

Publishing as Artistic Practice

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Ed.

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2016

Sternberg Press 

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Publishing as Artistic Practice

Annette Gilbert

Agenda: From the Margin to the Center

While the slogan and title of the present volume “publishing as artistic practice” has not gone viral yet, the potential for it can already be felt. Its tremendous popularity in parts of contemporary art, literature, graphic design, and small/micro publishing scenes, where publishing and making books has become an essential part of a comprehensive artistic practice, suggests that it incorporates a striking critical diagnosis of the contemporary moment. In fact, it has become increasingly more frequent for the practice of authors, artists, and designers to overlap with the practice of publishers, and vice versa. It is by no means uncommon for publishing to be conceptually integrated into a work and even for publishing to be understood as an artistic project or declared as a work itself. If this were the case, then publishing would have to be understood as an artistic form of expression itself.

Given the diversity and proliferation of such works, concepts, projects, and initiatives amongst artists, authors, and graphic designers, the time is now ripe to push publishing into the center of aesthetic and academic discourses. For this reason, it is necessary to sharpen the focus and to no longer question only the significance of publishing *for* artistic practices, but to also search for the possibility and significance of publishing *as* artistic practice, just as recent artistic positions and conceptions have proposed.

From Book to Publishing

It is of primary importance to establish from the beginning that the focal point of artistic, aesthetic concerns has decidedly moved away from the debate surrounding books that has left its mark on the last two decades. As a consequence, the discussion concerning the artist’s book has then progressed to a new domain as well.¹ The implications of this shift of emphasis—from medium, i.e. artifact, to practice; and from book to publishing—surface in the catchy flyer Jan Blessing and Constanze Hein designed for a workshop in February 2015 that was organized with Kristin Mueller, a workshop which, incidentally, served as the starting point for the present volume. The flyer was designed to look like a book’s dust jacket [fig. 1]. But, there is no book inside, it is empty, and this fact evinces a gap, which, in turn, produces a shift in focus: away from the book and its contents, and toward the circumstances, practices, and processes of production that encompass and foster a book. As such, the flyer embodies the notion of publishing that is usually difficult to grasp. Moreover, it implicitly supplies a justification for the necessity of this shift in focus by demonstrating that a published work cannot be regarded independent of the publishing process and its determining factors. The flyer in the form of a dust jacket echoes these processes and factors and also makes them tangible. The present volume will be concerned with just this.

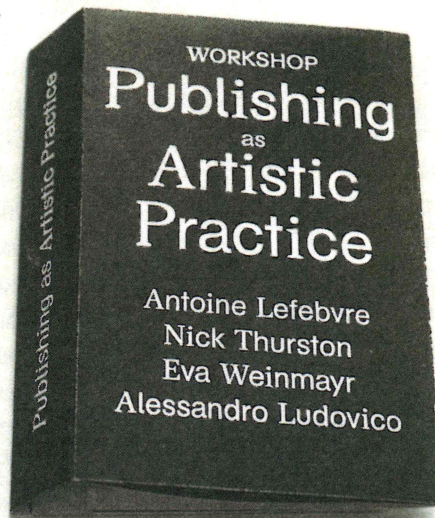


Fig. 1. Flyer for the workshop *Publishing as Artistic Practice* in Berlin, February 2, 2015, designed by Jan Blessing and Constanze Hein. Photo: Studio Pandan.

Practice Turn

On account of this shift of focus, we are now operating in the field of praxeology that has experienced a major surge in recent years as part of the interdisciplinary *practical turn* (or, *practice turn*).² In the social sciences (but also increasingly in philosophy, history, cultural studies, anthropology, science studies, and philology), a variety of research fields “now regularly draw on practical theoretical approaches to reconstruct the routines in businesses, the forms of using technical and medial artifacts, the characteristics of gendered ‘performances’ or even the ‘doing culture’ in everyday practices.”³

What is common amongst them is the “emphasis on the importance of close attention to particular practices and the context within which they are located.”⁴ Nevertheless, it should be no surprise that the definition of practice is contentious. Following David G. Stern, we can preliminarily say that “[n]o short answer will do here. At the very least, a practice is something people do, not just once, but on a regular basis. [...] the identity of a practice depends not only on what people do, but also on the significance of those actions and the surroundings in which they occur.”⁵

Andreas Reckwitz’s very broad definition could also prove helpful for our discussion: “A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.”⁶ The relevance of the implicit norms that

guide a practice for the practice is often underestimated: “The norms that are constitutive of these practices should not be understood in terms of sharing explicitly stated or storable beliefs or values, or in terms of conscious intentions—although these will certainly play a part from time to time—but rather as a matter of unreflectively acting in the same way as others, of doing what ‘one’ does.”⁷

This deliberation addresses the problematic nature of researching the practices themselves: if they are “functioning,” then they are barely visible and are regarded as being “self-evident” to the agent, which is why they can only be articulated and taken as an object of explicit analysis and theoretical discussion with great difficulty. Aside from the analysis of artifacts, there are laboratory studies, participant observations, interviews, and self-explanations by the agents that can also be interpreted, which is why a number of the protagonists operating in this field have the floor in the current volume.⁸

Publishing Studies

Interestingly, the first attempts to theoretically reflect upon the artistic practice of publishing originated in the artistic scene and not in academic discourse. The dissertation and artistic research projects of Delphine Bedel, Antoine Lefebvre, Bernhard Cella, and Eva Weinmayr⁹ are noteworthy examples as are the works of Nick Thurston, Hannes Bajohr, and Alessandro Ludovico, all of whom are anchored both in artistic, literary fields and the academy.¹⁰ This attempt to consolidate and cross-pollinate aesthetic and academic discourse could also be valuable for publishing studies which currently still struggles to become a distinct academic discipline.¹¹ After all, the fact is that publishing still “remains untheorized.”¹² This applies just as well to the history of the book (or book history, as it is also called) as well as literary studies; that is, to the very disciplines who would seem to have questions of publishing within their “jurisdiction.” Artists, authors, and publishers who are active in this field have recognized and lamented this lack of research. Nick Thurston, for instance, reminds us: “I think we need to recognise publishing as a specific field of practice and theory, akin to a ‘discipline’ in academia.”¹³

Such a praxeological perspective, however, has remained considerably undeveloped in the studies scattered across numerous disciplines that take publishing as their subject. Of those key models “for analyzing the way books come into being and spread through society” that have been developed in book history, Robert Darnton’s model of a “communications circuit” is of particular interest for the context of the present volume. This circuit “runs from the author to the publisher [...], the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader” and attempts to capture “each phase of this process and the process as a whole, in all its variations over space and time and in all

its relations with other systems, economic, social, political, and cultural, in the surrounding environment."¹⁴ As has been stipulated on numerous occasions, this model would have to be calibrated differently according to the selectivity, number, balance of power, and interaction between agents for earlier epochs¹⁵ and for the present age.¹⁶ Furthermore, Darnton has also received criticism for his preferential treatment of the *agents* and circulation of the *book* at the expense of the *processes* associated with publishing.¹⁷

Focusing on the impact of the publication process on the creation and constitution of a work, Jerome McGann has examined a further fundamental aspect of publishing that has remained widely neglected. Under the headline of the "sociology of texts," McGann has shown in *The Textual Condition* that the act of becoming public, of the "socialization" of the text, is necessary for it to transition from manuscript to "work."¹⁸ Ultimately, as Lothar Müller has advocated, someone becomes "an author not by composing manuscripts, but rather when the work is circulated in print. Indeed, the concept of authorship has been explicitly bound to being printed at least since the lexicons of the seventeenth century."¹⁹ This suggests that an author and a work only emerge in a public, "institutional" framework; or, even further, that authorship is always accompanied or indeed created by publication. As such, works are "*institutional object[s]*" in the widest sense of the term whose "existence is dependent upon the existence of a *practice*."²⁰

Even when "the role of publishing as an act of mediation"²¹ is often called upon, publishing's potency to facilitate and actively shape the product often remains underappreciated, if not neglected entirely. Michael Bhaskar has felt compelled to denounce the popular, but misleading conception of a book as a mere container of its contents: "publishing is active; it is not a passive matrix through which content passes but a force partially shaping and inflecting content."²² This insight is of particular importance for literature: "If one is to establish a full understanding of the[...] relationship [between society and literature], publishing must be factored in. In the creation and dissemination of texts, publishing isn't just an afterthought. It co-constitutes texts and books."²³ Like Rachel Malik who laments that the central role publishing plays in literature has not yet been properly addressed in literary studies,²⁴ Bhaskar comes to the conclusion that: "Literary theory needs publishing theory."²⁵ This, of course, also applies to the phenomena that have emerged in the artistic field and that are discussed in the present volume.

Bhaskar has consequently proposed an ambitious attempt to theorize publishing where he raises the question "whether there could ever be unchanging integral parts" and "core activities" of the historically continuous and consistent but nevertheless changing practice of publishing. Starting from the fundamental thesis that "publishing is not necessarily to be equated with books; if anything, it is some kind of activity," Bhaskar commences with a discussion of the standard understanding of publishing as an act of "making public," which he maintains is "circular" and

“inadequate” since it depends upon a vague and highly controversial concept of the public sphere that is, in contrast to other practices (such as broadcasting and posting), not specific enough. That’s why he suggests “limning a working definition of publishing within the boundaries between public and private is impossible.” In contrast to this, Bhaskar suggests that in conjunction with the contents, which are a prerequisite for publishing, the practices of filtering and amplification are the core of publishing. If we take filtering as the traditional gatekeeper function, then amplification means acting such “that more copies of a work or product are distributed or consumed”: “Thus, simply leaving a manuscript on a bench is not amplifying it in the way photocopying and posting it to all your neighbours is amplifying it.”²⁶

This model of publishing is supplemented by two further components: “Filtering and amplification occur *through* frames *according* to models.” While the frames capture the “presentational or performative aspect” (“they don’t just deliver a work but deliver it in a certain way”), the models encompass the “interplay of causal factors, goals, motivations and ideological underpinnings [that] shapes and provides the *raison d’être* for content.” Accordingly, Bhaskar concludes that publishers are “not just producers of books but filters for content and constructors of amplificatory frames.”

Bhaskar’s four-tiered publishing model, in which every element “elaborately and inseparably intertwines in practice,”²⁷ exhibits a certain proximity to Rachel Malik’s strict praxeological perspective. She defines publishing as “a set of historical processes and practices—composition, editing, design and illustration, production, marketing and promotion, and distribution—and a set of relations with various other institutions—commercial, legal, educational, political, cultural, and, perhaps, above all, other media.”²⁸ The constellation of these variables that is always unique constitutes “the various horizons of the publishable which govern what it is thinkable to publish within a particular historical moment.”²⁹ With this in mind, it has become necessary for further studies to systematically and historically untangle this set of factors and their relationships to one another, together with their respective horizons, which is what the present volume aims to provide as a preliminary dossier in its focus on a specific practice of publishing.

Publishing as Artistic Practice

Thus, to understand and analyze a practice itself, we are confronted with fundamentally complex interrelationships—and this is even more complicated when, as is the case with “publishing as artistic practice,” this practice is by definition situated at the intersection of *two* established practices, namely, publishing and art.

This picture becomes even more colorful when we include a further practice that is closely associated with publishing, namely, the literary practice. This inclusion is legitimate given that the publishing practice's configuration, which abides by certain aesthetic premises, is not restricted to (visual) artists in the narrow sense of the word. The present volume is more concerned with opening the discussion beyond the limits of fine arts in order to do justice to the growing interest in publishing from inside of the literary field as well as to the growing trend that aims to dissolve the boundaries between different art forms.³⁰

Seeing as the basic manifestation of literature is a publication—in fact, leaving aside oral or performative modes, it is *the* form of literature's existence par excellence—literary authors and literary studies exhibit a mature experience in the matter of publishing. The experimental literary scene is particularly interesting in this context since it demonstrates a strong “tendency to conflate writing and publishing.”³¹ This can be clearly seen, for instance, in post-digital literature since it, according to → Hannes Bajohr in this volume, owes its existence to a very specific constellation of publishing technologies, dissemination strategies, and textual genre. But this tendency can also be found in certain forms of Conceptual writing that are distinguished by “an approach to making language public that is performed by choreographing a specific intersection of the practices and institutions of publishing.”³² Forms of Appropriation literature could also be mentioned, which → Hanna Kuusela analyzes in her contribution and which → Aurélie Noury uses as the basis for her *Éditions Lorem Ipsum*. These can be labeled as a “kind of writing through publishing.”³³

There is yet a further practice that overlaps with publishing that must be taken into consideration: namely, graphic design, which, according to → Alexander Starre, is “the missing link between visual art and literature.” In a united polemic against the practice of industrially mass-producing printed matter, the graphic design scene has recently made an assertive claim for the artistic ambitions of their practice and their products. In surveys of contemporary production, there is often talk of “today's unprecedented experimentation with the creation of book design as *artistic* objects.”³⁴ Although the designers naturally focus more on the book itself, there are nevertheless increasing attempts to incorporate the newly emerging design concepts of the (post-)digital age into a comprehensive analysis of the whole practice and process of publishing. Craig Mod, for instance, proposes that “we need to start thinking differently about what books *are* and how they are produced. [...] we need to reconsider the whole approach to the process of making a book into the thing it is: the creation, the consumption, and everything that happens around and in between.”³⁵

As such, “publishing as artistic practice” spans a complex field of practices marked by countless patterns, interdependencies, and nested hierarchies—without even drawing the associated practices of economics, law, politics, etc. into the discussion here. Likewise, the intricate “question

of whether there is some sort of hierarchy among cultural practices, and whether and how some cultural practices organize, anchor, or constrain others³⁶ must also remain unanswered for the time being. In any case, from a praxeological point of view, it is a formidably complex *mélange* of practices that have been grouped together under the aegis of “publishing as artistic practice” and it is this which the present volume takes as its subject matter.

Somehow Different

Keeping this in mind, we can now pose the real question at hand: In what sense can publishing be said to be an artistic practice? As → Anne Mœglin-Delcroix has established in her attempt to formulate an answer to this question in the present volume, it will not suffice to ascribe this form of artistic publishing solely to “the social or professional identity of the person who undertakes this project.” This is because it would only say something about embedding the protagonists in a certain field and not about the specific characteristics of the practice itself, which might justify calling it a decidedly unique artistic practice and/or category of publishing.

At first glance the aforementioned slogan seems as if it wants to simply widen the abundant variety of forms of artistic expressions and to establish and shape publishing and making books as an artistic practice that has its own right to existence in the art world with the potential corollary of ennobling the publishing practice in turn. But there is another agenda that often reverberates within the slogan: the implicit conviction that these artistic forms of publishing—no matter how they are to be defined—are categorically different from the standard art practice and its framing conditions, and, further, that they could be liberating and indeed revolutionary for such conditions. One often speaks of “publishing as an *alternative* artistic practice” in this context. This thought arises in a programmatic form in → Antoine Lefebvre’s description of his own practice, for instance, where he considers himself to be an artist-entrepreneur and purposefully situates his publishing house—company and artwork at once—between these worlds:

“This practice is alternative, or other, insofar as it represents an alternative to the usual mode of operation dominating the art world: it is both an alternative space for art; a new place for it to develop differently; but also an alternative to the art market as it develops in the book market.”³⁷

As → Anne Mœglin-Delcroix and → Antoine Lefebvre have shown in their contributions, the contemporary movement displays a remarkable proximity to the publishing as artistic practice discourse that developed with the artist’s book and artist publisher in the 1960s and 70s. Then, artists favored the book as a medium because, for them, the art industry and market was inadequate. As such, they searched for alternative spaces and practices to make art, and this was ossified in slogans such as “The Page as Alternative

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Space.”³⁸ Their understanding of themselves as “different” and “alternative” was echoed in the names they christened their presses with, such as Something Else Press (Dick Higgins) or Other Books and So (Ulises Carrión), something which is carried on to this day in the appellation of presses like Unpublishable Series (UbuWeb), Edizioni Periferia, and Zavod P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E.

Nevertheless, we shouldn’t fail to recognize that aspirations and reality easily drift apart—at least for contemporary presses, just as → Michalis Pichler demonstrates with the phenomenon he calls seriosity dummies. These dummies are symptomatic of the corruption of the scene’s ideals since they can be used to achieve clear profits of distinction and can accumulate symbolic capital. According to → Michalis Pichler, even the practice of bookswapping is increasingly infiltrated by the market logic of capitalism. In any case, one should keep Ulises Carrión in mind, who already denounced the “total ignorance on the part of the artists of the traditional book world that, in its 500-year history (I’m talking here about printed books), has developed with market mechanisms and a celebrity syndrome similar to those that typically oppress the art world” and who described the “unlimited optimism” that “books would allow artists to liberate themselves from galleries and art critics” as a great “misunderstanding”: “I would like to ask, what for? To fall into the hands of publishers and book critics!”³⁹

It is not the case that artistic publishing practices are only conceptualized as an alternative to the art world. Sometimes they are also taken as an explicit alternative to the established models of the publishing world when, for instance, there is talk of “independent publishing as artistic practice” or when a small press is defined “as an artistic, political and social alternative to mainstream publishing.”⁴⁰ The question is not only whether such a practice can always live up to its promise but also whether the underlying binary it establishes can be postulated at all. For, just as there is no *one* mainstream (the field of publishing fragments into many diverse models and categories of publishing that operate on entirely divergent premises, business models, and forms of organization, as one can see in the differences between trade and academic publishing as well as the POD industry), one cannot speak of *the* small press as *the* alternative. In fact, even important artist publishers rely on proven models of the publishing world, which is what → Anne Moeglin-Delcroix has shown with the examples of Something Else Press, which acts like a wolf in sheep’s clothing and mimics trade book publishing, and Coracle Press, which pays service to the rather elitist tradition of the artisanal private presses. What we can say is truly alternative here is at best the offbeat, non-mainstream contents or design of the books, and the ambitions of these small presses; but it is decidedly not the publishing practice or business model as such.

The same could be said about contemporary publishing projects. Many of those that are conceived as decisively alternative to the “mainstream”—and which, for instance, forgo ISBNs or being materialized in print, are distributed solely on the internet, facilitate DIY prints on home

printers, make use of uncommon printing techniques or design concepts, exploit POD, follow the self-publishing model, or are created manually—may at first glance seem to be “alternative” or “new” in comparison to traditional publishing models but they never result in a fundamentally new way of publishing. All of these tactics have been or are being explored in “mainstream” publishing too, which, as we know, is facing radical changes to the industry and is feverously searching for new ways to subsist. As a consequence they have demonstrated an imposed willingness to experiment. This has meant that a number of concepts originating in the independent scene are being readily incorporated into the “mainstream” at an ever increasing pace.⁴¹

Alternatives to “mainstream” publishing have also been widely discussed in the experimental literary field. For the most part, this stance feeds off the experience of marginalization, i.e. off the position of being virtually forced to be an outsider since experimental, avant-garde literature finds little acceptance in the literary world. The art world has then offered a harbor that not a few literati have emigrated to and which, at present, willingly grants asylum to experimental literature.⁴² But since literature is primarily manifested in publications and practically no alternative to publishing results from this, a long tradition of publishing projects and self-publishing ventures that a number of protagonists in the contemporary literary scene identify with⁴³ has become an essentially important back route in the literary field. This particular legacy that has birthed a wealth of innovative publishing strategies should also prove useful for the contemporary discussion regarding publishing as artistic practice, which distinguishes between ventures that prioritize publishing unconventional contents or ways of writing and those that desire to alter the publishing practice itself, believing that it is important “to produce a different kind of publishable text and a different culture of publication [...] from outside the mainstream as a positive choice.”⁴⁴

This specificity and otherness of the artistic practice of publishing should be clarified in the following based on the contributions collected in this volume and on the phenomena they discuss, since they spotlight and sketch some of the emerging trends and significance of this practice—albeit in a necessarily provisional and incomplete manner.

Artistic Autonomy, or: Publishing as Maker Culture

Like in the avant-garde’s book art and the artist’s book movement of the 1960s and 70s (→ Anne Mœglin-Delcroix), the idea of artistic freedom and autonomy is of prime importance to the contemporary artistic publishing scene. This is concerned less with being independent from institutions, commerce, and the market than it is with structuring the publishing process and its framing conditions as well as with expanding the exceptionally

large artistic spectrum for creative leeway regarding content, design, material, and printing techniques of the publications—whether they are low-tech, DIY, hand-pressed prints, bulk print runs, POD products, or digital publications. The active engagement especially of the visual arts with regards to the *making* of books is encouraged, indeed, incited by the fact that “publishing is and always has been a ‘maker culture’” that looks back on a “long craft tradition of printers and publishers.”⁴⁵ As such, it answers the “longing for the ‘humanization of digital technologies’” and the “increasing ennoblement of the thing in art, theory, and everyday life” that, according to → Hannes Bajohr, are characteristic of the post-digital age and its discourse.

This element of artistic autonomy for every essential aspect of a publication has become increasingly important in the literary context as well. Authors are progressively no longer satisfied with simply writing texts and they no longer consider the design of texts and books as a contingent factor but rather as properties that constitute their work. Contrary to the traditional conception of a literary work that reduces it to the text—in the sense of an abstract, linguistic structure—the designing of a text and a book has become an essential part of the author’s creative activity that is as valuable as the writing itself. Questions of design are thus no longer held to be the responsibility of the publisher; rather, they are subjected to one’s own authorship. The Polish artist Zenon Fajfer and the literary scholar Katarzyna Bazarnik have created the neologism “liberature” in order to describe this “literature in the form of a book.” It shifts the emphasis from “litera” (lat.: letter) to “liber” (lat.: book): “the material book, which can be of any shape and structure, ceases to be a neutral container for a text, but becomes an integral component of the literary work.”⁴⁶

This, of course, is not an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. There have always been literary authors who have pursued a holistic “liberatic approach,” such as Laurence Sterne, Rétif de la Bretonne, William Blake, Raymond Queneau, William H. Gass, B. S. Johnson, and Raymond Federman. This “type of literary artist, who transgresses the border between writing and designing” can no longer be embedded only in the category of experimental authors. As → Alexander Starre illustrates in his contribution, they can increasingly be found even in “mainstream” trade publishing. The books of Mark Z. Danielewski, who tells his stories not only *in* a book but *with* the book, for instance, are the “collaborative product of a ‘bibliographic [i.e.: liberatic] author’⁴⁷ and a design-oriented trade book publisher.”

Reproduction as Production, or: Writing Books Rather Than Just Texts

But there are other authors who go a step further. Not content with the expansion of artistic freedom in designing texts and books, they strive to revise the entire publishing process, including all of its agents and

responsibilities. In this spirit, the book artist and author Ulises Carrión already defined “the new art of making books” in 1975:

“In the old art the writer judges himself as being not responsible for the real book. He writes the text. The rest is done by the servants, the artisans, the workers, the others.
[...] In the new art the writer assumes the responsibility for the whole process.”⁴⁸

The notion of “taking over the responsibility for” is symptomatic of this debate. Based on this idea, Nick Thurston has developed a new publishing model that he understands as having been realized to some extent in Conceptual writing since the concern there is never just with the text. Rather, “the ‘author’ take[s] responsibility for the full object-status of the reproduced cultural object.”⁴⁹ In this context, Thurston holds the publisher to be responsible for enabling “a certain kind of unconventional but highly-literate writer to write books rather than just texts.”⁵⁰

Echoing Ulises Carrión’s almost identical dictum from 1975 that “In the old art the writer writes texts. / In the new art the writer makes books,”⁵¹ Thurston’s slogan, which, according to → Antoine Lefebvre, had already been shaped by Stéphane Mallarmé,⁵² fundamentally contradicts the traditional conception of literary work as well as the traditional yet still powerful paradigm regarding the division of labor in the field of publishing, which Roger Chartier has famously formulated as such: “authors do not write books; they write texts that become material objects.”⁵³ The long-established “industry model” of publishing that → Nick Thurston illustrates with the formula “production-then-reproduction”⁵⁴ is based upon this strict division of authorial text production and the publisher’s subsequent production of the books. Whereas the text production phase has positive connotations arising from the emphasis on the creativity and originality of the author in the commonplace understanding, the following phase of manufacturing and publishing books is viewed as a purely mechanical reproduction of a given text in which others take over and “nothing essential” is added to the work.⁵⁵

An alternative model that is currently being investigated with great enthusiasm by the experimental literary scene can be said to follow → Nick Thurston’s corresponding formula “reproduction-as-production.” Here, the attempt is to break up the logic of production and reproduction that was outlined above; or, to even reverse it by “re-conceptualiz[ing] reproduction as a form of production” and by increasing its value “as a creative act” equal to writing so that it loses its subsequent, secondary character. This is in accordance with Rachel Malik’s plea to move away from the sharp distinction between production and reproduction and to no longer privilege the writing process but to see it as one process amongst many in publishing: “Writing is not opposed to publishing: composition is one of its processes.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, shifting the logic from “production-then-reproduction” to “reproduction-as-production” not only inverts the order, it also changes

the temporality. The two processes are no longer sequenced as stages but are collapsed into a simultaneous process: these days, “writing and publishing are [often] the same action,” as → Nick Thurston states.

“Reproduction-as-production” would then suggest a practice of publishing that admits that “the artwork only legitimately ‘becomes’ whatever it is as an artwork in its being reproduced and having a reproduced form.”⁵⁷ This would mean that authors “implicate the processes of reproduction in the conscious processes of artistic production (a.k.a. composition)”⁵⁸ and that the authorial responsibility is for the entire process and result.

Publishing as Site-Specific Gesture and Critical Intervention

On this basis, Nick Thurston has developed “an approach to writing by which someone composes or choreographs how the practices and institutions at the intersection will affectively inter-relate. This would involve nominating the resultant text plus its contexts of production, distribution and reception as altogether the stuff to be read.”⁵⁹

This approach has been implemented for instance in Thurston’s recent work *Of the Subcontract. Or, Principles of Poetic Right* (2013), which is discussed by him and → Hanna Kuusela in their contributions. The poems in that book were all written by ghostwriters contracted through Amazon’s subsidiary Mechanical Turk (AMT). Every poem is accompanied by information regarding the number of minutes the unnamed contracted laborer invested in the poem as well as what Thurston paid for it—anywhere between 1 cent and 1 dollar. As such, the extraordinarily topical socio-economic dimensions of outsourcing, i.e. the precarious post-industrial work and production conditions in general, become a central theme of the book and are then given a trial run in the field of poetry, which is typically seen as being the most authentic genre and the least corrupted or furthest away from the concerns of the market—yet, following Ulises Carrión (see above) and Vanessa Place,⁶⁰ this view is erroneous. *Of the Subcontract* thus presents itself as a space where literary, publishing, and curatorial practices come into contact with the discourses and institutions from the economic, social, political, and ethical realms. The publication is then “a material representation of the textual and contextual processes that were choreographed to intersect [...] in specific editions, at specific times, each projected into a specific historico-socio-cultural milieu.”⁶¹

Thurston considers this form of conscious positioning of the intersecting practices and institutions of publishing as a “site-specific gesture,” or, as a “site-specific intervention.”⁶² Whereas the exhibition, gallery, and museum were regarded—mostly from an institutionally critical perspective—as the “site” in the site-specific art of the 1970s, it is the publication that needs to be established and critically investigated as the “site” in

the literary field,⁶³ which is what Fritz Balthaus has stipulated with his intervention in Brian O'Doherty's collection of texts *Inside the White Cube* (→ Annette Gilbert) as being long overdue.

This site-specific and (institutional) critical impetus can also be accredited to every post-digital work "that takes as its topic the structural, socioeconomic, and material conditions of its production." In his contribution, → Hannes Bajohr classifies such works as "factographic." However, the focal point here is not only the precarious working conditions of today's artistic production, which Holly Melgard, for instance, has addressed in her *Reimbursement* (2013): "often I find myself paying to work rather than being paid for work."⁶⁴ It is also the many shortcomings of the POD system that have been subject to criticism, as → Hannes Bajohr and → Annette Gilbert have shown in their contributions. In the works of Silvio Lorusso and Jean Keller, for instance, both the POD and the exaltation of this system, which has been praised as a refuge for freedom and democracy, have been demystified. Lorusso's and Keller's works suggest that in the general enthusiasm for the virtually unlimited artistic freedom in the field of POD publishing it shouldn't be forgotten that even a predominantly autonomous author or self-publisher is imposed by boundaries that are determined by the medium, material, technology, economic relations of production, and institutional and legal regulations.

Elisabeth Tonnard and Klaus Scherübel, for instance, have made these institutional conditions and dependencies on the publishing system the subject of their publishing projects: Tonnard's *The Invisible Book* (2012) is a book that was never written or printed but it can still be purchased and is considered to be "produced" or "published"; and Scherübel's *Mallarmé. The Book* (2000–), which consists solely of a cover and a Styrofoam block, can be found in libraries and bookstores, since it is furnished with an ISBN and has been fed into the institutional and book trade distribution. Elisabeth Tonnard and Klaus Scherübel focus their entire efforts on the framing conditions of publishing and demonstrate that it is entirely feasible to bring an invisible or blank "book" into economic and institutional circulation so long as it has been institutionally "accredited." In this way, according to → Annette Gilbert, they reveal the "externalities" of the publication process and the powers that bring the publications into existence, which normally remain invisible.

Publishing as an Act of Creation, or: Writing through Publishing

→ Aurélie Noury, who has not "written" a single book for her Éditions Lorem Ipsum, also relies on the productive powers of the publishing process that are integral to the work. As the provocative title of her contribution to this volume proclaims, she searches for those rare cases in fiction that deal

with fictitious writers and their works, which, in turn, are described in such great detail in the fictional text that, for all intents and purposes, they already exist in completion and are virtually ready to go to print. Aurélie Noury disconnects these texts that have hitherto lacked independence from their respective narrative contexts and re-publishes them as separate, autonomous volumes authored by the fictitious writer. Éditions Lorem Ipsum's books celebrate "publishing as an act of creation" (→ Aurélie Noury), thereby taking the formula "reproduction-as-production" very seriously.

The publishing strategy of many of the works that → Hannes Bajohr discusses in his contribution on post-digital literature is similar to this but so too are the web-to-print projects that Paul Soulellis assembles in his *Library of the Printed Web* (2013-). The publications presented there are grouped under the heading "search, compile, publish" and are also based on foreign, i.e. found, material. Using diverse artistic strategies (Soulellis makes a distinction between grabbing, hunting, scraping, and performing), the artist/author collects found material from the web, generates, searches, organizes, designs, and finally publishes it in print.

In light of this, the formula "reproduction-as-production" gains a further shading. Up until now it has only been used to describe an inclusion of the amplification and publishing ("reproduction") phases in the author's creative process ("production"). Now, however, the formula can also refer to the publication's fabrication phase of content ("production"), which is turned on its head by the projects described here since the published contents are no longer originally created ("production") but are taken from available sources and copied ("reproduction"). Copying and reproducing found materials, then, could be perceived as a widely accepted method of creative production that would align with the formula "reproduction-as-production." The tendency to supplement or even replace the writing of new, original texts, which has dominated the core of creativity and literary production to this date, with other activities (such as copying, appropriating, compiling, downloading, remixing, crowdsourcing, and the programming of algorithms) that are principally of the same value has been recently turned into a slogan by Kenneth Goldsmith: "The future of writing is not writing."⁶⁵ One very productive form of "not writing," and the projects discussed above attest to this, is publishing. With Nick Thurston, one could speak of "a kind of writing through publishing."⁶⁶

Editorial and Curatorial Practices

The aforementioned tendency to work with found materials is closely related to the increasing convergence between publishing and curatorial practices, which has been documented as a further trend in the context of publishing as artistic practice by → Anna-Sophie Springer and → Hanna Kuusela in their contributions. That the "curatorial ethos" has found its way into the

publishing practice should be no surprise since curating has taken over in almost all realms of life (from fashion and collections to magazines and online platforms). Dorothea von Hantelmann speaks of “the curatorial paradigm” that shapes our post-industrial and post-material consumer society: “the skill—or, if you will, the ‘art’—of choosing has become a cultural practice in its own right.”⁶⁷ The core of curation is this very art of selecting, which includes its capability of ascribing meaning to the selection.

If the curatorial practice was previously at home in the exhibition business of museums and galleries, and has in the meantime ascended to its own *artistic* activity in those fields, it can now also be found in “the ‘paginated’ realm of reproductions—the world of books and libraries.” → Anna-Sophie Springer demonstrates this kind of “curatorial space” in her contribution about books on birds: “for those asking how publishing and the curatorial relate and intersect, natural history books open up unique pathways beyond art history.”

In the literary field one can also discern that an increasing number of agents understand their literary or editorial practice as curatorial and/or label them as such. In one of his most recent aphorisms, Kenneth Goldsmith thus postulates that “Choice is authorship. Legitimate authorship.”⁶⁸ This is seconded in the “blurb” to his *Theory*, which is not arbitrarily organized as a loose-leaf collection, where it is stated that it is “*curated* by the author-poet.”⁶⁹

One can take a critical stance to this current fashion. Nevertheless, it is unmistakable that the curatorial practice and the publishing practice, especially the editorial practice, do indeed have a large overlap: processes of selection, organizing, arranging, putting into relationship, and presentation of materials represent the core of curation as well as publishing, i.e. editing.⁷⁰ As previously mentioned, Michael Bhaskar also counts filtering as being one of the four basic components of publishing practice and affirms that “curation competencies lie within the ambit of publishing speciality,” whereby the very recent influence of curating has set a new tone: “Filtering is slowly shifting from a selection emphasis to a curation emphasis.” The difference between them, however, is that curation “is less about commissioning, more about combining; less about origination and binary choice deliberations, more about arrangement and patterning.” It could be that the key to the future of publishing lies within the curatorial approach: “Part of why curation is so valuable to the future of publishing is that almost by definition it cannot be totally mechanized. [...] Yet curation isn’t just about efficiency; it’s also about personal taste, an individual’s style and judgment. Curation has value precisely because of its fuzziness, its ability to surprise with a flash of insight.”⁷¹

In contrast to this, → Hanna Kuusela takes a critical view on the emergence of curatorial practice in the literary field since it strengthens the culture of (self-)promotion. In their drive for recognition and authorship, the literary curators—in contrast to the traditionally rather withdrawn understanding of a publisher or editor’s role—“not only make public others’

texts but also seek [visibility and] publicity for their *own* practices, and thus accumulate and create cultural capital for themselves.” This can be seen particularly in the appropriating and participatory forms of literature that are based on the use of foreign texts. Originality is not proclaimed for the published contents but rather for the idea of the project and the collation, frame and presentation of the foreign contents. → Hanna Kuusela fears that this profiling of the publisher or editor as a curator threatens to be at the expense of authors whose texts—whether they consent or not—are used in the curator’s project: “the praxis of curating is also, or above all, an act of reterritorialization, i.e., an act of designing a new power.” This is shown in Nick Thurston’s *Of the Subcontract*, which, according to → Hanna Kuusela, critically reveals “how the relationship between the (multiple) producers of the text and the (individual) literary curator” can take on ethically dubious and exploitative traits “when taken to the extreme,” but it cannot escape the dilemma that “[p]oets and professors can point to this change, but so far, have not been able to move beyond it.”⁷²

Publishing and the Public Sphere, or: Publishing as a Political Issue

In a very programmatic text that is often invoked in the publishing as artistic practice discourse, Matthew Stadler, a co-founder of Publication Studio, refers to the publication of a text as “a political act [...], which creates a political space called public space.”⁷³ The established connection between politics, the public sphere, and publishing is not a matter of chance. From a media history perspective, the concept of the modern public sphere is in fact strongly related to the practice of publishing since it was print that led to the “invention” of the modern public sphere. A new “media constellation” resulted from the printing press, and subsequently writing had two different media to choose from: “this alternative enabled and forced a functional differentiation, in the course of which both the manuscript as well as print took on new cultural and textual tasks.” Since then, the connotation of handwriting is usually associated with the private sphere and something that has remained unfinished and the printed text is associated with the public sphere and something that has been brought to completion. Printing grants a text “a higher quality and dignity” and because of the enlarged public sphere that it reaches, it also has a larger political “explosive power.”⁷⁴ It can be said, then, that “the printed word” has become “the core of the modern public sphere.”⁷⁵

This is the reason why publishing quickly becomes a political issue. But it also explains why any restriction on this public sphere receives a highly sensitive reaction: “Books need to circulate to have an impact by being read. [...] Owning a book is fine but it still needs to be accessible” (→ Eva Weinmayr). As such, the diverse “ways to suppress the publishing of, the access to, or the

distribution of texts and books” are closely followed by the arts and literature and, as → Eva Weinmayr documents, any form of suppression arouses opposition and “creative subversion” by the activists in the scene. Thus, contemporary artistic interventions are clearly rooted in the tradition of counterculture that ranges from the *Whole Earth Catalog*, the *Revolting Librarians*, and the “sozialisierter Druck” (pirate edition) of the student movement. Focusing on samizdat, → Valentina Parisi considers it to be a similar kind of self-publishing practice to those in the counterculture tradition.

In the contemporary “age of access”⁷⁶ it is no longer the censors or the ideologically prejudiced acquisition and cataloging policies of libraries but rather the copyright restrictions, the market power of individual companies and the regulation of access that the activists amongst the artists and poets protest. In this context, → Hanna Kuusela and → Alessandro Ludovico are reminded of Aaron Swartz, whose “brave act of freeing the copyrighted academic knowledge of JSTOR” has been reflected upon in numerous art projects. As a further example, → Eva Weinmayr takes on Alessandro Ludovico’s own hacker project *Amazon Noir – The Big Book Crime* that was realized with UBERMORGEN.COM and Paolo Cirio, which utilizes the “look inside” function of Amazon to acquire complete books from the online seller’s website by using a “robot-perversion-technology” and to then distribute them across a variety of channels. → Nick Thurston expresses his anxiety about the contemporary surveillance technologies, which practically disintegrate the difference between writing on a computer and making something public since everything can immediately be edited and read by others without the writer ever knowing the better. It is not a stretch, then, to make the prognosis that the problems of availability, access, and control will remain dominating themes in society and in the artistic publishing scene in the coming years.

Publishing as Creating a Public and/or Forming a Community

Although the “printed word” has become “the core of the modern public sphere”⁷⁷ and some form of the public sphere is already included in printing due to the nature of the medium, the concept of the public sphere remains highly problematic in its connection to publishing. On the one hand, the public sphere in general is “a remarkably flabby historical concept”⁷⁸ that is, in addition to this, normatively charged as a concept of democratic theory. On the other hand, there is no consensus as to whether this is even a sensible criteria for defining publishing. Nor has it been definitively decided as to what “to make/to be public” should mean in this context: Is the principal notion of the public sphere that is associated with publishing decisive or does it merely depend on the actual number of copies printed? Is it crucial that the publication is in principle accessible to everyone or just that it,

in some form, circulates? “[O]r is it epistemological, the state of being *known*, or even being known to have been published?”⁷⁹ Whether the public sphere that the publication is intended for already exists or whether the publication creates it is another question that could be raised.

In the discourse surrounding publishing as artistic practice, the tendency has been to adopt the latter position, or at least to make an explicit differentiation between “making public” and “making a public.” In his attempt to distinguish posting from publishing, Paul Soulellis has defined them as such: “Posting is usually ‘making public,’ but publishing is making ‘a public’ by creating a space for the circulation of discourse.”⁸⁰ Matthew Stadler from Publishing Studio supports this when he suggests that publishing is “not just the production of books, but the production of a public. This public [...] is created through physical production, digital circulation, and social gathering. Together these construct a space of conversation which beckons a public into being.”⁸¹ It is noticeable that the first statement suggests a public being created *for* the circulation of discourse while the second is more concerned with a public being created *by* publication. This, however, is not necessarily a contradiction. Publication is governed by a dual movement or circuit, something which squares with Bhaskar’s observation that “growing from a society is only one part of a loop, which also includes how publishing helps produce societies.”⁸²

Due to the complexity of the related questions and the shaky concept of the public sphere, this “social nexus” is often bracketed out of academic discourse⁸³ although it plays a central role in the discussions concerning publishing as artistic practice. Very frequently, the idea of making a public through publishing is connected with the concept of a scene or community that is conceived of as a limited, yet in principle accessible, open public sphere.⁸⁴ As a rationale for his artistic research with NO-ISBN publications, → Bernhard Cella, for instance, holds that “[w]ithin communities, creating and stabilizing a collective identity is one of the main reasons for publishing.”⁸⁵ Eva Weinmayr affirms this strong connection and has headed her artistic practice with a quotation by André Breton: “One publishes to find comrades.”⁸⁶

The idea of publishing as a collective, community forming, or strengthening process affects the publication’s production phase as much as its reception. Based on the awareness that publishing necessarily constitutes a “concerted speech act”⁸⁷ that includes a number of agents, a model for a publishing community can be developed where a publication is produced in an act of collective productivity and creativity. One expression of this is the typical organization and self-portrayal of contemporary publishing houses and projects as production *collectives*. → Hannes Bajohr has given a depiction of this with the examples of the “publishing collective” Troll Thread as well as his own “text collective” OxoA. The community shaping aspect of publishing also applies to the processes and practice of post-production. Special modes of circulation have been developed as a means to create

community. The practice of bookswapping that → Michalis Pichler describes as well as the social library initiatives and sharing platform projects that → Alessandro Ludovico and → Eva Weinmayr discuss are two examples.

The places where the communities can organize, network, exchange, consolidate, and develop are of increasing importance.⁸⁸ These could be the rooms of production, as is the case in the print stores of Publication Studio, the rooms of trade, like the currently mushrooming micro fairs (→ Bernhard Cella and → Michalis Pichler), but also the rooms of reception, like Wendy's Subway, which is a library, reading room, and workspace, which cultivates a "social relationship of reading." The ability of this space to facilitate community and discourse is documented by → Rachel Valinsky, K. Antranik Cassem, and Matt Longabucco in their contribution, in which they take the opportunity to collectively write a text. In this sense, their tri-vocal contribution reflects upon and puts to the test "publishing's sociality as a form of artistic practice."

(Private) Publishing in a Personal Network of Relationships

One extreme of such community specific publishing takes place when the intended public is limited to a very small, almost private circle from its inception. This form of publishing within a limited public sphere that was familiar in earlier cultures of sociability such as the scholarly circles of the early modern age or literary circles of friends and literary salons is discussed in the current volume in conjunction with samizdat publications (→ Vadim Zakharov, → Valentina Parisi) and NO-ISBN publications (→ Bernhard Cella). These publications derive from an environment of intimate communication that is based on personal acquaintances. Usually passed from hand to hand, they circulate "outside of the 'anonymous' public sphere, namely in a restricted circle of tendentially reciprocally communicating 'friends.'"⁸⁹ In this sense, → Vadim Zakharov has also explicitly identified the samizdat publications as "token[s] of friendship" and as a continuation of the typical studio and kitchen conversations that took place during those years. This form of publishing practice that is primarily focused on the human relationships contains an aspect of authenticity and trust that would be lost in addressing an anonymous public sphere, which is why → Vadim Zakharov adhered to this format even long after Perestroika.

By embedding production, circulation, and reception in a personal network of relationships, the publications that appear in a minimal number of copies—regardless of whether they are circulated as a manuscript, typescript, private printing, or POD—have the private nature of a manuscript or letter.⁹⁰ This has implications for the status of the work since this is constrained by the socialization of the text. Following Jerome McGann (see above), a text becomes a work as a result of its publication. Furthermore,

there is also a difference between unprinted, "private" manuscripts and the "public" printed page with regards to the aesthetic judgment of the work's status: in contrast to the published text, which is seen as being complete, a manuscript is considered to be "unfinished," and regarded as being a mere draft.⁹¹

This lesser status is mirrored in the general neglect or even contempt of manuscript books and private printings in the history of literature, books, and libraries as well as in its special treatment it receives from the law. The conditions under which a publication has legal implications are not yet in force with a manuscript. In Germany, for instance, a publication that is marked with "printed as a manuscript," can rely on the fact that "a publishing of the work in the sense of a public notification hasn't been achieved, which is why it is forbidden to cite such a text,"⁹² or to duplicate, discuss in a critique, or otherwise make use of it.

Interestingly, the limited medial, legal, and aesthetic status of such private publications doesn't apply to the samizdat culture. Regardless of the limited print run and extremely limited circulation, samizdat was understood by all of its members (as well as by the state) as a *publishing* model and their texts were normally granted the status of a publication and work. As → Vadim Zakharov explains, there was an unspoken agreement: "As soon as we completed the five copies and brought them into circulation, they were, for us, finished and released, that is, published." Following → Valentina Parisi, one could speak of an "increasing institutionalization of self-publishing in the 1970s."

The act of circulation is crucial here. As such, this verifies Bhaskar's thesis that the number of copies published does not determine its public nature: "Scale, while not irrelevant, neither constitutes nor invalidates amplification. Amplification has various degrees and criteria for success, dependent on the model being used. At a conceptual extreme, the idea of amplification says that even if only one more copy is encountered than otherwise, then we have amplification; we have publishing."⁹³

That the samizdat transcripts were associated with a definite status of publication is also reflected in → Valentina Parisi's findings that a surprising number of writers sought to give their hand or typewritten products the appearance of being a *book* by making them look like printed matter, especially by using typical paratextual elements such as a title page, publisher logo, and imprint. This was done also by faithfully imitating the text's setting and typography. → Valentina Parisi classifies this "kind of mimicry" as "samizdat reprints."

It is equally astonishing that "a samizdat copyright" has emerged that prohibits the reproduction of the samizdat editions without the author's consent. Claiming the copyright for a work aims at strengthening the position of the author and wielding a form of work authority especially in anonymous communication situations where the author loses the direct control over his work, as in the case of print publications, which address a wider audience

that is not personally known by the author. There is, therefore, every indication that these copyrighted samizdat editions—even if only a handful of copies exists—are no longer conceived of as manuscripts but as released works in a greater, rather anonymous public sphere.

Samizdat thereby established an unusual “forum for communication, which is situated on the threshold between the public and private sphere” that could potentially be taken as a role model for contemporary digital constellations that also cannot be “adequately conceived through the strict dichotomy of private and public communication.”⁹⁴ In this sense, the NO-ISBN scene that → Bernhard Cella examines oscillates between the private aspect of communication and the desire to enter the public sphere as well. One sometimes has the impression that the status of the publication is purposely left in limbo. Every now and again, the NO-ISBN publications seem to have arisen less from the wish of “creating a public” than from the interest in publishing as a “maker culture.”⁹⁵ As such, it is in accordance with the general trend of handmade products that has emerged in our society.

Visibility of Cultural Production

Another extreme in dealing with the public sphere is executed by artistic projects that draw on a larger, anonymous public in principle but which consciously refuse to be a part of the established distribution systems and thereby demonstrate en passant the thin border that separates publishing from “random communication and chance encountering.”⁹⁶ When → Lucas W. Melkane, for instance, leaves copies of his book in a backpack in public spaces as a symbol of protest to the contemporary culture of the market and spectacle and allows it to be found by chance like a message in a bottle, he simulates a thought experiment that is often employed in scholarly discussions in their attempts to define the public sphere in connection with publishing:

“Here’s a brief thought experiment: you write a novel, and leave it on a park bench. Is this a published novel? Let’s say you print 1,000 copies, leaving them on 1,000 park benches. How about now? Or how about a publisher buys it, takes out masses of adverts, but literally no one buys a single copy? In what sense has that work been published? At what point does a letter or email pass from private correspondence to public, published text? One hundred or 100,000 recipients? Or is the idea of putting a numerical value on being public absurd, and if so, what conceptual distinction should we make instead? If I post the email on the Internet, we can assume it has been published, but then, if nobody views it, how is it more public than an email sent to 100 people?”⁹⁷

Questions such as these gain particular relevance in light of the new digital forms of production and communication. Melkane’s abandoned backpack and the message in a bottle set out at sea that is familiar from previous

centuries are in a certain sense analogous to today's posting, blogging or tweeting—all of which have rekindled the discussion about the public nature of publishing.⁹⁸

Furthermore, Lucas W. Melkane's subversive form of undercover distribution contains a high-level of presuppositions in that he is infringing upon the "unwritten etiquette" of this artistic "practice known as 'shop dropping,'" namely "that the goods in question should clearly and explicitly be works of art."⁹⁹ As it happens, → Lucas W. Melkane's book is a reprint of Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *Jealousy* whose story Melkane has supplemented with two details—nevertheless, without indicating them and without listing himself as the author of the reprint. Even if one holds the opinion that the books Melkane placed in the world are published and distributed, they are rarely understood as being "his" work by others. If anything, the publications are circulating under the wrong name. → Eva Weinmayr reports of a similar case in her contribution, where an unknown person added two chapters to a pirate copy of a Jaime Bayly's novel without making any indication of it. Following → Lucas W. Melkane, one could also speak of an "artwork that exists within indifference" in this case; an artwork whose author never reveals his/her identity. Such a work ventures not only to withdraw its distribution from established channels but also to rid itself of the typical distinctions drawn in our culture that are, for instance, connected with the author's function.¹⁰⁰

The staging of withdrawal is also an apt description of Katie Paterson's *Future Library* (2014), which → Paul Benzon discusses in his contribution. Placing full trust in the future, Paterson planted a forest in 2014 and founded a library for texts that will be submitted yearly by famous authors. These literary texts, however, will only be published on the paper from the trees and presented to the public in 2114. In this constellation of delay that offers neither amplification, distribution nor access, the texts inevitably "remain in a limbo of potentiality."¹⁰¹ This leads → Paul Benzon to speak of "a corpus of *unpublished* works of fiction" and to pose the question whether Margaret Atwood, who submitted the first text, can already list it in her catalog of *works*.

The long timeframe and uncertainty of the outcome of Katie Paterson's project call attention to the enormous effort that the artist has invested to ensure the longevity of the texts in a secured space: the setting includes a special library room, an archival and library-oriented infrastructure, financial safeguarding (through selling limited editions), city and state funding (the disposal and protection of a piece of forest as well as a library space), as well as private, non-profit engagement (selection panel and committee of trustees). This case seems to also affirm Kenneth Goldsmith's pointer, which → Annette Gilbert discusses in connection with institutional critical publishing projects, that "you have the institution as survival strategy."¹⁰²

There are other publishing projects that take a contrary position and consciously withdraw from the established practices of institutionally

disseminating, registering, archiving, and protecting publications. The NO-ISBN movement that → Bernhard Cella discusses in the present volume is an example of such “strategies of decentralization and disobedience.”¹⁰³ For a variety of reasons, this movement refrains from providing its publications to institutions and the market. As a consequence, it more or less consciously takes the risk of remaining “invisible.” This means that they are scarcely ever registered in libraries or archives and are often fated to become invisible or lost, ending much like the so-called gray literature.¹⁰⁴ What is meant here by invisibility is very different than what is meant in Elisabeth Tonnard’s *The Invisible Book*: It is of an institutional nature and not of a material one.

Kenneth Goldsmith makes a provocative reversal to what has already been suggested in his *If It Doesn’t Exist on the Internet, It Doesn’t Exist* where he links the public sphere today with words posted in the Internet and not with those that are printed and institutionally supported:

“the new radicalism is paper. Right. Publish it on a printed page and no one will ever know about it. It’s the perfect vehicle for terrorists, plagiarists, and for subversive thoughts in general. [...] if you don’t want it to exist—and there are many reasons to want to keep things private—keep it off the web.”¹⁰⁵

Whether this is the case is up for debate. Nevertheless, the current discourse demonstrates that there are numerous concepts of the public sphere at play here and that an ironclad drawing of fronts between the Internet and print distorts the richness of the constellations of the mediums. Instead of simply counteracting the public sphere of the printed word with that of the posted, it seems more productive to concentrate on mixed forms—like, for instance, experimental post-digital literature that, as → Hannes Bajohr suggests, profit from “the strange status of POD as at once analog and digital”—and to assume that there is a range of visibility in *both* media forms. This is because, as shown, there is a scale of visibility that can be found within a single realm itself (see the example of “visible” institutionally secured publications and mostly “invisible” NO-ISBN publications). Likewise, as → Hannes Bajohr maintains, not every speech act in the Internet has the same status of being “public.” Even in the Internet, “existence” in the public sphere depends on a number of constellations, such as the “site” of the “publication” (i.e. there is a difference between private homepages, curated sites and highly-ranked platforms) and the reputation of the speaker: on the Internet “the perlocutionary part of a speech act (and the publishing gesture is one) depends in its outcome on the identity and the status of the agent performing it: It makes a difference *who* publishes *what* in *which context*.”

Regardless of how this question is decided, we can nevertheless maintain that if we want to ensure that this form of prolific cultural production that originates outside of established institutions—ignoring here questions concerning the number of copies and whether the publication is digital or in print—will be publicly perceived and enter the cultural memory,

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[REDACTED]

then alternative ways of labeling, acquiring, assigning value, tracing, and archiving must be discovered—just as → Alessandro Ludovico urges in his contribution: “People involved should then assume responsibility in scanning and sharing, on a personal and independent level, to build their own cultural history, preserving (physically) and sharing (digitally) all the knowledge that they think is valuable.” This can be achieved in the form of a database, such as *NO-ISBN*, samizdat and Internet archives, like *MANI* and *aaaaarg.fail*, formerly *aaaaarg.org*, or in social library projects like *BookCrossing* and *memoryoftheworld.org*—all of which are projects that → Bernhard Cella, Valentina Parisi, Alessandro Ludovico, and Eva Weinmayr present in their contributions. The social components of these self-organized initiatives shouldn’t be underestimated. They often arise out of the desire to share and exchange and serve as a platform for an activist community. According to → Eva Weinmayr in her contribution with the telling title “Library Underground—A Reading List for a Coming Community,” such projects follow in the footsteps of the librarian activists of the 1970s and have aspirations to develop alternative systems of classification and cataloging.

But we are not only concerned with whether or not these publications that exist outside of the institution can be located and archived. The question of assigning value to them is also closely related. By circumventing the established publishing houses and institutions, they lack authority in the public sphere. It is as if they didn’t exist. One can already ascertain from the blanket derogatory designation of self-publishing ventures as “vanity presses” that they are not sufficiently appreciated. As such, they must establish their right to existence and cultural value through other means. If it was previously true that in the established gatekeeper system “[e]ven a book that sold poorly and received no or terrible reviews was considered ‘legitimate’ because someone outside of the author saw value in it,” then publications stemming from outside an institution must face the reality that they “don’t count. New Institutions, not gatekeepers, but alternative groups that take [this kind of] writing [and publishing] seriously will be needed to validate this form of cultural production.”¹⁰⁶ The coming years will show whether this will succeed.

Radical Contemporaneity

On that note, the current volume is a snapshot in the truest sense of the word. The field of publishing as artistic practice is bound to the moment of its emergence and stands out for its extreme contemporaneity: it is part of a continuously changing media landscape that is shaped by economic and institutional upheavals, discursive shifts in legal, political, and artistic fields as well as renegotiations of concepts of authorship, creativity, the public sphere, and accessibility. Not only does publishing stand at the intersection

of these developments but it is actively introducing new ruptures—but no more so than in publishing as artistic practice whose defined sensibility and delight in experimentation in all realms of publishing incite and inspire the registration of slightest tensions and quakes, the diagnosis of subtle dislocations, the critical reflection on both the status quo and emerging developments, and the probing of new potentials in the field of publishing. It is still unforeseeable whether the ideas and concepts emerging in the context of publishing as artistic practice will have a “Duchamp-like” impact later—but at least something is happening that is steeped in a grand cultural tradition and that is concurrently challenging this tradition, promising openness and open spaces, new beginnings and deeper insights. In the end, the concepts and projects of publishing as artistic practice build on and develop publishing culture as well as perform a form of artistic research that can also be highly beneficial for science and society as well as for the publishing, literary, and art world.

Making the Invisible Visible: On the Present Volume

The publication of a volume on publishing also enables and enforces a very practical, direct way of thinking about publishing, since the current volume is steeped in the practices, processes, rules, and framing conditions of publishing—all of which are the subject of the present publication. Finally, this volume also circulates in the “horizons of the publishable” that “denote[] both a boundary or limit and the conditions of a possibility.”¹⁰⁷ The choice of publishing house and contributors by the editor, for example, programmatically situates the volume at the intersection of artistic and academic discourse, but it also influences the editorial and design-based traits, which give the volume its particular character.

An edited volume necessarily oscillates between the individuality of the particular voices and the necessity of unifying them into a whole. The usual practice in academic publishing with its guidelines and style sheets—especially regarding formatting, spelling, citation, and copyright—aims at harmonization, but runs the risk of homogenization and uniformity. The attempt to dispel of all norms in order to preserve the peculiarities of the author’s voices and to also reflect the range and variety of contributions that originate in highly diverse publishing, writing and academic cultures, has proven to be impractical, which is why the standards of the publishing house, the Chicago Manual of Style, and American spelling have been followed. It is only in the academic style of quoting that a few artistic and literary contributions find a certain amount of freedom.

The design of this book itself engages with this irresolvable conflict between individuality and control in the name of a coherent whole. The design has created a framework similar to the guidelines and style sheet which

integrates the individual contributors and their voices. Whereas, consistent design elements like the fonts and the unified print space create constancy and uniformity, the variant graphic styles for the academic articles, interviews, and essayistic/artistic contributions, as well as the dynamic column of footnotes, create variance. The individually designed title pages, which are an interpretation of the respective contributions, allow for all contributions, regardless of their length, to have the same presence while also highlighting both their specificity and singularity.

On top of this, the designers themselves contribute to the publishing discussion when they reflect on the peculiarities and artistic potential of the book as a medium and the publishing practice by making visual insertions and quotations dispersed throughout the book. This meta-level is decisive for the cover's design as well. Using the data that is of prime importance for bibliographies and distribution, the cover exhibits the standard parameters and framing conditions of publishing in distended proportions and brings the inside out by reversing its recto and verso. As such, it makes the hidden and invisible elements of the publishing practice visible, which, in the end, was the objective of the present volume.

Translated by Shane Anderson

- 1 "As opposed to the artist book that refers directly to the book as a work of art, 'publishing' transfers the socioeconomical, technical, and legal aspects of dissemination of the artist work—the activity of making it public to a specific audience." Delphine Bedel, "Meta/Books – Publishing as Artistic Practice," in *Code—X. Paper, Ink, Pixel and Screen*, ed. Danny Aldred and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé (Farnham: bookRoom, 2015), 03:11–03:22, 03:15f.
- 2 See Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike von Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001); David G. Stern, "The Practical Turn," in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, ed. Stephen P. Turner and Paul A. Roth (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 185–206.
- 3 Andreas Reckwitz, "Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 32, no. 4 (2003): 282–301, 282 [unless otherwise noted all translations S.A.].
- 4 Stern, "The Practical Turn," 185.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 186.
- 6 Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (2002): 243–263, 250.
- 7 Stern, "The Practical Turn," 189f.
- 8 See the statements by Michalis Pichler and Lucas W. Melkane, the interviews with Vadim Zakharov, Bernhard Cella, and the artist publishers of the first generation in the contribution by Anne Møeglin-Delcroix as well as the self-reflective descriptions that Nick Thurston, Antoine Lefebvre, Aurélie Noury, and Eva Weinmayr give of their own practices.
- 9 See Bedel, "Meta/Books"; Regine Ehleiter, "Publishing as Artistic Practice. A Conversation with Delphine Bedel," *Eikon* 86 (May 2014): 41–47; Antoine Lefebvre, "Portrait de l'artiste en éditeur – L'édition comme pratique artistique alternative" (Ph.D. diss., Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2014), online <http://labibliothequefantas.free.fr/index.php?/theseis>; Bernhard Cella, Leo Findeisen and Agnes Blaha, eds., *NO-ISBN. On Self-Publishing* (Cologne: Walther König, 2015); Andrea Francke and Eva Weinmayr, "The Piracy Project," in *Code—X*, 01:07–01:18; Eva Weinmayr, "One Publishes to Find Comrades," in *The Visual Event, an Education in Appearances*, ed. Oliver Klimpel (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014), 50–59.
- 10 See Nick Thurston, "Publishing as a Praxis of Conceptualist Reading Performances," *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 6, no. 3 (2013): 421–429; Nick Thurston and

- Sharon Kivland, "Reading. Some Positions," in *The Book is Alive!* ed. Emmanuelle Wackerlé and Richard Sawdon Smith (Farnham: bookroom, 2013), 150-159; Hannes Bajohr, ed., *Code and Concept. Literature and the Digital* (Berlin: Frohmann, 2016); Alessandro Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print. The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2012).
- 11 Still in 2006 Simone Murray gave a diagnosis on the "contemporary publishing studies' embryonic institutional and disciplinary status." Simone Murray, "Publishing Studies: Critically Mapping Research in Search of a Discipline," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2006): 3-25, 13. Although there are countless higher education programs under this label, they are primarily designed to meet the qualifications of practitioners in the publishing industry and often unilaterally emphasize trade book publishing or academic/educational publishing. This theme remains acutely there. See the contributions by Josipa Selthofer, Christoph Bläsi, Bertrand Legendre, and Sophie Noël in *Libellarium* 8, no. 1 (2015).
 - 12 Rachel Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable: Publishing in/as Literary Studies," *ELH* 75 (2008): 707-735, 708.
 - 13 It is further stated that: "It's similar to the challenge that has faced curating and exhibitions history since the 1990s: how to develop a sophisticated meta-consciousness about a field of action that many assume to be secondary or to overlap with already established disciplines of knowledge, like art history." Louise O'Hare, "Artists at Work: Nick Thurston" [22.8.2012], <http://www.afterall.org/online/7239>.
 - 14 All quotations from Robert Darnton, "What is the history of books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83, 67.
 - 15 Thus, for instance, the term "publisher" is an anachronism. See the alternative model suggested by Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: British Library, 1993), 5-43.
 - 16 See the draft of a simplified communications circuit for the digital age in Adriaan van der Weel, "The Communications Circuit Revisited," *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis* 8 (2001): 13-25.
 - 17 See Adams and Barker, "A New Model"; Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable," 711, and Michael Bhaskar, *The Content Machine. Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (London, New York, Delhi: Anthem, 2013), 104-106.
 - 18 See Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
 - 19 Lothar Müller, "Das Ungedruckte autorisieren. Wie die Wahrheit zu Papier kommt," *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* IV, no. 4 (2010): 14-22, 15.
 - 20 Stein Haugom Olsen, "Defining A Literary Work," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, no. 2 (Winter 1976): 133-142, 134.
 - 21 Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 5.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 169.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 140.
 - 24 Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable," 708.
 - 25 Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 140.
 - 26 All quotations *ibid.*, 18, 33, 34, 105 and 114. See for the relationship between posting and publishing the most recent and elaborate examination from Paul Soulellis, "Making Public" (paper presented at Fondation Galeries LaFayette, Paris, June 22, 2015).
 - 27 All quotations from Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 80, 89, 104, 117 and 133.
 - 28 Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable," 709.
 - 29 *Ibid.*
 - 30 More than a few of the publishing projects and works discussed in the current volume are in this sense borderline cases which can equally be regarded both as literature and as art.
 - 31 O'Hare, "Artists at Work: Nick Thurston." This development was reflected upon early on in the literary scene, see for instance Kenneth Goldsmith's seminar "Publishing as Practice" in 2006/07 at School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
 - 32 Nick Thurston, "Who is taking responsibility for that text?" (paper presented at the meeting for the International Text and Image Association, Chicago, February 2014).
 - 33 *Ibid.*
 - 34 From the publishing announcement of Robert Klanten, Matthias Hübner, eds., *Fully Booked. Cover Art and Design for Books* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2008), <http://shop.gestalten.com/fully-booked.html> [emphasis mine]. A stock-taking of innovative approaches in book design has been provided by Robert Klanten, Matthias Hübner, Andrew Losowsky, eds., *Fully Books: Ink on Paper. An Exhibition of Design and Concepts for New Publications* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2013).
 - 35 Craig Mod, "Designing Books in the Digital Age," in *Book: A Futurist's Manifesto. A Collection of Essays from the Bleeding Edge of Publishing*, ed. Hugh McGuire and Brian O'Leary (Boston, MA: O'Reilly Media, 2012), 81-105, 90.
 - 36 Ann Swidler, "What anchors cultural practices," in Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn*, 74-92, 74.
 - 37 Antoine Lefebvre, "Portrait de l'artiste en éditeur," 269.
 - 38 Barbara Moore and Jon Hendricks, "The Page as Alternative Space. 1950 to 1969," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (Rochester, New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1993), 87-95.
 - 39 Ulises Carrión, "Bookworks Revisited," in *Second Thoughts* (Amsterdam: VOID Distributors, 1980), 56-70, 64.

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121-429; Nick Thurston and

- 40 According to the theme of a conversation to which the MoMA Library invited on July 11, 2012 and Sarah Bodman, "New pages: Celebrating the Book as a Democratic Multiple in a Variety of Twenty-First-Century Forms," in *The Book is Alive!* 122–129, 125.
- 41 See for example the adoption of holistic book concepts in the literary publishing houses that produce bestsellers (see → Alexander Starre) and the coupling of digital publishing and POD as dissemination strategies (see → Hannes Bajohr).
- 42 See for instance the 2014 Zurich exhibition *Poetry Will Be Made By All*, co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Kenneth Goldsmith (see → Hannes Bajohr).
- 43 See for instance Craig Dworkin, Simon Morris and Nick Thurston, *Do or DIY* (York: Information as Material, 2012).
- 44 O'Hare, Louise, "Artists at Work: Nick Thurston."
- 45 John W. Maxwell, "Publishing Education in the 21st Century and the Role of the University," *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 17, no. 2 (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0017.205>.
- 46 Katarzyna Bazarnik, "Time for Liberation," in Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature or total literature. Collected Essays 1999–2009* (Kraków: Halart, 2010), 7–8, 7.
- 47 For a more comprehensive view on the "literary bibliographer" who "draws book design into the signifying territory of the work," see Alexander Starre, *Metamedia: American Book Fictions and Literary Print Culture after Digitization* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 168 and 171.
- 48 Ulises Carrión, "The New Art of Making Books," in *Second Thoughts*, 5–22, 8.
- 49 Thurston, "Publishing as a Praxis," 424.
- 50 According also to the maxim of his imprint Information as Material. Thurston and Kivland, "Reading. Some Positions," 151.
- 51 Carrión, "The New Art of Making Books," 8.
- 52 "I found Stéphane Mallarmé to be a precursor in the idea of authors making books, instead of just writing texts. [...] Mallarmé would therefore be one of the first examples of this 'new art of making books' that Carrion links to artists' books."
- 53 Roger Chartier and Guglielmo Cavallo, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (London: Polity, 1995), 5. Similarly, Roger E. Stoddard, "Morphology and the Book from an American Perspective," *Printing History* 9 (1987): 2–14.
- 54 More detailed in Thurston, "Publishing as a Praxis," esp. 423 and 425.
- 55 See Heinrich Bosse, *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschafft. Über die Entstehung des Urheberrechts aus dem Geist der Goethezeit* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 18.
- 56 Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable," 709.
- 57 Thurston, "Publishing as a Praxis," 423.
- 58 Thurston and Kivland, "Reading. Some Positions," 151.
- 59 Thurston, "Who is taking responsibility for that text?"
- 60 See → Annette Gilbert's deliberations on VanessaPlace Inc. in the present volume.
- 61 Thurston, "Who is taking responsibility for that text?"
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Thurston can thereby draw upon Rachel Malik's definition of a book as "a site where various publishing processes—writing, editing, design, marketing, production—intersect and conflict." Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable," 710 [emphasis mine].
- 64 Holly Melgard, *Reimbursement* (Troll Thread, 2013), 4. For more details see → Hannes Bajohr.
- 65 Kenneth Goldsmith: *Theory* (Paris: Jean Boite Éditions, 2015), n.p.
- 66 Thurston, "Who is taking responsibility for that text?"
- 67 Dorothea von Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," *The Exhibitionist*, 4 (2011): 6–12, 8.
- 68 Goldsmith: *Theory*, n.p. In a further aphorism, he adopts the concept of curating for literature: "Writers are becoming curators of language, a move similar to the emergence of the curator as artist in the visual arts."
- 69 Announcement of the publishing house, <http://www.jean-boite.fr/box/theory-english-edition> [emphasis mine].
- 70 The differences and similarities between the publishing practice and the editorial practice should be considered separately. In the current discourse, the boundaries between them are often blurred.
- 71 All quotations from Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 185.
- 72 Darren Wershler, "Afterword: Title of Essay in Plain Type," in Nick Thurston, *Of the Subcontract. Or, Principles of Poetic Right* (York: Information as Material, 2013), 133–141, 139. "This book is not a solution but a symptom, a litmus test of larger social changes, both basic and corrosive." Ibid.
- 73 Matthew Stadler, "What is Publication Studio?" (paper presented at a conference at Musagetes in Guelph, Ontario, June 6, 2012), online <http://musagetes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/What-is-Publication-Studio-by-Matthew-Stadler.pdf>, 11.
- 74 All quotations from Rüdiger Schnell, "Handschrift und Druck. Zur funktionalen Differenzierung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert," *IASL* 32, no. 1 (2007): 66–111, 71, 102 and 93. See also: "Print technology created the public." Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (London: Penguin, 1996), 68.
- 75 Müller, "Das Ungedruckte autorisieren," 18.
- 76 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2000).
- 77 Müller, "Das Ungedruckte autorisieren," 18.
- 78 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 17.

Annette Gilbert's deliberations on aPlace Inc. in the present volume. On, "Who is taking responsibility for the text?"

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39. "This book is not a solution to the problem, a litmus test of larger social conditions, both basic and corrosive." Ibid.

stadler, "What is Publication?" Paper presented at a conference on "The Book is Alive" in Guelph, Ontario, June 6, 2014. <http://musagetes.ca/uploads/2014/04/Publication-Studio-by-Matthew-Stadler.pdf>, 11.

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Print technology created the conditions for Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Bell's *Medium is the Massage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 68.

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in, *The Age of Access* (New York: Putnam, 2000).

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and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 11.

- * 79 Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 18f. [emphasis mine]. Praxeological approaches, however, suggest that every act is in reference to other people, which is why every act would be public and it is only the degree of public sphere that varies. This implies that there is no single public sphere.
- * 80 Soulellis, "Making Public."
- 81 "About," <http://www.publicationstudio.biz/about>.
- 82 Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 163.
- 83 Bhaskar deliberates: "Publishing has large consequences on the public sphere as the littoral between private thoughts and the public realm. [...] There is insufficient space to explore this idea in detail. Providing an explanation of the public sphere is itself a book-length project or more. It should be noted however that there must be a relationship of some sort." Ibid.
- 84 There are differing opinions regarding the concept of "community," since "that allows a false implication of openness. I prefer the word 'public' because it is literally an open space, and it does not imply harmony. [...] it includes conflict." Matthew Stadler in Antoine Lefebvre, "Entretien avec/Interview with Matthew Stadler," in *Portrait de l'artiste en éditeur. Entretiens*, <http://labibliothequefantas.free.fr/index.php/?/thesis>, 21–43, 31.
- 85 Bernhard Cella, "NO-ISBN as a political strategy," in *NO-ISBN*, 379–408, 405.
- 86 Eva Weinmayr, "One Publishes to Find Comrades."
- 87 Bosse, *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft*, 41.
- 88 As it has been sketched by theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser, the difficult connection between abstract, rather immaterial public sphere and concrete public spaces needs to be examined separately, especially with respect to the public nature of publishing. A first step in this direction has been made by Lionel Ruffel, "The Public Spaces of Contemporary Literature," *Qui parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 22, no. 2 (2014): 101–122.
- 89 Carlos Spoerhase, "'Manuscript für Freunde.' Die materielle Textualität literarischer Netzwerke, 1760–1830 (Gleim, Klopstock, Lavater, Fichte, Reinhold, Goethe)," *DVJS* 88, no. 2 (2014): 172–205, 182.
- 90 For samizdat and Moscow Conceptualism's preference for letters see Annette Gilbert, "'Falt ihn zusammen und steck ihn zurück.' Der Brief in der vor-gutenbergischen Wortkultur des russischen Samizdat," in *Der Brief – Ereignis und Objekt. Frankfurter Tagung*, ed. Waltraud Wiethölter and Anne Bohnenkamp (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld 2010), 184–195.
- 91 "A higher quality and a greater degree of perfection are expected from a print than from a handwritten transmission. A print was considered as an *opus perfectum*, not only in the sense of a quantitative completion, but also from a qualitative integrity." Schnell, "Handschrift und Druck," 78.
- 92 Karl Löffler and Joachim Kirchner, eds., *Lexikon des gesamten Buchwesens* (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1936), 411f.
- 93 Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 120. ¹
- 94 Spoerhase, "'Manuscript für Freunde,'" 203.
- 95 That some publishing projects may be jaded by the satisfaction of the creative production process is also suspected with respect to the burgeoning POD production: "POD technologies enable an extraordinary and interesting new cultural practice—a form of popular culture centered on production rather than consumption." Ann Haugland, "Opening the Gates: Print On-Demand Publishing as Cultural Production," *Publishing Research Quarterly* (Fall 2006): 3–16, 4 [emphasis mine].
- 96 Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print*, 148. This is in accord with Alessandro Ludovico's thesis: "Publishing cannot exist without distribution." Ibid., 147.
- 97 Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*, 18f.
- 98 See Soulellis, "Making Public."
- 99 Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print*, 148. For further examples of the implementation of this artistic strategy in the field of publishing see *ibid.*, 147–149.
- 100 The problem, however, is the implicit intention to deceive buyers and readers and the falsification of the Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jaime Bayly's authorial intentions.
- 101 Seekers of lice, "Invent the Present: Footnotes," in *The Book is Alive!* 54–63, 55.
- 102 "I, for example, owe my career to academies and institutions; if my work is not being taught or written about, it doesn't exist." Kenneth Goldsmith, "My Career in Poetry or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Institution," *Umélec* 1 (2012).
- 103 Gabrielle Cram, "NO-ISBN – The An-Archive as Subject," in *NO-ISBN*, 259–265, 265.
- 104 This also often applies to the majority of POD products, since, according to → Hannes Bajohr, "despite the inherent reproducibility of POD, the books do not circulate, are not disseminated, and have no pretensions for finding an expansive readership." See also Peter Brantley, "The New Missing Books," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 28 (2012): 172–175.
- 105 Kenneth Goldsmith, "If It Doesn't Exist on the Internet, It Doesn't Exist," September 27, 2005, http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/if_it_doesnt_exist.html.
- 106 Haugland, "Opening the Gates," 15.
- 107 Malik, "Horizons of the Publishable," 721.

**SOME PRELIMINARY
OBSERVATIONS
TOWARD A STUDY
OF THE VARIETIES OF
ARTIST PUBLISHERS
IN THE SIXTIES AND
SEVENTIES**

Anne Mæglin-Delcroix

MINARY

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Nihil novi sub sole?

The importance acquired by artist publishers in the years 1960-70 was unprecedented. But the phenomenon itself was not new: the history of the artist's edition is punctuated by great figures and ambitious undertakings, like those of William Blake in the late eighteenth century, Balzac during the 1820s and William Morris's Kelmscott Press in the late nineteenth century. However, it should be observed that this history, above all, in the twentieth century, was dominated by writers, such as Virginia Woolf in Britain (the Hogarth Press), whose example was followed by various members of the Bloomsbury Group, and in France Georges Hugnet (Les Éditions de la montagne) or Pierre André Benoît (under the name PAB), to cite only a few. Even more numerous were the poets and writers who were founders and publishers of reviews.

What was really new in the sixties and seventies was the extension of this phenomenon to the field of the visual arts and its amplification over the years. This extension and amplification were directly related to the adoption, obviously much more surprising among artists than writers, of the simple book as an artistic medium of primary importance. But it is not particularly surprising that the proliferation of artists' books and magazines over the years should have led to the emergence of artist publishers. The reason was basically the same as for writers: freedom. The freedom to publish their works, as rapidly as possible, in the form they wanted and without being answerable to anyone else.

Freedom, as we know, was the key word in those years of self-affirmation and struggle for independence in all areas of social life and culture. Art was no exception. In the field of artists' publications, this craving for independence certainly had a political coloring. (What didn't in the sixties?) But it was rarely explicitly claimed in political terms except in the countries of Eastern Europe or Latin America, then under dictatorial regimes, where publishing was strictly controlled and self-publishing was the only solution. But elsewhere the decision to self-publish, or publish one's friends, primarily reflected artists' desire to have complete responsibility for their own work and dispense with the authorization of the art institutions, the values they embodied, and models they imposed. It responded to the artists' urge to control the whole production process and do without intermediaries, meaning checks and obstacles between the project (conception) and its fulfillment (printing), or even its presentation and distribution. Self-organization was the outcome of this urge toward self-sufficiency. Publishing one's own works (as in the case of Edward Ruscha or Ian Hamilton Finlay, for instance), or those of one's artistic family (with Dieter Roth, Dick Higgins, Simon Cutts, Herman de Vries, Maurizio Nannucci, Leif Eriksson, among the most important, to be discussed here), expressed a superlative form of freedom of artistic expression.

It should be noted in this respect that the political argument for wider distribution, often stressed when discussing the origins of the artist's book presented as a democratic alternative to the unique work of art, though it had

some foundation, was less common among artist publishers than the personal aspiration for freedom of action, which was common to all of them without exception. herman de vries clearly illustrates this widespread outlook. Asked about his early work as a publisher in Arnhem in 1960, on the occasion of his first personal book (untitled, known as *wit is overdaad*), he described it as just one facet of his many-sided activity as an “emancipated” artist who was also an author of texts and a commentator on his own works. “i had the idea that now artists were ‘emancipated,’ so i did it myself. I also gave short talks at the openings of my own exhibitions for that reason in the sixties.”¹ In 1974 (for his little book *noise*), though he had not lacked publishers for his works since 1960, de vries created what he called temporary travelling press publications during a stay in Nepal, in direct response to the resources offered by Kathmandu, especially paper and printers. “i discovered some small printers with unexpected possibilities: they were still printing with lead type that they obtained from india where the printers were selling their old lead type because they preferred to work with the modern offset, so we had a choice of older types that were no longer available in many other places—and, more importantly, it was cheap.”² Opportunity makes the publisher. And circumstances. In summer, whenever herman de vries is not traveling and works in Eschenau, where he lives in Germany, he renames his publishing house: eschenau summer press.

It is significant that among those who will later publish other artists and thus become actual publishers, all began, like herman de vries, as publishers of their own works. Most often, it was the first of them. Dick Higgins launched Something Else Press with *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface* in New York in 1964; Maurizio Nannucci founded Exempla in Florence in 1967 by publishing a multiple, *Rosso*; Simon Cutts created Coracle Press in London in 1975 by

publishing six titles of his own (though not his first). Leif Eriksson started Wedgepress & Cheese with his first-ever artist's book in the strict sense (after a series of object-books), *The Waste Paper Act* in Malmö in 1978.

As for Dieter Roth, who was the first of all, he took this approach to an extreme. In 1957, in Reykjavík, he founded forlag ed because he was unable to find a publisher for his first book, *Kinderbuch* (1954). So he published it himself, with a print run of a hundred copies.³ He continued to publish his books under the same name until 1961. He then went into partnership with Hansjörg Mayer in 1968, largely to publish his *Gesammelte Werke* (*Collected Works*), but having a publisher did not prevent him from establishing other personal publishing organizations at the same time. In 1971, he founded Verlag (*sic*) to release his “essays,” then, in 1974, he set up Dieter Roth Familienverlag (becoming Dieter Roth Verlag in 1978) to issue books and records by his family and friends, as well as the journal *Zeitschrift für alles* (*Magazine for Everything*), when Hansjörg Mayer gave it up after the first three numbers.⁴

1 herman de vries, “answers to anne mœglin-delcroix's questions about artists' books and so,” in herman de vries. *les livres et les publications. catalogue raisonné* (Saint-Yrieix: Centre des livres d'artistes, 2005), 276. It is widely known that herman de vries has suppressed the use of upper case in his work.

2 Ibid., 272.

3 Dieter Roth, “Interview with Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson” (1986), in *Gesammelte Interviews*, ed. Barbara Wien (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2002), 391 and 394.

4 Most of those chronological details are found in: *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, text by Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter (New York: The Museum of Modern Art; Baden: Lars Müller, 2003).

He then continued by publishing facsimiles in photocopy of his old *Tagebücher* (diaries), some of his exhibition catalogs, written at the same time as he was preparing the exhibitions, etc. Dieter Roth is an ultimate example of editorial dynamism because he did everything, or practically everything, himself, so as to ensure control over his own work, but also to be able to publish a lot and quickly, at the same hectic pace that he worked. It was definitely freedom that gave him his driving force as a publisher. But it should be added that publishing gradually grew so important that it became utterly inseparable from his work, itself inseparable from his life. It was not just a part of his work, as it was for the artists mentioned earlier.

The Poet is Born, the Publisher is Made

About art in the years 1960–70, it has become commonplace in the discourses of art historians and critics to insist, quite rightly, on the de-specialization of artists, a corollary of the “de-definition” of the art of which they were the protagonists. Many artists are known who, without being born artists according to the Ciceronian adage (*nascuntur poetae, fiunt oratores*), still turned themselves into artists by a sudden personal decision, a kind of intellectual conversion, without attending art school or even practicing an artistic technique. But so much stress has been laid on this “generalist artist”—who, though without professional competence or acquired skills, regarded all means as valid for making art, as if the will would make the way—that we tend to assume that in the case of those who became publishers, publishing was added, as another spontaneous ability, to a creative versatility that was in principle unlimited.

Nothing could be less true. It is indisputable that artists self-published sporadically, without any special training, taking advantage of the machines at their disposal, such as mimeographs, photocopiers and stapling machines, or even by turning to others for help. But those artists who published their own books or those of their friends with some continuity did so on the basis of their specific skills and their practical experience of printing and sometimes publishing. There are only a few exceptions: Ian Hamilton Finlay, but he was familiar with the world of books because of his debut as a poet and surrounded himself with loyal collaborators; herman de vries, but his eye had been trained by his often critical interest in layout and other physical aspects of book production.⁵ Moreover, for these and other artists (Dieter Roth, Simon Cutts, Maurizio Nannucci), who had formerly engaged with concrete poetry, the technical issues bound up with graphic design (typography, layout, etc.) were already raised by their visual work, and vice versa.

For most of them, the printing trades in one form or other provided their initial training or early employment. Some points are worth mentioning in this respect. Edward Ruscha, so attentive to format, layout, paper, and in general the appearance he

⁵ de vries, “answers to anne moeglin-delcroix’s questions,” 273.

wanted to give his books, which he himself described as a “professional feel,”⁶ first earned his living as a graphic designer in advertising and paged up the first issues of *Artforum*. Maurizio Nannucci was also a graphic designer (of theater posters and record sleeves), to which he added learning on the job, favored in the late 1960s and early 70s by the political posters and leaflets he printed with makeshift means. Exempla, founded by Nannucci in 1967, was an artists’ cooperative and printing press. At Zona, which he founded in 1974, there was a small offset press to be used to print publications oneself.⁷ These publishing houses, to which was added Recorchings for music, exemplified what Nannucci also claimed as professionalism: “Publishing is a form of art which gives the artist a degree of independence and also affirms the professional quality of the work.”⁸ Freedom is not incompatible with know-how—quite the contrary. Freedom can be exercised all the better when accompanied by the appropriate technical skills.

Dieter Roth left high school without gaining a diploma in 1947, then

6 John Coplans, “Concerning ‘Various Small Fires’: Edward Ruscha Discusses His Perplexing Publications” (1965), in *Leave Any Information at the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*, ed. Alexandra Schwartz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 24.

7 Maurizio Nannucci, unpublished interview with the author (in collaboration with Annalisa Rimmaudo and Laurence Corbel), Florence, July 19–20, 2013.

8 “Bookmakers: Some Remarks on Artists’ Books and Archives. A Conversation Between Maurizio Nannucci and Gabriele Detterer,” in *Bookmakers* (Saint-Yrieix-La-Perche: Pays-Paysage, 1995), unpag.

9 Some of this information comes from the chronology in *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*. On Dieter Roth’s work as a typographer during four years, see “Dieter Roth über Bücher usw., Gespräch mit Kees Broos” (1986), in *Gesammelte Interviews*, 377.

10 Simon Cutts, “Tarasque, The Trentbookshop, Coracle, Workfortheeyetodo,” an interview with Wolfgang Görtschacher (1994–1997), in *Some Forms of Availability. Critical Passages on the Book and Publication by Simon Cutts* ([New York]: Granary Books; Cromford: RGAP, 2007), 34.

began his apprenticeship in commercial art in Bern. The following year he enrolled at the Gewerbeschule (vocational school), where he attended, among others, courses in design and typography. This enabled him, while working as an artist, to get a job as a typographer in a printing works and later with design firms, among the many other ways he earned his living. We know he mastered all the traditional printing techniques (to which he added his own inventions) and in 1970 opened his own printing shop in Braunschweig for his graphics.⁹ The publisher Dieter Roth was first a printer by profession.

Long before founding Coracle Press in 1975, Simon Cutts met Stuart Mills in 1964 and began working in his bookstore, The Trentbookshop, in Nottingham, then became his partner in the founding of Tarasque Press. After using a mimeograph machine, then the services of a printer who had an offset machine, in 1968 they bought a printing press, “largely because we thought we could try to learn to print and do things that we could not persuade other printers to do. [...] So we just got into it a bit and found out how to order paper, found out how to cut paper up, how you take format sizes out of whole sheets and all that kind of stuff. We carried on and that understanding just increased.”¹⁰ Most of the early publications at Coracle Press were still printed on this press until 1978 when it finally broke down from overuse. But they had completed their apprenticeship.

The colophons of the books published by Leif Eriksson often record that he was responsible for the typesetting, layout and even the binding. While quite young, between leaving boarding school and doing his military service, Eriksson had worked for a large printer, Almqvist & Wiksell in Uppsala,

which printed theses for the university and had a monopoly over printing calendars and almanacs in Sweden. "I worked in the printing house and I also worked for a time in the page setting department and ended up in the book-binding department. I learned everything from that Almqvist & Wiksell."¹¹

The most accomplished technician was definitely Dick Higgins, because his training as a printer was a vocation. But he was an extreme case by his very professionalism, as we shall see. Interested in printing since adolescence, he chose to study at the Manhattan School of Printing, where he learned various techniques, including offset.

"And when I finished the Manhattan School of Printing, I had become a good technician. As a job, when I returned to Europe in March 1963, after the Yam Festival, I worked in a small print works called Zaccar Offset. [...] When I left Zaccar Offset, I worked for a company that produced books, where I learned special printing and production techniques."¹²

He kept friends there, with whom he continued to work to produce books at the Something Else Press starting in late 1963, sometimes paying his bills by designing books for them.

"In 1963 I worked for Book Press, and in 1964, for a publisher who reprinted textbooks, mainly for libraries. It taught me what sort of books libraries wanted, which was very important for Something Else Press."¹³

The librarians were not only concerned about the contents of the books, but the quality of the materials, including acid-free paper.

The price of this extreme competence (which hardly fits the picture we generally have of a Fluxus artist) is that for Dick Higgins professionalism turned into a profession and the publisher eventually devoured the artist. He himself declared he left Something Else Press in 1973, handing over its management to others, partly because it was in dire financial straits, but also because his work as a publisher competed with his work as an artist. "I was

also torn between the desire to do my own work and my role as publisher."¹⁴ Barbara Moore, who was taken on as an editor after Something Else Press was founded, has described the way Dick Higgins did everything: he chose the titles himself, was responsible for design, production, finance, press releases, the printed blurbs on the covers, and he kept a close eye on production.¹⁵ It is revealing in this respect that Ken Friedman, in his obituary paying tribute to him,¹⁶ regretted that Dick Higgins was less well known as an artist than a publisher. There are good reasons for this: his work as a publisher was a full-time job.

The character of the artist as an amateur publisher, improvising, devoid of any technical expertise or experience of any profession, is therefore a largely imaginary construct, at least in the case of the most active and constant of them. It was partly due to a certain mythologizing of early artists' books, which underestimated both the role of publishers and the

¹¹ Leif Eriksson, unpublished interview with the author, Malmö, November 10, 2014.

¹² Jacques Donguy, "Entretien avec Dick Higgins," Barrytown, April 7 and 8, 1992, in *Poésure et Peintrie*, ed. Bernard Blistène (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, 1993), 423. Zaccar Offset became the printer of Fluxus.

¹³ *Ibid.*
¹⁴ "Dick Higgins, la Something Else Press," interview with Christian Xatrec, *Art Press* 188 (February 1994): 19.

¹⁵ Barbara Moore, "Some Things Else about Something Else," in *Something Else Press*, pamphlet (New York: Granary Books Gallery, 1991), unpag.

¹⁶ "Dick Higgins, 1938–1998," *Umbrella* XXI, no. 3–4 (December 1998): 107.

importance of technical skills. Indeed artists, critics, and historians have got together to blur everything that could evoke continuity with established practices in the history of the book. In order to effectively defend the right to exist of the new object that was the artist's book, it was felt to be necessary to promote the idea that it was breaking completely with the tradition of the luxury illustrated book, in which craft skills are essential and the publisher's role vital. Such a tactical simplification masks the fact that the break in question, though very real, passed more through the book as an object in itself (whose modest appearance, small format, and low price were actually the antithesis of the pretentious pomposity in books for bibliophile collectors) than through the technical means used to produce it, with the exception of engraving, excluded because it was closely associated with rare and expensive books. Moreover, the cycle of book production in 1960–70 was much more difficult to master than nowadays, when editing software and office printers make the work of artist publishers much easier, sometimes rather too easy, enabling them to make a book without getting up from the computer.¹⁷ By force of circumstances, when someone intended to do without the established structures of the artistic edition (museums, galleries, specialist publishers), but still wanted to produce a quality printed work cheaply (as was the case of the artist publishers discussed in this study), he had to possess a minimum of practical knowledge to be able to watch over the production, even technical skills (composition of the content, layout, and sometimes printing and binding), in order to keep costs down.

Conversely, one could advance this hypothesis: it is perhaps a certain incapacity assumed in those areas, combined with an interest in the materially well-made book, which led such important artists in the history of the artists' book as Jean Le Gac, Robert Filliou, or Marcel Broodthaers, to turn over responsibility for the production of their books, including the graphic design, to their publishers (Lebeer-Hossmann, for example, the publisher of all three), whose profession, or part of whose profession, it was. And here is another plausible hypothesis: we can assume that among the Conceptual artists, for whom the book was in principle its content and the interest in print purely intellectual, the lack of artist publishers may be explained by the irreducibly craft dimension of publishing, even in the case of publications as spartan as theirs. The exception that proves the rule is the series of booklets self-published by Art-Language between 1967 and 1973: often bound by a plastic strip (instead of the usual staples), issued in very few copies, ostentatiously numbered and signed, they display a "handmade" character surprising in the context of Conceptual art.

17 By a paradoxical retro-active effect, some of the publications of the sixties and seventies, which according to conventional bibliophile criteria passed for simple and even ordinary, when compared to certain books today have come to appear sophisticated and almost like fine art editions!

Contrasting Kinds of Publishers: Elements for a Future Typology

Two main arguments, which have since become canonical, were used from the start to defend the legitimacy of the

artist's book as compared with the artwork in the traditional sense of the term. The first, the search for an "alternative space"¹⁸ for art, meaning a different mode of existence and presentation of the works, and the second, the need for their wider distribution, considered a condition of art's democratization or at least its availability. The problem is that if the utopia of easier access to art was an essential part of the book as an alternative space, this same space, essentially critical, hence by definition marginal, escaped from the mainstream and was in reality difficult to combine with wide distribution.

In fact, what we actually find is distribution based on affinity, intense but restricted, qualitative rather than quantitative, so to speak. This kind of distribution functioned within and on the scale of a narrow social group, a network of artists, collectors, and readers (often the very same people), with the publisher as their cement. They were book lists periodically sent out to the publisher's correspondents, which gradually gave visible form to an implicit community. This may have been a clearly defined group, with close ties, durably united by a shared aesthetic and themes, making it almost a "school," with a team of active contributors as at Coracle Press; a circle of friendship and artistic encounters with uncertain outlines, in the case of eschenau summer press & temporary travelling press publications, around herman de vries; a national network of artists, Swedish in this case, thanks to Leif Eriksson's personal commitment to making their publications known; or an international network when, in the case of Nannucci, publishing embodied a deliberate strategy of communication. Be that as it may, people read, published, and met up with others who shared the same interests and had similar concerns. Should we be surprised?

Having said that, and although we tend to speak of the "artist publisher" as of a clearly defined entity in art in the 1960s-70s, a sort of new function that appeared in the artistic landscape in that period, it would be important to enter into the details of practices so as to avoid smoothing over the differences and creating a uniform, but again imaginary, figure. In reality, if we accept the declarations of intent of the artist publishers, which tend to be repetitive—notably about the two factors mentioned above, of providing art with an alternative space and a wide distribution—we will fail to see the complex reality, the singular position of each in the field of contemporary art then being structured: in brief, the specifics of the work of each artist and their approach to the two factors in question. You only have to browse through the

overview entitled *The Artist Publisher*,¹⁹ presented by Simon Cutts in 1986, which covers both self-publishing and artists' presses, to realize the diversity and sometimes divergence in their approaches, despite the fact that the title is in the singular (and disregarding the selection based on sometimes excessively broad criteria²⁰).

It is not possible, within the limits of this article, to give some idea of this plurality of approaches, or even to sketch a typology.²¹ Here I will have to confine myself to giving some

18 Kate Linker, "The Artist's Book as an Alternative Space," *Studio International* cxcv, no. 990 (1980): 75-79.

19 *The Artist Publisher*, exhibition catalog by Coracle Press (London: Crafts Council Gallery, 1986).

20 For example, a number of the books it includes were put out by institutional publishers, not artists.

idea of the desirability of accurately mapping a field that is less homogeneous than is generally thought, with two examples. We can briefly compare two kinds of publishers, similar in their aspirations but antithetical in their practice, even on the two key issues of “the alternative” and distribution, though they were both apparently in agreement on those points. They are Simon Cutts (Coracle Press) and Dick Higgins (Something Else Press).

As Simon Cutts observed, the title of the first section of *The Artist Publisher*, “Self-publishing as a Critical Alternative,” could have been that of the whole exhibition, since the artists presented intended “to subvert an ‘Establishment,’”²² namely the one defending “the fine art factors.” The books listed, including those issued by Coracle Press (but very few by Something Else Press) therefore proposed a “critical alternative,” and like Mail Art were “a means to disseminate ideas/images outside the rigid Gallery/Publishing House machinery.”

Dick Higgins, for his part, while largely sharing the above ideas, practiced them very differently for ten years (and in a hundred or so books), because of the very distinctive way he conceived his subversive relationship with the establishment. This was obviously inspired by the Fluxus utopia of art which, by penetrating all areas of life, would change it from within. As Barbara Moore notes,²³ Higgins’s conception of publishing was based on the strategy of the wolf in sheep’s clothing. In other words—and Higgins said as much more than once—he had to give the books he published the physical appearance of normal books very well made, so they would be accepted by the book trade and blend into the decor of contemporary life (to the point of being sold in supermarkets, hoped Higgins). So the Something Else Press’s attitude to the establishment was the opposite of the Coracle Press’s, since it entailed imitating, at least externally, a product recognized as legitimate.

Dick Higgins denied wanting to infiltrate the establishment (and so compromising himself with it). But he could only do this by defining the establishment as something paradoxically not established, hence transformable by those who come from outside: “In capitalist societies, an establishment is not a self-constituted closed circle, trying to repel outsiders. It is a circle of specialists designated by market forces and, to a lesser extent, elected by their peers”²⁴ to direct public opinion. With a touch of naivety, Higgins explained that in February 1966 he sent the first issue of *The Something Else Press Newsletter*, containing his article “Intermedia,” to three thousand people with this hope: “By acting as if you belong to the establishment [...] perhaps you will be judged as valid as the accepted establishment.” He concluded: “And that has enabled me to be considered, if only for a time, as a potential member of the establishment.”²⁵ In those days, among political activists, notably Trotskyists, such a strategy, appropriate for minority currents, was termed “entryism.”

21 A volume of unpublished interviews with publishers of the 60s and 70s is in preparation, to be issued by Éditions Incertain Sens (University of Rennes 2). It concludes a four-year program (2013–2016) of research into the first publishers of artists’ books, under the direction of Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, with the support of Maison des Sciences de l’Homme Paris Nord.

22 *The Artist Publisher*, 5 (also for the following quotations).

23 Barbara Moore, “Some Things Else about Something Else,” unpag.

24 “Dick Higgins, la Something Else Press,” interview with Christian Xatrec, 18.

25 Ibid.

Consequently, the model to follow, in Higgins's eyes, was commercial publishing, even in imitating its social respectability. We can again quote Barbara Moore, since her reaction, when Dick Higgins invited her to be his editor as soon as he rented an office, was significant:

"I thought it was some kind of joke. In those days founders of small presses didn't rent offices and 'hire' editors. They worked from their homes and collaborated with friends. [...] But I'm not sure Dick actually used the adjective 'small.'"²⁶

The books he published, as we know, were refined objects: the cover might be hard or soft (in this case a cloth cover protected by a dust jacket), on which was printed the blurb, as was done for bookstore books, and often a large number of pages and standard format. Since Something Else Press publications were normally intended for a wide readership, their print runs were quite large (usually around three thousand copies, sometimes even more, not including reissues). Finally, the materials were of good quality so that the books would last without deteriorating, "You don't know, when you look at the books of my colleagues [!], if the paper has always been yellowed or was once white. Mine were always made out of the best materials, so they last."²⁷

Dick Higgins was perhaps the most "professional" of artist publishers, but probably the least representative. He created a strange mix between a Fluxus subversive project and the conformity of commercial publishing. This is the challenge with which any search for an equation between art and life has to measure itself: it is not easy for art to penetrate life without getting lost in it.

Simon Cutts also lavishes great care on the materials used in the books he publishes, the quality of bindings and paper, the excellence of typefaces and printing and the elegance of the books. But his strategy is the opposite and frankly more logical. He deliberately established a style of nonconformist books, whose slight impertinence is obvious even before one gets their point. Their appearance immediately announces their "alternative" character compared to commercial books. They are issued in small formats (most often pocket-sized, like notebooks), in bright, pure colors and have the homemade or handmade appearance.

This explains why the print runs have always been low, at least when compared with those of ordinary editions or at Something Else Press: between one hundred and three hundred copies. This enables us to see the importance of diffusion in a new perspective, though Simon Cutts has titled his collection of writings on the book *Some Forms of Availability*.²⁸ Here lies the paradox characteristic of Coracle Press: this purported availability is limited in advance by books with an artisanal component. While being rather cheap, they are often numbered and signed, a fact that, incidentally, also

makes it necessary to moderate Cutts's claims to have made a breach, as mentioned above, with the values and usage of the "fine arts." At Coracle Press, the small press of the sixties and seventies failed to sever all its ties with the tradition of the private presses, born in Britain in the late nineteenth century.

²⁶ Barbara Moore, "Some Things Else about Something Else," unpag.

²⁷ Jacques Donguy, "Entretien avec Dick Higgins," 23.

²⁸ Ibid.

With some slight exaggeration, disregarding the complete difference in their aesthetics, we could say that Simon Cutts's enterprise recalls something of the disturbing discrepancy we find in William Morris, between his militant commitment to socialism, including his understanding of his publishing work as a collaborative process, and the reality of his published books, handmade by resurrecting ancient skills and thus necessarily restricted to very small print runs, hence to a tiny public.

These two antithetical examples embody two extreme positions among artist publishers, and each entails its share of paradox. The "artisanal" alternative of Coracle Press, in the name of a critical project, discreetly rediscovered the elitist tradition of "the art of the book." The "commercial" alternative of Something Else Press, in the name of the imperative of distribution, ran the risk of siding with what it was intended to criticize. Between the two, there was room for a great variety of positions and publishing styles, as many as there were publishers.

Publishing as Artistic Practice: The Strictly Artistic Challenge

To conclude, we must come at last to the crucial question, which was implicitly assumed to have been resolved, though it is not self-evident. In what sense can we speak of publishing as an artistic practice? What is the actual significance of an artist turning to publishing, if this significance is not expressed solely by the social or professional identity of the person who undertakes this project? How to move beyond the incantatory repetition, rarely justified, especially among the younger generation, that "publishing is an artistic practice"?

The artist's edition is an artistic practice only if it is deliberately involved in an overall art project that encompasses publishing among other activities. That is why, for example, Hansjörg Mayer, although being an artist and a publisher, is not considered an "artist publisher" strictly speaking because his publishing work is separate from his art work, even though he has published artists whose work he came across when he was a concrete poet, then a filmmaker and a photographer. Publishing only acquires an artistic significance in relation to the guiding purpose that confers its coherence on a whole artistic process, however composite its manifestations. In other words, it does not suffice to say, as we did at the beginning, that art in the sixties and seventies became a completely open multipurpose activity, which could even include publishing among other "activities" (to borrow from Allan Kaprow this word deliberately as broad and commonplace as possible). If we left it at that, we would simply have to conclude that, faced with the same context, artists respond to it in similar ways—which can be sociologically true but is aesthetically false: there is a strong visual identity in all that comes out from each artist's press, just as there is a strong visual identity in the other mani-

festations of each one's work (poetry, objects, environments, actions, etc.). And it is this that is *artistically* relevant.

So if it is true that in the 1960s–70s, publishing was part of the extension of an artistic activity whose apparent unity had been fragmented, to interpret the properly artistic meaning of the work of each artist one has to seek that unity on another level, both deeper and more personal. It has to be found in the guiding idea, whether explicit or not, which urged a given artist to take on this fragmentation in a singular way. In other words, it has to be found in what might be called the artist's *Kunstwollen* ("artistic will" or "artistic volition," depending on how one chooses to translate it). Borrowing this concept from Alois Riegl, and commenting on it in a famous 1920 text,²⁹ Panofsky emphasized its theoretical usefulness. It enables one not to stop at an explanation of art by its external determinations (in our case the historical conditions of the redefinition of art and the artist in the 1960s–70s, the nature of the various activities that it entailed, the expansion of the "small press," and other contextual factors that allowed all that). Conversely it helps us characterize the unity of the "artistic volition" that organizes art from within, in both form and content, and does so in different ways for each artist. In a given historical situation that influenced them all simultaneously, each made an idiosyncratic response, which is why their works differ. To this degree, publishing is always "a conceptual art project," to quote the formula proposed by Leif Eriksson in order to define the relation between his publishing work and his work as a visual artist. "With my press I wanted to do something completely different from what I had been doing, like graphic prints and traditional visual art. The publishing press as a conceptual art project."³⁰ What does the phrase "a conceptual art project" mean here? Not just a more conceptual aspect of the work, let alone a kind of printed Conceptual art, but an intellectual project that is expressed through this channel, among others which all together make up the whole, more or less homogeneous (in this case rather heterogeneous), which is identified as the *work* of this or that person, in the fullest sense of the term.

The methodological consequence to be drawn from this is as follows.

To carry out a study not of the phenomenon of artists' presses in general, but the unique way each artist takes part in it by establishing a style, a style of publications visually and intellectually identifiable as is the rest of his work, the right approach would be not to treat the question of publishing separately, but to consider it from the perspective of all the artwork by the artist in question, of which it is but a part. Otherwise publishing is not an artistic practice, just the occupation of an artist (or of anyone else).

Translated by Richard Sadleir

29 Erwin Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* XIV (1920): 321–339, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott & Joel Snyder.

30 Leif Eriksson, "A Very Brief Story About Swedish Booked Art," in *Outside of a Dog. Paperbacks & Other Books by Artists*, ed. Clive Phillpot and Sune Nordgren (Gateshead: Baltic, The Centre for Contemporary Art, 2003), unpag.