this in Uncreative Writing, there was a show that was held at the Whitney that was called Image World. It was at the time of television, which just looked like it was going to eat static images. It was going to eat print culture completely and be moving. You had an artistic movement in New York that was called the Pictures Generation. It really addressed that moment in which we became an image world rather than a textual world, but what that didn't take into account was just around the corner was computing, which is all linguistically based. For example, again, we've all received a JPEG in the email that didn't render as an image but just rendered as miles and miles of code, and that code is just all alphanumeric language. So really, all of our digital world is comprised entirely of language. So we're good for language. I think we're OK on language.

https://archive.org/details/imageworldartmed0000unse/page/n1/mode/2up

Now, the second part of that is maybe my retreat. I've just been spending this year reading like mad because I'm offline. I always read a lot, but this year, I've actually had the time and the space to dig and to read extraordinarily deeply. I read on a Kobo because I can't, in Croatia, I'm not going to get too many English books. I like the Kobo. I love the Kobo, and Marcell Mars runs Memory of the World and LibGen and everything's available. So that's fun. I'm doing a lot of reading this year.

ILAN 1:06:29 I remember when you were in Athens, you spoke about this kind of snowfall of text. You said that most of the text is made for machines or for systems to be read by systems. I consider you still like one of the first quantitative

writers, one of the writers that said early on that all text is about quantity. The new capacity of artists and writers is to have to find the tools to navigate this kind of overload of information or abundance of information and find the tools to do this. I'm wondering now, what is your take on this? Because now we have the tools to do that. Now we can parse 30 petabytes of comics and understand what humanity thinks about speed throughout the 20th century and on and in different localities and geographies. Now we have the tools to do this. Do you imagine new artistic practices coming out of it? Would you like to be involved in these kind of things? Or are you like, OK, I got the principle of it, and I'm not so curious about the forms this will produce or something.

KENNETH [1:08:01] Well, I see so little good stuff. I think my experiences with AI have been really bad. To me, AI has ended up reifying whatever it is we know. I learned this a long time ago when I had a meeting with some pioneering AI people, and they were trying to make a machine write poetry, and they were making this incredible neural network produce things that looked like Tennyson. They were making early 19th century poetry using this machine. Why can't you make it do something perverse and something strange? They were trying to wrangle, to squeeze money out of it. The only way that money could be made from some kind of poetry is if it actually looked like poetry. Then people would want to buy that machine because it was capable of writing poetry. I said, well, what are you feeding it? The neural network was being fed only really classic literature, which I actually happen to love. I like Tennyson, don't have any problems with it, but they weren't feeding it Gertrude Stein, or Cantos.

politics

So their taste was wrong, so it was just reifying some sort of stupid traditional notions of literature. They just didn't have the imagination or the taste, or actually I want to call it perversity, to feed the machine stuff that would break it, because they couldn't afford to break it. They needed to monetize it. Artists have always been the best, really good at breaking things rather than trying to make something stable. Again, it goes back to the W. H. Auden quote that says poetry makes nothing happen, Its beauty is its lack of utility. So when you try to harness art to become useful, you betray its base quality. Its quality is to be useless. Poetry makes nothing happen.That's why it's beautiful in a culture where we're so geared up toward productivity to

make a space where nothing happens. That sounds really radical to me, and that's the way I read Auden. It's probably the wrong way to read it, but I really am inspired by that quote.

I did work with my students once on Midjourney and we asked it to render just a regular pencil, a yellow, number two pencil, so the most basic pencil, and Midjourney could not do it. It kept putting like a finger on the end of the eraser. It couldn't make a pencil, which is OK, it's cute, but it's already cliche. The surrealism of the broken, the hands on AI. If I have to go into a gallery and see another hand with six fingers on it, I can't. To me, it was just a sort of failure. But if I asked it to make an image of an orangutan on the moon playing golf, it was really perfect at that. So it couldn't be so stupid as to make something normal, but it could be so stupid as to make something magical or surreal or incredible. So, I'm interested in the banality, and to me, all of this shit is incapable of doing what I'm interested in. I also think that uncreativity or perversity of any kind of avant garde or revolutionary ideas artistically are not being programmed into those machines. So they're just reifying what else is there, not to mention racial and sexual prejudices that are already built in. So it's just a reifying machine. I'm not so happy about it.

What: Future of Publishing

MARTA [1:13:14] What is the future of publishing? It's a question that we've also not been maybe so happy with or that we've had our pushbacks on. I guess if you could have a say in where publishing goes, what would you say? Or do you see a future in publishing? What are your thoughts?

KENNETH [1:13:56] Publishing will continue. Look, it's important to make these markers. You're sitting behind a shelf full of books, those are not going away, right? But your Instagram posts are all going away. So, that kind of thing, even in a symbolic way, is really important. There's something durational about these artifacts that we're creating in paper artifacts. So I think it's important to keep going, particularly the kind of work that Nero and our fellow types of publishers, alternative publishers like Nero are doing. Everybody's writing books on these incredible machines that are constantly crashing

and glitching, and yet when you go to the airport and try to buy a book, there's no evidence of that digital trace in any of those books there. There's no books that contain an actual glitch, right? So to me, that's really false. Everybody's pretending.

There was a beautiful essay, and I'm sure many of you have read it, that was published on a listserv million years ago by a guy called Matthew Fuller. The title is "It looks like you're writing a letter: Microsoft Word". When you're actually on Microsoft Word, you're not writing a letter. You're enacting so much, but there's so much denial that we're actually not writing on a typewriter. There's no acknowledgement in mainstream publishing at all of the technology behind it. To me, this is this great motion of sense of denial.

https://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0009/msg00040.html

So, I'm not publishing UbuWeb anymore. That's done. It's useless, really. I think it's dumb. Although I just have to say one other thing. There was a moment in which I thought, why am I continuing to do UbuWeb when we have YouTube, right? Because a lot of stuff from UbuWeb was just being taken and thrown up on YouTube. I was seeing nice stuff on YouTube. Now, with everything else, I realize that I hate YouTube because all it is is ads now. I hate it. I won't use it. UbuWeb doesn't serve ads. You can actually watch a situationist film uninterrupted, so now I'm really realizing how precious that kind of thing is. So I keep reacting over the years to different technological changes.

Sometimes it feels like I'm really wrong, and why am I doing this? Then the culture and the environment changes, and I'm like, oh, yeah, I was right. Then something else will happen where that changes again. So I just think that a vision like Nero is so beautiful. I just think that the vision of, I'm just going to specifically say Nero because I know Nero and you're there, but I mean it for anything else. Follow your vision. Your vision is right. Your vision is good. It's always been good. It's always been right. Keep doing what you're doing. It's so important that you do what you do. There are going to be times when it looks like, what the fuck, why are we still doing this? And having been publishing for 30 years on the digital platform through the beginning of the internet to what it is now, I'm really glad I stuck exactly with what I started doing. It was right. My impulse was right. It was good. It's been a journey and the journey is not over. At the end of the day, you have to just keep doing what you're doing, and don't even question it. Because if

you question it, it's going to end. That's what they really want, and they win. Just keep doing what you're doing. You're doing beautiful, beautiful vision.

TOMMASO 1:19:26 I actually want to just comment on what you just said. We started with a lot of negativity and we are concluding with a lot of positivity. I also feel sad when you say Ubuweb stopped. I can also understand where it comes from. So maybe the question is, why?

sustainability of workflows

I will try to apply the same positivity that you said before. We should actually keep on going with everything we are doing. I think there is one word that has come up a lot during all our discussion. It has to do with the sustainability of things. The proposal of federating, that the internet can also be this place in which work and labor can be shared, and things can be connected in a different way than platform is trying to convince us that they are. Have you ever had any thought about this idea of Federation of Networks?

https://mastodon.social/explore

It has to do with alternative social media. Something from 2010s and on, but then developed to Mastodon. It is based on a technology that is called Federated Network. Basically, you can install the server on your own computer and run an instance. Then what you publish in that instance is shared with all the other instances around the world. So, it's an internet within the internet. It's like a recursive internet. But then in case of Mastodon and other platforms, they use a specific protocol that is called ActivityPub. It's an open-source protocol that is actually working very well, to the extent that Zuckerberg decided to use it for Threads. I think the concept of Threadverse, apart from the specific technological object, it's something that can also be taken as a theoretical object. We could try to think about how to shape the internet from a big tech to a minor tech. Our own computer or small computer at home can be a server, a place where we archive, but at the same time we share with others. I have the feeling that UbuWeb is an immensely valuable archive for people who don't want to go on Youtube. I think there is a lot of value in creating islands, not isolated, but interconnected ones.

KENNETH 1:22:27 I remember I went to Cuba 15 years ago. There was a sneaker network, where I brought a hard drive full of things from UbuWeb, and they copied it. There were several thousand films, it was copied and then passed around, because they had absolutely no resources there. Then Marcel Mars is

working on what he's calling Ubu in a Cave. So, Ubu's not that big, it's got 5,000, 6,000 films on it, but it's all compressed media. The whole site is probably two terabytes at most, the whole site. So Marcel's going to make it so that you can download this and have all of UbuWeb with all its functionality just on a hard drive. I think what you're talking about is kind of the next step. People are actually becoming islands and kind of getting off of centrally controlled networks and becoming their own servers.

sustainability of workflows

So I guess that's nice, because it's been a real shit show for 30 years, moving UbuWeb, being chased from one server to another because we're doing everything pirate. It's been a real hassle. And if years ago we could have been federated, is that what you're calling it, a federated site, then we would have saved ourselves a lot. I would have saved myself a lot of trouble.

UbuWeb, by the way, I want to say it's never going away. Believe me. People like Marcel Mars and Dušan and all of our friends out there, Peter Sund and all of these people are making sure that UbuWeb never disappears. It's just, right now, it can't be added to, but that was a price we had to pay for independence and longevity. I had to choose between sort of continuing to update, continuing to expand. At this point, again, there's more shit on UbuWeb than anybody can ever watch in the next 10 lifetimes. Do you know the Criterion channel? You know what this is, Criterion Films? They have, at any given time, about 2,500 films. UbuWeb has over 6,000 films, it's so enormous that it's OK.

It could get bigger, but it doesn't actually, it's kind of the same way I'm just feeling about my own publishing. It's pretty good. I did a lot. Do I really need to do another few books? Do I really need to put up another 1,000 films on UbuWeb? I mean, why, at this point? So anyway, I do love this idea of federation. Wish it had been around in 1996.

14 Dušan Barok

4 July 2024, 12:00 PM

Introductions

DUŠAN 07:40 To briefly introduce my background: I studied Information Technologies in Bratislava, Slovakia, where I grew up. Parallel to my studies, I was involved in the local non-profit culture scene, mostly between art and technology. In the late 90s, I started a small cultural magazine, but we soon lost the funding needed for print runs. A friend introduced me to HTML and I realised that it could be a better solution than paper because, at that time, people already had access to the web. That's how I discovered web publishing. We redesigned our first website, which was called Koridor, every few months, exploring different ways it could be organised and designed. At the time, we called it a "portal". The idea emerged to set up a website that would document our work, which grew into Monoskop, two or three years after Wikipedia arrived. Suddenly, there was software that allowed people to put things online without understanding programming. This was before content management systems like WordPress existed. The MediaWiki installation we set up is still there and operating. It has grown into a huge, lively, multilingual wiki for arts and studies.

digital objects

references

https://monoskop.org/Monoskop

tools

https://www.wikipedia.org/

In the early 2010s, I did my Master's in Rotterdam at the Piet Zwart Institute, a program which is now called XPUB but at the time was called Networked Media. It was an eye-opener, especially in terms of using free software and an interventionist

https://www.pzwart.nl/experimental-publishing/

tools

way of working with technology, and tools that built things. It involved writing HTML files in the text editor, using Terminal and doing prototyping, which greatly influenced my work ahead.

Why: Politics of P●●lishing

CAROLINA [17:08] We tend to see archives as frozen in time, a collection of things that are stored in a dark room to be looked at or, at most, touched with gloves. How do you see new ways of publishing as fostering archives as living entities? Can we publish living archives?

printed objects

digital objects

DUŠAN [18:24] In a way, print is archiving of the digital, while the digital is constantly changing. Oftentimes it disappears, or only remains in the web archive. However, even with live websites, things get reformatted, designs, content and embedded media change. So, in digital publishing, unlike in print, you never really have a final version. This is also how print publishing operates, working with the PDF as an intermediary between content production and the print.

One can see how the environment and the ways of navigating it changed over the years — I would say that in the 2010s, we lived through the era of social media, which was sucking increasing amounts of attention. We eventually stopped clicking on those links and ended up scrolling. The scroll silos have locked us in, and the experience of the web has essentially shrunk to a handful of websites, with everything else remaining invisible or being subsumed into the platforms. Today, it's even worse with AI. We were expected to use our critical faculties to

social media

filter out relevant social media posts and search results, but AI chatbots give us only one answer, which, by the way, is likely wrong and unsourced.

governance and ownership

The question for digital publishing and web publishing is how to operate in this context, which is very different from what the web was 10 years ago. The experimental artistic approach would be, for example, to develop our own chatbots, train our own AI tools and figure out how to work with AI in a sustainable way that doesn't burn the planet and credits the sources. One would not build a general knowledge AI, but a focused, topical AI. If artists build these tools, they will treat what they do as a data set for training bots. In classical pre-publishing, this would be the type of thinking that goes into creating anthologies, or where we collect different sources and bring them together under a thematic umbrella. Maybe it's interesting to think about publishing today as creating and producing content-based datasets that can train AI to serve different purposes and different audiences while being aware of what's happening with this Silicon Valley approach, and how to do publishing sustainably.

How: Infrastructures of Publishing

CAROLINA [25:43] In the Netherlands, some museums already use AI to make archives more accessible, reducing the threshold of archival knowledge and opening it up to people who do not yet know how to search from a specific archival studies perspective. One can just ask the archive for data the way you'd ask a chatbot. It's interesting to think of these technologies serving a more cultural purpose. Building on this notion of cultural and public value, I wonder, how do look at the infrastructures for linked open data? How can we create stronger networks between repositories?

digital objects

sustainability of workflows

DUŠAN [26:50] I was never very good at linked open data. Now, when people look at shadow libraries, they say that really good work has been done to make these things available. On the other hand, we end up feeding ChatGPT and similar companies that get a lot of value out of this free labour. This is an interesting argument to think about not just in terms of shadow libraries, but in terms of everything that is published online.

What can we do about it? Monoskop consists of a lot of pages and files but metadata is not as standardised as Wikidata. It has a classic digital library, and there is always some kind of metadata, but it's meant for a full-text search. I never thought it would get this big. At the size it is now, one can find anything with a full-text search, but the Monoskop dataset is useless for training bots because there's no structured data. It's a collage of different texts, images and PDFs. It may have been a lazy approach but at the moment it looks counterproductive to what's happening on the web, how content is being sucked up by AI. At the same time, I think we should build datasets. There is a way to think about it without the grand-scale vision that it has to be an all-knowing machine.

I will give you an example of a small projec, which was part of Monoskop: an anthology of articles about shadow libraries. It is based on the Monoskop wiki section on shadow libraries, which has a lot of articles. I took those articles, converted them to Markdown, and put them in a directory. Then I ran the TF-IDF algorithm, which identifies words or phrases that are specific to a text. For example, if you click on Infrapolitics, it will give you Nanna Thylstrup's text. For text or corpus analysis, it's one of the most basic algorithms, but it's very powerful. You can twist or tweak the algorithm in whatever way you find interesting. When I made this project, I used a corpus analysis tool as its main interface. But if I would do it again today, it would probably end up looking like a chatbot.

https://monoskop.org/reader/index.php

https://monoskop.org/reader/index.php?word=infrapolitics&text=

refernces

Who: Community of Publishing

CAROLINA *35:44* New, non-linear structures, like linking and tagging stimulate new ways of reading and cultivate new readership communities. But they also create new dependencies. For instance, wikis are very labor intensive, counting on the community of readers to contribute and maintain it. How can you maintain Monoskop long-term? What is your community?

governance and ownership

DUŠAN *36:43* We have been able to maintain Monoskop for so long because we run our own infrastructure. Since 2008, we have our own computer server. We don't even have a rack. It's not a virtual machine, it's a real piece of metal, sitting in a small server house in Prague. It runs Monoskop and almost 100 other

domains, platforms and websites, and we are two admins. I'm not very good with server administration, but I've been learning it for many years, so by now I know how to set up an email account or a domain. Operating botht the hardware and the software is important, because we keep total control over the environment that makes these websites available to the public. If Monoskop were on a commercial provider, they would cut us off sooner or later.

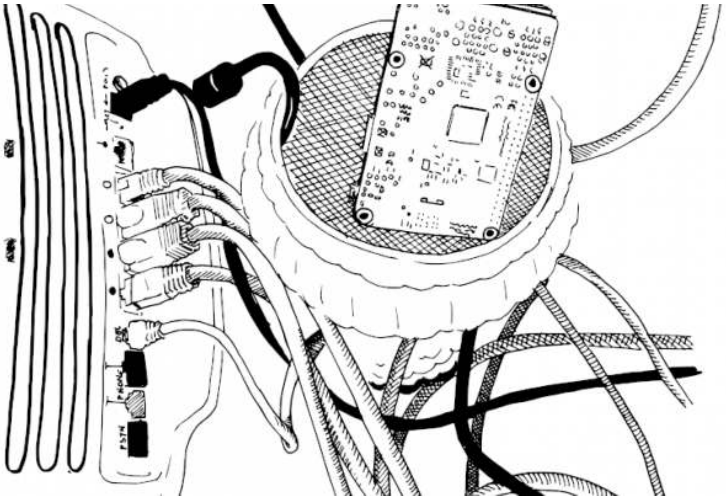
business models

The legal entity behind the server is an NGO that ran a festival for many years. It used to run partly on grants when we did events. Now our main source of income is donations, and we have one or two websites for larger cultural initiatives that we charge for. We've been able to run it this way for 17 years.

https://www.monoskop.org/Community_servers

community

In terms of traffic and security, we've had some attacks, and it requires work on our part. It's not easy to run a server but it's possible: there are so many community servers out there and some of them are run by artists. Many communities have their own infrastructure, but they are often overlooked, invisible and considered "too geeky". These marginal practices are crucial for working and experimenting with the web over the long term.



CAROLINA [42:30] We only see infrastructure when it's broken or when there's a problem, because infrastructure is supposed to be seamless and practically invisible. We notice the tap when the water stops running. But that doesn't mean the tap is any less important when it works well. This might be a good time to pass on the mic to the rest of the table. Does anyone have any questions?

LORENZO [42:57] I would like to know more about the editorial process behind Monoskop. The wiki is open to everyone, but I'm curious to know how you collaborate, and how the editorial process and workflow is structured.

DUŠAN [43:33] We never had a clear definition of what we were doing. It's not clear if it's a publishing project, documentation, or an artwork. No one knows what Monoskop is. If anything, it was socially determined from the beginning. It started in a physical space, a media lab called Burundi in Bratislava in 2004, and the first users were members of the place. If any of these people created an account on this Wiki, they were likely to contribute something relevant, whether that was changing information in an article, adding contextual information, uploading a missing file, or creating new articles.

I look at the recent changes almost every day to see what's happening, but very rarely do I have to delete anything. Sometimes I email authors but usually they contribute to Monoskop mostly through social links. I almost always work with a few people who know the subject, like sound art or federated networks, much better than I do. For the sound art section, I've worked with two others from the start. For the section on federated networks, I talked to people involved in federated networking from the start and asked what should be there. I have worked with Ilan Manouach on the conceptual comics section, being mostly a technical help. He could do nearly everything by himself.

ILAN [49:11] When I started an archive of comics, I discovered Anna's Archive, a huge repository containing 5% of the books that have been printed by humanity, LibGen, and Sci-Hub, and Anna's Archive. As a researcher, it's quicker for me to go get papers on Sci-Hub and books on LibGen than go through my university's library access, which is antiquated. I need to ask for

permission and then the book comes two weeks later. Piracy works better than any of the alternatives.

Is it enought today, in 2024, to put media online, or should we try to find new ways to deal with distribution and dissemination of knowledge? What are the next steps? How do you distill knowledge today in ways that are both democratic and with the same ethical principles that Monoskop started with?

DUŠAN *49:21* It's true that Monoskop Log in particular started with our discovery of Russian shadow libraries in the late 2000s, where we found media theory books that we heard about, but never had access to. It was exciting to make things public. By 2008 or 2009, Gigapedia had hundreds of thousands of books, and it made sense to copy some of those files into a more thematic repository. Most content on Monoskop was copied, an assembled context within the web that has always been huge. This has not changed. Acts of filtering, selecting, highlighting and re-contextualising make the difference, also if the repository is treated as a data set for training neural nets.

LORENZO *54:08* I'm curious to know about your relationship with publishers. What's your take on hosting books or PDFs of other publishers? Do you have a collaboration, silent communication with them or legal problems?

https://monoskop.org/MaMa

DUŠAN *54:49* That's a big question! For example, the multimedia institute — MaMa — in Zagreb been around for many years. They do amazing things with the public. Hardt and Negri published a theory book with them in Croatian in 2003. They find books that are in English and, a few months later, publish them in translation. In the 2010s, I visited MaMa and found out they like Monoskop. They decided that they would share all their books with us. Each time there was something new, they would send me a PDF and their Monoskop page became a large MaMa library. They are also open about it: one can always buy the book or download it from Monoskop. They don't sell PDFs, only the print copies. It turned out that free digital distribution helps print sales, because the more people read the books, the more they're discussed. If you're a researcher and you want to reference or find something, you need a PDF. But if you want to read the book cover to cover, print is better. That's how it will always be.

digital objects

business models

digital objects

printed objects

Most authors of books that appear on Monoskop are aligned

with the copyleft, and they are generally happy that more people can access their work. Sometimes, publishers don't like a certain book to be there, in which case we delete the files. Of course, these books are in other libraries — maybe they don't know about it or maybe they do. It's also not like everyone searches for a book online before they buy it. People look for books online because they're mostly researchers and they need to find something quickly. I don't think selling ePubs helps that much.

TOMMASO 1:00:13 The Internet Archive was forced to remove half a million books published a big corporate publisher from their archive because of a lawsuit in the US. In Italy, some of the shadow libraries are banned. One cannot access Anna's Archive, Library Genesis and Sci-Hub, unless with a VPN. I live in the Netherlands and the same is happening here. These are tragedies in our field of work. Have you ever encountered these kinds of issues and, if you did, how did you deal with them?

DUŠAN 1:02:34 Publishing is a very broad term, even when it comes to books. Monoskop is not a site where you would find blockbuster books that were made as consumer products, because they are not relevant to our project. You can probably find those on the Internet Archive, which may be why it triggered commercial publishers to take action. Then there's academic publishing, probably publicly funded, and other kinds of publishing, sustained by publishers not connected to universities or academia. Sci-Hub mostly consists of publicly funded content coming from researchers at universities. I think it's ethically wrong what's happened to the whole academic publishing field, that it's ended up with five big publishers who own all the journals. University libraries have to cut off access to a lot of these journals, or whole packages of journals, because they simply can't afford it. What Sci-Hub does is a necessity today for researchers worldwide to survive, otherwise, the life of an academic is very limited, even with access to university libraries. But with other publishers who are not blockbusters and who are not academic, it's mostly about the revenue. It's case by case. If the book is good, the free digital distribution does help sales. There are examples like Alessandro Ludovico's books that are openly access. I think his first book, "Post-Digital Print", went through three or four printings, and the book was launched on the Monoskop Log. On the day of the launch, they gave me a USB stick, I put it on Monoskop Log

https://www.sci-hub.se/

governance and ownership

https://monoskop.org/images/a/a6/Ludovico%2C_Alessandro_-_Post-Digital_Print._The_Mutation_of_Publishing_Since_1894.pdf

and that was the first day the book was published. He did the same with new books with MIT Press, it's open access, and I think it does help the sales. So if the book is not good and it appears online, people might see that it's just not good and they will not buy it, but it's really hard to talk about in general. I would say that I totally support all publishers and I don't do it to hurt them, I do it to support them and to give visibility and access to their work because maybe they can't do it, even if they would want to, which was also a case I heard many times.

JANEZ 1:08:04 It looks like if you're on Monoskop or a shadow library, it means that the book deserves attention, so it can be a way to give value to a publication.

DUŠAN 1:08:18 People sometimes go "bingo!" when they find their books showing up on the Monoskop Log.

ILAN 1:08:53 Dušan, you brought up open-access publishing. As an academic, I see there's a new ideology evolving around it. We tried to publish a book with De Gruyter, which is an important academic publisher, and they asked for 10,000 euros for open-access. It's a new business model. Why do I have to fundraise as a researcher?

DUŠAN 1:09:25 They ask you for this amount, because they can afford it. If you work with a normal, small, or medium-size publisher, they would say "We can talk about open access", but they would never ask you for 10,000 euros.

ILAN 1:09:49 Exactly. I would like to contrast open access and piracy again. What is the new term for piracy? I thought it was an interesting way to remain in the system, but I'm more interested in things outside of the system with unsolicited networks of distribution. It doesn't have to be a professional quest or something you have to pay, ask your university to find money to open access and I'm not accessing anything. I use proprietary things and then I put it on piracy. I send links to everyone. I provide access to SCDB, I just give it to every researcher who asks for it. I'm wondering if you see this tension also in Monoskop. It can be co-opted by saying it's very important. For me, my ethics are: no, you should refuse interpretation. To say that you are involved in piracy, you are not involved with open access. Whatever they put away, you'll take whatever you find interesting and put it on your website without any open access.

DUŠAN 1:11:18 There is a language that has developed around

open access, with colours: gold, yellow, green, etc. My experience with publishing in the Netherlands: I was at the university there and then we managed to publish two articles in journals which are not open-access. But the Netherlands already had a program at the time — this was five, six years ago — where it was relatively easy to tell the journal that I'm from a Dutch University and they connect to it and charge them, so I didn't need to do much. Maybe they only had a limited amount of papers they could support every year, a few thousand. I don't know how is it now. I'm not an expert with open access, it's probably better if you talk to someone else, Janneke Adema or Gary Hall, who spent a lot of years researching this. Open access is a really broad field within which you have kind of different modalities and different economies and I don't know how they work exactly.

What: Future of Publishing

CAROLINA *1:13:45* Where do you see publishing going, and where you would like to see it go?

DUŠAN *1:14:23* For many reasons, websites have an average life-span of three years. Sooner or later, we will have to look at archiving platforms digitally. Recently, I worked on a project called Art Doc Web. The idea was to create an artist website archive of 20 artist based in Berlin. With a collaborator, I was responsible for development. We found that the tools we need already exist, open-source, and are relatively easy to use. We only needed permissions from the artists. They didn't need to send us anything. One tool would make an archive of somebody's Instagram account, for example. Each of these web archives is just one file, and when I click on it, it is loaded, opened and rendered in a browser in a way that it feels like it's a live website, but it's not live. You can search for images and text within this archive website, so it is fully functional. I would emphasise the importance of thinking about these platforms, that we want them to be live, to have things added. At the same time, we also want to keep them. These are parallel concerns.

https://webarchive.multiplace.org/artdocweb/

CAROLINA *1:17:47* Thank you so much for sharing your experiences, your projects and your thoughts.

DUŠAN [1:18:45] Thanks for having me.

Timeline

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↓

August 2023

↳ *Exit Reality* by Valentina Tanni is relased by NERO Edition in Italian

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↓

September 2023

↳ *The Kawayoku Inception* by Noura Tafeche is realased by THE VOID (INC)

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October 2023

↳ .expub project begin (Aksioma, NERO Editions, INC & Echo Chamber)

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January 2024

↳ *Expanded Publishing Fest #1* in Amsterdam (INC @ THE VOID)

|

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February 2024

↳ *Ammasso* in Rome with Valentina Tanni and (NERO & THE VOID)

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April 2024

↳ *Expanded Publishing Fest #2* in Amsterdam (INC & NERO)

↳ PostScriptUM #50 *Daydreams, Playable Nightmares and Out-of-Body Journeys* by Valentina Tanni & Silvia Dal Dosso published by Aksioma in both English and Slovenian

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May 2024

↳ *Internet Aesthetics: A Journey Beyond the Threshold Talk by* Valentina Tanni (Aksioma)

↳ *Let's Play: Brexit Reality* by Total Refusal & Valentina Tanni (Aksioma)

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June 2024

↳ English Translation of *Exit Reality* by Valentina Tanni released bu Aksioma & NERO

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July 2024

↳ Expert Session and conversations about expanded publishing held in Rome @NERO HQ

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August 2024

↳ Based on the video essay (The Kawayouky Inception) published in September 2023 by INC, Aksioma publish **The Kawayoku Tales**: ***Aestheticisation of Violence in Military, Gaming, Social Media Cultures and Other Stories*** Noura Tafeche (PostScriptUM #51) the text is also available as longorm on INC website.

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October 2024

↳ Expanded publishing fest #3 (INC & THE VOID)

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November 2024

↳ PixxelPoint Festival Discoursive Program (Aksioma & THE VOID)

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December 2024

↳ *The Kawayouky Inception* (FULL SET) by Noura Tafeche is now published on metalabel. This set includes a VHS cassette with the video essay by THE VOID and the printed publication by Aksioma.

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January 2025

↳ Conversation on Expanded Publishing v1 is in beta

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Febraury 2025

↳ PostScriptUM#52 **Girl Intelligence** by **Alex Quicho** (Aksioma)

↳ Exhibition by Noura Tafeche @Aksioma gallery (expanded from the original essay published by THE VOID)

↳ Tactics & Practices Conference, lecture performance by Noura Tafeche and Alex Quicho (Aksioma), live video essays by Iva Ramuš Cvetkovič, Lesia Kulchynska and Donatella della Ratta (THE VOID)

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May 2025

↳ *PostScriptUM*#53: **Internet's Dark Forests: Subcultural Memories and Vernaculars of a Layered Imaginary** by Marta Ceccarelli. (Aksioma)

↳ Conversation on Expanded Publishing v2 is launched by all the partnerns

|

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June 2025

↳ Expanded publishing fest #4 (INC & THE VOID)

↳ .expub | Exploring Expanded Publishing (Conversation on Expanded Publishing v3) is released

Colophon

.expub

Exploring Expanded Publishing

This book is the outcome of the two-year research project .expub | Exploring Expanded Publishing, initiated and supported by the Creative Europe grant. The project brought together four institutions and publishing initiatives from across Europe: Institute of Network Cultures (Amsterdam), Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art (Ljubljana), NERO Editions (Rome), and Echo Chamber (Brussels).

The first section includes contributions by: Sepp Eckenhaussen, Geert Lovink, Ezequiel Soriano, Annette Gilbert, Jordi Viader Guerrero, and Ilan Manouach.

The second section documents a series of conversations held at NERO Editions in Rome, from July 2–4, 2024. Consortium members — Lorenzo Ghigiotti, Marcela Okretič, Janez Fakin Janša, Ilan Manouach, Tommaso Campagna, Marta Ceccarelli, and Carolina Valente Pinto — interviewed:

Clusterduck, Silvio Lorusso, Thomas Spies, Irene de Craen, Geoff Cox, Gijs de Heij, Yancey Strickler, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Dušan Barok.

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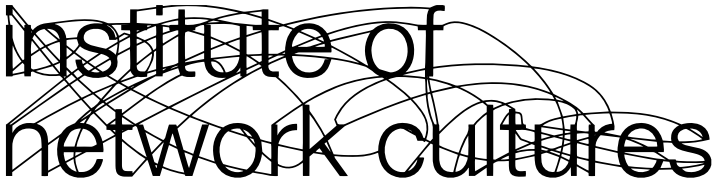

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