These transcripts are from the interviews conducted by Karolina Latka who interviewed Grace Kress and Molly Flatt to aid in research for Amplified Publishing, funded by Bristol + Bath Creative R+D

Addendum 1

Interview with Grace Kress from Shelby x Studios https://www.shelbyxstudios.com/zine

Karolina Latka: Hi Grace,

Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. It's great to be able to talk to you - I think what Shelby X Studios do is amazing and I'm really excited about your upcoming story!

For anyone who might not know you yet, could you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do?

Grace Kress: I'm Grace, the founder of [Shelby x Studios](https://www.shelbyxstudios.com/zine); an online platform that combines art and activism to build communities of care, amplify radical messages and imagine the world without systems of oppression so that we can begin to dismantle them.

I'm a politically conscious artist, who works on design, illustration and community engagement projects to strengthen social justice actions. I see art as a powerful tool that brings communities together, makes information accessible, inspires change and spreads positivity.

As part of Shelby x Studios we offer a zine subscription. Each monthly issue explores different social justice topics and the role of art in activism.

KL: That's a very impressive and important mission! And I definitely agree, art is a powerful tool.

This is perhaps a silly question given that you founded Shelby x Studios, but could you tell me which part of the publishing industry (or industries) would you say you associate yourself with the most? Is it mainly e-zines? Or is there more?

GK: I would probably say zines more generally. The digital space is actually pretty new to me. I studied graphic design and have always loved print. It's only more recently after experiencing barriers to participating in physical spaces due to chronic pain that I've been creating digital zines.

And even zines I came to through my love of political pamphlets and the way they have been used to share information and build community

KL: That's great! And what do you think about using personalisation in publishing?

GK: Hmm… could I throw a question back and ask what you mean by personalisation? When I read that I could answer it in different ways depending on the meaning of personalisation…

KL: Of course! Feel free to throw anything back!

That is actually a brilliant question. I was going to ask you what personalisation means to you slightly later. But let me quickly tell you what I mean…

During my research and a few other chats with people in publishing, I have noticed that personalisation and customisation are often treated interchangeably, which can be slightly confusing. Now, naturally, their meaning varies slightly between the fields but from my perspective personalisation is tailoring the content to a person based on the data available about the user/audience (e.g. personal data, such as name, location, time of day, weather in your area, and so on). Customisation on the other hand is allowing the user/audience to tailor the content to themselves without the need to share any personal data. For instance, when browsing the web we often get personalised ads (and movie and game localisations often vary in content based on the region they're localised for), but when we play a video game we can customise our character. Since we're on it - what do personalisation and customisation mean to you? They naturally can vary between your field and mine so it would be great to see your perspective.

GK: That's interesting. I'd agree about the differences between personalisation and customisation.

I think language is really interesting and actually it can be very important to define what we mean by certain things as words have such strength.

Personalisation can have lots of different meanings and I think it can be good, and not so good, depending on the context. For example, as a social care approach it can mean that everyone who receives support has choice and control over the shape of that support. And so in that context I think it's great as it means that individualised support can be tailored to each person depending on their needs. In the context you spoke of, I think it can have perks for the user but probably more so for those selling products or services. Because of that I worry about the collection of data and how actually, although it's supposed to be personalisation, it can be too blanketed online to make it really personal and the purpose becomes about selling stuff rather than benefiting an individual's needs.

KL: Definitely! So, coming back to my earlier question, have you ever used any personalisation or customisation methods in your projects?

GK: Not directly, at least, not yet. It's definitely something we're exploring though… I particularly like the idea of people being able to create their own zines using the content we create so they can collate the different bits of information and artwork they're interested in. That would be more customisation.

I'm also hoping to commission Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, an Animator/Artist that creates work centering Black Trans people to create a zine that people would interact with differently based on their identity. A kind of choose your own adventure.

That kind of personalisation is maybe about challenging people's perceptions, affecting the way they navigate spaces and asking them to interrogate how their identity impacts the way they experience things.

KL: That's amazing! I really hope that works out well and you'll be able to commission it as I can't wait to see it! So, do you think using personalisation or customisation in publishing has a purpose, an audience need for it? Do you think it can benefit publishing? This is one of the big debates I came across so it's great to find out more about your opinion on it.

GK: Ohh. That's a big and interesting question and I look forward to hearing more about your research findings.

I don't think I know enough to answer but I can share some of my thoughts…

I think it has a purpose if it is used with the right intentions. If the purpose prioritises audience need - brilliant! Too often though, things are employed as marketing tools rather than meeting need, although I appreciate both things could simultaneously be true. One perk of personalisation could be that people access content they want/need but can that take the magic out of things? Do we want to only access the content that we expect? And if personalisation is based on data collected on the internet how accurate and nuanced can it be?

Customisation seems more interactive. I wonder again about its purpose though. Is it used to increase engagement and interaction or is it just a shiny add-on? Ultimately, for me, it comes back to intention. If we're using personalisation and customisation to further meet individuals needs then sure, it's a great idea and these tools can really help people engage in meaningful ways. Too often though it's about increasing profit margins and people just become pawns used to make sales.

Hope that doesn't sound too negative.

KL: No, that's absolutely fine! It is important to hear your thoughts and worries. Understanding why publishers and artists could be wary of using such methods is the only way of improving them to ensure your needs are met too and that you'll be confident that your audience benefits from them when using them.

Have you ever come across any interesting/innovative use of personalisation or customisation in publishing? Anything that caught your eye?

GK: Not sure it counts as publishing but wanted to share the black trans archive created by Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley (https://blacktransarchive.com/).

I would say Container Magazine has offered something that feels like a very personalised experience by inviting artists like myself to participate in discussions around the content they share.

It's also something we've been thinking about doing at Shelby for a long time. Rather than the artists who create content for each zine doing so independently and then that coming together to create a zine, we'd invite them all to discuss the relevant topic and then they'd either co-create content or create content based on the discussion they'd had. We're also playing with the idea of a zine club where we send out a piece of content from a zine and then invite people to engage with it in some way. Maybe the artist who created it would come and talk about their process or run a session around it. Maybe it would just be a chance for our audience to explore the content further, learn from one another and even create their own zine in response.

Jumping about a bit but the second part of that feels like it maybe answers your question on whether I used personalisation/customisation in my projects.

I also did a lot of market research before setting Shelby x Studios up to find out what social justice issues people wanted to learn about. And we have created zines in response to that so in some ways that feels like personalisation as we've created content specifically to meet the needs of our audience.

KL: That's great! Now, let's talk a little bit about interactivity, which you actually already touched on… What do you think about using interactivity in publishing?

GK: There's something about interactivity in publishing that feels really exciting. I like the idea that there is a relationship between the content creator and the audience and that these change through that process, the audience become the content creators and vice versa. I think interactivity can ignite a sense of play, which helps creativity to thrive. Digital publishing opens

up new avenues for interactivity and I'm interested in how these features can help make things more accessible too.

KL: Thank you so much, it was great to have a chance to talk to you about everything.

Addendum 2

Interview with Molly Flatt from The Bookseller.

Karolina Latka: Hi Molly,

Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. I'm very excited about it - I loved the chat we had earlier this year about personalisation and interactivity, and I think you have really interesting views on the subject.

For anyone who might not know you yet, could you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do?

Molly Flatt: I'm an author, journalist and comment editor of The Bookseller. I also co-programme FutureBook, the biggest publishing conference in the UK, and over lockdown I co-founded the Big Book Weekend: a free virtual book festival accessible to all, supported by BBC Arts and Arts Council England. My debut novel, The Charmed Life of Alex Moore, was published by Pan Macmillan and I'm currently writing the next.

KL: Wow, that's very impressive! This might be a silly question, but when doing so many things, which part (or parts) of the publishing industry would you say you associate yourself with the most? Is it, for instance, digital (and physical) book publishing? To give you an example, as a Game Developer working in the children's digital entertainment space I would say for me it's the gaming and digital children entertainment industries.

MF: Writing. Sitting alone with a keyboard, making stories. All the rest is fun and stimulating, but the writing is where my heart really lies. And it's the hardest part, too.

KL: Definitely! Creative processes always take time. When we spoke last, you highlighted that personalisation might not always be useful for certain parts of publishing. Why is that?

MF: I think personalisation can be amazing in publishing. I love companies, such as Wonderbly or Picabook, that are using personalisation to help a range of kids and families see themselves

more closely reflected in books, and I enjoy how projects such as Visual Editions' *We Kiss The Screens* and *Breathe* can help reflect your choices and perspectives back at yourself. But I also think people turn to books - particularly novels - to immerse themselves in others' lives, preferences and viewpoints; to escape, challenge and disrupt themselves. They use books to flex their empathy, to go deep into a stranger's vision or version of reality rather than their own. I think that's hugely important, now more than ever. And I'm not sure there's any other art form that does it so well. It's a sort of superpower.

KL: Love it, that's very true! Do you ever use personalisation in the projects you're working on? Why or why not?

MF: No, because so far there's never been a problem come up that it was the right solution to solve it. As far as I can see.

KL: During my research and a few other chats with people in publishing, I have noticed that personalisation and customisation are often used interchangeably (additionally, their perception in different fields can vary slightly too). Could you tell me what both of them mean to you?

MF: I'd say for me customisation means tweaking surface details (changing the colour of a cover, say), while personalisation goes deeper to adapt something more fully to an individual's tastes and preferences

KL: That's great, we definitely see them very similarly. To me personalisation is tailoring the content to a person based on the data available about the user/audience (e.g. personal data, such as name, location, time of day or weather in the area), while customisation is allowing the user/audience to tailor the content to themselves without the need to share any personal information. For instance, when browsing the web we often get personalised ads, but when we're playing a video game we can customise our character.

From personal experience, I know that both personalisation and customisation are important (if not core) storytelling methods in the gaming industry. Could you tell me, from your experience, how do you think they apply in other (your) publishing industries? As you mentioned before, they can be a good tool for certain types of publishing, but there are other types that don't benefit from using these methods quite as much. Are they important in your field, or are they just tools that don't bring as much benefit?

MF: I'm not sure I've come across it much, beyond personalised kids' books and more experimental projects I mentioned earlier. Bookshops, such as Daunts, offer personalised book

subscriptions where their booksellers tailor monthly book mail to a customer profile. And I suppose you could argue that any use of personal data to target something is customisation - such as Amazon or Audible's recommendation algorithm, for example. That's huge. There's a lot of talk around publishers and booksellers needing to use reader data more effectively. But that's very much behind the scenes stuff.

KL: Definitely! On that note, actually, one of the big debates I came across as a part of my research is the debate around the purpose of using certain personalisation and customisation in publishing. I think we touched on the subject last time we spoke, and I'm sure you're very aware of it - many people question whether using these storytelling methods is only caused by wanting to innovate the field without a need for it, or if it, in fact, has a good purpose (is there an audience need for it?). Do you think there's a purpose (audience need) to use personalisation or customisation in publishing? Or is it more of something the artists/publishers want to use for innovation purposes?

MF: I think companies like PicaBook and Wonderbly can be a great way to draw in new readers, especially kids, by showing that they can see themselves in stories too. And everyone likes to be cast as a hero!

And I do think experimental storytelling projects where the text is personalised can be fun and interesting and tell us about ourselves, our biases and preferences - but they tend to be about the personalisation, not enhancing some other experience through the personalisation. The ones I've experienced feel like they'd very much only appeal to a niche audience already interested in experimental fiction. Maybe they could be harnessed to make an impact in work, such as anti-racism or bias awareness? I'd like to see that.

But are these experimental projects books, or are they games? Do books become games as soon as they're interactive? Does that question matter? I don't know. It probably matters if you're specifically trying to draw in certain audiences who self-identity as readers or gamers. And it probably matters in terms of who you're trying to sell them to or get funding from: book publishers or games makers.

However, honestly, when it comes to personalisation, I'm not sure books are the best medium. Games, for sure. Even TV. But the most moving, impactful, brilliant books I know don't get their power from being personalised, and I don't think they'd gain much from it. As I said, I think many readers turn to books to escape the personalisation and self-focus that's all around them elsewhere, from social media to sneakers.

But then I'm old. I'm 39. Maybe there's a whole new personalised book genre about to explode.

KL: Now, let's talk a little bit about interactivity… What do you think about using interactivity in your field?

MF: What do you mean by interactivity? Like chose your own adventure books? I think it can be fun used for marketing campaigns but I don't see a huge use case for the actual book itself… which would surely then become a game?

I mean, I guess you could say all the touchy feely toddler books my 2 year old likes are interactive…

Also there are platforms, like Wattpad, where authors can interact with their communities, crowdsource ideas and feedback and so on. I think that's totally cool, and I admire those who can do it, but I also think you have to have a very strong sense of your own purpose to hold on to what you want to create and not be overly swayed by lots of competing opinions…

KL: Choose your own adventure book is a great example, but there's definitely much more to it (Wattpad is another great example!). Gamification and interactivity are very similar and there is a very fine line between them, for sure. I'd say that interactivity is a process of two people or things (e.g. Human-Human, Human-Computer or Computer-Computer) working together and influencing each other. Gamification on the other hand is a method of using gaming elements (such as progress bars, goal and quests) in non-gaming environment in order to increase engagement, enjoyment, immersion etc. For instance, children's digital bedtime stories are often interactive in order to provide a higher level of immersion while maintaining the quality wind down time needed, but fitness and language apps use gamification to keep the users motivated and engaged. There is a certain level of interactivity possible without gamification within the physical and digital literacy space which I find very interesting.

But I'm aware of the time. I shall move on!

Do you ever use any form of interactivity in the projects you're working on? And why is that?

MF: I guess then I just haven't seen a memorable example of that. I don't seek out or get a huge amount of exposure to that stuff. I'd like to see more.

In terms of the next question, well the conferences are interactive!

But I don't write interactive novels, no. The rest of my career is quite collaborative, so this is a realm where I have the joy of being in total control. I love doing stuff to readers that's out of their control, too. Wahaha.

KL: Ahaha love it! Well, that's it then. Thank you so much! That was the last one of my questions and it was great to get the chance to talk to you about all of this.