



Alternative methods of distribution for artists' books and 1982, DOOM KNOTS, Maria Fusco

For a presentation at our first seminar:

How are artists using and investigating new media for publishing?

Where are we going with this? Where will the books end up?

(<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/seminar08.htm>),

Maria Fusco discussed some alternative methods of distribution for artists' books, with particular focus on a number of contemporary artists' projects that challenge conventional boundaries of production and presentation.

Fusco also presented *1982, DOOM KNOTS* her artist's project which utilised Bluetooth to transmit a daily series of short texts to office workers in London. The following text is an edited version of her presentation.

1982, DOOM KNOTS

This is a project that I was involved in at the end of 2006 at Westbourne Studios in London. It was an exhibition called 'Arcade' and was very multi-media in terms of the type of work that was shown. The curator Andrew Dodds approached me to produce short texts which would be transmitted on a daily basis via Bluetooth. There was a massive gallery space but there were also big office spaces for creative industries.

They were really short texts, 7 in total, and they were transmitted each day at 3pm which was when office workers have their lowest sugar dip of the day. I thought it would be quite nice to send them something that will either bamboozle or bore them. My project was called '1982, DOOM KNOTS'.

What I would also like to discuss are some hard copy examples of things that I think are interesting in terms of alternative methods of dissemination or distribution. I am also interested in how these link to a lot of the issues that Francis Elliott has been talking about ¹: "folksonomic tagging". The little blue tags on the Wikipedia pages where you can link to other sections. It is something that was invented with the advent of web 2.0 and with interactive practice. It allows the people who are building the website to create their own path of how you use the website. So you are creating your own rules of engagement.

There is something interesting about that, in how you interest people in your work, how you create an audience for your work and how you sustain an audience for your work. A couple of these projects that I am going to show - although they are hard copy - employ very similar methodologies of dissemination and distribution.

Here's a quote from Michelle de Certeau from 'The Practice of Everyday Life': "The means of diffusion are now dominating the ideas they diffuse". That is a very interesting quote, certainly for the practice of artists' books, where you are looking something that by its very nature is metacritical, or is reflecting, or looking, or pointing back at its own conventions of form. It is also very interesting in regards to thinking about our idea of new media.

A body of work by Cildo Meireles from the 1970s, *Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project*, was in the 'Open Systems' show at the Tate Modern a couple of years ago. He also had some brilliant work where he stamped messages on banknotes. He stamped things like 'Yankees Go Home!' It is the idea of the object itself being the carrier which can be in some way infiltrated or piggybacked on which has a definite relationship in my head with artists' books. Especially with certain types of contemporary artists' books which look, smell and stack like average books but in fact have some different rationale and purpose to them.

I also have a quote from him which might be interesting to consider in relation to these ideas of circuits and how one might piggyback onto these that are already existing. He said: "Number 1, in society there are certain mechanisms for circulation (he calls them circuits). Number 2, these circuits clearly embody the ideology of the producer but at the same time they are passive when they receive insertions into their circuits". This is a very interesting concept in relation to web 2.0 technologies and in relation to the veracity of certain information and also the flux of information. This idea of the circuit that embodies the creator's ideology, but it is passive at the moment when you insert something into it and then it goes back and works around again. "Number 3, this occurs when people initiate circuits".

I've got another quote from Marshall McLuhan, from 'The Medium is the Message' the 'cleverly' titled sequel to 'The Medium is the Message': "Professionalism is environmental". This is interesting to consider in the idea of knowledge acquisition and in terms of how you begin to fiddle or fool with accepted knowledge acquisition and piggyback onto it. "Amateurism is anti-environmental". When he says amateurism he is not using it in the pejorative sense, he is being very positive about it. "Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment. Amateurism seeks the development of the total awareness of the individual and the critical awareness of the ground rules of society. The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and specialise, to accept uncritically the ground rules of the environment".

Back to the Arcade exhibition. The texts were transmitted at 3pm every day; some were a bit long to go on one screen so went on a double screen. With Bluetooth the person receiving them had to accept the message coming, which was interesting. People would accept the initial one then people would eventually go “oh god I don’t want that again” or “great it’s come”. I was also asked on the opening night to do a short text that would be regularly transmitted throughout the night, and that was a different text. In that text I had, ostensibly, a nasty phone that kept talking at you and being really aggressive to your use of it as a phone, very resentful. It kept berating you as the user or reader for using it over and over again.

The text is ‘1982, DOOM KNOTS’, there is a reference there to Alasdair Gray’s ‘1982, Janine’. The text took the form of little chapters. Either chapters for an imaginary book or that they were the book themselves.

[Reading chapters 1 to 3 from ‘1982, DOOM KNOTS’]

CHAPTER 1

1

1982. I walk everywhere. Walking is, of course free, and as we were poor, this was an extremely important consideration. I go onto to explain at that time, I was too young to work, and there was nothing to do at home, so walking filled my time. At the weekends, I walk with him; we always follow the same route, the same sequence of places, I like that. We talk as we walk, and I like that too.

CHAPTER 2

31

I begin to sort through the contents of bins on my journey. I can’t recall exactly where it started, but think it was probably outside the back of the courthouse. What I am sure about, is that I was always alone when I did it.

CHAPTER 3

47

At first, I choose only those bins that are sited somewhere secluded, so that no one can observe me. Later, when I feel compelled to look through each one I pass, I don’t care where they are or who sees me. I take the bins’ contents out, empty it onto the pavement, and sift through.

I’ll just mention *Slim Volume*. *Slim Volume* is edited by a curator called Andrew Hunt who is based in IPS in Bournville. It is a very interesting distributive system both in terms of how he collects, edits or curates the work in the first place and also in terms of how he disseminates it.

Slim Volume is a portfolio publication, I would definitely call it a book but he calls it a poster publication. Each one is in an edition of 150. He invites fifty artists, writers or practitioners to produce 150 pieces of work. He doesn’t pay them or financially support it in any way, so what they provide to him is dictated by their circumstances at that time. That’s really interesting. There are a big array of people in there from students to relatively well-known artists and very well-known artists, who have a bit more money and can splash out a bit more. Obviously there are a lot of photocopies in there, but there are also a lot of screenprints.

It is interesting because you get a real sense of the particular circumstances and sensibilities of the people who are producing the work at the time. That would be, in my eyes, one of the definitions of an artist’s book. Clive Phillpot talks about it in *Artist/Author*, this idea that the only thing that ties together artists’ books is their mongrel nature. That in some way they reflect the sensibilities and citizenship of the particular artist at the time.

In terms of distribution this is interesting in terms of viral marketing. What Andy does is to ask each of the artists who contribute to *Slim Volume*, to nominate some people who they would like it sent to. Then, cleverly, he puts a list in with each one so he is already citing a peer group. People then go “ooh I’m in the list with, ooh”. It builds a constituency of people who are invited into the party of your work at that time. It is interesting in regards to viral marketing and to think when you put someone on an emailing list, to send out work, whether you hide the other email addresses.

When I used to work for Book Works, I curated a project called *Sharp Talk*. We commissioned writers to write parallel texts that went along with the artists’ publications. It was double-edged. It was to market the publications, but it was also a clever way to commission new work. We had a nicely designed email, sent it out with a text on it, and it did have an interesting relationship between the hard copy object and the email object. There was an interesting tension from how those were used together. Seeing those people who were interested in it, they had printed out the email and tucked it into the book, reading them in parallel.

[Reading chapters 4 to 5 from ‘1982, DOOM KNOTS’]

CHAPTER 4

60

Whilst sorting through the piles of rubbish, I read the wrappings, the junk mail, the newspapers, the packaging, the shopping lists, the letters and the magazines. Gradually, I began to witness the mass accumulation of brainpower expended in

their production. All of this reading matter was familiar: I understood the discarded instructions for electrical appliances even though I had no use for them; the newspapers were sometimes old, often new; the letters were always addressed to people whom I didn't know personally, but who I recognised just the same.

CHAPTER 5

77

A thousand voices begin to speak to me directly. I alone listen. No one else wants them, that's why I have to look through every bin, so as not to show any favouritism.

'Stellar' is a fanzine David Osbaldeston. It looks like a fanzine and for each issue he works almost collaboratively with whoever he is focusing on for that particular issue. Normally it's an artist but it might be a writer or a curator. He goes to them and says can you give me all of the stuff from the last two or three years, it depends on how many shows they have been doing. All the marketing materials, all the press releases, all the stuff that has been archived but has no use anymore.

He then spends an intensive six-week period physically re-scribing all of that stuff out. Although he roughly approximates the fonts and typefaces of the materials, he is definitely claiming ownership over it. Both through the actual action of re-drawing it all, his editorial process and his actual hand. The hand of the artist.

This is interesting in my head, in terms of notions of authorship and ownership. Also in terms of considering what is information and is this project as much about the communication of information, as the information it communicates. This is interesting to consider in regards to web projects because of their infinite reproducibility and transportability. The dematerialisation of it but also the intense weightiness of it.

Jean Baudrillard, writing before we knew that CDs would degrade, talks about if we are humans and we are touching and handling CDs and we're not making any impact or difference on that digital materiality, then it must mean we're dead and we don't exist because we're not having any impact on the physicality of it. There is something interesting in that framework and idea. The hand and touching and the transmission of digital stuff and how that sits with the weightiness of a lot of the materials we all work with on a day-to-day basis.

There is a press called the One Star Press, based in Paris, who produce books at an astonishing rate. They are a Print-on-Demand publisher, and what they do is create an empty template, the same template for everybody,

they then invite a number of artists to drop their work in. The interesting bit is that on their website you can view the whole PDF of the book, download it and keep it to browse for free, or you can buy a hardcopy of the book for 35 Euros. Lots of people still buy the hardcopies of the book even though you can have the whole thing for free. An interesting dynamic relationship between the physical and the tangible and this idea of digital, a point of departure intellectually, to begin to think about that reinvesting of waste and is it waste and what's the point of having it, the qualification of your actual relationship with it?

[Reading chapters 6 to 7 from '1982, DOOM KNOTS']

CHAPTER 6

93

I observe that most people are revolted by my daily habit. It seems that they are disgusted with the notion, that such discarded matter could still be read, and therefore still hold meaning. This activity becomes indispensable to me. I leave my house early in the morning and come back late at night. I never take any of it home, so it takes ages to work through so much stuff.

CHAPTER 7

Over time as the world's words leak into me, I begin to leak out. I don't walk with him at the weekends anymore. I don't talk with him or listen to him. I have become far too busy with my bins.

A final quote from Roland Barthes from 'The Rustle of Language' talking about Roman Jacobsen's work. He states that: "He realised the authentic, scientific phenomenon of modernity was not about fact, but about relationship. A decisive opening gesture of classifications, casts and disciplines. There are no more owners".

Maria Fusco is a writer, critic and editor, and Director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths College in London. Further information on Maria Fusco:

Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery
www.whitechapelgallery.org/education/writer-in-residence

The Happy Hypocrite: www.thehappyhypocrite.org

MFA Art Writing
www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mfa-art-writing/

Arcade (for which DOOM KNOTS was commissioned)
www.arcade-project.com/index.html

**Some questions and answers with Maria Fusco
Seminar 1 (08/05/08)**

Vikki Hill: A quick question about the Bluetooth project. When the exhibition was over did you have any feedback?

MF: No. That was the difficulty with the project, getting any feedback. I had quite a lot of feedback on the opening night and that's why I wrote a different piece for the opening night that was more clearly delineated in terms of what it was. I was quite tempted to have a 'tell me what you thought about...' and I think the curators were quite keen on doing that, but I ultimately felt that would unravel the project too much to do that because one would have to begin to explain what it was in order to get that type of feedback.

Jan Martin: Was the methodology the point of the project or was there anything to be read into the story?

MF: Hopefully the two of them have an integral relationship. The methodology was interesting and enabled me as a producer to reach anybody who happened to be in the vicinity. The reason why I think it worked in this radius was to with the fact that it was a massive building with loads of studios and offices and lots of people who have the technology. Hopefully the texts I wrote had some reflective quality on multi-path interference. That idea of a flux of information both in terms of electronic messaging and in terms of rubbish and our investment with things. There is something from an obtuse angle that I was trying to deal with.

Jan Martin: Within the story and the problems the man in the story had, is there any comment on the environment that he's having distress in?

MF: It begins hopeful because they are quite happy going through the bins and they are giving things loving attention. Clearly the narrator in the story hasn't got the best social skills, but ultimately as the world's words leak in the narrator the narrator begins to leak out. That's interesting thinking about Wikipedia, about how one traverses amounts of information and selects information. I think Wiki comes from the Hawaiian word for fast.

Jan Martin: In the story he was doing past communication, all past communication. These days past communication is a second ago, everything is past. So that was a comment within that as well?

MF: Yes. The comment I suppose is two-fold, there is an infinite potentiality for anything in terms of how you use it again. Barthes talks about cruising information and

the pleasure of the text and he talks about how that is the most appropriate way to read a book or read a text. So that you are creating your own meanings that are the most appropriate at that particular time. Cherry-picking basically. You know what it is like to read a theory book from beginning to end. Number one it is really boring and number two it's actually not very useful. Because what you are looking for is very specific things that you are utilising in your own way. In the story it is double edged, in terms of the grand potentiality and in investment and close looking and care. This is something I am concerned about, how with care and attention you can illicit good things from nothing and how on the other hand there is a potential negative side. Either obsessive or a complete waste of time.

Iain Biggs: Is there a case for the bin as an artist's book?

MF: That's interesting. Lynne Tillman and Stewart Home have an interesting conversation in a book I edited 'Put About: a Critical Anthology on Independent Publishing'. She talks about books as handy containers which is one of my favourite nomenclatures for a book. A dumping bin or a reservoir or a battery, a battery of potentiality. I would think about all books like that, the artist's book is interesting to consider like that because it's functionality is arguably much more open because it doesn't have direct applications in the way that a recipe book does. I'm thinking of the book '15 Lombard St.' by Janice Kerbel which is a handbook of how to rob Coutts bank at 15 Lombard Street. Working with students, one of the questions we talk about with that book is that if someone tried to rob the bank with it and failed, would that mean the project had failed or would it mean they as the user of the book had failed in using it correctly. It brings into question the purpose and functionality of the book and the functionality of the artist in the production of the book and the use value of it as an artist's book. '15 Lombard St.' is a good pressure point for these ideas.

Note

1. You can download a PDF version of Francis Elliott's *Possible Strategies For Exploiting Wikipedia For The Dissemination and Profiling of Artist's Books and Multiples on the Internet* from www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/seminar08.htm