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Foreword, on the “moment of release”
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Release!

“Some moments are important, some are more important, some are even worth writing about.”¹

Even though significant activities and decisions associated with the publication process (for instance regarding language, design, target groups, distribution, promotion and sales strategies) ultimately are aimed at a publication’s successful release, the very moment of the release often is neglected; also in most of the attempts of identifying and theorizing publishing’s constituent elements it slips through the more or less tightly woven nets of schematic grids. However: The moment of releasing a publication is crucial. Especially if we understand publishing as an activity of “making a public” rather than an act of “making public,” as Paul Soulellis suggests: “Posting is usually ‘making public’ but publishing is ‘making a public’ by creating a space for the circulation of discourse.”² Soulellis’ statement draws from the insight that the simplistic perception of publishing as “making public,” which also is prone to favor a broad and nondirectional proliferation of information, is bluntly and wrongly presuming the existence of an indisputable public that can be addressed as a social totality. He underlines that an audience, a public, does not exist per se but is a “cultural artefact” that

1. Adapted from Bukowski, Charles. “The Skaters,” in: Bukowski, C., War All The Time (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p. 271 [Original wording: “I stand up, wave, smile, / things seem very happy / as down below us they whirl and / glide. / some moments are nice, some are / nicer, some are even worth / writing / about.”]

2. Soulellis, Paul (2015). “Making Public,” retrieved from: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-yTRf2HjY8WN0QtfAeJ9ObJfWjvow2LTTDxzGPFfw/edit?usp=sharing> (last accessed 24.10.2017)

3. "A public (...) exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, websites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. (...) The public emerges from the conversation, whether it's the chatter of a DJ or a poet performing a new work. And this is key for us (...) that 'a public' might be a self-organized form that does not exist outside the discourse that addresses it." in: Soullelis (2015) 12 Weinmayr, Eva. "One Publishes to Find Comrades," in: Klimpel, Oliver (Ed.). *The Visual Event, an education in appearances* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014), p. 50-59. Online: <http://evaweinmayr.com/wpcontent/uploads/Eva-Weinmayr-One-publishes-to-find-comrades.pdf> (accessed 14.10.2017), p. 59

4. Warner, Michael (2002). *Publics and Counterpublics* (abbreviated version), in: *Quarterly Journal of Speech* Vol. 88, No. 4 (pp. 413-425), p. 413

5. Miessen, Markus and Vidokle, Anton. "Capacity to Act," in: *Caring Culture*, ed. by Miessen, Markus and Phillips, Andrea (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011)

6. *Oxford Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/release> (last accessed 24.10.2017)

must be created in a deliberate and ultimately performative act - a public only emerges "by virtue of being addressed."³ Soullelis considers it as irrelevant whether the public is created for the circulation of discourse in order to make a publication or by the publication itself. In both cases the publication, respectively the idea to make a publication, can be seen as institutionalizing means instigating a "rhetorically active sphere embedded in and constructed out of discourse,"⁴ and potentially invoking a "capacity to act."⁵ If publishing is understood as a critical practice with a transformatory potential - a notion, which I favor but cannot go into detail about here - these discursive constellations may constitute spheres in which (counter-)discourse is produced and spread by (counter-)publics, who had their expression or voices suppressed by the existing social order.

Let's dwell on the verb "to release" for a while: Besides "allowing (information) to be generally available," it means "to allow or enable to escape from confinement; set free" or "to allow (something) to move, act, or flow freely"⁶. Thus it contains a notion of "letting go" as much as one of "passing on," both of them are - at least in Western societies - culturally and emotionally highly charged acts evoking notions of blessing and well-wishing, trust and entrusting; and echo of abdication of responsibility, power and involvement. The term release contains not only an allusion of protective attendance and fledging, but also an echo of surrendering and assuming control. Here, one may recall the many, and often deeply symbolic, stories of parents blessing their children before sending them into the big, wide world.

With its release, a publication (which in principle can be anything from speech act to printed matter) is passed on to others. With the gesture of handing over - if executed physically - or - if executed digitally - a "proxy gesture"

(in which the symbolic power of the physical act resonates) not only a product is imparted, but also information, a concern, a discourse about a certain topic. A gesture, as a semiotic phenomenon in which the meaning is conveyed through an action or motion, is an input signal, a "cause of a performance."⁷ It is something preceding an action and therefore "it signifies motion and agency of the most expressive and potent kind, precisely because it is so wrought with intentionality."⁸ The gesture, one could say, creates a link between what happened before and what is going to happen after the publication, it establishes a mental and emotional connection (of mutual care or interest for a topic or concern), which can trigger a variety of other gestures, actions and motions. Or as Alessandro Ludovico writes with respect to paper (but I argue that every other medium bears a similar potential): "(...) paper can be seen as a conceptual 'conductor', able to transfer the metaphorical 'energy' it contains, through the gestural act of passing the (...) product from one person to the next. On this subject, the Dutch art curator Nat Muller wrote: 'In this context we view the act of publishing as a gesture that accommodates the political, the artistic, and in some cases, the defiant'.⁹ Of the same tenor is the publicist Eva Weinmayr's quote of Matthew Stadler, the founder of Publication Studio:¹⁰"It is imperative that we publish, not only as a means to counter the influence of a hegemonic 'public', but also to reclaim the space in which we imagine ourselves and our collectivity."¹¹ Stadler's claim expresses his believe in publishing's sociopolitical and transformatory potential, and the importance of the gesture of passing on as a defiant move of reclaiming space for so far unacknowledged publics by directly addressing potential allies, or "kin,"¹² for that undertaking. A gesture always is "grounded in the immediacy of an opening to the Other, (...) as something that is often, or perhaps even necessarily, relational".¹³ It

7. Luciani, Annie. "Gesture / movement / action," in: *Enaction and enactive interfaces: a handbook of terms* (Grenoble: ACRIOE/Enactive Systems Books, 2007) pp.121-122

8. Ludovico, Alessandro. *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2011; 2014) p. 68.

9. Ludovico (2011; 2014), p. 68

10. See: *Publication Studio*, online: <https://publication-studio.myshopify.com/> (accessed 20 August 2017)

11. Weinmayr, Eva. "One Publishes to Find Comrades," in: Klimpel, Oliver (Ed.). *The Visual Event, an education in appearances* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014), p. 50-59. Online: <http://evaweinmayr.com/wp-content/uploads/Eva-Weinmayr-One-publishes-to-find-comrades.pdf> (accessed 14 August 2017), p. 59

12. "So, make kin, not babies! It matters how kin generate kin." In: Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 103

13. Ruprecht, Lucia (2017). "Introduction: Towards An Ethics Of Gesture," in: *PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY* Vol. 3, No. 1, 2017 (pp. 4-22), p. 4

is conditioned by – taking into consideration that gestures as performative utterances can only be understood within a system of cultural, social or state norms and conventions – a direct addressing of its potential public, as “all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, and it must attempt to realize that world through address. There is no speech or performance addressed to a public that does not try to specify in advance (...) the lifeworld of its circulation: not just through its discursive claims (...) but through the pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address, temporality, mise en scene (...)”.¹⁴

A publishing mainly and consciously aiming at the creation of concerned (counter-) publics “through physical production, digital circulation and social gathering”¹⁵ requires a special mind-set of the ones involved into a publishing process: They have to “let go,” to “set free” their publication, and thereby abolish authorship claims, and dismiss the prevalent notions of the publication as mainly a consumer good. They should recognize publications (as institutionalizing objects) as frames and containers for discursive activities rather than as containers, and understand that the finalized “product” itself has not a negligible but an auxiliary character: it retains its property as a temporary “intermediate” of a discourse, which will be resumed, transformed and appropriated after the release. A responsible public, to that effect, is asked to take care of the freshly “fledged fosterling.” So please, dear reader of this catalogue, take on the responsibility passed on you together with the physical object and feel addressed. And feel invited to join the discourse and activity around a publishing that reaches beyond the conventions and terminologies prevalent in the “mainstream publishing world.”

Rebekka Kiesewetter is an editor, writer and critic, visiting lecturer and a member of Depot Basel. She is interested in creating agonistic sites for critical discourse and practice reaching beyond predominant cultures, hierarchies and narratives. Under this realm she develops and realizes transdisciplinary and collaborative learning and curatorial formats, printed, digital and hybrid (proto)publications, oral and physical performances.

A focal point of Rebekka’s theoretical and practical work is publishing. She conceives, develops and produces printed and digital matter together with several publishing houses and initiatives; but she is also concerned with developing publishing beyond classical notions and formats. Against this background she explores and tests publishing as a method for investigating technical frameworks, political contexts and cultural processes; as an interface for connecting together people with different backgrounds; as a frame for observation, research and discourse; and as a tool for shaping communities, proposing alternative value systems and for opening new political horizons.