

Reading Artists' Books: Problems for Computer (Witten/online, 11 Dec 25)

Witten/online, Dec 11, 2025

Regine Ehleiter

The fourth edition of the series "Reading Artists' Books" presents publications from the 1960s to the present that have critically reflected on computational thinking—that is, ways of thinking shaped by computer-based and algorithmic processes—or that have relied on computer technologies in their making. Already in the 1960s and 70s, artists and theorists were asking whether computers could expand or even replace human creativity, how algorithmic tools might reconfigure artistic roles, and who would have access to these emerging technologies. These questions, first raised over half a century ago, are resurfacing today with renewed urgency in the context of current debates on artificial intelligence. Publications such as Alison Knowles's "A House of Dust" (1969), Stanley Broun's "100 this-way-broun-problems for computer IBM 360 model 95" (1970), and Manfred Mohr's "Artificiata I" (1969) demonstrated how concepts of chance, computational iteration, and algorithmic logic were translated into the analogue medium of the artist's book—often coupled with a critical reflection on the promises and limits of digital technologies.

The event is dedicated to Alison Knowles, who passed away in October 2025 at the age of 92 in New York. It takes place within the framework of the Studium Fundamentale at Witten/Herdecke University and connects to ongoing discussions within the Centre for Advanced Study "Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change" at the University of Münster. Shinji Toya's (London) contribution exploring digital obsolescence highlights the fragility of network-based artworks and digital infrastructures. "Computers at Work. About Women in Computing" (2019) by Sophie Rentien Lando addresses the role of women in computing history, recalling that, in the early days, "computers" referred to predominantly female workers who performed complex calculations by hand. Gloria Hasnay (Düsseldorf) will discuss her publication "Key Operators. Weaving and Coding as Languages of Feminist Historiography" (2024), accompanying an exhibition of the same title at Kunstverein München. Finally, Jonathan Harth (Berlin/Witten) explores the famous notes of British mathematician Ada Lovelace, widely regarded as the world's first computer programmer.

The program brings together artists, theorists, publishers, and curators who will introduce selected publications in relatively short presentations (10–15 minutes each), among them art historians Hannah Higgins (Chicago), Margit Rosen (Karlsruhe), Ursula Frohne (Münster) and Constanze Fritzsch (Florence); literary scholar Frank Fischer (Berlin); designer and programmer Jürg Lehni (Zurich); and artists Antye Guenther (Rotterdam), Andreas Bühlhoff (Hamm/Berlin), and Rodrigo Araya Yáñez (Santiago de Chile).

The event will be held in English.

READING ORDER

13:30 | REGINE EHLEITER (on-site): Introduction to the event, followed by a reading of Stanley Brouwn, "100 this-way-brouwn-problems for computer IBM 360 model 95" (1969)

13:45 | FRANK FISCHER (online) reading Nanni Balestrini, "Tape Mark I" (1961)

14:00 | CONSTANZE FRITZSCH (online) reading A.R. Penck, "Ich-Standard-Literatur" (1971)

14:15 | ANDREAS BÜLHOFF (on-site) reading "Reading Writing Interfaces – Word, InDesign, TextEdit" (2022)

14:30 | JÜRIG LEHNI (online) reading "Things to Say" (2009), "Empty Words" (2011), "News" (2011), and "Research Notes" (2011)

14:45 | ANTYE GUENTHER (online) reading "The Beheading of the Fruit Fly? (How will I know if you are truly a sentient being?)" (2022)

15:00–15:30 | Coffee break

15:30 | URSULA FROHNE (on-site) reading Lucy R. Lippard's contribution to "Information" (MoMA, 1970)

15:45 | HANNAH HIGGINS (online) reading Alison Knowles, "A House of Dust" (1969)

16:00 | Rodrigo Araya Yáñez (online) reading "Entreactos. Ordenadores y sirvientes" (2014–19)

16:15 | Gloria Hasnay (on-site) reading "Key Operators. Weaving and coding as languages of feminist historiography" (2024)

16:30 | Jonathan Harth (on-site) reading Ada Lovelace, Notes to her translation of Luigi Menabrea's "Sketch of The Analytical Engine Invented by Charles Babbage" (1842)

16:45 | Shinji Toya (online) reading "3 Years and 6 Months of Digital Decay" (2016)

17:00 | Drinks Reception

Two pre-recorded videos, produced especially for the event, will be available online from December 11 through the project's Vimeo archive:

- Margit Rosen reading Manfred Mohr, "Artificiata I" (1969)
- Students (Witten/Herdecke University) reading Sophie Rentien Lando, "Computers at Work. About Women in Computing" (2019)

The event was organized by Regine Ehleiter, Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Chair for Digital Arts and Cultural Communication at the WittenLab. Future Laboratory Studium Fundamentale at the University of Witten/Herdecke and Senior Fellow of the Centre for Advanced Study "Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change", in cooperation with the Office & Network for Media Art and Digital Culture medienwerk.nrw and the Centre for Advanced Study "Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change" at the University of Münster. The Centre is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The work of medienwerk.nrw is funded by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, on whose behalf it undertakes coordination, professionalization, and advisory tasks in the field of media art. The medienwerk.nrw office is based at HMKV Hartware MedienKunstVerein in Dortmund.

The series "Reading Artists' Books" was initiated by Regine Ehleiter and Tabea Nixdorff in memory of Chicago-based curator and librarian Doro Boehme (1957–2022). It offers a public platform for artistic publishing practices through collective reading and lecture formats. Previous editions

have focused on publications presenting literary writing by contemporary artists (HGB Leipzig, 2022) and on publications with asemic writing, inspired by the works of Argentine conceptual artist Mirtha Dermisache (Freie Universität Berlin, EXC "Temporal Communities," 2024). Recordings of previous events are available via the series' Vimeo channel: <https://vimeo.com/user180742593>.

TIME AND LOCATION:

Thursday, December 11, 2025, 13:30 – 17:00

Witten/Herdecke University
New building, room E.022 a/b
Alfred-Herrhausen-Str. 48
58455 Witten

and online via Zoom. Registration here:

<https://uni-wh-de.zoom.us/meeting/register/bCbRCDXpS0ChN8fsdTo7Uw>

WEBSITES:

<https://www.uni-wh.de/en/reading-artists-books-problems-for-computer>

<https://www.uni-muenster.de/KFG-Zugang/en/veranstaltungen/2025rab.html>

<https://www.medienwerk.nrw/projects/reading-artists-books-problems-for-computer/>

Reference:

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