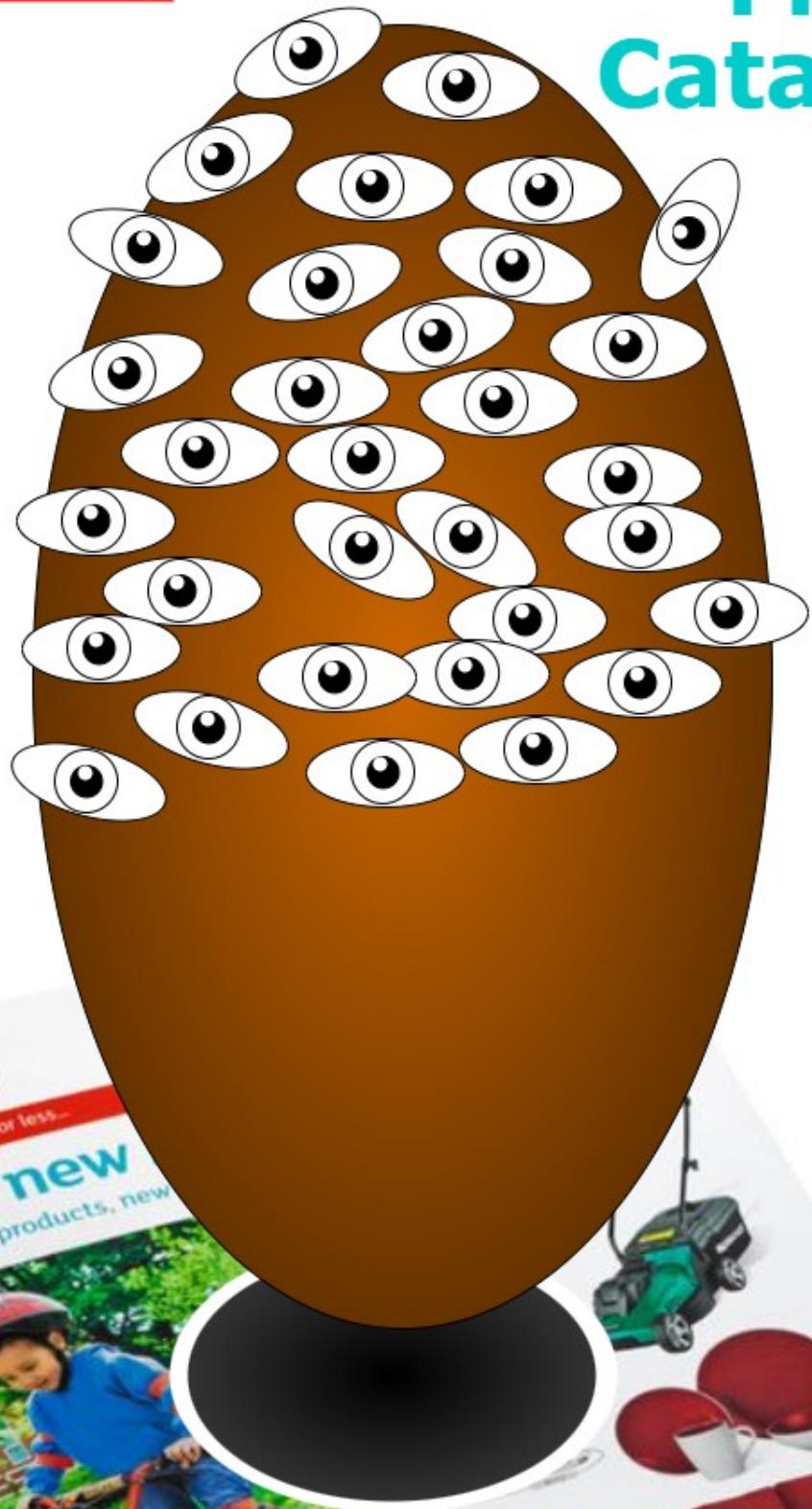


Argos's

Free
Catalogue



Three Points of Preamble

Cultural Context: Argos was a catalogue retailer that operated in Ireland until the firm pulled out in 2022. The idea was one could peruse the catalogue and order a wide assortment of - mostly home goods- to pick up and pay for, at the store (which was just a shop front attached to a warehouse). Why it was named after a many eyed giant from Greek mythology, is a little beyond the comprehension of this author. What they can say for certain however, is that the author remembers spending hours as a child circling Lego sets in the catalogue and collectively dreaming of wild and dangerous creations, with their siblings. The artefact made a good medium for dreaming within the material horizons, a nice way to spend rainy afternoons...

Organizational Context: As Food Not Bombs Dublin grows, we face the logistical issue of trying to incorporate more and more people. With the continuous inflow of new people we have at our finger tips such a diverse wealth of material, skills and needs. How we incorporate these people, make use of material/skills and communicate/address needs is by facilitating a reinforcing cluster, comprised of projects of mutual empowerment. This kind of project is an unbelievably powerful tool, but requires a large amount of communicative labour in connecting and prospecting to make it work.

Currently in this environment, good communicators and networkers hold a too much of power. Such power can be made even stronger by decentralizing it away from such figures; and distributing access to the wider membership. In such a set up as ours, you can have power or you can have control; but you can't have both. The task at hand is not just development, but prefigurative development. Progress need be thoughtful, to be genuinely progressive.

Junk Yard Politics: The author might very well be onto a winning idea here. This is yet another design attempt, at quick and dirty infrastructure building, out of the materials on hand. In the right configuration such mundane items may become greater then the sum of their parts. Capitalism throws so much of value away. The Greek gods, old catalogues and ourselves have all been discarded by the logic of greater and greater extraction and expansion. Junk Yard Politics is the reconfiguration of what is left behind, to suit concrete social needs. Junk Yard Politics is an 'on the ground' materialist design practice. That we and the world around us may become greater then the sum of our isolated parts.

Argos's Free Catalogue: The Yellow Pages of a Gift Economy.

Form:

Figure 1: Box Open

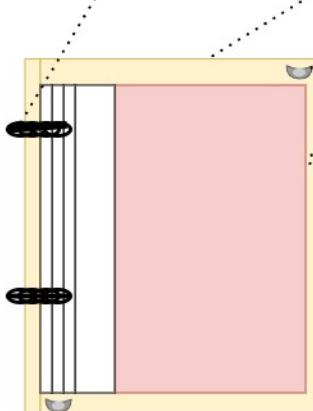
Box Closed

Ringlets and Rope

Wooden Box



Wing Nuts



Mini Pocket
Folder

The two diagrams (Fig.1. and Fig.2.) sketch out the material constitution of Argos's Free Catalogue. Essentially it is a wooden box, who's lid is bound to a series of pocket folders via rope and metal ringlets.

For this we will require both traditional pocket folders, and the segmented ones used for storing trading cards (Fig.1.). This current prototype has the box close via wing nuts on the opposite corners, but other closing mechanisms are available.

Inside of the box (Fig.2.) is a cheap thermal printer (link in footnotes), refills of thermal paper rolls, charger for the printer, A4 paper, a scissors and pens.

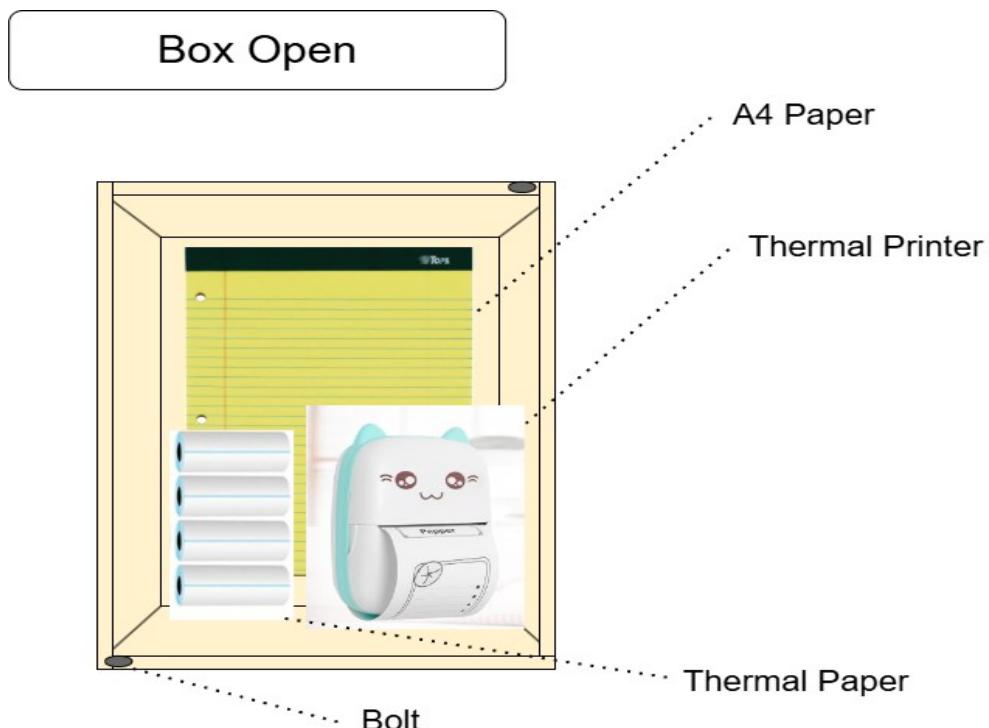


Figure 2: Box Closed

Function:

This design would allow members to internally advertise (1.) the skills they posses that they would like to bring to the mutual aid group (2.) the resources they have access to, that they would be willing to give/share, and (3.) what their needs are. It gives a point of address that isn't a particular person.

The thermal printer is a cheap and lightweight way to print out photos of stuff that persons have that others or the group at large could use to meet personal needs, or for communal projects. The use of photos over descriptions gives some sense of dimension which is important for scheming up novel combinations of what is available.

Such photos can be captioned with some kind of contact info and inserted into the mini pockets of the folder. This design uses persons residences as a kind of distributed warehouse. A free

shop that has potentially infinite shelf space, that is more robust than a traditional free shop because it is networked.

It can be carried to distro without too much trouble, and allows folks to potentially give and receive without significantly reduced latency. This might facilitate a wider circle of material solidarity that would support the emergence of new functions of our institution.

The regular pocket folder and paper allows for the insertion of more involved advertisements and commentary. Art, diatribe, expressions of acute need, pain points in the mutual aid process, aspirational advertisements for half dreamed conceptions of a better world. This is not to define strictly what can and can't be put into the free catalogue. Rather to give space. As a communication channel this device differs from the chat in how it frames acceptable input. Communication in the chat needs to be actionable, its what are we doing. The catalogue is more prospective and gives space for actualizable speculation, its what could we be doing.

Postscript

Those who are fans of the theory goon sesh, may recognise 'Argos's Free Catalogue' as a body without organs. A sterile body that itself is generative of production, without predefinition of the form that production will take.

Previous design work by the author has explored the conception of mutual aid as collage (see the allergens board). Whilst we surely need more folks to lead cooks, to only value persons within the organization in line with fulfilling this function is a mistake. The group does not know what it needs, and members do not know what it is they can provide until such action is negotiated between these entities.

Continuous addition to the collage over time creates a bricolage. A mutual aid group that is open and continuously incorporating is a bricolage. If our labour not only sustains one another, but actually builds capacities then every shape we take will facilitate the emergence of the next. Not merely a repeat in a cycle of activity and burn out. But the continuous growth of an institution of resistance

From a cybernetics point of view most systems function via the initial attenuation of variety, or the reduction of inputs to a standardised formula, that can be processed by the system. This is not what the author hopes to accomplish. Rather this prototype might facilitate an explosion of variety. A counter institution more dynamic than anything else in the landscape. Whether this is realised or not, every attempt inches us closer. <3