Unpublishing

an xPub Book

Unpublishing in the Digital Era

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CHAPTER 1

Data, Information and the Absurdity of Unpublishing

book burning. One early form of censorship worth mentioning is *The Index Librorum Prohibitorium* or List of Prohibited Books (fig. 1). This was a practice in the Roman Catholic church of censoring via a list of books to be banned. The first edition was published in 1559, with 19 other versions published throughout the centuries, and the final version published in 1948, only to be suppressed in 1966. The list included texts that were believed to threaten the morals and faith of the Christian doctrine, notably Galileo's writings were treated as foolish and absurd which lead the Inquisition to be put him under house arrest for the rest of his life. However, as the nature of publishing changed with the popularity of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15th century, books that were rare or deemed unholy, became much harder to control as they could be mass-produced. Putting the author under house arrest wouldn't help to stop the text from spreading. In the 21st century, the authorities of the digital networks are still doing their best to censor what seems to be unholy in their terms, but controlling the flow is becoming ever harder.

INDEX LIBRORVM
PROHIBITORVM,
CVM REGVLIS CONFECTIS
per Patres a Tridentina Synodo delectos,
auctoritate Sanctiss. D.N. Pij IIII,
Pont. Max. comprobatus.
VENETIIS, M. D. LXIIII.

Fig. 1 – Index Librorum Prohibitorum (1559)

Facebook seem to work really hard at unpublishing any kind of sexual content, alongside actual disturbing content such as child pornography, which seems to be put at the front of every argument, perhaps in an attempt to seem more morally secure. So much effort and secrecy goes into it, that content moderators have to hide out, or sometimes don't even know for which company they are working for, in order to remove content form a set of rigid guidelines. These guidelines are a reminder of the Roman Catholic Church's list of banned books (mentioned in chapter 1), where the authorities decide on the morals, and anything contrary to chastity be it pornography, masturbation or homosexual practices, is a sin and should be banned from public knowledge.

Eva and Franco Mattes, an Italian artist duo, investigated internet content moderators, resulting in an installation using the leaked moderation guidelines and a series of videos interviewing one hundred moderators with 3D avatars and computer generated voices to keep anonymity. They explain that:

> Contrary to popular belief, the removal of offensive material from the Internet is not carried out by sophisticated algorithms. It is the nerve-wracking, demanding job of thousands of anonymous human beings: people disguised as algorithms. (Mattes, 2015)

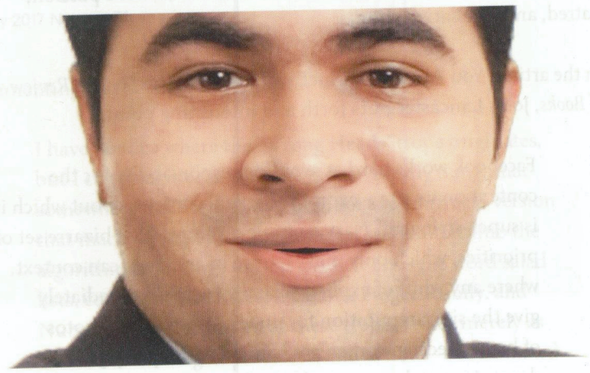

Fig. 12 – Dark Content, Episode 3

Fig. 13 – Dark Content, Episode 2

There has been a reversal of roles it seems, between human and automated jobs. Comparing the ease of publishing to the human labour put into unpublishing, is something that would have been unimaginable a few decades back. There are, however, automation tools being developed in order to control and moderate images before publication, one example is the PhotoDNA program, developed by Microsoft. The software uses hash-based technologies to identify and remove existing illegal images online. It is done by converting these images into a grayscale format, overlaying them onto a grid and assigning each square a numerical value.
The designation of a numerical value converts the square into a hash, or a digital signature, which remains tied to the image and can be used to identify other reproductions of the image online.
The technology seems to be very efficient against the propagation of an already recognised image, but there will still be many new images

Fig. 16 – PhotoDNA

Illustrations

Illustrations

Fig 1. Index Librorum Prohibitorum (1559)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index_Librorum_Prohibitorum#/media/File:Index_Librorum_Prohibitorum_1.jpg

Fig 2. Thorne, David (2008) *Overdue Account*
http://www.27bslash6.com/overdue.html
(Screenshot from 20.03.2018)

Fig 3. Deactivating or Deleting your Account
https://www.facebook.com/help/250563911970368?helpref=hc_global_nav
(Screenshot from 20.03.2018)

Fig 4. and 5. Google Terms of Service
https://policies.google.com/terms
(Screenshot from 04.04.2018)

Fig 6. GitHub Help
https://help.github.com/articles/removing-sensitive-data-from-a-repository/
(Screenshot from 20.03.2018)

Fig 7. Do It Now Foundation (year unknown) *Safe Sex? Save Sex*
https://aep.lib.rochester.edu/node/45599
(Screenshot from 27.03.2018)

Fig 8. MediaWiki Database Schema (Last edit: 02.03.2018)
https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/File:MediaWiki_database_schema_latest.svg

Fig 9. MediaWiki Manual: Preventing Access (Last edit: 04.03.2018)
https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Manual:Preventing_access#Restrict_viewing_of_certain%20_specific_pages
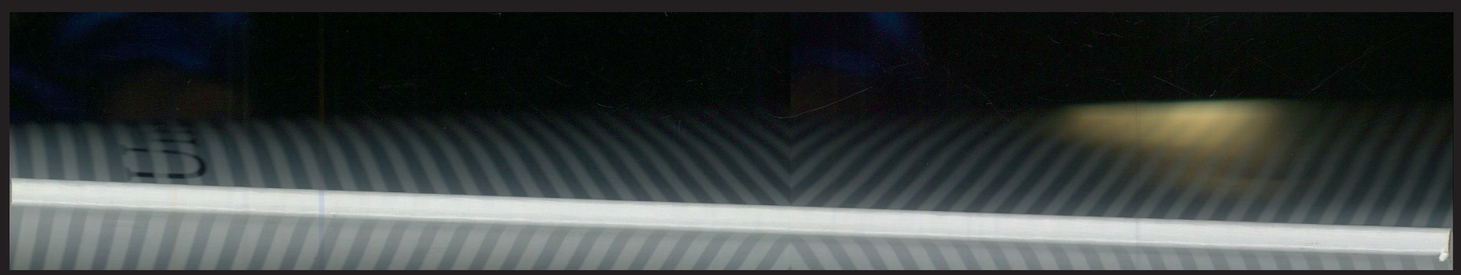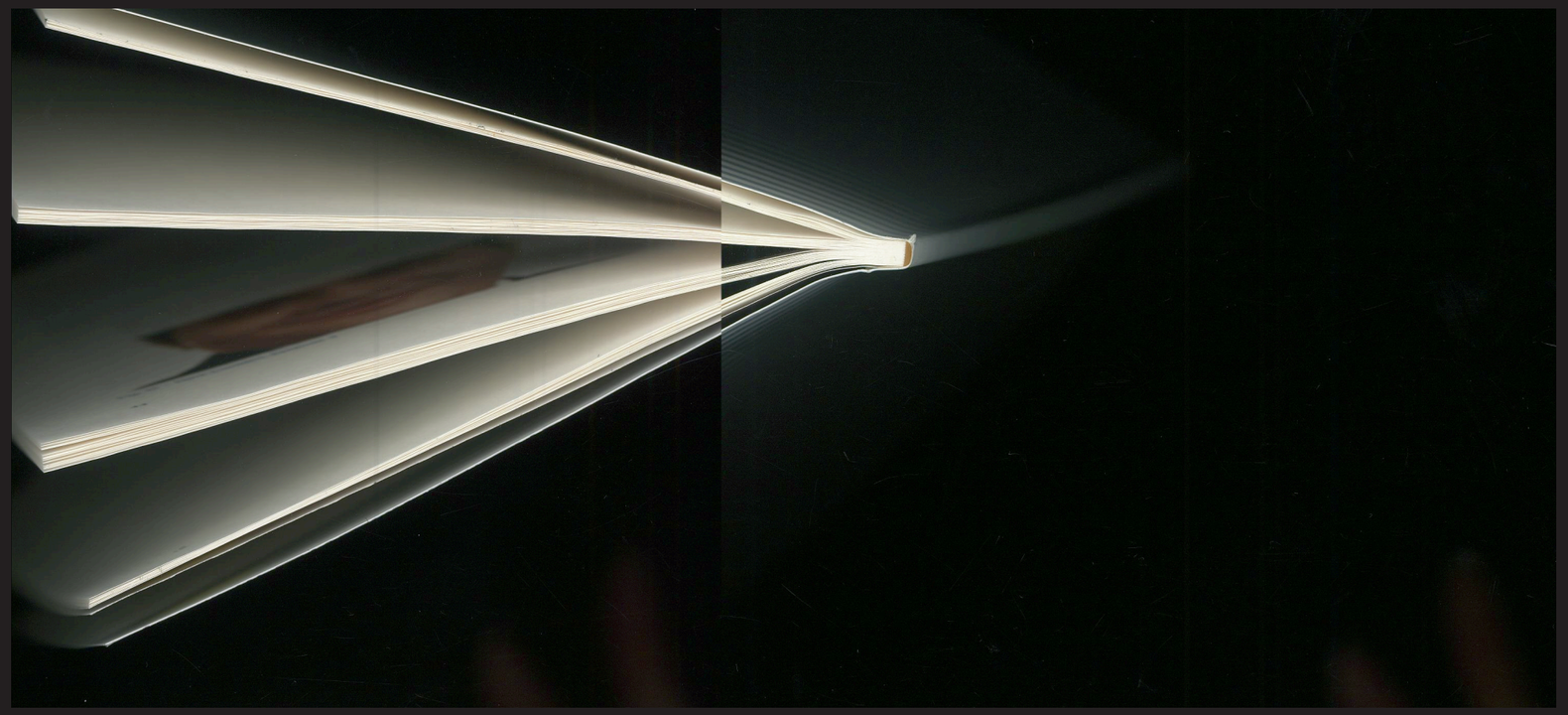
Fig 10. The Finger Family Song by ChuChu TV Nursery Rhymes & Songs For Children (Published: March 2015)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=86&v=3xqqj907TgA
(Screenshot from 24.03.2018)