

Typologising the artist's book

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Over the past thirty years, the artist's book has inspired comment from critics of disparate disciplines from writers on art, bibliography and librarianship, all keen to bring the artist's book under the writer's explanatory gaze and assimilate it into critical discourse. As a cross-disciplinary field of activity, it is thus open to constant reconfiguration from the respective voices of the practitioner, the critic, the librarian and the bibliographer. The definitions and categorisations offered by these writers often belie their respective dispositions, their training and the expectations of the audiences for whom they write.

A careful reading of the critical literature on artist's books reveals three distinct motivational drives within writers: the need to historicise, to define and to typologise. Although the first two impulses have been comprehensively mapped elsewhere,¹ hitherto less attention has been paid to mapping relations between the artist's book and other sub-genres of the book arts. Indeed, early grand narratives of the artist's book display an inherent tendency to regard it in splendid isolation, rather than as acting *in perpetual relation* to other fields of the book arts.

Yet contemporary debate has moved on and today the artist's book is allowed to enjoy an active dialogue with other book arts. This has led to a proliferation of terminology, and the establishment of typologies that remain confused, blurred and disputed. Following recent research,² this article will review how different bibliographic forms have been related to the artist's book throughout the critical literature. Many are used widely, though some are unique to individual writers. By mapping these terminologies alphabetically in an easily consultable form, it is hoped that this article will hold practical applications for both collection management and development.

Adult picture book

Term coined by Hobson³ to describe hybrid productions that combine the highly polished production values of mass market trade books with the 'zaniness, insouciance and design sensitivity' of the artist's book.

Altered book

Term used to describe the alteration or reconfiguration of conventional publications by an artist. The artist, intent on subverting the book in hand, can impose drastic and sometimes savage alterations upon its body, removing or re-ordering pages, obscuring text and adding notations. The original text is often painted or drawn over, shapes are cut through leaves and pages are removed or re-ordered. As such, the altered book often presents itself as a palimpsest, retaining evidence of both before and after states.

See also *metamorphosed book* and *transformed book*.

Anti-book

Term coined by Polkinhorn⁴ to describe publications that render problematic the plastic and conceptual parameters of the book, and hence occupy a tenuous position within bibliographic markets and economies. Certain permutations of the altered book, the bookwork and the bookobject can be viewed as displaying an anti-book aesthetic.

Artist's magazine

Term advanced by Phillipot⁵ as a 'useful umbrella term to describe magazines for which artists have been centrally responsible'. He notes 'a growing tendency to identify a category of art magazines as "artists' magazines", a phenomenon closely associated with "artists' books"'.⁶

For Pindell,⁶ the artist's magazine is 'often neither fish nor fowl and lines of distinction between the literary and visual are often blurred'. Due to the

economics of production, or artistic intent, an artist's magazine may only extend to a run of one or two issues. However, it is differentiated from the artist's book in that 'it assumes, at least at the outset, continuous and multiple progeny'. Where runs do exceed a few issues, formats and typography are likely to shift and alter considerably.

For Walker⁷ all art magazines can be divided into three discrete sub-genres: magazines *about* art, magazines as portable galleries, and magazines *as* art. He positions the artist's magazine at the point where 'a conflation of all three' occurs. He further notes, 'Any periodical can be regarded as an art work in its own right in the sense that it is a fine example of printing and graphic design'.

For Pindell, the artist's magazine is directly opposed to the conventional art periodical, the latter 'primarily aimed at promoting "art as bullion"'.⁸ Tagg observes, 'The growth of outsider magazines has in no small way been influenced by suspicion of the established and influential "glossies": of their commitment to the status quo in art and art business ...'.⁹

For Zweig, 'A disregard of market factors provides the possibility for personal or radical content intended for a very limited audience'.¹⁰ Pindell views the artist's magazine as 'a means for the artist to put him or herself directly into art history without the aid of the critic or dealer or curator as mediator – an alternative space'.¹¹ Curiger, Editor of *Parkett* magazine, has spoken of artists' projects within magazines as 'allowing artists access to a public place usually inhabited by critics'.¹²

Phillpot¹³ enthusiastically observes, 'Texts by artists in art magazines have . . . subrogated the descriptive and interpretive roles of the critic'. But whereas some commentators have provided a history dating back to the 1920s and beyond, Phillpot specifically fixes the emergence of the artist's magazine in the 1970s, crediting magazines such as *Schmuck* and *Extra* with 'the prime intention of acting entirely as vehicles for magazine art, or literally as art'. For Phillpot, earlier artist-produced magazines cannot be artists' magazines because 'Unlike artists in the '60s they were not consciously using the production of a magazine to question the nature of artworks, nor were they making art specifically for dissemination through a mass-communications medium'. He does however accept that periodicals such as *Merz* may now be viewed as the forebears, if not the progenitors, of the artist's magazine, and notes that an oversimplified reading can fail to accommodate a number of magazines of the 1920s and beyond that occupy cross-domain positions.

See also *magazine art*.

Artist's publication

General term used to refer to all forms of publication in which the artist assumes creative directorship. Platzker¹⁴ notes, 'For the last ten years, it has been hard to think of artists' books without considering a larger parallel, sometimes overlapping body of work loosely known as artists' publications. Primarily, this has occurred as artists are offered new opportunities to work within different forums . . .'. His definition sees 'artist contributions to exhibition catalogues, writings by artists, or criticism and theory as fair territory within this expanded definition of the medium. In this work, dissemination of ideas becomes the art form rather than the physicality of the form being at issue'. See also *publication arts*.

Beau livre

See *livre d'artiste*.

Book art

Term credited to Phillpot by Atkins¹⁵ and advanced for its concern for the 'artwork and not . . . the pedigree of the maker'.¹⁶ Phillpot observes, 'Genres of art are not normally prefaced by their makers' professions . . . so why not just "books" or "book art?"'.¹⁷ The advantage of the term lies in its ability to present artists' books as *art in book form* rather than *books by artists*, and is often a reaction against proprietary holds over praxis. Kostelanetz notes, 'One trouble with the term "artist's book" is that it defines an art work by the profession (or education) of its author rather than by qualities of the book itself'.¹⁸ Phillpot observes, 'In the end, the very phrase "artist's book" may prevent us from getting outside the artworld and may keep us a curiosity . . . They shouldn't acquire that almost pejorative label "artists' books" – they are *books*'.¹⁹

Other writers, seeking a new accommodation between the artist's book and those that draw upon the craft tradition, advance a very different reading. For Dalberto, book art refers to any art that 'employs the book form'.²⁰ For Pittman and Whaley, 'All book art has some features in common. It is usually paper-based, usually has a cover, usually consists of multiple elements . . . and usually its content is revealed in some type of sequence . . .'.²¹ Smith²² advances the concept of *holistic book art*, in which specialisation and isolation between spheres of activity are rejected.

Bookobject

Term credited to Hugnet by Lufty²³ and used to

describe books that assume a sculptural role based on formal qualities rather than informational capacity. Ruhé asserts, 'Where a book is treated in such a way that it can scarcely be handled as a book any longer, like a book cast in concrete . . . the term used is "book objects"'.²⁴ Apple writes that 'For the artists working with books in this manner the issues are not primarily ones of content within . . . but rather of the form itself . . .'.²⁵

For Phillpot, bookobjects need only allude to the form of the book.²⁶ He notes 'Book objects very often only look like books – they may be solid objects which cannot be opened, let alone read; they become sculpture'.²⁷ Similarly, Berry writes on the creation of bookish objects rather than readable books.²⁸ For Moeglin-Delcroix, 'Les premiers livres-objets . . . abolissent la fonction de livre à lire . . . Le livre y perd donc sa fonction de communication au profit de sa manifestation sculpturale . . .'.²⁹ Rapko notes a growing propensity 'simply to treat the book metaphorically as a stimulus for sculpture'.³⁰

Carrion³¹ rejects 'so-called object books'. Likewise, for Warnke, 'The book object, the book sculpture . . . seems to have reached a dead end'.³² Freeman is dismissive of artists who employ the book as a sculptural element and who fail to fully explore and analyse the codex form.³³ For Drucker,³⁴ the bookobject proper attempts a sculptural meditation upon the bookish qualities of 'Finitude, sequence, and the continual opening of spaces in the process of turning page after page from the central spine of the bound book'. She observes two separate modes of engagement – an engagement with 'the book as an object in sculpture' and with 'the sculptural form of the book'. Spector observes that this typology categorically distinguishes the *book-like object* from the *bookobject*.³⁵ Similarly, Gette distinguishes between the *book-object-book* and the *object-book-object*.³⁶

Bookwork

Term ascribed by Carrion³⁷ to the 1974 British Council exhibition *Artists' bookworks*, and subsequently advanced by Phillpot as a replacement for the term *artist's book*. The latter term is now reconfigured to include all 'books of which an artist is the author' whilst the former now describes 'artwork dependent upon the structure of the book'.³⁸ Carrion similarly advances the bookwork in preference to the artist's book, which he now repositions as any publication by an artist, including the conventionally literary.³⁹

In contrast, Tousley regards the bookwork as a more specific manifestation of the artist's book, rather than as a replacement term. She observes,

'Consensus has settled on the artist's book and bookwork; the former is the generic category, the latter denotes an artwork inextricable from the book form'.⁴⁰

Carrion defines bookworks as 'books that are conceived as an expressive unity, that is to say, where the message is the sum of all material and formal elements . . . books that incorporate as a formal element the sequential nature of books and of the reading process'.⁴¹ Echoing this definition, Dalberto advances the bookwork as any 'artwork dependent upon the structure of the book'.⁴² Einzig asserts, 'The bookwork . . . is not the "artist's book" . . . [It] is, however, the other side of that same coin; it also treats the book in its entirety, not, as with the "artist's book", the product to be created, but, startlingly enough, as a given medium to be used, like clay, wood, metal'.⁴³

Catalogue d'artiste

Term coined by Moeglin-Delcroix⁴⁴ to describe the transplantation of an artist's book aesthetic into the gallery-published exhibition catalogue. She notes that the *catalogue d'artiste* opposes the habitual functions of the exhibition catalogue by replacing 'la trace d'une oeuvre ou la mémoire d'une exposition' with artwork in primary form.

Many commentators have noted that galleries are increasingly jettisoning the conventional monograph or *catalogue raisonné* in favour of artist's books that operate as accompaniments to exhibitions. For Hoffberg, 'Artists have turned to the alternative spaces and artist-run galleries to allow them to turn an exhibition catalogue into an artist's book . . .'.⁴⁵ Freeman opines, 'A catalogue and the objects which form an exhibition, if conceived simultaneously and congruously, could possibly exist as an artist's book'.⁴⁶ Houghton observes that more and more artists' books are being published to act as exhibition catalogues.⁴⁷ Phillpot notes, 'Artists' books . . . sometimes mimic other types of publication, and can therefore be difficult to disentangle from regular exhibition catalogs or books on photography, literature, and many other subjects'.⁴⁸ Similarly, Prince speaks of ' . . . artists' books posing as catalogs'.⁴⁹

Moore and Hendriks locate the genesis of the *catalogue d'artiste* to Daniel Spoerri's *Topographie anecdotée du hasard* (1962), produced to accompany his exhibition at the Galerie Lawrence, Paris.⁵⁰ Other canonical precedents have been identified, including the books of Douglas Huebler and Ruscha's *Edward Ruscha (Ed-werd Rew-shay) Young Artist* (1972), produced to accompany a show at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Reid contends that contemporary galleries have become 'speciality publishers, producing scholarly writings, inventive curatorial projects and artistgallery collaborations that function as both object and documentary'.⁵¹ For Moeglin-Delcroix, it is this interdisciplinary approach that has augmented a 'confusion volontaire des genres qui rend indécise . . . la discrimination entre le catalogue et l'oeuvre, le document et le livre d'artiste'.⁵² Elms illustrates the way in which bibliographic categories can become blurred, as once discrete forms are allowed to borrow from one another in symbiotic exchange: 'Anyone who regularly visits stores that sell artist books . . . will notice how many "art catalogues" of yesterday are sold as "artist books" today . . . This can be attributed to the . . . way each artist approached making the catalogues for his or her show, treating it as a project on par with their own work'.⁵³

e-artist's book

Term coined by Chappell⁵⁴ to describe artists' books produced in digital format or for online environments. For Drucker, 'The book as an electronic form . . . is already functioning as an extension of the artists' book form'.⁵⁵ For Frank and Hoffberg, 'The book's liberation is not only made possible, but is (or at least can be) powerfully abetted by the computer, both technically and conceptually'.⁵⁶ For New York publisher Printed Matter, 'Our mission . . . is to flatten artists' publications out and treat everything with the same weight, be it a Xeroxed, staple-bound zine, a beautifully printed deluxe edition book, or a CD-ROM'.⁵⁷

Drucker asks directly if CD-ROMs can be viewed as books and concludes, 'At the heart of this is the issue of whether or not a book is defined as a Concept or an Object'.⁵⁸ Wirth observes, 'An obvious conceptual overlap is that both books and some computer programs, like film and video, are time-based mediums'.⁵⁹ Platzker⁶⁰ observes, 'Artists have expanded the mediums with which they are working by taking advantage of new technologies as they are developed . . . While many of these new publications aren't strictly "books" they do function in similar ways to the original conception of an artist's book'. He goes on to assert that the CD-ROM 'can provide for a book-like experience that in many ways is richer than one that could be expressed between the covers of a traditional book . . . '.

Édition de luxe
See *livre d'artiste*.

Fine book

Advanced by Richman⁶¹ as a modern permutation of the *livre de peintre*, a distinction supported by Lange,⁶² who views the fine book as born of the monetarism of the 1980s and the cult of the expensive, precious art object. Vogler⁶³ prefers the term *fine press book*, and assigns it to books that display a high standard of craftsmanship and material. Hobson⁶⁴ contrasts the *fine press book* (employing letterpress typography, illustrations and fine binding in small, select editions) with the *livre d'artiste* (which adopts many elements of the fine press book but substitutes literal illustration for visuals supplied by a well-known artist who designs the book singularly or in collaboration with the publisher).

Fine press artist's book

Term coined by Verheyen to describe a category of publication that mixes elements of the *livre d'artiste* with the artist's book. The resulting publication is 'more closely allied with the *livre d'artiste* in that it is an editioned work' and is produced by artists 'more often than not working in close collaboration . . .'.⁶⁵ For Young, the fine press artist's book is 'characterized by a devotion to text'.⁶⁶

Illustrated book

Moeglin-Delcroix posits the illustrated book as diametrically opposed to the artist's book, not least due to its usual designation under writer rather than artist.⁶⁷ For Perreault, the artist's book, unlike the *livre illustré*, exists 'within the context of art rather than of literature'.⁶⁸ Balken notes, 'Frequently, the artist and writer who are coupled through collaboration never meet on a project . . . A pure exchange of ideas fails to take place'.⁶⁹ The Library of Congress defines the artist's book as categorically separate from the illustrated book, with 'works about books richly illustrated with original prints by well known artists . . . entered under Artists' Illustrated Books'.⁷⁰

Rice observes that where the artist's book does approach the illustrated book, it is often in direct parody of the mimesis, parallelism and linearity of the latter.⁷¹ Yet Hubert posits the traditional, illustrated book as the 'acknowledged point of departure of the modern artist's book, whose deviations, whether friendly or aggressive, have in no way threatened the survival or indeed the multiplication of the former'.⁷² For Cole⁷³, the designation of works as either *livres illustrés* or *livres de peintres* is not based on objective reality but on the 'old prejudice separating artists and illustrators'; 'any categorization based on the creator rather than

the product is bound to be arbitrary'. Castleman pays no heed to such semantic differentiation: her *A century of artists' books*⁷⁴ is more a grand narrative of the illustrated book, and can perhaps be viewed as deliberately making the semantic differentiation problematic.

Livre condamné

Term coined by Hubert⁷⁵ to describe publications in which the book operates as the site for experiential deconstruction and the problematisation of reading as a cultural act. Otherwise known as a *livre détourné*.

Livre d'artiste

Direct translation of *artist's book*, yet often positioned as wildly different in terms of semantic meaning. For Duciaume, the *livre d'artiste* remains a very particular form of bibliographic production: 'Idéalement et traditionnellement le livre d'artiste est fabriqué à partir de papiers fins, généralement faits à la main; la typographie est réalisée à partir de caractères d'imprimerie choisis pour leur lisibilité et leur beauté. La composition se fait à la main, l'impression également'.⁷⁶ For Drucker, *livres d'artistes*, unlike artists' books, 'come into the world announcing their "importance" in their production values (expensive paper, binding, large formats, "hand" printing)'.⁷⁷

For Stein 'Every *livre d'artiste* is an artist's book, but not every artist's book is a *livre d'artiste*'.⁷⁸ Similarly, Gordon states that the painter's book is something more than simply the translation of *livre de peintre*.⁷⁹

Drucker remains adamant that 'Artists' books were to counter the traditions of fine press, limited edition livres d'artistes . . .'.⁸⁰ Zweig opines, 'Experimental books printed in large editions, and meant to be read and experienced, have nothing in common with these books-as-investments except in the fact that they are formally books'.⁸¹ Similarly, Smith contrasts the merits of the production book with those of the one-of-a-kind book, advancing the former as innately democratic, with the ability to reach wide audiences of varied demographics.⁸² For Polkinhorn, the two are born of 'diametrically opposed political implications'.⁸³

Drucker observes, 'It is rare to find a *livre d'artiste* which interrogates the conceptual or material form of the book as part of its intention, thematic interests, or production activities. This is perhaps one of the most important distinguishing criteria of the two forms, since artists' books are almost always self-conscious about the structure and meaning of the book as a form'.⁸⁴ Due to these seemingly antithetical credos, Zweig advises drawing sharp

distinctions between the artist's book and the *livre d'artiste*, asserting, 'There is no reason why these two endeavours should ever live in the same universe of discussion'.⁸⁵

Although Drucker does admit that certain one-of-a-kind books can occupy cross-domain positions, she asserts that they must remain diametrically opposed to the *livre d'artiste*: 'An artist's book can be a unique work, a highly limited edition, or an inconsistent edition, and still be a work which is a direct expression of aesthetic ideas in a book form. And these works do not have to fall into the conventions of livres d'artistes . . .'.⁸⁶ Yet Turner and Tyson reject such distinctions, seeing them as reflective of a capricious and precious separation of the fine and applied arts within Western society.⁸⁷ Similarly, Foye has cautioned against divisive comparisons, and instead advances recognition of a mutual dependency.⁸⁸

Livre de peintre

Term used interchangeably with *livre d'artiste*, though Phillpot⁸⁹ is careful to differentiate the two, applying the first to limited edition, unique, expensive and hand-crafted objects, and the second to a more generic category in which illustration becomes paramount and the text of secondary importance. Confusingly, Richman⁹⁰ attaches the first set of qualities to the second term. See also *livre d'artiste*.

Livre détourné

See *livre condamné*.

Livre illustré

See *illustrated book*.

Livre-intervention

Term coined by Moeglin-Delcroix⁹¹ to describe works of deliberate political or social intervention.

Livre somme

Term coined by Moeglin-Delcroix to describe books in which photography and reprography ' . . . sont les instruments par excellence des projets de collection ou d'inventaire'.⁹²

Magazine art

Term advanced by Phillpot⁹³ to describe 'art conceived specifically for a magazine context and, therefore, art which is realized only when the magazine itself has been composed and printed'. He asserts, 'Just as the term "artists' books" subsumes an area designated "book art", so might "artists' magazines" subsume "magazine art"'. The

generality of the term *magazine art* often accommodates the specificity of the *artist's magazine* in a similar way to how the *artist's book* is accommodated within *book art*.

See also *artist's magazine*.

Metamorphosed book

Term coined by Sellars⁹⁴ to mean *altered book*, q.v.

Non-book

Term coined by Prinz⁹⁵ to describe publications that enact a conceptual renegotiation of the form of the book.

Painter's book

Term employed by Ray⁹⁶ to mean *livre d'artiste*, q.v.

Photobookwork

Term advanced by Morgan⁹⁷ to describe publications in which photographs act as 'neither "pure images", as in art photography, nor . . . illustrations made to accompany other, more essential information'. For Morgan, 'The images make sense only in relation to the context in which they are seen, that is, within a specific language sequence. The isolated image, removed from its original source, is immediately decontextualized in terms of original meaning . . .'. Elms defines the photobookwork as a 'tightly knit, well-edited, organized group or set of images in a linear sequence presented in book form . . .'. Linearity is important because it gives the imagery its temporal quality'.⁹⁸ Ruscha speaks of using deliberately mundane and neutral photographic images accompanied by a minimum number of captions in order to problematise distinctions between high art and everyday, industrial experience.⁹⁹

For Sweetman,¹⁰⁰ the photobookwork invokes 'the interrelation between two factors: the power of the single photograph and the effect of serial arrangements in book form'. He has written of inflecting the photographic image, altering its immediate context in order to dislocate and problematise the readings of official culture and sanction. He notes, 'A shift in context or caption altered the meaning of the photograph. And it is precisely this manipulation of meanings that characterizes a distinctly modern attitude towards the use of photographs'. The photobookwork thus becomes a 'category of space which encompasses everything from illogical coincidences to strictly determined relations'.

Publication arts

Term coined by Zweig¹⁰¹ to cover the wide spectrum

of publications with which the artist can be directly involved.

See also *artist's publication*.

Transformed book

Term used by Drucker¹⁰² to mean *altered book*, q.v.

This article has provided a concise yet comprehensive introduction to the terminology of the field as it stands today. It has been seen that the artists' book does not occupy an area of consensus in either discourse or praxis; rather it is situated within a disputed territory in which ambiguity, boundary fluidity and indeterminism are commonplace. The terminology one uses to categorise the artist's book is open to continual redefinition and re-evaluation, a process further accentuated by the fact that the artist's book often seeks to *remettre en question*, or to subvert, what has passed before. In the realm of the artist's book, it is perhaps best to acknowledge that unified theories do not exist, and that theoretical debate remains compartmentalised, rather than holistic.

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