

# The Role of Instagram in the Performativity of Post-digital Authorship in the Comic, Zine, and Art Publishing Community

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**Insights have been developed into social media influencers and marketing strategies which aid book discovery and sales. However, less is known about the distinctions in the use of social media platforms in the comic, zine, and art publishing sectors. Focusing on the author's use of Instagram in her artist-publisher-researcher practice, this article analyses the role of the platform and conceptualizes its use in the performativity of post-digital authorship. The article introduces the concept of post-digital authorship, in which a process-based performance of content aims to build identity, participation, and recognition connected to live and virtual events and digital and print formats of micropublishing. The contribution of this paper is the relative un-performance of the author on Instagram, amidst the micropublishing strategies in the community of comic, zine, and art publishing, in comparison with authors in other sectors of the publishing industry.**

*Keywords:* post-digital authorship, performativity, practice research, Instagram

### Introduction

Situated in the field of comic, zine, and art publishing, this article contributes to understanding of the role of Instagram in the performativity of post-digital authorship. It is developed from a conference paper I presented at the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) in Amsterdam, in July 2022, titled 'The Artist Book, & the Comic and Zine Fair: Performing post-digital book cultural practices through posts and stories'. The paper presented my findings from my post-doctoral WiRe (Women in Research) fellowship project (2021–2022), 'An Autoethnographic Study of Artists' Publishing and Artists' Book Fairs in the UK of the Hackney Comic + Zine Fair (HCZF) and Bound Art Book Fair (BABF) in 2021'.<sup>1</sup> These examples of artists' book, comic, and zine fairs differ from their mainstream counterparts such as the London and Frankfurt Book Fairs in being smaller in scale, both in the numbers attending and in the economies and markets that are involved. The global market for comics and graphic novels has shown strong growth in recent years, as highlighted by the increase in the presence of publishers specializing in these publications at the London and Frankfurt Book Fairs (Adamowski, 2023; Anderson, 2022). Despite this growth of the comics and graphic novels sector, HCZF

and BABF continue to be important events for maker, self-publisher, and small press communities circulating publications in alternative networks from those of the Frankfurt and London Book Fairs.

This article focuses on my use of Instagram in my artist-publisher-researcher (APR) practice while attending HCZF and BABF in 2021. This is set against an overview of the role of Instagram in my APR practice methodology from its inception to the date of writing. Examples are provided of my Instagram feed interacting with those involved in HCZF and BABF in the trajectory of my APR development in this period. Questions that this article examines are: What role does Instagram play in the performativity of professional, semi-professional, and amateur practices of authorship and self-publishing, and how does this reflect current post-digital publishing conditions? And what are the implications of this

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activity for our understanding of the role of Instagram among self-published authors situated in markets and communities positioned at a tangent to the trade fiction genres and mass market publishing?

These questions are considered from my position as an 'artist-publisher-researcher', a term for my practice research methodology which acknowledges the domestic, personal, and emotional sides of life as part of the work of producing knowledge. The analysis focuses on conceptualizing modes of performance and non-performance and concepts of performativity in my APR practice and the theorization of post-digital authorship. The subsequent discussion posits a conceptualization of post-digital authorship in the field of comic, zine, and art publishing and evaluates this with regard to the current literature on authorship. The article presents a granular understanding of levels of performativity of authorship

online among the community of practitioners in my Instagram network connected to HCZF for example, mixed with in-person events, such as BABF. Aspects of the conscious un-performativity on Instagram of my APR practice in this field of publishing connected to visual arts, graphic novels, and comic- and zine-making are discussed. The article concludes that the performativity of authorship in this field and the role of Instagram contrast in distinct ways to other publishing genres. In doing so, the article presents insights into the role of Instagram and the levels of performativity involved in its use in post-digital authorship. It reveals a curated balance of performed and un-performed presentations and representations of participation in certain communities of practice intermeshed with the performance of certain types of author-publisher identities.

#### Post-digital publishing and authorship

Social media have disrupted traditional authorship (Johnson, 2022), contributed to traditional marketing plans for publishers (Baverstock and Bowen, 2019), and helped to shift and shape attitudes to self-publishing (Thompson, 2021). In the field of comics, zines, and artist-publishing, practices of authorship and publishing have been flourishing, leading to an increase in online and in-person zine fairs incorporating social media in interesting ways to circulate and distribute a wide range of publication formats addressing a variety of themes in highly visual ways. In 2023, 33 small publisher, comic, and zine fairs and markets took place across the UK (Small Publishers Fair, 2023). The interest in zines, comics, self-publishing, and artist-publishing, alongside changes in attitudes to the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos, is seeing a shift of the associated publications and communities into the 'mainstream' (Commentz, 2011, p. 4). The author, self-publisher, or artist-publisher is motivated to create, unhindered by the conventions of the publishing industry, with an autonomy of agency. This seemingly open and accessible, low-cost and do-it-yourself mode of publishing, however, retains a certain exclusivity, a 'deliberate limitation' associated with features of the art world such as the limited edition, the signed copy, and a conscious dissociation from the mass-produced (Commentz, 2011, p. 4).

The role of comics, zines, and artists' books as resistant transmitters and as DIY publications associated with activist and independent publishing endeavours

and counterculture movements has been documented (Preston, 2022; Duncombe, 2017; Milne, 2019; Drucker, 2004; Pichler, 2022). However, the focus is often on the material product, distinctive formats, and modes of circulation (Bettley, 2001). Less is known about the practices of production, consumption, and circulation of publications in this field of publishing; less still in the contemporary post-digital age, when consumers, readers, influencers, and content creators have greater agency to work in different modes – non-professional, semi-professional, and professional – as they participate in producing and promoting publications. Coupled with the use of virtual modes of connection, such as Zoom calls and Instagram (a preferred social media platform for illustrators, fair organizers, and arts organizations), it is a flourishing community supporting the endeavours of the artist-publisher and the comic- and zine-maker. This community celebrates the experimental formats and helps to advance respective maker-publisher practices and to develop author, fair, and publisher brand identities.

'Post-digital' reflects the circumstances in which analogue and digital technologies are used in conjunction with increasing levels of autonomy among individuals working in a DIY capacity unhindered by a lack of professional training or of affiliations with professional institutions (Andersen et al., 2014; Bajohr, 2016). 'Post-digital' refers to the mix of digital and analogue formats, live and virtual events, and print and digital formats rather than to the immediate period after the major impacts of digital disruptions in art, culture, and society in the 1990s (Andersen et al., 2014). 'Post-digital', then, reflects

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an ongoing and developing process characterized as 'the messy and paradoxical condition of art and media after digital technology revolutions' (Andersen et al., 2014,

p. 5). In the publishing industry, the contemporary post-digital time frame is understood as ‘the expansion of digital: the second (or even third) wave of digital publishing, wherein digital and analogue book technologies exist with simultaneous relevance’ (Dane and Weber, 2021, p. 1). Post-digital book cultural practices are those which involve, for example, posting images of printed books to Instagram, book reviewing on the social networking site Goodreads, and supporting a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign for the publication of an experimental typography art book (Dane and Weber, 2021, p. 1).

### **The artist book, comic, and zine publishing community**

By way of contextualizing this paper and introducing the community of publishers in which my APR practice connects, I will introduce the Hackney Comic + Zine Fair (HCZF) and Bound Art Book Fair (BABF) and provide an overview of how these fairs use Instagram. HCZF was set up to showcase, celebrate, and champion ‘many different forms, styles and genres that sequential art can take’ (HCZF, 2021d). HCZF 2021 was predominantly virtual, with events programmed throughout September via Zoom. Described by a table attendee of BABF as a ‘self-organized fair’, HCZF 2021 presented its event programme on a bespoke fair website (presently closed) and an Instagram account. I attended seven online events which included a mix of workshop discussions and panel presentations. Events were recorded and published on the HCZF YouTube channel (HCZF, 2021b).

BABF is an annually organized fair, set up to celebrate ‘artist publishing practices based in Manchester, UK’ (BABF, 2024). In contrast to HCZF, BABF is not a virtual fair and, apart from a one-year virtual hiatus in 2020 during the pandemic, owing to the restrictions at that time, the fair has been held in person each year as a physical event. Despite the differing characteristics of their mode of delivery, both fairs advocate for the comic and zine medium and provide a forum for independent publishers and audiences interested in the genre of content in circulation.

HCZF used Instagram as a site for the main communications of the fair programme and its hosting of zine-makers and comic artists, whereas BABF used its Instagram account to document the live fair event and display curated images of selected publications and exhibitors. HCZF presents the visual identity of the fair

differently each year. In 2021, the Instagram account used a bright apple green colour with the letters ‘HCZF’ in black capitals and the bio information stated, ‘join us for a digital comic and zine fair, dozens of debut books, free online talks and excellent in-person events. #HCZF’ (HCZF, 2021a).

HCZF organizers make clever use of the grid view, in which individual posts are arranged to form a larger composite image when you view the account profile page. Individual posts contain images that represent the comic- and zine-makers who have virtual tables at the fair. For example, three posts have separate calls to action—‘Watch some panels’, ‘buy some comics’, ‘one more week’ – which when viewed in the grid create a cohesive banner (HCZF, 2021a). The words ‘comics’, ‘manga’, ‘small press’, ‘SELF-PUBLISHED’, and ‘INDIE’ are visible in the background of a post that, when viewed, displays a fast slide reel of images representing a selection of comic- and zine-makers presenting at the fair (HCZF, 2021c).

As BABF was an in-person fair, the emphasis was on a programme of events, which placed less onus on the design of the Instagram profile page and on individual posts. The Instagram profile page for BABF does not make the same design use of the grid view as does HCZF. The BABF posts are thus not curated like those of the HCZF account to create an overall image. The BABF Instagram profile page links to the fair’s website and to the Whitworth Gallery as the host for the fair. A major difference of the BABF account is that the stories function is used to provide a potted archive of the previous years’ fairs: Hypertext in 2020 and Bound 2019 and Bound 2018 (BABF, 2024). Bound 2017 is not included as a story, although the Instagram account was created in August 2017. Instagram posts by BABF in 2021 are fewer in number than those from HCZF. A single post includes a slide reel of images of the attendees and the tables in the Whitworth space, displaying a greater degree of curation than the HCZF account. The emphasis on the use of stories, which include reels of images documenting each year of the fair, exemplifies this more curated approach to the Instagram feed. One post in particular was interesting in using a kind of reverse psychology to entice the viewer to come to the fair by posting two images on a carousel of a man holding up a black T-shirt with the text ‘I went to Bound Art Book Fair and all I got

was this Lousy T-Shirt' on the front and, on the back, text including the fair dates and the list of exhibitors. The text accompanying the image of the T-shirt in the Instagram post said, 'Lousy is as lousy does. Super super ltd edt tees at the @taxicabindustries table!' (BABF, 2021). Despite the usefulness of hashtags to finding and following content of interest, hashtags were not commonly used on the BABF posts to categorize content.

This overview of the two fairs' use of Instagram illustrates the differences in its use and introduces the community of practice in which my APR practice was situated at the time of these fairs.

### **Performativity and performing an APR practice**

Before I present my APR practice, an analysis of the role of Instagram in its development, and a notion of Instagram's role in performing post-digital authorship in the field of comics, zines, and artist-publishing, it will be useful to define concepts and theories of performance and performativity. Theories of performativity have evolved from Goffman (1959), Butler (2006, p. xv), and Taylor (2022), which I link to the performance of practice and the practice ontology this research has adopted. Goffman viewed self-presentation as the form of daily interactions played out in a 'structure of social encounter' where people 'tirelessly' present their best public performance of themselves (Gardella, 2023, p. 57). Butler (2006, p. xv) understood performativity, in her analysis of gender, as the external revealing of an anticipated 'essence' that was routinely performed: 'a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of the body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration'. Focusing on the context of social media platforms, Taylor (2022) develops a theoretical framework for conceptualizing authenticity through the lens of performativity. The distinction for Taylor (2022, p. 12) in understanding performativity is a focus on the consequences, 'in terms of its cultural effects', of the performance associated with social media platforms.

The theorization of publishing as a practice by authors in the field of contemporary book cultures and publishing studies has been limited (Bhaskar, 2013, pp. 23–27). Among the range of theories developed about publishing as a business, the various stages of production and consumption, and the agents involved, there is limited contemporary theorization of publishing practice utilizing

a practice ontology and a practice research approach such as my APR methodology. 'Practice' is understood as what people do and say in repeated actions forming activities that are performed on a regular or habitual basis and that may be customary or traditional (Bain and Mueller, 2016, p. 30). My APR methodology is a practice research approach, particularly suited to producing understanding of experiential, tacit, and embodied knowledge (Bulley and Sahin, 2021). As such, it responds to a gap in understanding of publishing as a practice in these ways and adds to a nascent body of work theorizing publishing praxis (Thurston, 2021; Gilbert, 2016). It builds on practice-based studies approaches to research in organization studies and on established modes of practice-led, practice-based, and practice research approaches in disciplines of contemporary art (Bulley and Sahin, 2021; Gherardi, 2009; Gherardi, 2012; Corradi et al., 2010; Gilbert, 2016; van Amsterdam et al., 2023). A practice ontology is based on praxeological theories that broadly agree on the 'essential concept that social life is contingent, emergent and formed by practices' (Bain and Mueller, 2016, p. 34).

My practice research represents a transition and development of my professional artist practice in the visual arts (between 2000 and 2011) to incorporate publishing and publication-making to the purpose of generating new interdisciplinary knowledge of publishing practices. I use distinctive strands of drawing and publishing activity which serve different purposes: observational, reflective, exploratory, and communicative. Drawing is a tool that I understand as a generative apparatus for capturing, generating, and linking research concepts and enquiry. Thus, my APR methodology incorporates experiential, theoretical, and practical aspects of knowing, being, and doing to develop new understandings of publishing practice situated in and co-constituted with social and cultural networks doing the same kind of practice.

My APR practice is based on the incorporation of visual means of documenting experiences and communicating the mixture of emotional and factual kinds of autoethnographic data. Observational visual notes use a variety of drawing methods undertaken live during seminars, conferences, and other literary events. Drawings and sketches are made of the people presenting and of images that represent, for example, the ideas

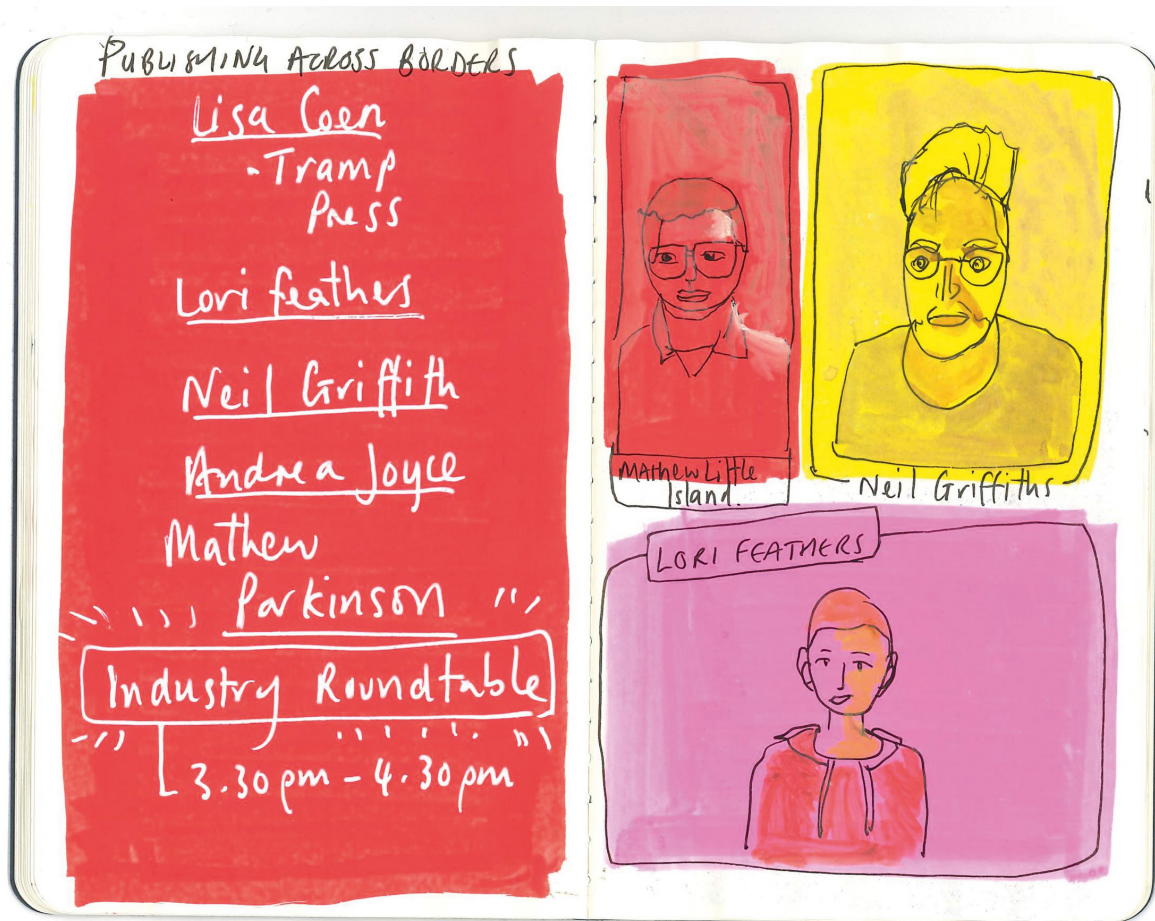


Figure 1 Scan of notebook pages featuring drawn panels. This spread featured in an Instagram post I made after attending the virtual symposium 'Transnational Publishing' (Preston, 2023).

being discussed. They are made in physical notebooks with a variety of pens, markers, pencils, and watercolour paints. An early example of this mode of note-taking (Figure 1) utilized panels to frame the page before populating them with notes or stand-out quotes, in a manner similar to the production process and frame format of the comic spread.

Reflections of experiences, often mixed with auto-ethnographic, domestic aspects of the researcher, are posted to my Instagram account, @louisapreston\_scribo. Posts are developed from the original sketches using the mobile phone camera (or scanner) and editing software freely available on the iPhone and on Canva. These editing tools, in addition to Instagram, frame the post content visually and with the option to add different fonts and create titles and text to caption the images. My Instagram feed is one of the digital spaces for my

experimental publications as an APR. Instagram posts present glimpses of the development of my practice to date. My profile at present contains a link to my current website [www.researchtown.uk](http://www.researchtown.uk) (updated in August 2023). The hashtags #drawing, #imagemaking, #collage, #printmaking, #publishing, #publication design, #research, and #publishing studies are used to categorize the content of my posts.

*Research Town* gathers my portfolio of work produced as a professional artist with current scholarly work in publishing studies and contemporary book cultures (Preston, 2023b). The postcards derived from slogans and the memory poetry comics and zines that are produced through my research activity are also presented via a blog section of the website titled 'Press Room' (Preston, 2023a). I refer to these publications as 'epistemic artefacts', a term combining the meanings of 'episteme', from

the Greek for ‘knowledge’ (Parry, 2020), and of ‘artefact’ as ‘an object that has been made by a person, such as a tool or a decoration, especially one that is of historical interest’, and something that is seen in a scientific experiment or study and does not exist naturally but has been caused by the way the study or experiment has been done (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024).

The following section presents my Instagram posts, understood as epistemic artefacts and observed in this article as reflections of the initial development of my APR practice (December 2020 to March 2021). Secondly, posts that created interactions with the comic and zine community (introduced previously at the HCZF and BABF between April and December 2021) are presented for discussion.

**Initiating the APR practice and interactions with the comic, zine, and art book community**

I initiated my public professional Instagram account in December 2020 (Preston, 2020b). Significantly, the timing of the initiation of this account, which marked the

beginning of the APR practice and a return to drawing practice, owed to the reflective pause generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns of 2020–2021.<sup>2</sup> My first post, on 4 December 2020 (Figure 2), featured a pen and watercolour drawing on A4 paper with the accompanying text, ‘#inkpensketch of my favourite and long-term drawing companions. Some of these old friends have been with me since my art-school days c.2000–2004’ (Preston, 2020a).

The post reached 21 accounts: eight were existing followers and 13 were non-followers. This first drawing, made from a prompt to draw your materials, reconnected me to my past drawing practice as an artist, circa 2000–2010. I posted this image to Instagram hoping to connect with a community of like-minded practitioners in the early stages of the pandemic and the lockdowns we were collectively enduring.

My Instagram feed also reflects my first interaction with the comic and zine community as a participant in a memory poetry comic workshop at the Glasgow Zine Festival in April 2021. The Instagram post I made after

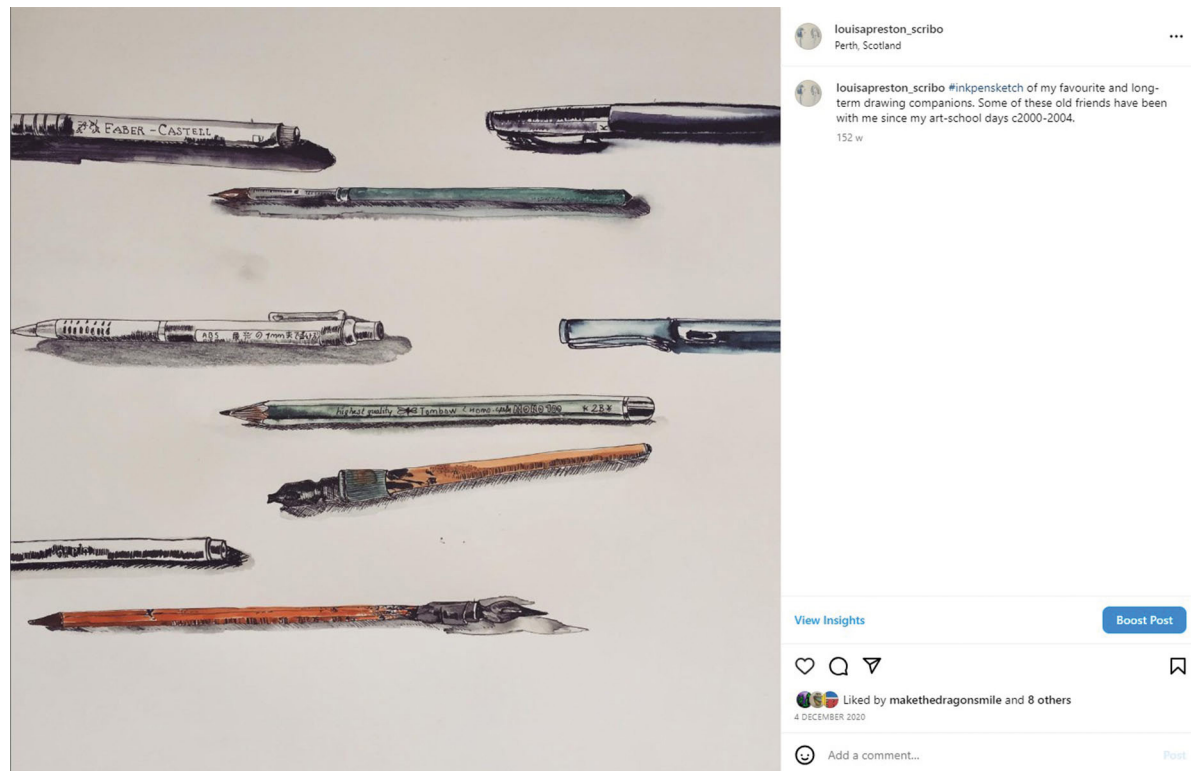


Figure 2 Instagram post of ink and pen sketch depicting my drawing tools (Preston, 2020a)



Figure 3 Instagram post of 'At the Park' memory poetry comic (Preston, 2021c)

that workshop was my first attempt at a memory poetry comic. This memory poetry comic was developed from the raw sketches and sentences I made of a memory that came to mind from the prompts given in the workshop. The five-panel comic, titled 'At the Park' (Figure 3), depicts my memory of being at the park when my son was learning to ride his bike.

The panel contents are derived from responses I made to five prompt questions posed in the workshop: 'What do you see?' 'What do you hear?' 'What do you smell?' 'What do you taste?' and 'What do you feel?' After writing a line in response to each of these questions, we were asked to note next to each sentence some ideas for the drawn elements of the comic; these did not necessarily need to reflect what we had written down. I used Canva to change the written sentences in my sketchbook to serif type and gave the memory poetry comic a heading in a large bold heading in a sans serif font. The text accompanying this post states, 'What could be considered my first memory poetry comic ... Thank you for such an inspiring, informative, and practical workshop!' (Preston, 2021c). I added the hashtags #poetrycomics, #memorypoem, #illustratorsoninstagram, #zinemaking, and #zinepoetry.

In September 2021, I attended the first of the HCZF online events. My participation in the fair's events

and workshops enabled further experimentation with comic-making techniques. A hand-drawn image in pencil on lined paper documented my experience of attending the Zoom event 'The Power of the Small Press' while sitting on my living room floor. My laptop is depicted positioned on a small table. My pens and watercolour pencils are positioned on another small table. In the background is my bookshelf (Figure 4). The text overlaid on the image states, 'HCZF @garethbrookes The Power of the Small Press' (Preston, 2021a). Canva was instrumental in converting the sketch, as with 'At the Park', into an Instagram publication. I added the green circular band, about three millimetres thick, over the image and amended the font for the text header and subheader accordingly. These mini-publications on Instagram demonstrate how I began to test the possibilities of Canva and Instagram for creating a new kind of mini-publication format.

The green used in my post echoed the apple green colour of the HCZF branding, and Instagram posts of other account users who attended the fair employed the HCZF branding in their design. The first event speaker, Gareth Brookes, announced his upcoming talk at HCZF in a post that included seven images in a carousel format. Five of these images are of books that he presented at his digital table in HCZF. Two images are HCZF-branded





Figure 4 Screenshot of the Instagram post about ‘The Power of the Small Press’ event at HCZF (Preston, 2021a)

stills in the striking apple green colour which, in effect, advertises the fair as well as the talk. The caption on the post states, ‘It’s live. @hackneycomicfair is go!’ The hashtags #hczf #comics #zines and #diyartesanato are included and the @hackneycomicfair account is also tagged (Brookes, 2021). The hashtag #comics had 33.4 million posts on 9 November 2023. The cover images of the physical publications are presented squarely in each image space in the carousel. Each print publication is placed on a neutral-coloured linen fabric background which adds to the visual physical materiality of the image being presented through the digital mode of viewing on the Instagram platform. These images also contrast with the green background design familiar to viewers as belonging to or related to HCZF.

With this post, one moment in his eight-year long Instagram account, Brookes performs his authorship and connections to the wider comic and zine community. The post announces his speaker involvement in HCZF and recirculates the HCZF information about his upcoming talk by utilizing HCZF-branded content in a carousel of images that directly connect his publications to HCZF, his Instagram followers, and other Instagram users interested in the hashtags included. In terms of

Taylor’s concept of performativity on social media, the inclusion of some of Brookes’s previous publications enables this Instagram post both to provide a shop window for his publications and also to build connections, reputation, and regard in this community of practice.

HCZF shared the authorship of their Instagram account through ‘takeovers’, in which another account user posts on the HCZF account and essentially takes over the posts that day. Throughout the fair, a mixture of zine- and comic-makers and small publishers created posts for the HCZF account. For example, the artist Lesley Imgart made posts that communicated her publication-making process (Imgart, 2021), and the publisher Avery Hill presented a selection of their publications (Avery Hill, 2021).

In contrast, BABF posted a series of what they called ‘Exhibitor Spotlights’. The Exhibitor Spotlight posts tended to place in the carousel function two or three images that presented stacks of publications set in rows on a white background. The visual design of these posts was like that of a gallery showcase exhibition in which publications are presented in a glass box for viewing. This resulted in the physicality of the publications being promoted over the use of flat digital images to present

the content of the publications. In this way, the BABF Instagram feed promoted a stronger visual sense of a curated art gallery than the posts from HCZF did.

**Post-digital authorship: un-performing/un-performativity**

MacTavish (2021) shows how Instagram and the posts to the hashtag #bookstagram can be viewed as a post-digital site for book culture. #bookstagram organizes posts about books and bookish content produced by the community of users who follow it and make posts with it. #bookstagram had 89.9 million posts on 11 May 2023. This had risen to close to 97 million posts by 8 November 2023 (Instagram, 2023). In March 2020, the number of #bookstagram posts was 40 million. It had grown to 50 million by September 2020 (MacTavish, 2021). The rate at which posts to the hashtag have grown is slowing, but the number of posts is still growing. The Bookstagrammer is regarded as a ‘producer’ – a term for someone who simultaneously consumes and produces content in their engagement with online platforms (Bruns cited in MacTavish, 2021, p. 82).

The Bookstagram community is situated within a larger set of book promotion activities in the online space that cultivates ‘book buzz’ with an ‘ethos of bookishness’ (Murray and Striphas both cited in MacTavish, 2021, p. 82). Bookstagram has structures of hierarchy in terms of professional and non-professional users and differences in the numbers of followers that the accounts have amassed. MacTavish (2021, p. 85) points out, however, that the hashtag search system and the algorithms working with the functions of the platform that allow users to share posts by other users, sorting the feed in personalized ways for the user, effectively flatten this hierarchy. Thereby smaller – non-professional – producers have the potential to wield influence of equal power to that of traditional industry professionals such as the literary agent, brand name author, editor, and bookseller. The mix of ‘niche content creation’ and a supportive community of followers in this networked platform is keenly observed in the Instagram posts presented in this article, although these posts are not tagged with #bookstagram and so are not directly connected to this stream of content. At the time I posted about ‘The Power of the Small Press’, I had not recognized that the green band in my post echoed the branded colour of HCZF 2021 (see Figure 5). I tagged HCZF and the event speaker in



Figure 5 Photograph of the postcard with the slogan ‘Art Galleries are a Sanctum’ (Preston, 2023c)

my post and included the hashtags #illustratedntoes, #autobiographicalcomics, #sketching, #comics, #zines, #comicandzinefair, #artfair, #artistbooks, #artistpublishing, #selfpublishing, #poetrycomics, #smallpress, and #smallpresspublishing. In making this post I was effectively performing my authorship of illustrated notes such as the image depicted. In addition, I was performing my interest and participation in the works on display at HCZF. This post created a direct connection between me and @garethbrookes and @hackneycomic-fair through the comments the post received from them, even though my post reached only 35 accounts.

The branded tote bag that one can buy in the museum or gallery shop, or in the local independent or national chain bookshop, is understood as the coded performance of cultural capital accumulated by the

literary festival attendee (Dane, 2020, p. 1). The T-shirt post that BABF made to promote @taxicabindustries limited edition T-shirts can be viewed similarly, as akin to the T-shirts that music concert attendees buy to mark the occasion of a live performance. The idea that authors perform their authorship is not new. Indeed, the realization that authors can use social media to sidestep the publishers' gatekeeping mechanisms is also not new (Nash and Squires, 2019, p. 144). This bypassing of the traditional publishing process lies at the heart of the kind of publishing that constitutes the communities of practice that I interacted with during HCZF and BABF. The 'citizen author' who shares works in digital spaces in ways that will help them to gain traction by increasing their followers and developing new connections with a wider readership (Johnson, 2022, p. 29) is reflected in the data presented here about my APR practice and the author practices of those presenting at the virtual and physical tables of HCZF and BABF.

Usually, Instagram posts are made in the moment, hence the title of the platform. Curiously, however, there was a delay in the publication of my Instagram posts responding to the live event. Moreover, my Instagram posts were relatively scarce during the time frame of HCZF and I made no posts at all during the time frame of BABF. This scarcity of posts, rather than abundance, and the conscious decision I made not to publish during BABF – or non-performance – is a theme of analysis which forms a central contribution of this article to our understanding of post-digital authorship in the comic, zine, and art book community of practice.

Since I created my Instagram account my rate of production of posts has been low. However, the number of accounts that my posts have reached has grown in a correlation with the new connections that I have made by attending live events (in person or online) and subsequently linking to them via Instagram. Despite their scarcity, my Instagram posts – viewed in the framing that Cariolle (2018) describes – are 'micropublications'. Micropublications are 'reflective, diverse and immediate' (Cariolle, 2018, p. 315). In the words of Commentz (2011, p. 7), these kinds of publications are 'exercises not destined to survive a lifetime of aesthetic scrutiny, but to document a particular stage in time, and state of mind'.

Zines and Instagram posts may be likened to each other as 'small offerings left to drift in the flow of pro-

duction that testifies of the worth and steadfastness of their author's endeavour' (Cariolle, 2018, p. 315). In this community of practice of micropublishing, which is viewed as an avant-garde reacting to mainstream publishing structures, authors aim more than anything else to find or create a sense of belonging (Cariolle, 2018). Utilizing Bourdieu's theory of habitus and the field of cultural production, micropublishing may be viewed as economically precarious and consequently agents place emphasis on the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital, 'namely in terms of belonging and recognition of one's contributions' (Cariolle, 2018, p. 316). In learning to become a zine-maker or comic author, the new entrant to this community of practice performs their practice through the production of publications with a certain degree of symbolic capital and 'a feel for the game' which develops alongside evaluations by other participants in the field, who thereby provide a legitimacy to certain

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capital and 'a feel for the game' which  
develops alongside evaluations by other  
participants in the field**

kind of publications which affords the authors the ability to 'enact their difference' (Cariolle, 2018, p. 316). This chimes with Johnson's (2022, p. 29) concept of the 'citizen author' who may not be seeking to use social media to market and sell their works in the ways that commercially minded publishers do.

My early Instagram posts, then, were about acquiring 'a feel for the game'. My positioning as an author in this field – situated in academia and motivated to utilize drawing and other creative methods for purposes of research and contributing to knowledge in the field of contemporary book cultures – is as someone who is enacting difference through my micropublications. The infrequency of my posts is in part explained by this dif-

ferent positioning, as someone who also teaches, fulfils admin responsibilities, and has traditional research publication requirements as part of holding a teaching and research academic post. As I am an APR, my micropublications are part of a practice that seeks to develop experimental publications that express a situation or moment (per Commentz, 2011) through drawing and text in this community of micropublishers, but also seeks new understandings of publishing connected to the visual arts in a community of academic researchers situated in the UK university system.

At BABF I featured in a post of the collaborative MODUS workshop I attended which was organized by project collaborators from Onomatopoe – an art publisher from Eindhoven (Onomatopoe, 2022) – Goldsmiths University of London (Goldsmiths University of London, 2024), and London College of Fashion at University of the Arts London (UAL, 2024).<sup>3</sup> I chose not to make any Instagram posts during the fair, but, one week after I returned home, I posted a story thanking the people I had chatted to at the fair, tagging them in the post and including images of the publications I had bought, alongside some of my sketchbook pages (Preston, 2021b).

During BABF, the sketches and notes I made while reflecting on the fair experience and how I felt sitting in the Whitworth Gallery café did not make it on to Instagram. But, some eight months later, I produced a set of postcards with the slogan ‘Art Galleries are a Sanctum’ (Figure 5), a phrase I wrote in my sketchbook pages during BABF. I have since given these out to colleagues and anyone who wishes to have one. The postcard is published on my website, and the small deck of remaining postcards (from a print run of 100) rests in my desk drawer.

A memory poetry comic I made after attending BABF was also not posted to Instagram and is instead published on my website and exists as an individual paper drawing. These examples illustrate that the performance of my authorship straddles the fields of both academia and micropublishing. The circulation of the ‘text’ happens in differing modes and formats across differing sets of communities, which sometimes overlap. The Instagram post is one of these formats but also plays a crucial role in the performativity of my authorship in this post-digital age as an APR.

### Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the role of Instagram in a developing APR practice and the resulting connections that were made with the organizers and events of HCZF and BABF in 2021. The cultural effects of my use of the platform are shown in the public performance of the development of my APR practice and its micropublications, an overview of which can be seen in the grid view of my Instagram profile page (@louisapreston\_scribo). As an archive of moments in a practice, the Instagram account serves up a timeline of this development. The authorship on my feed contains autobiographical elements in terms of the experiences that have prompted the particular drawings, memory poetry comics, and responses through the medium of drawing.

A fluid sense of authorship of the HCZF account (@hackneycomicfair) has been demonstrated in the Instagram takeovers and the recirculation of HCZF green-branded messaging to promote the fair, the speakers, and the other people presenting. People posting on the HCZF Instagram account during the takeover days essentially perform their selected content platformed through the HCZF brand. Alignments have been drawn between the performance of cultural capital through the tote bags worn by attendees at the book fair (Dane, 2020, pp. 5–8) and the T-shirts made by @taxicabindustries for BABF and further performed through the Instagram post made by BABF. Akin to the book buzz generated by the London and Frankfurt Book Fairs, attention to HCZF and BABF is driven primarily through the use of Instagram and a wide-ranging use of hashtags with smaller numbers of posts than #bookstagram. Nonetheless, this niche sector of publishing activity demonstrates a particular post-digital performance of book cultural practices that intermesh with publications produced by self-publishing or small press independent publishers, using drawing and sequential narrative in ways that Instagram plays a significant role in. The experiences of these post-digital book cultural practices are visualized in the content of my posts, and others’, relating to HCZF and BABF.

This paper provides a view into the decision-making behind the performance of a developing practice in the context of art publishing and comic- and zine-making and the application of it in my case to advance knowledge in this area. In terms of the ‘performativity’ (Taylor,

2022) of my APR practice on Instagram, a question arising with respect to my selection of what to post in the performance of my practice is that of how researchers may consider Instagram data. It may be useful to think about the applicability to other Instagram users of my choices not to publish some posts on Instagram, preserving my experience instead as an ephemeral memory of in-person encounters with physical versions of the publications or drawings. In the context of comic- and zine-making and art publishing, Instagram has become a valuable channel for publication in its own right for testing prototypes among the options of print publications and publication on other online platforms such

as website or blog. However, as this article has shown, Instagram also affords a performativity of comic- and zine-maker and art publishing communities of practice which is distinctive from that of the communities of practice on Bookstagram and the channels used by the conglomerate book publishing industry.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Division of Literature and Languages at the University of Stirling for their feedback on an earlier version of this article during a work-in-progress seminar. ■

### Notes

1 HCZF 2021 was organized by the graphic designer and comic-maker Jo Stone. The fair partnered with Broken Frontier and Gosh Comics and was also supported by funding from Arts Council England. Broken Frontier is a comic and graphic novel review website and Gosh Comics is an online retailer of comics in addition to selling through a bricks-and-mortar shop in London. The inaugural HCZF took place in 2019 in Hackney, London. BABF is hosted by the Whitworth, a gallery owned by the University of Manchester. Research data from HCZF and BABF discussed in this paper were gathered during this WiRe fellowship

at the University of Münster between August 2021 and April 2022.

- 2 This pause generated similar motivations for individuals who even changed the course of their careers and has been posited as the main reason for the 'great resignation' (Silken, 2022).
- 3 MODUS is described as a 'platform for expanded fashion practice', based on the meaning of the word 'modus' as 'a mode of procedure: a way of doing something'. <https://www.onomatopee.net/exhibition/modus/>.

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