

Manuals in dialogue

A manual is an instructive medium that is used to transmit existing knowledge. This knowledge is to be found still -suspended in time- until the manual is brought into use. Then a linear movement of knowledge towards one direction takes place, from the author to the reader, which can be likened with the function of a jigsaw puzzle. Georges Perec at the end of the preamble in *Life, A User's Manual* comments that

“... every piece the puzzler picks up, and picks up again, and studies and strokes, every combination he tries, and tries a second time, every blunder and every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated, and decided by the other.”

Manuals can therefore be perceived as objects that afford just confined knowledge as they instruct the reader and then go back to suspension. In this sense, the very nature of a manual is rather static and limited.

To overcome these restrictions, we propose to run a workshop during which we point out the parameters that make up (successful or not) manuals as inspired by Richard Sennett's observations made in *The Craftsman*.

As a starting point, we will draw attention to the etymology of the word “manual” (from the Latin *manualis*, “belonging to the hand”) and to the relation between gesture and language. We will then bring different formats of manuals (i.e. DIY picture manual, a written recipe, recorded gym instructions etc.) into a dialogue by merging and/or juxtaposing them so that the contained knowledge of each participating manual can contribute towards the creation of a new one. Through this experimentation, we want to explore how manuals can “give and take” knowledge so that the latter, through a creative process that takes place at both ends (author-reader), does not remain static, but it is “put into movement”.

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