

### **What Is Publication Studio?**

A talk for Guelph, Ontario, by Matthew Stadler

Three years ago I was broke, which is to say middle-class broke, meaning I had a house to live in and lots of valuable stuff but no job, less than \$800, debts well beyond that and a kid to raise. I am a writer, so I'm used to this kind of thing. And I live in Portland, Oregon, where middle-class broke is still a viable and common part of the economy. For me, this round of broke (I had been there before) looked less like disaster and more like a typically uncertain Portland summer.

There are so many kinds of broke, and one great tragedy of the last ten years, in the U.S. anyway, is the disappearance of what I call middle-class broke. The perils of low savings or material want have become a one-way street towards permanent debt and dispossession. Less so in Canada, but the economic collapse, and the cruelty that has accompanied it, are worldwide. People don't swing back up so much any more. But I didn't know that then, and it was summer, my kid was happy, and my relative poverty and joblessness felt like a kind of freedom.

Portland has always had high unemployment, markedly higher than nearby cities like Seattle or Vancouver, B.C. And Oregon's economy is closer to Mississippi's, the poster child for American poverty, than it is to, say, California's. Chronically high unemployment, low capitalization, very few big companies, anemic investment in government or social services. People have done things broke there for a long time.

At least a third of my friends were unemployed, including a smart young woman named Patricia No. The first daughter of immigrant Koreans, Patricia was raised as a piano prodigy in Rochester, NY. But she gave up music and became a writer after studying with poets Anne Lauterbach and Robert Kelly at Bard College. In 2007, she moved to Portland and got a job assisting an architect named Brad Clopefil. Then she lost the job when Brad's firm had to downsize. For six months Patricia looked for work in Portland, wanting to stay despite the grim prospects. We crossed paths a lot and talked about writing, projects that might be fun, little ways to make a little money, the whole micro-economy of unemployed writers and artists.

What happens when large numbers of skilled, creative people get tossed out of the regular economy? This is a long-standing reality in the arts. Most artists are never paid, and most paid artists are only sometimes working. Which means that maybe the arts offer us a kind of test case for broader changes that are now afoot.

Patricia and I met often, enjoying the bounty of Portland summer, berries growing everywhere, good, cheap produce, free time and sunshine. We talked about writers we admire and about their work, a lot of it unpublished. Some of the best writing is not commercial enough to ever get published. We read it when friends send a manuscript or a stranger makes a 'zine or their own small, hand-made book. This work circulates, but no money moves. We read each other and talk while everyone waits for the big break when a real publisher will see the light and someone will finally make money from art.

I've been around the block in publishing, working at every level, and a lot of the unpublished work I see is from well-known writers. Even the best-known writers produce high-quality work that can't clear the bar of commercial publishing. Their editors can't calculate the audience, the gamble on a print run can't be made and either the work is lost—i.e. "revised" into commercial viability—or else it circulates in the samizdat world of manuscripts passed hand to hand.

Patricia and I saw several superb novels that had been rejected by dozens of commercial publishers. We saw volumes of first-rate poetry that, naturally, had no publisher. Broke, unemployed, it seemed silly to spend our idle time lamenting this bad luck. And so, instead, we found the machinery necessary to make sturdy, perfect-bound books one at a time, contacted the writers we admired (many of them already friends) and said, "We love your work—we want to publish it."

"Publish" meant we would make the books available in eBook and softcover form to anyone interested in buying them. And, crucially, we would talk about it. We'd attend to what I call the social life of the book, doing anything we could to help expand the circle of readers, and therefore buyers, of the work. We had time, our taste, passion and the sometimes puzzled co-operation of a few talented writers. The only things we lacked were money and any knowledge of business.

The machines that made this possible were rugged, hand-operated binders, cutters and a digital printer old enough to be cheap on eBay. They cost me my savings and about \$500 more, but in July that year, my son and I went to New York, where the owner of this machinery was eager to get rid of it, and we rolled it out the door and drove the whole rig back across the country to Portland.

In September 2009, Patricia and I published our first book. It was a catalogue for an art show by Roy McMakin and Jeffrey Mitchell, two Seattle artists we

knew and admired. Roy and Jeffrey had a show in Portland that month and wanted a catalogue, but no one had done anything about it until we e-mailed them two weeks before the opening. The pages were printed at a friend's digital shop, the covers were recycled manila file folders, and the title and spine were marked using a cheap hand stamp with interchangeable rubber type, a Trodat Printy. We worked hard, very hard, and made ten copies of the book in time for the opening. We sold them all. It was fun and simple and direct. "So far so good," we said to each other.

Then we published a novel by Lawrence Rinder, a funny novel called *Revenge of the Decorated Pigs* about the high-stakes world of artists, collectors and museum curators, Larry's profession. In fact, he curated the famous Whitney Museum Biennial in 2002. Larry had amazing insights and a very funny story to tell. We made one copy of his book and our friend Mike Merrill bought it. With the profits we made two more copies. Our friend Philip Iosca bought one and a stranger bought the other. And so on and so on. We simply made more copies of the book and kept talking about it. That's all we knew how to do.

Our ignorance and our poverty turned out to be our best resources. We learned about the machines. We became very skilled book-makers. But we literally did not know how to do a professional job of publishing. We had no understanding of our audience, no knowledge of the market, no sales strategies, nor any tools for carrying such things out. We only knew how to make books and how to speak about what we loved. Our poverty made the interaction matter. We could only continue if the people we talked to also came to value the work.

The machines we found can produce only one book at a time, and that was crucial. In traditional publishing, you've got to make many books, and everything begins with a cataclysmic and expensive moment called the launch, when a book has been produced in large numbers, shipped to bookstores or other points of delivery and suddenly is made available to the public. Its life, after this launch, is a long, slow tale of pushing piles of books out to readers and making back the investment that first brought the book to life. Or losing that investment. Most commercial books have a three- or four-month shelf life before they either succeed or are pushed off shelves by the next wave of new releases and swiftly disappear.

Our machines make sturdy, perfect-bound books (what we all know as a regular softcover book) one at a time, by hand. So they never disappear; we just make another as needed. It takes about ten or fifteen minutes and costs \$4 or \$5. We spend that small amount each time there's a new buyer. It's

called print on demand or POD. You walk into our storefront and say you'd like a certain book, we make it and then hand it to you in exchange for money. It's more like a bakery or a corner café than it is like a traditional bookstore, full to the rafters with stacked books, old and new, awaiting readers or a home.

The problem we now woke up to every day was, "How can we make the books we love and sell them to people?" There were no other parts to the equation—no hidden investors, no long-term strategies, no warehouses, no debts to manage, no distant goals. There were only the books we made each day and the people who might buy them. This became the way we lived. It became our occupation.

Here is one lasting meaning of the Occupy movement: the occupation that is more than a temporary protest, that is one's occupation, a permanent way to live—our occupation. Not a side project, not the pleasures of spare time but the working hours of every day.

What relationships and conversations comprise your work? What is your occupation? We made ours writing, reading and the books we love, and the task of sharing those things with others.

It wasn't much easier living this way than living broke. The money that came in—\$1,000 the first month, a few thousand in the months after, today about \$10,000 each month—was not life-changing. But it was always enough for us to know this was our occupation, the work of the day—how to make audiences for books we love. We never shifted our problems to, say, courting investors or pursuing commercial strategies (whatever those might be). Books, reading and writing are what we do.

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A long-standing division in the arts puts the conduct of artistic work on one end—subjective, idiosyncratic, often proudly misfit—and career or economic reality on the other. This second pole, the economic structures that move money around art, is driven deep into the ground as an intractable thing, rigid, unforgiving, inarguable. It is the "real publisher" most writers spend their time waiting for. We venerate that economy with the title of "real" and artists who don't bow to it are alternately ridiculed or praised as being unrealistic, impractical, indifferent or generally unconcerned by not having a career.

This is a false distinction. It fatally limits the impact of artistic imagination by making us think we cannot act as artists and transform economies. The lie tells us that art cannot directly address the movement of money within artistic practice, that to do so is to step outside of our work as artists. There are the two separate poles, the working artist is told—art and business—and to go completely towards either one will fatally compromise our engagement with the other. Or so the myth goes.

This divide is old news. The chasm was probably broadest in the 19th and early 20th centuries when the aura of artistic genius became tightly bound up with a romantic image of poverty and material want. Mammon was the great soul-destroying enemy of the artist. But in the late 20th and 21st centuries we've seen this myth undone by artists and writers such as Marcel Duchamp, Anne Focke, Iain and Ingrid Baxter with N.E. Thing Co. and many others. Their strategies are widely various, but these artists and writers put the economy of art production and its circulation solidly within the scope of their agency as artists. The market is an element of their artistic practice. They make business choices as art.

A short list of such projects—most of them indebted to Duchamp—turns out to be a rather long list indeed. It includes N.E. Thing Co., the seminal early 1960s project of Vancouver's Iain and Ingrid Baxter; ArtMark, the activist design company that led to the Yes Men; Claes Oldenburg's "store"; the Bruce High Quality Foundation; and Bernadette Corporation. While many of these businesses are carried out with a knowing wink of irony that allows their practitioners to protect their bona fides as real artists, the more interesting ones risk appearing entirely ignorant of all professional standards, artistic or business, operating idiosyncratically outside any metrics of either so-called good art or smart business.

Among these I would count Anne Focke, whose art is conducted within the form of art administration and a professional consultancy that does not bill itself as art, and Bernard Cache, the French mathematician and designer whose company, Objectile, creates unique pieces of furniture via mathematical equations that direct factory assembly lines to shift their output, one by one by one. In the guise of being a furniture company, Cache, a doctoral student with Giles Deleuze, has done some of the most far-reaching work in math and formalism.

The actions of these artists are typically read as strategic assaults or interventions in the business of art, effectively pulling apart the unity they first proposed by working the way they do. The metaphor of two warring camps launching insurgencies resurrects the divide. Artistic imperatives and

insights get pushed back onto one side of a gap across which tactical forays are lobbed against the other side—business, which art-lovers pathologically maintain is the other, the enemy against which art labours. Artists like Duchamp become spies or double agents rather than simply being the new unity that lives without the conflict or the myth of a division.

Ironically, our broad cultural response to this evolution—new economies shaped by the intelligence of artists—is always to refuse it, to venerate the artist's work by restoring the divide and believing still in the separation of art and business.

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Patricia No and I had set up shop in a borrowed downtown storefront owned by sympathetic friends. They used it for events, but events never started before lunch, so we ran our shop there from 6 a.m. to noon every day. Arriving in the pre-dawn to fire up the printer, heat the glue and ready the binder, we were like neighbourhood bakers. The city came to life around us while the hot glue melted and paper stacks churned out of the machine. The smell of fresh books filled the storefront by the time the first trickle of coffee-toting drop-ins came by.

Our books were very plain. We bound them in recycled file folders. The title and author were rubber-stamped on the front and the date of production was stamped on the spine. Because we make our books on demand, there were only ever four or five of them in the shop, sitting face up at the end of a long table where we worked. Numerous times in the first few months, intrigued young twenty-somethings (Portland abounds in them) would scrutinize our few, very plain books, watch our earnest working of the wonky machinery and ask, "Is this a performance art piece?"

"No," we'd reply, "it's a business." But it was a business based on nothing beyond our passions as readers and writers. Unequipped for anything else, we did business exactly the way we lived as readers and writers. The work was intense and open-ended, driven by pleasure. We published whatever we loved and never considered anything else. It didn't matter if only one person or two or ten or a hundred liked a book. We made however many were needed. And, making one book at a time, on demand, we always profited.

It was an odd kind of business, like slow food but for books. Somehow it made sense to people. I believe our slowness and focus (some might call it ignorance) clicked with people. Our work emerged in the midst of some sort of broader slowdown. Maybe we're exhausted by shopping? The sight of a

storefront empty of everything except a few plain books, and two people working very hard to make more, stood out, a relief amidst the hectoring come-ons of retail. Our store was the opposite of retail. Nearly empty, no colour, only the noise of production, no special offers or enticements. We were friendly—very friendly—but all we ever talked about was books and the writers we loved. We'd become stewards of our own passions. If someone wanted what we made, wonderful. They paid us good money for it, on average \$20 a book. We valued our labour and the work of the writers, and we charged enough to pay everyone for the work they'd done.

Books are what we know. We grew up with them and know how they move and find new readers. But we also wanted the work to reach people who don't buy books or were too distant to get them, and so from the start we made all our books also as eBooks and offered them for sale online. We even posted them for free on something we call our free reading commons, a site where anyone can read any of our books (in the same page layout and format as the printed book), and where they can annotate and comment in the margins. It's the digital equivalent of the margin notes found in all our most dearly beloved bound books at home. Readers in the free reading commons can also see and reply to annotations others have made. It's a busy place, and an essential part of what we call publication—the creation of new publics.

The first hundred or so books we made were mostly sold to friends. Friends loaned us the storefront. Friends came by to help, curious about the machines. Friends attended parties we held for our writers or talked to others about our books. The freedom of “middle-class broke” rests on a foundation of friends and resources that are substantial, even if they add up to zero dollars. Our experience so far—there are now six Publication Studios in different North American cities and one in Bordeaux, France—suggests these resources exist in any community, as they do in ours. But we systematically devalue them by measuring our poverty against someone else's financial wealth. We're severed from the resource of friends and community by the dissolving actions of markets and an endemic fear of strangers. Where politics or markets have not actively disabled them, the abundant resource of friends and neighbours naturally flows towards ventures like ours.

The poet Richard Jensen calls the business of publishing a “stage dive” into the waiting arms of those who love literature. This is precisely what we experienced. Our high level of risk compelled the support of an interested public. This public, also known as a market, could either catch us—and we'd

float magically in a sea of supporters—or part and leave us in a broken heap on the floor.

I'm not sure we understood this at any conscious level, but everything conspired to make us bold, foolish and trusting—everything: the times, our circumstances, the sheer giddiness of deciding to invest all we had in books we loved. And we found that others responded to our risk with excitement and an equally bold investment of their time, attention and money in the books we made.

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What are “the times,” these broader changes that form the sea on which our project floats? They are equally the financial crisis that, in the Fall of 2008, interrupted the smooth ascent of global neo-liberalism—that is, the collapse of major banks and contraction of financial investment, government programs and multinational corporate growth that has thrown so many people out of the old economy—and the proliferation of locally scaled, globally connected, micro-economies and political alliances that have been vividly symbolized by the recent Occupy movement. These form a background hum, audible everywhere, that harmonizes with the particular pattern of our work.

These broader changes, or the times, or the big picture, are a kind of myth-making that is essential for risky, imagination-based projects such as publishing or political activism. Our efforts are sustained and gain strength when we link them to bigger things: stories, movements, history. As much or more than money, these resources can keep risky ventures afloat, buoyant on uncertain seas, as they are blown towards more friendly shores.

Our work has been helped enormously by the writings of Saskia Sassen, a Dutch-born sociologist who first gained notoriety for coining the term “the global city” in her 1991 book of the same name. This is what she called cities such as New York, London or Tokyo, which had become such powerful nodes of global finance they began to float free of the nations of which they happened to be part. They began to function almost autonomously as actors on a global stage, more akin to each other than to other cities in the nations to which they belonged.

Sassen tracks the ways that power organizes itself and reconfigures when the old container of the nation changes and, as she puts it, “breaks open.” Where nations once determined the political rights and fates of citizens, today huge sectors of the economy float free of their jurisdiction. Many have simply been

thrown out of the system. The vast, migrant population of poor sans papiers, or illegal immigrants, who perform the most basic labour in every developed nation in the world, lives largely outside of national laws. At the other end of the spectrum, wealthy corporations mitigate the high costs of national taxes and business restrictions by creating legal frameworks that let them float free of national claims. Offshore or multinational corporations are able, at least in part, to elude the net of national laws.

The link to our tiny, uncapitalized business is surprising but solid. We love literature. Our only work is to make books and find readers. Markets might be shaped by nations but readerships less so. The readers of books—and, even more profoundly, the physical passage of books through the world, passing from one reader to the next, hand to hand—only correlates incidentally to nations. Making the books that matter to us and a dispersed collectivity of fellow travellers, we engage a global audience that finds our work regardless of national borders, or they find it in the de-territorialized space of the Internet. Working this way, we are a perfect example of what Sassen has termed (in *Territory, Authority, Rights*, her most recent book) a “multi-scalar assemblage.” This concept is a key to future prosperity and justice.

A multi-scalar assemblage is any group of people that acts at every scale, from the intimately local to the global, in the course of their work together. It could be as deliberate and overwhelming as a huge company like Coca-Cola pursuing global distribution through vast networks that reach down to the tiniest corner groceries of every city in nearly every country of the world, or as short term and tactical as survivors of a tsunami trying to get services to their villages, regardless of which nations they happen to be a part. Doctors without Borders/Médecins sans frontières is a multi-scalar assemblage. The punk-rock musicians who tour Europe selling vinyl records they carry with them are a multi-scalar assemblage. The Internet-savvy neighbours of a Rio favela who hook up online with the working-class activists of Buenos Aires are a multi-scalar assemblage. The Zapatistas are a multi-scalar assemblage.

What is most interesting and most potent about these groups is their ability to operate with the narrowest and most local of interests and yet have agency on a global scale. Money is not the key. Their potency rests in their focus, the enduring intensity of their commitment. Their focus and its intensity resonate. Work that means a lot locally, at a one-to-one level, will travel far and have relevance to others everywhere. So, paradoxically, a narrow, local focus is the key to global reach and relevance for a multi-scalar assemblage. There is no scaling up except by scaling right back down to the most immediate and personal needs.

We can probably understand this best if we think about our own memories of travel. What registers clearly and makes an impression, the further we go from home, are not the calculated accommodations of, say, McDonald's tweaking its burgers and salads to address French or African tastes. What registers and leaves an enduring solidarity in us is the hyper-local production of a French person or an African making what they love and know well for a local clientele that understands and values it. That's food we remember. It echoes our own and leaves its mark.

In the political realm, what helps the solidarity of a water-rights group in Brazil is not the acknowledgement of its needs by a distant authority like UNESCO—especially now that top-down aid groups like UNESCO are starved of resources and are both less able and less nimble in the face of disaster. What matters more is finding sympathetic groups with the same needs, the same urgency and meanings, who can act as allies. A clear articulation of local needs powers the emergence of multi-scalar assemblages that can move swiftly, virally, horizontally to change the globe.

What all these group have in common is a paradoxical marriage of low-tech, labour-intensive tools—the favella's hoses and barrels to carry water; the punk musicians' tapes or vinyl; the Zapatistas' hand-made wood, fake rifles, symbols their army carried to announce the militancy of their cause—combined with a savvy use of digital and Internet tools to make themselves legible, near and far.

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How do literature and books align with the political struggles of *sans papiers* or the resource battles in favellas, cross-border disaster relief, the Zapatistas, punk rock or the Occupy movement? How is the production of novels or poetry by writers we admire relevant to these broader global movements?

Literature is politics. It is radically egalitarian, even anarchistic. Literature opens up meanings over which no single party—not the author, not the reader, not the critic, the fact-checker or the lawyer—can ever hold full authority. That's what makes it literature. It opens a space of mutually negotiated meanings that never close or conclude.

In this, literature differs from other writing. In non-fiction, there are established legal standards of fact that grant authority over the meanings in a non-fiction work, and these can be argued in court, or informally outside of court, until they conclude with a binding judgement. Literature also differs

from private communications that mean only what the writer says they mean. Literature must be given up by the writer. She or he must relinquish it to the public. In the act of relinquishing authority over the text—giving it up to a public—the writer makes literature. This is a political act called publication, which creates a political space called public space.

In the public space of literature, negotiation and dialogue among equals are a permanent condition. We read and reread and never arrive at any single answer. Literature suspends us in a deeply social arrangement that is never closed by answers, authority or ownership. Which is why the retail life of literature has always been, at best, awkward. Literature—bent on opening up, inviting shared agency—gets packaged as a private possession for sale in markets. It's awkward, but it works, and we have managed to buy and sell the rights to books, and now eBooks, so writers and publishers possess a thing they can withhold, store or sell to consumers. By contrast, Publication Studio asks if the open relationships of literature might suggest a different economy, a different way to organize our work and support it. In this it shares a lot with the political struggles of disempowered groups.

Moreover, and more important, the ability to print and circulate a book remains a unique and powerful tool. When a community, however small or intimate, can take that power into their own hands—determining the availability and circulation of ideas and texts without reliance on outside arbiters of taste, marketability or politics—then the local suddenly becomes legible to others, everywhere. It can be books or it can be the Internet. In many ways the book and the printed page are the proto-Internet, a network of circulation that has always formed viral, horizontal networks of solidarity by bringing the hyper-local into legibility and welcoming hands everywhere.

The fit with our work is profound. Affordable, one-at-a-time production of printed, bound books combined with the broad reach of digital technologies make a powerful new tool. We print and bind inexpensive books and piggyback on the low-cost economy of off-the-shelf digital tools: Tumblr's blogging software; PayPal's financial tools; the typographical and book-layout tools of Open Office; a.nnotate.com's online document-annotating tool. These tools let local groups take the means of production into their own hands and reach sympathetic partners around the globe.

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Soon after we set up shop, Colter Jacobsen came to Portland from Berkeley, California, to spray-paint special book covers for Larry Rinder's novel. Colter is a superb artist, very successful, who mostly works with pencil and

pen, redrawing photographs by hand. He loved the novel and we asked if he'd make unique covers for forty-eight copies. We would bind these and sell the books as art objects, a limited edition. We could do this because we make our books one at a time by hand.

It was easy and fun. Colter spent four days with us. He picked out forty-eight used file folders (our standard cover stock) in a variety of colours and made stencils for spray-painting his designs onto the covers. He drew a fabulous, furry little pig, something at once cute and vicious-looking, and we made end papers for the novel with those. He painted forty-eight small watercolours of pigs in love, each unique and each one sized to fit in a special sleeve we glued onto the inside of the back covers.

We assembled the books and bound them, then held a big communal dinner for Larry and Colter. Fifty people came and they all bought books. Six or seven bought the artist edition and the rest bought a \$20 plain edition. Everyone feasted and drank together and Larry and Colter talked to us about their work. We rolled the machines out into the room with us and spread the loose pages of Larry's novel across the huge table where we all ate, and throughout dinner the pages got stained by food and wine, written and drawn on by drunk revellers. At the end of dinner we collected the pages and bound them in a special cover. We made a unique copy of Larry's book, the residue of our evening together, right there while everyone watched, and handed it to Larry and Colter as a gift. These are the kinds of things you can do if you make books one at a time.

Colter really enjoyed himself. He kept asking questions and trying out strange things with our machines, printing on paper bags, binding tin foil or feathers, drawing all over book covers rather than simply rubber-stamping them. And then, a few weeks later, he won a prize for his art and called to say he was going to buy the same machines and could he run a Publication Studio in Berkeley? We said, "Yes."

In Winter 2009, Derek McCormack, a great Canadian writer, came to Portland to promote his story collection, *The Haunted Hillbilly*. Derek stayed a few days and we showed him the machines. Derek is a visionary. His mind is a slow-burning fire, and I saw the sparks flicker in his eyes. He kept saying, "It's just like a bakery, books made fresh each day." And off he went, back to Toronto. Derek spent more than a year talking to friends, describing the machines, assembling money and talent to publish the work he loved, including original books with Pasha Malla, Andrew Kaufman and Will Alsop, all one at a time, in the basement of a Parkdale coffee shop. He calls

the business The Book Bakery, and he opened it last February with Michael Maranda and Alana Wilcox—Publication Studio Toronto.

In Spring 2010, Patricia and I were invited to Vancouver, B.C., to set up shop at READ Books, a superb independent bookstore run by artist Kathy Slade at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Kathy, in collaboration with the artist-run centre Artspeak and a journal called *Fillip*, asked us to operate our machines in READ's small storefront space, right in the middle of the books, every day, 9 to 5, for a week. We'd meet people, talk about the Studio and publish a handful of new books with Vancouver-based writers and artists. Hauling our own machines from Portland turned out to be pricey so, in the end, Kathy and her partner, Keith Higgins, found a way to buy their own set.

In Vancouver we made new books with Aaron Peck (the launch was at the Night Market) and Jamie Hilder, a Vancouver artist and activist who had trained as a downtown ambassador, the private police of Vancouver's downtown business owners. Jamie advocated for the basic rights of homeless people while wearing the uniform of the downtown ambassadors and ended up testifying in a lawsuit brought by a First Nations rights group against the business association. The book we published with him, called *Affidavit*, is his testimony in the lawsuit. Kathy brought a long-standing project of photographer Mina Totino into print using the newly acquired machines. It's called *I Look Up*, a kind of photographic encyclopedia of clouds and sky taken by Totino with a Polaroid over many decades. Now the work is publicly available as a book. Others came in and made single copies of books they cared about, or ordered titles they saw online and which we could make for them as they waited.

We worked in Vancouver for a week, running the machines with Keith and Kathy. And when we went home to Portland the machines stayed, and Keith and Kathy kept working. They made new books with artists Dan Graham, Kate Armstrong, Robert Dayton, writers Michael Turner and Lorna Brown and others, bringing the work that matters most to them to a new public—Publication Studio Vancouver.

My friend Thomas Boutoux co-founded a bookstore and publishing house in Paris, both of them bare-bones labours of love. Our conversation about publishing goes back eleven years. Thomas was very interested in the machines and invited us for a visit, like the one we'd made to Vancouver. But this was France. Rather than get machines and have us drop in for a week, Thomas proposed a pop-up studio in Bordeaux, where he teaches at the École des Beaux-Arts. Students would build it out and run it for the duration of a major art festival called Evento. It all began with a semester-long class

Thomas taught with his colleague, Benjamin Thorel, and a remarkable philosopher and chef named Fabien Vallos. For half a year a dozen students at the École des Beaux-Arts learned about publishing, shopped for machines, tried their hands at production, and cooked and ate with Fabien.

I received an invitation from them to come to Bordeaux and publish a book. In the months leading up to my trip, they helped me create a new book with a writer I admire, the Canadian poet Lisa Robertson, and then Lisa and I both went to Bordeaux to produce the book and launch it at the Studio. The week was a revelation. I've always talked about the social life of the book, and found ways to integrate food, drink and sociality into the gatherings that make new audiences for books. But I had never worked with a chef or thinker as insightful as Fabien. Thanks to him, food and drink were built into the very DNA of Publication Studio Bordeaux.

Rather than beginning the day with glue and print toner and paper, as we had done in the pre-dawn hours in Portland, PS Bordeaux's day began at the market, buying fresh food and bread that would make that day's menu—first, the menu for those doing the work and second, to set the table for an enthusiastic public that would gather for that evening's launch dinner. Every day, every new book had a launch dinner in Bordeaux, much like the one we had made for Larry and Colter in Portland. Fabien planned and cooked these dinners with the same focus on near-at-hand simplicity and directness as we had used to shape the Studio's approach to publication. This was a revelation—the artistic sensibility that first shaped the way we chose to publish could also be applied directly to the conduct of social events, dinner gatherings, the social life of the book. In Bordeaux, I experienced a fully evolved Publication Studio.

It was inspiring to see Fabien cook dinner for 30 using just a table, knives, a sink and a toaster oven. His ability to pick the right ingredients and treat them right—cutting and combining, organizing food, rather than heating and radically transforming it—to make a meal exactly mirrored the way we pick and publish literature. The book I made in Bordeaux, and celebrated with meals there and in Paris, was *Revolution: A Reader*, an annotated collection assembled and written with Lisa Robertson that forms the centre of an ongoing conversation transpiring in many places.

Next Winter, Publication Studio Bordeaux becomes a permanent program of the École des Beaux-Arts, where Fabien, Thomas and Benjamin teach and the work continues. There are now also Studios in Boston and Portland, Maine. And conversations with colleagues and friends in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Dallas, London, Malmo, Sweden, and Mexico City are poised to extend this

horizontal network of independent studios. We'd like to reach a maximum of twelve to fifteen studios, geographically dispersed to make a rich mix, a broader footprint, and various enough to cross-fertilize publics from many different cultures.

Each of these connections has been a direct extension of our primary interest as artists and writers—sharing the books we love with others. We are not businessmen. We are artists. And yes, money, jobs and livelihoods are on the line. Maybe our small scale affords us this luxury, but we would be wrong not to take advantage of it, not to make the most of it. Done right—with attentiveness, engagement, mutuality and over the long haul—our sensibility shapes a resilient, living organism, a network of hyper-local work that moves books and conversations across every scale, from the local to the global, with as much effectiveness and reach as any conventional publisher.

Literature has a pattern and a pace of growth, and it differs from the pattern and pace of retail markets. Books pass one to one, like a blood disease, and they endure. Commodities burst upon the public in spectacular ways, become ubiquitous and then disappear. Publishers have done an amazing job adapting the culture of literature to the needs of retail. We've made books function as commodities and turned readers into consumers. What Publication Studio proposes, though, is the opposite. We look to literature, with its primacy on one-to-one relationships and its slow patience, to shape an economy, an occupation, a way we can live and work. What we build can be as big as the world, an organism with small footprints in many places around the globe—a multi-scalar assemblage. That is our hope for Publication Studio.