

Preface

Publishing is by all means a form of architecture. What we essentially do as publishers and editors is to make space, frameworks, structures – and build sites (for others) to occupy and work within. Like the architects, we conceive physical and material objects albeit on different terms; whether as a building or as a book. We curate connections – whether visual, linguistic, social, material, symbolic, intellectual, emotional – we design new narratives. The process of printing a book and its mechanisms; choosing its paper, form and size, finishing and details – to the actual execution and printing, is essentially building through printing. When being asked by architect Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli to contribute to the 2020 Russian Federation Pavilion at the Venice Biennial of Architecture, these were some of the thoughts that came to mind.

With this year's theme being "How Will We Live Together?" and particularly the Russian Pavilion's investigation around 'the public role of cultural institutions', I started thinking about the idea of domestic publishing and wanted my contribution to revolve around that. In the wake of the global outbreak of COVID-19, I found myself as a publisher and my practice operating with limited resources; the printeries closed and 1200 copies of my previously published publications were stuck in a distributor's warehouse in the countryside UK. What do we do when all existing institutional modes of production, publishing and distribution vanish in crisis? As a response, I wanted to create a publication that could be self-produced and self-distributed at home, or within a domestic or local space, while still defunding the paper medium. I wanted to make use of the home printer – that of the amateur – and to consider self-publishing in relation to autonomy and personal agency. I wanted the publication to be downloaded free online and translate into print – to avoid selling, shipping or sending the print-prepped file. Playing with the possibilities, limitations and variations of different home printers I wanted to make the publication as generic as possible; printed on A4 copy paper, set in monochrome color

(black and white), no images, no binding; minimal efforts and technical requirements. All this could allow for a more open and efficient publication, circulation and discourse.

Paper publishing is in many ways the ultimate manifestation of many of the values arising amid this pandemic: attention, dedication and patience. What's the enduring appeal or meaning of materiality, of the physical object, the time capsule, the artifact right now? Print media and the values it inhabits have been somewhat neglected in the context of the internet. Amid this ongoing viral pandemic, most of us have been completely immersed in the digital sphere and exposed to short-lived content, click-bait headlines and fast-food journalism on a scroll — formed by the 'quantity over quality' mentality that has imprinted the domain of digital media. As an antidote to this, printed matter is loaded with collectibility, stackability and longevity which allows us, as readers, to wrestle with our attention span, and for once fully retreat to something substantial. Primitive, authentic and meditative material objects you can emotionally and physically connect with; smell, touch and study. It can certainly bring an experience with a presence the digital flicker cannot successfully imitate, replicate or translate. During and following this pandemic, it will be interesting to see how people — readers or publishers — will grapple with the printed medium, whether artistically, economically, mythologically, physically, symbolically etc.

This foldable one-sheet publication, in its zine-friendly, pocket-sized format, contains a questionnaire with six fellow contemporary publishers – ranging from self-publishers to commercial publishers, of publishing conglomerates or of micro-press – who challenge the traditional institution of publishing in any form.

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