

# Books Like Smoke

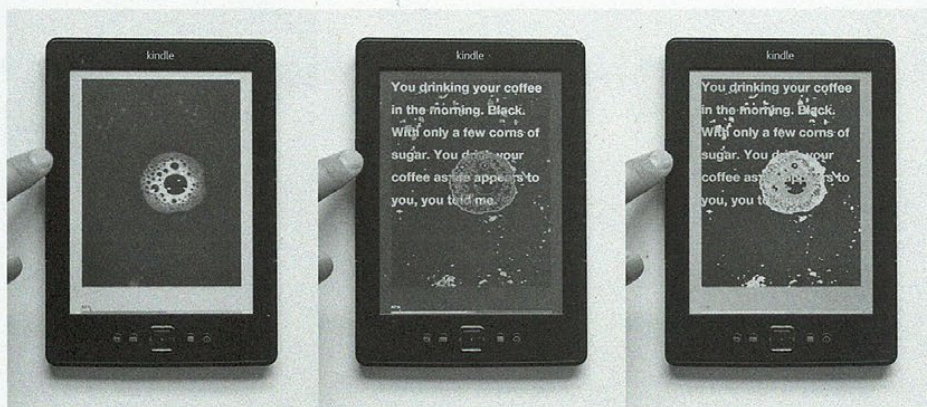
Marius Schwarz

Transform

Instead of writing about the future of books I wanted to share some experiences and insights I had with digital publishing in the past ten years. To me they feel like a glimpse into a possible future of book design.

When I moved to Amsterdam I initially only wanted to stay for one semester. To travel light instead with my collection of books I took a kindle reader with me. A pragmatic decision given that the device as such is quite ugly. But there was something intriguing about the way it turned its pages. The digital ink would first inverse to erase the previous page before it loaded the image of the next page. Eventually I started wondering if I could make something for this device that would have the same quality and beauty of some of the artists' and designer books I admired. I ended up writing a text about a couple breaking up over coffee (really corny but it served the purpose) that I intersected with close-up images of the bubbles that build on the surface of a cup of coffee. Through the flickering effect of the kindle, text and image merged in a filmlike way and supported the mood that was set in the text. It was just a quick experiment, but it did show me that there was potential in digital publications.

Speculation



Marius Schwarz, *Coffee*, ePub, 2013

After my studies I started to work for a design studio and we were working on printed books and magazines. Even though we could find spaces to interpret the artworks visually, our conceptual influence was limited and we were often sandwiched between institution, curator, publisher

Care



and printer. And for me as an assistant it meant mainly production work. I missed the experimental freedom and the collaborations on equal foot that felt natural at art school. Besides work I hoped design could be a language, form a personal cultural program, or at least a creative outlet.

This is when I started my publishing project EEEBOOKS. In the beginning I only had a vague idea what it would be. I wanted to work with befriended artists and wanted to see if we could create interesting digital formats to archive their work and keep it accessible to later audiences. This picture of a friend photographer served as my starting point. What I saw in it was a book that released its content in the form of smoke: content that overcame the confinements of the object and now existed as a free form. This is what my publications should also feel like. Not as a compromise, but as an opportunity.



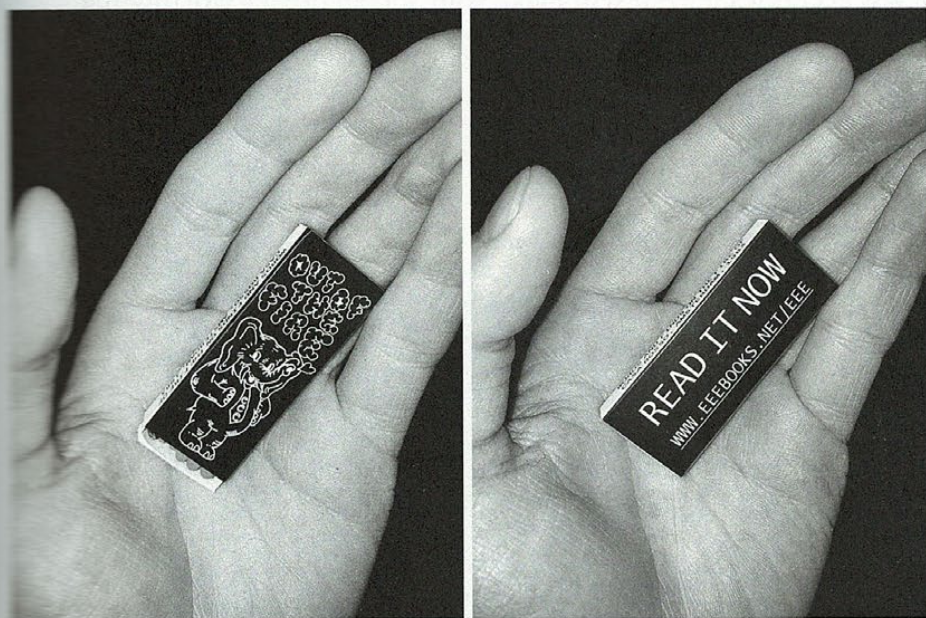
Caspar Sanger, *Greifloch*, 2016

One of the first projects I published was *OUT OF THE FIRE* by Jacob Darfelt about the fire in strip club Casa Rosso in 1983. It represents an urban legend in Amsterdam of which many versions circulate. Jacob talked to five witnesses whose recollections of the night partly overlap



and partly contradict. The publication displays these transcribed interviews word by word, animated in the speed of the original speech. This creates a reading that feels very close to spoken word, thus close to the gossipy character of the story. Something that a printed text could not have done. With some help I managed to code it as an ePub format that readers could download and read on their phones.

Now all I had to do was to make people aware of the publication and take care that it would not disappear in all the noise online—not that easy. I was looking for an object that I could hand out and that would serve as a gateway to the digital file. In the end I printed a matchbox set, much like the ones that Casa Rosso used to give away at their bar. But instead of ‘Do It Now!’, my matchbox said ‘Read It Now!’, and instead of the strip club’s phone number there was a link to the publication. These match boxes were handed out during a walk in the red-light district where an actor reenacted one of the witness accounts in the publication in front of the original site.



Jacob Darfezt, *OUT OF FIRE*, eebook, 2017

Many publications followed in different digital formats, all released with objects, and often during performative live events. With painter Charlott Weise I worked on a publication to accompany her solo show ‘He at Sea’ (Kunstfort Vijfhuizen, NL). It consisted of a cycle of



sketches that we recorded live while Charlott drew them on an iPad. These videos revealed her process, her timing and wit—aspects that the finished works don't show.

With musician Lukas Varady-Szabo I worked on a sound piece called *OBLIGATION: STUDIO* about the daily routines in our design studio. Listeners could interact with the elements of the composition, and therefore everybody would hear a slightly different version, just like the sounds in our studio that slightly vary every day. With photographer Caspar Sängner we created an interactive photobook called *GEGENWÄRTIGE ÜBERRESTE* that extended his pictures with a voice-over narrative, animations and sound. It premiered in a small cinema where viewers were led into the empty room with a wireless keyboard and could navigate through the scenes autonomously. The latest edition to the series is an animated 3D drawing by Severin Bunse that was released as a *SCREEENSAVER* with an accompanying flip book as a promotional object. Please go and download it on [www.eeebooks.net](http://www.eeebooks.net)—it will make your screen breaks worthwhile.



Severin Bunse, *SCREEENSAVER*, eeebook, 2022

All of these publications have in common that they are uniquely digital forms. They could not be shared and experienced in other ways. For such a long time, printed books have been *the* way to tell stories and luckily they won't disappear anytime soon. But next to them—today and in the future—there is a growing palette of possibilities how stories and artworks can be captured, conserved and retold. For us designers, this means that next to taking care of text, image and material in a book, choosing the fitting medium, adding sound, interaction, animation become part of the craft. Apart from designers we'll be collaborators, sparring partners, editors, writers, printers, directors, producers, sound technicians, stage designers, programmers, hosts, tour guides and whatever else we come up with. What an exciting time to make books!