

## Introduction

If we still say library or *bibliothèque* to designate this kind of place to come, is it only through one of those metonymic slippages like the one that led to the Greek noun *biblion* being kept, or the Latin noun *liber*, to designate first of all writing, what is written down, and then “the book”—even though at the beginning it meant only the papyrus bark or even part of the living bark of a tree?

—Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, the open access and scholar-led Open Humanities Press published the experimental book series Living Books About Life. This series, consisting of twenty-five openly editable books, was made available on an open-source wiki platform for people to reuse, remix, update, add to, and collaborate on (see figure 0.1).<sup>2</sup> These wiki books were designed to interrogate and break down barriers between the humanities and the sciences by repurposing previously published science research and clustering it around a specific topic (e.g., energy, air, pharmacology, or bioethics) accompanied by an editorial introduction. This experiment in connecting and reusing various open access research materials—including articles, books, texts, data, images, video, and sound—and in exploring collective writing and open editing was designed to challenge “the physical and conceptual limitations” of the codex book, but it also questioned the various institutions and material practices that accompany it (e.g., the liberal humanist author, copyright, its aesthetics of bookishness). Yet more than that, it was an experiment in reimagining the book itself as living and collaborative, as an iterative and processual form of cocreation. With this, Living Books About Life—together with its sister series, Culture Machine Liquid Books—was one of the first experiments in humanities book publishing to rigorously



**Figure 0.1**

Home page of the Living Books About Life book series

explore the potential implications and possibilities of the digital medium for the humanities monograph, for the humanities, and, ultimately, for the human.<sup>3</sup>

This book wants to similarly explore, speculate on, and experiment with the future of the scholarly book. In doing so, it raises a number of important questions for our common, print-based conceptions of the book and for the monograph in particular as a specific material and conceptual instantiation of the book.<sup>4</sup> Instead of seeing the monograph as a fixed object, I present it here as an elaborate set of scholarly practices, structures of knowledge production, and discursive formations, which together enact the dynamic and emergent materiality of this medium. At the same time, in a complex interplay of relations, the scholarly book helps to shape the various formats, debates, and actants that are involved in the processes of knowledge creation. This double aspect of the book, as both *enacted* and *enacting*, means that the monograph occupies an important nodal point in this meshwork of relations and thus plays a vital role in determining what kinds of knowledge are possible. It is therefore extremely important to take account of the ongoing changing materiality of the scholarly book if we are to understand its potential to enact new institutional forms and to embody and perform different scholarly practices.

As you might have noticed from the preceding paragraphs, *Living Books* regularly uses the terms *book*, *scholarly book*, and *monograph* interchangeably, as their meaning tends to overlap in different contexts, making it difficult to try and establish clear boundaries between these categories. Furthermore, due to the paucity of writing on the monograph as a specific material form, this book predominantly focuses on *the scholarly book* format (which also includes edited collections, for example) and often discusses *the book* more in general—unless the context asks for the use of the term *monograph* in particular. At the same time, by using these terms interchangeably, I want to complicate attempts at solidifying (through clear-cut definitions or characterizations, for example) what a scholarly book is, was, or could potentially be.

Indeed, the need to experiment with alternatives to challenge this solidification and to highlight the dynamic materiality of the book is all the more felt in a situation in which our current (still heavily print-based) forms and practices of scholarly communication are increasingly problematic—especially in the humanities. Here, a situation has emerged wherein the present arrangements tend to sustain the interest of established stakeholders, inhibiting wider access to scholarly research and experimentation with new forms of scholarship and scholarly communication. These arrangements are predisposed to be repetitive and conservative instead of being open to alterity. In this sense, they continue to reproduce what can be perceived as essentializing aspects of the book, which include a fetishization of both the author and the book-object.

Instead, *Living Books* both outlines and imagines more experimental, ethical, and critical futures for the monograph; futures in which scholars take greater responsibility for their continued engagement with the scholarly book's becoming.<sup>5</sup> This requires a critical investigation of our academic communication practices, our systems of knowledge production, and the debates that surround both scholarly publishing and the past and future of the academic monograph. *Living Books* can be seen as an example of such an investigation. In addition, it encourages scholars to rigorously explore their own relationships and entanglements with the monograph—and with scholarly communication in general, too. They should do so in order both to determine what they want the book to be *and* to examine new ways of being for themselves as critical and engaged theorists.

## Alternative Futures

Exploring alternative futures for the scholarly book at this point in time specifically is important for several additional reasons—most importantly because it can be argued that the scholarly book and its further development in the humanities is at risk. In saying this, I am not referring to a dystopian future in which the printed book is replaced by its digital nemesis—the much-heralded “death of the book.”<sup>6</sup> I am merely endeavoring to draw attention to the way it remains hard today for certain kinds of work in the humanities to obtain a formal publishing outlet, whether it be in print or digital format. The reasons for this situation are diverse and range from library budget cuts to the ongoing commercialization of the scholarly publishing industry. Nonetheless, the consequences are wide-reaching. In particular, this state of affairs influences the job prospects of early-career researchers, for whom, more often than not, it remains a challenge to get their first book published. It also affects the quality of scholarly research in that it remains difficult to publish academic monographs that are highly specialized, difficult or radical, experimental or multimodal, or that fall outside current vogues in academic publishing, making them harder to market or incorporate into a specific series or publication list. Indeed, we have grown accustomed to a situation in which a book finding a publisher tends to be determined by its marketability, not by its value or quality as a piece of scholarship.

The mechanisms behind this situation, more commonly known as the so-called monograph crisis, have by now been well-discussed and are, as chapter 3 sets out, ultimately connected to the overall neoliberalization of the university.<sup>7</sup> However, although developing a critique of the political economy of scholarly publishing remains important, the intention here is not to put forward a crisis narrative regarding the academic book, scholarly publishing, or the humanities in general.<sup>8</sup> This is for the simple reason that it can be argued that the humanities have always been in crisis and that humanities book publishing has never been financially self-sustainable.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the intention here is not to overcome this condition via the route of technological utopianism (wherein innovative digital solutions will resolve the crisis) or the search for new *sustainable* business models or by defending an idealized past system of values associated with the (printed) book and the humanities. Instead, it might be more useful to embrace this “crisis” or

messiness to some extent, in order to explore the potentialities that seep out of these ongoing and indeterminate contingencies, both for the book and for the humanities. As such, *Living Books* will focus predominantly on *affirmative projects* (and related ideas and concepts), projects that are exploring alternative futures for the book, the difficulties mentioned thus far notwithstanding.<sup>10</sup>

Yet in addition to its potential to provide affirmative alternatives to intervene in the current political economy of publishing, there are further reasons that it is important to explore the scholarly book as it is presently unfolding. The book's changing materiality also offers us an opportunity to question and critique the repetitive print-based habits that continue to dominate scholarly communication. Although shorter forms—from articles to mid-length monographs—along with collaboration and teamwork, are becoming increasingly common, and indeed could be said to have always been an essential aspect of humanities scholarship, the authority of the printed long-form argument and all that it entails (e.g., fixity, stability, the single author, originality, copyright) continues to dominate the humanities.<sup>11</sup> This is not surprising, as from its early beginnings the printed book format has been of the utmost importance, as a specific material form, for scholarly communication—especially for the monograph as a particular physical embodiment of the concept of the book. Since the rise of modern science and scholarship, the scholarly monograph, in common with the academic journal, has for the most part been produced, distributed, and consumed in printed and bound codex formats. For the majority of scholars, the printed book format produced in an academic setting (i.e., published and distributed by an academic publisher) has thus become synonymous with formal scholarly communication. With the development of digital and multimodal forms of communication, this analogous relationship between print (and all that it entails) and formal scholarly communication is becoming less determined, and the future of the scholarly book is once again heavily debated.<sup>12</sup> Whether the monograph of the future will exist in print, digital, hybrid, or postdigital print forms is therefore something that is currently being struggled over by the various constituencies that surround the production, distribution, and consumption of academic books.

It is clear that if we want to explore the potential future(s) of the scholarly monograph in an increasingly digital environment, it is essential to examine the history of the book in relationship to the practices and institutions

that have accompanied the monograph; to analyze the specific contexts out of which the book as a technology coemerged.<sup>13</sup> This asks for a closer look at how the book form has developed, from writing systems such as wax tablets and scrolls to codices and e-books—to cite a few of the most obvious examples—and to explore how, as a specific material form, the scholarly monograph came to be what it is today, influencing and shaping scholarly communication at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

The monograph, as a specific media technology, is continuously reproduced in specific contexts: by academic professional and disciplinary structures, where the printed monograph serves as the dominant vehicle for promotion and tenure; and by the publishing industry, where the bound book format remains its main commodity form for the humanities. This partly explains why the digital, with its perceived affordances of openness, fluidity, and disintermediation, is seen by many as posing such a disruptive threat both to the traditional values of the humanities and to the business models of academic publishing. In this respect, the dichotomous nature of many of the debates over the future of the book (i.e., print vs. digital) can be traced back to a much larger struggle related to power structures and to who controls (new) knowledge and communication systems within academia.

That said, it is perhaps worth emphasizing that in my critique of this print-based legacy that continues to structure academia, it is not my intention to position the printed book *in opposition to* the digital book.<sup>15</sup> However, I am interested in how this often highly polemic battle over the future of the book (which also tends to draw on the crisis rhetoric mentioned previously—i.e., “the death of the printed book”) leads to a situation in which essentialized mythical affordances such as individual authorship, fixity, authority, originality, and trust have come to be connected to a specific format—that is, print. This is the case even though book historian Adrian Johns, for example, has argued extensively that the elements of trust invested in print publications were in large part the result of social structures and systems that were negotiated and put in place (including an elaborate disciplining regime set up and maintained by publishers and booksellers) and thus were not natural or essential to print at all.<sup>16</sup> This defensive stance on the future of the book, based on an idealized print past, is something that *Living Books* investigates and critiques. It does so first and foremost in order to emphasize the non-self-identical condition of texts: print is not fixed and stable—not in its production, its dissemination, or its

reception—and it has also never been stable.<sup>17</sup> Witness our need for bibliographical studies and critical editing to try to recover the presumed original state of a work (from Shakespeare to the Bible). Furthermore, this critique also aims to expose the power struggles, the politics, and the value systems that lie behind our hegemonic print-based habits and debates and aims to explore whether, through our practices and actions, we can offer alternatives to perform the book differently, in potentially more ethical ways.

Let me reiterate here that print-based communication is evenly capable of promoting more ethical and experimental forms of scholarly communication. Print is not the problem here, nor is digital the solution. What I am referring to when I write about *print-based forms of communication* is the way print has been commodified and essentialized: through a *discourse* that prefers to see print as linear, bound, and fixed (as a “work” with an “author”) and through a system of material production within publishing and academia—which includes our institutions and practices of scholarly communication—that today certainly prefers quantifiable objects as auditable performance indicators. Even more, it is this “print complex,” with its power structures and stakeholders, that is being increasingly supplanted in a digital environment, while the book is being rethought as an object and commercial product within digital publishing.

This critique of our print-based systems and practices notwithstanding, digital books are similarly encapsulated in formative processes and structures. As a result, essentializing attributes or properties, such as openness and fluidity, are also accorded to the digital format. I therefore also do not want to claim that the potential for increased collaboration and open forms of publishing will be a guaranteed outcome of “digital innovation.” Experimenting with new forms of communication is hard work, involving more than only the overcoming of technological barriers. As I outline throughout *Living Books*, it also entails a critical redesign of scholarship. Digital promises and utopias will similarly face scrutiny. It is my intention to examine those aspects that might *actually* be exciting, experimental, and perhaps more ethical in digital scholarship. This includes analyzing digital publishing projects that explore in an ongoing manner what a new digital ethics and politics might entail. In this respect, I concur with Johanna Drucker, when she argues that “we can’t rely on a purely technological salvation, building houses on the shifting sands of innovative digital platforms, with all the attendant myths and misconceptions. Which aspects of

digital publishing are actually promising, useful, and/or usefully innovative for the near and long term?"<sup>18</sup>

This book presents the argument that, on the whole, both sides in this debate (around print and digital) still very much cling to concepts connected to the bound and printed book and remain overwhelmingly *humanist*. Even when it comes to experiments with the book that are proposed by those working in an online context, most of the time digital substitutes are being sought for stability, authority, and quality. This can be seen as an attempt to structure the digital according to the academic arrangements and value systems that, as scholars, we have grown accustomed to with print. Some examples of the kind I come back to throughout this book: Wikis, seen by some as *the* exemplary fluid and collaborative technology of the digital environment, are set up in such a way that any edits that are made to them, as well as information concerning who made these edits, are easily retrievable. Creative Commons licenses, designed to make the sharing and reuse of materials easier, are still based on underlying liberal notions of authorship and ownership, and instead of offering an alternative to copyright only really reform it.<sup>19</sup> And finally, the remixer, curator, or collector, often positioned as offering a radical critique of the individual and original author, has merely succeeded in adopting the latter's position and authority. In other words, instead of experimenting with the new medium and rigorously examining the systems and values on which the book is based (including notions of individual authorship, ownership, and originality), many experiments with digital monographs are emulating print. The fact that digital books are finding it difficult to move beyond these kinds of print-based aspects is further fueled by a discourse and a system of power relations that has invested heavily in this print-based system. For instance, think of the (initial) reluctance among publishers to experiment with open access and their continued use of digital rights management (DRM) on digital books and platforms to mimic print-based copyright mechanisms. *Living Books* showcases experiments that explore the book, its debates, and its practices and systems affirmatively—no matter what kind of format, whether it be manuscript, print, digital, hybrid, or postdigital. Experiments, in other words, that imagine the book itself as a space of experimentation, as a space to intervene in the fabric of our scholarship, and as a space to question the hegemonies in scholarly book publishing with the aim of performing scholarship differently.



Who, then, is currently experimenting with the book in these ways, and why? One example is scholars who want to change the way quality is established through experiments with new forms of (open) peer review or who want to critique the myth of single, individual authorship by exploring forms of collaborative and even anonymous authorship. But there are also scholars (and publishers) who want to question the commodification of the book by exploring both gift economies and the opening up of the book through forms and institutions of open access publishing and commoning or, related to that, who want to explore the fixity of the book through experiments with reuse and the remixing of material, or those who intend to critique the objectification and bound nature of the book by working with processual works, with liquid books, and with versioning.<sup>20</sup> Yet most interesting of all, perhaps, are scholars who see the book as laying at the basis of our system of knowledge production in the humanities and for whom changing, rethinking, and reimagining the book is seen as an important and perhaps even essential (first) step toward reimagining a different, more ethical humanities—albeit a humanities that is messy and processual, contingent, unbound, and unfinished, something we could perhaps start to perceive as a *posthumanities*.

### Posthumanities

As part of its overall argument, *Living Books* wants to contribute to a further decentering of the humanist tendencies still dominant in the humanities today. These tendencies are clearly reflected in humanities' communication and publishing practices, especially in the perceived "salient features" attributed to the printed book. These reflect a clear anthropocentrism, a reassertion of the primacy of man, which comes to the fore in the fetishization of the rational, individual, original, liberal humanist author, perceived as an autonomous agent responsible for knowledge creation. But beyond this romantic focus on the author-subject, these humanist essentialisms are also performed through the medium of the book, reflected as they are both in the book as object and in the social practices forged around it—that is, in the way the book is perceived as a fixed and bound commodity, as an original work that can be owned and copyrighted by a proprietary author-owner. Within such a humanist framework, agency is perceived as

a property of individual, indivisible, unified entities, something a clearly defined author or book-object has.

In general, this reflects the authority of certain essentialist ideas related to the universal sovereign “human,” ideas that continue to underlie the humanities. A critique of this authority and, with that, of the universal definition of man adopted within these fields has been developed for over a century now, but nonetheless this authority remains strongly ingrained in humanities knowledge production. This critique has shown that what has been instilled is a normative and severely restrictive definition of *man* and of what it means to be human, which has turned into a social convention about what the category *human* includes, establishing strong binaries based on exclusion to maintain its privileged position in opposition to the nonhuman other (e.g., the female, animal, machinic, algorithmic, environmental). We can see this reflected in what practices of authoring have been allowed and are regulated (e.g., the individual self-identical author) and which have been excluded (e.g., plagiarism, piracy, distributed authorship). *Living Books* contributes to breaking down these supposedly natural and normative practices—exploring that which has been excluded in this process—and with that challenges the primacy of the human in humanities knowledge production. How can we think of foundational concepts and practices such as authorship, texts, the book, copyright, and the university differently, while questioning the political economy, the aesthetics, and the methodologies that came to accompany these humanistic institutions?

One way to start breaking down this authority is by a wider reconsideration of the multiple intertwined agencies (human and nonhuman, technological and medial) involved in the production of research. This would include a recognition of the multiple forms and modes of authorship, taking into consideration the relationship between the author and the technologies or tools involved in knowledge production—as has been explored in depth in the (critical) digital humanities and media studies, for example. This is to emphasize how our tools or technologies of mediation (including the book) are often othered, too—for example, when the relation between humans and tools is defined as external. In this context, this would indicate that technologies (e.g., the book, writing) are set up in a binary relationship to authorship (i.e., the author-subject vs. the book-object) instead of being seen as playing an integral agentic role in meaning production. Working with expanded concepts of agency in this respect—such as those brought

forward in theories of feminist new materialism and posthumanism—might aid in recognizing the diversity of relations at work in publishing and knowledge production. This includes a recognition that technology is part of what it means to be human, of how humans are entangled with their technologies, constituted in and through them. Following Derrida and Stiegler, technics are *originary*, meaning that we as humans have been posthuman from the very beginning.

In formulating, performing, and expanding this critique of the idea of the human around which so much of the humanities has been built, *Living Books* connects to a larger movement toward formulating a *posthumanities*. *Post* here is not intended to be oppositional; it also does not denote *after*. It rather reflects a questioning and deconstructing of humanities' humanist legacy, wherein a posthumanities has always already been preinscribed in the humanities; it has always been part of the humanities' humanist *other*. A "becoming-posthumanities" then involves a critical exploration of how new (digital) tools and technologies offer opportunities to rethink and reperform our humanist fixtures, institutions, and practices (including authorship, the book as a fixed object, and copyright), questioning our standard (print-based) parameters within the humanities, and asking why they have become hegemonic. Why have we provided them (and continue to provide them) with so much power and legitimacy within our systems of knowledge production? As part of this, a posthumanities explores more in depth our relationships to tools and technologies, examining the agency of the technologies we interact with and how we can take into consideration the agentic nature of our tools, including as part of experiments with more distributed and multiagentic authorship practices. Extending from this, taking on insights from posthumanism, this involves conceptualizing the book as an *apparatus*, constituted of various agencies and subjectivities (e.g., human, animal, environmental, machinic, organic) and ways of thinking and being.<sup>21</sup>

But perhaps most importantly, a posthumanities asks what it would mean to create spaces for alternative posthumanities' ways or methods to create, perform, and distribute research. How can we design ways of communicating that better accommodate a plurality of different actors and actants, acknowledging the agency of nonhumans and material objects in research practices, while at the same time not taking the binary human/nonhuman as a given? Ways that decenter the human and, with that, creatively and affirmatively reperform our ideas of the humanities, asking how

research can be more inclusive with respect to present, past, and potential future intermediaries? In this sense, a posthumanities has to include both a theoretical *and* a practical critique. In other words, next to a theoretical investment, it should also involve our scholarly practices, methods, and approaches with respect to authorship, with respect to producing, circulating, and disseminating research, and with respect to the aesthetics of our scholarship (beyond text and toward the visual and graphical, for example). How can we aid in a practical posthumanist critique of ingrained humanist notions? Within *Living Books*, this is particularly explored as part of the development of a form of posthumanist authorship, as described in chapter 2, and of a scholarly poethics, as described in chapter 4. At the same time, practically, a posthumanities approach has been an integral part of the development of this research project throughout its various versions. In this sense, *Living Books* asks: How can we perform knowledge-making practices differently, to the point where we actually begin to take on (rather than take for granted, repress, or ignore) the implications of the posthuman on how we live, work, and act as academics and researchers? What can the humanities become in all these entangled constellations?

With this reassessment of the agencies of knowing comes a reacknowledgement that the *I* or *we* that knows can no longer be taken in simply by an individual human *I* (including the supposedly static and stable authorial *I* and communal *we* used throughout this book). An opening up of the *we* involved in knowledge production allows then for a problematization and an expansion of the frame of knowledge subjectivities (beyond a narrow human or humanistic frame), to include a complex network of various different voices, elements, and perspectives, and agentic relations with which *we* are entangled and produced out of. The *Is* and *wes* this book is composed off are thus already always plural, consisting of a manifold multiplicity of actors, groups, relations, and networks. These *Is* and *wes* signal membership of an indeterminate community, yet a community which this book nonetheless—paradoxically, perhaps—makes an appeal to throughout to take up responsibility for its publishing practices. Normally *we* is used in a reflexive way to signal membership of a certain community, but in this case it is a *we* that doesn't necessarily from the outset delineate the boundaries of a community in a specific way. In this sense, *Living Books* appeals to all of you: to the community to come.

### Book Future and Book Past

Focusing on alternative futures for the scholarly book specifically doesn't mean the book's past or present condition should be neglected; both stages are fundamentally wrapped up in the book's further becoming. Challenging unilinear representations of past, present, and future enables us to instead focus more on the book's ongoing development—the book to come, in Blanchot's words—which is always unfolding in an enveloping move with its past and future.<sup>22</sup> Past, present, and future are here seen as relative concepts, where a different reading of the past reconfigures the book's future and vice versa.<sup>23</sup> *Living Books* therefore focuses equally on the history of the book and on its discursive formation, taking into account how a specific reading and (re)reading of that history shapes the book's present and future.

The importance of the book's history (i.e., the influence of the book's past materiality and systems of material production) on the medium's present and future condition has always been acknowledged within book studies. However, as set out in chapter 1, not enough attention has been given in past and current models of book history to how book history *writing* has shaped the book's becoming. Hence it is important to analyze the specific manner in which book history has been written and to explore the vision of the book that has been brought forward by the prevailing discourse on book history.<sup>24</sup> For example, this discourse is highly dichotomous, based on various sets of oppositions (e.g., the causal relation between the book on the one hand and culture or society on the other hand) related to the description of the book. Furthermore, the book itself is mostly described in an *objective* way—disconnected from us as scholars and unrelated to our communication practices—as an object that either has agency or has agency inflicted upon it. In addition, there is also an object-centered approach that lies at the heart of book history—an approach that envisions the book as an object instead of as an interconnected and relational process, or event.<sup>25</sup>

Contrary to this, the second part of chapter 1 highlights how the book and society cannot be disconnected so easily in this kind of oppositional thinking as both are always already entangled. In this respect, the argument is made that book historians and media theorists need to give due recognition to the inherent connectedness of the various elements and plural agencies involved in the becoming of the book. This includes our own discursive as well as material entanglement with the book as scholars, wherein

our book histories are inherently *performative*, meaning that our specific depiction of the book's history is incremental in shaping its future to come. This becomes even more pertinent if we take into consideration the way that we as academics are not only influencing the becoming of the book through our *discursive* actions—that is to say, through our descriptions of the book's past, our reflections on its current condition, and our speculation on its potential future—but also simultaneously shaping the book through our *material* scholarly practices, through our usage of the book as a specific medium to publish and communicate our findings about its being and development.

*Living Books* therefore intervenes in this book historical discourse—which up to now has mainly adhered to forms of *representationalism* and binary thinking—and reframes it by focusing on its inherent *performativity* and by paying extra attention to how studies of the book in their description of the book-object, its history and becoming, have influenced its present and future incarnations.<sup>26</sup> This involves exploring the genealogy of the book and the assumptions that lie behind our historical descriptions of the book medium. In doing this, connections are made with the material-discursive genealogies of Michel Foucault and the agential realism of Karen Barad, with contemporary (materialist) media theories of (re)mediation and media archaeology, and with theories of feminist new materialism. These theories support the performative materialist approach toward the scholarly monograph that is adopted in this book, as part of which the monograph is positioned within a wider meshwork of processual relations.

Foucault's concepts of archaeology and genealogy provide key reasons for the relevance of analyzing the history of the scholarly book here. Foucault's historiographical methodology allows us to explore and understand the emergence and development of book discourses from within certain contexts and practices, while simultaneously highlighting the critical and performative possibilities of (re)reading these discourses differently. Foucault has used his archaeological method to investigate how a certain object or discourse has originated and sustained itself, how its conditions of existence have been shaped by discourses and institutions and the rise of certain cultural practices, and how this exploration of the past of a certain object or discourse aides us in understanding its present condition better and enables us to rethink the new in the light of the old. He emphasized the way in which our historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the

present state of knowledge and thus how our foundational concepts can be seen as the effects and the outcomes of specific formations of power.<sup>27</sup> In his later genealogical strategy, Foucault critiqued readings of origin in his search for minor knowledges arising from local discursivities, drawing attention to neglected, alternative, and counter histories that have developed in the subconscious of a discourse's development. As Dreyfus and Rabinow point out, in his archaeological practice, Foucault initially focused more on how a discourse organizes itself and the practices and institutions it is directed at, while neglecting the way a discourse is itself embedded in and affected by these practices and institutions. In his genealogical approach, this original focus on an autonomous discourse is subjected to a thorough critique.<sup>28</sup> Origins are here seen as embedded in political stakes, wherein genealogy investigates the institutions, practices, and discourses that come to determine a hegemonic origin against multiple and diffuse points of origin. Foucault's interest here lies in how truth claims emerge and how we can read them differently. With his critique of established historical readings or discourses—which thus function as systems of authority and constraint—Foucault wanted to focus on the heterogeneity of histories, to emancipate historical knowledges from subjection and to enable them to struggle against a hegemonic unitary discourse.<sup>29</sup>

The overview of the histories of the book provided in *Living Books* similarly present archaeology and genealogy as related and in many ways complementary concepts and strategies.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, this study is archaeologically informed as it is interested in the origins and development of both the current dominant discourse surrounding the printed book (and more specifically the scholarly monograph) in its transition to the digital environment and the book format under the influence of this discourse (and vice versa). But it is genealogical, too, in the sense that it pays specific attention to the formations of power that influence and determine both this discourse and the dominant descriptions and analyses of this discourse, and with that the book as object as it has developed and continues to develop in an increasingly digital environment.

From a specific media historical viewpoint, excavating the histories of the book is also important in order to illustrate how “new media” (e-books, printed books) have historically remediated “old media” (printed books, manuscripts) and to explore the influence of other new media, such as film, television, and digital media, on the development of the printed book and

the e-book. Remediation, as understood by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, is one of the theoretical frameworks that has been developed to conceptualize some of the continuities between media and to explain the continuous resurfacing of the old in the new (and, vice versa, the adaptation of the old to the new).<sup>31</sup> As media theorists Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska point out, remediation does not emphasize a separation between the past and the present and between new and old media in the form of technological convergence.<sup>32</sup> Rather, Bolter and Grusin critique visions of history as linear and teleological and favor the idea of history as a contingent genealogy: nonlinear and cyclical. To expand on this, it is important to stress the political, cultural, and economic forces that (re)mediate media and to emphasize—with respect to the constructive power of scholarly practices, for instance—the performative power of our own daily practices in reproducing and remediating the printed monograph in the digital domain. As Bolter and Grusin state: “No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.”<sup>33</sup>

*Living Books* therefore pays attention to the emergence of scholarly practices and institutions in the Western academic world that influenced the development of specific discourses surrounding the book and its various material manifestations. Furthermore, it also pays close attention to alternative readings of the history of the book and its institutions. How did they emerge and for what reasons? How can we already find these alternative readings *within* the dominant discourses, instead of presenting them as dialectically opposed?<sup>34</sup> Throughout *Living Books*, ruptures and discontinuity from within are searched for and highlighted through a transversal discursive reading, emphasizing the heterogeneous character of the discourse on the history of the book and how it has been constructed. As part of this reframing of the discourse, this book proposes a *diffractive* reading to capture the book’s historical debate as it evolves.

Based on a practice and concept of reading introduced by Donna Haraway and subsequently taken up further predominantly by feminist new materialist scholars such as Karen Barad and Iris van der Tuin, a *diffractive reading* reads insights and positions through one another to acquire an



overview of the debate from multiple positions. In this sense, it is not based on a comparison between philosophies as closed, isolated entities; instead, a diffractive reading moves away from (presenting) humanist position-taking in opposition to other statements, readings, or schools of thoughts. I position diffraction as an affirmative, dynamic reading method or strategy instead, as a specific posthumanities practice of critique, one that is embedded and productive, one which “breaks through the academic habit of criticism and works along affirmative lines.”<sup>35</sup>

I am thus not installing what Van der Tuin has called “a new master narrative,” in the sense of putting forward a new performative or feminist new materialist reading of the book historical debate in opposition to earlier readings.<sup>36</sup> Instead, this diffractive method is used to read established narratives through each other to emphasize their entanglement, to explore where differences arise and are constituted, and to (begin to) move beyond the binaries that have structured the discourse—breaking through, as Van der Tuin has argued, “a politics of negation.”<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the performative character of the debate is highlighted to show the continued influence it has on the present and future material manifestations of the book.

Throughout *Living Books*, this diffractive reading involves a reframing of the history of the book and the material formations and practices that have accompanied it (from authorship to openness): by *diffractively reading* the oppositional discourses through each other, to emphasize their connectedness and to push them to their limits by juxtaposing them; by laying more emphasis on the *humanist tendencies* in this discourse, their ongoing influence and the performative attempts to critique them; and finally, by drawing more attention to the *performativity* of these material-discursive formations and our own involvement as scholars in their becoming. This will highlight the multiple, mutually interwoven aspects of the discourse in its becoming, as well as leave space for heterogeneous discursivities within this framework.

### Material-Discursive Practices

A specific focus on a genealogy of the book, focusing on its historicity and temporality, needs to simultaneously consider the book's emergent materiality, which encompasses both the systems of material production that have surrounded the book in its ongoing development (including our institutions

and scholarly practices), as well as the specific material formats of the book (i.e., manuscript, digital), with all their potentials and limitations. I am particularly interested here in the way the material agency of the book influences how we think and act as scholars and how we communicate our findings. This also includes a recognition of how the materiality of the codex book is actively structuring the digital becoming of the book, for example. On the other hand, the specific affordances of the digital book simultaneously create conditions for new forms of knowledge and new scholarly practices (or at least they have the potential to do so). The book is thus an embodied entity, materially established through its specific affordances in relationship to its production, dissemination, and reception; that is, the specific materiality of the digital book is partly an outcome of these ongoing processes. As Katherine Hayles states, materiality is a “dynamic quality . . . joining the physical and mental, the artifact and the user.”<sup>38</sup>

Hayles is an important theorist to have argued for the importance of a more robust notion of materiality in media studies in this respect, especially in the realm of print and hypertext. Hayles’s campaign for *media-specific analysis* (MSA) is very valuable in this context, too, as part of which she emphasizes that the meaning of a text is integrally entwined with its materiality, or *physicality*. Texts are thus embodied entities and materiality an emergent property, “existing in a complex dynamic interplay with content” (and additionally contingent through the user’s interactions with the work).<sup>39</sup> She is sensitive to the influence of what D. F. McKenzie calls the *social text* on the materiality of the book, in this sense extending her notion of materiality toward “the social, cultural, and technological practices that brought it into being” and the practices it enacts.<sup>40</sup> Hayles focuses less, however, on the historical discourses and narratives that she herself and her scholarly colleagues have constructed on the meaning, the definition, and the future and past of the book, and on the continued performative influence of these discourses on the evolving materiality of the book (and vice versa). As stated previously, this reflexive act of being aware of and critical of one’s own practices and contributions to the larger discourse, while rethinking and reperforming them, is what *Living Books* is in large part about, extending from the tradition of feminist rereadings and rewritings of (masculine) discourses.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, first of all, I conceptualize the material development of the book as being inseparable from its discursive becoming, where the argument

this book presents is that discourse is always already material, and material always already discursive—instead of positioning the two in opposition to each other or exploring in which way the one influences the other, which has been the dominant tendency in the discourse on book history. We need to be aware of how discourse organizes social practices and institutions, while our discursive practices are at the same time affected by the practices and institutions in which they, and we, are embedded. Drawing inspiration from—as well as showing some of the inconsistencies in—among others, the work of Roger Chartier, Adrian Johns, Robert Darnton, and Paul Duguid (book theorists who have all tried to de-emphasize in more or less successful ways the oppositional nature of the book-historical debate), and diffractively reading them with Karen Barad's theories of agential realism and Donna Haraway's notion of the material-semiotic, I view these material-discursive practices as *entanglements*.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, I want to emphasize that media discursive practices are *performative*. Based on a reading of the later work of Foucault, its understanding of power and discourse as productive and affirmative (i.e., performative), and its insistence on the entangled nature of matter/bodies and discursive structures (*dispositif* or *apparatus*), *Living Books* attempts to think beyond these dualisms. Applying Foucault's work on discursive formations, practices, and power struggles, I want to draw more attention to how scholars' own discursive practices—specifically with respect to the scholarly book—materially produce, rather than merely describe, both the subjects and objects of knowledge practices and thus partly determine the dynamic and complex nature of the history and becoming of scholarly practices. In this respect, this study is performative, too: it is actively involved in and takes responsibility for the becoming of the scholarly book and wants to explore how it can enable different incisions in its development, incisions that might promote a more ethical involvement (from scholars) with the book as it unfolds.

To further support this, the work of various feminist new materialist theorists is engaged. As a theoretical project, (feminist) new materialism can be seen as displaying an antipathy to oppositional, dialectical thinking; instead, it emphasizes emergent, productive, generative, and creative forms of material becoming.<sup>43</sup> Important in this respect is that it sees embodied humans or theorists as immersed in these processes of materialization.<sup>44</sup> These insights are used to underscore the need to understand the book as a process of mutual becoming, as an entanglement of plural agencies (both human and

nonhuman). The separations, or *agential cuts*, as Barad calls them, that are created out of these entanglements have created inclusions and exclusions, book-objects and author-subjects, readers and writers. But cuts (or, using an alternative vocabulary, *incisions*, *decisions*, or *interventions*) need to be made, in order to enact boundaries, make concepts meaningful, and attach properties to objects. Following Barad, these cuts are enacted by the larger material arrangement of which we are a part, but we are still accountable for the cuts that are made, for the inclusions and exclusions that are woven, for the relationalities and forms of emergence that are established, and—in the words of Haraway—for the specific *world building* that we as scholars do.<sup>45</sup> Cutting thus involves taking responsibility for the boundaries and the separations and dualities we create through our discursive position-taking (in book historical debates, for example) and our material practices (by publishing a printed and bound book with a reputable publisher, for example).

As is argued more extensively in chapter 5, during the course of their history, scholarly books (and we as scholars are involved in this too, through our scholarly book publishing practices) have functioned as specific material-discursive practices, as *apparatuses* that cut into the real and make distinctions between, for example, objects of study and the subjects that research them (scholars or authors). At the same time, these practices produce these subject and object positions—in the way that, for example, scholars as discursing subjects are being (re)produced by the book and by the dominant discourses and practices that accompany it. Books are thus performative; they are reality-shaping, not just a mirroring of objective knowledge.

Based on this idea of the performativity of both the book and our discursive practices, the intention is to move beyond the dichotomies that have structured the debate on the history of the book in the past, by focusing on the entanglement of material-discursive (Barad) or material-semiotic (Haraway) practices that shape the form of the scholarly book, as well as the institutions accompanying it.<sup>46</sup> This study thus acknowledges the entangled agentic nature of books, scholars, and readers and of the discursive practices and the systems and institutions of material production that surround them (from the publishing house and the university to peer review and copyright).

## Versioning and Version Control

One of the main incisions that (historically) are made in relation to the process of the becoming of the book is one in which the book is cut into different iterations, editions, or *versions* (i.e., from drafts and typescripts to proofs, published versions, print runs, editions, and revised editions). As a concept and practice, *versioning*, as it has come to be used within academic research and publishing, refers to the frequent updating, rewriting, or modification of academic material that has been published in a formal or informal way. As a practice, it has affinity with software development, in which it is used to distinguish the various installments of a piece of software. Similarly, within music, versioning is a specific form of copying that relates to the practice of creating (cover) versions of “original” songs.<sup>47</sup> Versioning is also a common feature of many web-based publication forms, from blogs to wikis, based on the potential to quickly revise and save a piece of written material.

With versioning comes version or revision management and control, which can be seen as an important (inbuilt) aspect of versioning. In a software environment, for example, the various platforms and pieces of software that allow for updating most of the time also enable the tracking and archiving of the various modifications that are made to a work or project.<sup>48</sup> In collaborative environments such as wikis, this makes it possible to establish who is responsible for a specific edit and provides the possibility of comparing various revisions with one another.

Although related to software development, versioning and version control have been around for a long time and can even be seen as an essential aspect of writing (e.g., word processors), publishing (e.g., Victorian serial publications), editing, and scholarly communication more in particular.<sup>49</sup> Think about the practice within the sciences and increasingly in the humanities to publish preprints and postprints, but also online first versions, versions of record, corrected or updated versions, and revised editions. And even earlier research stages, including discussions on mailing lists, working papers, and conference presentations, can be regarded as different renditions of an academic publication in progress, reflecting various stages of development. However, where in a print context the communication or sharing of research in process mainly took place in small community settings (e.g., papers at conferences, postal exchanges, personal communications between colleagues), what has

changed most recently is that, depending on the scholarly field and context, these forms showcasing evolving scholarship are increasingly publicly available online. Witness the rising use of online social networks such as Twitter and Facebook (enabling the live-tweeting and streaming of research events, for example) and platforms such as Academia.edu and SlideShare, next to the prevalence of personal websites, blogs, and microblogs on which drafts and first research ideas are posted. Together these developments have led to research being shared publicly at a much earlier stage, often years before its formal publication, without the associated time lags formal publishing brings with it, not to mention the paywalls and copyright restrictions—but it also allows scholars to update, add to, and change their research as it progresses. For example, media theorist Lev Manovich published different iterations of his monograph *Software Takes Command* (2013) online on his website as the book developed. As he outlines with respect to this practice: “One of the advantages of online distribution which I can control is that I don’t have to permanently fix the book’s contents. Like contemporary software and web services, the book can change as often as I like, with new ‘features’ and ‘big fixes’ added periodically. I plan to take advantage of these possibilities. From time to time, I will be adding new material and making changes and corrections to the text.”<sup>50</sup>

Versioning also highlights the inherent collaborative nature of scholarship as more than often we publish drafts to solicit feedback from our colleagues, via which texts get redrafted and revised with the aid of our extended research communities, be this via comments at a conference or annotations on a draft paper posted online.<sup>51</sup> Within the humanities, it is fairly common for certain versions (i.e., the blog post, the conference presentation) to be clearly presented, communicated, and published as such during different points in a research work’s development. Yet only the so-perceived final (book or journal article) version as published by a press or publisher is held to be the *version of record*, authored by a specific author or set of authors as an original piece of work—even though, as highlighted, versions often emerge in and out of highly collaborative settings.

What I am mainly interested in with respect to this development is how these forms of processual and collaborative research have the potential to critique our current essentialized and object-based scholarship and publishing systems. Its increasing proliferation triggers a thorough rethinking of what both scholarship and publishing are; it encourages us to reevaluate at

what point and for what reasons we want to, should, or are required to cut down our ongoing research and how we can guarantee that these closures do not bind its further development. Instead of primarily emphasizing the end result as part of such an object-centered approach, could a focus on the various renditions of an academic work also involve a shift in our attention toward the collaborative and more *processual* nature of research? And might this lead us to start paying more attention to the performativity of our practices: that it matters *where* we bring out our various versions (what platforms we use or which publishers), *how* we do so (open or closed and with which license), and the different formats our versions appear in (print, HTML, video, PDF, podcast, EPUB)? Will it help us to look more closely, for instance, at how different platforms and formats influence the way we produce a specific version and how it is further used and interacted with? Could versioning also involve more recognition being given to the various groups of people that are involved in research creation and dissemination, as well as to the various materialities, technologies, and media that we use to represent and perform our research, from paper to software? Would a focus on the continuously evolving nature of research make us more aware of the various cuts we can and do make in our research and for what reasons? And might this involve us making more informed and meaningful decisions about which incisions we want to make, what kind of versions we would like to bring out, and with what intention (to communicate, collaborate, share, gift, attribute, credit, improve, brand, etc.)?

Versioning might in many ways better mirror the scholarly workflow research goes through. However, experimenting with different versions (including using different formats, platforms, and media) also offers us an opportunity to reflect critically on the way this workflow is currently (teleologically and hierarchically) set up, institutionalized, and commercialized within scholarly communication and how we might generate and communicate our work differently at the various stages of its development. It might, for example, encourage us to ask questions about the role of publishers and about what the publishing function entails exactly, as well as about the authority of a specific text and who does (and does not) get to have a role in establishing this authority. What currently counts as a formal version and for what reason? At what point has a text been reviewed by our peers, by our community of scholars, when in a public setting it can potentially be “reviewed” in a continuous manner, even after it has been

formally published? Collectively, as researchers, we have tried to organize our research and writing around fixed and authoritative texts, presumed consistent and stable from copy to copy, based on the technology of the printing press. Could we arrange our research differently around the processes of writing in a digital environment? As Kathleen Fitzpatrick suggests, for example: “What if we were freed—by a necessary change in the ways that we ‘credit’ ongoing and in-process work—to shift our attention away from publication as the moment of singularity in which a text transforms from nothing into something, and instead focus on the many important stages in our work’s coming-into-being?”<sup>52</sup>

Rethinking this organization involves taking a critical look at the way versioning is currently set up on web-based research platforms and services (and is also increasingly being conceived in academic publishing—think of digital object identifiers, for example). This includes an investigation of revision management and control (including which revisions and author edits are archived), which can be seen as an essential aspect of versioning. In other words, not only does this encourage thinking about what constitutes a version, at what point and for what reason, it also solicits further reflection on the ways in which we deal with these versions and conceptualize versioning within academia. Consider the idea of the materiality of different versions, for example, which becomes important if we look at scholarship in particular: the way research is versioned is hardly neutral, and there remains a clear difference between a text published in a blog post and a text published as a printed article, even if the text or content remains exactly the same.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, versioning in scholarly communication mainly seems to refer to the continuous updating of one single text, post, page, or topic (i.e., it assumes an original and a final version). What happens, though, if the updates and changes are ongoing and content is brought in from elsewhere; when texts are merged, remixed, and cut-up, abandoned, and taken up again; or are simultaneously published on a variety of platforms or in plural formats?<sup>54</sup> Even more, if these updates are ongoing and collaborative, is it really necessary to keep all the various versions? And for how long do we keep them? What is the use of revision control in highly collaborative environments and wikis? Could insisting on this be perceived as yet another sign of our fear of letting go of (certain forms of) stability and fixity? Version control could again lead to the reinstalling of print-based and humanist mechanisms when each version becomes a clearly



recognizable fixed and stable unit with a single author and clear authority. Does this signify how versioning could become a new way of objectifying scholarship as part of its processual becoming, similar to current publishing business models based on selling various book formats, from hardcover to paperback and EPUB?<sup>55</sup> Can we in some way balance our need for both fixity and process? As *Living Books* argues, doing so will involve an in-depth exploration of when and at what points fixity is needed and for what reasons. In this respect, it is important that we are “thinking about how ideas move and develop from one form of writing to the next, and about the ways that those stages are represented, connected, preserved, and ‘counted’ within new digital modes of publishing,” as Fitzpatrick has argued.<sup>56</sup>

### Critical Praxis and Scholarly Poethics

Over the course of its development, the research for *Living Books* has been openly published in various versions or iterations itself. By positioning the book as a pivotal, yet struggled over, element shaping the future of knowledge production within the humanities, *Living Books* argues for the importance of experimenting with alternative ways of thinking about and performing the scholarly monograph. In particular, it argues for the importance of experiments that go beyond simply reproducing established practices of knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption. Therefore *Living Books* itself functions as an intervention and experiment; starting with the long-form argument that is the book itself, it actively critiques, in form, practice, and content, established print-based notions, politics, and practices within the humanities in a performative way. As such, its critical exploration into the materiality of the scholarly book and potential alternative futures for scholarly communication has included being openly published and versioned as part of its own emergence. Content has been (and will continue to be) made available by means of various social media, open archiving platforms, remixed and distributed multimodal and multiauthored publications, and interactive online versions—all interconnected in different ways. As part of its conduct and format, exploring and experimenting with (while at the same time remaining critical of) the possibilities of the digital medium, the way *Living Books* has been produced and distributed has become an integral part of its critical, interventionist, and performative stance. Making the research for this book available for reuse, comment, and interaction online as

it developed, in the form of blog posts, papers, articles, tweets, presentations, draft chapters, remixes, and various bound and printed as well as multimodal versions, was done with the specific intention of questioning and disturbing the existing scholarly publishing model—which is still focused on predominantly publishing the final outcomes of research, on proprietorial authorship, and on fixed text-objects.<sup>57</sup>

Following a methodology of what I have called elsewhere *critical praxis* and develop in this book further (in chapter 4) as part of the development of a *scholarly poethics*, *Living Books* has been envisioned as an experiment in making affirmative incisions into the book apparatus.<sup>58</sup> As I argue, engaging in a methodology of critical praxis can prevent the simplistic repetition of established practices without analyzing critically the assumptions on which they are based. *Critical praxis* then refers to the awareness of and the reflection on how our ideas and ideologies become embodied in our practices, making it possible to start to transform them. What this book tries to challenge is how certain structures and practices underlying knowledge production determine what counts as legitimate knowledge, while at the same time (re)producing a specific kind of subject position or social identity—namely, that of the academic scholar. Hence developing critical praxis can be seen as a method to critically analyze the dominant sociocultural conditions and relationships that constitute academia, as well as our own subject positions within the same.<sup>59</sup>

Experimenting with new practices to produce and distribute theory can serve as a direct critique of the material conditions under which humanities research is being produced. Cultural studies has been at the forefront here, exploring its own interventionist potential as a field, which, beyond a set of institutional practices, we can understand—with Ted Striphas—as a set of critical “writing practices.”<sup>60</sup> Scrutinizing the way these practices are currently set up and function underlines both systemic power relations at play and our own responsibilities in either repeating these practices or, alternatively, choosing different options. Having better access to the instruments of the production of cultural studies (i.e., the publishing system) and to the content that gets produced includes exploring and also taking control of “the conditions under which scholarship in cultural studies can—and increasingly cannot—circulate.”<sup>61</sup> Emphasizing our roles as scholars *within* this system would be an example of critical praxis in action, exploring how we can, as Striphas puts it, “contemplate anew what we may want out of

it, and as appropriate to reengineer the publishing system so as to better suit our needs.”<sup>62</sup> Yet beyond our practices and institutions, the (dominant) discourses relating to knowledge production similarly have strong subjectification effects, which contribute to what Alan O’Shea has called our “tendencies towards self-reproduction,” the effects of which are not pre-given but outcomes of specific struggles.<sup>63</sup> As O’Shea points out, “the practices in which we engage constitute us as particular kinds of subjects and exclude other kinds. The more routinised our practices, the more powerfully this closure works.”<sup>64</sup>

To maintain the position of the interventionist potential of the processual book, I do not theorize this closure imposed by the dominant discourses within academia and the subjectification effects they have in an “overemphasized way,” as O’Shea puts it. Rather, I draw on Foucault’s later work, in which he advances the ways in which subjects develop agency within constraining and subordinating systems. Subjects reproduce (hegemonic) power in a positive, productive way (e.g., by reproducing the liberal humanist author as part of our publishing practices); however, they also have the ability to modify power in a different, creative way, through reflexive technologies of the self that resist power’s normalizing effects.<sup>65</sup> If we envision critical praxis as both a critical method and a creative, transforming, and transformative one, part of this creative impulse then lies in the potential to, as Striphas puts it, “perform scholarly communication differently—that is, without simply succumbing, in Judith Butler’s words, to ‘the compulsion to repeat.’”<sup>66</sup> The (print-based and humanist) norms of scholarly communication that we perform today (and reproduce in a digital environment) through a routine set of practices were forged under historically specific circumstances, Striphas emphasizes—circumstances that might not apply in their entirety today. This triggers us to ask new questions about these practices and to start performing them more creatively and expansively (expanding our repertoire) than we currently do.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to stress however, as cultural and media theorist Gary Hall has argued extensively, that in our experiments with the digital, our ethics and politics should not be fixed from the start.<sup>68</sup> We need to leave room to explore our ethics and politics *as part of* our experiments, as part of the process of conducting our research and of producing living books. Critical praxis not only serves to critique established notions of how to write a book within the humanities, to provide just one example. As an affirmative

practice, it also has the potential to develop new (digital) research practices and to experiment with new forms of politics and ethics as part of that—including, in this specific case, practices that experiment with sharing, versioning, and reuse, as well as simultaneously remaining critical of these methods.

Chapter 4 extends this idea with respect to a scholarly poethics. It outlines how, next to having discussions about the contents, theories, or methods that make up and structure our scholarship, developing a scholarly poethics would include having in-depth deliberations about the way we *do* research, about the ways in which we perform and communicate it, which in this context involves paying more attention to how we craft our own research aesthetics and poetics as scholars, exploring the forms and material incarnations (as well as the specific relationalities of publishing these would embody) that would best suit our contingent scholarship. Taking its inspiration from earlier explorations of the aesthetics and poetics of the book in art, poetry, new media, and electronic literature, *Living Books* encourages the uptake of the experimental ethos and practices that have driven material explorations in these fields in an academic research and publishing context. *Living Books* can therefore be seen as an experiment in developing a scholarly poethics as part of its digital, open research practice.

Publishing versions of this research on different platforms, and then remixing and gathering these dispersed versions together in various other forms and outputs—of which this book is one—raises, as mentioned previously, questions about the bound and objectified nature of the book and of scholarly research more in general. This practice—not uncommon in (digital) humanities scholarship—relates to the production of what Marjorie Perloff has called *differential texts*, which she defines as “texts that exist in different material forms, with no single version being the definitive one.”<sup>69</sup> In this specific case, *Living Books*’ differential method has been designed to draw attention to the processual and collaborative nature of this research in its various settings and through its multiple institutions of informal and formal communication, from social media and conferences to mailing lists and journals. Instead of being just a single, linear, long-form argument, *Living Books* has been designed in such a way that the majority of its multiple distributed versions can be traversed, read, rewritten, and reperformed in manifold ways. The different forms and shapes the previous versions of this book and their (multiple) arguments have taken on, framed and embedded

as they are within other debates, shows the reusability and remixability of the different strands of this argument in different contexts, highlighting how the specific manner and order in which this argument is narrated within this book is not the only way in which it can (possibly) unfold.

My choices for the specific versions outlined previously have further been based on an intention to explore those platforms, technologies, and pieces of software that favor experimentation, openness, interaction, multimodality, and interdisciplinarity, as these are the features of scholarly communication that I wanted to highlight and examine in this book. To what extent can these features, in combination with the various material incarnations of this book, help reimagine the bounded nature of the monograph? How do these versions differ from each other, and how are they shaped by the specific material affordances of the software, platforms, and media that support them, in intra-action with our scholarly practices and the structuring discourses and institutions surrounding these?

Versioning has also served as a method to highlight how problematic it is to connect the idea of (myself as) the individual humanist author to the monograph more in general and to this book in specific, as many of the texts from which *Living Books* has emerged have been coauthored, commented upon, reviewed, and/or annotated in various settings by different (groups of) people and are thus necessarily the results of (reworkings of) inherently collaborative work. This is of particular importance when we take into account that a monograph is commonly thought to consist of all original work written by the book's proprietorial author.<sup>70</sup> *Living Books* has wanted to instead focus on the processual and collaborative nature of this research in development, to provide credit to the various people and groups (but also the various posthuman agencies) that have been contributors to this research; who have shaped it, enabled it, commented upon it, critiqued it, adapted it, or shared it, among others. With this, *Living Books* simultaneously calls into question the nature of agency, as presumed to be attached to and localized within individual human authors or material (book) objects.

*Living Books* is therefore also accompanied by an extensive *endnotes section*, in which I further elaborate some of the ideas and concepts developed in this book, connect to and acknowledge existing literature, and highlight specific developments. My choice to use explanatory endnotes in this extended way is partly because endnotes and footnotes are one of the more

established ways in which linear narratives can be broken down within print publishing, highlighting its networked and hypertextual capabilities. But more importantly, it allows me to relate to and establish relationships with the communities of scholars, practitioners, and activists this research is connected with and indebted to, to emphasize the significance of their contributions to the development of this research and the ideas it is based upon. It highlights how this research is always already collaborative and in progress.

In this sense, echoing what Karen Barad outlines in her introduction to *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, *Living Books* is the outcome of an ongoing entanglement of agencies: “Friends, colleagues, students, and family members, multiple academic institutions, departments, and disciplines, the forests, streams, and beaches of the eastern and western coasts, the awesome peace and clarity of early morning hours, and much more were a part of what helped constitute both this ‘book’; and its ‘author.’”<sup>71</sup>

### A Nonfinal Version

Yet it is impossible to ignore how this book has also, as one of its main iterations, been published as a conventionally bound, printed book. Monographs remain the customary requirement (especially with first books) toward acquiring tenure and permanent positions within humanities fields—and this book in particular needs to fulfill the requirements of the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF).<sup>72</sup> This formally published version is perceived to be a single-authored written piece of original work in long format, narrating a linear argument, bound and made available both in print and digitally (as a PDF). This will most likely be regarded as the final or original version, or the version of record. However, as I have wanted to point out by versioning this book in the ways I outlined earlier, this “bound” version is not necessarily the most important, interesting, or valuable version of the book, nor is it necessarily the “final” version. Not only are the different versions of this book connected to each other, they are also connected to the other works they reference. The intention behind *Living Books* has always been to create different instantiations of the book’s argument, existing on distinct yet connected platforms, to experiment with what these different forms and formats can bring to the argument, its reception and interaction, how they change it and form it. These iterations then function as nodes in

a multiformat, interlinked, distributed network of texts, notes, drafts, references, and remixes, wherein no part is necessarily more or less important than the other parts, nor will one text form the end point or final version of the book project. Yet, and this is what *Living Books* wants to critically reflect upon, certain versions do become more important due to the value and importance awarded to them within our scholarly communication and reputation systems.

A further reason I am therefore focusing on a variety of versions as part of this book, from blog posts to interactive versions, wiki versions, and multimodal remixed versions—all types of publishing that are currently being experimented with within humanities publishing and communication—is to challenge the continued emphasis on the end result of our research as being the most valuable, to stress that different cuts are possible in the publishing process—cuts that perform various functions for the scholar, the research, and the platforms that carry them (i.e., registration, collaboration, feedback, annotation, reuse, critique). Experiments in recutting, versioning, and remixing research materials are one potential means to extend our notions of the book and to gather our research together and re-envision it in alternative ways, exploring what other kinds of publishing are possible. Gary Hall has made this clear with respect to the new strategy for academic writing and publishing that he himself and others are critically and creatively experimenting with at the moment—in particular, through his openly produced series of performative media projects or “media gifts” (cut down in one of its iterations as a book, *Pirate Philosophy*): “The book version should not be positioned as providing the overarching, final, definitive, most systematic, significant, or authentic version of any material that also appears in other iterations, forms, and places; nor should it be taken as designating a special or privileged means of understanding the media projects with which it is concerned. It is, rather, one knot or nodal point in this meshwork, one possible means of access to or engagement with it.”<sup>73</sup>

*Living Books* has been published in open access with a license that allows further derivatives (i.e., versioning, reuse, and remix). The MIT Press has been experimenting with a variety of models over the years to raise and secure funds to publish its books in open access.<sup>74</sup> In 2019 MIT Press Direct was launched, the Press’s own dedicated platform for ebook distribution to libraries, and in 2021 the MIT Press announced the launch of Direct to Open (D2O)—a consortial funding model—a collaborative, library-supported

model to enable the publication of open access books. Starting in 2022 all new MIT Press monographs and edited collections will be openly available on MIT Press Direct, funded through the participation fees of supporting partner libraries (in exchange for access to the Press's back catalog).<sup>75</sup>

These kinds of membership models to support open access publishing are a promising alternative to the model increasingly used to support open access for books—namely, book processing charges (BPCs). This so-called author-pays model, which has proved increasingly popular among commercial presses and university presses, puts in additional monetary barriers for humanities scholars (and their institutions) willing to publish open access. This makes it especially hard for publications that have developed without external funding connected to them or which have developed out of post-graduate or early career research (as *Living Books* has) to be published openly. It also introduces additional competition for already scarce funding into the humanities fields—next to creating further global inequity with respect to who gets to publish. Beyond questions of whether a BPC-based open access model is necessary to recover costs (with most BPC models, the processing charge seems to be based on the perceived loss of print sales when a book is available in open access, when it is not necessarily the case that there will be a loss of sales), the question remains whether academics or universities paying for these kinds of high BPCs to cover the costs for making a book openly accessible is the right decision to make (always and in all cases).<sup>76</sup> For example, in the context of commercial publishing, BPCs take away any risk for the publisher and hence become nothing more than glorified subsidies for a commercial system.<sup>77</sup> In addition to BPCs covering publishing costs, publishers can still make additional profits through the sales of printed books and freemium services on top of a free open access edition—a practice more commonly known as *double-dipping*.<sup>78</sup> This question, whether to pay a BPC to publish a book in open access, is especially problematic in cases in which, as with *Living Books*, its various earlier versions were already available in open access before it was formally published as a scholarly monograph. In addition to that, not (formally) publishing a book in open access does not necessarily mean it will not be openly available.<sup>79</sup>

My focus in *Living Books* is, however, less on thinking about open access as something that only applies to the *products* or *outcomes* of publishing, to published books and articles, but instead, in the spirit of open notebook science, as something that applies to the various different ways in which we can share our research openly as it develops, on “developing a (pre- and



post-) publishing economy characterized by a multiplicity of different, and at times conflicting, models and modes of creating, binding, collecting, archiving, storing, searching, reading, and interacting with academic research and publications.<sup>80</sup> Even more, for this particular bound and fixed book or (online) PDF version, it being published in open access is arguably less important than for those versions (e.g., the CommentPress version or the wiki version) that are designed to promote and directly solicit open interaction with the arguments presented in this book. Most of the more experimental aspects (both conceptually and design-wise) of this research have been developed as part of previous versions, mainly due to the fact that most presses currently do not have the means, skills, and expertise (or willingness, given the perceived lack of revenue from these kinds of experiments) to support experimental, multimodal, and processual forms of publishing. However, the way the current attention system and politics of valuation in academia is set up is that these kinds of more experimental iterations (which, when not formally published by a journal or publisher—although often community-reviewed—are seen as informal or gray publications) are most often only interacted with by specialized communities, and it is still through the medium of a closed access book published by a reputable publisher that a wider and different public are made aware of this research.

In this context, the choice for the MIT Press, and for the Leonardo book series in particular, has been a deliberate one, given the forerunner position the MIT Press has always taken in the realm of experimental and open access publishing.<sup>81</sup> As outlined previously, *Living Books* has from its first instantiation attempted to rethink, reimagine, and reperform the scholarly book and a scholarly communication system that continues to prefer clear-cut, bound, and fixed objects to emerge from our research; a preference based on a print paradigm and the structures and practices that have grown up around this. It explores the different cuts or incisions possible in our scholarship, ones that are potentially more ethical and that highlight the processual, iterative, collaborative, and distributed nature of scholarship. In this respect, its aims are aligned with those of the Leonardo community: to promote critical explorations of established material forms and media histories and to draw connections between fields and disciplines across art, scholarship, and technology. With its focus on new media, media poetics, and media performativity; its uptake of new intellectual paradigms (such as media archaeology); its attention to the genealogy and materiality of media

and technology; but most of all its focus on activism, experimentation, ethics, and change across these fields and topics, the Leonardo journal and book series has been an important inspiration for what this book tries to argue and achieve, and it constitutes a valuable context and community for its ideas to be taken up and to be developed further.

To cut down and gather this processual research in a bound book format published by the MIT Press has therefore been a specific choice, though not one that should be perceived as an endpoint but rather as a cleaving, a gathering together of some of its earlier iterations. This experiment in versioning *Living Books*—which is ongoing—is intended to raise awareness of the specific incisions that we make when we publish research (and the ones that are made for us) and to explore whether we can potentially make different, more informed and meaningful intermissions in our research, at different stages during its development. How can we make critical cuts in our scholarship while at the same time promoting a politics of the book that is open and responsible to change, to difference, and to that which is excluded? When and why do we declare a work done? When do we declare ourselves authors? And how do we establish our connections with others in this respect? These remain intrinsically ethical questions, especially when we perceive ethics not as something that is external to us, established from the outside by preestablished norms and principles, but as something that is always already present in our practices and institutions and performed through them.<sup>82</sup> Experimenting critically with the materiality of the scholarly book, with its accompanying “aesthetics of bookishness,” and with the way our system of scholarly communication currently operates is, as *Living Books* argues, a meaningful step toward such a continuous ethical engagement.<sup>83</sup>

One could argue that the coming of a new medium offers us a gap, a moment within which—through our explorations of the new medium—dominant structures and practices become visible and we become aware of them more clearly. The discourse, institutions, and practices that have come to surround our printed forms of communication and that we have grown accustomed to have not only fortified certain politics and ethics that we need to remain critical toward; these politics and ethics are also being transported into the digital, where our practices and institutions are being reproduced online.<sup>84</sup> To enable us to remain critical of the power structures and relations that shape knowledge, I argue throughout *Living Books*

for the importance of experimentation with different forms of knowledge production during and as part of the research process. Doing so presents an opportunity to rethink and analyze critically certain traditional skills and research practices that have become normalized or have become the dominant standard—both within humanities research and within the process of writing and producing a humanities publication—and, where needed, to start performing them differently.

### Forms and Forces of (Un)binding

To explore the potential of the book to embody and perform alternative scholarly practices and new institutional and aesthetic forms, *Living Books* first examines the ways in which the scholarly book has been bound together and fixed in the course of its development. To do this, chapter 1 starts with an in-depth analysis of the book-historical discourse and the divisions it embodies, which continue to influence and structure the book's material formation. To explore the reasoning behind the positions adopted within the book historical discourse, the influential debate in the *American Historical Review* between Elisabeth Eisenstein and Adrian Johns, two of book history's key figures, is analyzed critically. This debate illustrates some of the important oppositions (e.g., book vs. society, evolution vs. revolution, media vs. human agency) that continue to overshadow the on some occasions highly agonistic wider discourse. To trace back this continued oppositional thinking, chapter 1 explores book history's disciplinary genealogy—as initially an amalgam of literary studies and historiography (new historicism)—and puts forward an alternative performative vision of the history of the book, one that endeavors to go beyond some of the earlier identified dichotomies. Based on a reading of Haraway, Barad, and new materialist (media) theories, it focuses on the entanglement of plural agencies (i.e., technological *and* cultural, human *and* nonhuman, discursive *and* material) as part of the processual becoming of the apparatus of the book.

Chapter 1 thus provides the groundwork toward exploring, in the next three chapters, how various agencies enforced *forms of binding* on the book while drawing attention to the ways in which these disciplining regimes are currently being reiterated in a digital context. Three forms of binding in particular—representing some of the highly contentious practices and concepts that have come to define the book—make up the framework applied

in this book. They are *authorship*, the *book as commodity* within systems of knowledge production, and the perceived *fixity or stability* of the book as an inherently bound material and aesthetic object.

These three interconnected examples of material-discursive *book formations* have been envisioned within and developed throughout the book-historical discourse as part of a struggle to define the scholarly book's past and future and have been important in promoting and advancing the book's print-based features. To explore critically the material changes the monograph has experienced, *Living Books* looks at these book formations in depth throughout chapters 2–5, which together constitute the main body of this book. These three material-discursive practices and formations will be read transversally through the reframed discourse on book history proposed in chapter 1. Hence each subsequent chapter starts with an introduction that explores the respective book formation from a historical perspective.

Parallel to these examples of book formation or forms of binding—which have been fundamental to the way print-based features and practices were commodified and essentialized—*Living Books*, importantly, also looks at alternative ways to both think and perform the book, highlighting various forms of *unbinding* that are being examined in digital environments at the moment. What forms might a politics of the book based on unbinding take in this respect? Three practices and/or concepts of unbinding are analyzed in particular in *Living Books*—while emphasizing that both these triads of book formation and unbinding represent what can be perceived as *essentializing aspects* of the print and digital medium—namely, (radical) openness, liquidity, and remix, with an overarching focus on experimentation. These key terms are explored throughout this book in order to critique and examine the main forms of humanist and print-based binding that, I argue, have worked to turn the book into a fixed and stable object of scholarly communication. *Openness* can be understood as a disruptive force with respect to existing models in academic publishing, whereby open forms of book publishing enable public sharing of scholarly research, which (in certain models) forms a potential threat to the commodification of scholarship. *Liquidity* is perceived to put the supposed fixity and stability of scholarly communication at risk, through experiments with the versioning, linking, and updating of scholarly publications, for example. Finally, *remix* can be regarded as a critique of originality and individual authorship, simultaneously exploring the interconnectedness and networked relationships of scholarly texts.

However, the concepts of openness, remix, and liquidity, together with some of their current implementations, are also scrutinized in this book, where both the potential and the shortcomings of the various experiments that are currently being conducted along the lines of these three practices and concepts are critically analyzed. Yet even though these forms of unbinding also still tend to adhere to many of the previously mentioned humanist and essentialist aspects of the book, *Living Books* highlights the ongoing potential for experimentation that these forms of knowledge expression also embody, emphasizing their potential as forms and practices of critique and resistance to the object formation of the book. To explore this potential, *Living Books* looks at experiments in scholarly book publishing with new forms of anonymous collaborative authorship, radical open access publishing, and processual, living, and remixed publications, among others. It shows how by cutting the book together and apart differently and by exploring experimentation as a specific discourse and practice of critique, these publishing ventures have the ability to challenge and rethink both the book as a fixed and stable commercial object and the political economy and practices surrounding our systems of scholarly communication.

Chapter 2 explores the first book formation, *academic authorship*, a specific scholarly practice that is intrinsically connected to the scholarly book and which binds it together through the notion of the work. This chapter examines authorship from a historical, theoretical, and practical perspective and analyses the role humanist authorship has played and continues to play within scholarly communication. It does so by exploring the different ways in which authorship functions within academic networks and how authorial roles have historically been formed through our publication practices. An analysis of several recent experiments with both authorship critique (hypertext, remix, collaboration) and antiauthorship practices (plagiarism, anonymous authorship) leads to an exploration of the potential for a posthumanist critique of authorship and, as an extension of this, possible forms of posthumanist authorship. Chapter 2 ends by proposing to expand and critique the author function to take into regard alternative, potentially more ethical notions of authority and responsibility, based on distributed forms of both human and nonhuman agency.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine scholarly publishing as a specific material formation accountable for the *commodification of the book object*—among other means, through the formal publication of scholarly materials. Chapter 3

explores the narratives that have surrounded the material production and commodification of the book object in publishing and academia, looking at ways to reframe this discourse at specific points. It does so, for example, by challenging the perceived opposing logics structuring publishing and academia—one seen to operate via an economic logic and the other via a cultural logic—highlighting how the commercialization and globalization of scholarly publishing is directly related to the neoliberal marketization of the university. It further reframes this discourse by providing an alternative genealogy of openness, analyzing some of the different values and politics that have underlain the uptake of open access in different settings, countering the idea that open access and neoliberalism are intrinsically connected.

Chapter 4 continues by looking at potential opportunities to more directly intervene in the current cultures of knowledge production, both in the system of material production surrounding the book and in our own scholarly practices related to the book as commodity. It focuses in particular on examples of book publishing projects that have explored strategies of radical open access, experimentation, and care as forms of intervention and critique. Based on a reading of works in feminist poetics of responsibility and theories related to mattering and the ethics of care, this chapter showcases how various academic-led publishing endeavors are currently moving away from a predominant focus on the outcomes of publishing, instead drawing attention to the relationalities of publishing. Based on this reading of current practices and theories of care, ethics, and relationality in scholarly publishing, this chapter concludes with a plea for the development of a scholarly poethics.

Finally, chapter 5 takes an in-depth look at what is perceived to be one of the codex format's specific material attributes—namely, *fixity*—and the forces of binding created and imposed upon this format. Here the printed book has been fixed down by being bound in a physical and material sense, but also by creating stability and fixity over time due to printing technologies that promoted the easy duplication of copies—and with that the durability of print as a preservation strategy—and due to practices and discourses (e.g., copyright, authorship) that gathered the contents of a work together. Issues of stability and process are explored in more depth by looking at the concept of *the cut* as theorized in new materialism, continental philosophy, and remix studies. Here the question of stability is examined from a different angle, asking, from a perspective of cutting and iterative boundary-making, *why* it is that we cut and bind our research together.

Alongside this, a number of recent digital experiments focused on more processual forms of scholarly research are examined, most notably in the form of fluid, remixed, and modular books, remixed authorship, and digital archives. As part of this, two book publishing projects are explored—Living Books About Life and *remixthebook*—which experiment with remix and reuse and try to rethink and reperform the book apparatus by specifically taking responsibility for the cuts they make in an effort to cut well.

The chapters in this book are intrinsically connected as part of a connected line of argumentation—and many different transversal relations exist between them—yet they have been written in such a way that they are not dependent upon one another for understanding their argument. Care has been taken to make each chapter—at the expense of some (sometimes intentional) repetition—into something that can in principle be read independently.

In the lead-up to the four chapters that discuss the previously mentioned forms of binding, chapter 1 first embarks on the process of analyzing the book historical debate as it has developed over the last few decades.





This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/11297.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11297.001.0001)

# Living Books

## Experiments in the Posthumanities

By: Janneke Adema

### Citation:

*Living Books: Experiments in the Posthumanities*

By: Janneke Adema

DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/11297.001.0001

ISBN (electronic): 9780262366465

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2021

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding and support from The MIT Press Frank Urbanowski Memorial Fund



The MIT Press

© 2021 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

This work is subject to a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC license.



This book was set in Stone Serif and Stone Sans by Westchester Publishing Services.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Adema, Janneke, author.

Title: Living books : experiments in the posthumanities / Janneke Adema.

Description: Cambridge : The MIT Press, 2021. | Series: Leonardo | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020047155 | ISBN 9780262046022 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Scholarly publishing--Technological innovations. |

Open access publishing. | Learned institutions and societies--Publishing--Technological innovations. | Publishers and publishing--Technological innovations.

Classification: LCC Z286.S37 A34 2021 | DDC 070.5--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020047155>