

INSIDE

UPSIDE

Discover  
the Hidden  
Structures  
of Your  
(Digital)  
Content

DOWN

OUT

Manual for Using Modular Publishing as a Way  
to Create, Edit, and Structure Content ←

This manual focuses on the initial phase of a (digital) publishing process. It offers methods to critically examine the narrative structures of content and explore alternative conceptions of a publication. By raising the question of how modular publishing can be used as a way to create, edit and structure content it tries to resist a monolithic story line, and embraces multiple perspectives.

## How to Use this Manual

The following questions have guided the research at the base of this manual:

*What technical possibilities exist for making modular publications? How can these be employed in a durable and flexible way?*

See [An Exploration of Existing Tools](#) for an overview of existing tools and [The Tool](#) for a more elaborate reflection on our preferred method, Twine.

*What consequences does modularity have for the content, reader experience, and design of a publication? How do writers and readers experience it?*

See the different methods for an insight into user experiences: (re)organising your content on [A→Collage](#); [B→Scalar](#); [C→Twine](#). See also [Publishing process](#) for the different people and groups involved.

*How can the alternative presentation of information be embedded within a critical tradition? And how can this help to position work with regard to new reading publics, including authors?*

See [Inspiring theory](#) for a short overview of existing literature on the topics, [Selection of Interesting Examples](#) for some best practices out there, and [Further Research](#) for more.

If you want to dive right into the material, find the [Hit Me! Questions](#) that are scattered throughout this manual.

The concept of modularity describes the process of breaking up a larger text into smaller elements that can be used as building blocks to create different collections of interlinked elements.

Combined with a focus on the relationships and connections between these modules this manual offers a way to investigate the hidden structure of your (digital) content and imagine alternative conceptions of a publication.

## Exploring Modularity

We take inspiration for the use of modular processes from software development. Modules can be re-used but are still flexible. They allow for a publishing workflow that is open to many different publications and designs, while still facilitating a structured (time-saving) process.

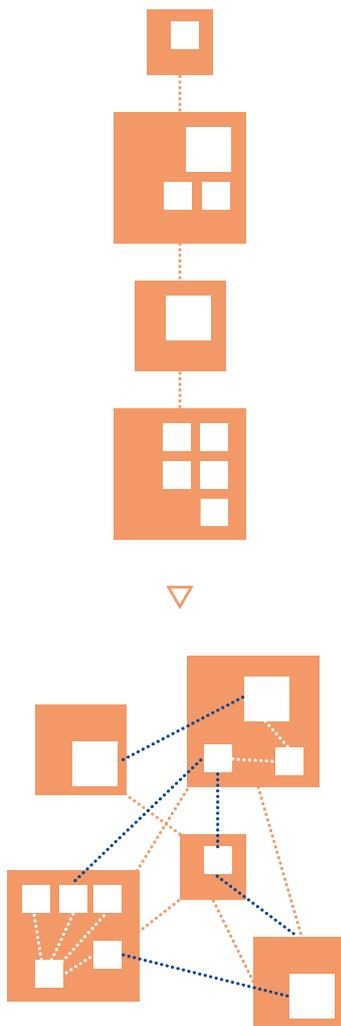
Modularity can also be used to conceive of a publication in a different way from the usual, linear, A-Z model. In this sense, modular publishing is a way to position a publication differently. It asks for other conceptions of how a text works, what kinds of modules (videos, images, quotes, audio, etc.) would be desirable, and how all the modules might interrelate. Modularity then is not just a part of the (technical) production workflow but involves the presentation of the content and the editorial decisions made. This could result in a different way of writing and reading; in other ways of telling stories and presenting research.

Working through different concepts of modular publishing and investigating their benefits and pitfalls, we've arrived at a view on creating, editing, and structuring content that takes into account relationships between modules rather than just considering the modules themselves. The different connections and resulting pathways are what deserve attention in making innovative, critical, and urgent publications.

It has turned out that visualization of the structure, of the composition of the ideas in text, images, video, and audio is essential. The possibilities for visualizing offer new means for the iterative process that content creation is about. Such visualizations can also play a part in a different way of engaging the reader.

## Goals

- Give authors and editors tools to think about the structure of their digital content in a different way.
- Speed up the process of getting a grip on your content and its structure.
- Stimulate different forms of narrativity for research/non-fiction content.



②  
 Would it be interesting to add extra parts to your collection of contents, for example in a different format (multimedia), a background article, or an interview?

### Type of Content

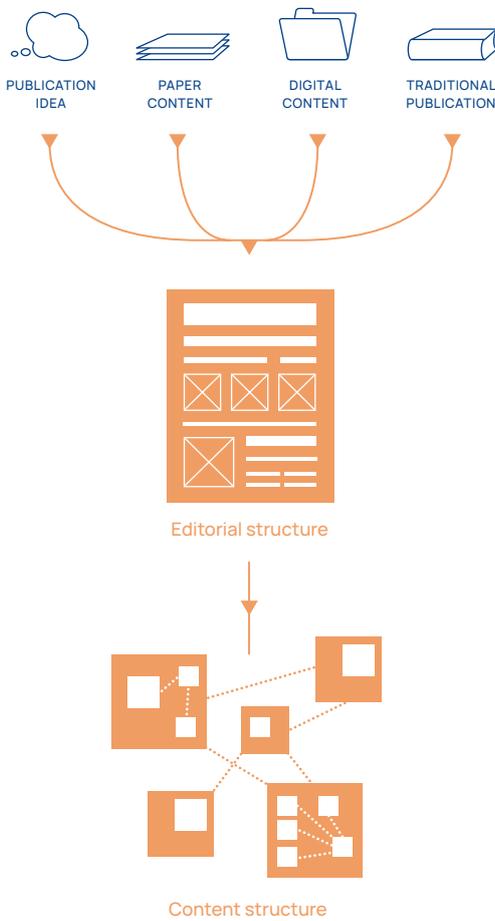
The type of content with which digital, modular publications are made, varies widely. The methods described in this manual have been tested on both text- and image-heavy content. Examples cover a wide range of textual elements (titles, chapters, footnotes, endnotes, etc.) and deal with content that may include images, video, audio, etc.. This manual is meant to support the thinking process of authors and editors, hopefully sparking insights and possibilities in an early phase.

### Making Public Project

This research was conducted as part of a larger project called Making Public. The overarching question of this project relates to 'urgent publishing': how to publish swiftly and timely in an overheated information climate, so as to join the public debate with high-quality information that reaches and engages prospective audiences. Practically speaking, the question is how digital applications or work methods can help to speed up the publishing process and allow positioning of the publication in inventive ways, without sacrificing the quality of the work.

Proposed strategies in the project were using modularity, automation and hybrid formats. While all three are related to the work done, modularity had central focus. Using modular techniques, workflows, it should be possible to speed up the publishing process, but also to automate certain parts of the process or to have different, modular publication formats emerge.

The different terms in this manual have gained and sometimes changed meaning through the course of our project. At the utmost start of a publication project, where content is conceived and structured, urgency and speed have taken on a double meaning. Using the right methods, tools, and workflows might win time, but is also specifically aimed at approaching urgency from the perspective of the content itself. Working with modular content makes different formats and narrative structures possible; narratives that resist a definite or linearly told meaning and that thus convey matters with another sense of urgency.



How could your publication differ when it's published digitally rather than on paper?

## Focus

The process of making a digital publication has many phases; from the conception of the idea, to getting the publication into a distribution network and reaching its audience. This manual is written to help authors, editors, and other content creators to gain insights into the first phases of the publishing process of a digital publication: outlining, creating content, structuring, and analyzing the content. These are the steps in which the creators of the publication decide and define its content and its structure.

While this manual is meant for gaining insights into content from an authorial and editorial point of view, it is important to think about how the outcomes can be transferred in a usable way to the designers and / or developers of the publication. Therefore, when discussing the methods available, output formats will also be considered.

## New Structures

What happens if we leave behind the constraints of printed book formats and the linear story mode? How can a publication make use of and thrive in a hypertextual, multi-medial and -modal universe? How can different text styles (including notes, annotations, extensions, and diversions) be included? How can images, video, and audio be used? And how to create different ways to navigate through the publication?

The usability of the concept for the reader should also be considered. How can other sensibilities of reading from a screen (scanning, scrolling, skimming, surfing, hyperlinking, etc.) as well as (self-)navigation for the reader be made into a feature and used to conceive of a different forms of publishing?

The goal of thinking about and possibly developing new structures for content is related to positioning the publication. Alternative ways of telling stories and presenting information and knowledge can be considered 'urgent': an additional objective is to attract new reader groups and authors who support these goals.

## Starting Points

There are different starting points imaginable. Either the process starts from scratch and there is an idea or overall concept of and for the content, but nothing is written or structured yet. Or the content for the publication already exists or an existing (paper) publication is being adapted. The difference between creating a publication from scratch and working with existing content is most evident in the early phases of the process, when the different elements or modules and the relations between them need to be defined. The decisions made then will define the navigability of the structure and content.

**First Steps**

*From Scratch*

**Outlining**

The publisher/editor has a first brainstorm session with the authors/makers of the imagined publication.

The publisher/editor and authors/makers decide on the outlines of the publication: what it is about; the type of content that will make it up (e.g. texts, images, videos, audio); first idea about the structure of the content (e.g. elements, relations)

The decision to make a digital publication is made.

**Creating content**

The content is produced including draft(s) of the structure: elements (parts), multimedia; relations between elements; stratification, etc.

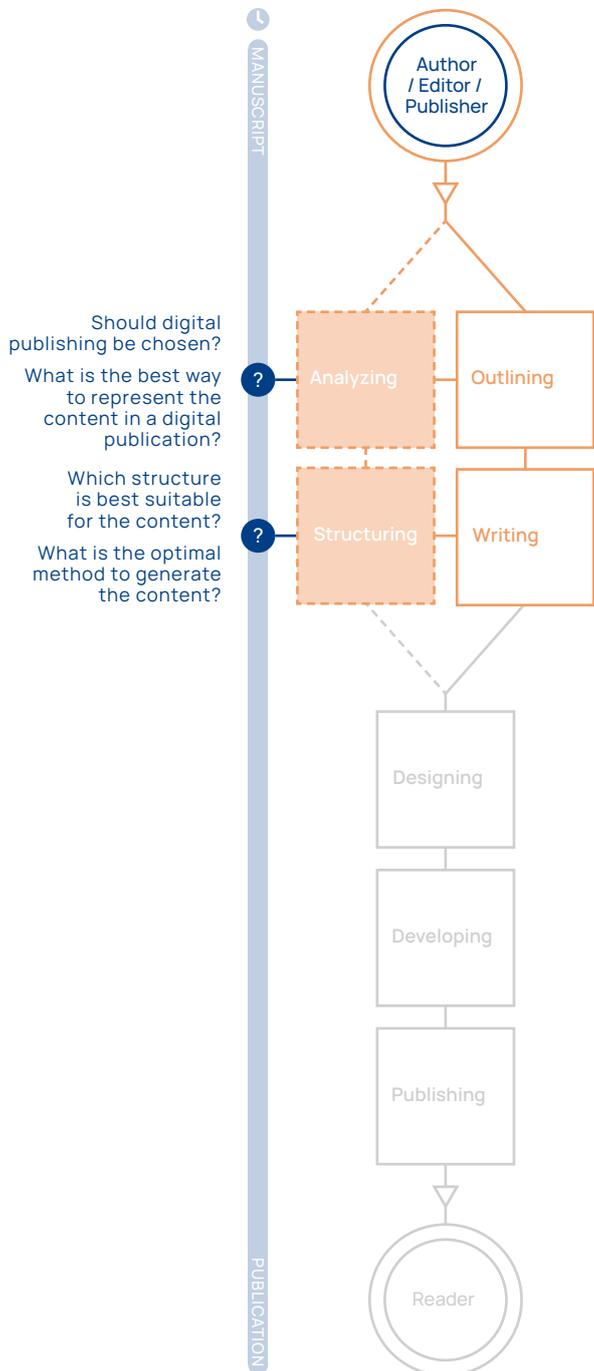
**Structuring and Analyzing**

The publisher/editor and authors/makers (optionally with a designer) together design a proposed structure for the publication: a visualization of the structure, including: which elements the content consists of; usability of multimedia; relationships between the elements and a possible navigation system for the reader. This is where a method such as one of the proposed options in this manual comes in.

*Existing Publication*

When adapting an existing (paper)publication, the Outlining and Creating Content phases differ from the steps as described in 'From Scratch', because the content already exists but needs to be re-thought/re-defined (within a digital context). The structuring and analyzing phase are the same.

In the next chapter the different proposed methods are introduced.



# How to Choose a Method: Collage, Scalar, Twine

Make a  
mindmap on  
a napkin.

Now, in prez!

Modularity helps to approach the content in a different way than we are used to. How to apply such modular thinking? At the heart of such a process is to define the different parts and relationships that the content is made of. Then, the possible structures of a content collection can be investigated by approaching the content as consisting of separate elements and visualizing the relationships between them.

Relationships can be established on many different levels, such as between different chapters, between paragraphs within a chapter, between video and text or between words and footnotes, for example. Visualizing them offers insight into new connections or show where links or elements are still missing. It can also help to construct different reader experiences, reading paths, or content orders.

Below are three possible methods that can help do this. A list of practical points and the established pros and cons per method help to choose the most suitable one for your project. A more detailed explanation of each method follows accordingly.

It is important to think about how detailed you want to be when cutting-up or conceiving the material, whether physically or digitally. A text can be divided on the level of chapters, paragraphs, sentences, media types, and so on. How far you want to go first depends on the type and amount of content. Second, it can be based on editorial decisions or on the 'type' of element (e.g. caption, image, footnote, etc). Take into account that once you start cutting there is no easy way back.

Each method invites active (re)evaluation of your content and its structure. You can use the questions below to get started. (See also the Hit Me! Questions scattered throughout this document.)

- Would it be interesting or even necessary to add extra parts to your collection of content, for example in a different format (multimedia), a background article, or an interview?
- What relations does the extra part have with the rest of the content?
- Can you enrich chapters or parts of the content with extra information, such as longer quotes, audio snippets, images, captions, external links, etc.?
- What does this approach tell you about the relationship between form and content of the publication?
- Does this lead to other possible ways of writing, reading, or building an argument?

Introduction

Publishing Process



How to Choose a Method

Collage

Scalar

Twine

The Tool

A Selection of Interesting Examples

Inspiring Theory

Exploring Existing Tools

Glossary

Colophon

	A → COLLAGE	B → SCALAR	C → TWINE
Practical	<p><b>REQUIREMENTS</b> Content printed out on paper and a pair of scissors, optionally tape or string to signify relationships.</p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; SKILLS</b> None</p> <p><b>ACCESSIBILITY</b> High</p> <p><b>OUTPUT</b> Paper, notes, pictures, etc.</p>	<p><b>REQUIREMENTS</b> Computer, internet and Scalar account.</p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; SKILLS</b> Knowledge of digital text editing and the use of content classification is practical.</p> <p><b>ACCESSIBILITY</b> Take into account the start-up time to get to know the program. Free account after verification, unless the system is self-hosted, then no account needed.</p> <p><b>OUTPUT</b> XML</p>	<p><b>REQUIREMENTS</b> Computer, online via website Twine or offline via application download.</p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; SKILLS</b> Basic knowledge of code is very practical.</p> <p><b>ACCESSIBILITY</b> Learn-by-doing mentality and the usage of tutorials desired.</p> <p><b>OUTPUT</b> HTML</p>
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Accessible method</li> <li>▸ Choose and adapt your methodology</li> <li>▸ Allows for a complete overview of material and relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Open source</li> <li>▸ Back-end is designed for production use; a ready-to-use solution</li> <li>▸ Collaborative editing possible</li> <li>▸ Built-in visualisations of the structure of content</li> <li>▸ Possibility to define narrative pathways for the reader</li> <li>▸ Use of many different media formats (video, images, sounds, various embeds)</li> <li>▸ Practical features have been implemented such as metadata and annotations</li> <li>▸ Scalar can also be used for publishing the final publication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Open source</li> <li>▸ Both online and offline use possible</li> <li>▸ Clear interface</li> <li>▸ Many tutorials available</li> <li>▸ Overview of links between content</li> <li>▸ Data storage on personal HD</li> <li>▸ Content is easy to exchange between Twine installations</li> <li>▸ Installing or writing plugins is possible</li> <li>▸ Twine can also be used for publishing the final publication</li> </ul>
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Undoing or making adjustments is less easy</li> <li>▸ Searching by keyword or relationship is not possible</li> <li>▸ Content is difficult to hand over for next phase in publishing process as it remains analogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Unless the application is installed on your own server, data is stored on an external server</li> <li>▸ Self-installation is not straightforward, some specific technical requirements have to be met</li> <li>▸ The system feels cumbersome and slow to use, the program needs a lot of time to process the actions</li> <li>▸ The navigation in the back-end is not very clear, especially with more complex publication structures and many connections</li> <li>▸ Only exports Scalar-structured XML</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Markup language is used</li> <li>▸ Inclusion of media is not straightforward</li> <li>▸ Footnotes/endnotes are not supported</li> <li>▸ Twine-structured HTML import only</li> </ul>

We have developed an extended version of Twine, to make it more suitable to the specific goals of this manual. In the extended version, the following augmentations have been made:

- **Markdown** editor
- Better media handling
- Footnote support

For more information see [The Tool](#).

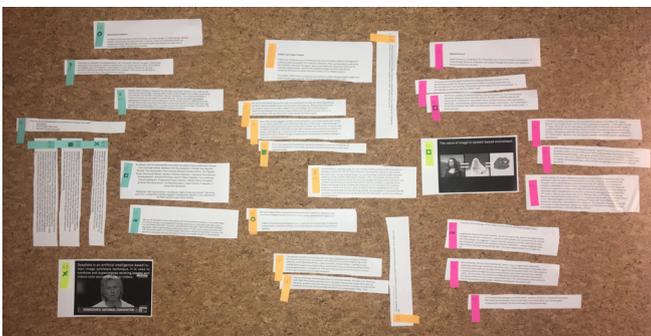


The 'collage' method is very useful in the first, creative phase of structuring the content, to make a draft of the structure of the concept of the content. It creates insight in the structure of the digital publication and allows for visualizing the different elements and relations between them, the 'stratification' of the elements (in parts), the use and place of annotations, images, video, audio, etc.

The collage method is accessible to use: you can choose your own system and it gives a complete overview of all the material and relations. It is a good method to use in the phase Analyzing/Structuring, when there is a lot of material and content to work with.

Take into account that in the end the structure and overview remains analog and is not possible to hand it over to designers or developers, for the next phase in the publishing process.

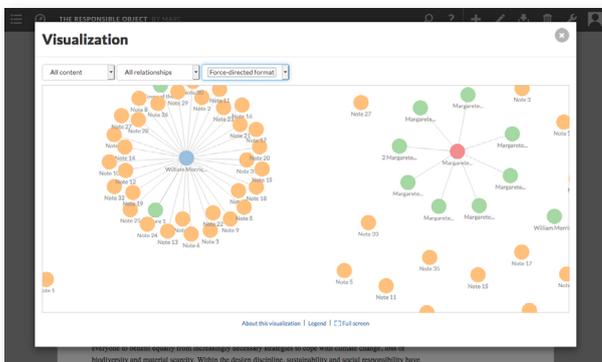
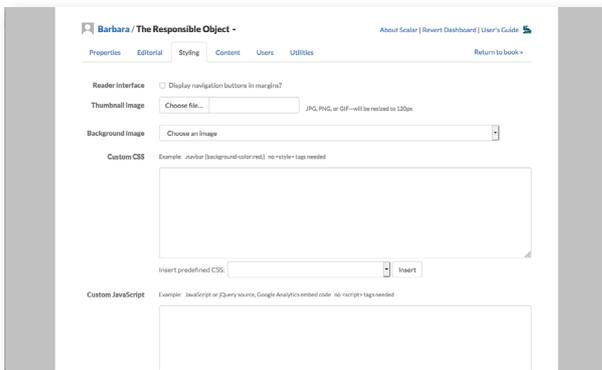
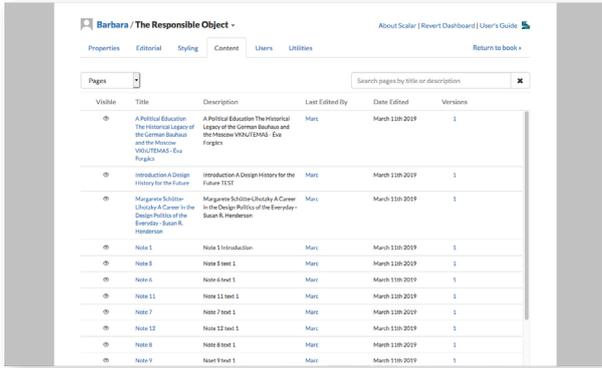
NB: Don't forget to take pictures during the whole process!



## Step by Step

- ▶ **Start out by collecting** tools and printouts of your content or ideas: paper, scissors, tape, markers, texts, images or other.
- ▶ **Choose your own methodology.** Try to define and divide the different elements the content consist of. Zoom in on a deeper level in the text or other media. Cut up the content or your notes/ideas and lay it out in front of you.
- ▶ **Use different colors, tape, strings, print outs, highlights** to make the relations visible between the elements. To understand the relationships you can think about how you cluster them, how close they are to each other, using colored markers to highlight similarities between parts and elements, drawing lines between parts and elements that relate to each other, etc.
- ▶ **Question if any relationships are missing.** Did you find relationships between elements or parts you did not foresee? Can you use shapes like the circle, triangle, grids, fractals, etc. to find different possible structures between the parts, other than linear, A-Z models?
- ▶ **The intention is to create a complete overview** of possible structure(s) of the content and reflect on how it impacts your narrative.





Scalar is an application geared towards creating long-form digital publications, maintaining a balance between standardization of content and structural flexibility of the resulting publication. The focus of Scalar is mostly on (academic) scholarship and its feature set reflects that nature. Apart from text, the application allows for including content from various media sources (images, video, audio, etc.).

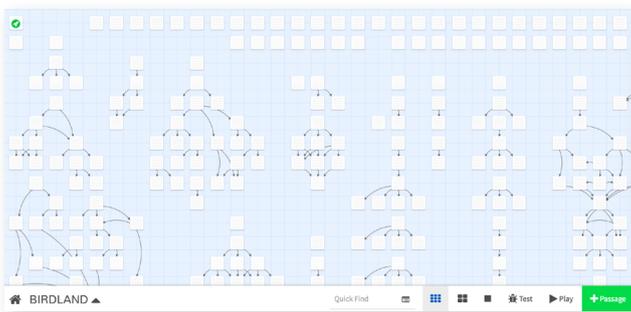
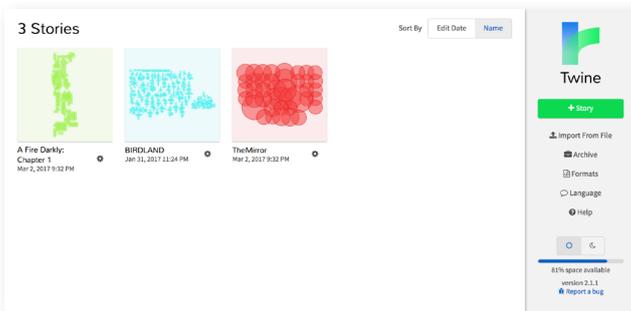
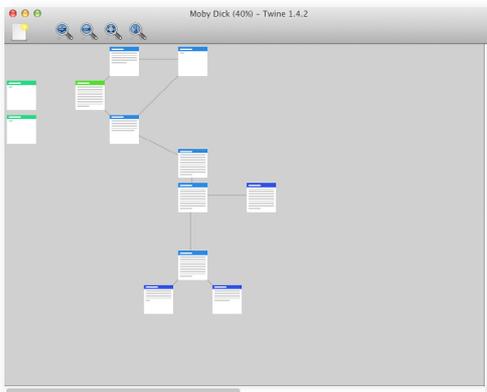
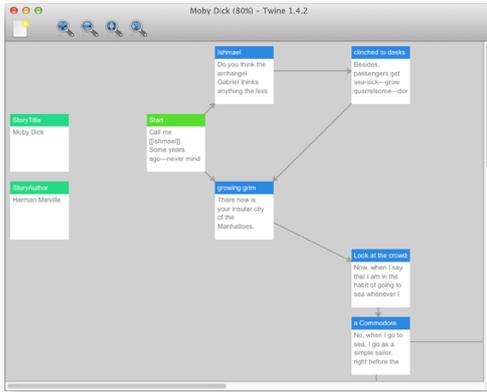
Scalar is mostly useful when working with existing content, although you can author content in the application itself.

Scalar publications can be exported as XML files which can in turn be imported in other Scalar installations. The XML contains all content and relationships, but for use with other software or tools one would need to write a parser to interpret the XML.

NB: Make a backup of your material!

## Step by Step

- ▶ **Apply for an account** at [scalar.usc.edu](http://scalar.usc.edu) or do your own install of the application on a web server using the code hosted on Github and released under an open source license (<https://github.com/anvc/scalar>).
- ▶ **A user guide is available at:** <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/guide/index>
- ▶ **Digitally prepare** your texts, annotations, images, and other media. It is possible to copy and paste formatted text and media. It is possible to also work with notes and placeholders, so as to make a visual images of possible structures.
- ▶ **Think about a concept** for the structure of your publication: Scalar allows for many different levels of relationships, down to metadata and annotations.
- ▶ **Create the various elements** of the publication using the relationship types (paths, comments, tags, annotations) offered by Scalar.
- ▶ **Make use of the possibilities to visualize** the overview of the structure of your content, as offered by Scalar.
- ▶ **Think about possible pathways** based on relationships, and about possible ways of navigation to present to the reader. These can also be made explicit using so-called reading paths.
- ▶ **The intention is to create a complete overview** of possible structure(s) of the content and reflect on how it impacts your narrative.



Twine is a tool created for authoring and publishing interactive fiction and games. Ordering and linking content as discrete elements (passages) is one of the most important concepts used in Twine, representing them as a map-like overview. Including media by reference is also possible.

Like Scalar the tool is most useful when working with existing content, although you can develop content in the application itself.

Twine projects can be exported as HTML, which can be styled and scripted using the options present in the application. The resulting HTML is rather condensed and hard to read, but can be viewed in a browser or imported as a project (story) in another instance of Twine.

Because of the possibilities of Twine we decided to develop an extended version, containing some additional features which makes it easier to use for our purpose. If you use different media types, footnotes or Markdown, consider going directly to Github to download the extended version. For a background story on the extended version see [The Tool](#).

NB: Beware that in both versions there's no rich-text editor and any content copy-pasted will end up as plain text. You can work around this by writing in Markdown from the start, preferably in Twine itself.

## Step by Step - Original Version | Step by Step - Extended Version

- ▶ Go to [twinery.org](https://twinery.org); use the online version or download the application for offline use.

- ▶ Go to Github <https://github.com/DigitalPublishingToolkit/twinejs> for the extended version.

- ▶ **Tutorials:**
  - <https://twinery.org/cookbook>
  - <http://www.adamhammond.com/twineguide/>
  - <http://catn.decontextualize.com/twine/>
  - <https://opensource.com/article/18/2/twine-gaming>

- ▶ **Digitally collect** your text(s) and all other media of your content, or work with notes/ideas/placeholders.

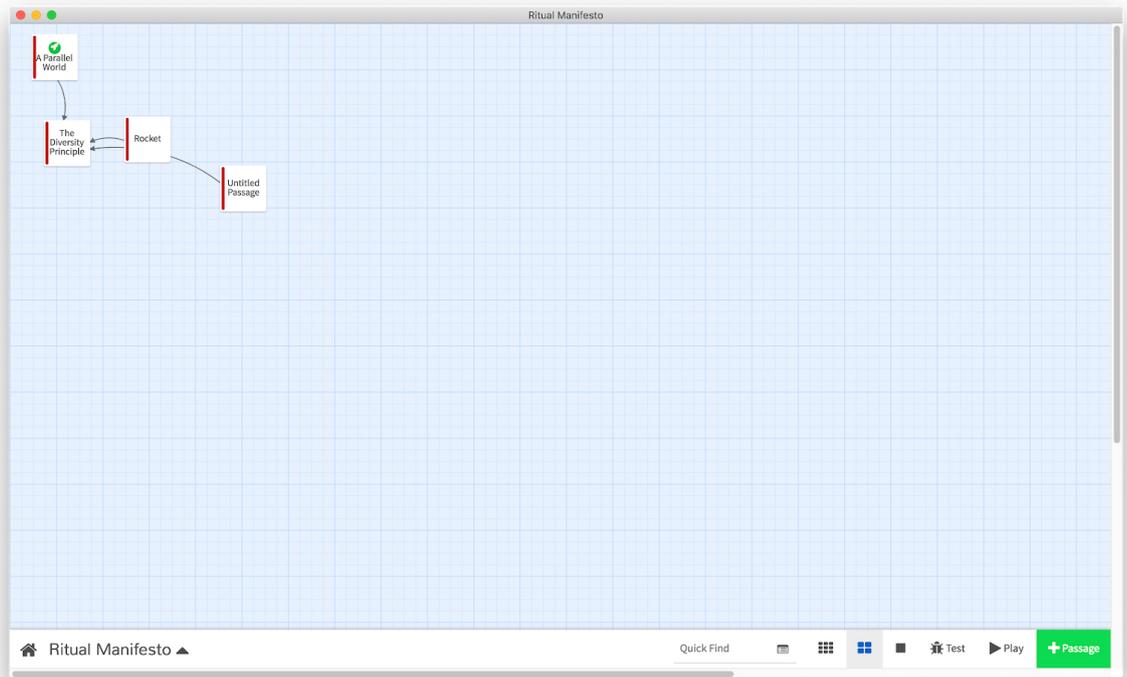
- ▶ **Think about a concept** for the structure of your publication: create the various elements of the publication and think about possible pathways to construct between them.

- ▶ **Think about possible pathways** for the reader through the content. Create the various passages in Twine and interlink and tag them where possible.

- ▶ You can let the application 'play' out your publication to see the effects of your structuring/organizational choices.

- ▶ The intention is to create a complete overview of possible structure(s) of the content and reflect on how it impacts your narrative.

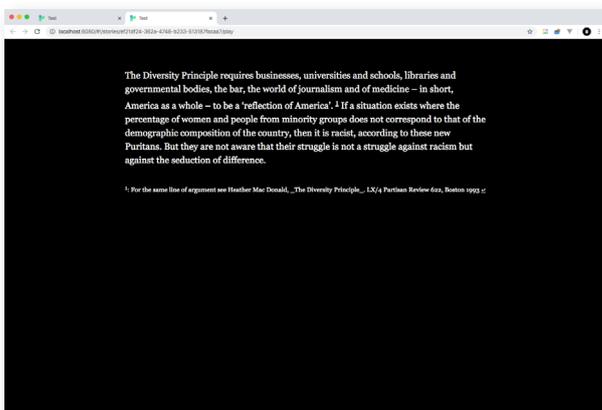
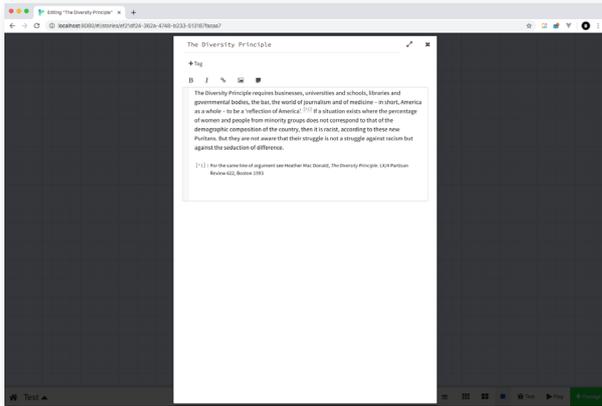
Twine is an open-source software application mainly developed to create interactive fiction. Its relatively narrow focus and opportunities for extending the software make it a good tool for digital publishing projects in general. Twine's output format is a bundle of HTML pages combined with styles (CSS) and scripts (JavaScript). The tool has been used for creating interactive novels, but also for assisting with developing branching narratives for games and other media (notably an episode of *Black Mirror* by Charlie Brooker).



②  
What is your vision - ideally;  
and what are your hopes -  
practically?

The main interface of the application consists of an empty grid whereupon story blocks called passages are placed. The passages may contain text, tags and media. Text is formatted using [Markdown](#) and passages can be interlinked by using the link format prescribed by [Markdown](#). Links between passages are visualized using arrows pointing to the relevant passages on the grid. Further organization is possible by adding color to a passage.

Twine's output format is a bundle of HTML that can be viewed in any browser. This bundle does not resemble the grid with passages connected by arrows, but is more of a straightforward [hypertext](#), where you make jumps to various interlinked passages by clicking on hyperlinks. It's possible to extend Twine's output through a variety of methods, notably macros, CSS and JavaScript.



The application is very suitable for prototyping modular publications, though the resulting HTML output needs a lot of work to become more than just plain hypertext. This process will likely need to include a designer and a developer familiar with web development and a willingness to account for the peculiarities of Twine in the development process.

Creating more scholarly or media-rich publications in Twine is not as straightforward. Support for footnotes and endnotes isn't present, probably because there isn't a uniform specification for this feature in Markdown either (Pandoc's versus John Gruber's specification). Media (images, video and audio) are included by reference and must be hosted externally.

Images could for example be encoded and contained in the resulting HTML output (by using data URIs) but this is not recommended, because of the limited storage space in the browser memory (localStorage, to be exact). As such, when using Twine you're essentially looking at a plain text representation of a story without many visual references.

While Markdown's syntax is relatively simple, the amount of available markup tags or the correct usage of them can be a little daunting for beginners. Twine's user experience could be helped by a Markdown editor (SimpleMDE) or a formatting preview. As directly embedding media into HTML isn't feasible, linking to external files is the only option. Again, this is not very hard for someone who's familiar with how the web works, but Twine's interface could guide a novice user more thoroughly in how to correctly reference files.

A more usable version of Twine would include the features described below:

- A Markdown editor
- Easier media handling
- Support for footnotes

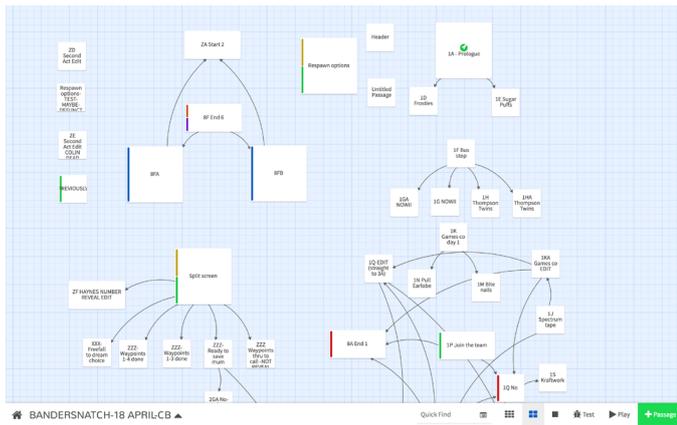
As Twine is developed as a web application in Vue, a JavaScript framework for building web applications, it is possible to add these missing features by creating an extended version of Twine based on the publicly available source code.

②  
Distant reading  
finds patterns in  
a corpus of books  
that are not obvious  
at first sight. What  
would an algorithm  
doing distant  
reading find in your  
publication?

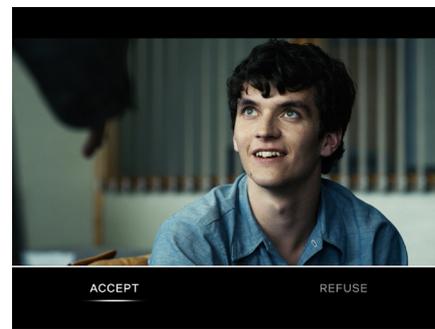


**Interactive Fiction**

When it comes to new forms of interactive reading experiences, we started out with a historical overview and compilation of publication tools . The case of *Black Mirror* special episode 'Bandersnatch' (2018) propelled our questions straight into mainstream media and provided a lot of discussion material. Is it possible to transfer the eighties feel of 'choose your own adventure' stories to a meaningful form for our times? 'Bandersnatch' was made with the help of our tool of choice, Twine. See for example these interesting articles that provide an insight into the creative process: [Inside Black Mirror Bandersnatch](#) and [How the Surprise New Interactive Black Mirror Came Together](#) .



Source: Custom PC



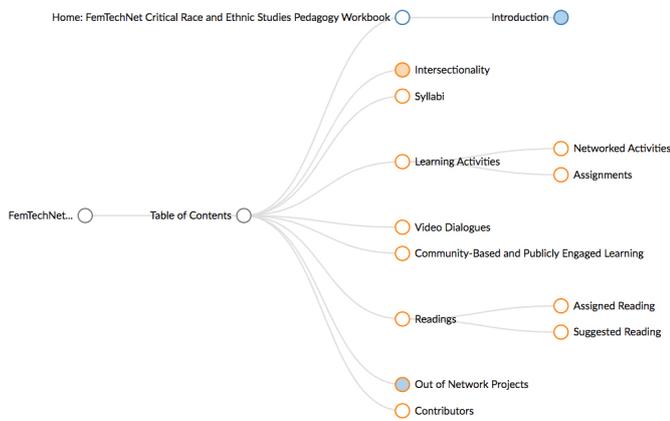
**Book as Folder**

A recurring idea for fast publishing that demands an active collaboration of the reader is a form that can be called the Book as Folder: *Queer Archive* (2018) by Paul Soulellis and *Float* (2016) by Anne Carson. Paul Soulellis remarks that the mere act of leaving a book unbound, is an act of generosity towards the reader. In *Float*, the contents are also unbound, 'small chapbooks that hold poems, jottings, lists, reflections and excerpts of thoughts that can be shuffled, rearranged, set aside or read over and over as a reader chooses' ( Anne Carson's Poetry Collection *Float* In *Unconventional Medium To Suit The Message* ).



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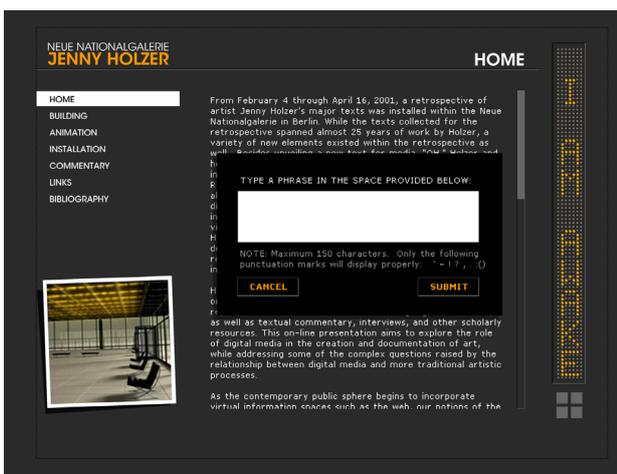
Decisions about how to organize and order content can also be approached in other ways. In the course of the research, modularity as a concept made way for questions of a more relational matter. How to connect the dots in the (modular) content? If the publication is regarded as a more fluid work in progress, then how to decide on 'making the cut', as Janneke Adema and Gary Hall pointed out in their Urgent Publishing presentation. An example is the Living Books series that Adema and Hall work on at the Open Humanities Press. NXS is another publication that regards the connections between the different elements as guiding in the structuring. They use a concept of 'chain reactions', where authors respond to another's article and so knit the publication to a whole.



Scalar and Vectors

As part of the project we have dived into Scalar. It was not always easy to find the best practices for this application, but here are two of them: Home: FemTechNet Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Workbook (2015) and Redshift & Portalmetal by micha cárdenas (2015). The first offers an academic collection in a new constellation; the second uses the tool to create an interactive fiction.

A predecessor of Scalar was Vectors, an academic journal experimenting with digital forms and other ways of presenting research, so in that sense very much related to what we are doing. It shows that time moves fast in the digital realm. Some examples that are still worth checking out are Digital Dynamics Across Cultures (2008) and Jenny Holzer at the Neue Nationalgalerie (2005). The first recalls the lay-out of scattered stars of *The Ritual Manifesto*, both use design to present the content in a new and meaningful way.



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# Inspiring Theory: Other Forms of Writing, Thinking & Publishing

Thought can be structured in different ways, just like the web itself – it can be centralized, decentralized or distributed. The way of structuring impacts thought itself, which is why such structures deserve more attention than they usually receive.

Working through our ideas for somehow realizing the vision of a new kind of digital publication, our thinking was sharpened by the following scholars, theorists, and practitioners. Two concepts have functioned as guiding stars in the sky while thinking about the vision of this research: the 'carrier bag' as formulated by Ursula Le Guin and the 'hyper essay' of Peter Sloterdijk.

## The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, Ursula Le Guin

Publishing in a political space – the standard of academic (male) publishing (with its codes and rules) is leading, The Carrier Bag Theory is an opponent, another way of thinking.

What happens if you take the image of the carrier bag quite literally, as is possible in a digital environment, that has many beginnings without ends? In a digital publication conceived as a carrier bag one could collect many parts and content modules, that might interact in new and surprising ways among each other and with the reader. This seems to chime in with the notion of modularity as a strategy. Moreover, it gives modularity a critical weight, as the carrier bag not only conceives of a new form but also of a new type of message, relating the issue to what we call urgent publishing.

In *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986) Ursula Le Guin travels back in literary history to develop a radically different approach to storytelling, right from the very start. Stories have always focused on the hero slaying the beast. Why not ask what those collecting seeds and fruits have to tell? The carrier bag story opposes 'the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic' in favor of a story 'full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations'.

Changing the narrative means changing power structures. We cannot talk about urgency in changing certain societal issues without also thinking about how we are talking and writing and arguing ourselves. How do we carry our ideas? The carrier bag opens up avenues to challenge myths of origin and originality, authoritarian authorship, single-voiced narratives, hero perspectives, and definitive truths. Is a 'Carrier Bag Theory of Non-Fiction' possible, shaping publications that hold grains of knowledge and experience of various kinds and species, which can be laid out in different ways and directions? How would these forge meaningful connections and complex relations between contents, people, places and futures?

Are there  
stimulating  
precursors to  
what you want  
to do? Who or  
what inspires  
you in the  
digital realm?

### **Essayismus in unserer Zeit, Peter Sloterdijk**

Peter Sloterdijk develops the notion of a 'hyper-essay' in this speech from 1993. Essayists are writers who are used to handling multiple perspectives and resist the urge to find definitive answers. Hyper-text changes the possibilities and position of the written text and its writer, giving the essay even more opportunities to flourish.

The increasingly complex world calls for a complex form, moving beyond linearity towards a text that more resembles a cloud. Knots, nodes, and intersections take over center stage. Instead of beginnings and ends, this essayistic form is overflowing, ever expanding, pouring out. The author is a navigator in this sea of references, quotes and thoughts. The most important element of writing is selecting and instead of making a linear argument about all the different inputs, the writer shows how the selection process took place and what possible pathways it affords.

Over the course of our research we encountered some necessary critiques of our idealized visions.

### **Posthumanities and the Critique of Modularity, Janneke Adema & Gary Hall**

At the Urgent Publishing conference (May 2019), Janneke Adema and Gary Hall formulated a thoughtful but fierce critique of modularity. Modularity, with its roots in computer programming and as theorized by Lev Manovich, focusses on discreteness, standardization, and subsequent shareability. It functions well in a cultural industry that is highly commodified and that favors snippets over complexity. Rather than following such modular logic, we should try and develop other models of publishing. Especially when it comes to in-depth content it is important to think of other possibilities that respect process and quality.

Adema and Hall put forward a different publishing model that emphasizes relationality, rather than the finished object. It asks how a publication comes to life, grows, and moves. Who are involved in the process and how do those actors - human and non-human - relate to each other? What are alternative ways of gathering and binding information? Instead of working towards a finished object, they argue that we should think about how, where, and why boundaries between content are drawn, for example, or when a 'cut' is made in the publication process, and by whom, thus deciding when to present something in a certain form. These boundaries and cuts could be imagined to take place in different places, at a time earlier in the research process, or shared between a larger group of people (e.g. including readers).

This would also allow the book as we've known it for so long to take on different forms, generate other forms of authority, and make different kinds of knowledge possible. We cannot maintain a critical stance towards 'old' forms of publishing and writing, without changing the formats and presentation of that critique in itself (see also Adema's & Hall's essay about the [Posthumanities](#)).

### Designing for Difference, Tara McPherson

Tara McPherson (also referenced by Adema and Hall), develops a critique of [modularity](#) that goes into the heart of computation. In her article [Designing for Difference](#) she unravels how code itself functions as 'a realm determined by math, physics, or reason, apart from the messy realms of culture'. In her book *Feminist in a Software Lab* (2018), McPherson elaborates further on the question of [modularity](#), computation, code, and the cut.

The model with which code is generally understood, McPherson writes, underestimates cultural influences and prioritizes [modularity](#) over relationality or complexity. Looking at coding from the perspective of 'the stack' means focusing on these discrete compartments and individual layers instead of on the connections and traverses between them. Moreover, McPherson argues that discrete, simplified, and reduced bits of code correlates to certain tendencies in society and culture such as discrimination, making the search for different tools and models especially urgent. For example, interpretative analyses do not fit naturally with database structures.

McPherson follows Karen Barad's idea of the 'agential cut' to think of other conceptualizations of code, and thus, of cultural productions that use computational logic (such as publications perceived as a collection of modules). The cut, as stated above, is a decision that is made, which makes it important to know why and from where someone is doing the cutting. The cut is not intended to standardize, as happens when working towards [modularity](#), but allows for difference. The big question, according to McPherson, is thus how to design digital tools that allow for such differences. The *Vectors* journal and the *Scalar* publishing platform that McPherson is involved in, are examples of such tools.

Designing for difference means designing for 'potential futures and becomings' – concretely speaking, allowing different pathways to open and foregrounding the collaborations between different actors in the production of a publication.

Thinking of your reader, what kind of wild forms of reading behavior can you imagine? Like democratic reading, reader as navigator, book club aficionado, marginalist, mobile reader, etc.

### Theory to Practice

Some practical guidelines for new ways of digital publishing can be extracted from *Feminist in a Software Lab*:

- Think about the point of view: of the cut, but also of a database used;
- enable exploration of content by the reader over mastery;
- seek possibilities over critique - critique will follow on its own;
- ambiguity and complexity need to be consciously constructed, will not occur naturally when using contemporary technology;
- resist the temptation of the template;
- aim for interdisciplinarity and intersectionality in both content and production;
- allow for horizontal reading and writing practices, instead of vertical ones;
- use a strategy of defamiliarization in design, to make the reader stop and think;
- in other words - use friction as a strategy, just as well for the content;
- thus demanding slow reading for urgent matters;
- let portions of the content unfold at key moments;
- and so play with linearity without abandoning it;
- foreground collaboration, for example by including a designer's or editor's explanatory statement;
- think of ways to close the gap between archive (database) and analysis.

### Paul Soulellis

Paul Soulellis teaches and produces new publishing methods and strategies, among others under the moniker of 'Urgentcraft'. His practice goes against the grain of the neatly divided database, perfectly bound-up book, or continuous feed of the post. He seeks how to balance fast publishing on urgent topics with a queer perspective that turns away from the focus on success, that might be conceived of in terms of revenues, clicks, followers, or other quantified measures. An 'abundance of meaning' is aimed for rather than a growth of engagement; the network around a publication is appreciated more than the 'weak ties' that might be called the audience.

Soulellis' talk on *Urgentcraft* (2019) ends with a list of possible tactics for urgent crafters, that echo others mentioned here, such as: 'Practice a slow approach to fast making', 'Acknowledge complexity and contradiction in making', 'Resist design perfection / stay with the mess', 'Fail to provide the perfect read (resist legibility)', and 'Prioritize communal care as a never-ending practice'.

# Exploring Existing Tools

To make a decision on which tool fits the goal of our project we explored different types of tools. Inspired by principles of non-linearity we started our investigation with a focus on older examples of **non-linear digital narrative tools** and briefly looked into **hypertext fiction** and **hypermedia**.

Realizing that it is important to be able to have visual aids in structuring and managing your content we started to collect a wide range of mapping tools. We looked at these tools in more detail, assessing their main functionalities, their 'commercial' setup, and usability.

From this analysis it became clear that we needed to pay attention to output formats, the possibilities for visualization and for making relationships on multiple levels, the possibility to upload multiple media and for adding footnotes.

Based on these criteria we selected Scalar, Twine and TiddlyWiki to investigate in more detail. Eventually TiddlyWiki did not make the cut because its learning curve was too steep and its functionalities for the purpose of our project were not clear enough. Because of the importance of user-friendliness we also decided to include **an experiment with pen and paper**

## (Mind)mapping

### Open source

- Research Catalogue

### Freemium

- Mindmeister
- Mindomo
- Writemapper

### Paid

- Prezi
- Xmind
- Scapple

## Interactive / game design

### Open source

- ink
- Ren'Py
- Yarn Spinner

### Paid

- articy:draft
- ChatMapper

## (GUI) prototype

### Open source

- Pencil

### Freemium

- Fluid
- MockFlow

### Paid

- Moqups

## Narrative outlining

### Open source

- Manuskript
- Organon
- oStorybook
- Plume Creator

### Freemium

- Bibisko
- Gingko

### Paid

- Novlr
- Scrivener

## Visual boards

### Freemium

- Are.na
- Milanote

### Paid

- Mural

## Note taking

### Open source

- TiddlyWiki

### Freemium

- Corkboard
- Evernote

## Wireframe / diagram

### Freeware

- yEd Graph Editor

### Paid

- Gliffy
- Omnigraffle
- Visio

# Glossary

**CSS** (*Cascading Style Sheets*) A language defining the (visual) presentation of a document written in a markup language.

**Distant reading** The practice of applying computational methods to literary texts, usually obtained from large digital libraries, as a form of literary study.

**Framework** In the context of computing, a framework provides a generic base (often a collection of tools, templates and best-practices) to which developers can add their own code and develop a specific application.

**HTML** (*HyperText Markup Language*) The standard markup language for documents displayed in a web browser.

**Hypertext** Text displayed on a screen containing references (hyperlinks) to other text immediately accessible by the reader. The term 'hypermedia' is used for collections that also incorporate images, movies and sound, as well as text.

**Markdown** A markup language for plain text, designed to allow for output to many different formats.

**Markup language** A method of annotating a document in order to add formatting (italics, links, lists, etc.), to describe parts of a document (headers, footers, sections, quotes, etc.) or to provide instructions for software processing the document to transform it in any way.

**Modularity** In the context of this manual, the concept of modularity describes the process of breaking up a larger text into smaller elements that can be used as building blocks to create different collections of interlinked elements.

**Parser** A parser analyses a string of symbols in a natural or computer language, conforming to a certain grammar, outputting an overview of sentences, words or other comparable constructs and their syntactic relations.

**Positioning** The process of placing a publication within a certain audience or societal debate, based on the content of the publication, as opposed to marketing/communication.

**URI** (*Uniform Resource Identifier*) A string of characters that identifies a particular resource in a uniform way.

**XML** (*Extensible Markup Language*) A markup language defining a ruleset for encoding documents in such a way that it can be read by both humans and machines.

# Colophon

This manual was researched,  
written, and designed by:

**Marc de Bruijn**

Puntpixel

**Gert-Jan van Dijk**

1001 Publishers

**Barbara Lateur**

Studio BLT

**Pia Pol**

Valiz

**Miriam Rasch**

Institute of Network Cultures

Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

**Kimmy Spreeuwenberg**

Willem de Kooning Academy

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Cristina Ampatzidou

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Sepp Eckenhaussen

Simon Franke

Maital Huijgen

Emy Koopman

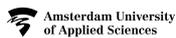
Thaïsa de Leij

Silvio Lorusso

Ania Molenda

Renée Turner

Erwin Verbruggen



**valiz**

**1001**

⟨PUNTPIXEL⟩



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**We value your input and questions**

Contact us through the Institute of Network Cultures

[www.networkcultures.org](http://www.networkcultures.org)

or e-mail to [miriam@networkcultures.org](mailto:miriam@networkcultures.org)