OFF•THE•PRESS:

ELECTRONIC•PUBLISHING•IN•THE•ARTS

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Conference, Workshops, Bazaar, Arts & Crafts
May 22 - 23, Rotterdam

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DIGITAL PUBLISHING TOOLKIT

OFF THE PRESS, ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING IN THE ARTS 22 & 23 MAY, 2014 ROTTERDAM - REPORT

Off the Press is the third one in a series on the state of electronic publishing that started with the Unbound Book (http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/unboundbook/), and was more recently followed by the presentation of the research of The Publishing Toolkit at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam in November 2013.

A disclosure of my particular interest, perspective and background might be appropriate. I studied Literary Theory, and learned HTML back in 1994, and taught basic HTML in my days at Mediamatic. Though I use Wordpress for my blog. I still maintain my website using hand-coded HTML (plus a few line of CSS). It does the trick – my website also displays fine on a smartphone or tablet as far as I know. I'm an editor, writer, theorist – not a designer. In the past few months I've been tinkering with various editorial tools and ways of making epubs – and created two epubs for Sonic Acts. I have not been part of the Publishing Toolkit project, but up to a certain point I have traced a similar trajectory. Some of the remarks in the report will derive from that experience.

Geert Lovink introduces the conference and workshop programme stating that it is important to raise the critical issues in the world of electronic publishing. He outlines the context of contemporary publishing with bookshops (for printed books) in decline, and ebooks still on the rise (they have entered the market for educational publishing). The ambition of the Digital Publishing Toolkit programme is to make sure that we – I assume he means citizens, students, readers, artists, small publishers – are empowered by the tools we use, and are able to shape the tools and the discussion, instead of leaving it all to Google, Amazon and other large players that know how to bundle power, money and attention to shape tools, access to knowledge and culture.

STRUCTURED DATA

Joost Kircz is the perfect speaker to kick off the conference, that is, if you want to emphasize the *structural* aspects underpinning computer publishing, and bring in knowledge acquired in more than 25 years in the business. Joost Kircz' experience in electronic publishing and database publishing goes back to 1987. He gives a perfect summary of what happens with editing and publishing when you work electronically. He stresses the fundamental issue: electronic publishing means storing data in code which is not human readable, but can be manipulated in many ways. Markup needs to be structural, to enable output in different media. This all goes back to SGML (1982), to HTML as sloppy implementation of SGML, to XML. A good history lesson, in which he also quickly refers to Markdown as *editing* tool.

Structured, coded data is the basis for electronic book production. This fundamental 'truth' can't be repeated often enough as it is apparently still not understood by many people who work in writing, editing and publishing. Presentation and content should be strictly separated in electronic publication. If they are strictly separate, and content is stored in a structured database, then it's search, store and retrieve. The structured data can be used for output in a great variety of media. Books are made of documents, which are made of paragraphs (and other structured 'bits' of data), which are made of words, made of letters, made of ASCII, made of, in the end, bits. And then there are metadata of course. There is no going back to the old way of making books.

This is what anybody should know, I guess, but this is also where the problems begin. If you understand that it works this way, and that it has been like this ever since the 1980s, one wonders why the workflows in publishing is still not based on this model. (One exception being database publishing in the academic world). And why, given that this model is so clear and simple, is the reality of electronic publishing such a mess? (Was the mess-up created by the sloppy implementation of HMTL, has the development of visual web design been a factor, or is it because of the dominance of Word?) The other issue is that the strict division is all fine when you deal with text. But what happens with content in which it's the visual aspect that carries the meaning? Then maintaining this division is either banal (insignificant), or impossible to maintain. I guess that in a computer and database universe the answer is that when it's solely visual, it should be an image-file.

What an optimal editorial workflow is in an electronic world is not so difficult to imagine. But though most of us have worked electronically at least 25 years (unless you're younger than that, and you have worked electronically pretty much all the time anyway – at least when you're not a zine-making artist), there is no tool that *really* fits the job. A lot of this surely has to do with the adoption of Word (and Word-like) word processors as default writing software since the late 1980s. I could start ranting here – but won't. Part of the research of the Digital Publishing Toolkit is to come up with an editorial tool for small publishers. In a sense it's the Holy Grail for editors: a tool that allows you to do the whole editing process, ending with a clean source document that can be use for various media outputs. (And generates good and well-formed output…). Theoretically it should be 'super-easy' to create simple epubs from clean texts which are also used for the web, for print publication, for database publication, epubs which work fine on any device (and do not mess up the presentation)… – especially since epub is an open standard… Welcome to reality: there is no perfect technological fix.

POST-DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Alessandro Ludovico – editor of *Neural* (http://neural.it) and expert in post digital publishing (see http://postdigitalprint.org) – gives an overview of a

specific culture of artist books, made possible by the coupling of online free digital content, print on demand, and simple scripting. This has created a new taxonomy of publications that scrape content from the internet. 'Search, compile, publish'. It's the idea of the 'Library of the printed internet'. Ludovico mentions three methods that are used to produce books from existing online content: 1. grabbing and scraping, 2. hunting. 3. performance. Sometimes these experiments are exhilarating – not as books itself, but rather conceptually. TraumaWien's massive production of books made from Youtube comments come to mind (See more below). As well as various other non-artistic misuses of the print on demand systems and Amazon to sell real books, which are books (as they are bound stacks of paper), but the content is, well, spam?

The second subject Alessandro Ludovico puts in the mix is industrial scanning of books – as done by for instance Google Books. What he does not mention, but what I find very interesting, is that industrial scanning has made possible new ways of doing literary theory and literary history too. The 'big data' of Google Books and the possibilities of searching through an enormous corpus is used to gain new insights on both the history of literature, and through that also on history. I am of course referring to Franco Moretti's books (a.o. on *The Bourgeois* in the 19th Century) and the Stanford Literary Lab (http://litlab.stanford.edu/). Moretti's take on this is quite down to earth. The thousands of scanned books – which nobody will ever read – can be used to get *some* insight on the development of ideas, and of daily life. Human intelligence is needed to obtain these insights and critically evaluate them. (It is the same sort of 'big data'-use that allows Thomas Piketty insight in the evolution of income and capital in his book *Capital in the 21st Century*). No superior machine intelligence is produced in the process, as the Ray Kurzweil's of this world would like us to believe. (Upload all the knowledge of the world in the cloud, have various algorithms harvesting and analysing the data – and see: new insights and knowledge emerge, eventually making machines more intelligent than us humans). But let's not get into the whole discussion on 'big data' and singularity. Alessandro Ludovico refers to it, but does not open up this 'box', instead opting to reflect on the emergence of hybrid reading 'forms', and the 'Long Read'-format which now seems to have become a genre of its own. Not only are there now (more) hybrid forms of reading as before, we also now are more aware that we use, and always have used different 'modes' of reading, there is more than 'close reading' and 'speed reading' – there's scanning, browsing, deep reading, distant reading (Moretti's term), and more.

The questions after the presentation are on the current state of Google Books – as there has not been much 'news' on that recently. Florian Cramer mentions that, judging from the website-design Google Books might be heading more in the direction of selling (or e-books) than in pursuing the grand scheme of storing all the knowledge of the world.

MULTI-FACETED PRACTICES

Michael Murtaugh introduces a series of presentations which reflect on various electronic reading and publishing practices that have emerged over time. The first one is about using Twitter and Catalan. Elizabeth Castro – computer book author – uses Twitter to interview people about Catalunya and the Catalan language (see #CatalanTalk). She explains how she uses the Twitter-interviews in different languages (she has an online volunteer translation team) about Catalan, how she stores and archives them using Storify (https://storify.com/). The question is how to go from Storify to epub? As tweets are basically HTML, this should be straightforward enough. She explains the workflow. First export to XML. Create XSLT to filter the XML – of course there is way too much data in the source code of the tweet, she only needs the body text. Then she makes an InDesign template, imports the XML, and maps tags to styles. InDesign to epub can be a good tool – I am told also by others – if you use InDesign in a very structured way. How she designs in InDesign is strictly structural and systematic. Not all graphic designers I know work this way. They might work visually oriented, and not necessarily 'structured' in a technological sense. (Hence the horrible output when you 'just' convert some InDesign files to epub).

Elizabeth Castro, wrote about 100 pages (says Florian Cramer) about cleaning up InDesign files for epub. So Florian Cramer asks her about it. She answers that InDesign has become much better in this respect, but also states that InDesign is simply the tool she has used for a long time. If another tool fits one's goal better: use that.

The People's Ebook (http://hepeoplesebook.net), presented by Oliver Wise, is intended to be the tool to create ebooks in the most simple way. There are now a number of such tools. (I made the epub2-version of the Sonic Acts publication *The Dark Universe* with Pressbooks (http://pressbooks.com/), which I found an easy and agreeable tool which fitted that particular project. I am used to Wordpress, and in Pressbooks is easy to do the footnotes by hand.) The People's Ebook uses WYSIWYG for the People's Ebook, not Markdown. Markdown would have been easier – they say – but as not many people use Markdown, it's not the best choice for them. An interesting experiment they did is turning Tumblr's into epubs at http://streambooks.thepeoplesebook.net. As a lot of webAPI's gives data in the form of JSON – which is what their tool wants – so it's possible to turn a Tumblr into epub automatically. In fact technologically this is not (so much?) different from the scraped-free-content artist books that Alessandro Ludovico mentions.

But why epub? That is a good question, to which Oliver Wise gives good answers: epubs are self-contained, good for archiving, they enable a good reading experience (though better than paper? better than a laptop? I wonder), they are cross-device (or they are when you know how to use Calibre for conversion). And yes, an important reason is that people buy them. He's probably right. Epubs read on an e-reader enhance a

concentrated reading experience, where being online enhances a 'distracted', link-following, scanning reading experience (which is not necessarily bad – it is useful in many circumstances).

HTML IS KING/QUEEN?

Adam Hyde is the man of the Booksprint methodology of making books (http://www.booksprints.net/), Floss Manuals (http://booki.flossmanuals.net/), Booktype (http://www.sourcefabric.org/en/booktype/), and many more similar projects. He recently did a Booksprint on Booksprints. He gave up art after art had brought him to Antarctica. He entitled his talk 'Books are Evil, 8 years in the wilderness', and gives an overview of publishing projects he has been involved in over the years. His first book-making platform was based on Twiki. He learned that HMTL is 'king/queen' – the source files for his books are always HTML. He has also learned that doing Farsi in Regex (I did not know what Regex is) is extremely hard – touching on the language issue that tends to be forgotten in a predominantly English-focused world. Hyde finds it amazing and unbelievable that people in the knowledge industry, and publishing still reject the idea that HTML is king/queen. Not all the speakers here agree with him, others champion Markdown, or XML, or would say HTML is too sloppy. Hyde made a whole range of free softwares from Booki and Booktype to Lexicon, PubSweet, BookJS and Objavi. And learned that doing something the simple way is the best way. Import and export is all file conversion. He ends with 'Monstruous, Belligerent, Learnings', the central argument of which is – again – that HTML is 'it'. He states that in our world paper books are weird, as they were digital files first. He has a great metaphor: printed books are like frozen waves. He pleads: one has to get into the digital space for real – design does not relate to a fixed thing (a frozen wave – as can be found in Antarctica), but to data which flows and can be reflowed. Anything else in this world is crazy. Books – as printed things – are evil: they brought us copyright, industrial culture, the myth of the solitary genius. The market conditions for printed books do not exist without these. He pleads: let's forget about the book, and really go into collaborative knowledge production. He's being provocative – but he is right as well. Why go back to the book in a networked world? Only at this point the issues begin. Is science not collaborative knowledge production? Sure this is possible in a printed book format too? In the discussion later on, he says that his is a reversed provocation, against the fiction or myth that books are authored by a single author, even those are not made by a single author, they are collaborative efforts.

Florian Cramer chimes in and warns that one should not fight windmills, not fight against a situation that does not exist anymore, or has lost power. The myth of the single author is not so strong anymore in a time of Facebook, Amazon, cloud-storage, and the Clay Shirky collective intelligence cloud-ideology, with the iPad as the most 'evil tool'. Also Marcell Mars reacts (from the audience), making a point of the book as a cultural structure, rather than

a technological one – though it is also technological. He counters Adam Hyde's championing of HTML, mentioning that many things that are great about book technology are not solved in HTML, like pagination, citation and referencing. To which Adam Hyde replies with the example of the implementation of 'doi' (digital object identifier). It is interesting to see the playing-out of these differences – shall we call them ideological? – differences that to almost anyone outside electronic publishing or coding will seem pretty arcane…

These ideological differences come back in the presentation of John Haltiwanger about tools for knowledge production. He starts from the fundamental principle that knowledge production is too important to be locked in with proprietary software. His writing environment is a minimal full-text text editor. He invokes Simondon's concept of technology and transduction and outlines how the tools we construct and use form a sort of 'skeleton' that's around us in four (sic) dimensions. Like Adam Hyde he uses a picture of a glacier too. I have to admit that I loose track of what he's exactly getting at – maybe it is just how the technology that we use envelops us and our world. I am too focused now on the practical issues, it's not a day for me to contemplate the differences between Simondon's philosophy of technology and cybernetics. John Haltiwanger absolutely loves Markdown, I am told, and co-leads the pandoc workshop the next day.

WORKFLOWS AND TOOLKITS AND BASIC KNOWLEDGE

In his introduction to the next panel Florian Cramer puts the issues 'on the table', technological ones and pragmatic ones, concerning online versus offline, epub versus app versus website, issues of file size, bandwidth and connectivity. He mentions that many of the apps and tools that people now use unthinkingly do not work without connectivity. We are not sure bandwidth will stay as cheap as it is now. (And then he does not even mention that connectivity means tracking use). The world of epub, he says, is like the world of web design of the middle 1990s. There is a beautiful standard (epub2 and epub3), but very bad implementation and support of it by different reading tools. (An extremely simple but crazy example is that the CSS of the Kobo Touch displays the emphasis tag as bold instead of italics). And then, Florian Cramer says, there's the unworkable Microsoft/Adobe legacy in the workflow in the editorial and design world. This makes the question how to publish both on paper and electronic, which should be simple, quite problematic. He also says that the promise that electronic publishing is cheaper than print publication is false. (Though sometimes it is cheaper, we will hear). A slide 'you must change your life' states that XML is het ideal solution (as Joost Kircz outlined). Florian's pragmatic solution is to use simple markup languages like Multimarkdown (which Adam Hyde is against).

According to Florian Multimarkdown has all the functionality that is needed

for book production, and it has a straightforward and simple structure. It does body text, three hierarchies of headings, emphasis, strong, citation, footnotes, lists, and links. (HTML has already too many possibilities says Cramer). The only problem is – I think – that not many people are used to such markup languages. I have the impression (no hard data) that more people can write simple HTML than Markdown. But I might be mistaken. I'm of the generation who learned to write HTML, pre-Dreamweaver.

Then it's over to Miriam Rasch, and the current research of the Institute of Network Cultures (INC) project group. They made two anthologies – the INC Reader #9 and #8 *Unlike Us* and *Society of the Query*. (They can be downloaded as PDF and epub at different sites). She speaks about how she changed her habits and workflow as an editor in the course of the project. (It partly mirrors my own struggles with using softwares, tools, and way of collaborations in book projects). Getting out books in various formats is a way of reaching a larger audience. The workflow starts with Word-documents of writers, these are edited by editors, go back and forth. A final document is sent by the editor to the designer who imports it into InDesign to produce a designed PDF, which can be printed, and made available digitally. It's institutionalised DIY. (Good term). Making the epub of *Unlike Us* was totally separate – it was the only output format outside this workflow. (This particular epub is one of the best I ever saw – looking at how it worked on my Kobo, and inspecting the source code. Many epubs I have on my Kobo Touch have Table of Contents and footnotes that do NOT work). So how did the workflow change through producing the epub for *Society of the Query*? They made Markdown the central document format for keeping the definite texts and archiving. The workflow became Word —> MarkDown —> HTML —> output formats (epub, ibook, website et cetera).

They also made a personal epub-machine (coded by Michael Murtaugh) that allows you to choose from the available material – including stuff which is not in the original epub, like blogposts, photos, videos associated to the *Society of the Query* project, and generate a personal epub. But it can be done, and it's fun. (Though the idea of the epub as a self-contained file loses some of its power. I think. As the power of a self-contained file, as a book with covers, also lies in the fact that there are identical copies, that others have read the same book (or epub), and can refer to it as the same book, even though the reading experience of that same book might differ quite a bit).

Context Without Walls, presented by Pia Pol is the project of Valiz publishers within the Digital Publishing Toolkit project. They created a digital version of the printed book *Common Skin*, looking at the visual essays, the footnotes and the extensive indexes. For the toolkit they made an epub3 generator (EPUBster). She says: 'we as publishers do not know how to use Markdown'. The question is: could they not learn it? It does not take an intensive week workshop, you learn it in two hours. (She took part in the pandoc workshop the next day). It mystifies me that apparently people are willing and able to learn Excel and Word – which I find hard and horrible programs, with way too many and too complex functionalities – but not Markdown, or basic HTML.

Or is it that people do not know how to use Word and Excel either, but just type in the open window and hit 'save? I'm afraid not many people use Word in the right way, or take advantage of even 20% of its functionalities. (Who ever received a perfectly formatted Word document that used styles consequently and in the right way?) Editors do usually know their tools, or at least the functions they need. But there is definitely a problem – for education as well – that massive success of consumer-friendly intuitive interfaces have locked people – except 'nerds' – out of understanding the tools they use, and really making use of them.)

(I did not understand pandoc – the converting tool that Florian Cramer had advised me to use. I did not even understand where my Mac had saved the program when I downloaded it. Of course not: it's a command-line tool. You need to open the terminal to use it. I'm afraid I hadn't used the terminal in three years. But at least I knew that there is such a thing as terminal access, and that I can learn (again) to use it, and it is not extremely difficult. Though it might not be extremely attractive (visually), not intuitive.)

Two other visually oriented projects follow. First an epub3 produced for the Stedelijk Museum, which is nice enough, or very nice, yet I can't get rid of the impression that I'm looking at something which actually is a website (which it is of course). Arjen de Jong presents the work of the BIS Publishers workgroup. Their goal was to explore the possibility of rich media with highly interactive content. He mentions that iBooks Author has a crazy user agreement, which is unworkable for a real publisher: epubs created by iBooks Author may only be sold in the Appstore, and nowhere else. And it only produces one format. So it's unusable professionally. They focused on tablets as the platform to produce for, as that is where their market is. This choice decided the use of tools and formats. E-readers, he states, move forward really slowly, and are basically one-function tools: to read texts. (They are, and that's their *forte* too). For anything else (and for reading) we have laptops and tablets. The publication they worked on – an interactive 'book' on sketching, where the reader or users makes sketches – would be ridiculous to produce for an e-reader. So it makes sense.

MORE PRESENTATIONS

visualMANIAC (http://visualmaniac.com/) from Madrid create and sell image heavy (art) publications. Judging from their websites, they are much more in an 'ipad-touch-screen-world' than some of the earlier presenters. They have about 1200 publications in the store. They are a small fish in the pond where Amazon rules, looking for a commercial format in a world where it still is difficult to have people *pay* for digital content. Their solution is to work together with institutions, also offering their services and expertise. The challenge is to survive and remain independent as an online bookstore for digital content, of whatever format (HTML5, epub, apps, PDF). The question is: where do you buy your 'books' and 'magazines' for the e-reader and

iPad? Is there a (market) possibility for a store? What is the function of a store for digital content? Of course a small store with a good choice of content is nicer to browse than Amazon – but wouldn't I get the PDF or epub rather directly from the publisher or the author? It's the old question of the middle man trying to define a niche.

My colleague at V2 *Michelle Kasprzak talks about making epubs for the Blow-up program of V2* (http://www.v2.nl). This happens next to the printed books that V2 *is publishing. (Actually today a new book is published: Giving & Taking, edited by Joke Brouwer and Sjoerd van Tuinen). Why did she bother to make these ebooks, that delve deeper into the theme of each Blowup – events that had to be experienced there and then? The old reason: books can be distributed over space and time, and are easily archived. She dug through the archive to find archive stuff to republish (with help of me, 'the archive guru' at V2*), and combined and mixed it with new and commissioned content. She used the methodology of the Book Sprint – a masochistic concept, she says with a smile – to create the e-book on 'the New Aesthetic'. She elaborates on the method of Book Sprints: getting the group together, the nudging needed from someone who oversees the process, the choice of a central topic. She calls the room where the authors who were writing the book on the New Aesthetic in 5 days humorously 'the torture room', and 'the pressure cooker'. She organized a second Book Sprint about the V2_ long term research project 'Innovation in Extreme Scenario's', with the ambition to make a reader to explain the topic. The sprint morphed into writing personal essays on the topic. 'Write often, distribute widely' – is how she ends the presentation. To get the message out there. Focusing on the methodology of making a book, to speed up the process, is another angle at electronic book production – though it is not tied to electronic tools. Even in the 18th Century books were produced and published very, very fast to react on topical issues.

Matthew So presents the books of Badlands Unlimited (http://badlandsunlimited.com/), founded by the artist Paul Chan. They see publishing as an experiment, make books 'in an expanded field'. In their store they have the choice between IRL (printed), Amazon, or iPad+iPhone. They are not typical. They work only on Mondays and Tuesdays, give a 50-50 royalty for authors – which is indeed unheard of. They are not coders, and rely on the knowledge that they acquired themselves – a bit of HTML for instance. They started to do e-books because it would be cheaper to do – and in their experience it worked out cheaper. The first books were by Paul Chan – just when he was becoming well-known. Their most successful book – commercially – is the Marcel Duchamp interview book. Matthew So shows a number of ebooks that make artistic use, or actually misuse of simple technologies embedded in for instance iBook Authors. There's a lot of meta-technological fun. *How to Download a Boyfriend* (with Cory Arcangel, Tony Conrad and many others) is an example of that – typical of the post-digital aesthetic, (mis)using the most horrible visuals of contemporary internet culture. Another example is an iBook with only ads (it became 230 pages thick). These books typically do not work cross-platform, they are made for

ipads, and are an artistic statement. Publishing these books cross-platform, he says, is not an issue, since the artistic impulse and concept comes first. If they can be cross-platform, they will be. All their ebooks are a good example of what can be done with the available tools, especially iBook Author, and care less for all of the issues that the other speakers today mentioned. Maybe you have to be American to work like this? Is it harder in the Netherlands and Europe, as a small art publisher, to simply make books that will NOT work on an e-reader, or your laptop, and only on an Apple device? And tell you customers, 'no sorry, it does not work on your machine'? This attitude is relaxing as well. Maybe we should care less about it. Just make e-books with the best tools. And when it won't display anymore on your new reading device in 6 years time, so what? In the discussion afterwards he admitted that they did run into quite a few rejections from the iBook store. Sometimes this concerned censure, sometimes the problem was in scripts they had used in an iBook – which Apple saw as possible malicious code. But though he is concerned, he seemed not to be terribly deterred by it.

The Serving Library is a project by Stuart Bailey, David Reinfurt and Angie Keefer (who presents it here) – they are Dexter Sinister. I have collaborated with Stuart Bailey in my *Metropolis M* past, and greatly admire his work. Angie Keefer gives a short introduction and then shows a long video – *Letter & Spitter.* It is about the 1960s breakthrough work of Donald Knuth (http://www-cs-faculty.stanford.edu/~uno/index.html), the man behind Metafont (http://www.math.zju.edu.cn/ligangliu/LaTeXForum/TeXBooks/Metafont/MetaFontBook.pdf) and TeX. It's going into the fundamentals of digital typesetting. Dexter Sinister made a script to make a single font that is constantly moving and changing – and this font is used in the video. It's great, it's crazy, it's what is possible in a computer world, but the video is too slow for my brain, goes on too long, and I wonder if the message comes across.

All of this, as Sebastian Lütgert says from the audience at the end of the discussion of the first day, is like the web of 20 years ago. Everything that is experimented with, all the changes in workflows, all the issues, is what we have seen 20 years ago. And he asks: is the book really the paradigm that we want to look at when we are concerned with knowledge production? (He says a couple of things more that I am unable to summarise on the fly). He is right, and it is very strange to see the middle 1990s re-enacted. One could also argue that this is exactly great about epubs: all these tools are quite simple, you need just a few days to understand them and work with them – and sometimes much less than that. In fact figuring out how to upload them to the App-store can take more time to figure out. It's fun to make epubs, but it is pretty doubtful that it's the only future of reading and publishing.

ART UNCREATIVE ART SPAM ART

In the evening it's time for presentation of projects that perform publishing, instead of just doing publishing, Shirin Pfisterer, from Crosslabs/Willem de Kooning Academy, is the first presenter. She made a plugin for a web browser that saves and scans your reading behaviour – or at least the bits that you highlight yourself. (Very useful I would say). *Out of Print* is an installation by design collective sixthirty that explores the abundance of online news that divides our attention. (That make us reading more and understanding less). As this one is actually a real type-setting machine and printing press it's rather an art work that asks questions than a pragmatic tool (though of course it really works). What they print is headlines, looks nice, but not really connecting to the issue of the abundance of online news. *Collate* is a later work from them (2013) that looks at the publishing process and is an experiment in collaborative editing. They made a book using *Collate* – with 3 essays – printed with Blur.

TraumaWien (http://traumawien.at)– presented here by Lukas Jost Gross does ebook projects, relational publishing, and organizes events that mix literature with art and acid techno. They connect, I guess, to a real Viennese tradition. Think Der Wiener Gruppe (with Ernst Jandl, Konrad Bayer, oswald wiener etc.). They are great, so please excuse me for not being critical. They published 25 books – but they only sold about 100 in 4 years. In their crazy projects they exploit ebooks and on demand printing technology, and use spam. They've automatically generated epubs from Youtube-comments, and employing Kindle's direct self-publishing service, uploaded about 2400 such books automatically to Amazon. Their 'hack' was running for three days, before they were found out. (They stupidly did not use TOR or another way to hide their IP-address used for uploading). Luckily it was seen before that by journalists, and so it was picked up, and the story went around the world. They show what you can do when you really want to exploit the technologies. They actually sold about 5 of those books. What he is not referring to is that this project is one of the best examples of Conceptual Poetry, and Uncreative Writing (see the book by Kenneth Goldsmith – of UBUweb –, and the anthology *Against Expression* by Craig Dworkin & Goldsmith), which has gained quite some attention in poetry and theory circles in the past years. (In the Netherlands composer/poet Samuel Vriezen is into this). Though TraumaWien holds probably – as befits Austrian – the most extreme position. (And yes, TraumaWien have the PDFs of these book up at their site: http://traumawien.at/stuff/texts/.) They also have a great scheme to get readers: get the torrent with all the new German epubs, contaminate all the 24.000 epubs, and re-upload. Keep on seeding, making sure people take your torrent. And all of those readers who think they're going to read the new Daniel Kehlmann book for 'free', will get the TraumaWien version.

'That's a tough act to follow', says Oliver Wise from the Present Group, who is now presenting with Eleanor Hanson Wise. They show The People's Ebook, and try to answer the question why it is framed as a tool for artists. The answer is first in the social scene they are themselves part of, and

secondly because getting artists involved into making epubs, is a method of pushing the technology further. Their historical example is Sonia Landy Sheridan's residence at 3M's Color Research lab in 1971 and 1976. Furthermore artists they know do publish, but are usually not technological savvy, and do not use epub – so having such a tool for that scene, is useful.

The last presentation I see is by Greyscales' Manuel Schmalstieg (see http://greyscalepress.com) – *Black Holes in the Galaxy*. He starts with the idea of the flip-flop: going from digital to analog and back. He made a couple of printed editions, sometimes pirated – for instance Neal Stephenson's essay from Wired on the undersea cable, with new illustrations. He aggregated a novel from texts written by various ghost writers. He made the edition 'In Conversation with Julian Assange.' Some of these book remained undercover, as they were pirate editions, and rights were not acquired. His most successful publication is a book with transcriptions of talks by Jacob Appelbaum, – a book which can be added to every time a new talk is transcribed. He ends with on overview of spam publishing – which very nicely complements the presentation by TraumaWien.

TOOLS AND WORKSHOPS

The second day of Off the Press starts with workshops. I decide to go to the workshop about pandoc first, as it promises to be about a way of working with text that I am not used to, but have started to like. When I started to use computers, in 1991 there was already Word and that is what I used for writing. At the same time I still sometimes had to use command line tools and learned about 20 Unix-commands. Through the years I've met people who championed the use of emacs, LaTEX, Multimarkdown or pandoc. But I have never really figured out how to work in that 'paradigm'. First thing to understand is that pandoc is basically a very powerful converting tool. Pandoc is not an environment, but a step in a chain, a step in the workflow. It just converts. And it won't solve the problems of converting visual design to a digital format. It is based on using Markdown, a simple markup language that uses asterisks, square brackets, underscores. I have always found it easier to write HTML markup, than this type of markup, but it is even simpler than writing HMTL-tags. The idea is that the plain text file shows the structure in a human readable format but is ready for computer consumption at the same time. What you see is what you get – but in a different way. An interesting remark is made – I forget who made it: 'Word and InDesign are not *basic* tools of the trade – though most people now have grown up thinking they are. They are very *specific* tools.' And it's true that especially editors can take advantage of the knowledge of markup languages to create better, cleaner source texts… There's some panic and chaos in the workshop, as the difference in competence is really big. Some participants use the terminal mode all the time, others have never seen a command line interface before, let alone worked with it. There is also a bit of a clash between those who think that people should be empowered to use tools

themselves and acquire what they think is necessary basic knowledge, versus people who do not have such 'basic knowledge', consider such knowledge to be 'technical', and who, let's face it, will probably never use these tools themselves anyway. In the middle is a majority who at least would like to get a taste of the 'basic knowledge'.

After the lunch break I have a look at the other two workshops. Two groups of each 20 participants (the maximum) are working concentrated. In the SuperGlue workshop (http://superglue.it/) all have just installed, or tried to install, the SuperGlue package, thus creating a local network of mini servers. (The SuperGlue website states: 'SuperGlue's mini-server provides full control of your personal data by enabling you to run and maintain your server at home. This means you can better protect and share important information, directly with those whom you want to share it with. So your privacy is in your hands.') Danja Vasiliev, one of the workshop tutors and creators of SuperGlue asks: 'who has got it working?' About everybody has it working. When I check my Airport it sees six SuperGlue networks. Again, I realise I should finally learn how to set up my own server, that I should learn this little bit of command line tweaking, so I can run Wordpress on my own machine, and have all the other useful tools at my fingertips. It really is basic knowledge. A lot of it is hardly 'technical' – but it's in a different computer paradigm, that feels very far removed from the shiny 'intuitive' interfaces.

Megan Hoogenboom leads the workshop in which the participants try to make an epub form a work of visual poetry. About everyone is playing around with what I call good old-fashioned HTML: writing tags. It looks like they are having good fun with HTML and CSS.

Both the SuperGlue workshop and the visual poetry workshop show that it's fun to work with tools that empower you as user, that give you the feeling of being in control and creating something – instead of consuming nice interfaces that mostly control you. (I would say that working, well playing, with an iPad mostly give the user the feeling of being controlled by the interface, not of being in control. Using an iPad certainly does not enhance the feeling that one can make something oneself, apart from using services that offer heavily pre-formatted ways of creation. Sure, the touch screen can be great to control sound output, and it can be nice for gaming, but that is another thing). It's an old point, but it stays relevant.

Back in the days – roughly 1997 to 2000 – I taught basic HTML (and writing to the web and so forth) at Mediamatic. At the time it was still considered 'handy' for editors and designers – who actually already were working in Dreamweaver and were doing Flash – to know some HTML. (Of course the question was always raised: why should we know these tags, when you can do the same visually in a WISYWIG editor?) Who, apart from the 'nerds', maintained their websites doing HTML in the 21st century? Maybe some artists who liked the simplicity of HTML. Some academics. The great thing is that a website made with simple HTML in 1995 still displays fine in any browser. I think there is a basic, simple fun in creating something with one's own hands. Maybe the result doesn't look as slick as other websites, but it

will work fine, and you have control over almost every step.

Also in the visual poetry workshop I mostly see smiling faces. They generate an epub in the end – using a command line tool. And that's great. There is fun in making epubs. (Michael Murtaugh told me that the pandoc workshop, which started quite chaotic, also ended with a great feeling of relief from the side of the participants, when they create an epub-output with pandoc with a simple command.)

LIBRARIES

'Mp3 was not made big by the music industry, it was made big by file sharing, started by hackers. Netflix makes it decisions about programming by analysing Pirate Bay downloads. Maybe,' Florian Cramer says, because he's doing the introduction again, 'we should have started the conference with this last panel on underground publishing.' The underground file sharing of books is, at least in Europe, much larger than the retail market of e-books. Artists have been very active in this scene from the beginning according to Florian Cramer. It also exists much longer than the retail market. Some of it is illegal 'sharing' of books, but not all of it. Here at the conference *Bibliotecha* is running on a little local file server. It appears as an open wireless device on one's computer and allows you to download books that people have put there. There's also a website and a public repository – at http://bibliotecha.info.

Sebastian Lütgert, the next speaker, ran a repository of philosophical and activist and underground texts 'back in the days'. (I still should have a lot of those files somewhere on a harddisk, the start of my digital library together with downloads from Project Gutenberg). His talk is about 'what do you do with your books'. What do you do with the gigantic amounts of unsorted PDFs and epubs that you have on your hard disk, often not properly named. He assumes we all have such collections – do we? He does not like Calibre as a management tool and reader. Calibre (http://calibre-ebook.com/) – in the first place a converter for epubs and comparable formats – seems to be the tool of choice of many. Though I wonder how many users in the iPad/iPhone/Adobe universe know of it. Sebastian Lütgert main question is: how should library-software function, what is a good ebook-management tool? With support from Constant vzw (http://www.constantvzw.org/site/) in Brussels such software is developed: openmedialibrary (http://openmedialibrary.com/#about). He shows how it works in a web browser. It allows browsing the library of peers, and transferring books from there to one's own computer.

We're in 'the underground' here so we're assuming that we're dealing with free content and books that people have bought and like to share with friends… But the topic now is not how the digital is or should be changing society, culture and the economy. We're looking at how the tools work in

practice. Tools like this one are important, they are an activist 'cog' in the 'machinery'. They change the function of the public library too – and public libraries, at least in Europe, are thinking about these transformations. Here we get into an endless and endlessly interesting discussion, which is a topic for another conference. It is self-evident that this is about sharing knowledge, which is a basis of our civilization. If I sound a bit ironic, this is unintentional. I agree with the philosophy to build these tools – it is an active and activist impetus to change society.

Calibre by the way also has a function to set up a content server, and can connect to other users. I think Calibre is a decent viewer, it's great for conversion (Mobi to epub...), and can be used to produce ebooks. The main downside to Calibre, for me, – except for the fact that it adds its own code to your converted epubs – is that its interface is not attractive at all.

After Sebastian Lütgert it's over to the Marcell Mars – hacker, activist, researcher. He is expert in book sharing and book hacking, and is, or was, actively involved in creating code for Calibre. (Actually he has just been banned from the developer forum). He wrote a sharing tool for Calibre: memoryoftheworld.org/public-library). He says: aesthetics and usability are less important than social interaction. Calibre might be ugly – he says it's ugly – and not the easiest tool, but it has thousands of users. He wants to make Calibre a political project. He mentions the property regime and intellectual property are a huge problem. They sure are. He also rants against the technological problems – the asymmetry in the network, laptops that send requests for data, but never send data, though they could. He is so right in that. The internet we have created is a far cry to what it could have been in the dreams of 30, 20 or even 10 years ago. But most importantly Mars wants to connect again to the idea of the public library. The public library as the democratic dream of access to knowledge. He's from Croatia where in 1991 books were burned because they were in Cyrillic, in Serbian, and/or communist. And the book scanning project at MAMA in Zagreb was a way of resurrecting that burned library. He's passionate about the idea of the public library, and a passionate speaker with his Karl Marx-beard, using the word struggle quite a bit. I think he is very right in his passionate plea for the public library, and his plea against the development of electronic reading as 'streaming', licensing temporary access to a file, where the whole reading behaviour is controlled. In between he advises us to read *Paper Machines*, Markus Krajewski's book on the card catalogue. The issue he raises is that of having power in the control over access to knowledge, control over the index to knowledge. He pleads to not let Google take over a total control over this index, that we need to retain the index of the public library. He also pleas for retaining the function of a librarian – as a person, a human being – and not hand over the control over the index to computer engineers and algorithms. There are many points in his presentation that deserve a detailed think-through and discussion.

Dusan Barok of monoskop (http://monoskop.org) is the last speaker.
He delves into the history of reading and publishing, going back to

manuscripts and scrolls. While he talks an image of one of the earliest Greek manuscripts of Plato's *Phaedrus* is shown, with the title 'Communing Texts'. Referencing is his main topic. How to refer to passages in an ebook? Pagination – a historical, 'technological' invention that came about through the development of the codex – is hardly ever mentioned in the discussion of ebooks. Dusan compares two traditions of referencing: the academic one (pointing to a specific passage in a text) and hyperlinking between sections of a website (through using anchors). He would like to see the possibility to digitally augment references in scanned printed books, as well as the possibility to link to any passage in a digital text – regardless of whether there is an anchor in the HTML. He says that this means looking at digital text as a continuous line of data (which is the materiality of digital text anyway). Enabling referencing between texts is important, as in such a way a community of texts can arise.

During the discussion Joost Kircz repeats that we indeed need referencing inside texts – and that this still does not exist. Interestingly Sebastian Lütgert says that it is probably easy to make such references inside electronic publications – and sketches the concept how it could work. Sounds simple. Joost Kircz says: well let's make it, because this does not exist, and we have been wanting it for over 30 years now. (I think: doesn't this go back to Ted Nelson's ideas on transclusion – and that was very problematic?) Marcel Mars thinks that any computer student could solve it. But it's another question if such a standard would be used. (And making sure it becomes a standard is difficult).

Marcell Mars ends one of his answers with that he hates the idea of the underground in the American and UK sense – 'I'm not underground, fuck you'. He is very right – when you would consider all our book sharing (which in the current technical implementation means downloading) as being the new implementation of the public library. (And not as building a private library).

TOOLKIT

So, is there a toolkit? There is no finished toolkit yet. There is the repository with tools http://digitalpublishingtoolkit.org/github/. There is also by now a good insight in the various workflows used by small publishers, artists, writers, self-publishers and organizations. There is an overview of the pro's and con's of different tools. There is an overview of how all of this relates to the larger context of publishing, and to reading and sharing behaviours in online and offline culture. There is probably no perfect toolkit that fits every need. What I personally learned, is that pretty much everybody has been trying out different ways of making epubs that are good enough to bring into the world, and that there's almost always something that has to be done 'by hand' as well, some tweaking and correction. Every method has advantages and disadvantages, and what fits a certain project depends on a variety of

factors: the source text, the editorial process, the goal of the publication, the envisioned market or reading group, the available time… I think a progression has been made thanks to this project and the three conferences. There is also progression in knowing that a lot concerns really very basic stuff – very basic stuff.

The attraction of epubs for me lies in the fun of making something which is simple, which you can do yourself (just as well as any large institution). It's in the joy of making – and also there is a parallel with web design of the middle 1990s. In that respect I have gone from amazement over the fact that such a fuss was being made of 'e-books', to a joy of making epubs.

(For pictures see: https://www.flickr.com/photos/networkcultures/)