

**Interview with David Senior and Sarah Hamerman
Museum of Modern Art Library
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MoMA: “Web-to-print” artists' books and zines are only a small subset of what we can call digital artists' publishing, alongside social media accounts, blogs, ebooks, etc. Why focus specifically on this aspect, and what do these publications indicate about our current media environment?

Paul Soulellis: It's impossible to work as an artist today without some relation to the internet as a persistent condition that spills over into so-called “real life.” I'm particularly interested in artists who are asking questions about materiality in this context. How does network culture manifest in unexpected forms and places, as we negotiate new ways of constructing identity and presenting work? Serious discourse — once reserved for real-time conversation, or publishing to paper, is now possible within the context of an instagram comment or a facebook group. Similarly, artists who work with digital content are reversing expectations and discovering more and more ways to “make public” and circulate their work within the conditions of the gallery space, the printed page and other physical spaces. I believe we're now straddling these different spaces in an almost impossible — yet highly satisfying — way, as Duchamp describes his concept of the *infrathin*. He wrote that the infrathin is an “indifferent difference” — “the immeasurable gap between two things as they transition or pass into one another.” If materiality, presence and aura are now fluid ideas, then why not celebrate network culture in multiple forms and versions? It's tempting to see the printed book or zine as making a claim for some kind of authentic presence, with its privileging of the tactile, but by making new versions of digital, network-based material we're actually celebrating a much more slippery condition — the infrathin space between things as they multiply and exist in new, simultaneous dimensions.

MoMA: You indicated “grabbing,” “hunting,” and “performing” as some of the ways that artists are working with the mass of digital information. Are there any other terms you might add to this list? How are these behaviors evolving with new technologies?

PS: Yes, those are typical appropriation techniques, and I wrote about them in 2013 because I was searching for language to describe the kinds of artists and works I was discovering through [Library of the Printed Web](#). Since then, I've realized that what these terms describe is really no different from how a collage artist might have worked in 1913. I do believe there are other strategies that are more directly relevant to today's *infrathin* condition, like versioning, making public and “[performing publishing](#).” I also think transduction is an interesting concept to consider — in evolutionary biology, it's the passing of DNA from one species to another as they evolve. As we think about artists who pass their work between dimensions or states, simultaneously copying, versioning, making physical and then digital and then physical again (I'm thinking specifically about artists like Artie Vierkant and Oliver Laric but almost anyone who makes web-to-print works is doing this), transduction is at play. What is lost or gained as works straddle

and travel between these different conditions? I'm also thinking about Hito Steyerl's "In Defense of the Poor Image," and Silvio Lorusso's similarly titled "In Defense of Poor Media."

MoMA: A lot of people describe the renaissance in artists' books (and records, tapes, etc) as "nostalgia" for the physical thing but I don't think that quite captures it... Are artists using print because it's more tactile? Because it's a stable and archival way to present information? Because they are interested in its design features?

PS: All of those ideas are at play, like tactility, speed of consumption and the pleasures of physical archives. But there's another thing at work, and while it's not a new idea, it is happening in new ways: community. The exchange and distribution of these physical formats is happening in places like Printed Matter, and in the explosion of art book fairs and other events like Internet Yami-Ichi, where people are enjoying the power of face-to-face contact and a supportive, real-time environment. I don't think these places are popular because they're replacing digital networks or social media in any way; rather, they're being celebrated as alternative ways to extend networks and social relations into physical space. If anything, digital networks are directly fueling this real-time renaissance by enabling people to discover (and then broadcast) new communities. These are places where inclusivity and diversity is encouraged. These are artist-controlled places. These are self-publishing spaces.

MoMA: Now that technologies like Adobe Creative Cloud, Google Docs, etc are so common, we might say that **all books are web-to-print. To me these artworks are distinct because they seem to bring the platforms and interfaces to the forefront... so is this a critical practice?**

PS: I've had this thought too, that all books are now web-to-print. To some extent, this is true. But I think we need to look at **artistic intent** vs **production** to identify some critical differences. Artists who are aware and actively playing with the infrathin condition, or even reacting to it (if they're less aware), are creating works that have some kind of critical perspective built in (maybe by nature of participating in it?). This might not always be obvious, but that's where my role as curator/collector with Library of the Printed Web steps in (or yours or any curator's). By bringing the works together, and giving them some context, discourse is created.

I think "platform poetics" is a good way to put it (borrowing the term from [Rachel Ossip](#)). Using existing platforms and making those interfaces visible is a way to highlight the hyper-mediating condition that we have created for ourselves. These publishing platforms and communication interfaces are impossible to avoid when constructing one's identity as a citizen of network culture. Library of the Printed Web celebrates the artists who recognize this and actively engage with this condition in their work.

MoMA: How would you describe the relationship between Library of Printed Web, the website, and Printed Web, the publication? They are similar, yet not exactly copies of one another.

PS: Library of the Printed Web continues to be a physical archive of printout material that I collect. Most of the work is contributed by artists, or found by me online or at art book fairs. It reflects my own curatorial thesis and it's a way for me to investigate the questions that you're bringing up here. I developed Printedweb.org recently as a place to park the entire project, but the Library of the Printed Web [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com/libraryoftheprintedweb) continues to be relevant, essential even — it functions as both an index of the collection (the catalogue), and as a way to communicate the collection in public, since my ability to do so physically is limited (although, I do show the physical collection whenever I can).

Printed Web, as a serial publication, is very different. It's a place to feature new work from some of these artists, and to set it in motion. Each issue is a group show (after Seth Siegelaub). By circulating this work myself, I can enact various publishing experiments, including print-on-demand as an intentional, performative artistic practice, and how versioning enables published works to occupy different positions, depending on how it's dispersed. Printed Web #3 was an open call, and I received works from 150 artists. The beautiful challenge there was how to make this work circulate in accessible ways. Should some of it be free? Can a print-on-demand fabric PDF be a publication? Can a GIF be a publication? Is poor media (media that privileges circulation and accessibility over quality) an appropriate way to distribute network culture in physical space?

The Printed Web project is my own publishing as an artistic practice.

Printed Web 4, a commission by Charlotte Cotton at International Center of Photography, will feature the work of nine artists in a print-on-demand newsprint publication, to be installed at ICP's new exhibition space at 250 Bowery in June. For the first time, the issue will have a theme, borrowing from Charlotte's title for the inaugural show, "Public, Private, Secret." ICP is also commissioning a text by [Michael Connor](#) to appear in the issue.