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The Point of Publishing: A modular contemplation of publishing

Keywords

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Abstract

*This article introduces *The Point of Publishing*, a modular contemplation of publishing. *The Point of Publishing* was published on a WordPress template as short daily posts at <http://pointofpublishing.com> from 1 September to 29 November 2012. This article explores some of the stylistic and thematic origins of the text; provides an exemplary excerpt and creates new modular abridgements of the text; and gives details of the work's development, production and reception. Approaches to writing and publishing merge in the process of creation and dissemination, and are presented as structured creative output using a modular approach, which leads in turn to further adaptations, abridgements, and the possibility of new projects.*

The Point of Publishing: A modular contemplation of publishing

The Point of Publishing arose from the author's desire to look at publishing in a different, non-functional way. The objective was to unwrap ideas about publishing that did not belong in a recently completed project (a textbook, a career guide, an introduction to the whole process and business of publishing) aimed at people wanting to develop a career in publishing, whether in a university course or on the job. This book, *The Publishing Business: From p-Books to e-Books* by Smith, was published in the summer of 2012 and was composed of text, illustrations, diagrams, charts, case studies, review questions and other modular elements. It has been well received by people in publishing and university publishing courses and has been favourably reviewed in the specialist press.

The Point of Publishing is a very different kind of text aiming to provide a view of publishing that focuses not on the skills and knowledge needed to work in publishing, but on questions related to publishing's non-monetary value, its cultural and political context. The text is not driven by the need to explain functions and processes, or to provide an academic analysis of publishing 'issues'. It is a charivari, a turbulence within which new understandings of the point of publishing might emerge, and it benefits from a semi-structure that can be thought of as modular.

Ninety 'modules'

From early on in the development process the text was organized with an eye to a 'printable' structure of ten sections of ten pages each – nine module pages of text and a full-page chapter title. With prelims this fitted into a 104-page book – although there were to be no page numbers. Each module would stand on its own, contextualized by the section in which it found itself, and with further resonances within the other points. The ten sections within which the 90 points of publishing were developed were headed (and tagged) with short section titles of one or two words each:

1. the point
2. points of view
3. intent content
4. limen
5. public privacy
6. edit redact
7. permit restrict
8. inside out
9. access archive
- 10 totality integrity

This articulation of the content was proposed with intentional internal and external resonances, and can be presented unnumbered and unpunctuated as an extremely compressed textual version of the project.

the point points of view intent content limen public privacy edit redact permit restrict inside out access archive totality integrity

The naming and organization of the modules was an important part of the development process: the key words were the first elements to emerge and were rearranged several times over the initial planning phase. Once decided, they formed the basis on which ideas were placed within the sections and determined the grouping and order of the ten sets of modules.

Writing the modules within the sections was sometimes done in a linear way, but more often individual words and short drafts were placed and moved within and between sections (and within individual modules) throughout the period of writing. There were numerous drafts of each section (set of nine modules) and of the whole draft text – even when many pages were still blank space. The modular template was a determinant of the final structure and meaning, and the requirements of what emerged as a quite strict formal structure acted as a creative encouragement and source of discipline.

Only when the whole work was finished and laid out as if for print publication were the individual modules entered into the content management tool. Publication of the each module was then set for 12:00 GMT on 90 consecutive days starting on 1 September 2012. Each post was promoted automatically from the website via WordPress, e-mail and Twitter @PointofPublish. Content and style did not alter during the 90-day publication period, and there was no subsequent editing of the text, except for minor typographical and spelling errors. Comments were not allowed on the website and there was never any intention of interactivity with an audience.

Modules

The Point of Publishing is an exploration of publishing using language, metaphor and categorical juxtapositions, presenting glimpses of an alternative epistemology of publishing. The first module sets the scene for the work to come.

1.1

Upload, post, send, share: meaning publish, quite clearly. A point – the point – something private becomes something public, intentionally. The idea and another idea that someone might want to read it.

The final version or a variety of versions, changing, fluid: what's 'published' may be 'work in progress'. No matter: it seems new, original enough, at least in some details of arrangement.

Put it out there; wait to see what happens, or go direct to the next point of publishing.

All 90 posts can be read on The Point of Publishing website.

After the publication of these daily posts in September, October and November 2012, the entire text was subsequently made available from this and other websites as a complete pdf download (Smith 2012a).

Redaction and remoduling

A subsequent operation reduced the 90 modules to ten short (approximately 200 words) mashups that can be read in their own right as summary, commentary and creation. Just as the brief section headings can be read as an interrelated compression of the meaning that opens out in the full text, so this severe redaction of the finished sections, mostly to a few words from each module, provides the basis for new speculations that may not have been explicit in the 'original' text of the published project.

... final version or a variety of versions, changing, fluid: what's 'published' may be 'work in progress'. [1.1] ... buckling down to hardy tasks, making do, trafficking, trading, conveying valuable and mundane cargoes, consigned, delivered safe or slippery, extending manifold distance and memory. [1.2] ... the right seasoning of panache, bravado, cunning, devil-may-care. [1.3] ... a look-out for the emerging 'published', scanning the expanses for tell-tale points on the horizon. [1.4] Signals and semaphore, dit-dit-dash and flashing beams, sat-nav and sonar, public and private media, chat and chivvying: an interlacing of interest and intensity knits around needle points, patterning. [1.5] ... discover, rediscover, invest and reinvest with meaning, using charts and maps, wayside signs, name-plates, travellers' tales and mealtime gossip; wisdom of old voyagers and the boasting of youthful buccaneers. [1.6] Let's have more braggadocio, more bull, more flair and fandango. [1.7] ... rely on undercover agencies, pinning the known and possible on the bulletin board, interposing squints, lenses and prisms in the line of sight, moving the focal point, releasing kinetic features of a quasi-static medium. [1.8] Exegesis, structured discourse, is not the most helpful or enjoyable order of the day. Stop worrying if there is a point at all. [1.9]

Making points gives value to having a point of view. [2.1] Pushing home a cooked-up point, ignoring evidence, perverting known and unknown knowns, will only briefly blindside medium, message, messenger and messagee. [2.2] Yes is yes, no is no, or start again, revise, reconsider, resubmit. [2.3] ... socializing the publishing process, mixing our and other people's views in Babel or Bedlam. [2.4] ... frequent border skirmishes with marauders, reavers and moss-troopers. This is a place where custom and constraint cannot prevent a motley mix of selves. [2.5] Publishing is never instant, but often timely. 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 –

we have lift-off. [2.6] ... spread-out rusticals. Their stories do not intermingle as they might, but stack up, tottering, only to be brought together in few intimate moments or by ideology and hopefulness. [2.7] ... all turn into neat ideas in the publisher's fevered imagination. Looking like it's not a serious business. Daft really. [2.8] Each gathered set of data, each chosen quoddity, each twist or spin provides individuality to the piece ... Ducking stools, ordeal by water and by fire make the wordsmiths into witches, publishers into pharmakoi. Words are false, fickle and flirty, and that's a fact. [2.9]

... direction over the threshold, through the limen, out into the wide published world ... An overflowing, a tipping point, an overbalancing, a bursting that makes mockery of borders and membranes ... [3.1] Calamitous cliché of creativity, flowing out from inner space ... [3.2] Clicking and swiping canonical poetry, hyperlinkages offer seemingly unlimited interpretation, soon sterilize every dissection tool in the readers' laboratory. Total editing kills texts. [3.3] Looking clever isn't being clever. [3.4] ... publishing makes sterile ordering of bits and bobs come to life by flair and simple style. [3.5] ... convert a slush pile to slush, a dirty flood of melted precipitation, run-off, leaving muddy deposits, robbing silt and soil, making future forest growth and useful cropping more difficult. [3.6] The innards, useful for divination or augury, the guts of the book, vital organs ... the search for the brief moment between purity and putrefaction, the time when the publishing is more like livingness, vitality in the process of disintegration, a creation that is at once mature, magnificent and mure-hearted. [3.7] ... pages, chapters, illustrations are numbered ... like the multiple white-bound volumes of the genome. [3.8] ... all the worlds that words can give us, and some more that we may approach with want, wariness or wonder. [3.9]

... the liminal's added surfaces and depths are governed by a limenarch, the warden or governor of a port. [4.1] Ordered processes towards publication keep measured time, counting down to final revelations, borders crossed: points of no return ... [4.2] ... laden, battered down, it's out and away, breasting the waves, course determined by weather and tides, captained and crewed with skill and intent ... [4.3] ... springboard or trampoline that adds momentum to the athletic endeavour. [4.4] Up, up and away, then, after feeling gingerly, stepping over, keeping a horizon in view. [4.5] Paper turns brittle, yellow, crumbles, becomes dust. [4.6] ... boundaries of good taste, propriety, standards in private and public life are intrinsic to the publishing risk ... some words remain particularly diabolical, revolting or totally forbidden, with new ones banned from time to time. [4.7] ... past a sell-by, due to expire, out of date and out of time, defunct, archaic, old-fashioned, and historic ... [4.8] ... points on the edge where breakthroughs happen. Digging in is digging down, and digging down is for diamonds or death. [4.9]

Publishing reveals; like writing and reading, reviewing, recommending, sometimes wriggling nervously and uncomfortably between the public and the private spaces of life. [5.1] ... puts things into print, puts them out and then can withdraw ... [5.2] There is knowledge, depth of experience and old-fashioned nous

involved. [5.3] ... careless or malicious words ... a greater farrago of financial cost, febrile litigation and loss of face. Publish and be damned to penury is more like it now. [5.4] ... there's now just wariness of competition and adaptation, borrowing and the joys of cultural bouillabaisse. [5.5] Some locations, billed as legacy, are more to do with the storing than the stored. [5.6] Looking for something near to truth, there are gum-shoes on the case, mean streets to wander, filing cabinets full of bottles of booze. [5.7] ... membership of groups and networks is known to more than other members of the clubs we didn't choose to join. [5.8] ... stranded like a fakir on a bed of nails, calmly aware, resigned, getting peace out of pondering possibilities of physical and spiritual development. [5.9]

Red, blue, yellow and black ink and other coloured pencil suggest control, management of form and content, editing, proofing, approval. Say 'thank you' to the editor. [6.1] Redaction black-outs have become a narrative tool, a bar-code for censors. Read! Action! [6.2] Images manipulated by extended pointillism: dots, pixels, screened, digitized, still and moving, silent and voiced, extend creative text and illustration from printed page to almost everywhere. [6.3] Feeding on user-generated surveillance, antisocial media shouts the previously whispered. [6.4] An editorial architecture can open up a space for life, or create sterility like that of international airports, bridges, or opera houses [6.5] Adding notes in the margins, in pencil, on the screen, someone watches and reads the mixing of a reader's thought with that of the writer. [6.6] No telling anyone how to read a book, they say, but authors, editors and designers are some of those who guide and cajole the eye and mind ... [6.7] ... business of alarums and excursions, and of the immediacy possible between molecules. [6.8] ... drawing together cannons, articulating orthodoxies, cementing and challenging temporal and spiritual power, upholstering seats of state and empire, and priming charges in political flashpoints. [6.9]

... pockets in authors' and publishers' shrouds, inheritances based on previous generations' talents, declarations of stewardship and legacy. Permission is power. [7.1] Income derived ... not the same as benefit derived. [7.2] ... what risk it is that's worth the risk. [7.3] Everywhere simple rules apply: restrict authors, threaten publishers, punish readers ... the long list of bullet-pointed dead and damaged: S. Z., Y. S., R. A., A. P., L. X., W. N., V. N., and thousands more, semi-anonymized or unknown. [7.4] ... stark immutability of published work. [7.5] ... knowing the dangers of speaking out. Taking it down, making a 'not for publication' declaration ... pulping and clandestine disposal, burning books. [7.6] Fear and loathing, laughter and ridicule ... It is just us. [7.7] ... all jurisdictions, militias and vigilantes are empowered to cajole and cudgel, deny and denigrate, cripple and kill voices that are not approved. [7.8] If numbered well, the pages reassemble as a whole, or wholly new in a refreshing random pattern. [7.9]

Texts and images ... replicated, revised, renewed, replaced, rejected ... making all time shine with the virtue of the visible now. [8.1] Voices, manuscripts come out of drawers and onto shelves, move through

this or that checkpoint, take a journey across a physical or political boundary. [8.2] ... community of this daring, done in and for public spaces. [8.3] ... between-two-languages state where new meaning makes tensions irresolvable ... [8.4] ... alembicated processes solidify results to no purpose. [8.5] ... done with readings, shows, performances, that are now part of the dipping in, dipping out, reaching near to saturation point. [8.6] Relevance can be reviled, revered, rescued. [8.7] Grid lines, points of intersection and reference, starting points: topography, cartography, map and aerial vision provide palimpsests of meaning, images, locations, human effects, that tell a story in space and time, showing changes of nature, use and ownership, overwritten by digital records. Publishing is not everything they say it is. [8.8] Browse there, buy here, store in another place, keep, dispose, admit or deny, ship from islands and enclaves, obscure or advantageous tax points. [8.9]

... in the mind, memoranda, handwritten between the covers of a journal, pecked out on a small keyboard or printed in a public volume. [9.1] ... connected with another time and place, used for this time and place, underpinning a time and place that does not and never will exist. [9.2] Monkish devotion to decoration and reproduction is displaced by monkeyish typing, terabyte upon terabyte creating a tsunami of foaming danger. [9.3] The archive is everywhere, and everywhere is archival ... discarded and dismembered life clog its shallows and its depths. [9.4] ... we do not trust what we read and only half remember. We do not trust ourselves. [9.5] ... self-betterment and canonical trending. [9.6] ... humming bunkers in the distant wastes: the cloud where there is often not a cloud in sight, except the memory of the mushrooming missiles the silos once sheathed. [9.7] ... points of congruence and communication. ... many meeting points: book fairs, literary events, seminars, workshops ... come together for negotiation, discussion, public reading, private browsing, display of publications and people. Cities are where they do it. [9.8] One topic is hidden under each agenda: worry and confusion, lack of conviction and sense of purpose [9.9]

Total publishing is not an option. [10.1] How much stuff publishing uses every day. [10.2] ... wizarding up a golden prize ... [10.3] People must be grafted into the heart of publishing and toads kept out of the driving seat and the middle of the road. [10.4] ... the indignant and determined conviction of everyone around, not just the long stop of regulation. [10.5] Publishing is creativity, originality, industry, conviction: a conviction that is properly whole, complete, pure, entire and chaste ... Deconstruct the concatenation of the acceptable. Make anything, read anything. Trust writers; value their oddities; defend fecklessness and disdain for fearful thoughts. [10.6] Buying local, reading global, taking opportunities to taste and savour, makes reading central to a grounded cosmopolitanism. [10.7] But the dark side must be nurtured ... journals under pillows, printing press and paper concealed in barns and sewers, pockets full of ideas, memory sticks in secret places, passed from hand to hand and self-destructing if you choose not to accept the mission. [10.8] Publishing looks after its tools ... ordinate

what publishing is for, using words because they are good words. Another word: punctatim. The point of publishing has one final point. [10.9]

The word 'point' and words deriving from the same root occur on numerous occasions in the full text, reflecting the way in which one word can act as a starting point for different types of enquiry into the nature of a cultural activity, and, while this project specifically eschewed multilingual references, there would be different linguistic triggers in other languages.

point – point of publishing – point of departure – point of reception – point of no return – assembly points – points on the horizon – point of reference – needle points – pointed magic hat – disappointment – focal point – unique selling points – aiming points – making points – point of view – debating points – tipping point – to a point – focus point – still point – point-to-point – vantage point – points of the compass – punctuation – punctiliousness – pointillism – pointing – punctuating – flashpoints – bullet-pointed – point of law – reference point – pointed comment – point sizes – checkpoint – crossing points – saturation point – points of intersection – starting points – counterpoint – point of sale – price points – decimal points – tax points – point and click – point blank – shortest distance between two points – pointless exercise – point of precipitation – points of congruence – meeting points – points mean prizes – point of weakness – punctatim – final point.

This wordlist provides an additional way into the text, and offers another invitation to rewrite it on a differently aligned modular template.

The extracts and new versions of the text presented here demonstrate perhaps that the conscious construction (book-like format, length of modules, section headings) and subsequent deconstruction (word lists, redacted mashups) of this modular text present opportunities to both the author and reader to create new structures and meaning from even the simplest of texts and their components.

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Contributor details

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Scene is dedicated to a critical examination of space and scenic production. Central to this journal is the understanding that the designer's contribution to a production involves much more than providing a visual background. *Scene* welcomes new critical frameworks for the scholarship of creating a scene and invites contributions which explore all aspects of design contexts for live and recorded performance – particularly those which pay attention to the shaping of artistic vision, aesthetic sophistication, critical thinking and craft.

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