

Book Designing in the Age of the Loam

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* 1991 San Sebastian, Basque Country | Vienna, Austria

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Monica C. LoCascio

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Monica C. LoCascio is a multimedia artist-researcher focusing on questions of resonance, connection, and interference, particularly within and between bodies. Her work is inspired by such topics as biophotonics, somatic therapy, and quantum theory, as well as memory, non-linear time, and geometric principles. Unattached to a particular medium, she uses research techniques to inform her explorations of form.

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Having been born in Göttingen and growing up in Kassel, taking the reverse path the brothers Grimm took in their lives, some relationship with writing, layouting and publishing was probably already etched into the slate of his life. He was entangled in a small university newspaper called the *Faltblatt* at his *alma mater* close to Hannover where he would later be wielding the mad cursed dagger of curating an art mediation programme for a local student-organised festival and labouring together with a team of three to bring birth to a *fluide perspektiven*, a mediating catalogue, within a week. He believes in the revolutionary potential of the printed word, and co-led a small revolution during the *documenta 14* called *Dating the Chorus*.



00_The process

This book is the living manifestation of the Data Loam project. Not only is this publication the framework in which the project and the exhibition are documented, it embodies the ideas, ideals and insanities which make up the entirety of its two-years+ lifespan. As a result, the creation of its design framework has been multifaceted from the beginning. Our task was nothing less than to create something unconventional and then put it into a conventional shell, otherwise known as a book.

The whole process engaging with 'the book' has been nothing less than a profound journey, steeped in wild experimentation, rigorous brainstorming, curatorial risk and ... fun. To work at such high levels and pace is, in itself, rare for contemporary academic environments. Sometimes stultifying, rule-bound and linked to market driven concerns, creative thinking and making can often be tossed into the back-seat of academic curricula, or divided off from the 'theory' or the 'science', used instead as an example, illustration or decoration. Sometimes creative thinking and making are thrown aside entirely: too messy, too difficult, too slow, too fast or not fitting in. But the design process that Data Loam presented—to 'translate' into a seemingly conventional book form, a wholly different approach to the proliferation of information, the impact of new forms of matter, the role of art practice in re-thinking distributed intelligence and, simultaneously, not to shy away from significant knowledge exchange with the computing sciences, physics and meta-mathematics—was a bear of a challenge, but one we were eager to accept.

Our task was two-fold. First, to give full breadth (air, life, intensity, visceral immediacy) to what had been accessible to those who had attended the *Data Loam: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft* exhibition. It was crucial to develop this without doing a disservice to the artists-scholars-researchers' artworks involved either by over- or under-designing the content. This meant we had to figure out, visually, texturally, tactilely how to foreground a kind of logic of sense, a poetic approach to the works, in part so that those not having been to the exhibition would have a 'way-in' to the conversation without having to overthink the connections. Second, our task was to impart this same

evolution [i:və'lu:ʃən]

connecting with your inner fish has its place, but do not mistake the sense of mathematical unfolding (teleological or otherwise) as the sine qua non for change. evolution is that rare bird who steals a little of this and a little of that from all and sundry—the lyric rhythm of the poet, the laughter-politic of revolutionaries, the mono-brow of the deeply stubborn, the ode-to-perfection of those 'on the spectrum'; fauna, mineral, wave and animal eating plants included. kinshipping as key.

kind of logic to the whole of the book, connecting the texts in such a way that did not perpetuate the old trap of dividing ‘theory-writing’ from the art exhibition or indeed from the sensual knowledge-practices of art making. We wanted to do this in such a way that art, with all its messy logics, was the translating vehicle, and not, as has so often been the case in the past, using ‘text’ as the translating vehicle for all things art, humanities, science; that is to say: knowable.

We created the design of the publication in three stages, beginning with many sessions where we asked, from many different angles, about what a book is and what meanings it may obscure or even preclude. We tried not to be influenced by having to produce ‘only’ a marketable publication where costs would compromise quality. Instead, we spent a lot of time figuring out what we thought could be the ideal version of the publication for the project. This was both a hands-on approach—literally feeling, smelling, touching different papers, book bindings and so on—whilst simultaneously, a sensuous intellectual enterprise, manifesting in one design, the rhythms, flows, patterns inherent in the algorithmic codings and multi-dimensional intensities of our ‘information age’. The second stage was to design a prototype that would encompass the manifestation of these ideals. This prototype was installed at the *Data Loam: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft* exhibition. It had the uncanny role of being an ambassador whose remit was to share with the public the merits of this kind of approach, whilst simultaneously embodying contemporary art practice as both the work of art and, of course, as an artwork.

The third and final stage of the process was the translation of what we had dreamt and built before into a printable and affordable book. Perhaps this has been the most difficult, as it was a ‘stage’ that ran through the whole project but made itself most overt as we tried, experiment after experiment, to share, on the pages of our book, the wild and ineluctable twists and turns of creative making. What follows details that journey.

01_The questions

In the beginning there were questions. Lots of questions.

We began the design process of this very publication by asking ourselves simple questions: What is a book? Where are its limitations and its potentials? The conventional answer—that a book is a good design: on the material side the book is a container, its pages containing the pictures and letters that encode the information.

We decided that given the minimum viability of the printed word/image, a book would be the obvious container of information and at the same time the vehicle to disseminate information, we wanted to celebrate the book as the physical manifestation between and amongst messenger and receiver, the medium as it were, transmitting imagination, time, secrets. More than that, and taking as given that our book, at least in this incarnation, would be produced with paper, glue, binding, and other decomposing materials, it would embody its own decay. In this sense, too, we wanted to champion its role as a medium (of magic) trading in the strange knowledge-necromancy communications between the spirit worlds of those long since dead and those very much alive. As the noted physicist-astrologist, Carl Sagan put it in his celebrated *Cosmos*, the book is nothing less than magic, allowing one to skip over time limitations and amongst its pages, communicating with the dead.¹

¹ Carl Sagan (2003 [1980]), *Cosmos*, (London: Abacus/Little Brown Book Company), 296.

At the same time as embracing the dead-fantastical dancing across the frontiers of space-time and the medium of magic, we also were quite painfully aware of how a conventional book literally prohibits its contents from oozing out of its binded pages. Data is limited to a certain frame, curated and contextualised between cover and back, enabling the information to fulfil only a certain arranged task.

From this elementary cognisance, we grafted our position as designers within the triangle described above—informant, receiver and medium—and simultaneously the concept for this very volume that you now hold in your hands. Understanding our position as that of a kind of contemporary Virgil-esque-spirit guide, we dedicated every decision to the recipient of the book, seeking to enable the

reader a (somewhat) bureaucracy-free journey to this, our, rather radically materialised world of the book. We hope this guide will enable those who grasp its mettle to become a comfortable user of the publication; to engage with the content and its form, according to her or his or their will; to gain a living sense of interaction, so much a part of any knowledge system.

But this raised the obvious question: How could we embed interaction in a rigid medium such as the printed page?

For us, to produce a printed publication meant partly to lose the direct participatory potential of, for example, digital means of publishing, whilst gaining something of equal value. Would this be possible? The printed book, with all its constraints, probably finds its greatest strength within its limitations. This is to say that its *form* is finite—not meaning that the material on which information is printed will deteriorate at some point—but that its content is fixed to the place where it was put. Additional information can only be added to its fringes or wherever it was intended by the designer. Also, its limitedness requires the information to be carefully curated, to be finely tuned, as it cannot easily engage with other media as an active agent. The book exists within its own realm. And within this realm, the elements of the book's design are navigational items, devices to create a sense of orientation within the still turbulent and turbid river of information which constitutes its entirety.

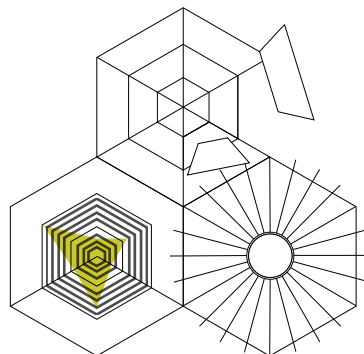
The first problem then, was to breach its own linearity.

02_The prototype

A prototype was produced for the *Data Loam* exhibition as a placeholder for our design ideas. It physically attempted to break with the linearity, which was not only dictated by the order of the content within the book, but always symbolically present within the existence of a first and a last page. To begin to resolve this, our prototype took as its 'start' a collaborative/ participatory approach, where the design itself would include magnetic sheets as cover pages of the contents' various organisational elements. Each element within the enframing by magnetic sheets were interchangeable. Through this process, which was nothing less than a luxury, we were able to discover the design limitations of the medium ourselves, without being constricted by conventions and prescribed formats. What emerged were six design cornerstones which would be built into the overall design so that the interaction the book would offer would be a valuable experience, one that differed both from the (often dry) reading of academic papers and the sensuously-deprived encounter with traditional art catalogues.

For the prototype installed within the *Data Loam* exhibition, a slightly mechanical design ensued, with the book sitting, as it were, as an object within the exhibition. If we were to 'translate' the whole exhibition into the book, we would have to figure out a way to cannibalise the entire exhibition so that it would energise the whole discussion around future knowledge systems, whilst simultaneously maintaining the integrity of the works that enabled the Loam to encounter and proliferate new forms of knowledge-practices. As will be evident when viewing the *Catalogue Exhibition* essay, we invented a hexagonal grid and, to our surprise and joy, learned that it was not dissimilar to the earlier work of Borges and his *Library of Babel* design fantasy.² This meant that not only could we establish an organisational order, but within this order every modular piece of information could be interchanged.

² Jorge Luis Borges, *The Library of Babel* at libraryofbabel.info/.

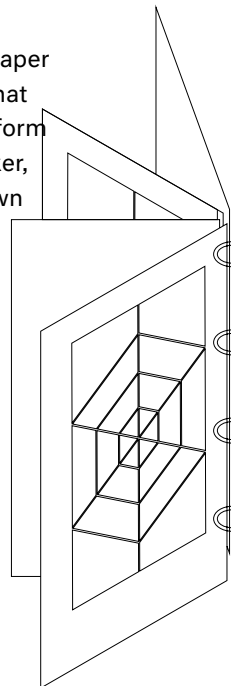


02_01_The sections

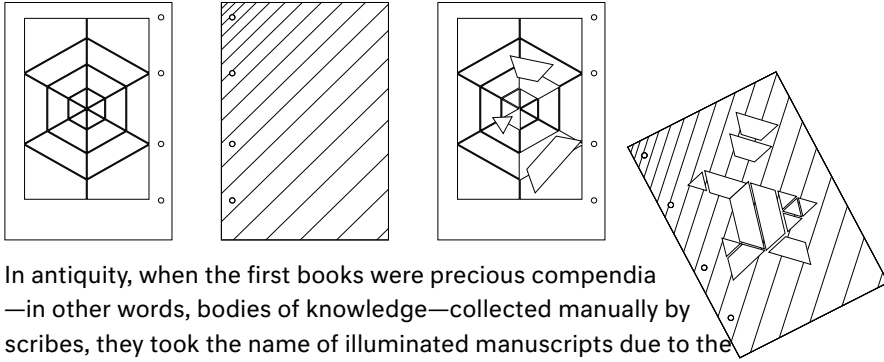
Data Loam does not speak directly about data per se. This is because to do so would mean ignoring a fundamental aspect of information in the digital age: the fact that what is called 'data' interrelates and consequently produces constant changes within itself. These constant changes simultaneously produce different connections, often at different degrees of coherence and retrievability. How would one design a book that intended to talk about the limitations of information systems, without the book itself resulting in a reduced system? How would one allow for different possibilities interrelating in such a way as to express constant changes, shifts, connections therein?

For us, the goal was not to present just another book stuffed with various collections of information archived in various venues, and colour corrected to the best of our abilities. We were committed to the idea that, like the circulation and exchange of data as mentioned earlier, anyone approaching the Data Loam could create their own version of the collection. Any one 'version' would be nothing less than an intelligible system of particular links (themselves slices of information), continuously discontinuous; shape-shifting and yet readable (graspable, understandable, communicable). We were committed to develop a design that could cope with a system without hierarchy or full formed definition.

In this sense, too, there is no designated beginning or end to this book: it is up to the reader *how* to navigate through it. The sections of the book could be extracted and re-incorporated in whatever might be the desired order. In addition, information printed on paper would be mirrored on magnetic pages with detachable pieces that could adhere onto metal sheets. As a result, there was no strict form but room for constant change. The reader, as an inter-actor/maker, together with the chosen front and back covers, created their own book, one that could follow many possible lines of curiosity. A dynamic collection, intertextual evolution.

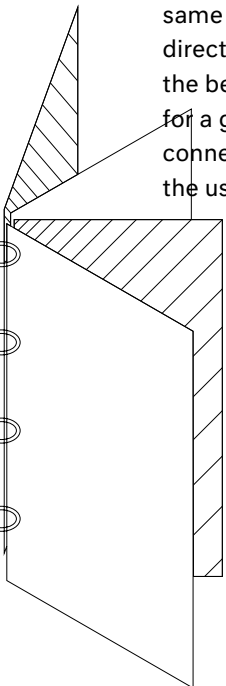


02_02_The materials



In antiquity, when the first books were precious compendia—in other words, bodies of knowledge—collected manually by scribes, they took the name of illuminated manuscripts due to the gold plates that were used to highlight the important information and beautify the whole, creating an aura of significance around them. Sometimes the edges of the pages gilded, creating the effect of mixed medium between paper and metal.

In our compendium, titles, authors, keywords, abstracts and images were to be collected on magnetic material that would be framed by a metal plate, allowing the reader to reorder, and more importantly, remix them. Some additional blank magnetic pages would be provided so that the readers could create their own schemes and curate its content. In this way, a spider web structure of the magnetic sheets began to emerge, with its content fashioned after the prevailing scientific article model; namely: title, authors and their affiliations, abstract, keywords and images. We depicted the resulting order of information in a pyramidal form, multiplied this same pyramid until it became a concentric figure (symbol) without directionality, such that the centre could be the conclusion as well as the beginning. When shuffled and re-assembled, its parts would allow for a greater number of conjunctions. Looking for the meaning in the connection, the set became boundary-less, directly interfering with the usual sense of the archive.



02_03_The trim size

When navigating the interrelations within a cloud of concepts, one has to always start from a little point. This little point cannot be an arbitrary one plucked out of the air; nor can it be some dogmatic rule imposed from on high (or low). It had to have some kind of ability to guide without imposition. For us, this little point was the trim size. We settled on the trim size because we knew that at the end of our dizzying research on shape systems, we would have to come back to a marketable printed book, eventually.

In preparation for the exhibition and publication for the Data Loam project, all of us rummaged through our respective (and sizable) bookshelves to find something that could be used as a reference point for the publication design. Suddenly we found it: *FILM ALS SKULPTUR*, a publication with a manageable size one could hold in the palm of one's hand. It also had a text-to-image ratio that to all of us seemed close to what Data Loam could at some point become. This book was thus used as a model to set the specifications and acquire quotations for the printing costs of the publications trade-edition. *FILM ALS SKULPTUR* became our little point, our first 'grain of sand,' to paraphrase the magnificent William Blake, which had enabled us to begin to hold in the palm of our collective hand, the infinity of the Data Loam world and all that might emerge from it.³

³ "To see a World
in a Grain of Sand
// And a Heaven
in a Wild Flower //
Hold Infinity in the
palm of your hand
// And Eternity in
an hour..." William
Blake (1975
[written 1803; first
published 1883]),
*Auguries of Inno-
cence*, (London:
Cygnets Press).

02_04_The grid

Our grid was designed around the spider web motif that we had previously developed for the *Data Loam* exhibition, using the book section cover pages made of magnetic material. With this idea as a starting point, we proceeded to flush out the rest of the design, bringing in considerations of classic graphic design theory, the golden mean, and large margins to facilitate note-taking as well as providing sufficient white space for ease of reading.⁴ Final manipulations on the grid design were made based on the production requirements for the punching of the holes and cutting of the sheets made of various materials that differed in their physical properties.

Importantly, both by experiment and computational manipulations, we settled on the hexagonal grid. This allowed us to assemble new playgrounds of intelligence, distributed, circulating, and exponential, whilst simultaneously creating the weave/spider web(s) of information and knowledge exchange.

⁴ Joseph Müller-Brockmann (2008), *Grid Systems in Graphic Design: A Handbook for Graphic Artists, Typographers, and Exhibition Designers*, (Switzerland: Niggli Verlag).

02_05_The indexing and colouring system

Thinking about the further development of the inter-relating nature of the *Data Loam* publication, we then needed also to envision a method that would translate the information contained in the articles into visual form. We aimed to use unsupervised machine learning algorithms for natural language processing to determine six categories from the articles. These were to correspond to the hexagonal grid that we used for our overall design. We then decided (just because we could and we felt like doing so!) a ratio based on the percentile likelihood of each article to the respective categories. These percentiles would then be converted into CMYK values to give each article a theme colour, based on the content of the article itself. The algorithm mentioned here makes use of the generative statistical model called the *Latent Dirichlet* allocation.⁵ Within it, each text consists of a mixture of topics, and to each word in the text, a topic can be attributed. The algorithm that we wanted to use was tested with a reasonably large data set, resulting in specific and distinguishable lists of words that were summed up in various categories. Current machine learning algorithms are capable of performing such analysis and categorisation of meaning within texts with great precision, albeit only when fed by quite large data sets. We were lacking these quantities by having only 17 text-based chapters. In this case, resulting word lists could be quite similar to each other, making it hard to propose different categories.

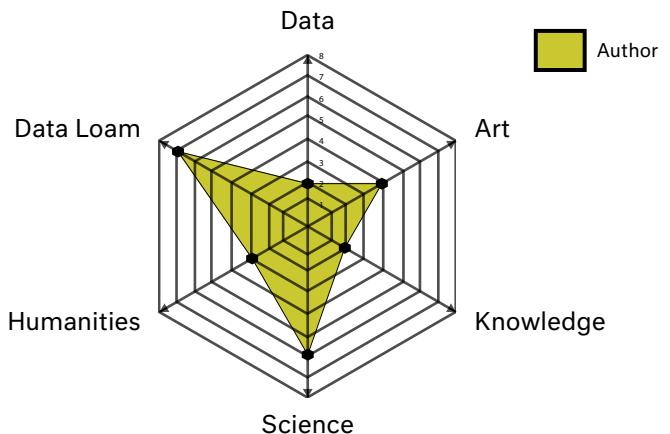
Hypothetically, it would have been possible to use an unsupervised machine learning approach to reach our goal. However, as the sample was too limited given the similar word lists, it would not have been that effective without using additional external texts related to our content—such as those from other exhibition catalogues, art publications and even writings from the field of data science.

⁵ Cf Ali Jahanian (2016), *Quantifying Aesthetics of Visual Design Applied to Automatic Design* (Springer Theses Series), (New York: Springer). See also Laura A. Isaly (2012), *Augmenting Latent Dirichlet Allocation and Rank Threshold Detection with Ontologies*, (nl: Biblio-scholar Books).

6 Values from 0 to 100%

Value Data + Art = K
Value Knowledge = C
Value Science = M
Value Humanities + Data Loam = Y

C = 20
M = 60
Y = 100
K = 60



02_06_The typeface (and its size)

Each typeface in existence carries a *zeitgeist* and energy that inevitably will influence a reader's experience. For the publication, we wanted to use one that did not induce a theme of kitschy 'data' or sleek 'design'. We desired a typeface that was neutral, so that the information printed on the page would fully speak for itself. But we also knew that there was no such entity as a neutral typeface, not only because of a viewer's instant conscious or unconscious bias based on subtle design cues, but because the very materiality and circulation of data was never without its 'something'.

We came across Neutral, a typeface designed by Kai Bernau within his B.A. thesis project in Graphic Design at the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague (KABK) in 2005. The typeface was meant to convey, to quote Bernau, "[...] a typeface free of all connotations or associations that could distract a reader from the text, a font that delivers the character of the written material untouched by the character of the typeface design."⁶ We were interested in the fact the designer relied on Plato's *Doctrine of Ideas* as a starting point before moving through the teachings of the 16th century tea ceremony master Sen no Rikyū, and onto the minimal starkness of conceptualism. We were interested in the way in which the designer foreground the problem of timelessness, archetypes, and neutrality. However, the attempt to design such a font bearing the tropes of neutrality cannot of course escape the obvious paradoxes. Bernau was well aware of false promises of unencumbered 'neutrality' which describe things and events as if free of any connotations.⁷ Nevertheless, Neutral nears the desired characteristics as closely as possible, and therefore was chosen as the designated typeface for our publication project as well as for the exhibition signage. Of course sizing also threw up a whole series of issues, all of which are common to book designers everywhere. In the main it had as much to do with thinking through size as a quiet, intimate form of 'translation'. This meant in part that we had to think of it in relation to what one might be accustomed to given the massive use of iPhones and various mobile operating systems. We thought that if the font was to carry minimal informational intervention, it might make more sense to mimic Apple's iOS for everyday use. In the end we decided to mirror that which was the most used day-to-day reading platform worldwide: the smartphone.

⁶ At carvalho-ber-nau.com/neu-tral-research See also typotheque.com/articles/an-idea-of-a-typeface

⁷ As Bernau puts it: "Because everybody's backgrounds and expectations differ, however, the more closely we attempt to answer the question 'What is a neutral typeface?', the fewer people agree on various details, and the more the proposal of a neutral typeface becomes a paradox." Ibid.

And so we turned to Apple's iOS font as a kind of updated Rosetta stone, translating from one set of knowledge systems to another. In this way, we used the size of the different text bodies, the headings, captions and footnotes, as well as the spacing, to mimic Apple's iOS font guidelines. Interestingly, by fusing formats stemming from the digital with an analog format, we were able to blur the edges between the solid and the fluid much further. This of course underlined a fact most artists-designers and technicians working in the field have known for some time: that the digital and the analog do not exist within their own secluded nexus, but are always in interaction with each other.

Neutral

Neutral Medium 100 pt

Neutral

Neutral Regular 39 pt

Neutral

Neutral Regular Italic 20 pt

03_The translation

After the creation of the prototype we had to translate its concepts into realizable formats without losing the spirit of challenging design conventions. Elements like the font and the trim size were directly adapted into the design, but as we were not able to replicate the removability of the content from the magnetic sheets, we had to find surrogates.

03_01_Sections and blurred limits

In an attempt to replace the mobility of the content and to maintain an interconnected fabric, we positioned the catalogue in the middle of the publication, considering that when a book is first held in one's hands, focus lands more easily on the images rather than on the text, and the tendency is to start closer to the middle than the first pages. With this in mind, we decided also to place the table of contents right in the middle, as if a magic tree-trunk with branches of the content stretching and flowing from its neural centre. This meant the articles would saddle both sides of the catalogue, coinciding with the process of the project itself, which began with multiple re-searches, had a central exhibition and concluded with an explosion of shape-shifting approaches (letter, text, image, notation) to communicate our findings. We selected two different papers for these sections, a thicker one to hold the colourful images of the works, and a lighter one to carry the longer texts, a difference that is sensitive to touch and sight, with a feeling that differs between the two in the way that the attitude towards a book or an exhibition is not the same. However, because the two areas within the book are not so different from one another and its content is in a constant flux between artwork and written chapter, we allowed ourselves the luxury of inhabiting part of one type of paper with the content of the (so-called) opposite section, now and then forming a natural co-habitation.

This approach was influenced by the motto "Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft," an attitude towards information that considers it a living and constantly changing entity, difficult to place in one category or another. For this very reason we considered it necessary to soften the edges of the information and make it blend in, overlap and become blurred. It was important to emphasise that an image is not an illustration of the text it accompanies, nor is the text an explanation of the image it follows. Both converge and mutate their multiple meanings with respect to one another.

03_02_Actualising the colour system

As it was our idea and ideal to create a series of navigational devices that would help the reader to steer the uncharted data mines of the book's content, we thought of using colours unique to each author and artist, and then to link them to their works by a subtle reference rather than directly linking them by equivalent values expressed in numbers. We sought to guide via the use of colours because colours can allow subtle differences to emerge, at times so subtle that differences may not be distinguishable from one another at all. We particularly liked that aspect. The values translated partly had to succumb to the rules of the respective encoding system, for example the length of the base36 values having to be multiples of three, reminding us that even in the most literal attempts at translation, there is always some kind of undecidability playing into any system, ordinary or complex.⁸

The first attempt of our idea to generate different colours from a machine learning algorithm failed. Trying to figure out how to solve the problem, we came across an experiment by Charlie Coleman where he used two different text-encoding schemes to translate a string of characters into colour information expressed in a hexadecimal-colour.⁹ It very much suited our needs as the way it decoded or encoded the given information revealed an idea that is contained in the Data Loam project as well. So we decided to re-try the idea of using an algorithm to generate colours from the respective names per se, but this time, we linked the authors with their works using a graphical system, namely the table of contents.

The western alphabet in its most commonly used form consists of 26 letters from the Latin alphabet (ISO basic Latin alphabet). Of course there are variations, Umlaute or diacritical symbols leading to a larger number of letters depending on the respective lingo. In addition to this we used the Arabic numbers from 0 to 9 to express numerical values. These are, very simply put, the two most common schemes used to encode our everyday conversations and interactions. But because these two schemes are exactly that: arbitrary choices (even if chosen because of massive uptake), we were already quite possibly exceeding the multiple of 3 rule mentioned above. If we wished to apply another schema to encode information encapsulated

⁸ See Kurt Gödel (2003 [1931]), *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of 'Principia Mathematica' and Related Systems*, (Mineola, NY: Dover).

⁹ Charlie Coleman, "Text to Color," Experiments at charlie-coleman.com/experiments/

within the two already in use, this could only work as long as we kept to a base36 value. If a string does not fulfil this rule, an x amount of beginning letters are added to its end until it does fulfil this rule. The function used by Charlie Coleman first determined the length of the string and then of the three parts that in the end created the values for red, green and blue. That being said, this method of course did not work when the length of the string was not a multiple of three. What we consequently needed to do was to code for intensity of color along with the red, blue, green. These three color packages were then translated into base36, or hexatridecimal encoding scheme that used the totality of the Latin alphabet as well as the numbers from zero to nine to encode information. The algorithm then translated the base36 expression into a hexadecimal value which was scaled down to be within a range between 0 and 255, the values which decide the intensity of the respective three-color mixture of red, green and blue. Luckily, it worked.

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03_03_AR&QR

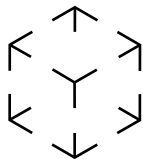
For quite some time, a book has mainly been the vehicle around which information is imparted and circulated. If one thinks of works by ancient to mid-modern philosophers, literary writers, monks and scientists, for example, form tends to follow function. But in our contemporary times, a book—and especially an edited book—has often required an intelligence which (literally) makes sense of the works, and does so in such a way that gives it impulse, flow, accessibility. This has traditionally been the role of a curator, whose critically important task, unlike that of a translator *per se*, is to position and tailor the content—and in our case, literally draw the lines, help weave the tapestry, guide the eye. We hoped to do so in order to carry forward a certain message whilst simultaneously guiding the readers through designated streams of information. Certainly one can never completely avoid the interpretation of a piece of information when communicating it, as information inserted in a context can never be pure; it is always influenced by the medium it passes through, encounters, expresses.

Nevertheless it was our intention to give away as much of this power as possible, discontinuing the hegemony of information. We felt that by choosing a single image from the whole documentation roll of the exhibition to represent an entire piece, would limit its interpretability by imposing our own perception of it. We wondered: how would it have been for another person to walk in and find the piece in the context of the exhibition, to look at it from different angles and to focus on different details? Which frame of a video is the best representation of a multimedia work? We decided to take in the raw graphic information, the plethora of the artwork-images, exposing the documenting of each artwork from as many different angles as possible. Still, this was not enough.

So we circled back to rethink what a book might look like if we started to play with rather than straight-jacket the archives of our exhibition. Could we create a kind of sandpit near the ocean? Any book connects to other planes of information, references are drafted, connections forged across media. But these connections are not literal.

For this reason and linked to the need to break with the limitations of the printed book, we made use of AR and QR technologies to expand the content of our restricted body of paper.

In this way, readers would get to watch and listen to the original video pieces, and could directly access extensive information about the piece, the artists and authors practices on their respective web-sites, completely out of our editorial and design control. Now accessible: the comments other individuals may have left under the pieces via online platforms; accessible too, the change of perception/impact of an artwork that time and other events could bring. By allowing the access and linkage to these more fleeting media, the book surpasses its function as a cryogenic chamber that freezes a state of information at a moment in time. It exceeds its temporal limitedness, expanding its windows towards other worlds, becoming an actual portal to the apparently transparent, forever mutating organic fabric, while giving up some of its privileges, breaking even with the tailor's linearity, both curatorial and editorial, to become a more democratic expression.



03_04_The table of contents

The table of contents can be considered an abstract-made-almost-real representation of the book's content. It is the map of references by which the recipient finds orientation within the publication's content. Within this book, the table of contents links the authors' names from the centre to the respective articles in a manner following an organic, rigorous graphical flow. This was absolutely critical as we did not want any aspect of the book to appear (or be) decorative in the sense it had no particular reason for being there. Instead, the reference between the author and the location of the article is never severed, and yet the lines bleed, from the inner core to the edge of the pages to find their destination in a continuous manifold flow.

Even though the publication's linearity is hereby challenged and the traditional sense of a book's order, completely disrupted, still one can start from the first page, or indeed any page, where the system it announces does not lead to a strict order, but still manages to make sense of the data as loams: the future of living breathing shape-shifting knowledge systems.

03_05_Lexicon

The idea for the lexicon first emerged as we were (literally) hanging the works at the *Data Loam* exhibition. Traditionally, little tags are set next to the art, stating the material of the artwork, the year, and title if there is one, along with the name of the artist. We wanted to disrupt this rather tired system of information meant to enframe an artwork but usually just denuding it of a wider intelligibility. We decided, instead, to exchange the paper titling for smartphone screens, which would have running through their tiny surfaces the juxtaposition of concepts, persons and facts that might otherwise be unrelated to the actual artwork placed next to it. The concepts arose by each artist choosing five or more words, concepts or themes that in some way spoke to their contribution. These were then set upon, with slightly mad intensity, political anger, boredom or laughter and let fly in and around the exhibition. Reactions were immediate. Recall the importance of Nietzsche's plea for a *Gay Science*, making into songs, half poems or preludes of rhymes the absurd dance of knowledge in all its cohesive in-forming.

In order to give a sense of the way in which this absurdity played into the curatorial knowledge system, we exaggerated this aspect in the book via the selection and form of the lexicon entries. Some of these assertions are canonical, but a good part are fictitious and some are simply lies. We satirised the style of credibility that lexicographic entries normally have and the arbitrariness of the positioning in the book simply resulted from layout-related gaps and are therefore completely coincidental. In the tradition of the surrealistic *Cadavre Exquis* we created references subjective, dreamlike and often sexually charged values that one would otherwise deny an encyclopedia. The co-existence, interpenetration, slipping and sliding, not to mention overlapping of different systems of order has been one of the basic concerns of this book. With this absurd lexicon pulsing through the book, playful and sometimes unexpected connections are all that remain.

feedback loop [ˈfiːdbæk luːp]

if the little # gave birth to 120–240 character larvae of fancy, opinion and irritation pupating its pluralised way through much of social media, take pause now to welcome the = its non-identical bi-directional adopted twin whose place on the keyboard is yet to be found (easily). addressing a different kind of economy/circulation, more akin to a morphogenesis of sequence-play, this names the ever-expanding fractalised surface, that sometimes makes connections in the oddest of places.

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And to the reader: Make it your own, just like the loam.