

'Counter speed with a blossoming of un-immediacy': interview on Urgent Publishing

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Making Public

(<https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic>)

BLOG:

'Counter speed with a blossoming of un-immediacy': interview on Urgent Publishing

By [Miriam Rasch](https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/author/michael/) (<https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/author/michael/>), June 25, 2020 at 11:18 am.

For their upcoming podcast series where researchers in the [ARIAS](https://arias.amsterdam/) (<https://arias.amsterdam/>) network talk about their projects, Morgane Billuart and Katie Clarke asked me to introduce Making Public and the urgent publishing concept and to explain why publishing research is needed. The transcript is shared below, stay tuned for the audio recording!

—

The world is an urgent place, if ever there was one, and publishing must follow suit. In the two-year research project Making Public, we developed an account of urgent publishing. We started out from the very practical problems presented to small publishers by a speedy and accelerated media and information sphere, where it's hard to keep up pace when you still want to provide high quality publications and engage with readers on a profound level. We worked with publishers in the arts, cultural, and research domains, who especially run the risk of getting bulldozed by the heavy players, while they have such invaluable contents to offer.

Over the course of the project, the notion of speed changed into one of urgency. Urgent is what is both *on time* and *timely*. You could say it's a qualitative reiteration of speed. A focus on speed is too one-sided. What are we publishing, why, and for whom? Those are questions that have always been pertinent. But from the perspective of urgent publishing, the answers may take on different forms. Urgency

asks to let go of many preconceptions. It may not be a book that is published, it may not be the story of a single author, it may be for an unsuspected audience you do not know yet.

With urgent publishing we propose an open and situated practice of publishing. It is important to think about how you publish what you publish, and say what you say, in times of wild uncertainties and unpredictability, when there is not a lot of time to go to the bottom of things. Writing – or talking – from a place of uncertainty calls for different forms. And for remembering and sustaining the openness of publication: an urgent publication published urgently should not strive to have the final say but to exist in an ecosystem of publications and of readers. Such openness also asks something from the reader: to take up the responsibility to establish connections and acknowledge complexities and not judge one publication as if it were pretending to be the holy scripture. Such publishing is a social act that involves all players, establishing a network comprising both human and inhuman actors.

There is a lot of speedy publishing going on right now. But it seems obvious to me that the most interesting examples are the ones that are situated within such contexts, that form an ecosystem of networked publications and readers tied into them. Ad hoc zine-making, pop-up online reading groups, a resurgence of the epistolary genre: these examples of urgent publishing abound, even if they are in themselves rather small-scale and often short-form, catering to a niche audience, which is oftentimes locally focused. Of course, archiving will be important. The open-ended and situated character of these publishing practices offers new challenges in that regard. When will the first collaborative covid19-archives be born? Who collects the abundance of cardboard signs from the many Black Lives Matter protests? Aren't these placards the most urgent form of publishing imaginable?

Why is it important to be critical of publishing practices?

Publishing has always been both a means to establish or confirm authority *and* a means to counter it. You can print the Bible, and then again in your own colloquial language. The same can be said about the internet. Online publishing establishes a mainstream and even monopolies – and then again, counter narratives, personal diaries, dialogic experiments, and previously neglected voices emerge in the margins. Of course, this is not straightforward: large media are often trusted sources, and at the same time they can be strict gatekeepers, whether in old or new ways, like the

gatekeeping qualities of the Facebook, Google or Amazon algorithms. On the other hand, counter narratives may include underrepresented writers, but also troll farms. To be critical of such practices thus also means to be critical of infrastructures.

How is that related to sustainability?

Speed seems to be at odds with sustainability in many ways. Speedy publishing does not go together well with a sustainable practice. Sustainable publishing should have an eye on what we call 'the afterlife of the publication', but also on building lasting connections with the public. So, sustainability has two sides: making sure an item remains accessible and kept safe, and maintaining a strong relationship with the reading public. Sustainability is an even trickier subject when looking at digital publishing. Anything on the web can vanish one moment to the next. As Adrienne Lafrance says, the web is a phantasmagoria. There has been a lot of talk about the archive the past years, also of the digital realm. It's good to see the Royal Library archives webpages, for example. In this project, we concerned ourselves more with the 'afterlife' – a sense of keeping the publication alive for readers, which corresponds to the focus on openness in urgent publishing. That also means allowing the publication to move in different directions, change its meaning or its form, as it encounters new publics. Often a publication – be it print or online – is forgotten very fast. We've looked into reading groups, remediation, and other such practices.

What is your technique for putting emphasis on the importance of digital publishing?

Urgent publishing exists in a post-digital realm. There's no such thing as non-digital publishing anymore. A print book is just as well developed and created in a thoroughly digitized environment and functions in an ecosphere where the boundaries between online and offline have faded long ago, as Alessandro Ludovico has taught us. Why then a focus on digital publishing specifically? To me, the internet can be seen as an instance of publication. Even though monopolies have largely taken over, there's still the promise of the web as a space for everyone to publish and to do so on their own terms, in their own forms, and following their own voice. That promise needs to be kept alive and deserves a constant strive towards concretization in practice, often experimental in nature.

How does your research through publishing unlock certain human behavioral patterns with regards to proximity and distance, presence and absence?

Urgent publishing for us came to signify first and foremost a situated practice. That's also why I prefer to talk about hybrid publishing rather than digital publishing. It stresses the need for a multi-planed approach: not just having print, a website, and a pdf, or so, but including live events, reading circles, and archives. The end publication of the project was initially published via e-mail; an intimate medium that fits the times surprisingly well. The personal inbox is a private space, wherein our chapters were invited courteously and consciously by the readers on subscription. Each week they received a new instalment, with the complete book, designed and printed with care, following after a short two months. We hope to have established a certain relationship with the readers in this way, building over time, while still having conceived, written, and produced the book rather fast. Unfortunately, the final part of this publication process, a meet-up and launch of the physical book, gathering our physical bodies as well, could not happen because of the corona virus.

Which questions are still unanswered?

In the future, I would like to dive deeper into the possibilities that arise from an open or 'unfinished' approach to publishing. The fluidity and at the same time strong connectedness of an urgent publishing practice: how to use them to the benefit of urgent societal matters? How do you decide when to 'make the cut' and bring the publication into the networked environments that will sustain it?

What are your desires for urgent publishing in the future?

For me personally, I would like to see – and perform – more experimentation in the rhetorical aspects of urgency. I think more than anything, we need new ways of writing and talking and discussing with each other, ways that respect uncertainty, multi-linearity, polyphony, dialogue... To me this is the most urgent question of this moment and I hope I will get the chance to develop it further.

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The results of the Making Public project can be summarized in three key points and an afterthought:

- **Relations.** Using other narrative or rhetorical structures which challenge the reader to actively engage with the text. Is a Carrier Bag Theory of Non-Fiction possible, with multiple entry

and exit points, like a forest with many entangled pathways?

- **Trust.** Activating the network and have publications travel – whether via online recommendation systems or hand-to-hand. Put trust in the network and in collaboration over competition.
- **Remediation.** Taking care of the afterlife to make sure the publication lives on after its champagne moment. In reading groups, in remediation practices, in allowing the reader to cut it up and paste it back together in a new form.
- **Afterthought.** Bring a little friction into the game. Friction means frustrating the demand for constant and transparent communication, thus opening up a space where interpretation, change in perspectives, and active listening can take place. Showing the specificity of medium and language and how they take part in meaning-making. Counter speed with a blossoming of un-immediacy.

June 2020, Miriam Rasch

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MOST RECENT READINGS

Special issue Urgent Publishing Debris @ Pervasive Labour Union zine

By Miriam Rasch, June 19, 2020

Making Public teamed up with Lúcia Pereira of Pervasive Labour Union zine after the Urgent Publishing conference to make a special issue that would move far beyond the known realms of 'conference proceedings'. What happens if you shift focus from the official reports and try to include the 'debris' left after an event, in the [...]

(<https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/2020/06/19/special-issue-urgent-publishing-debris-pervasive-labour-union-zine/>)

Making Public Presents the Urgent Publishing Toolkit and Publication

By Barbara Dubbeldam, June 9, 2020

What strategies are available to publishers in the cultural and research domains to conceive, produce, and position their contents in an urgent way? In the two-year research project Making Public (2018-2020) conducted by the Institute of Network Cultures at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and partners, which has come to a close, methods and [...]

[\(https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/2020/06/09/making-public-presents-the-urgent-publishing-toolkit-and-publication/\)](https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/2020/06/09/making-public-presents-the-urgent-publishing-toolkit-and-publication/)

Here and Now? Explorations in Urgent Publishing

By Barbara Dubbeldam, May 20, 2020

Here and Now? Explorations in Urgent Publishing presents the results of the Making Public project, led by the Institute of Network Cultures in collaboration with 1001 Publishers, Amateur Cities, Amsterdam University Press, ArtEZ University of the Arts, Hackers & Designers, Mind Design, Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, Open!, Open Set, Puntpixel, Studio BLT, Valiz, and Willem de Kooning Academy.

[\(https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/2020/05/20/here-and-now-explorations-in-urgent-publishing/\)](https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/2020/05/20/here-and-now-explorations-in-urgent-publishing/)



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