

In *Xerography, Publics, and Counterpublics*, Kate Eichhorn writes of the specific independent print culture formed by the proliferation of xerography and the subsequent design of posters, public notices and eventually, zines. The text meticulously traces the story of the copier or xerox machine as a creative medium for artists and activists (Eichhorn, 2016). Eichhorn establishes how xerographic production enabled access to both public spaces as well as discourse outside the dominant publishing systems. (“...xerography helped people imagine and realize publics and counterpublics that operate along a startlingly different axis—where the possibility to express and circulate opinions is infinitely expanded.”)

The risograph today perhaps functions similarly, albeit in a considerably less accessible way. However, as a duplicator, the risograph potentially offers an independent, self-sufficient means of production (Prader, 2022) and is increasingly used by designers, activists, and educators. The riso machine extends the lineage of the xerox machine, while introducing a materially complex surface that is characterized by distinctive textures, misregistration and colour interaction.

Eichhorn concludes her argument by establishing the importance of xerography specifically to “people whose lives have never fit clearly into established notions of the private or public spheres.” Hence, the role of printing technology in resisting or facilitating social change becomes apparent. Legibility within print, similar to our access to publishing systems, is not neutral, and is instead determined by access to reproduction technologies.

In my risograph work, I use texture density, scale and layering to produce conditional legibility. Here I attempt to look at *legibility* in two distinct ways: the first, our literal perception of print as legible and the second, from the sociological perspective of legibility as described in James C. Scott’s book, *Seeing Like a State* (Scott, 1998). Rather than treating clarity as a desired design outcome, the prints explore how visibility can be partial or withheld - reflecting not only legibility as a means of control (by the state), but the ways in which minority identities or counterpublic discourses often exist outside “recognition”. A process intrinsic to risography is taking test prints; these prints, often taken on used sheets of paper or other test prints, create an interesting interaction and layers of concealment. Even though they are of the same material, they create an illusion of numerous prints and reinforce questions of legibility.

Thus, in this way, risograph becomes not only a method of reproduction or duplication, but a practice in which legibility and visibility can be actively negotiated through the print itself.

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