

Dissolution 1999-2017 2017, Aarhus Konsthall

– publication & Exhibition – a bibliography in the book-serie Den store nordiske registrant over kunstnerbøger og andre kunstrelaterede trykte sager, published by Antipyrine & *[asterisk]

”Because of the new technology, which was no longer compatible with older technology, one day my digital works of art ceased to function. My older publications that took form as programs and net art became books and I trained myself as a bookbinder. I combined an old craft with contemporary techniques and encoding.” This is how Olle Essvik explains the transformation of his art from digital dissolution to the material, from disc to book. This exhibition will display publications from the period 1999 – 2016 together with books published by Rojal. A retrospective exhibition based on dissolutions, publications in the form of books and digital objects.



Locus Bookus (Introduction to)

What I'm trying to pick out with this term [dispositive] is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions, in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.”

– Michel Foucault “The Confession of the Flesh” (1977)

The subject of this registrant is the Swedish artist Olle Essvik, who in his works transfers and connects traditional analogue crafts like bookbinding and woodworking to digital programming and code. In addition to Essvik's own works, the registrant contains a supplementary index of the publications from Rojal, a small publishing company, run by Essvik together with the artist and translator Joel Nordqvist. As often when it comes to artist run publishing, Rojal's activities are hard to separate from the editors' own artistic practice. The publishing company is a work in progress and an artistic strategy, producing hand bound books in editions from 1 to 300 copies.

In addition to books this registrant will include multiples, calendars, CD's, computer discs, PDF's for download, codes, home pages, scans, photocopies and 3D-printing. Together, all these items form a dispositive of

books and reading, dealing with how the analogue book, as well as its digital versions and deposits, is a way of doing, thinking, learning, and experiencing.

Today the book is again bursting its bounds, becoming a point of mediation, swallowing other media systems and forms of knowledge while fragmenting and migrating into new forms.

– Mathew Fuller “Nobody knows what a book is any more” (2017)



As McLuhan observed back in the 60's, media history is not linear. New media contain old media, the digital and the analogue are each others prerequisites. It is often through overlaps, (re)connections and short circuits that we understand, and most radically use, and perceive the characteristics of different media. For Olle Essvik, this exploration is a constant part of the works, which is rarely expressed through one medium only, but often through a combination of digital code and analogue craft [snr-oe oox]. The process often takes a quite prominent place, whether it is the hand shaping physical material or the programming of digital code – resulting in objects/codes of a descriptive character, relatively didactic tools, generally with an vague purpose, a work to be continued by the reciever. Several of the works are machines or games [snr-oe oox], meant to



be activated, and the books are often manuals [snr-oe oox] for actions to be carried out – both artworks and tools. A central concept of the 60's thinking on the artists' book was democratization, the book as an exhibition, cheap and easy to produce and distribute, and thus an act of resistance to the art institutions. In a way Essvik, with his limited editions and multiples, breaks with this tradition, but at the same time he offers a radical renegotiation of this strategy through his reading machine dispositive, often with accessibility and lucidity as a democratic application. A glimpse into the devices that shape our every day lives. In one of his most recent works, *Enemies of Books* [snr-oe oox], he explicitly steps forward as a media archaeologist, working to break down the border between conceptual poetry and artists' books. The book consists of two parts: 1) reproduction of *The Enemies of Books* (1881), by the English author William Blades, (among the enemies listed are fire, water, dust, book worms, collectors and book binders); 2) a documentation of the reproduction process, along with all the meta data needed for the reader to undertake the same operation:

Enemies of Books, in Essvik's DIY-operation, is at the same time a digital book dispositive, comfortably merging book historical contexts, technologies and media practices as well as bibliographic systems. A subtle, experimental approach, that avoids the old speculation on the "death of the book". Essvik's library represents a temporally and spatially complex network of machines and expressions, one that reflects basic everyday experiences – of time, recurrences, coincidences, interactions, dependence, sleep, transience – his own, and those of our present times. Transience in particular is a central aspect to the chaos of digital preservation. To be more precise, several of Essvik's digital codes no longer work. They collapse as the simple result of hard- and software incompatibilities. Remaining are the books, several of which, in Essvik's case, contain digital code – as documents without a player – a compost for book worms and digital worms alike, if the sediments become difficult to distinguish for the media archaeologists of the future.