

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Year of Underground Publishing – and Learning

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, April 30th, 2014

In June, we will celebrate a year of our [PUBLISH!](#) project. It's been an interesting, exciting, frustrating experience that presented us with important lessons about visions and long term focus.

We kicked off Phase 1 of PUBLISH! in June of 2013, on a rainy weekend in New York. This first year has been what we called the Year of Underground Publishing.



It was a huge success, not so much as in the number of people that turned out (more on this later), but in that it totally captured the idea that we had conceived. It didn't matter that many people were confused when we tried to explain what we doing that weekend. We didn't have the *elevator pitch* quite down.

In retrospect, I am ok that many people *didn't get* what we were trying to do. I am more than ok. I'm happy with it. People *understand* it now, having seen the various examples of PUBLISH! that we presented at [AWP in Seattle](#), at the Grand Park Downtown BookFest, and the [not-PUBLISH! project](#) we and Kaya Press offered up at the LA Times Festival of Books.

But what people have come to associate with PUBLISH! is the typewriter. The novelty of outdated technology and this has happened because we have let it happen. And with this, we have only achieved one of our many goals with PUBLISH!



A big part of what we have been trying to achieve is to democratize the publishing process. By opening up the opportunity to publish to *anyone* with 3 minutes of free time, combined with the Poetics Problems that we released into the wild, inviting *anybody* to send in answers in *any form* for guaranteed publication, we have succeeded in this part of it.

However...

The other part of the PUBLISH! equation was to show how the entire publishing process—the editors, the printers, the publishers, and even the devices we use to facilitate our writing—actually *prevents* us, or at the least, makes it difficult for us, to actually express the thing we want to express.

The publishing industry is like a gigantic Rube Goldberg system that takes our words, runs them

through various mechanisms that activate other mechanisms, *boop boop boop*, then voila, spits out some variation of what we meant to say.

The difficulty of the typewriter keys and the way it gets stuck. The way the speech to text software hears something we didn't say. Staplers running out of staples. Printer running out of ink. Bad wi-fi. All of these things working *against* us as we try to declare ourselves publicly.

This is the part that has gotten lost. I guess it's more accurate to say this is the part we have chosen to sacrifice to fit PUBLISH! into a bigger program.

Don't get me wrong. We LOVE what we have done at AWP and at Grand Park and what Kaya Press did with its own variation at LA Times Festival of Books. Each time, it fit the event going on around it and people participated in droves and loved it.

But we're closing in on a year now, on the end of Phase 1: Year of Underground Publishing, and it's time for us to assess what we have done, focus on the events we have left at [The 9th Annual Celebrating Words Festival](#)...



and [Dirty Laundry Lit: Bondage](#).



We now have to start planning and fine-tuning and refocusing our vision for Phase 2 of PUBLISH!

It's time, once again, to ask ourselves what and why we are doing the things we do. And that's always a good and necessary thing.

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