CHAPTER 7

# The Publishing Self: The Praxis of Self-Publishing in a Mediatised Era

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In November 2000, the American sculptor and erstwhile typewriter poet Carl Andre sent a postcard to the English artist Simon Morris. Andre's terse missive forbade Morris from reproducing *Three Vector Model* (1970) in an exhibition about reading methodologies because, as the postcard's opening sentence stated, Andre believed that, 'The desire to read the work of art is the annihilation of the possibility of reading that work of art.' Until 2018, Morris and I co-edited a small press called Information As Material with the American poet-critic Craig Dworkin. It functioned during my tenure—and continues to do so without me—as a writers' collective, one that has morphed with every project since Morris started it by accident in 2002. Dworkin and I joined around 2006, and the literary theorist Kaja Marczewska replaced me in 2018.

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In summer 2013, there was a small survey exhibition of some then-recent projects by Information As Material at the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art in Sunderland, England. We used a photograph of Andre's postcard as the front face of the exhibition invite and used the backside of the invite to publicly reply. To Andre's declaration against the very possibility of an art of reading, 'We say, whatever, Carl... perhaps you should learn to read differently.' That exhibition's title, 'Learn to Read Differently', was a call to work that in many ways expresses what the various editorial teams do or have done under the collective name Information As Material, and why we do it.

Information As Material functions like an umbrella, under which the collective tries to keep open a space for a peculiar kind of conceptualist writing to be self-published.[1] It is a small press that functions as a self-publishing vehicle, which supports its editors and other authors to take responsibility for the full object-status of the texts they write as reproduced cultural objects. The authors we support write books not just texts, exploring publication as a mode of public action. Everything about the composition, reproduction and circulation of such books is subject to or open to what might normally be called 'authorial' decisions. That holistic exploration of each book's object-status and social life is why Information As Material books are often called artists' books, in the once-radical spirit explored by Ulises Carrión and others.[2] How we publish and how we understand our task as an imprint, both build on the precedents of those literary and artist's book small presses of the 1970s and 1980s who understood that independent and non-commercial publishing cultures are sustained by delicate ecosystems, every aspect of which requires imagination, communal care and a collective willingness to keep the culture open in every sense of the word.

What our imprint publishes is given coherence by the overlapping interests that Dworkin, Marczewska, Morris and I have in: cultures of administration; the imposition of scientific and aesthetic hierarchies upon language; the possibilities of heterological and heteroglossic modes of collaboration; the ever-accelerating floods of textual over-production in an always-already digital age; the site and performance of writing; the subjectivation of readers; and in kinds of writing that happen on the outside of literature (and other disciplines of knowledge) from inside the elastic field of contemporary art. The imprint works to unfold some of the historical and ethical lessons of DIY and small-press culture through what Kenneth Goldsmith calls the 'practice of publishing', such that Dworkin,

Marczewska, Morris and I have collaborated in various combinations toward an understanding of 'publishing' as a mode of praxis.[3]

These interests overlap with one another in strange ways, and at those points of overlap they create seams or folds in the circulation of language. In those folds, unusual forms of language can come to the surface. Each of these unusual forms is formed in and by the specificities of its seam. For Information As Material, publishing is the performance of drawing those language formations out and making them public in whatever way might allow other people to read them interestingly—to read them differently than one would if that formation of language had just stayed in the seam. Co-working toward this performance is our mode of praxis, a praxis of publishing, one we collaboratively developed by using the author function of the quasi-institution Information As Material as if it were an umbrella. With that umbrella, we try to protect a little space within the broad ecology of small-press publishing, relying on its hospitality and the value it places in keeping openings open for writers, editors and readers. In that sheltered niche, we have always invited writers to take the risk of thinking composition to its horizons. We have tried to enable ourselves and others to take authorial responsibility for the full publication while guarding against the delusion that an author needs to (or ever could) control everything about the publication's becoming or social life. This is small-press publishing performed as a gesture of keeping open a space for radically imaginative acts of self-publishing.

I have regularly argued that for publishing models taking this tack—one that is admittedly marginal, minor and incredibly inefficient—it is important to remember that the word 'publish' derives from the Latin *publicare* (to 'make public') via the middle English *publicen* ('to get rid of,' 'to let go of').[4] It is in this complicated double sense that Information As Material has published over 50 books, chapbooks and pocketbooks; editioned fine and mass prints; made documentary films and web works; and produced exhibitions, either by curating thematic group shows or by the collective making artworks under the name IAM. It is also with this complicated double sense of 'making public' in mind that I want to point toward five things in this chapter. First, how we might distinguish certain kinds of self-publishing by the way in which they problematise the subject-status of the self at work. Second, how the digital mediatisation of writing technologies outside the context of the language arts is casting some kind of technical foreshadow in front of new writing generally. Third, what might be interesting about recontextualising our experiences of

mediatised media as literature or art—if you like, what might be aesthetically possible in that foreshadow. Fourth, how those aesthetic possibilities beg the question, 'but what kind of realism is it?', and how something like a documentary-realist idea of new writing can help us to see the risks of mere ambience. And finally, how the critical frameworks with which we attend to acts of publishing need to shift from analysing objects to analysing processes if we are going to use them to think with (rather than against) the kind of experimental work being done in such actions.

Each of these five points is introduced with an example, the first of which is a book called *Of the Subcontract* that I originally self-published through Information As Material in summer 2013. The idea for the book was triggered in 2010 by the burgeoning new industry of online-only labour pooling services, epitomised at the time by Amazon.com's market-leading service Mechanical Turk. This 'crowdsourcing marketplace' connects businesses (called Requesters) with freelance workers (known as Turks or Turkers) who will complete specific Human Intelligence Tasks—jobs that computers cannot yet quite do—for set amounts of money. Such platforms are transnational, database-driven, anonymous and the businesses participating have no liability for their workers beyond the agreed payment. These services complete the on-demand fantasy of computational capitalism, an ideology perfectly expressed by the strapline for Mechanical Turk, which describes the labour force it pools as 'Artificial Artificial Intelligence'.

*Of the Subcontract* takes the form of a conventional collection of 100 poems with the slightly unusual twist that all of these poems were written for me by workers on the Mechanical Turk service. Those poems are arranged from 1-cent to 1-dollar according to cost-of-production rather than expressive theme. The stylesheet for the layout of the whole book blends the organisational conventions of a mainstream poetry collection with a sample of the amazing range of performance metrics that Mechanical Turk's Requester interface automatically generates for every job as it is being done, from the time it took that Worker to complete the task to the effective hourly rate they therefore earned.[5]

A subtext to every aspect of this self-published book's 'authoring' is the shifting distinction, or increasing indistinction, between linguistic units of meaning and non-linguistic units of meaning in a born-digital world of design, a world that is increasingly designed[6] as if it were a seamless mediascape.[7] Each of the four sections in the book has a title and graphic epigraph derived from the icons and straplines used by Amazon. The

range of processes, critical registers and institutions drawn into this book project are also extended and reflected upon elliptically by Mckenzie Wark's Foreword, which was subcontracted to a worker in Lahore via Freelancer.com, and then directly by Darren Wershler's Afterword essay, which he wrote for himself.

With the details of this strange example in mind I want to make my first point. Self-publishing is conventionally assumed to be a last resort. Maybe the work is not good enough to interest somebody else in publishing it or the author does not understand how the publishing industry is meant to work. All such reasons are considered to signify a failure on the author's part, a failure to get properly published. This interpretation complains that self-publishing is a misuse of access to the means of reproduction, a problem exacerbated by the ubiquity of desktop publishing and the internet as a distribution network.[8] It also mistakenly presumes that all self-publishing just reproduces a 'self' that has already been stably produced. This interpretation presupposes an industrial logic of manufacturing: a composition is finalised, like a manuscript, then reproduced in units, by typesetting, printing and binding; or, a self is finalised then reproduced like a unit. In either example, the creative work is finished before reproduction starts because the system of reproduction needs a stable unit.

This kind of self-publishing has an archetype, the vanity press, against which we can deduce a different kind of self-publishing, more like a publishing self, one who often finds community in the openings kept open by small-press cultures. Vanity presses mimic the structures and behaviours of those presses on the inside of the mainstream of the publishing industry—those that obey a manufacturing flow of production-then-reproduction—and they do so to centre the ego whose vanity is to be impressed—impressed upon us, the public, and back upon itself, the vain self. Although one ego might control the means and agenda of production at a vanity press, being vain in no way demands that the subject of that ego does the work themself, nor that they take responsibility for the work. Quite precisely, vanity publishing is vain, it relies on affirmation and risk-aversion, and consequently will always favour controlled representations. And what the vain model can only ever obscure is that all publishing projects always involve a multitude of selves who need to productively interact through multiple processes, multiple institutions and with multiple people.[9]

As a collective, Information As Material became fundamentally interested in how performances of making language public can conceptually extend, or even hyper-extend, the changeable selves (plural) who might

choreograph an act of publishing. Following the cue of all artistic conceptualisms—that all art is both conceptual and aesthetical, and the impossibility of an either/or relationship between these qualities makes all artistic representations imperfect—we reproduced cultural objects that privilege language, most often books, as if they were insufficient representations that invite readers to engage critically with their insufficiency.[10] In a practical and conceptual sense, this meant that we produced our publications with the forethought that the thing we were composing will be reproduced in a certain form. Those multiplied forms of the cultural object are 'the work', the thing to be experienced and read, not tail-end designs that have transferable content poured in to them. Hence, for *Of the Subcontract*, decisions about the cover stock, the layout, the information design and the graphics were 'authored' in performative conjunction with decisions about the subcontracting method, as one choreographic act of composition. The aim at Information As Material is to see the self-publishing self be challenged and mediated by the process of their publication becoming public as a reproduced cultural object.

I believe we can think about this radical model of self-publishing—one choreographed by the publishing self—as a productive negation of the logic of reproduction that depends on the sequence described above as production-then-reproduction. In its place, a new logic might instead be better phrased as reproduction-as-production, in the sense that the work only becomes whatever it is in its being multiplied and circulated. By this model, self-publishing would multiply the self, reproduce the self as an act of production, and in many ways put 'the self' at stake through the process of writing reproducible objects—objects that only work as insufficient representations of the self publishing themself.

During Easter 2014, I was responding to some interview questions about *Of the Subcontract* and stumbled back upon this comment from Jean-Luc Nancy, first published in French in 1996 but actually written in 1995:

> For the moment, it is less important to respond to the question of the meaning of Being (if it is a question, and if we do not already basically respond every day and each time ...) than it is to pay attention to the fact of its exhibition. If 'communication' is for us, today, such an affair – in every sense of the word ... – if its theories are flourishing, if its technologies are being proliferated, if the 'mediatization' of the 'media' brings along with it an autocommunicational vertigo, if one plays around with the theme of the

> indistinctness between the 'message' and the 'medium' out of either a disenchanted or jubilant fascination, then it is because something is exposed or laid bare.[11]

That the mediatisation of media seemed more paramount an issue than the question of Being 20 years ago, to someone who is not a philosopher of media, is a telling sign.[12]

Since then, digital software-hardware combinations have standardised desktop publishing, seemingly naturalised the database and algorithm as organising principles for life, and now aggregate flows of data in constant streams around the world in volumes way beyond the limits of what we can actually read.[13] Every time we type on a computational device our keystrokes are being published by default, to some degree of discretion, every few seconds. They are saved automatically into the file you are making, onto the archive drive of your device, onto the linked backup servers your workplace has installed, and evidently onto the monitored databases of international surveillance groups like the NSA. That is an edition of four before you have even finished a sentence. What this kind of immediate and invisible reproduction demonstrates is that often now writing and publishing are the same action—that self-publishing is something we do to ourselves by default, if only because we let our machines do it to us. How the structure, outlook and methods used by small-press publishers (rather than the content they choose) respond to these changes is a key stake in any claim they might make to being new or newly relevant in our mediatised era.[14]

Services like Mechanical Turk might be driven by new technology but the demand they supply is rarely new. After all, ghostwriting is at least as old as the scriptures and enjoyed a fascinating professional history during the modern era.[15] That an online marketplace and the transferable materiality of text-as-data can reduce lag in connecting clients and providers just improves an old model. But it also further conceals the use of such cognitive labour services in fields of knowledge production. For example, in academia we have no real idea how many students now use the innumerable and untraceable dissertation writing services that tout their wares online and have come to be called 'essay farms', which exemplifies my second point. The digital mediatisation of the media of writing—both the language itself and our technologies of inscription and dissemination—is casting some kind of technical shadow in front of new writing practices.[16] This shadow abstracts the authorial self even further; and as a foreshadow,

or shadow in front, it can help us to at least look toward an outline of how digital networked technologies might prove to be antecedents for the new kinds of language formations we can make public through a praxis of publishing.

On 17 March 2014, the *LA Times* website published an article that was itself a significant news story, not because it was written entirely by a computer algorithm but because its penultimate sentence openly admits so: 'This information comes from the UGSG Earthquake Notification Service and this post was created by an algorithm written by the author.'[17] The author is not claiming to have composed the sequence of words, or even to have sourced and analysed the data. Ken Schwencke's authorial claim is to have written the algorithm that did the work—to have mediatised the medium of public language and to have sold its output. Algorithms like Schwenke's compose texts using a method called narrative analytics, which is perfectly suited to data-led fields of knowledge, like science. The frontier for automated text generation systems is epitomised by natural language generation services like Narrative Science, whose workflow is couched in the same iconographic register as Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk platform. Narrative Science promises that its downloadable software Quill will analyse a dataset, transform that data into a narrative text, and crucially 'compose' precise, clear insights.[18] Until now, the latter at least—the production of new insights—had been assumed to be the preserve of human authorial subjects. For example, it is at the core of the social contract that research universities hold with the rest of society when they promise to use public money to produce new knowledge.

Narrative Science is a simple system compared to Long Tail, an automatic book generation programme named after an eponymous concept from statics and business studies because its publications target niche markets by automatically producing hyper-specific data analyses. For example, in January 2019 it produced *The 2020-2025 World Outlook for Ultraviolet (UV) Curable Inks*, a 300-page study on the market prospects of that product across 190 countries. Long Tail was programmed by Philip M. Parker, a Professor of Management Science at the transnational business school, INSEAD. Parker's authorial output via Long Tail is beyond prolific. Back in 2014, Parker was the listed author on Amazon.com of over 106,000 books, with titles ranging from statistical analyses of very specific datasets to crossword puzzles derived from *Webster's Dictionary*. E-book editions are available immediately and print-on-demand means there are no surplus stock issues for paperback or hardcover copies. Even

more impressively, the publishing company Parker established for his automated book generation programme, Icon Group International, had published over 550,000 automated books by late 2014, a total that has continued to grow ever since.

Ken Schwenke, Narrative Science, Philip M. Parker, Long Tail and the Icon Group cluster a tiny yet overt sample of what I am calling a technical foreshadow, being cast outside of literature over and in front of all new writing that engages with contemporary media of publishing. Where and what 'the self' is in these complicated systems of making language public are unclear. Indeed, it is unclear in a way that poses different questions to our ideas about selfhood than those that framed high-modern literary debates about neuters (Maurice Blanchot), life writing (Virginia Woolf), committed literature (Jean-Paul Sartre) or the turn to disjunction (Ezra Pound). Even more pertinent to the ideas proposed by this chapter—of publishing as praxis, and the idea of a radical publishing self—is the question of how an authorial self can work in this shadow, which introduces my third point. For some of the writers that Information As Material has supported, a move away from something like the working book toward working databases completes a move or step backwards from the published codex toward documenting the flows of language in a network, new networks that are fundamentally database-driven.

In summer 2013, the American writer Kenneth Goldsmith developed an exhibition entitled 'Printing Out the Internet', commissioned by and presented at LABOR Gallery in Mexico City. Whole areas of the gallery were piled high with A4 print-outs, some strewn across the floor, others jammed into cardboard boxes stacked on the floor. This one-work installation was made by inviting people anywhere in the world to print out sections of the internet and post them to the gallery. During two months on show, with an additional two-month lead in, over 20,000 bundles of material were sent in an act of crowd sourcing, choreographed by Goldsmith to remind people that websites and web-based storage are neither a stable or permanent repository for the contents shared via them let alone the virtual communities they underpin.

The project was dedicated to Aaron Swartz, an esteemed computer programmer and activist who committed suicide in January 2013 on the verge of being sentenced to 35 years in prison plus a $1-million fine for downloading lots of academic journal articles via the JSTOR digital library. JSTOR operates a transnational, commercial distribution firewall and sells licenses to its databases of academic journal articles on behalf of their

publishers.[19] The inspiration of Swarzt's activism and the material premise of making databases actually present were refined by Goldsmith in a second gallery installation in 2014, a work commissioned for an exhibition called 'Smart New World' at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany, and entitled *Papers from the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. It was arranged in the space as a temporary working office with one shared bench flanked by five individual desks, each staffed by volunteers from the local art academy who serve as invigilators, librarians and data processors. During the show they collectively mined a 33 GB torrent of over 18,000 journal articles downloaded from JSTOR and uploaded to the file-sharing site The Pirate Bay by someone called Greg Maxwell soon after Swartz was first charged. Maxwell's torrent came with a long statement about why he was recirculating these articles from the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, which he had legally downloaded as a registered user of JSTOR but was breaking his contract of use by freely sharing. In Goldsmith's installation, those files are downloaded and printed live then stacked up as a growing archive on the public bench.

This whole, very material operation, being staged publicly as gallery art, brings to the surface something that is still just a few clicks away: Maxwell's torrent is still available as immaterial data on The Pirate Bay to anyone who wants it.[20] Nominating this shadow library as art, and making a processual performance of having data processors extract its content like miners in a delegated performance, implicates or subsumes a chain of acts of self-publishing:[21] Academics write articles for academic publications; academic libraries collect academic publications; academic distributors re-sell access to digital archives of those publications; academics access the content then share it; the shared content gets recycled by students of the academy. One irony brought to the surface by Goldsmith's exhibit is that the last group in this chain, higher education students, are the primary (unwitting) financiers of the academic self-publishing ecosystem, wherein academe constitutes an institutional-self. Yet Goldsmith's act of re-representation, of turning the process and archive into a single artwork, simultaneously brings all of those acts of self-publishing under a macro-institutional framework and the function of one author's name.

Where, what and how these selves are at work in making this language public—public again yet differently—is complicated and computationally driven. But the re-representation of textual documents as aesthetic texts, in a literal and important sense, is an act of documentary realism for which editorial decisions have choreographed the performance of re-publishing

rather than cut into the units being re-published.[22] It is a kind of realism based on reproduction-as-production, a realism that uses aesthetic contexts to put already public texts under a different kind of readerly pressure, all of which frames my fourth point. Such language practices are always caught in the modifier *re-*: they re-work, re-peat and re-produce. As such, our very terms of description remind us via echo that they are a form of re-alist publishing, in the Middle English sense derived from the Latin that they 'relate us to things'; things that are, in this case, language acts—the what, where, when and by whom, of language being made public—made materially present as art.[23]

What I am sketching is a docu-realist mode of publishing as an artistic performance, and its premise is inscribed in the very concept of the document: a text that serves as evidence, as record. When such performances are made public, that idea of the document—as a text that makes present the written instruction for, or proof on paper of, an event—is hyper-extended through a poetics of allegory that leaves us with the kinds of conceptualist forms of textual objects I described above.[24] By which I mean, doing this kind of work as art or literature produces deformed publications—publications re-formed as the privileged tokens of broader public actions—whose material presence is an inadequate yet necessary representation of all of the work that went into reproducing that text as a specific form. These forms present us with real problems when they acknowledge their own problems as representational forms. Which is to say, each such form problematises the socio-historical presence of a particular language act by choreographing its re-representation, as Goldsmith's 2014 exhibit bluntly demonstrates.

The aesthetico-political tightrope that such acts of publishing tend to walk has, on one side, a collapse into a merely ambient formalism and, on the other side, a more radical formalism. That second side is charged by a conviction that, rightly or wrongly, re-representing material might offer some kind of critical lever to speculative forms of re-reading.[25] Both the political and aesthetic potential of that second side depends on its capacity to enable people to read the same thing yet differently—to enable new forms of reading differently. The following pair of brief examples should help locate that capacity in the conceptual and practical terms of the recent tradition of small-press documentary poetry. The first identifies a key precedent, the second an extreme and more recent example.

In 1986, the Austrian poet and playwright Heimrad Bäcker published the first instalment of his two-volume book *nachshrift*. In 2010, it was

translated into English by Patrick Greaney and Vincent Kling and published by the Dalkey Archive Press with the title *transcript*. Presaged by the young Bäcker's time in the Hitler Youth and later the Nazi Party, yet pitched against the idea that the horrors of the holocaust are somehow unspeakable, *transcript* is a book-length poem almost entirely composed of quotations from medical charts, train schedules, telephone records and written communiqués sent between Heinrich Himmler and his colleagues, all of which refer to the planning and execution of the Shoah. The book has an archival typology with most of the quotes floating alone on an otherwise blank page—treating the page like an index card—and identified by endnotes. In a short 1992 essay, Bäcker directly self-identifies *transcript* as a work of documentary poetry and tries to describe how writing for such a genre works:

> If I stay with this language, if I keep at it, if I set it as text in a book (and that means: if I expose it to reflection by using it just as it was used, but with literary intent), the relational structure in which it then appears makes it recognizable, in a new system, as that which it does not want to be recognized as: a language of radical substitution. I negate its negation[.][26]

Now that our technical conditions of reproduction and circulation have destabilised both the material and movement of written language, the poetics of allegory associated with such realisms have become hyper-.[27] More recent poetry has hyper-extended the quotational gesture of cutting out clear extracts in favour of forms that at least appear to represent the whole of its source material. In 2010, the American poet and attorney Vanessa Place released the first book in her trilogy *Tragodia*. This 400-page volume was published by Insert Blanc Press using print-on-demand. Its title, *Statement of Facts*, functions as a literal process note to the whole project. The book only contains 33 legal documents that Place originally wrote for the California Court of Appeal as appellate briefs in her day job as a Criminal Defence Attorney. Changing only the names of the victims discussed, Place expropriated her own labour power to re-re-represent these statements of fact—which codify the official history of serious sexual crimes in legalese—and thus turns them into relentlessly hyper-real, tragic prose poems that are only available, like public testimonies, on demand.

The seeming indifference of documentary poets to the personal and emotional experiences and consequences of the content they repeat is intentionally misleading. It belies the fact that the selections made and

their re-contextualisation are a documentary poet's expression of their subjective relation to the material and its social history. In the same spirit as the Düsseldorf installation by Kenneth Goldsmith discussed earlier, Place's gesture is to move the whole raw thing from one context of reproduction and reception to another, given that the court records for these cases are already public documents. It is a method that was exemplar of the modus operandi for one wave of Conceptual Writing, according to which there seemed to be a compositional purity to shifting whole lumps of text from non-literary to literary contexts with little or no edit.[28] The appearance of the textual object as a new whole—the aesthetic text—which uses *détournement* and mimetic design to undo the received appearance of the old whole—the informatic document—is the style of reproduction shared by conceptualist forms of literature that want to make the inadequacy of the document-as-aesthetic-form something that can be conceptually productive as literature or art.

That I would try to analyse this as a style of reproduction-as-production is a symptom of my fifth and final point. If we are going to develop adequate frameworks for thinking about publishing as a form of creative praxis in itself, we need to re-engage interdisciplinary discourses that could help us to question the status of the publication as the singular significative unit of such work, the unit that gets privileged by readers and critics by default. In its place, we need to find ways of reading the interaction of resources, people, institutions and processes that differently combine in every act of publishing.[29] We need to shift away from analysing the object—the publication, which all kinds of textualisms look to as the privileged unit of writing and as the primary evidence for all interpretation—as something merely contextualised by the world outside. Instead, we need to try to read the whole praxis of publishing, and in doing so find ways to recognise and evaluate the significant effective input of, for example, editorial work, graphic design and distribution methods. Small-press cultures embrace the interdependency of every input. It is how they remain small and self-sufficient. The shift I am advocating would be based on us trying to think with that embrace—as an act of intellectual care, not of control—so we can learn from small-press practices to better understand the shifting horizons of publishing.

How we might do so and not just repeat the mistakes of postmodern contextualisms is an important problem, in answer to which I think we need an updated concept of publishing-in-general: a concept of publishing as an intersection and co-working of processes, resources and institutions

that form differently specific discursive relations each time they interact in our highly mediatised environments of writing, distribution and reading.[30] With some such idea we might be better able to conceptualise the act of publishing as the unit of creative intention and, therefore, as a feasible unit of analysis. This would not deny that writing-as-composition is a specific practice nor that it is a privileged one. It would simply help us to see that writing-as-composition is only one of the mediatic processes that are essential to publishing, that it is never the only process that effects the composition of a pubic language act, and that every act of reading happens within a complex and multi-layered mediascape.

The aesthetic similarities of my next and final example to the form and intent of the work of Bäcker and Place just described should give a sense of what I mean. In 2009, the German-born Uruguayan-raised artist Luis Camnitzer first presented *Memorial*, an artwork made up of 195 panels. Each panel is individually framed, 33 × 27 cm, and ostensibly a page. Wherever it is shown, the framed pages are wall-mounted in a long grid that collectively recreate the telephone book for Montevideo, Uruguay. Into those pages of alphabetised lists, Camnitzer has inserted the names of that city's citizens who were amongst the 300 victims of forced disappearance during the Uruguayan Dictatorship, a military dictatorship that was triggered by the *coup d'état* of June 1973 and lasted until late February 1985. By digitally adding space and content to the directory's layout, Camnitzer's gesture is to unwork the secret burial of these people by equating their ghosts with the living via their names.[31] In doing so, Camnitzer falsely restores their names to a public record they never featured on, and declares their deaths as an informatic false-truth through the afterlife of their names.

That Camnitzer has intervened in the substance of the text and not 'just' shifted its context of reception distinguishes his project from my previous two examples. But Camnitzer's knowingly anti-aesthetic structure works—like the prose form of Place's book-length poem—against-yet-with the idea of aestheticising historical trauma. And like all of the examples in this chapter, Camnitzer's spatial installation means that we can parse the bits of language that conceptually problematise the whole of the document without necessarily needing to read all of its content. As such, the priority of the writer's conventional role is undercut then spun into a different and temporary relationship of interdependence with the rest of the inputs, labour, histories and institutions that have gone into making this specific language act public again yet differently.

Of course, the economies and epistemologies that underwrite the respective industries of the literary arts and the visual or plastic arts have historically always had very different relationships from one another to reproducibility. Yet as is true of all forms of conceptualist cultural production—and this is the root of their necessary inadequacy as cultural objects—*Memorial* invites a different kind of reading from the models presumed by textual analysis or even conventional literacy. Understood as literature or art, Camnitzer's work invites us to read differently. That invitation seems to be stretched open with a unique intensity by projects that traverse the categories of the arts to instead focus on exploring the radical potential of the publishing self and the praxis of publishing, a model of publishing that demands a collision of categories and their discourses if it is to be adequately understood. I suspect that new and plural ideas about reading will prove to be the political and aesthetic legacy of small-press cultures that are willing to shelter these niche models of publishing. Doing so will require such cultures to re-think their aims, workflows and institutions in a way that can take seriously an updated concept of publishing-in-general, one by which choreography and responsibility are recognised beyond 'the publication' and authorial autonomy. Hopefully those ideas will allow future generations to do a better job of figuring out how to write one-step ahead of their own technical shadow, if such a step ever becomes possible.

## Notes

1. The conceptualist mode or approach to art-making characterises conceptual movements and scenes, including Conceptual Art and Conceptual Writing, but is not exclusive to them. I have always been more interested in the mode than the movements.
2. For example, see Ulises Carrion. 1985. The New Art of Making Books [1975]. Reproduced in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*. Edited by Joan Lyons. Utah: Gibbs Smith.
3. During the academic year 2006–2007, Kenneth Goldsmith ran a graduate seminar entitled Publishing as Practice at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
4. OED.
5. For a more extensive discussion about the politics and poetics of this project, see Stephen Voyce. 2014. *Of the Subcontract*: An Interview with Nick Thurston. *The Iowa Review*. 43/3.

6. The extension of designerly approaches to every aspect of life is a common topic of discussion in fields like genetic engineering or discussions about the Anthropocene. However, here I am referring more directly to the legacies of total design in visual culture, taking a cue from Hal Foster:

> The world of total design is an old dream of modernism, but it only comes true, in perverse form, in our pan-capitalist present. With post-Fordist production, commodities can be tweaked and markets niched, so that a product can be mass in quantity yet appear personal in address. Desire is not only registered in products today, but is specified there: a self-interpellation is performed in catalogs and on-line almost automatically. In large part it is this perpetual profiling of the commodity that drives the contemporary inflation of design. Yet what happens when this commodity-machine breaks down, as markets crash, sweatshop workers resist, or environments give out? (192); Hal Foster. 2002. The ABCs of Contemporary Design. *October*. 100.

7. The term 'mediascape' was coined by Arjun Appadurai to describe social environments within which technical mediums have a significant presence. See Arjun Appadurai. 1990. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture* 2.2. The concept has been developed in different directions in different fields by scholars including Michael Cronin (translation studies) and Francesco Casetti (media theory).
8. On the increasing significance of desktop publishing to our histories of writing, see Matthew Kirschenbaum. 2016. *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard. On the increasing significance of the internet to publishing distribution methods and networks, see Michael Bhaskar. 2013. *The Content Machine: Towards A Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*. London: Anthem Press.
9. Rachel Malik. 2004. Fixing Meaning: Intertextuality, Inference and the Horizons of the Publishable. *Radical Philosophy* 124: 13–26.
10. See, for example, Peter Osborne. 2013. *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* London: Verso.
11. Jean Luc Nancy. 2000. Of Being Singular Plural [1996]. In *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Redwood: Stamford University Press, 28.
12. That Louis Althusser's writings about capitalism and reproduction, which began to appear in the early 1970s, were first gathered as an ensemble and published posthumously as *Sur la reproduction* in the same year as Nancy's essay, 1995, seems symptomatic of a growing awareness that fundamental changes were afoot in the social conditions of, and relations between, reproduction and power. See Louis Althusser. 2014. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses*. London: Verso.

13. On these issues, three interventions by N. Katherine Hayles are particularly illuminating: 2003. *Writing Machines*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; 2007. Narrative and Database: Natural Simbionts. *PMLA*. 122/5; 2012. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
14. For example, Chris Sylvester's Troll Thread imprint (2010–) and Sam Riviere's If a Leaf Falls (2015–) both aptly demonstrate 'how' with very different strategies of response: the former uses a digital-first model that explores print-on-demand and runs on a social media platform (Tumblr); the latter is a highly subjective editorial project that uses domestic stationery and printers to produce micro-editions. Both seem eerily contemporary.
15. For a critical overview of ghostwriting's professional history, see Azalea Hulbert and John Knapp. 2017. *Ghostwriting and the Ethics of Authenticity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
16. 'Mediatisation' is a popular, if contested, concept in communication studies. For an overview of its applications therein, and some of the debates about its popularity, see Andrea Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, Knut Lundby. 2015. Mediatization: Theorising the Interplay Between Media, Culture and Society. *Media, Culture & Society* 37/2: 1–11.
17. Analytical coverage of the *Los Angeles Times* article included Will Oremus. 2014. The First News Report on the L.A. Earthquake was Written by a Robot. *Slate*. 17 March; https://slate.com/technology/2014/03/quakebot-los-angeles-times-robot-journalist-writes-article-on-la-earthquake.html (accessed 8 August 2019).
18. Narrativescience.com; https://bluetext.narrativescience.com/products/quill/ (accessed 8 August 2019).
19. For an overview of digital library cultures and politics, see Joe Kagaris (ed.). 2018. *Shadow Libraries: Access to Knowledge in Global Higher Education*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, including a brief contextualised overview of the Swartz case in Kagaris's 'Introduction', 6.
20. The Pirate Bay; https://thepiratebay.org/torrent/6554331/Papers_from_Philosophical_Transactions_of_the_Royal_Society__fro (accessed 12 August 2019).
21. On the concept and politics of 'delegated performance', see Claire Bishop. 2012. Outsourcing Authenticity: Delegated Performance. *October* 40: 91–112.
22. This connection between the radical publishing self and the idea of realism can also be thought art historically vis-à-vis the historical avant garde, in particular, for example, the interwar realism of Soviet art, which developed formalist methods to explore the mutability of the human body emerging with and from a utopic idea of communism. See Devin Fore. 2012. *Realism*

*After Modernism: The Rehumanisation of Art and Literature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

23. OED.
24. For a comprehensive comparativist history of 'the document', see Lisa Gitelman. 2014. *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
25. See Nick Thurston. 2018. What Was Conceptual Writing? In *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art*. Edited by Andrea Anderson. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 244–253.
26. Heimrad Bäcker. 2014. *Documentary Poetry*. Trans. Jacquelyn Deal and Patrick Greaney. Calgary: No Press.
27. See Patrick Greaney. 2014. *Quotational Practices: Repeating the Future in Contemporary Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 133–140.
28. See Jacob Edmond. 2019. *Make it the Same: Poetry in the Age of Global Media*. New York: Columbia University Press.
29. This idea was first proposed in a philosophically adequate form by Rachel Malik. Fixing Meaning: Intertextuality, Inference and the Horizons of the Publishable.
30. Re-engaging the formative discourses of new historicism (i.e. Stephen Greenblatt) and the text-oriented lineage of British cultural studies (i.e. Raymond Williams) might be particularly helpful for trying to understand how the traps of postmodern contextualisms emerged and how we might avoid repeating them without giving up on context-sensitive approaches.
31. Here, 'unworking' is meant directly in the sense proposed in 1983 by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community* as 'the unworking of works that the community as such produces: its peoples, its towns, its treasures, its patrimonies, its traditions, its capital, and its collective property of knowledge and production'. Jean-Luc Nancy. 1991. *The Inoperative Community*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 72.