

PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED: HOW TO BE AN UNDERGROUND INSTITUTIONAL PUBLISHER

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ABSTRACT: The Centre for Fine Print Research (CFPR) at the University of the West of England, Bristol UK publishes reference materials on contemporary printmaking and related areas for an international audience. Three of its established publications focus on artists' books: the biennial *Artist's Book Yearbook*, *The Blue Notebook* journal for artists' books, and the free download *Book Arts Newsletter*. In this article, the editor of these three publications reflects upon how they were established, and some of the successes, trials and tribulations of publishing under an institutional imprint. From conception, content and design, to funding, print and distribution of hard copy and digital download, to their international base of readers.

KEYWORDS: artists' books, publishing, institutional, book arts, distribution

2011 is a celebratory year for our reference publications here at the Centre for Fine Print Research (CFPR), which sees the 10th anniversary of our Impact Press imprint publishing the *Artist's Book Yearbook* (ABYB) and the 5th anniversary of our journal *The Blue Notebook*. Our monthly publication, the *Book Arts Newsletter* (BAN) is the odd one out at 9 years of age. When Paulo Silveira invited me to write about how our publications are supported by our university, my first reaction was to laugh and say that I couldn't, because I wouldn't be able to tell the truth. Paulo's response to this was that people might want to know that they are not alone in their constant overcoming of difficulties, and that I should tell them the reality of our fight.

And that really made me think. I don't want to say that we are not supported at all by the university because of course we are, we have paid employment and the books we publish are part of that, so we are not struggling to pay our wages (although I might be soon if this is read by the wrong people). My point is, that Paulo was right; I don't want to be dishonest and say that it is easy, if

others might read this and think that we publish everything so simply when they find it so difficult, why would they bother to try? If that happened I would feel very guilty that someone had not started a journal or published a book because they felt they couldn't do it without the kind of 'support' that we get. So, here it is, a short history of how to publish and be damned.

The ABYB was founded in 1994 by Tanya Peixoto, John Bently, Stephanie Brown and Stefan Szczelkun, out of a need to offer book artists an opportunity to read critical essays by writers and artists, to gain an overview of artist's book production and most importantly to encourage greater discussion and awareness of book arts. Tanya Peixoto published the ABYB under her own Magpie Press imprint until 1999, when she went on to set up bookartbookshop¹ in London, a specialist venue for artists' books. We took over from Tanya, with myself as editor and Tom Sowden as art editor, with a small set-up grant from our university to cover the printing costs of the first edition (Tanya had already warned me that we would never make any money on the ABYB). Our first issue was published under our centre's Impact Press in 2001. With the growth of international artists' books activity, the ABYB has quietly tripled in size over the last ten years to 254 pages, and this year alongside the essays and reference listings, we received an amazing 600+ artist's book listings from 207 national and international artists. Tanya Peixoto and John Bently continue to contribute an essay or overview each to every issue.

The ABYB² serves as a resource for artists, academics, students, collectors, librarians, dealers, publishers and researchers. Each issue includes essays and information on many aspects of the book arts, with critical essays, interviews, information on book arts galleries, archives and collections, book arts courses, events, journals, bibliographies and reference publications, studios and websites, with contributors from around the world. Gathering the information we publish is an ongoing process, when I discover something of interest: a new artist, venue, collection etc. I save the information to add to the next issue. We announce a call for participation in January (all listings are free) and as the listings pour in, I edit and format them ready to add to my InDesign template. In between this, I invite writers to contribute essays and Tom Sowden designs the cover (fig. 1)

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Tanya Peixoto's bookartbookshop: <http://www.bookartbookshop.com>

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<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bookpub.htm>

and invites artists to produce artwork pages. These contributions are paid for only with a few copies of the finished publication and our undying gratitude, as we have no budget for any fripperies such as commissioning writers or paying artists, everything is achieved through goodwill. Actually assembling and editing the publication takes me a further 3-4 weeks, which is often fitted in between many other jobs that need doing. My position at the university affords me the luxury of doing this as part of my job, something that Tanya never had as an independent publisher, and I know I am very fortunate. This luxury can also be offset sometimes though with the idiosyncrasies of institutional mechanisms. As I begin designing the ABYB for print, I also steel myself for the forthcoming battle with the university's printing department.

Although we are the Centre for Fine Print Research, our university's printing department has a stronghold on the design, production and printing of anything that it considers official university business, and will not believe that as artists we can design or print anything better than they can (or at all, for that matter). Every time, I have to start a few months before I need the book printed, as I begin my argument to design it myself and have it printed by professional external printers. A labyrinthine trail of emails, notes, phone calls, agreements, denials of agreements, re-agreements, 'lost' paperwork, hold-ups and general obstructions ensues, but after three months, I (so far) eventually win and get the book printed by the printers I want to use when somebody finally relents or is distracted and signs the approval for order form. The external printers we use do not "improve" my or Tom's designs, or rearrange the pages and typeface to suit their protocol, or add lots of their logos and change the cover to their standard red and grey colours, or sign off the proof of the redesigned book themselves without showing it to me. Having delivered the file to my chosen printer, I then spend the next three weeks worrying that the university might decide to cancel the order, or after the job is delivered, refuse to pay them. Once the book is printed and paid for, I can then start to mail it out in small batches myself for safety. We publish biennially, so I don't have to experience this battle every year for the ABYB, and selling copies over two years builds up enough funds to just about cover the printing costs of the next issue. This is how it always has been since its inception, and how it continues, we will never make a profit from it, and it can only exist as long as I can publish it from within an institution that allows me to edit it as part of my employment. As long as we can sell enough copies to pay for the next one, we can carry on indefinitely, and that is the most important thing for me.

*The Book Arts Newsletter*³ (BAN) is our free news-sheet, that started as a single piece of paper used to publicise our exhibitions here at the university, but rapidly grew into a newsletter featuring exhibitions, fairs, conferences, courses, new publications and reports from all over the world, sent in by artists, writers, organisers etc. It now averages 30 pages per issue and is published every 4-6 weeks. Although we have always archived each issue online as a colour PDF for anyone to download, it used to be photocopied and sent out to a small mailing list which also grew from a few hundred to over 2000. The success of the free paper version of the newsletter was also its downfall. The university had agreed, in 2005 to take over photocopying and mailing, as I didn't have the time to do this each month. Each month I would send the copy with pre-addressed labels and an order to the official printing department (yes, the same one), and they would copy and send the newsletter out to addresses all over the world. What I didn't know was that each time they did this, they would charge the university 7000 GBP for their services. Because all photocopying for each school was charged as a total and not broken down into specific jobs, it wasn't until someone higher up queried the huge sums that were being paid and asked them for an itemised list that this was discovered. I received a call just as one issue was being processed, to be told that this would be the last one. And that was that. I dreaded having to tell people that we couldn't send it out on paper any more and that they would have to download their own copies, but surprisingly many people were very understanding and supportive. It took forever to send a note to everyone on my mailing list to tell them that I wouldn't be able to post copies any more and was switching their postal address for an email group I was creating, but I managed to get a reply from nearly everybody that it was all right for me to email them a notification to collect it online each month. Many said that they would rather download it anyway to save paper, and thanked the university for sending it for so long, some even sent or emailed goodbye tributes⁴ to the now defunct paper version. It was all very heartening that such a sudden disaster was actually turning into something that could perhaps work better. Now that I can only publish it online, I can add much more information and have colour images. It is still published at print quality so people

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Book Arts Newsletter, ISSN 1754-9086: Current Issue and Back Issues: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/banlists.htm>

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<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bangal10.htm>

can print it out to read themselves if they want to, and I know that some people do. It also means I can give later deadlines for each issue as I don't need to allow time for copying and posting which used to take weeks to go through the system. And word seems to spread much faster on the Internet as we now have more people on the BAN mailing list for the e-version than the paper version ever had, and I receive emails daily from people asking to sign up to the alert list. The artist Francis Elliott⁵ also suggested when he heard we had to switch to online only, that we include an artist's 'cover page', a free download A4 artwork produced by an invited artist, on the front of each issue from then on. I thought that was a brilliant idea and immediately asked him to be our first artist, producing the aptly titled *First Steps* (2010) for the No 59, August 2010 issue. Since then we have published the free artworks by a further nine artists to date: Mette-Sophie D. Ambeck, John Bently, Angie Butler, Guylaine Couture, Nicola Dale (fig. II), Sharon Kivland, Christina Mitrentse, Dietmar Pfister and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé.

The Blue Notebook journal for artists' books⁶ is now five years old, we publish this biannually, so October 2011 sees our 11th issue. This is quite unusual as *The Blue Notebook* ceased to exist two years ago. This journal has been the greatest challenge for me, but I still am so pleased that we started it. In the usual manner that many things happen, a casual remark in 2005 got me thinking. Manning our stand at a book fair, I was talking to the artist and writer Sarah Jacobs⁷ about her difficulties in finding a publisher for her shorter experimental writings around artists' books; she couldn't find a journal where they fitted in. We agreed that it would be wonderful if there was a journal where any form of writing about artists' books could be submitted. "Well, you should start a journal then" she said. Yes, I thought, we should. I discussed it with Tom and we got to work, putting together a team of referees (Paulo Silveira agreeing to be one of them) with the measly pay offer of a free copy of each issue in return for reviewing an essay for each issue. We asked artists and writers to start proposing essays and articles or interviews, from academic to technical, contemporary or historical,

experimental or narrative, in fact anything related to artists' books. That didn't mean that we just accepted everything, but we wanted writers to feel that they could write what they wanted, rather than reflect any particular house style. We wanted things that were new, different, though provoking, fun even. Our first issue launched a year to the date of that initial conversation, with of course, an essay by Sarah Jacobs within its pages. Over the last 11 issues we have had writers contribute articles from Australia, Brazil, Cuba, Denmark, Eastern Europe, Hawaii, Japan, South Africa, Switzerland, the UK and USA. Their essays have explored such diverse themes, a few titles include: The apartheid army as an unexpected incubator for artists' books; Exploring the book as a site for game-playing and storytelling; The Possibility of Poetry: from Migrant Magazine to Artists' Books; The Case for Failure in Artists' Bookworks; Deciphering Human Chromosome 16: We Report Here; A Queer Critical Analysis of Artists' Books; The rise of the photo book in contemporary self-publishing; Using Heidegger's ideas on the nature of time and relating them to Keith Smith's Book 91; Reading as Prowling, Furtive Roaming; Who cares where the apostrophe goes? non/participation in the Wikipedia definition of artists books; Silent Reading - Typography & Sign language; Allen Ruppersberg is everywhere. We have also had special reports on the state of book arts, and activities in Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Finland, Japan, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Scandinavia, South Korea, the Ukraine, and USA. We have also published reviews of exhibitions, projects, conferences, symposia and artist's book works, interviews with long-standing practitioners, and technical articles on technology and crafts such as POD, laser cutting, pulp-printing, papermaking and letterpress. And, we are constantly on the look out for more contributors, so please do get in touch if you would like to propose something. But how can you be on the look out for new contributors for a journal that ceased production in 2009? It goes like this. We were so excited about publishing a new journal that I stupidly forgot that our university's printing department did have the machinery that was capable of digital print production. We always knew that our print runs for each issue would be too small for litho, so we decided upon black and white digital print with a colour cover to keep costs down. I also put together a parallel digital version of the journal in colour, which subscribers get access to for download or online viewing. We found the perfect printer, got a quote and then the trouble began. Before, we had just about been able to argue that our print run was too large for the university so were given reluctant permission to get books printed externally, but this time our order was spotted and the dreaded phone call came. I was told that we had to use the university's

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<http://www.foundrypress.co.uk>

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<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bnotebk.htm>

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Sarah Jacobs' short biography link at information as material: http://informationasmaterial.com/?page_id=79

print department, and that was that. I handed over the files, they told me the price, it was double that of the external printer and 100% over our budget from subscriptions. I argued that we could get it printed cheaper outside and we couldn't afford this price, and after three weeks of battling they agreed to print it for the same price as the external printer. They then redesigned it, moved the specially designed artists' pages from the front to the back 'because that looked better', one now being upside down, inserted their printing logo onto the cover artwork, and printed the run without a proof, and with a cover of non-drying ink that rubbed off onto every other cover and our hands when we opened the boxes. I think I cried a bit, and then I sent it back, they were not happy but agreed to a reprint. It eventually arrived and we were able to launch at the autumn book fair (luckily, I had pre-empted the ordeal and had allowed time for many delays). The second issue they also printed, Tom designed the cover again, this time using a photograph of a rubbish bins overflowing with all the crumpled copies of the first issue's disastrous print run (fig. III). I don't think they were amused. They did one more print run for the third issue and decided to double the price without telling us and just took the money from our account, which left us in debt and in trouble. Enough is enough I thought, and I applied for special permission from the university to use our original printer, it was granted after much pleading and explaining that we couldn't publish a journal that lost us £500 every time it was printed. We had won, but our guard was down. After two more delightfully easy issues printed externally, as we wanted them and on time, and back at the original price that allowed us to exactly break even, it was perfect, publishing was a dream!

Just as the next issue had been delivered the telephone rang, the head of the printing department advised me that the agreement was over: "You now have two choices, either we print it and charge you what we want, or it doesn't get printed at all". To me that didn't seem much of a choice, so I said in that case we would have to cease publication, as we would not be allowed to publish anything that lost £500 per issue, it just didn't make sense, and was a waste of money. Being quite stubborn, and also now upset and rather angry, I began to think of this as war rather than giving up, maybe not total war, something akin to resistance; subterfuge. The journal was doing all right, we didn't (and still don't) have that many subscribers, but we could print it and post it for exactly the same amount of money that we received from subscribers, that was all we had ever wanted, and we considered that a success in itself. By now, we also had subscriptions from colleges, students had it on

their reading lists, we had articles ready for the next issue, I didn't want to let anyone down, so I pulled the plug, and put the word out internally that we had officially ceased publication. We have a friend, who has his own publishing imprint, so we immediately switched to him as the external publisher, who pays the printer, who delivers it to us in a car in unmarked boxes (yes, really), and the rest I cannot tell you. I don't know if any of our readers paid much attention to the change of publisher details in the colophon but they may have noticed Tom's cover design for issue eight, with his "closing down" and "under new management" signs (fig. IV). I know it doesn't take a master detective to realise that we still do publish a journal, but if no-one is looking for it, then they hopefully won't feel the need to find it. I also don't know how long our current plan will last but when that falls apart, we will have to think of another one, and we will. Some days I almost enjoy the battle, in a sadistic kind of way.

As I receive each print run of a publication back from our external printers and think of all the sleepless nights I have had worrying about getting the job printed and delivered as it should be, and without interference, I am always reminded of how small my battles are compared to others, and I realise that what might seem a gargantuan struggle to me is really nothing in the great scheme of things. In June 2008, Tom Sowden and I had the honour and pleasure of interviewing Janusz Paweł Tryzno and Jadwiga Tryzno at their Book Art Museum, in Łódź, Poland,⁸ with the help and translation of the writer Radosław Nowakowski. They have been publishing artists' books as CdA Press (Correspondence des Arts) and fine press books for 31 years, and until the political changes in Poland in the early 1990s, they produced all their publications underground, were spied upon by civil agents for the political police, manufactured their own illicit paper to print on from secretly procured textile production waste, collected abandoned machinery to repair and use, smuggled in parts to fix them and ink to print with, and printed their books illegally for twenty years. They have also been battling with the authorities to occupy their building ever since, so much so that they have a huge sculptural book in their foyer (resembling the scales of justice) created from one set of paperwork to and from the authorities on each side. Their ingenuity, commitment to what they do and their determination to do it at any costs is humbling. They will never give up, and I hope that I never will either.

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A transcript of our interview with Janusz Paweł Tryzno, Jadwiga Tryzno and Radosław Nowakowski at the Book Art Museum Łódź, can be downloaded from: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/tryznos.htm> <http://www.book.art.pl>

CAPTIONS FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

The images in this article are placed in its Portuguese version.

Figure I. The cover of the latest issue 2012-2013 of the *Artist's Book Yearbook*, designed by the Art Editor Tom Sowden.

Figure II. *Seasons of The Book*. Artist's "cover page" for the December 2010 issue of the *Book Arts Newsletter (BAN)* by Nicola Dale.

Figure III. The cover of the second issue of *The Blue Notebook* journal (Vol 1 No 2 April 2007), designed by the Art Editor Tom Sowden, referencing the print quality of the first issue.

Figure IV. The cover of the eighth issue of *The Blue Notebook* journal (Vol 4 No 2 April 2010), designed by the Art Editor Tom Sowden, alluding to its internal downfall and external rebirth.



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