

MULTIPLE STARTS IS ALWAYS GOOD.  
Åbäke & Gavin Wade

## 1. Åbåke:

Let's start from something which seems to be a possible common node of interest: Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book*. It is a problematic publication in many ways but it has provided us with more questions. At first it was the mere curiosity for a time and culture we are only inheriting but never lived ourselves. Publishing as a context was detrimental to the book. Even if it is amusing to see how the publication was more often than not stolen rather than bought (still true today) I wonder if the mainstream distribution didn't kill the actions suggested by the book almost immediately. After all, the resistance recipes it provides were best used and shared in secrecy or at least through a context specific network (this reminds me the first time I read about context specificity rather than site was in your exhibition catalogue of the Bournville show, *In The Midst of Things*, 1999).

## 2. Gavin Wade:

What i like about *Steal This Book* is exactly this dilemma of how to value and utilise the content when asked to discard other specific values - to exploit openings in the values of others to survive and thrive. So I would say it is essential that the book entered the mainstream in order to challenge it, to affect it and to indicate the usefulness of a system that can be stolen from, misused and viewed from other positions. That the 'pig empire' could take pride in providing a context that can be stolen from and continues to support society in ways they never imagined! It is a book with a life cycle, to an extent, as the system it directs us to exploit will more than likely close up those openings upon absorbing the information. I think this is performed knowingly by Hoffman. In effect he is playing his own game of 'shouting theatre in a crowded fire.' When i was looking at the process of upcycling that we utilise at Eastside Projects I found that it was useful to upcycle sections of *Steal This Book* as I hoped it would bring into focus the possibilities of right and wrong shifting as context shifts. Hoffman would probably have been clever enough to anticipate and

design-in an ability for his manifesto to work in different situations even though he does give detailed ways to survive in the book. The actions of his book may be impossible to kill. The impulse to 'steal' books and knowledge is so strong. The question is if enough people can accept it as a positive action. I was interested to hear Dora Garcia talk about her book also called *Steal this book*, and the way she sets up an exhibition situation where the only way to get the book is to steal it, but she has a security guard watching and he will force you to put it back if he sees you attempt to steal it. You have to be good at stealing to survive! A valuable lesson.

## 3. Å:

Overall I agree but in the specific case of the original book, its mainstream distribution probably caused an instant obsolescence of the "techniques" by revealing how to rig the system to... the system. The content of the book did actually exist as practice and in this case the word of mouth was one effective way of propagation, distribution, medium etc. The publishing touches another kind of "audience" and this gave the possibility then and now to reflect. It entered a meta discourse which we can all enjoy but I also love the direct manual of how to fight back. Dora Garcia's book is also an accomplishment in itself for a practice which could be seen as resisting publishing but I BOUGHT many copies (for presents) as the depletion of a representation compared to its actual physical encounter (I have never "met" her beggars, for example) was in my opinion insignificant. The book is not less than the work. It is another work despite drawing content which exist in other media than paper and ink.

Upcycling, restaging, remixing, reactualising, contextually paraphrasing, medium-translation... seem necessary for graphic designers. The question of the difference between "for" and "with" needs an update, which would be "from". As students, our fascination in the narrow world of G design went for the people who didn't need us: Maison Martin Margiela, Archigram, Daft Punk, the

anonymous designers of May 68 etc. It is a cliché to say so but design as service needs to be reassessed. To answer one of your questions about who we work with, for, from, about and around it is true we work with people who are sympathetic to a non-subservient graphic design and, as projects do lead to projects, it is very likely to encounter like-minded people more and more. Having said that, I prefer speaking empirically by very recent examples: on the one hand we just finished a new work in La Ferme du buisson with Yair Barelli. This is a performance which involves memory and dance of an event we know the participants did not know or care. On the other we designed a logo for the next Birmingham artist-led art festival (The Event). One is a story we need to tell and has yet to have a "graphic design" element to it and the other is a commission ("for"). We cannot say which is preferable. One story needed a performance, the other a visual identity. We are back to STEAL THIS BOOK: parts of it need being an action and other parts a book.

#### 4. GW:

Your design for The Event is a little like Liam Gillick's cat from his Venice Biennale project, it steals the breath of the organisations, but in this case you may not be stealing it because it tastes so good, you steal them all and use each organisations breath, their typography, no matter what they taste like, to spell out the words 'The Event' so giving it a sense of the reality of the situation where you encounter multiple versions of reality seen from different points of view. An artist led festival across an area of the city needs to exploit all of the individual groups' networks, skills and experience to multiply their individual work, coordinate the assault of art like a public rally. Somehow your multiple identity gives more of a direction for how the organisations should act and practice together. This i like very much, that your design is for us all to learn from.

Your last comments on Steal This Book did make me wonder how much that text could be consumed or used as a type of

social pornography, not really being used for it's intended purpose but for people to get off on the idea of doing something like that. Perhaps Hoffman would have intended that also, but I think probably not.

#### 2. GW:

In The MIDst of Things perhaps examined the heart of the mainstream 'philanthropic' corporate empire attempting to exploit loopholes of support that appear in the more philanthropic side of corporate history, which again can be seen as good or bad depending on your position. I angled that exhibition towards a continuation of the utopian aspirations of George Cadbury and his imaging of a factory in a garden that would be a model for new ways to live and work. This was mine and Nigel Prince's focus really (as co-curators), the utopian and the cross over of art, architecture and design to create new living situations. Altruism can still be found in many capitalist contexts of course. Disentangling it is one thing to do. Or just jumping in and walking the mind field and producing things through intuitive choices another. Actually, disentangling isn't really possible of course, but staging the performance of disentangling may be productive!

#### 3. Å:

The enlightened slavery if I may dare! Joke aside, utopia, despite its literal self-negation is more and more topical in a society of "capital realism". This might be a bit of a leap but I am interested in how the top to bottom modernist and paternal attitudes of Fourier, Cadbury et al translate today? Before we spin out of control, I'll ask something relating a bit closer to our (yours and ours) practices: do you see your work as a possible model? Manifestos seem to have been replaced by manuals...

As another spin-off, is education part of your program (I think the answer is partially yes)?

#### 4. GW:

I think enlightened slavery would be pushing it, although not far off. I get the impression many people did well by being

part of the Cadbury empire, particularly as it was so holistic. At least they were genuine about increasing standards of living, working conditions and self organisation, and i don't believe this is done without some genuine passion and belief in improving society and yourself at the same time of course. Our manuals at Eastside Projects have been a way to present a manifesto and to open up the ideas of art produced here as public actions to improve the city. As far as i am concerned if more members of the public in Birmingham are producing or demanding art then the city has a chance of being improved.

Education is implicit in our programming and performing of the how to construct a space, how to write a text, how to publish a book, how to print a flyer, how to build an organisation and how to create an exhibition. I invite artists who i feel contribute to notions of how to be public and why. We write the manuals as a collaboration between me, Celine Condorelli and James Langdon. James has taken the lead on the newest one, which is almost ready for print, and the manual is a list of verbs. I love this idea. Eastside Projects is a verb! Our education is the doing. So yes i believe it is a model, or more, it is a set of models. There are genuine links, connections and strategies across the three years of Eastside Projects so far, and into the next three years, tested and nurtured through improvisation, chance and also demand - the demand of the people who use it. Our manual is for people who want to use the gallery. And we respond to people who want to use it. Really like this notion of for/with/from. We'd like more demands from public users. Demand more of art, and those who are committed to making it may provide. I think we need professional demands and amateur demands. And we will always push the FROM as well.

1. Å:  
Another possible start: You "attempted to integrate full the impulses of design, curating, art production and architecture into the organisational values and processes of Eastside Projects". Would you

say there is a maximum scale (of people, budget, health and safety officers) to such attitude?

2. GW:  
Scale is such a vital issue and yes particularly in relation to Eastside Projects as a model of an artist run space that attempts to act publicly. One question is what scale can still convey and act through the personalities of those running the organisation, and can be accessible through those personalities? There is a scale of organisations that makes personality become a brand. We have attempted to avoid this but to grow and expand, which does inevitably force choices to be made about how much time the personalities can directly engage with the galleries users, supporters and collaborators. Speaking to other publishers i have got this sense that book making can often be very separated from receivers of their published material. Exhibition making can often be very direct and you can share space with users of the exhibition. How to share space with the users of books is another question. Involving a process of visible production in a book is one solution I suppose. Celine Condorelli, another director of Eastside Projects, was always interested in how we develop Eastside Productions as a site of production with the imperative that a place for the display of art should be a site of production of art. She paralleled this with the question of how many libraries were also sites of production for books rather than only repositories for printed material. Writers may write texts in libraries but how many bookmakers make books there? AND why not combine all the aspects of bookness in one place? This is part of our thinking for Eastside Projects also. What can we combine, make productive and perform. The scale we have currently reached may be a limit of a kind for some elements, ie physical space, staff but not in many others, ideas, partnerships, influence, policies.

3. Å:  
Indeed. And at the same time I believe production happens everywhere too. We

have been editing a parasitical magazine for almost as long as not having the budget to print and knowledge to distribute. Because they are pages printed in other people's publications, the production is always part semantic (is it a magazine?) and part negotiation. Recently, we have requested extra copies of our contribution which is always in knowing of the production of the host mag. It has been very difficult to archive but the question of the library often comes with the condition of it being used. The more modern libraries in Paris or London are better in terms of research but has probably closed its doors to the indoor flaneur.

#### 4. GW:

I hope the indoor flaneur can survive, perhaps in Birmingham's Bullring! Perhaps not. We open up ourselves to that to an extent, but i'm certain we would have to change if we the scale of audience increased massively. The scale of something like Tate feels like it should work for the indoor flaneur but the operating machine of the building is separated from the display facade. I'm not sure how you make the two exhibit simultaneously at that scale but it would be very interesting to try. There is something very provocative in the idea of the portability of a copy of a book, and the opportunity to use the copy in a given context for pleasure, production or education. Just wondering if there is something of this portability of a proposition in your parasitical work? I know we have one of your 'Slow Letter's series in our publication Book, the letter S, but I don't know where the rest of the work exists, or whether i have another of the slow letter series in another publication in my library. I must have i suppose given the opportunity for crossover between sites where you may insert them, and the opportunities for me to come across new additions to my library. Your sense of structure there feels very ambitious and provokes a sense of connection to a very complex context that you can stake out as the site of your work. I definitely feel some of that in my own Strategic Questions series, where i have

been attempting to develop and locate the answers to 40 questions by Buckminster Fuller. There have been 26 locations so far for 26 answers, some of them having multiple voices/answers by 83 artists to date. Only 14 more locations in the world to produce objective or subjective answers as artworks. That still gives me lots of options for future work. Part of my interest in that project was having something consistent and that built up that included through its structure randomness, surprise and chance in all aspects of its generation. Fuller is a fascinating example of a practice to learn from and use as a model of how to act and do in the world. He wrote the 40 questions as a letter he sent to 'world building leaders' and i have kept an element of physical publishing and distribution as one of the fixed elements of the structure of the project.

#### 1. Å:

Or  
You Up-cycle.

We always try to move forward, especially in the context of a magazine (magazines seem to always arrive AFTER the event, no?). We have a fascination for Press releases, artist portraits, interviews, reviews, cv and other bits which are considered secondary to the work. WHY can't they be primary?

#### 2. GW:

I think like you, i have always been fascinated with the press release and the invitation, and been drawn to artists and curators who deal with that like Seth Siegelaub of Bank for instance. James Langdon and I definitely see these platforms as sites of production. Looking at your printed invites for Shez Dawood's Studio project this is really clear and extends the notion of the studio for me. What was the process in producing that series of works?

#### 3. Å:

For this specific design, Shez had told us he only needed to send less than a hundred invites and the rest would be electronic. As the show happened in a very rich neighbourhood of London in a

surprisingly tidy house (what? not in a squat in Hackney Wicks?) we thought of preciousness but in the way we would understand it. The proximity of the Royal College of Art where Shez and we studied led us to go back and see our then favourite letterpress technician Ian Gabb. The deal was so: as the fee for the design and budget for printing was almost symbolic, we decided to "pay" our labours together by treating ourselves in dinners with Ian. As each invitation was of artists from different nationalities, we got to eat pakistani, german, palestinian, estonian and Italian. The production themselves were fun as making fake blood to splash or using letterpress adds a more enjoyable experience to the computer. Further projects have combined sites of exhibitions as sites of production, namely at Somerset house when we were asked to organise two events in a short residency of two weeks there we ended up moving our studio and organising one event a day, producing for each of our then 14 collectives and projects we were involved in (An Inventory of Aliases, 2008). The problem with this is rhythm and the addition of the spectacle side of acknowledging an audience while "making". We had to not perform anything public for a month or two after that.

4.GW:  
Who deals with that exhaustion of the performer? The exhaustion of performing a text, a book, an exhibition, of ideas? Being public may be exhausting when the options to be something else may be so readily available! I suppose an organisation, event or phenomena has a limited amount of energy and should be aware somehow of declaring, announcing their own point of exhaustion?!

2. GW:  
Our current Narrative Show announcements have arisen out of long discussions between James and myself attempting to make all elements of the gallery be part of Narrative Show. And Narrative Show become all parts of the gallery. The simple solution in the end was to print a simple sheet with one

colour telling the information prior to the start of Act 1 of the show. Then once Act 1 had started we added the new information and James overprinted the first sheet with a second colour. Then starting to add Act 2 over again, you start finding problems and opportunities that you couldn't really anticipate before. In fact we wanted to not anticipate on purpose. For Narrative Show we purposely repressed our intuition in order to let the process unfold in an unplanned way, with a supporting structure that would not override and make artificial a genuine narrative coming into being in the gallery. Odd to have to hold back on some skills to generate space to make work! Does this make sense to you at all?

3. Å:  
It does. The main problem is how to allow changes and evolution one didn't anticipate (which is the most exciting part!). We have witnessed similar processes which were actually "designed and curated" backwards with a result from which elements were withdrawn and then presented to the public. Yours seem adventurous and therefore exciting.

4.GW:  
Thanks. We are just trying to look hard and be observant for any opportunity to take advantage of possibility for evolving, visible and productive action. Once you get to a point of practicing intuition in a very aware manner everywhere you look you can find opportunities. Or that's how it feels! Perhaps it's just being open to possibilities, seeing alternative futures roll out in your imagination.

1. Å:  
Or  
After all, curation and graphic design can show similar traits. Sometimes, both are the facilitation of what is there and the "role" is to let the work speaks for itself, which could possibly be "working for", "be in the service of" in a valuable sense. I am just guessing but since work attracts work, the more it is "with", the less attractive the "for" becomes. This might be a dichotomy which is too simple. Our

work feels similar to your discussion with an artist about how a work from a previous show has become structural in the present one and WHY it cannot start from the white cube again. You chose the artists you show and maybe we try to chose our "clients". In concrete terms, we have in the past started our record label under the absurd pretense that we wanted to design record sleeves of music we'd chosen. More recently, our small publishing structure is equally a form of fraud whereby we justify approaching artists we want to work with by "being" a publishing house (but is truer) and telling them we already know the graphic designers for the job.

2. GW:

Yes absolutely. I am really attracted to this, a collaborator with numerous agendas and ambitions that can work alongside my own. In some ways this is what being a publishing house or a gallery is - an open invitation to combine energies and ideas, to test things out and experiment. I guess scale is going to be of importance to you within this set of conditions also. What do you see as the limits for your own development of publishing?

3. Å:

There are obvious limitations such as financial, time, distribution knowledge, working with structures which follow a specific hierarchy etc. More interesting to me is the relationship created via the making of a publication (but also true of projects in general). We have always refused politely requests from outside so far as we are busy and satisfied with the books we have planned for the next year or so. Christoph (Keller) often mentions the Roma guys claiming "Books make Friends". The development is to widen what we are allowed as amateur publisher. We are AGAINST the professionalisation of the project as we can only see failures, crying and mild despair as results of such ambitions. One of our latest book is Thomas More's Utopia but designed in a gothic version of the typeface More designed himself as an extra to his more than enjoyable critical-

fiction. We know it has no potential as a best seller but we want it to exist. Next is an unsolicited guide booklet for a museum which does not have an english version. They might not want it. We don't care. All this alongside a book about the work of fashion designer Peter Jensen with whom we have worked FOR in the conventions of graphic design providers for ten years.

Anyway I'd say I prefer starting or being part of a multitude of enterprises, associations, collectives than create an empire.

4. GW:

I feel the same as much as it may be possible to contribute to the multitude at scales from the unsolicited, short lived and local to the strategically commissioned, permanent and global! Artist/curator-/designer/publisher's add to all those options and I believe are able to make work in all those situations, through generating the space to operate on our own terms.

2. GW:

Another starter, i was wondering about your development of typography for projects - as a uniqueness, personality and context specific performance? How have you refined (or Not) this over time?

3. Å:

I think typefaces are narrative elements and we use them as such. If the one we are thinking of for a contextual reason doesn't exist, we have to draw it. Obviously, this interview should have one we agree on together.

4. GW:

We started at Eastside Projects looking at Herbert Bayer's universal typeface and we took the letter e against a dayglo background which converted the Bauhaus universalism into a vernacular acid house form. Recently James has been collaborating with and directing Radim Pesko on our new Specta typeface, of which there are many versions as Pesko adapts them for each show and James solicits new versions and then blends all the versions for particular moments. what



should the typeface for this be? One of comparative self promotion and reflexion with a historical connection to writings on the flaneur? What is a publishers typeface? A designers? A curators? An artists? A typographers? In that way of phrasing like so and so is an artists artist! "That typeface is such a typographers typeface!"

Look forward to the answer!!

How are we going to edit this one!! I'm thinking their are lines between different points as the questions have grown and expanded simultaneously apart like differences in species or tribes changing from different input until when you compare them they don't connect anymore, but in a good way, in that way of multitude/utopia of differences.

A continuation of a conversation (Multiple starts is always good) between **Åbake** and **Gavin Wade** that first appeared in Kaleidoscope Issue 12, 2011.

**ÅBÅKE** is Patrick Lacey, Kajsa Stahl, Benjamin Reichen and Maki Suzuki, a group of four graphic designers working in London since 2000.  
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