

Sean Dockray / aaarg.org

00:23 Woman:

Okay. So we are talking about aaarg again and to start with very simple straight forward, just, I would like to ask you to describe the project in a few sentences.

00:42 Sean Dockray:

I wonder how be it different from last time. Um, aaarg is a online library. I think that's the simplest description. Sorry, do you need more sentences?

00:58 Woman:

Yeah, it would be nice because you, it's not a normal library. It's a kind of a special library and I'm thinking of some special features it has which a normal library doesn't have.

01:10 Uh yeah, I guess it's a library that's created by the people who use it so they're the people who put things into the library and use it, and topics tend to aggregate around, like, topics of philosophy or political theory. They're not limited to those things but they tend to sort of aggregate around those areas and come out from there. Poetry, some fiction, although it tends to be mostly nonfiction. There is some fiction. It's not limited to English there's lots of German, Russian, Spanish, Greek. So there's, you know, there's lots of little sub groupings within the library and... Yeah, I don't, I think...

02:03 Woman:

It's okay, I'm just waiting always a little bit after you finish. *Incomprehensible* That we're able to edit. Okay, how did it start, the project, the library. Where does it come from?

02:16 Dockray:

Yeah, so this is question number one in the cross-examination in a way, where he asks did it start in 2005 or 2004, something like that. And actually recently I gave a lecture about this, about how I don't even know that answer to this question. Because, like, yeah I remember I created, kind of, I think was an early version of Drupal. It was like Drupal four, this kind of online library and there were a few, only a few things in it. Around 2004-2005, but even earlier I'd actually made a place where some people that I was collaborating with and a group called Institute for Advanced architecture in New York where we could sort of gather together some of the resources that we were using on projects. So we're doing projects on things like disability, funeral practices you know very, like, niche topics and we were sometimes together and sometimes apart and so this was just sort of like a common resource for us to be using, like a bookshelf in an office, something like that. And that was even earlier than 2002 maybe and then even when I start thinking about it, like those same people I was working with, or just um, I was going to school with in the 90s and we were photocopy things from books and at the University Library and share them with each other. You know so in a way the practice is something that extended back into the 90s technically, maybe early 2000s. But I think the first time that like the letters AAARG were used as around 2004 with sub-domain. So yeah the question when did it start it's difficult to to say but it started out of kind of these small collaborative networks, sort of doing research projects with other people and then, like, collaborations they sometimes you know are quite small and defined and then they sort of add-on. Sometimes certain people break off and start collaborating with other people and I think that our

guys the library also followed that kind of trajectory with the bookshelf becoming used by more and more people until it becomes, yeah what it is now.

04:57 Woman:

Okay. And again the question what it is now compared to the beginning?

05:03 Dockray:

Hm. It's a lot bigger now. So at the beginning I was involved in almost everyth... So in a way it almost reflected, let's say my collaborations. So originally was with people in New York and then I moved to Los Angeles and so then it was like people in Los Angeles and I was trying to even get those people in those two groups to come together a little bit somehow. Or they are in the world of architecture and then I was doing more in media art and also activism in Los Angeles and so again always trying to connect connect these kinds of worlds. But it was a lot closer to me and people that I knew, whereas now it's a, I mean, the vast majority of people who use the site, I have no idea who they are. They are all over the world they bear little resemblance to me or the people I'm working with. But somehow I think that there has been like a, in spite of the fact that it's scaled up so much, like from just a couple hundred items to, like, you know tens of thousands of items and users also, like, some similar sort of proportion and scale. I think like there's still a consistency in to the, like, what's in the library.

06:37 Woman:

I know we shouldn't talk about numbers and figures but I'm curious. The last number I heard was 90,000 users but is it more now?

06:46 Dockray:

I'd say it's probably gone up by like 50 percent since then.

06:49 Woman:

And 60,000 items, is that correct?

06:53 Dockray:

That's about right, yeah. I think that's accurate now.

06:58 Woman:

We'll cut it out. It's no secret anyway.

07:02 Dockray:

No, I mean but the thing is like if you take the scale, like, so that seems really huge compared to how it was and it is. Like, I remember, like, the original version of the site was all on one page, A through Z, was on one page and so one scaling problem is, uh, just how when it's too big to scroll through...

07:22 Woman:

Could you repeat that because I ***cleared my throat.***

07:24 Dockray:

Yeah, I was just saying that in those early years that I was talking about the entire library fit on one page that you could scroll through and at a certain point it becomes an interface problem because it's too big to scroll through. So you introduce something else, like **pagination** right? Like, so paginating by letter of the author's last name becomes like just a common way that you do this in a library that's what we did with aaarg. It was, you know, you take this one mass and then you, it gets too big to make sense of just all at once. So you find ways of making views into it, to make it sort of still useful for people. And now it's, you know, at sixty thousand things. Again like scrolling through 60,000 things would make it a useless resource, but that number pales in comparison to something like **Libgen** or, you know, some of the other, some of the sites that it gets compared to sometimes. You know, like Libgen is in the millions of several million items. So in a way, like the difference in scale would sort of say that they're actually quite different things but I guess what I'm saying is that even after all this time as big as it's grown it's a, it's actually kind of microscopic on the scale of what it could be. If its ambition was to collect everything. Should I...?

09:04 Woman:

It's okay. I'm just waiting a bit. What I'm interested still is, because you talked about the growth you know the growth dynamic and can you say, I mean you would probably have to guess, what are the dynamics? How did it grow from a few dozens of your friends to sixty thousand?

09:27 Dockray:

Um, hm.

09:30 Woman:

Because it's still a very special interest group.

09:33 Dockray:

Yeah I think that there are like, some very, like, specific mechanisms through which it grew, which are pretty easy to identify. Excuse me. Like to take right now for instance how does it grow now? And that's in order for someone right now in order to sort of add anything or sort of read anything that's in the library you have to have an account, have the login. And so in order to get a new account you have to know someone who already has an account and so people invite other people so that's a very, like, specific mechanism and you can understand how it might grow from there. That every person who knows about it and who uses it will then invite those other people who they know who they think would also sort of benefit from it or might be able to contribute to it. Earlier there was no kind of invitation thing, like, I don't know how long ago it was. Like six years ago maybe. People would apply for it. So they'd want to log in and they'd have to say, like, they'd write a note saying why they wanted to join the site. And so in that case the mechanism was pretty much discovery. They had to find it somehow and so how would they find it? Again probably the same way. They know people or maybe through like a, maybe through Google they would get lucky and just land there and then try and get in.

11:10 Woman:

I read somewhere that you collected all this, like, many applications.

11:18 Dockray:

Yeah. When there was about fifty thousand of thousand or so.

11:20 Woman:

Do you still have them?

11:21 Dockray:

Um, yes. Yes, I do have them. I kinda like reformatted them and then anonymized them. But then made them into the these, like, I do remember making them into... I was just trying to figure out, if you grouped them what it would look like. Like why would people, why were people joining. And in fact, yeah I mean this is then going on to answer another question that you haven't asked, but yes I remember that. I mean, so to an answer to the question you did ask: I think the mechanism in the abstract is always the same. It's people find out about it because of people who are already using it, so there's a kind of, like, the way that you'd expect that kind of network to expand. From its edges or members or something. So it always comes like that. So it's, I think it's rare that someone joins sort of out of the blue, or like there's no spam being sent out saying join this and we don't get those kinds of people joining. It's pretty much members, you know, sharing in word I guess. Expanding the space of the library. And so the question that you didn't ask, there's more of an anecdote which is that those reasons were really important at the time because it had grown beyond the sort of initial stages that I was talking about and it started to be some people that I kind of knew about but didn't know personally. I knew that they were for example college teachers who had salaries, you know. They were like, they had an income and at the time I didn't really have an income and so I remember seeing then that certain people, like, we're then using the site that I had created more for people who are working outside of an institutional context, outside of sort of institutionalized education, which I think was actually an important part of the spirit of it, at the beginning was that although it occasionally, like, branched into some people who were sort of, had appointments at the University or might have been a student or something, it was largely serving people who are sort of maybe without access to the resources that a university would provide. So once I started seeing that it was actually being used also inside the university by people who had access to income, libraries and so on, I started thinking, like, whoa, this this doesn't feel that good, I'm doing a lot of work, you know, in coding and you know, at editing, editorial kind of doing an editorial function and these people are making money. So I thought I didn't want to pull out of it and, you know, this project is probably time to stop. And around that time I'd started asking for reasons for why people wanted to join. It was unrelated but I'd ask for the reasons. And actually all those reasons that were coming in and I started realizing that it wasn't just in fact those people who had the big incomes and were teaching University were a minority, you know, like there was actually lots of people who were sort of more in line with what I was imagining at the beginning of the project but who I just didn't know about. So that, I guess that was, like, an important part of asking for the reasons was also to like fill up the project again with a meaning or a reason for existing because I've kind of felt like at a certain point, like, it had run out of reason.

15:29 Woman:

No, but it's a great file. Make sure you don't lose it. So let's talk a little bit about the technology. You said you invested a lot in coding and building this infrastructure. Can you outline briefly, you already mentioned it started with Drupal, just the development of different platforms that you use and how it grew, also in terms of technical features.

15:57 Dockray:

Yeah, well in a lot of ways it's followed the history of, like, open source content management systems. So like I said I think the original one might have been Drupal 4 and then it jumped over to

WordPress. So I was also following just like what I was learning at the time. Excuse me. And of course these Drupal and WordPress each sort of incremented their sort of major versions on occasion. So after a few years of WordPress and maybe even, you know a couple of migrations within WordPress, it jumped back to Drupal. Drupal 6 I think. I think we skipped 5 entirely. And then Drupal 7 and then I think I was also thinking oh, but what if we didn't rely on these sort of big content management systems, these like Drupal, as a framework is, it's, yeah it's just really big and also they attract spammers and things quite a lot and so maybe just doing a homebrew kind of PHP one would allow, I don't know, maybe it was just... I forget the reason why exactly. There could have been a number of reasons, it could have been to have more flexibility, it could have been just for the fun of building something. And then it moved into Python and **flask** is a micro framework within Python, which is currently what it is. So I mean in the whole history of the project, you know if you were to... In the same way that, like, you know, you know that a bunch of cells in your body sort of leaves your body every week or something and then, like, after a certain amount of time, like, you're actually made of entirely new cells...

18:04 Woman:  
Seven years.

18:04 Dockray:  
I think it's at seven years, okay, yeah. I think it's the same with the code. Even if we stayed on, you know, Drupal it would be a completely new code. But as it turns out because we're always also rotating through different platforms and things who is, um, you know, I guess the same project, but, you know, radically different sort of infrastructure underlying it. But always, I guess all of them have all been sort of open source frameworks that we've built on top of, aside from I mean PHP I guess as the language it kind of falls under that category but...

18:44 Woman:  
Okay, so when I asked you about the artists who are involved actively in building the site *incomprehensible* you gave me a lot of names, I was a bit surprised. I think five, six, seven or something.

18:57 Dockray:  
I think I just said artists.

18:59 Woman:  
I said artists and...

19:02 Dockray:  
And initiator, founder...

19:02 Woman:  
Yeah, exactly. My question now is, because I understand you enjoy, you know, building, experimenting with a system yourself, you enjoy playing with the technology. But are you doing it all by yourself or is there people who work with you and if there's people who work with you how are you collaborating when you thinking of new developments, new features?

19:27 Dockray:

Um, sometime... So the name Jeff who's in there, he's just a person I've never met, who emailed to offer to help once and he, I guess has some ideas of how he would expect or hope that the site would work and so he's sort of, you know, the code is all on github so he just downloaded it and then started making contributions and, yeah, and they're good they helped out quite a lot. I think he maybe even he works at a library or he has a library experience so his sort of contributions tend to be more in aligning the kind of metadata with sort of what would be expected out of a library I guess. Whereas, so that's like a more proactive kind of contribution and there's been a couple people like that, but he's the most recent and whereas Rob, Robert ???, he, I think he's volunteered some ideas in person sometimes but he's never like directly coded anything but he has, some stuff that he has coded he's made kind of easily available for me to sort of plug in to aaarg. So I think at a certain level he has to be listed as a contributor, collaborator. Yeah, I...

21:04 Woman:

But are you having discussions with anyone about how to develop? Like also now at the moment ??? right you're thinking about migrating the completely different concept of distribution. ??? So who is the people you're discussing this kind of decisions...

21:22 Dockray:

I think conversationally with, like, Marcel and Jan and Sebastian... Beyond, so and then, um, you know I'm working with someone in Australia for a completely different platform but I think maybe it kind of has ways of crossing over, just some, like, sympathies between the two, that's someone named Benjamin Forrester. I mean I'll talk to anyone who kind of wants to talk about it. I'm sorta, I mean I'm interested in finding a way so that it isn't so like centered on me, making a kind of executive decision about who or what happens with it. Like, um, the content of the library for instance. There's no there's nothing like that, you know...

22:27 Woman:

Can we talk about the content? I think...

22:31 Dockray:

Now? Or...

22:31 Woman:

Do you want to add anything to this kind of technical development aspect?

22:35 Dockray:

No! No, I don't want to. It's a part that makes me feel a little uncomfortable in terms of what we're talking about earlier. But, well especially this most recent, like, because it's also projecting, yeah, it's projecting.

22:49 Woman:

So you don't want to talk about it?

22:51 Dockray:

I mean, I'm happy to talk about it. It's just like...

22:56 Woman:

Willst du was sagen?

22:54 Felix Stalder:

Yeah, ich wollt noch, um, not so much about the *move* but since we're talking about kind of the scaling, how is that in terms of, kind of the technical side, was it... Did that make a big impact in how you were kind of designing this? Or was it kind of easy to scale? I mean just technically.

23:22 Dockray:

Yeah, no. Sorry. So the scaling was actually a large part of what was behind the kind of migration from one platform to another, come to think of it. And that's because, yeah, it's not particularly easy. It's easy to break up the collection into segments for example by author name. It becomes more difficult when you start... You know like Google runs into the *state* or the search engine because they had to figure out a different way to browse the entirety of the Internet and so at a smaller scale the library became quite big so that even just sectioning the library by name became a kind of like... Not a very nice way to browse. It a dry way of browsing it. So one of the first things that was introduced was, um, it was called issues at the time. So like issues of a magazine and if you think of a magazine would be, the issue would compile a number of articles, you know, but presumably, like, within addressing a particular theme. So that was like one of the first ways that then, the people who are using the library were also sort of taking part in the organization of it. So they were developing, you know, like the types of issues at the time where um, were highly kind of like esoteric or just very particular to what they are researching. Like I mentioned earlier, disability. That would be like one of the types of issues. And now it's called collections just cause in the vernacular of web organizing, you know, collections kind of makes more, it's just what people are more familiar with. But then at a subsequent time, and I think this is maybe why we switch to PHP, that, when I was telling you that one, was the search we used I think solar at that time. So this was just to provide a sort of easy way to use a search engine which we would go through all the titles at first and then now it's a elastic search and with Python we're able to then, and we moved to a server where we could do more stuff on the server and by more stuff one thing that I mean is that we could automate the reading of the PDFs, do a kind of image to text to then build search index and so you could search within the text, like, that was a pretty important thing for me. I feel like I found it quite, the site became quite different when you're able to then not only search within a text but then see the results like mapped on the pages and so this is where some of the interfaces that Rob, Robert ??? has built, became useful. Which is important because we could then map the search results onto the pages like sort of on a grid and, you know, see multiple search results at the same time. So I guess the like browsing slash, you know, reading in a browsing kind of way where you're not reading every word but you're kind of like reading quickly over a large, sort of the way that you read when you're doing research when you're doing that kind of like, when you're in that phase of research or you just trying to identify sources and just find chapters or find possible books. I think it was, these sort of search engines became useful when I imagine that the site could be sort of directed in this way as opposed to just like a repository for things.

27:29 Woman:

Okay. Good. I would quickly like to go back to the content. You mentioned briefly what kind of, how it started, how it evolved. But just to make it more explicit because it's not just a random, you know, anyone puts something. It has a special focus and I would like to ask you to describe again what kind of text are there. You mentioned it's mainly nonfiction all kind of fields and who's kind of putting it there. I mean who's who's curating it, yo know, the profile ???

28:07 Dockray:

I think it, it's like somewhere between eight and ten thousand people have put things, have uploaded things. So the answer to who's building the library is, again it's not a simple answer and frankly I don't know. Like even if I knew who every single one of the people was, which I don't, I just wouldn't know. So I could say that, you know it's about ten thousand people who have uploaded things into the library and maybe the easiest way to like to answer the question about what is in there is maybe to point at some of the times where when what is in there causes a problem. So like when someone uploads something and it causes a bit of a tension in the discussions, because, because there are no rules. There's nothing that says please upload, please try and keep things you know on topic, please limit your uploads to these sorts of, to these topics or even please limit your uploads to what's already in here. There's not, there's no guidance along these lines and yet it somehow happens but occasionally breaks and so, and when it breaks, you know, because people argue. So some of the arguments have been for one, what was this, it didn't ??? cried something and so like a manifesto or something. You know these, like, right-wing serial killers often, like, have to make a political argument too. So someone uploaded this. And also someone had also uploaded Mein Kampf and in both cases people who said, like, why do we need, like, why do we need to have this in the library? Why we recirculating the messages of these people and so on. So this would be one place like where a boundary I guess is strong and, you know no one, I didn't delete it personally. It might be that one of the other editors did delete it, but it did, you know, like let's say the boundary gets drawn even if I think it did get removed. In fact I'm sure it got removed but I think the argument itself begins to draw a boundary. Another one was someone was uploading, like uploading lots and lots of stuff like almost like they were a machine and they were uploading full books that were already available on the Internet Archive and people said this is sort of polluting the water, or like, you know, it's diluting maybe. Not polluting so much. It's diluting because everything that's been uploaded is, sort of has a kind of intentionality but it seems like you're uploading without any intention whatsoever. So that was a second kind of boundary and the third was... I think, no I can't think of a third one. I guess is that like helpful in terms of answering your question?

31:39 Woman:

Yeah yeah, that's good.

31:41 Dockray:

I kind of find it more interesting maybe... It's more difficult to describe to try and, like, name through kind of their properties or category or characteristics, what's already there. Because in a way that starts to then say, no this like type of experimental web writing can't be uploaded ???...

32:01 Woman (interrupting):

Yeah I understand but it's kind of naturally evolving.

32:03 Dockray (interrupting):

Yeah and I think it's...

32:05 Woman:

??? things that are related somehow.

32:07 Dockray:

Yeah. And certainly things that are uploaded now are different from what, I or, you know, like, going back to 2004, what would have gone up then.

32:19 Stalder:

So that people who upload did have a sense of the identity of what this is and they kind of relate to that by uploading things that fit into whatever they think it is rather than seeing this as a general open library.

32:38 Dockray:

Yes, I hope so. And in fact when you invite a member it says something like don't invite the wrong people and pretty much it's sort of saying don't invite people who are going to sort of ruin or pollute or, you know, that this is... You like this for a reason so don't invite people who are going to, like, take away those reasons that you like this. I think that's the, that's the hope in the kind of, you know, having it expand through people who are already members is that in a way you'd want to protect it and by protect it I really mean like that if all the sudden it goes from sixty thousand a six hundred thousand and those five hundred and forty thousand new things are totally irrelevant to you that ruins it for you, you know?

33:32 Woman:

You mentioned that other editors deleted certain files? So there is a, there's a kind of a small, I assume, hierarchy built into the system. So there's users who come in through invitation and then how do people become editors and what kind of functions do editors have? Or what kind of rights do they have?

33:58 Dockray:

Um, so in the same way that editors, I mean that users can invite new users, editors can also make new editors. And those are the only two kind of classes of users in the system and why would, what... And so an editor, what an editor can do is they can edit the description, the title, fix the author name, because oftentimes people make mistakes or they reverse first name and last name, or they just, like, don't put any description at all and whereas a description you know helps people kind of look at a thing before they decide they want to, you know, look at it in more detail. And they can also delete files or delete items from the library, which happens quite rarely but it does happen as I mentioned. And so why would I would one editor want to invite a user to be an editor? I think in a way it's sort of self-explanatory from what they're able to do is that... You know very few things are being uploaded and they feel a sense of ownership, I guess, over what's there and they want it to be consistent. Consistent in the titling or consistent in the descriptions and so they want help. So in a way you're recruiting other people to help you edit or perform a sort of editorial function on the site. And so how do they recognize other users? It's through kind of discussions. It's rare that I think that they didn't know them in person, it's more likely that, um, through discussions, you know, over the course of a couple weeks if you notice someone else is sort of taking an interest in the structure of things and, you know, the sort of boring, sort of descriptions, so if they if they seem like they're also sort of tending to it, then they would invite them also to be an editor.

36:14 Woman:

So what you already mentioned that there is discussions about, you know, between the users and maybe editors of what should be or should not be there. My question really is, and you said that

there is no explicit Terms of Use, can you talk a little bit still what the dynamics are? If there is no first of all why, are there no Terms of Use? That's, you know it's, it seems to be difficult in a way, very open but still there need to be certain processes of control in place. How does it work?

36:58 Dockray:

I mean I guess I am personally interested in how those dynamics can kind of realize themselves without an external or sort of explicit definition of what they should be and I think... I guess that's clear right that's...

37:33 Woman:

So it's an experiment?

37:34 Dockray:

Well it's fourteen plus ??? whatever, it's twelve or more years old now. So with many of these questions the answer, especially a question like this, the answer is, uh, I think do I answer it now for what I think right now at this moment or do I think about, like, why at the beginning I never bothered to put terms of use?

37:58 Woman:

Maybe both, why not both?

37:59 Dockray:

Yeah, I mean at the beginning it was pretty much, like, why do we need to put a kind of label with legalistic language on every single thing that we do? Like why can't, you know, a group of people just do what they do without having to, you know... I mean I realized we we do make laws almost, in almost every kind of interaction that we have as people. Like we have, like, habits or customs or those sorts or things. I realized that those laws or those customs are always there. I'm not trying to say that we can't interact without them but the kind of, like, legal language of a Terms of Use is it introduces something else. It always introduces I guess like the threat of an exercise of power, the threat of law. And I just thought I wasn't interested in having that threat sort of looming around the, like, boundary of the website like at the bottom or at the top or whatever. And more importantly I think, and this comes out maybe more in the public school project where it's explicitly a school with no curriculum which doesn't mean that it has no curriculum at all but the curriculum is sort of self generated, it comes out of the activity of the school itself, that's the important thing, like, it's laws get realized in the course of use, you know. It's customs get developed. And the important part about that is that they work at the moment that they're developed for the moment, you know, for the context in which they're operating but because they get generated in this way they're not like, they're not a, what's a word for like a... Eternal. They're not an eternal kind of legal framing which, yeah, exists in 2004 and in 2016. But because they're developed through use, that they can also be modified through use and so there's always the potential to sort of rewrite or change direction of what it, what it's about and I've, I mean I'm sort of interested in those those types of structures for institutions rather than the kind of, like, one where you write all the rules for it before the institution has even started. So...

40:35 Woman:

So when you say you're interested, are you, are there times when you actually reflect about it? If you look back and see what are the, you know it's a certain kind of performativity that takes place, you know, things evolve through action.

40:50 Dockray:

Yeah, I don't think...

40:51 Woman:

Is there a moment were you kind of were you kind of look at the dynamics and the development or is it just the system that you're part of and it does what it does, or...

41:03 Dockray:

Yeah, I'm not sure. I don't think I've ever done it in a way that would satisfy you in this question but definitely along the way from in the, particularly in the public school because it's a lot more straightforward in terms of this question of curriculum and to revisit, well what curriculum have we developed, what kind of school have we built and that is it because it's a change, a changing structure. We can sort of measure those changes and I have given some, like, talks or sometimes in writing about the school I have I guess reflected on that but I guess it's never been, it's never been like the subject of a long paper or something if that's, I guess what you're getting at.

41:57 Woman:

That's still missing.

41:57 Dockray:

Yeah, that's still missing. I mean my PhD like what I had started was looking at the essay as a methodology which is something that, I mean in a way it's something that Adorno just has already said, he wrote an essay called the essay as method and that's... In a way I don't know that at that stage I'd even said anything very different from what's said forward in this like essay that's more than 60 years old. But the idea of essay as a method is in a way this sort of like structure which develops according to its own internal dynamics rather than, you know, the contrast to be a sort of academic writing where there's certain formal constraints which are just assumed from the outside, that the essay sort of has to generate its own kind of form through its relationship to the content. And so in a way I guess, the more recently I guess looking at the essay more deeply is probably the closest that's come, the closest I've come to looking at this, like, structure, sort of soft generating structures.

43:08 Woman:

Yeah, okay, that's very nice. I wish I had that in mind somehow. I knew ??? You know it was not sure if you would directly relate it or not but that makes sense, very nice.

43:24 Felix Stalder:

I think I have a question there. This one, one thing is about keeping the rules dynamic so that they can change over time as interests, you know, shift. And the other one is to keep the decision whether you want to make them explicit ??? these are certain guidelines that will change over time ??? and will change them, I don't expect them to stay forever, or keep them really just implicit in the practice itself.

44:00 Dockray:

Right.

44:00 Stalder:

And you go with the second? Right, sorry. ??? and how you can rewrite them, you know, occasionally as you want but rather than have to embed them in a practice and to speak through the practice...

44:17 Dockray:

I think that, yeah, I think I really wouldn't have much to add so that except I think that would describe aarg more than the public school. I think the public school is actually, are closer to the to the first. So the first one you describe because there's actually a meta rule which is the kind of... With the public school is a meta rule which is the diagram of proposal to class. Which is this generic, almost abstract diagram and then we figure out ways to go to move from one to the other. And then every few months we revisit what rules we've created so in a way like there are certain ways that you decide which proposals become classes but these aren't, you know, eternal rules either that we explicitly say we're going to revisit what those rules are and decide if they should be abandoned. That we'll also occasionally throw out all the people who are sort of making these rules and replace them with new ones. So in a way the, I guess the public school attempts towards maybe even, yeah... I ran out of things to say about that.

45:38 Stalder:

Do you do anything so people can, you know, when they join or when they enter the project, get a sense of these dynamics? Or is this something that you assumed it will simply ??? with others.

45:53 Dockray:

Hm. I mean the answer is I assume that they pick up by interacting with others because I'm... In an... I'm actually thinking now maybe that's not totally true. And I'm thinking of the, this, I don't know. I'm sure we talked about it in the last interview about this yesterday email which was after the, I think around 2007, I forget the exact time, but after a few years of aarg sort of growing very very slowly and having, you know, a few hundred people there was an email list. And that email list sent out a list of everything that had been uploaded in the past week or day, I forget. I think it was day. And it was usually just one one thing maybe if nothing got uploaded it didn't go out. Sometime there was three things and so this is a it was a way for people just to know about what's new and they'd also see, you know, by seeing what came out maybe also they would be more inclined to produce something. So I have to say that even that that one email. the idea of that email already, is a kind of device which which I think begins to not teach rules but it begins to like communicate to people what is happening and the types of things that are expected to happen. But then once with the yesterday email I sent out I wrote a little email to everybody and it said that there's quite a lot of people here that don't know each other and chances are that if you're looking for something that you can't find, someone else on this list we'd be able to find it in their library or in their part of the world. And so just reply to this email with that thing that you're looking for and then I'll compile them all and put them together and make a list. And so I did you know sent that out and then one week later I put that list together and then, you know, that yesterday email the next day was huge. Like so many people had uploaded the thing that certain people were looking for. And I think this already started to teach or, like, I guess it changed the way that people related to the site. So it's like, it became a very explicit way...

48:39 Woman (interrupting):  
??? service that you put on top of them.

48:41 Dockray:

Yeah, but I guess I'm trying to like frame it in terms of what Felix was just talking about. About like in what way do these sort of rules or expectations or possibilities, possible ways of acting get sort of instilled in people, like, how do they know? Because the fact is they, up to that point it was all really clear, up to that point they didn't know that they could ask of anything from each other and then somehow just knowing that they could recognize each other as also a resource completely changed the the nature of the site, you know. So occasionally there are, there have been things like that. Which I think are quite explicit, active kind of interventions in getting people to understand how the site works and how to use it and how to be a part of it, but generally speaking it's, I just sort of hope that, you know, it's been around for so long, that it sort of, it itself teaches people.

49:51 Woman:

But with this mail, you stop doing this, right?

49:54 Dockray:

Yeah, I stopped doing it because I, it was, you can't send that many emails very easily, very cheaply.

50:02 Woman:

Okay. So the last part about the project is looking at sustainability in the future. Would you like the project to exist for another 10 years? And what would this need? No?

50:23 Dockray:

No. I mean it doesn't... I don't... I think that maybe we're going to talk about some of this in the next section, just because I noticed in there three terms and the Community Resource and **commenting**. So in the ??? that's sort of interview, there's this sense of which the Commons isn't something that you, like, create. But it's oftentimes a way of sort of naming a practice which is already existing. And so when you ask, do I want the project to exist in twenty, ten years, whatever, for me the answer's no. The more important thing is that, like, the practice which it came after and maybe it sort of facilitates, that that continues in ten years. But I don't think aaarg is essential for that practice to continue. In a way, like, maybe it would it would actually inhibit that practice in a certain way. Like maybe...

51:32 Woman:

If you want to keep the project.

51:33 Dockray:

Yeah if I want to, like, if I insist on aaarg continuing to exist and then that maybe it becomes a kind of like bottleneck to a kind of cultural practice which then starts to only happen through, in the same way that like Facebook is, it's a structure that it didn't invent people talking to each other, but if all the sudden people can only imagine talking to each other through Facebook then it becomes, that's problematic, you know. So I guess if aaarg kind of acts in that way that it becomes the way that people imagine to sort of share the research, you know, whatever types of activities it does,

sort of support them, maybe it shouldn't exist, maybe it shouldn't exist in ten years. So yeah I'm open, I'm kind of ambivalent. It's, at the moment it's exhausting to me because of the lawsuit and, you know, like it is a lot of... Right now it's breaking kind of a lot and so I have to think like ooh, what's wrong? How to free up disk space, how to make this code a bit more efficient, how does avoid these kind of timeout errors... That's also tiring.

52:57 Woman:

So did you say...

52:57 Dockray (interrupting):

Maybe it shouldn't exist because of that too.

52:59 Woman:

Did you say in the beginning that you don't want to talk about the doc library, is that right?

53:04 Dockray:

No, no, no! No, I was more, like, saying like in terms of whom I was speaking to about what to do next...

53:14 Woman:

But that would be then the next step, no? Kind of, or how are you thinking about a possible future of the practice at the moment?

53:25 Dockray:

Yeah. Um, yes. So one way of the possible future of the practice I think that library is possibility. So that is, is one of these the distributed protocols. So it's like not HTTP in terms of a client-server but it's a peer-to-peer protocol. So these things, there's several of them sort of being developed at the moment and there are, you know, all kind of interesting in their own way. I happen to just like the **DUT** community just because they're into open science and, you know, archiving scientific, public scientific data, these sorts of things. And the app that we've built which works, still kind of a proof of concept but it does work, is basically like a way that you can have a library and share that with other people and also subscribe to other people's libraries and just be able to search from them and borrow things from them. So in a way like the technical capabilities are kind of straightforward but I could have, like we've built it in such a way that, you know, if someone happened to put aarg as a library then it would be possible to subscribe to that and to have that as a resource among other libraries. We've been building it explicitly like for some very specific libraries like the Ronco archive, which is a group in the 70s in Australia, of activists in Sydney. They have an archive we've used some, you know, archives that have been made just like by... So that midnight notes archive that comes from **mayday** rooms which Marcel and Tony have already put in Memory of the world, so in a way it's sort of gluing together some of these other archives. And what they also allow is, um, because it's a peer-to-peer system is that like once you've downloaded something into your library then you begin to replicate that. So in a way it introduces a certain amount of redundancy so that we can, different people, like a group of people, can share in the kind of like hosting and distribution without depending on a centralized server. I mean, you know, like torrents or something do the same thing., I mean what's nice about that versus a torrent is that that can continue to be added to and it stays the same address whereas with a torrent you're kind of stuck after you've created it. You know these things have been around for a while and I've thought, I mean ways of

decentralizing the library have been around for a while but I've always been reluctant to follow them because one very important part about aaarg is its community, is people they're, who you can ask for things whether it's like a particular item, whether it's technical advice, whether it's sort of advice about what to look at next, what to read next. So this spectrum of conversations that happen happens because it's a website. But I'm also seeing that, you know, over the last few, over the last 12 years the web has changed a lot and maybe it's a good time to be thinking about a way that the project can work that's not on a website. that's I guess...

57:22 Woman:

Okay, so the second point is really the the ecosystem. You already mentioned different projects, different names and is there, what are the specific projects that are you, you're relating to at the moment or you you can friendly with and exchanging?

57:44 Dockray:

Well that I think is one. It's, I mean it's not one of the other things that are here but it's ??? the IRC Channel and talking to the developers and trying to make sure that the use cases I'm thinking about are sort of built into the project as its developing past alpha software. So that's one and within that there's a bunch of projects built on top of that protocol like one is called science fair which is, well it's a lot like SCI hub I guess but using the debt protocol and it's pretty much really offering scientific journals a way to publish directly into a repository that is sort of shared among the people who are using it. But I also think that it's, there's ways of publishing the back archive too so science fair is another one and then in terms of the ones that you sort of are familiar with, like, sort of certainly open media library which is Yan and Sebastian sort of project based on the, on OxDB and Pandora. You know they're trying, I think, it is quite similar in a lot of ways to what that library is trying to do, with you know, a few kind of differences. But I'm really interested in seeing how that project has developed. I'm extremely interested in the interfaces that Pandora offers in terms of, like, viewing and analyzing film footage, video footage. I'm really interested in how Tommy and Marcel are writing about Memory of the world and well I'm interested in Memory of the world as the libraries. I think that, yeah I'm also, because all of them are sort of promised on individual librarians, sort of sharing their library outward, it's not really the kind of model of sharing that ??? *is* interested in which I guess is more of like expanding a space of sharing, so multiple people sort of existing in the same space so in the in the language of, in the language of Memory of the world it would be lots of librarians in one library. So I'm more interested in how the library can be a space for multiple librarians, because also in there you have that space for sort of disagreement or figuring out how to live together. How to how to share a library which I think is, to me is, yeah, I'm just more interested in that question that in the question of just how to share the library that you as an individual have, but the writing that they do is like super important and informative.

1:01:08 Woman:

Go ahead, this is great.

1:01:09 Dockray:

Thank you.

1:01:19 Woman:

Fünf vor vier? Ja, ich denke...

1:01:18 Dockray:  
Do we have to hurry?

1:01:19 Woman:  
No, no there are ten minutes or so left.

1:01:23 Dockray:  
Okay.

1:01:33 Woman:  
So now comes an evil question about the **art** world.

1:01:41 Dockray:  
Okay, wait till you hear my evil answer.

1:01:45 Woman:  
So what role does the art world play for your practice?

1:01:53 Dockray:  
Hm, what role... Well, I mean again that's that's one of those questions that has a different answer at different times over the last twelve years. I think at the beginning I would never expect aaarg as its own thing to be at all kind of interesting to the art world in any way, like it was purely a kind of shared resource, it was a tool to facilitate people's collaborative projects but those collaborative projects were typically, I'd say within the art or architecture world, occasionally it was, as I mentioned before, activism. So that's at the beginning but then more recently, obviously the, aaarg is occasionally interesting as a project in itself after these years to institutions and so then, for aaarg those institutions aren't that interesting because they don't actually contribute very much of anything. So in some ways that library actually becomes like, so in Glasgow at the CCA there was just a show recently on libraries. And Benjamin and I, that initially emailed me about aaarg, but instead Benjamin and I had put that library into it as a kind of provocation for how an institution would be sort of helpful, which is that they could install this piece of software and then they as as an institution you have a whole bunch of resources would be able to host and you know be a node in the kind of network. So they would offer some redundancy to the catalog, so that they could actually, rather than doing what they normally do in my experience, which is sort of exhibit, you know for a sort of limited period of time that maybe we could offer some new sort of relationships that might be possible and like that would be by installing something on their computer using their networks that they could, you know materially support the project.

1:04:31 Woman:  
I was also thinking of the public library for example ??? Was that any helpful for you and how? Because there was example with it, that was not ???

1:04:44 Dockray (interrupting):  
Well that operated on a number, on a few different levels. Like one is the level of exhibition and I'd say the exhibition didn't help at all really. I mean it didn't help aaarg at all. Like maybe it helped another project.

1:05:04 Woman:  
Communicating...

1:05:04 Dockray:

Yeah, I mean I never heard anything that would, from any person who said now it better understand or anything like that. So I'll just say no, it didn't help. The conference itself just in terms of providing a kind of meeting of people and sort of an opportunity for me to hear from others who were working in parallel and not always having the opportunity to talk. I'd say with it helped quite a lot and that on that register... What other... I mean they, you know, that the Public Library sort of, what do you even call the, when you draw a line around the whole conglomeration of exhibition research project, symposium, this is sort of like hybrid chunk of a whole bunch of stuff. Not all of it was helpful but some of it was. I guess that's the way I think about it and that's just from my perspective. I think for other people, you know, different parts would be helpful.

1:06:15 Woman:

In our project we are also interested in looking at these projects. You know we're talking about it in terms of art theory or aesthetics even, and try to frame it, you know, use that as a framework on theory. Does it resonate with you or do you have any ideas about that or is it, or are you trying to not think about that?

1:06:48 Dockray:

Um, I think with projects like these, like typically the most interesting positions for me is to reject the idea that I'm thinking about it at all, because the arts institutions, arts writers and stuff are looking at it anyway, so I don't necessarily feel like it's the the best strategy to, like, meet them halfway by try and, like, do some theory for them to make the the project kind of line up to whatever sort of ideas of, like, social practice or relational aesthetics or whatever kind of like theories that they might be trying to, you know ,like building train tracks. I don't feel like building the train tracks to meet them so, it lines up and makes sense, the art world can can be here too. I find it more interesting to just don't think about it that much, you know. It's the job of other people to work it out, but that's you know from the position of someone sort of working on the project. Also because it doesn't, like I mentioned the thing about institutions is what does it provide? A lot of the times from my perspective all it provides is some occasional invitations to exhibit aaarg, which doesn't need to be exhibited. In fact it's a waste of time and energy to exhibit because someone walks in off the street and they like sit down at the computer and use, you know, or like okay I could make a nice, I could print out some things but they're not going to really read anything. You know it doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense in a gallery. It doesn't makes sense on a different sort of scale of living in a different type of space. So that's why I think then, okay well then looking at the gallery as a site what sort of resources does it provide, because it provides other resources than an exhibition space and how can those be sort of like mobilized to be interesting for us. And I think that doesn't, they by removing it from even thinking from, by removing it from that exhibition space it doesn't remove it from aesthetic theory or anything like that. It just I think forces, I hope, forces the people who are writing on it then also dispatch with the gallery as the kind of, like, as a necessary space of of contemplation for like how a thing can operate his art ???

1:09:51 Woman:

Well I think I guess I come a little bit from somewhere else. Where I'm coming from is more that I'm interested in the question what role do artists ascribe to themselves in terms of thinking about their work, conceptualizing their work, framing it or, as you said, that is other people's job, you know. Shall they think about it? That's what I'm interested in. Do you see that as part of your job as an artist of your practice, that you reflect about it, that you try to understand, you know, where you located within this art world? Because you are somehow.

1:10:34 Dockray:

Definitely.

1:10:34 Woman:

Where you place is, what your role is...

1:10:37 Dockray:

Yep. And I definitely do do that with, like, I do lots of other things besides aarg or the public school for that matter. But I don't think it, as an artist I don't talk about them all in the same way. Not only do I not talk about them all in the same way, but I even don't try to accomplish the same things when I'm talking about them. And I think that, yeah, it'll be a lazy answer but I think like with aarg and the public school in a certain way I've just found the most productive way of framing it is to not frame it. As to not... It's just not to do it.

1:11:24 Woman:

Okay. We'll leave it there. Yeah, we talked about that. The last point really is, I don't know if we, you know we should talk a little bit about it, the larger social and political context you're responding to. Because obviously if, I don't know that may be an assumption that I'm making, is that you're responding.

1:11:48 Dockray:

There's a response, right.

1:11:49 Woman:

That it's not something that just there because it's there but that it's a kind of a, you know, this is a need for something which is obviously not fulfilled somewhere else. So you start to build it. So what is it what you're actually responding to?

1:12:03 Dockray:

I think sometimes you think you're responding to something that you're not actually responding to, sometimes you don't think you're responding to something but you are responding to it and sometimes you're making a direct response to something. And those aren't mutually exclusive and I think it's been the same with aarg, is that sometimes I might have thought I was responding to the needs of some people that I knew but it was actually a greater need and I wasn't kind of aware of it or I not only became aware of it sort of through these question and the reasons people were providing for joining the site. And then sometimes I think maybe I'm quite aware of some of the sort of limitations and, let's say, distribution of publications or the knowledge is more accessible in certain parts of the world than others. And I think that aarg is in some ways sort of responding to that but then you know, I guess, from a quantitative perspective I'm not entirely sure if that's, you know, true or not. I don't know if it if it actually is responding to those things so the question of

response is hard because I don't know if I can even be honest in answering it or let alone be accurate. And even response wasn't how it came about, like, I know that sometimes. And I think it might be more the case with something like Memory of the world or scihub for instance. If you take scihub it was a response to a very, like, direct concrete kind of shortage that Alexandra was experiencing. Right, so in that case I think the response is more clear but with a project like aaarg and I'm not even capable of identifying where it, when and where it really started, I don't think a response is quite the right word, or concept.

1:14:42 Felix:

You mentioned before in the... We talked about the **debts** a library approaches, kind of open science and open publishing, these repositories for scientific information. Would you place aaarg, very loosely speaking, not **???** **different**, but very loosely into this movement or this set of ideas around pre-access, open publishing, open repositories, or is it more of a technical neighbourhood in that case? Also philosophically and kind of socially.

1:15:30 Dockray:

Yeah, I shouldn't be able to answer that like really easily but because it started out without, or kind of like, without a really direct consideration of those things it feels not quite right to say that's the reason for it now. That's why I keep shifting back and forth between how it started because in some ways I can't divorce it from that. Like in a lot of ways in 12 years I've learned a lot. Like in a way I learned a lot because of the relationship I've had to aaarg. And so by having this relationship and observing what happens, the types of people who are using it, what happens to it, from other people, it's shaped, it's also changed me and it's all, you know, and also like just shaped my understanding of the kind of landscape of publishing and all these things. So, like, I think that in some ways there's a lot of affinities between aaarg and those projects but, you know, I would never be able to just put it on the same cart because of all the particular experiences I've had in the sort of particularities of how it began. Yeah, I don't know, I can't, it's hard for me not to just **???** a little bit on that answer.

1:17:14 Woman:

No it's good, it's interesting. Is there anything else you want to ask? Or...

1:17:20 Felix:

There's one final maybe. Where it fits...

1:17:21 Woman:

Which one?

1:17:28 Dockray:

Oh, can I just add one part that I knew I want to mention in that last question as a last response, which is also, for me to, whatever opinion I have of that, you know, I haven't uploaded anything in a really long time and I can't even remember the last thing that I downloaded from aaarg, so you asked me that and I can have my answer to it or my non answer to it, but if you ask the last ten people who uploaded something or the people who have downloaded something in the last day, what their answer to it is, they might be more strident in kind of the affinities they see with with those projects. Or they might even reject any relationship, so I, you know that might even make my answer even more vague but I think it's sort of important since those are the people who are, like,

shaping it at the moment and we know that like what they do shapes it in the eyes of the law because, you know, in the cross examination or in the legal papers so far, the kind of comments that people make are what give a kind of legal character to the project, so...

1:18:54 Woman:

Okay, are we good?

1:18:56 Dockray:

I wasn't trying to say cut, I just...

1:18:59 Stalder:

Just one more question because this came up with, in a context of a few other discussions. You, I think most of this projects that we're looking at and that you also mentioned started out with an anti institutional trust, kind of from a particular kind of subculture that's very suspicious of institutions and um, but in some way simply by existing over a fairly large number of years and with a significant history ??? to it, it suddenly turns itself in a kind of institution. Is that something that you're concerned with? Is it something that you see as problematic or something that you see as something that perhaps would also allow you to walk away while it continues?

1:20:14 Dockray:

When I think I'm just trying to think of, like, a way to answer this in a brief way because I have lots of responses to that. But for one it doesn't concern me in the sense, I don't think that it was, that the projects were anti institutional and so they become institutions and, like, ah, we've been defeated, it's become the thing I hate or something. It's not not like that at all because I think I don't really have quite the antipathy to institutions that you might think in the project. I think it's more a matter of, like, the type. I'm sort of, I think institutions just happen in a way you can't stop them. But there's ways that the institution can sort of like perpetually deinstitutionalize itself. I guess that's more interesting to me, is thinking about like what mechanisms can be put in place so that it sort of undoes its own institutionality as it goes on. And this was more, this is something that was more apparent I think in the public school, like in these kind of rewriting of position statements which are, like, instead of a manifesto or a charter at the beginning, the position would be like a self-analysis at various points in its history with the intention of kind of, like, recreating itself. So like these mechanisms were about like both being an institution while also like undoing its own institutionality. But I think what I was saying earlier about **we at** aaarg in some way become, a kind of become... If it becomes the kind of limits of people's imagination of what practice of sharing knowledge, of sharing papers with one another, all these sorts of things. If aaarg begins to become a set of limitations then that would be the kind of like institution that I would be afraid of it becoming and maybe like wouldn't be so sad if it dissolved just sort of like free up those practices and people's imaginations to become something sort of better. And finally the the last part, which was about the benefits of an institution, in that it frees up individuals, it's able to outlive any particular individuals who are within it, is actually something that that is super interesting to me from the point of view of art and it's something that I did talk about at the very beginning of the public school which was hoping that because of the kind of like mechanisms that were set up at the beginning and the sort of shell of an institution that it would take on the life of its own, that it would become like a like an autonomous living thing and that I wouldn't need to be a part of it. And that was realized that about 2013, I stopped participating in the public school in almost any capacity and I continued to operate in a number of places and so that when I encountered it, it felt like like a alien to me, like it was

something I didn't recognize, like it wasn't... There was no familiarity that I had with it and there was a really, like, it was an alienating and kind of exhilarating experience which i think is particular to, like, having created it like within an artistic context. b

Because I think it's it's rare that you have that experience with something that you've created.

Where it's still working and it, it's, it could turn on you that cuz you know it really is independent from you. And I think that's a beautiful possibility, like, for these types of things and in a way, yeah, I'd see that as a sort of hope also for aaarg. Because it could be that like actually my position especially because of the lawsuit, because that I'm tied up, timid, you know lots. I could be operating really in effectively, like, without I am distracted I'm not using kind of imagination, I'm not ambitious or experimenting I'm just tied up by a lawsuit frightened and anxious, you know. that's not a, that's not particularly good. So, like, you know maybe it'd be good if they could, you know, start to be, like, more dynamic again. I mean it's a long answer to a question about institutions.

1:25:48 Woman:

Very nice. Thanks a lot.

1:25:50 Dockray:

Thank you.

1:25:54 Stalder:

This was a great way to end it.