

## AFTERWORD

# PUBLISHING SEXY LIBRARIAN

ELLEN LUPTON

The object you are holding in your hands is a romance about a young, hyper-sophisticated librarian who leaves New York City for a job at a small-town public library.

The object you are holding in your hands is also a sculpture. It was conceived by a young, hyper-sophisticated artist who is now becoming a librarian. (Julia Weist is a graduate of the Cooper Union School of Art, and she is currently completing her Masters of Library Science at Pratt Institute.)

The object you are holding in your hands was initially not meant to be produced at all. Here's how it began. Following industry guidelines, Weist wrote sample chapters for a romance about a young, hyper-sophisticated librarian. Weist sent her proposal to half a dozen major romance publishers, all of whom rejected it, most with standard form letters. She exhibited the letters as a work of art.

Those letters inspired me to publish this book. Why are books rejected? The modern publishing industry is a system of gateways that limit and control the entrance of newcomers. Unsolicited manuscripts are destined for the "slush pile," a dumping ground for the beloved brainchildren of unknown authors.

The publishing industry is shifting as new methods of production and distribution allow any author to enter the field for almost zero capital. Print-on-demand technology (POD) allows a book to be digitally printed one-by-one upon the point of purchase, sidestepping the laws of mass production that have governed the book industry since Gutenberg invented movable type. Mass production requires

capital. Whether the object at hand is a book or a coffee mug, a costly set-up process is required before thousands (or millions) of identical goods can be cranked out. The endeavor only succeeds when the vast majority of those units are sold—hence the wariness of publishers to work with untried authors.

The object you are holding in your hands is an experiment in independent publishing. Today's world supports an enormous range of content tailored to an endless diversity of users. This new realm of niche media is populated by blogs, zines, YouTube, chapbooks, machinima, and other evolving forms. More and more people are ignoring the gatekeepers and producing their own projects. The slush pile is rising up in revolt, taking shape as a sublime and unstoppable creature of unknown proportions.

The making of *Sexy Librarian* is a story that will be told in yet another book, *Indie Publishing: How to Design and Publish Your Own Book*, authored and designed with my students in the Graphic Design MFA program at Maryland Institute College of Art (forthcoming from Princeton Architectural Press, 2008). *Indie Publishing* is an introduction to the craft of bringing a book into the world; *Sexy Librarian* provides an instrumental case study.

Publishing is an artisanal process. Once the writing is done, hundreds of hours are devoted to editing, design, and marketing. To enter mainstream distribution, a book needs an ISBN number and a barcode. To ease its acquisition by libraries, it requires a catalog record (ours was handcrafted by Sherman Clarke, Head of Original Cataloging, New York University Libraries). We established the imprint Slush Editions to brand the overall undertaking. We launched [www.SexyLibrarianNovel.com](http://www.SexyLibrarianNovel.com) to chronicle the project's ongoing life and promote its sale on Amazon. The survival of any book depends on the undying love of its author; before this book was even published, Julia Weist was producing parties and events to build interest in her endeavor. To publish is *to make public*, to put content into the open and make it accessible to an audience. That's what we have done with *Sexy Librarian*. We wish our book well as she leaves home to find herself.