



A Conversation: Andrew Januszak / Nicholas Gottlund

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Andrew Januszak: What made you want to enlarge the plates from your book, *Printing Always Printing*?

Nicholas Gottlund: The plates or images in my book are themselves enlargements from the book *Farming Always Farming*. The original halftone is expanded and has become coarser. The imagery is abstracted and what is foregrounded is the actual printing ink. I wanted to basically do that again, but relate it to the scale of the room or the body rather than the scale of the page or the hand.

AJ: Why did you choose the size and materials you used to create the plates you're showing?

NG: While the plate reproductions are enlargements of the entire book page, the imagery in the originals are primarily of landscapes and architecture. The viewer who walks into the room will see these pieces at first from a distance. By increasing them to 40x30 or 60x45, some of that information in the original photograph translates. This may be an obvious statement, but their materiality becomes more and more present the closer you get to them. The qualities of the reproduction process are made evident by enlargement. You can see the dust that was on the copier and the feathered edge where the ink bled into the fiber of the paper. The ways in which the pieces mimic the book also become clear up close. The borders of the plates were airbrushed to a light grey wash, where in the book a 5% grey was printed in the margins. Printing for me is best when it's a design on press situation and I can make certain adaptations as I go based on things like availability, material limitations, etc. It activates the studio environment and allows me to engage with the work beyond a strict process of conceptualize and execute. Lastly, the paper stock chosen for the plates is tan bristol board commonly used to make archival storage boxes for libraries. Making these boxes was a summer job for me while working in my college library.

AJ: The plates are essentially abstracted images from a book about farming. How does coming from a farming landscape / community influence the way you perceive and create work?

NG: When I'm back at home in my studio in Pennsylvania, it's the most relaxed I ever am. It's a landscape that's a mix of forest and open fields. I take a lot of walks up through the woods and into the surrounding fields. They provide a space, similar in a way to the studio, that allows you to be away from other people, but unlike the studio to be away from yourself. It's a clearing. The aesthetics of the Pennsylvanian German Farm and psyche are built into who I am and the way I consider things. I deeply admire the traditional construction techniques, the attention to detail, the necessity of easily obtainable quality materials and the very graphic often comic embellishments.

AJ: You made the photocopies of the images at a public library in LA. Was the action of photocopying the book pages in a library setting important to these prints?

NG: It is on a personal level. I enjoy the library experience. As public spaces they are interesting in that they are quiet. That silence I suppose is intended to create a space that allows you to focus on things such as reading. I'm not a big reader, so I use that silence to focus more on watching sunlight move across the space, feeling the temperature change from one floor to another or in this case making noisy copies in a corner. Making copies in that way reminds me of the way you would get xeroxed texts to read in school for an assignment. I always liked how the original books got flattened out into spreads and the only way the packet was ever bound was with a staple in the top left corner.

AJ: What materials did you use to create the Spanners?

NG: Strictly speaking they are book cloth glued to and wrapped around a thin aluminum bar. I used a strip of magnetic tape on the back to place them on the wall so they can be easily installed and arranged. The cloth I use is a single type manufactured in France from viscose rayon. It's dyed in various colors, all of which seem slightly "off". The colors seem to belong to an idiosyncratic system — adjusted and tweaked to just the tint or shade by an anonymous author.

AJ: What made you choose to include the Spanners in this show?

NG: Well, this is in a sense a show at least in part about printing, so it was a natural decision. I also wanted some color in the show beyond the tan of the paper. I thought it would be interesting to include the Spanners which are inspired by color bars on printed sheets, but whose colors don't actually reflect anything in the show. In other words, there aren't any objects in the show that are made using the colors of the Spanners. This is the first time they are being exhibited.

AJ: How do the Spanners relate to your work as a bookmaker?

NG: The process of wrapping and gluing the cloth is pretty much the same method as when I make a hard cover book by hand. The only difference is that on the Spanners there are multiple pieces of cloth that butt into one another. Where the different pieces (colors) meet there is not a seam. They are not sewn, but glued down. This makes the cutting of the cloth very critical. It has to be precise. This level of detail is something you become tuned into after spending a long time working at any craft or task involving the eye and the hand. Cutting the cloth completely parallel to the warp or weft threads is almost impossible for me. I still try. What

happens often is that when those two colors of cloth meet and one or the other is cut at on slight bias you see that run off or a series of little white tips of the underlying thread which read as a series of dots. It isn't until you get very close that you notice this. I take satisfaction in knowing that despite my best efforts, there will be something in that junction of color that I didn't expect.

AJ: Are the Spanners made for multiple arrangements or installations?

NG: Yeah, however at this point I only see them running horizontally approximately 24" off of the floor. There may be one or many installed depending on the length of the wall. They may touch end to end at times, again depending on the scale of the space. The Spanners exist on the surface of the wall in a way that is formally similar to the way in which a color or control bar sits on the surface of a printed sheet of paper. Lying in the margin, low on the wall, they occupy a space not out of view but often not considered. This placement allows for other works to be hung above them as well as for the accommodation of architectural elements such as windows. The colors in each of the individual Spanners are set up in a way so that they can be read from left to right or from right to left. The colors at the end of each piece may be imagined to bleed off the edge and run into a non-printed space.

AJ: Are there relationships to time and architecture in both the Spanners and the prints?

NG: The color bars on a piece of printing are usually trimmed off. They exist only for the printer within the timeline of the production process. The margin of architecture on the other hand never gets trimmed off, rather it often gets covered over by various materials designed to span the transition in surfaces. If we can expand this idea of treating the wall like the page and connect it more broadly to the notion of a focal point versus the periphery then by hanging something so low on the wall in addition to something that is centered to the height of the eye, all points have been given equal weight and value. Both the periphery and the focus can be anywhere. If we consider not only the interior space of the room, but also the overall environment such as what is visible through the window(s), then the Spanner or color bar can also be seen as a constant in light of a changing exterior. In this way they address repetition and time very directly.

AJ: The prints seem as though they can act as a reference to the printing process in terms of viewing a print up-close and the Spanners can also be seen as referencing the color bars in a proof of a print however, the prints and the Spanners are separate pieces. Why are they separate?

NG: Both types of pieces are directly linked to the printing process. Both types of pieces are basically unique. The prints are editions of one plus one artist's proof and one printer's proof. The Plates will be produced in that fashion until all of the original book pages have been re-printed. The Spanners deal more with seriality and as a series they are more open to alteration and change. The *Printing Always Printing Plates* are more finite.

AJ: Is there anything else you'd like to say about the process or materials used to create these works?

Something regarding process is that I've been dancing with for a while now are issues of authorship. In dealing with the ideas and processes surrounding reproduction (as someone who has devoted a good part of their life to publishing the work of others in a collaborative fashion), I find myself spending huge amount of time and energy on how best to translate someone's idea into book form. It's not that the line between ideas becomes blurred, but more so materials. After producing a book there's usually a lot of paper or cloth or ink leftover. I find it interesting to keep it on hand in the studio and save it for a project of my own down the line. The repurposing or even appropriation of a type of paper or a color is well within my comfort zone of influence. Almost all of my work made within the last three years has in some way incorporated a material from the publishing project into my personal work.

AJ: Do you think it's fair to say a viewer can contemplate these works within the contexts of printing, photography, and bookmaking?

NG: Sure, these works address aspects of all three of those disciplines. The halftone screen and the color bar iconography are things that are so ubiquitous that most people have encountered them at some point. Maybe down the line printing will actually be "over" and it will be a thing of the past. Then I don't know how these works will be interpreted. I'm not trying to romanticize a golden era of printing, in fact I like the idea that these pieces could be puzzling or even a bit alien to the viewer. Their specificity shouldn't be an obstacle to enjoyment.

AJ: The farms and farmland are slowly disappearing here in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, which is where you're from. Would you like to comment on how your work might relate to that through the processes of reproduction and abstraction?

NG: The work itself doesn't have anything to say exactly about the loss of farmland or traditional farms / homesteads in Pennsylvania or America. It pains me though to think back on the particular farms and places that are no longer there because they are fulfillment warehouses for large corporations. I understand the need to modernize infrastructure and the sacrifice that goes along with that — the upgrade of a bridge or widening a road, but to take a field and convert it into a site for a warehouse in the name of development is a particularly bitter loss.