

# Ghostwriting Files: Adding a voice to this polyphonic dialogue

On 19 September 2019, Het Nieuwe Instituut hosted the latest edition of the series Design Dialogues titled *Ghostwriting Files x Onomatopee*. Organised in collaboration with Onomatopee Projects in Eindhoven, the event focused on the shifting position of the designer in the global geography of freelancing and current economic climate in the creative sector. In her introduction to the presentations, Anastasia Kubrak (Het Nieuwe Instituut) contextualised the current form of labour as increasingly outsourced, delegated, masked and displaced. What is the effect of this on the notion of authorship in design and other disciplines? How can alternative forms of engagement and collective authorship offer resistance to precarity? These questions set a framework for the speakers: **Stefán Stefánsson**, **Silvio Lorusso**, **Fanfare (Freja Kir and Miquel Hervás Gómez)** and **Lara García Díaz**. Each speaker connected to different facets of the topic. To summarise:

**Stefán illustrated the 'illness'**  
**Silvio diagnosed the 'problem'**  
**Fanfare showed a 'reality'**  
**Lara proposed 'solutions'**

**Stefán Stefánsson** presented his own practice-based research on ghostwriting, interested in byproducts of the internet created by low cost outsourced design work. Using hired ghostwriters as research tools, he develops a body of work to criticise and evaluate issues of displaced labour from within.

**Silvio Lorusso** read a chapter from his recently published book *Entreprecariat: everyone is an entrepreneur. nobody is safe.* titled *Fiverr: Creative Self-Destruction*. In this chapter Silvio uses the example of Fiverr.com, one of the largest online platforms for freelance design work, to raise concerns about the implications of such services on current forms of labour and authorship. Silvio pinpoints the paradoxes behind the democratization of delegation.

**Fanfare** followed with a performative reading of email correspondence between themselves and various corporations from 2014 to 2019. Unveiling the studio's development and process of production this gave several insights into the working conditions of a nomadic creative practice established in Amsterdam.

Finally, Lara García Díaz presented her current research *Acts of Love* which focuses on sustainable creative labour. Lara approaches the topic from a feminist perspective, making parallels with the process of housewifization post WWII. If just a few can afford to work for free in creative practices, how can we activate forces of collectivization to work against this system?

It is here, post the event and at somewhat of a distance, we wish to include PUB as a fifth and additional voice to this polyphonic dialogue. Published in April 2019 the latest issue of PUB Journal *From Precarity* explored the topic of precarious working and living conditions within the arts and beyond. Contributors reflected on experiences of playing according to the rules of the game as well as finding viable solutions, alternatives and hope. In this instance we would like to find connections to and offer reflections on our own alternative form of engagement.

## **PUB**

### **There are many paths with few entanglements.**

PUB began and continues to develop in response to its own environment, the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam. The Sandberg Instituut is a conglomeration of 8 master programs, divided by departments, each with their own agenda, their own space and their own program. Students work in parallel rarely colliding.

In 2017 Daniel Seemayer graduated from the Design Department with a project called PUB. PUB was defined as an interdisciplinary initiative aiming to establish and structure a publishing practice at the Sandberg Instituut. A platform to identify connections and accelerate collaborations amongst the students.

In 2018 Miquel Hervás Gómez, Sascha Krischock (Design Department) and Agustina Woodgate (Radical Cut up) continued PUB in order to experiment with an alternative communication system and network topology missing amongst the students and between departments.

### **Through co-production we establish a platform for exchange.**

The initiation of a series of sessions based on practices such as publishing and radio led to a growing network of 34 students and alumni forming PUB. Within two years multiple flexible channels have emerged; PUB Journal, Radio, Pubcasts, TV, Type Lab and a VPN.

PUB is a non-profit organisation that receives funding from Sandberg Instituut. While being reactive to the infrastructural limits of Sandberg for cross-departmental collaboration it is important to note this is an approach the school actively encourages and supports.

### **Challenging the status quo of individual production and experimenting with the potential of working as a group.**

*Ghostwriting Files* provided us, as PUB, with a framework to reflect on the shifting conditions of work within creative practices, the circumstances for co-production and how this can affect the notion of authorship. In its current form PUB functions as a changing system of collaborations that reconfigures itself to distribute work amongst members according to individual skills and motivations. To offer an extra voice and perhaps some closure to the discussion that took place we would like to add what we have learnt through the practice of PUB.

As a self-organized community we understand that our relationships are not based on the typical hierarchies of work and labour. We are not working for the economic value of our practices but for the development of personal interests inside an educational structure. This structure provides funding for us to develop tools and exchange knowledge enabling us to complete projects that would never be possible by our own means. Any profit made from a project goes back into PUB to fund current or future work. Time and skills are our main currencies of labour in the sense that time is invested and skills are both contributed and attained.

We use tactics such as care, sharing and collaboration to develop a working environment based on togetherness. To give an example the PUB Journal was initially defined as a quarterly journal for Sandberg students. The first issue was published at the end of the 2018 academic year. At the beginning of the following year it became clear within the editorial and design team to achieve the second issue in the way we intended it much more time was needed. Weekly meetings continued however the deadline was temporarily suspended. Members within the team distributed and completed tasks depending on the time each had available. Care for one another's levels of stress as well as sharing the workload were key in the collaboration that took place.

PUB has opened the possibility to examine friendship as a working structure and creative method to articulate our practices together. The notion of friendship has been increasingly present in the artistic environment and it is something we see as having potential to redesign the values of 'professional' relationships and hierarchies.

### **PUB works inside out and outside in.**

In developing our own system and working conditions we noticed several strategies that have the potential to challenge precarity, or at the least, some of its surrounding issues.

The reconfiguration of the group according to the needs of each project and the skills or interests of each participant shifts the distribution of time, expertise and energy into a non-hierarchical process. In turn, this process is not subject to power structures that can cause rivalries and mistrust. We are not delegating outwards to the **competitively priced ghost writer, a reality illustrated by Stefán Stefánsson's practice based on outsourcing labour from the platform Fiverr.com.** By contrast we implement a system of choice turning inwards to the network of individuals that make up PUB.

Through active participation within PUB and fostering relationships to existing channels inside and outside of our immediate community we are able to create connections to

the place where we live. This ties into a point made by Silvio Lorusso when explaining the views of philosopher André Gorz: that delegation can lead to disorientation, eroding a sense of belonging to the environment in which we live, something that is heightened when care and active participation are missing. Fanfare also expressed how as a small core team they often function in collaboration with other practices, forming a larger network. This supports the creation of a local environment at a time of increased nomadism.

PUB has developed a network locally with various platforms, collectives and institutions. These include the GRA Bookbinding Workshop, Fabulous Future, Hackers & Designers, Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee, LAG, Library Rietveld/Sandberg, Unsettling Rietveld/Sandberg, Rietveld pavilion and SI MediaLab among others. PUB has also been active in other countries including Turkey, Spain, Germany and Switzerland. Broadcasting through existing radio channels such as RadioEE, Radio 80K (Munich) and Radio Relativa (Madrid) and presenting printed materials at book fairs Libros Mutantes (Madrid) and It's a Book (Leipzig). Through these collaborations we find not only opportunities to show our work but also platforms through which to develop it, creating a stronger system of collaboration within and outside of the academic environment.

**PUB has the potential to disappear and die, it has the capacity to expand or shrink.**

As our production is focused towards developing tools and insights for students and not commodification, the system is resistive against the actual violence of a market-driven society. We are also in the fortunate position that the academic institution that hosts PUB does not interfere with their own hidden agenda. Of course there are motivations for providing support however these are not masked and PUB is able to function independently.

Collectivity has become a tool to displace authorship generating a more equal work dynamic within the initiative. Even though everyone's work and involvement is credited projects are authored as PUB. As Lara García pinpointed during the open discussion, commoning is a way of overcoming precarity and generating new means for creative and artistic production. We believe that if we are able to reproduce these values in supportive spaces such as an academic publishing and sharing experiment, we might be able to breed them outside. Consequently, as designers, researchers and art practitioners we hope that we can redesign the perception of value and offer a new perspective on the systems that consolidate power around us.

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