

FORECASTING: LIVRE IMAGINÉ – DANS CINQUANTE D'ICI

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Image via Galerie Les Territoires, Montreal, QC

The exponential predominance of digital information leaves one to ponder: is it still possible to read alone? Tongue-in-cheek, the show *Livre Imaginé – Dans Cinquante d'Ici* (Book Imagined – Fifty Years from Now) is curated by Niekolaas Johanaes Lekkerkerk of *The Office for Curating*, Rotterdam as part of the critical reflections program at Les Territoires in Montreal. The twelve works that structure *Livre Imaginé* form a discussion about contrasting positions on the relationship between methods of information dissemination and shifts in technology. And although the exhibition title privileges the printed medium, the show itself makes clear that the book operates as an interlocutor, or ghost spectator, in the discussion of its own demise.

Case in point is Peruvian artist Elena Damiani's video work *El futuro del Libro* (The Future of the Book) (2011), which is accompanied by an English translation of its transcript. The work runs on a small projector while the analog video is displayed on an unrolled sheet of paper that hung from the ceiling that trails onto the floor. Visually, the video resembles programming on public broadcast television from the 1980s. Metaphorically, this undone roll of paper alludes to an unraveled, or unraveling, narrative. In line with this undoing, Damiani establishes a collage of image, text, and audio rather than providing viewers with a cohesive visual narrative. Spliced in with these collages are fragments of adages such as "time kills" and "ser quiere la informacion necisitata libre" ("if you want to be free you need information") that make clear the relationship between the right to information, the ability to access it, and the importance of speed in accessing information. Collectively, these elements comment on the layering of time, rather than its distinct ruptures, in the transition between obsolete and emerging technologies.

What the video and audio reveal is a counterargument to the notion that the book is becoming obliterated by digital technologies. Rather, the work depicts a process of accumulation that is articulated through pairing image and text. Damiani's work perhaps most successfully addresses the correlation between usefulness and presence. With a diptych of an image of men in line holding brooms juxtaposed with an image of an obsolete printing press, Damiani stresses that these forms of labour, of seeing and of reading, remain present (such as the broom holding men and forms of printing) but are becoming less visible. In which case, one might ask: if we can't see it does it exist? On the whole, *Livre Imaginé* ruminates on this question of use-value and tangibility. As material objects, books cannot maintain the speed of interaction that we demand of the Internet. Conceivably, through positing an expanded view of the book as metaphor, which can be repurposed or re-enacted, one can avoid a position of unproductive or exhaustive cynicism that proclaims the book dead.

Fleshing out the concept of the book as repurposed metaphor, Aurélien Froment's video work *L'adaptation manifeste* (adaptation expressed) (2008) is focused on the topic of re-enactment. For the duration of the six-minute video, actress Karine Lazard re-creates scenes of characters reading in films, such as Brigitte Bardot in *Le Mépris*, Julianne Moore in *The Hours*, and Oskar Werner in *Fahrenheit 451*, amongst others. This action, or re-enactment, requires viewers to double their looking – watching the work, and observing how Lazard performs her own watching – which also prompts an awareness of the interludes, or spaces, between how we read the work and the stages of its production. While these seemingly sterilized and performed re-enactments may posit the book as one prop amongst others,^[1] as indeed it is the only consistent prop, the work might also resituate the act of reading as an alternative form of looking. Recalling Maurice Blanchot's notion that you can only be alone with others,^[2] the act of reading in *L'adaptation manifeste* is always alone with an audience. What remains consistent throughout each scene is a desire for fidelity to the personal affective relationship of touching, feeling, and thinking one has with the tangibility of a book when reading it. While work such as

Froment's may emphasize the methods for repurposing the use value of books as material objects, the changing value of books as devices for knowledge dissemination remains unresolved.

The very concept of book as utopia, and 'thing' to be re-imagined, is proposed by Klaus Scherübel's work *Mallarmé, The Book (2004)*, which takes root in Mallarmé's thirty-year project "the book."^[3] This unrealized 19th-century project of Mallarmé's was an endeavour to reveal "all existing relations between things" and included a specified 480,000 copies needed to complete the project.^[4] Acting as both archivist and artist in collaboration with Printed Matter, Inc., Scherübel materializes Mallarmé's attempt in the form of a large blue dust jacket with white title font as both a "book store"^[5] and as a larger sculptural object. Significantly, aside from support structures there are no pages or words being protected by the dust jacket. As it were, despite realizing Mallarmé's utopic scale, the viewer is left no closer to his 19th-century utopic vision. What the relative failure of this project provides is a continuation of the desire for the 'thingness' of books, in their imaginative, failed and unrealized capacities.

Similarly, there is no discrete image of the imagined book (*Livre Imaginé*) revealed in *Livre Imaginé – Dans Cinquante d'Ici*, in part, perhaps, because its futures are rapidly multiplying. More than ever, the concept book appears imagined far at a distance in a state of unraveling, changing visibility, useful and not, alone and together. Noted in Damiani's video are Michel de Certeau and Richard Johnson's assertion that it is easy to "idealize information technology and demonize the book as if the two were not, indeed, both machines."^[6] What de Certeau and Johnson, and by extension *Livre Imaginé – Dans Cinquante d'Ici*, pertinently remind us is that all forms of information are a process of never-ending production, and that the future of the book is not determined by what is written in or on its pages.

{C}[1]{C} Motive Gallery, “Aurélien Froment, *L’adaptation manifest*”http://www.motivegallery.nl/?page_id=3589

{C}[2]{C} See Maurice Blanchot *The Unavowable Community*. Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1983.

{C}[3]{C} e-flux, *Mallarme, The Book*, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/mallarme-the-book/>

{C}[4]{C} e-flux, *Mallarme, The Book*, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/mallarme-the-book/>

{C}[5]{C} e-flux, *Mallarme, The Book*, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/mallarme-the-book/>

{C}[6]{C} Damiani, Elena. *El Futuro del Libro*, (transcript) 2011.