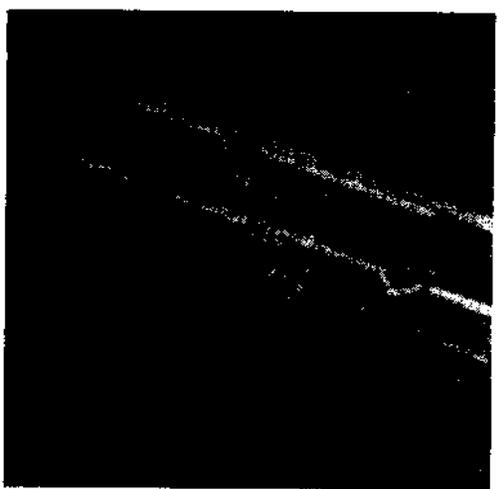
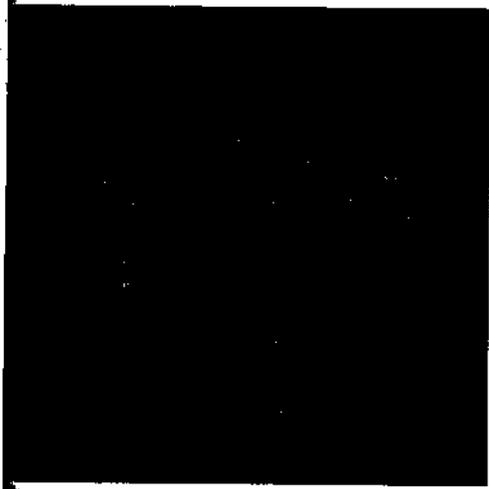
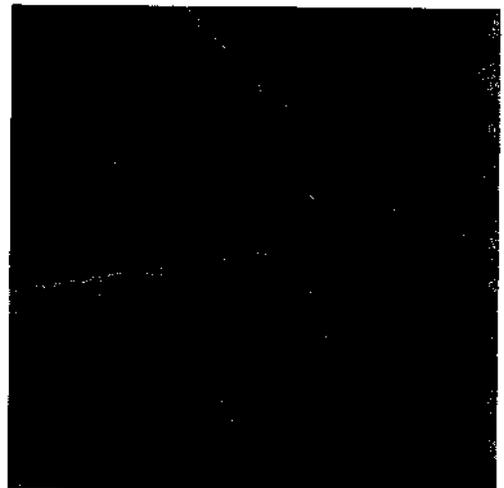
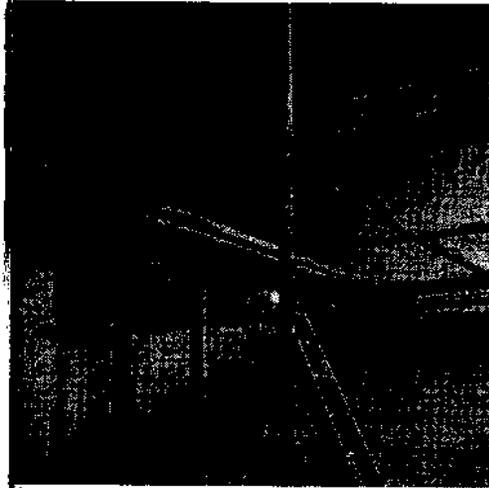


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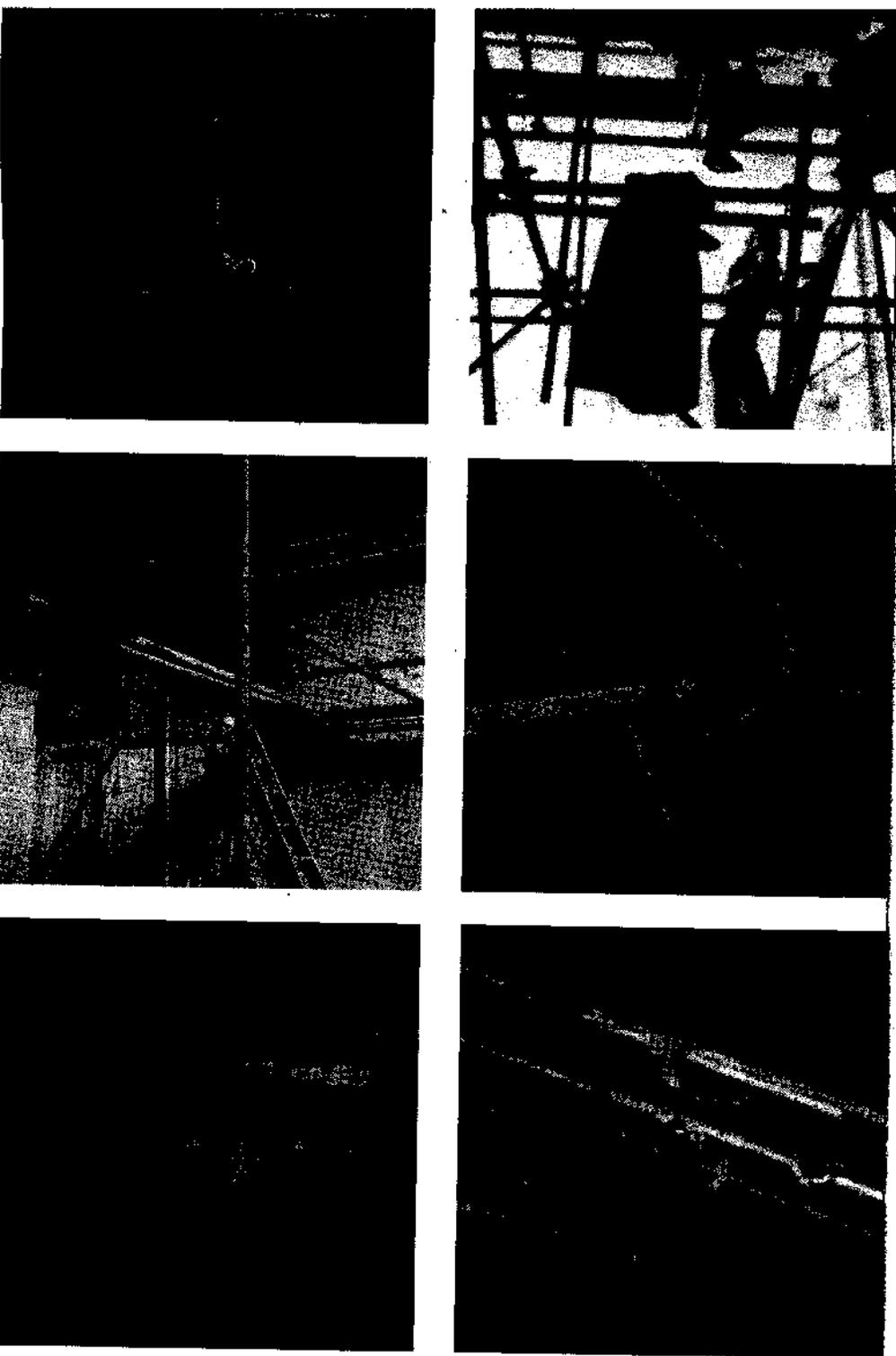
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edition	: 500 copies
print	: offset, two-sided black
photography	: 48 pts. screens
format	: 4 x 160 x 210 mm.
volume	: 72 pages + cover
paper	: recycling paper 80 grs. m <sup>2</sup> .
cover	: recycling paper 170 grs. m <sup>2</sup> .
bookbindingwork	: stitched

price per copy: Nfl 24,- + porto (\$ 15.00 + postage)

make cheques payable to Hetty Huisman  
anjeliersstraat 153 1015 NG Amsterdam  
postgiro nr. 4717939

send orders to  
VOID distributors, anjeliersstraat 153 - 1015 NG Amsterdam



Ulises Carrión  
**SECOND THOUGHTS**  
VOID Distributors  
Amsterdam  
1980

©1980 by Ulises Carrión  
Published by VOID Distributors, Anjelierstraat 153,  
1015 NG Amsterdam.  
Printed by Mekka, Passeerdersgracht 32, Amsterdam.  
Edition of 500 copies.  
Cover photographs from 'High Level Dinner,'  
Amsterdam, 1974, from Hetti Huisman/CeragenetiCs  
to Ulises Carrión.

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JUN - 2 1982

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## THE NEW ART OF MAKING BOOKS

This essay was written originally in Spanish. Its title is an allusion to a polemical poem by the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega, *El Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias* or *The New Art of Making Comedies*.

It has been published, in its complete version, for the first time in *Plural* No. 41, Mexico City, 1975. Later, a slightly shortened, English version was published in *Kontexts* No 6/7, Amsterdam, 1975. This version has been used for all ulterior publications and is also used, except for some minor corrections, in this book. The same text was included in the catalogue Contents published on the occasion of my exhibition at Remont Gallery, Warsaw, 1978. It also appeared in the European Issue of *Art Contemporary* No. 9, Vol. III No. 1, San Francisco, 1977. A Polish translation was published in *Linia* February-March, Warsaw, 1977.

I've used this text as a basis for lectures in the CAYC (Centro de Arte y Comunicación), Buenos Aires, 1978, and in the Pinacoteca do Estado, Sao Paulo, 1978.

The English version of this and all other texts included in this book has been corrected by Michael Gibbs, Martha Hawley, and John Liggins.

## WHAT A BOOK IS

A book is a sequence of spaces.

Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment  
- a book is also a sequence of moments.

....

A book is not a case of words, nor a bag of words, nor a bearer of words.

....

A writer, contrary to the popular opinion, does not write books.

A writer writes texts.

The fact, that a text is contained in a book, comes only from the dimensions of such a text; or, in the case of a series of short texts (poems, for instance), from their number.

....

A literary (prose) text contained in a book *ignores* the fact that the book is an autonomous space-time sequence.

A series of more or less short texts (poems of other) distributed through a book following any particular ordering reveals the sequential nature of the book.

It reveals it, perhaps uses it; but it does not incorporate it or assimilate it.

....

Written language is a sequence of signs expanding within the space; the reading of which occurs in the time.

This text has been published in art magazines and has been quoted in an art context, but it was originally intended for a literary audience. Nowadays my interests have become interdisciplinary, and this means that I appreciate the response my text has had among artists, but also that I regret that the reaction from writers has been so infrequent.

A book is a space-time sequence.

....

Books existed originally as containers of literary texts.

But books, seen as autonomous realities, can contain any (written) language, not only literary language, or even any other system of signs.

....

Among languages, literary language (prose and poetry) is not the best fitted to the nature of books.

....

A book may be the accidental container of a text, the structure of which is irrelevant to the book: these are the books of bookshops and libraries.

A book can also exist as an autonomous and self-sufficient form, including perhaps a text that emphasizes that form, a text that is an organic part of that form: here begins the new art of making books.

....

In the old art the writer judges himself as being not responsible for the real book. He writes the text. The rest is done by the servants, the artisans, the workers, the others.

In the new art writing a text is only the first link in the chain going from the writer to the reader. In the new art the writer assumes the responsibility for the whole process.

....

In the old art the writer writes texts.  
In the new art the writer makes books.

....

To make a book is to actualize its ideal space-time sequence by means of the creation of a parallel sequence of signs, be it verbal or other.

....

## PROSE AND POETRY

In an old book all the pages are the same.

When writing the text, the writer followed only the sequential laws of language, which are not the sequential laws of books.

Words might be different on every page; but every page is, as such, identical with the preceding ones and with those that follow.

In the new art every page is different; every page is an individualized element of a structure (the book) wherein it has a particular function to fulfill.

....

In spoken and written language pronouns substitute for nouns, so to avoid tiresome, superfluous repetitions.

In the book, composed of various elements, of signs, such as language, what is it that plays the role of pronouns, so to avoid tiresome, superfluous repetitions?

This is a problem for the new art; the old one does not even suspect its existence.

....

A book of 500 pages, or of 100 pages, or even of 25, wherein all the pages are similar, is a boring book considered as a book, no matter how thrilling the content of the words of the text printed on the pages might be.

....

According to this statement, the present book would be boring. Indeed, I think so.

A novel, by a writer of genius or by a third-rate author, is a book where nothing happens.

....

There are still, and always will be, people who like reading novels. There will also always be people who like playing chess, gossiping, dancing the mambo, or eating strawberries with cream.

....

In comparison with novels, where nothing happens, in poetry books something happens sometimes, although very little.

....

A novel with no capital letters, or with different letter types, or with chemical formulae interspersed here and there, etc., is still a novel, that is to say, a boring book pretending not to be such.

....

A book of poems contains as many words as, or more than, a novel, but it uses ultimately the real, physical space whereon these words appear, in a more intentional, more evident, deeper way.

This is so because in order to transcribe poetical language onto paper it is necessary to translate typographically the conventions proper to poetic language.

....

The transcription of prose needs few things: punctuation, capitals, various margins, etc.

All these conventions are original and extremely beautiful discoveries, but we don't notice them any more because we use them daily.

Transcription of poetry, a more elaborate language, uses less common signs. The mere need to create the signs fitting the transcription of poetic language, calls our attention to this very simple fact: to write a poem on paper is a different action from writing it on our mind.

....

Poems are songs, the poets repeat. But they don't sing them. They write them.

Poetry is to be said aloud, they repeat. But they don't say it aloud. They publish it.

The fact is, that poetry, as it occurs normally, is written and printed, not sung or spoken, poetry. And with this, poetry has lost nothing.

On the contrary, poetry has gained something: a spatial reality that the so loudly lamented sung and spoken poetries lacked.

.....

## THE SPACE

For years, many years, poets have intensively and efficiently exploited the spatial possibilities of poetry.

But only the so-called concrete or, later, visual poetry, has openly declared this.

....

Verses ending halfway on the page, verses having a wider or a narrower margin, verses being separated from the following one by a bigger or smaller space — all this is exploitation of space.

....

This is not to say that a text is poetry because it uses space in this or that way, but that using space is a characteristic of written poetry.

....

The space is the music of the unsung poetry.

....

The introduction of space into poetry (or rather of poetry into space) is an enormous event of literally incalculable consequences.

One of these consequences is concrete and/or visual poetry. Its birth is not an extravagant event in the history of literature, but the natural, unavoidable development of the spatial reality gained by language since the moment writing was invented.

....

The poetry of the old art does use space, albeit bashfully.

This poetry establishes an inter-subjective communication.

Inter-subjective communication occurs in an abstract, ideal, impalpable space.

....

In the new art (of which concrete poetry is only an example) communication is still inter-subjective, but it occurs in a concrete, real, physical space — the page.

....

A book is a volume in the space.

It is the true ground of the communication that takes place through words — its here and now.

Concrete poetry represents an alternative to poetry.

Books, regarded as autonomous space-time sequences, offer an alternative to all existent literary genres.

....

Space exists outside subjectivity.

If two subjects communicate *in* the space, then space is an element of this communication. Space modifies this communication. Space imposes its own laws on this communication.

Printed words are imprisoned in the matter of the book.

....

What is more meaningful: the book or the text it contains?

What was first: the chicken or the egg?

....

The old art assumes that printed words are printed on an ideal space.

The new art knows that books exist as objects in an exterior reality, subject to concrete conditions of perception, existence, exchange, consumption, use, etc.

....

The objective manifestation of language can be experienced in an isolated moment and space — the page; or in a sequence of spaces and moments — the 'book.'

....

There is not and will not be new literature any more.

This sounds better in Spanish, where 'printed' is *impresso* and 'imprisoned' is *preso*. I don't regret the loss. Playing upon words is a typical literary device and therefore I reject it.

There will be, perhaps, new ways to communicate that will include language or will use language as a basis.

As a medium of communication, literature will always be old literature.

....

## THE LANGUAGE

Language transmits ideas, i.e. mental images.

The starting point of the transmission of mental images is always an intention: we speak to transmit a particular image.

The everyday language and the old art language have this in common: both are intentional, both want to transmit certain mental images.

....

In the old art the meanings of the words are the bearers of the author's intentions.

Just as the ultimate meaning of words is indefinable, so the author's intention is unfathomable.

....

Every intention presupposes a purpose, a utility.

Everyday language is intentional, that is, utilitarian; its function is to transmit ideas and feelings, to explain, to declare, to convince, to invoke, to accuse, etc.

Old art's language is intentional as well, i.e. utilitarian. Both languages differ from one another only in their form.

....

New art's language is radically different from daily language. It neglects intentions and utility, and it returns to itself, it investigates itself, looking for forms, for series of forms that give birth to, couple with, unfold into, space-time sequences.

....

The words in a new book are not the bearers of the message, nor the mouthpieces of the soul, nor the currency of communication.

Those were already named by Hamlet, an avid reader of books: words, words, words.

....

The words of the new book are there not to transmit certain mental images with a certain intention.

They are there to form, together with other signs, a space-time sequence that we identify with the name 'book.'

....

The words in a new book might be the author's own words or someone else's words.

A writer of the new art writes very little or does not write at all.

....

The most beautiful and perfect book in the world is a book with only blank pages, in the same way that the most complete language is that which lies beyond all that the words of a man can say.

....

Every book of the new art is searching after that book of absolute whiteness, in the same way that every

poem searches for silence.

....

Intention is the mother of rhetoric.

....

Words cannot avoid meaning something, but they can be divested of intentionality.

....

A non-intentional language is an abstract language: it doesn't refer to any concrete reality.

Paradox: in order to be able to manifest itself concretely, language must first become abstract.

....

Abstract language means that words are not bound to any particular intention; that the word 'rose' is neither the rose that I see nor the rose that a more or less fictional character claims to see.

In the abstract language of the new art the word 'rose' is the word 'rose'. It means all the roses and it means none of them.

....

How to succeed in making a rose that is not my rose, nor his rose, but everybody's rose, i.e. nobody's rose?

By placing it within a sequential structure (for example a book), so that it momentarily ceases being a rose and becomes essentially an element of the structure.

....

## STRUCTURES

Every word exists as an element of a structure — a phrase, a novel, a telegram.

Or: every word is part of a text.

....

Nobody or nothing exists in isolation: everything is an element of a structure.

Every structure is in its turn an element of another structure.

Everything that exists is a structure.

....

To understand something, is to understand the structure of which it is a part and/ or the elements forming the structure that that something is.

A book consists of various elements, one of which might be a text.

A text that is part of a book isn't necessarily the most essential or important part of that book.

....

A person may go to the bookshop to buy ten red books because this colour harmonises with the other colours in his sitting room, or for any other reason, thereby revealing the irrefutable fact, that books have a colour.

....

In a book of the old art words transmit the author's intention. That's why he chooses them carefully.

In a book of the new art words don't transmit any intention; they're used to form a text which is an element of a book, and it is this book, as a totality, that transmits the author's intention.

....

Plagiarism is the starting point of the creative activity in the new art.

It seems to me now that I'm giving here too much importance to plagiarism. The assertion sounds too dramatic as well. Probably I was over enthusiastic about my recent freedom for using other people's texts.

....

Whenever the new art uses an isolated word, then it is in an absolute isolation: books of one single word.

....

Old art's authors have the gift for language, the talent for language, the ease for language.

For new art's authors language is an enigma, a problem; the book hints at ways to solve it.

....

In the old art you write 'I love you' thinking that this phrase means 'I love you.'

(But: what does 'I love you' mean?)

....

In the new art you write 'I love you' being aware that we don't know what this means. You write this phrase as part of a text wherein to write 'I hate you' would come to the same thing.

The important thing is, that this phrase, 'I love you' or 'I hate you,' performs a certain function as a text within the structure of the book.

....

In the new art you don't love anybody.

The old art claims to love.

In art you can love nobody. Only in real life can you love someone.

....

Not that the new art lacks passions.

All of it is blood flowing out of the wound that language has inflicted on men.

And it is also the joy of being able to express something with everything, with any thing, with almost nothing, with nothing.

....

The old art chooses, among the literary genres and forms, that one which best fits the author's intention.

The new art uses any manifestation of language, since the author has no other intention than to test the language's ability to mean something.

....

The text of a book in the new art can be a novel as well as a single word, sonnets as well as jokes, love-letters as well as weather reports.

....

In the old art, just as the author's intention is ultimately unfathomable and the sense of his words indefinable, so the understanding of the reader is unquantifiable.

In the new art the reading itself proves that the reader understands.

## THE READING

In order to read the old art, knowing the alphabet is enough.

In order to read the new art one must apprehend the book as a structure, identifying its elements and understanding their function.

....

One might read old art in the belief that one understands it, and be wrong.

Such a misunderstanding is impossible in the new art. You can read only if you understand.

...

In the old art all books are read in the same way.

In the new art every book requires a different reading.

....

In the old art, to read the last page takes as much time as to read the first one.

In the new art the reading rhythm changes, quickens, speeds up.

....

In order to understand and to appreciate a book of the old art, it is necessary to read it thoroughly.

In the new art you often do NOT need to read the whole book.

The reading may stop at the very moment you have understood the total structure of the book.

....

The new art makes it possible to read faster than the fast-reading methods.

....

There are fast-reading methods because writing methods are too slow.

....

The old art takes no heed of reading.

The new art creates specific reading conditions.

....

The farthest the old art has come to, is to bring into account the readers, which is going too far.

....

The new art doesn't discriminate between its readers; it does not address itself to the book-addicts or try to steal its public away from TV.

....

In order to be able to read the new art, and to understand it, you don't need to spend five years in a Faculty of English.

....

In order to be appreciated, the books of the new art don't need the sentimental and/or intellectual complicity of the readers in matters of love, politics, psychology, geography, etc.

....

The new art appeals to the ability every man possesses for understanding and creating signs and systems of signs.

.....

## FROM BOOKWORKS TO MAILWORKS

This text was originally written as an introduction to the exhibition of the same name that took place in the Municipal Museum, Alkmaar, October 1978. The catalogue, in Dutch and English, included a number of illustrations. The same text was published in Hungarian and English in the catalogue for a similar show at the Fiatal Művészek Klubja, Budapest, that took place in December of the same year.

Minor style corrections have been made for the present edition.

As the name indicates, this exhibition tries to show the contact points, the relationships, between artists' bookworks and Mail Art. Both forms are contemporary (they belong more or less to the last two decades) and influence and enrich each other. Although it isn't possible to draw a chronological sequence leading from one art form to the other, I want to show that Mail Art radicalizes some tendencies in the evolution of the art process — evolution that the bookworks had triggered, and that such radicalization has important formal consequences. This is the reason for the title suggesting a development from the one form to the other.

(Bookworks are books that are conceived as an expressive unity, that is to say, where the message is the sum of all the material and formal elements. Mail Art is any postal sending that incorporates one, several or all the elements of the actual mailing as part of the transmitted message. That is, Mail Art is the art of using the mail).

The show comprises, therefore, 2 sections. The first is formed by bookworks that have been selected among the material available for us at this moment, bookworks that in my opinion are excellent examples of their genre. The second section is made up of works that retain the book format (with some exceptions) but, on the one hand fully incorporate the developments originating from the Mail Art activity and, on the other hand, point towards future development.

In his 'Per un trattamento completo,' Franco Vaccari gives us the total cost of a complete beauty treatment, reproducing on each page the bills for each stage of the treatment. By identifying each page to a numerical value, that expresses the price of each stage, the book embodies the total sum on 3 levels: the total price, the treatment, and the art work.

Published by the artist,  
Modena, 1971.

Roy Grayson's 'Painting Book' shows the author painting a wall black. The wall takes up the whole area of the page, so identifying the page with the wall. The artist chooses arbitrarily the number of the steps in the process he's showing us, but the first and last stages of

Published by the artist,  
London, 1972.

the sequence are imposed by the process itself.

In 'Geschichte', Peter Meyboom tells us a story that could be summed up in a few words. The story acquires a new depth, however, due to the fact that each page is used as the actual space of a room. The words, names of things, are distributed on the page as objects would be in the actual space. The movements of people and objects are represented by the movement of the eyes while reading. Furthermore: the time used in turning the pages is the actual time wherein the story happens.

J.H. Kocman's 'Capillarity' consists of a pile of pages that have been perforated in several places by means of a needle. Afterwards, Kocman has let a few drops of watercolour pass through each hole. The pigment has seeped through the holes, producing soft colour stains in each page, until they disappear.

These are examples of what we might call 'bookworks' in the strict sense of the word. They are books that incorporate as a formal element the sequential nature of books and of the reading process. But there are also many books that use other, non-formal aspects: books as document, as object, as idea, etc. These works widen and deepen in various ways the expressive possibilities of books.

Davi Det Hompson's 'You Know it has to be a Hair Piece' is part of a long series of books. In this one, like in the others, there is on each page an arbitrarily chosen phrase taken from another book, newspaper, letter, etc. The phrases lack importance in themselves, they could be replaced by others. Their lack of context and of relationship between each other reveals their individuality, by freeing them from the 'formless mass' wherein they were hidden.

In John Murphy's 'Selected Works' there appears on each page a photograph of the same book-case. But in each photograph a different book has been taken out of the row and placed, unopened, on the same book-

Subvers Magazine No. 6,  
IJmuiden, 1972.

Published by the artist,  
Brno, no date.

In the lecture Bookworks  
Revisited (see further) I've  
tried to draw a more detailed  
classification.

Published by the artist,  
Richmond, 1977.

D.D.H. corrected me in his  
letter dated 14 November  
1978: 'the statements in  
my book were written to  
look as if they were taken  
from other sources, but  
they were all my own crea-  
tion'.

Jack Wendler, London,  
1975.

case. In this way, each book that is photographed is unique and, taken out of the book case, produces a unique page. But since all the other details of the photographs are identical on every page these have no other function than being elements of the new book.

In Ulises Carrión's 'Tell me what sort of wallpaper your room has and I will tell you who you are' each page is a piece of real wallpaper that's supposed to come from the bedroom of the person named in the same page. In this way the book gains two immediate referential levels, that of language and that of the matter itself upon which language appears.

In 'Facts on Evolution' Opal L. Nations tells us a story that lacks a beginning and an end, but possesses an internal structure that's easily identifiable. They are drawings that slowly but unexpectedly change on each page.

A more open structure is that of 'Dialogue in Pale Blue.' Here it is not a sequence of drawings but of folded papers like abstract 'origamis.' But the wider openness contrasts with the less familiar sign used on the pages: three dimensional instead of two dimensional. On the other hand, the title and the one colour (blue) of all the integral elements of the book neutralize the strangeness.

All the examples quoted up to now have nothing to do with Mail Art. However, they — and all the other works in this show — have appeared and circulated at the same time as Mail Art. The authors of these books have taken part in many of the big and small Mail Art shows that have taken place in many countries during the last few years. I, among others, think that one of the decisive factors for the world-wide proliferation of artists' books (and of artists' books shows) was their ability to be distributed by means of the mail. It is not surprising then that, in some cases, the two activities would merge together to produce works belonging to both 'genres.' This in turn has as consequence that these books often have a less rigid structure than those

In-Out Productions, Am-  
sterdam, 1973.

Strange Faeces, London,  
1972.

Broken Mimeo Press, Cle-  
veland, 1969.

described above. But they open up new possibilities and new directions for later developments.

A perfect example of this is Henryk Gajewski's 'Eliza Gajewski.' The book is organised as a photo-album. Each photo, as stated by the title on each page, documents one moment in the life of the artist's daughter. But the book has only the first 2 photographs. All the other will be taken in the future and gradually, as time goes by and Eliza grows, sent to each owner of the book. This work incorporates thus elements that question the existence of books as objects limited in space and time. This questioning is made possible through the use of the postal system.

Robin Crozier, an extremely active artist in the area of Mail Art, has asked all his correspondents — who have never met him personally — to draw his imaginary portrait. Later Robin Crozier has compiled and published a book with all the received answers. But, before reproducing the answers, he had copied them himself, one by one, had re-written all the texts and re-drawn all the images. In this way the book, the ultimate result, is an authentic work of the artist that has been only made possible thanks to the Mail.

Hetty Huisman's books/letters 'Brieven aan vrienden' function on a different level. Here every book is an actual letter, addressed to a particular person, handwritten and posted. The book format results from the length of the letter and this offers structural possibilities that a normal letter lacks.

In Regina Silveira's 'Brazil Today,' one of a series of 4, each page is an actual postcard on which the artist has silkscreened a print. In this way, between the original and the modified postcard a tension is established that, in its turn, acquires meanings which change with the turning of the pages.

The assemblings deserve a special mention. These are group publications. Every participant sends the compiler a work in so many copies as are necessary for the

Centro Klubowe SZSP PW  
Riviera-Remont, Warsaw,  
1975.

'Portrait of Robin Crozier,'  
Ceolfrith Press 25, Sunder-  
land Art Centre, Sunder-  
land, 1975.

Manuscript, Cabaron Press,  
Emmestad, Curaçao, 1976.

Published by the artist, Sao  
Paulo, 1977.

edition. The editor does nothing more than binding the received works — determining a theme for the edition is not obligatory. This type of publications, of which this show offers some examples, is also a 'genre' that was originated and fostered by the intensive mail exchanges among artists in different countries. In all the examples it's easily noted that the only common denominator of all the works is the use of the mail as a communication network. The case of the assemblings reveals one of the problems of both the books quoted and the assemblings themselves, that has not yet been solved: whether those publications based on various postal exchanges must be seen as a compilation of individual works from the participants, or alternatively, that the only and real author of the work is the individual who conceives, coordinates and realizes the project. The answer would be positive in the quoted example by Crozier, since he modifies the individual contributions of his collaborators. But in other cases the answer would be negative, since the individual sendings are too dissimilar and the intervention of the compiler, minimal. See, for instance, 'Rubber-stamp designs,' edited by Aart van Barneveld. In this case the artists have sent their rubber-stamps and the compiler has made the imprints. He hasn't received finished works from the participants but an 'instrument' that makes possible the making of the works, and therefore it's disputable whether the anthology is an assemblage, or a peculiar sort of assemblage, or no assemblage whatsoever but an anthology of individual works.

An extreme and significant case in this direction is Pawel Petasz's 'Common Press' project. This is a magazine of which he has only edited number 1. The edition of subsequent issues was offered to any interested artist, on condition that each editor would retain the name and format fixed in the first issue. In exchange each editor is free to decide upon a theme and all other details of the edition. Here again the same question arises: who's the real author of Common Press, Pawel Petasz who originally conceived this project, or the editors of each subsequent issue? It's not easy to justify the answer.

Stempelpiaats, Amsterdam,  
1978.

Plural authorship is further  
discussed in Personal  
Worlds or Cultural Strate-  
gies?

Number 2 was edited by  
Ko de Jonge, number 3 by  
Peter Below, number 4 by  
Grzegorz Dziamski, num-  
ber 5 by Ullses Carrión,  
number 6 by Carloca, etc.  
25 issues have already been  
published.

Books offered the artist the advantage of multiplicity, and this made possible a wider distribution of the work. Mail Art strengthens these tendencies. They stop being external to the work and are incorporated as formal elements. It's not enough to confirm that the work doesn't acknowledge spatial limits any more. This has practical consequences of great importance. An artist doesn't need to live in an 'art-capital' to have his voice heard and as a matter of fact there are centres of Mail Art activity in places where there are no art galleries but only a modest post-office.

We must state it with all clarity: the ubiquity of the work stops being a secondary characteristic and becomes an essential, defining, element that gives birth to new forms.

This is an incomplete list of the books in the show: Afessandro, Per la tua solitudine; Eric Andersen, A new; Ida Appiebroog, A Performance; John Armleder, 'Niente, purtroppo!'; Gabor Attal, Time Book; Vera Barcellos, Que há por detras?; Donald Burgy, Donald Burgy in the Center for Art and Communication; José Luis Castillejo, The Book of the Letter; G. A. Cavellini, Nemo Propheeta in Patria; Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Absence Presence; Hans Clavin, L'Angerie; Johan Cornelissen, Dezasete onibus pasando; Kan Friedman, Completion; Bill Gaglione, This is a special rubber stamp issue of Dad(d)azine; Anna Bella Geiger, Brasil Nativo - Brasil Alienígena; Dan Graham, Dan Graham; Peter Greenham, Redberry Court; Kristján Gudmundsson, Circles; Mary Harding and Dorothy Iannone, Speaking to each other; James Hugunin, (You) Read this book; Suzanne Lacy, Travels with Mona; Robert Lambert, Egozine Vol. 1; Raúl Marroquín and Anton Verhoeven, Changing personalities; Yutaka Matsuzawa, Vanishings - 1922-1975; Jim Melchert, Autobiography; Annette Messager, La femme et...; Pieter Mol, De 3 Pyramiden van Breda; bp Nichol, Lament; Thomas Ockerse, The A-Z Book; Genesis P-Orridge,

G.P.O. versus G.P.O.; Marius Quee, Lijn in ruimte; Jan van Raay, Second Coming; G.J. de Rook, Life; Edward Ruscha, Edward Ruscha (Ed-werd Rew-shay) Young Artist; Mieko Shiomi, Spatial Poem; Terry Sladden, A little wisdom book; Fred Truck, Camping Out; Jiri Valoch, See Page 13; Lawrence Weiner, Coming and going; Weproductions, Clinkscale.

The following assemblings were included: Album O-perozio (Tegolalo, Italy); Assembling 1 (Brooklyn, USA); Data (Toshigi, Japan); Experiencias (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil); Fifty Five Pages (New York, USA); Geiger (Turin, Italy); International Book (La Plata, Argentina); Latin American Assembling (Antwerp, Belgium); Postcards (Naples, Italy); Povia-Projeto-Documento (Alecirim, Brazil); Rubber-Stamp Designs (Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

Other group publications included: Blokroot (The Netherlands), Buzón de Arte/Arte de Buzón (Venezuela), Cabaret Voltaire (USA), Círcula Arte (Venezuela), Doc(k)s (France), The Dumb Ox (USA), Fandangos (The Netherlands), French Window (Yugoslavia), Reflections (Hungary), Schmuck (UK), Soft Art Press (Switzerland), Strange Faeces (UK), Ville International (USA), Ovum (Uruguay), Yellow Pages (Australia).

I wrote this text for the bulletin Rubber Vol. I No. 6, published by the Stempelplaats, Amsterdam, 1978. The bulletin also included a short notice on my works, together with some rubber-stamp reproductions and original works. But now, the title of this text seems for me to be too bombastic.

## RUBBER STAMP THEORY AND PRAXIS

The most striking thing about rubber-stamps as they function in our social reality is, that they are a symbol of power -- their role is to validate or invalidate something.

-----

There are many symbols of power and we are frequently confronted by them. But no one is as common and petty as rubber-stamps. Their lack of sophistication and glamour seems to contradict the enormous power conveyed by them.

-----

Artists' rubber-stamps present exactly the opposite characteristics: they are incapable of transmitting power, but this lack is compensated for by an increase in glamour and sophistication.

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Not that rubber-stamps can be *very* glamorous. There are, on the other hand, many artists' rubber-stamps that are in no way more sophisticated than plain rubber-stamps. Both glamour and sophistication are relative concepts, anyway. Suffice it to say that artists' rubber-stamps present the possibility for developments in such directions.

-----

But what about validity? This is an absolute concept. A normal rubber-stamp print certifies the absolute validity or non-validity of its supporting surface. On the other hand, we can define artists' rubber-stamps as 'rubber-stamps that lack validity in an absolute sense.'

-----

Please notice: a plain rubber-stamp stating 'Valid up to the 25th of March' doesn't lack validity on the 26th. It is the other way around: the support -- a document,

for instance — loses its validity because the rubber-stamp *is* valid.

-----

Why would an artist choose, at a given moment, to use rubber-stamps as medium? Would this mean that he has small ideas? This is possible. Or is he trying to test his ability? Is he challenging himself? Well, you think you are a great artist, here, make something great with this little rubber-stamp. This is possible as well.

-----

But this is not important. We cannot judge the value of art productions by the artists' motives.

-----

Rubber-stamps offer possibilities that no other medium offers, because they possess unique characteristics: they are, by definition, intended for reproduction.

-----

A photographic negative can be reproduced. But the multiple reproduction is inherent neither in the original photograph nor in the negative. Whereas a rubber-stamp exists in order to make several, many, countless prints.

-----

Of all new media, rubber-stamps are the most anonymous. There is no way to see 'the hand of the artist' in a rubber-stamp.

-----

But we can see the complete image of the artist in the way he uses his rubber-stamps. Like all new media, rubber-stamps turn away from technical skills and con-

centrates on praxis.

-----

Whatever an artist wants to say, the making of a rubber-stamp with his message gives him both his message and the possibility to reproduce it. There is, there must be a dialectical relationship between these two things.

-----

Every print of a rubber-stamp implies a choice by the artist. He creates not only when he designs his rubber-stamp, but also every time he makes a print.

-----

Artists' rubber-stamps can be anything except decorative. Their background (normal rubber-stamps) is too loaded with associations related to our daily life, and not necessarily the most joyful parts of it.

-----

In contrast with other means of reproduction — photography, for instance — rubber-stamps are associated with power. Artists' rubber-stamps remind us of those other rubber-stamps that actually control and direct our lives.

-----

## RUBBER STAMP ART

This was my contribution to the catalogue Stamp Art, published by Daylight Press, Amsterdam, on the occasion of the Stamp Art Show held at Other Books and So, from April 27 to May 15, 1976.

The text is perhaps too short and cryptic, I don't know. It was written in all haste, there wasn't even time to correct the typing mistakes.

I have resolved to include it here because it contains the essence of the ideas that I would develop much later.

Is 'Stamp Art' art? Positively. But, is it an art? No. Without the article, Stamp Art pretends nothing more than to be a genre. But nothing less.

----

Why is it that Impressionism, Dadaism, etc., aren't called Impression Art, Dada Art, etc.? Reverseely, why aren't Pop Art, Stamp Art, etc., called Popism, Stampism, etc.?

----

Among the many genres that artists have created, identified and developed, Stamp Art is a democratic one if there is any. The materials are simple, the format small, the appearance discrete.

----

But a great concept artist can make a poor stamp artist. Many a wonderful stampwork have been made by obscure, minor figures.

----

Everybody can make stamps, it's true. But only a few reveal and widen the range of its possibilities. After all, we are in the beginnings.

Stamp Art is already a fashion and it will pass as such. But it will remain as a genre, it will evolve, and, wherever it will be a man who feels genuinely attracted by it an knows how to exploit its possibilities, Stamp Art will create beauty anew.

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## MAIL ART AND THE BIG MONSTER

This was my contribution to the International Artists Meeting that took place in April 1977 at the Remont Gallery in Warsaw. My performance consisted of the reading of this text and the opening of my E.A.M. I.S. or Erratic Art Mail International System.

This text has been published in Journal No. 20, The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1978. A Dutch translation appeared in Winscherm No. 9-10, Gouda, 1978. It was also included, in English and Danish, in the catalogue The Erratic Art Mail International System, published by The Egmont Højskolen, Hou, 1979, on the occasion of my visit to the Festival Kunst og Kunstnere that Niels Lomholt organized.

I've used this text as a basis for lectures at the Galerie Sit Petri, Archive of Experimental and Marginal Art, Lund, in 1979, and at the Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, on the occasion of the First Winter Festival, Recife, 1978, organized by Paulo Bruscky.

The moment has come to declare that Mail Art has very little to do with mail and a lot to do with art.

\* \* \* \*

In the expression 'Mail Art' the word 'Mail' can be replaced by multiplicity, by expediency, by distribution, or by many other words. On the other hand, in 'Mail Art' the word 'Art' is there for art, for art and for absolutely nothing else.

\* \* \* \*

Mail Art uses the mail as support in the sense that non-mail arts use canvas, paper, iron, and wood as support.

\* \* \* \*

Many individuals using these supports never thought of 'canvas art,' 'wood art,' 'paper art.' Words, pieces of paper, envelopes, and colours are media. When an artist utilizes one or several of these media, and chooses the Postal System as their means of support, then Mail Art comes into existence.

\* \* \* \*

Mail Art uses as support the Postal System - a complex, international system of transport, including thousands of people, buildings, machinery, world treaties, and God knows what.

\* \* \* \*

The proof that the post is not the medium is that to use it, an artist doesn't need to understand how it functions. Even in the utopic possibility that the artist reaches complete understanding of the system, he cannot control it. What he controls is the 'work,' the 'mail piece' that he shall post. *That* is his creation.

\* \* \* \*

Most artists and the public seem to have lost themselves in the game. They have come to think that making Mail Art means producing postcards.

\*\*\*\*

Those artists use Mail Art as they would use paint, since they believe that mail is a medium that allows one to produce art works in postcard format.

\*\*\*\*

Only a few people realize that in Mail Art the terms of the equation have reversed: what in daily life functions as a system of communication, as means for conveying messages, as medium, has become in the hands of certain artists the support of all sorts of different media in order to produce Mail Art pieces.

\*\*\*\*

When I send by post a letter that is only a letter, I am using the mail as a system that allows the transmission of my message. This system includes two sub-systems - on the one hand the sub-system of written or visual language, on the other hand the sub-system of the Postal Services.

\*\*\*\*

The relationship between the two sub-systems is permanent but not rigid. The accent can be laid on one or the other according to the motivation or intent.

\*\*\*\*

When you receive a letter from your lover you are not so interested in what is written on it. You are mainly interested in receiving something from him or her. Your lover could have sent flowers instead of words - you would have understood very well. He/she may use words or flowers as long as he/she mails something to you. In this case the accent lies in the sub-system

'Mail.'

\*\*\*\*

Something very different occurs when we get a letter from the bank or from the police. Then, who does not care about the content of the envelope? Then it is not important if we got the message from the postman or from a heavenly spirit. In this case the most important sub-system is the written language and not the mail.

\*\*\*\*

When I say, that in Mail Art the mail is not the medium but the support, I don't mean to say that the mail is not important. It is extremely important. But it is first necessary to recognize and define its role in the process implied by a Mail Art piece.

\*\*\*\*

Let's imagine a piece of Mail Art that uses a substitute for the Post System. For instance, we can give letters to a number of friends that set out in different directions. We can give these friends precise instructions regarding when and how and to whom our messages should be delivered. All this is perfectly possible, is it not? But normally we use the Post Office because it happens to be the most convenient and widely used network. If we utilize the Post Office for our imaginary piece, its meaning would not change essentially.

\*\*\*\*

On the other hand, we cannot imagine a piece of Mail Art that does not use words, or drawings, or paper, or plastic. These are thus the media, the significant elements with which we construct our message in Mail Art.

\*\*\*\*

Immediately after having written this phrase I got the idea for my Mail Art project, the foundation of the E.A.M.I.S. or Erratic Art Mail International System, that delivers messages 'by any way other than the official Post Offices'.

Yes, it would change essentially. But here I'm underlining the idea of the Postal System as a means of distribution.

The question now arises: What about if an artist conceives of a piece in which mailing, the act of using the Post Office, post-stamps, one or several post-office clerks, or any other element of the Postal System play an important role? In this case we all would agree on calling the Postal System the medium or at least an element of the medium.

\* \* \* \*

Further, it can be that only by incorporating the Mail System as an essential part of the piece we are able to make a real Mail Art piece. It is actually so — the best Mail Art pieces use the post as an integral, functional element of the work.

\* \* \* \*

In order to realize this, it was first necessary to prove how marginal mail, as such, can be to Mail Art. Only then we can appreciate the role that mail should play and does play as an element of Mail Art. Which is to say, of Art.

\* \* \* \*

The question now arises, How does the adjective Mail affect the noun Art in reality? All sorts of platitudes have been given as answer to this question. It has been said that Mail Art is easy, cheap, unpretentious and democratic. All this is rubbish.

\* \* \* \*

Is it easy for an artist to send a postcard? Yes. But, as we have seen, an artist does not become a Mail artist by sending a postcard, no matter how 'beautiful' this card might be.

\* \* \* \*

Is it cheap to produce and to send a postcard? No, certainly not. You rarely produce one postcard, you

produce an edition of several hundreds or thousands of copies. In fact, many artists are forced to produce one postcard because they do not possess the financial means to produce a thousand copies.

\* \* \* \*

Is Mail Art unpretentious? This is difficult to answer. It depends on the artist. I would not care to say that mail artists are unpretentious. I, for one, am very pretentious. And there are those who state 'I am a mail artist' which almost means 'The other artists are no artists at all.'

\* \* \* \*

Is Mail Art democratic? I doubt it. For an art that pretends to be widespread, 200 correspondents is very, very little. And these 200 names are chosen with great care. And some answers are with no doubt more valued than others. Artists do not answer every letter from a not well-determined sender. Sometimes because of time-economy. More often because they do not deem the letter worthwhile to answer.

\* \* \* \*

Whether Mail Art is or is not easy, cheap, unpretentious, and democratic, is not very essential. A more important question is, Can you make good art with Mail Art? An even more basic question, What is and what is not Mail Art?

\* \* \* \*

A Mail Art piece consists of a series of actions, of which two are the most important — the production of the piece and the posting of the piece. There exists however a radical difference between these two actions. Namely, our control of the first is almost absolute, but we have almost no control at all for the second, the actual posting.

\* \* \* \*

When we are producing the piece to be mailed we are free to chose the materials and how to utilize them. We can chose the dimensions. We decide as for the outside and the inside. In other words, when I write a letter I am free to write whatever I want.

\* \* \* \*

What about the mailing? Then we are not free, we are subject to certain rules established beforehand. Not only that, we have also to pay a price that is calculated with precision concerning size and weight. There is no question of bargaining or being talented. You pay, or forget about your beautiful Mail Art piece.

\* \* \* \*

Seen from this point of view, Mail Art is no longer something easy, cheap, unpretentious and unimportant. Mail Art knocks at the door of the castle where the Big Monster lives. You can tell the monster anything you like, according to your experiences and beliefs. But the fact is, that the Big Monster exists and oppresses us.

\* \* \* \*

Every invitation we receive to participate in a Mail Art project is part of the guerrilla war against the Big Monster. Every Mail Art piece is a weapon thrown against the Monster who is the owner of the Castle, who separates us one from the others, all of us.

\* \* \* \*

What or who is the monster I am talking about? Do I mean the Post Master? Post Office clerks? Do I mean the Minister of Communications? Or, do I mean the technology they use and control? Do I mean those little, colourful pieces of glued paper that we must buy every time we post something? To tell you the truth,

I do not know exactly what or whom I am talking about. All I know is, that there is a Monster. And that by posting all sorts of mail pieces I am knocking at his door.

\* \* \* \*

When we were making painting we could talk about sensibility, beauty, vision, craftsmanship, etcetera. But when we are knocking at the Monster's door, what does it count? The answer is simple: it counts how hard you are knocking. How can we measure the intensity of our knocking? By the echo we produce, obviously.

\* \* \* \*

I know that the eternal skeptics won't like this. First they found Mail Art was too small, too petty. Now they are going to say that you cannot judge art with arithmetics. They do not see that, when we talk of numbers, it is not arithmetics we are talking about. We are talking about harmony.

\* \* \* \*

When someone posts a Mail Art piece and later gets an answer — that is harmony: agreement, accord. We could judge the beauty of the answer, yes. But as far as the Mail Art piece is concerned, the only thing that really counts is getting answers.

\* \* \* \*

What about Mail Art pieces that require to remain unanswered in order to exist?

\* \* \* \*

The answer is as follows — we still don't know how to measure the response. We count them one, two, three and so on because we still don't know any other way. This is only a temporary, provisional sort of measur-

ing. However, this imperfect method gives us an idea.

\* \* \* \*

We need more ideas for Mail Art. We are receptive to more ideas. Why don't you give some ideas? Only, do not say them: Mail them, please.

\* \* \* \*

To my knowledge, the only person who has ever written of Mail Art with understanding is Jean-Marc Poinso. His introduction to the catalogue Mail Art — Communication à distance — Concept (Collection 60plus, Editions CEDIC, Paris, 1971) is brilliant and even visionary. On the basis of his analyses of the works in the Section Envois of the Paris Biennale 1971, Poinso accurately predicts the ulterior developments of Mail Art.

## TABLE OF MAIL ART WORKS

This table was drawn by me to go together with the text Mail Art and the Big Monster. For various reasons, it was never published. This is a somewhat modified version of the original.

### 1. Format

#### 1.1. Total

- 1.1.1. Postcard
- 1.1.2. Letter
- 1.1.3. Package
- 1.1.4. Telegram

#### 1.2. Partial

- 1.2.1. Envelope
- 1.2.2. Post Stamp
- 1.2.3. Rubber Stamp

### 2. Scope

#### 2.1. Individual

- 2.1.1. One sender, one mailing
- 2.1.2. One sender, serial mailing
  - 2.1.2.1. One addressee
  - 2.1.2.2. Several addressees

#### 2.2. Group

- 2.2.1. All the invitations to participate plus all the answers
- 2.2.2. The answers alone are part of the work

### 3. Subject

- 3.1. Free
- 3.2. Given

### 4. Anomalies

- 4.1. Alteration of format
- 4.2. Alteration of scope
- 4.3. Alteration of subject
- 4.4. Alteration of the table

## PERSONAL WORLDS OR CULTURAL STRATEGIES?

I wrote this essay as an Introduction to the catalogue of my Mail Art project Artists' Postage Stamps and Cancellation Stamps. The project was exhibited at the Stempelplaats in Amsterdam from July 21st to August 17th, and the catalogue was published in the form of the Stempelplaats' monthly bulletin Rubber Vol. 2 No. 8.

The title refers to the exhibition Personal Worlds which was held some months earlier in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. This exhibition represented in some way the official policy on the actual art being made in Holland. As it happens, it is a bureaucratic and reactionary policy. (Quite a number of the artists that were shown are friends of mine and I have respect for them, but that was not the point.) This view emphasizes subjectivity in the artists' work, 'poetic' associations, vague feelings, private fantasies, precisely the sort of works whereby the art critic or historian can feel most useful in explaining to the general public its deep significance.

This Show includes works from some 150 artists living in or coming originally from some 25 countries. The cancellation stamps were all designed especially for this occasion by invited artists, and produced by the Posthumus Rubber Stamp Factory in Amsterdam. The postage stamps come, with few exceptions, from the Other Books and So Archive. They include either stamps that have been actually glued on postal pieces and often cancelled by the Post Office, or printed sheets with a varying number of stamps (see list of participants).

I'd like to make clear from the beginning that when I conceived of this show, my main concern was not to assemble a number of precious, curious miniatures. This clarification is necessary since most members of the public and the critics tend to miss the point when judging Mail Art works and exhibitions — they usually look for plastic quality, for visual appeal. Since most Mail Art pieces by nature don't lend themselves to such an approach, they tolerate Mail Art as an ancillary activity of some good artists and a cover for crowds of bad ones. As I have said on other occasions, Mail Art shifts the focus from what is traditionally called 'art' to the wider concept of 'culture.' And this shift is what makes Mail Art truly contemporary. In opposition to 'personal worlds,' Mail Art emphasizes cultural strategies.

This radical shift gives birth to quite a number of theoretical and practical questions, the most evident of them being, Where does the border lie between an artist's work and the actual organization and distribution of the work? As it usually happens, this question can only be answered by the artists themselves rather than by theoreticians, historians, and bureaucrats. When an artist is busy choosing his starting point, defining the limits of his scope, he has the right to include the organization and distribution of his work as an element of the same work. And by doing so, he's creating a strategy that will become a constituent formal element of the final work.

I'm using here 'culture' as a broader concept than 'art,' thus including non-aesthetic elements. ...the utilisation of various media — visuals, mail, sound — is not considered any more to be the defining factor in the art activity, but it is rather the co-ordination of a complex system of activities occurring in a social reality and including as well, non-artistic factors: people, places, objects, time, etc.' (From my text in Kunst og Kunstnere, Egmont Højskolen, Hø (Denmark), 1979.)

the response fits the request, the more beauty it possesses.

Why is the artist asking for answers from other individuals instead of giving himself multiple answers? He has indeed renounced the possibility of a unique answer. The necessity of giving multiple answers is then revealed, concretised by the plurality of sources. From this point of view, a Mail Art project is never closed. Every human being, even those who will never hear the question, can provide an infinite number of possible answers. And here intervenes perhaps the most crucial element in a Mail Art project – showing the answers to an audience. The artist should convince the audience that they are looking at him, that every piece in the show, that all these apparently unconnected pieces coming from various sources and with various purposes, are a true reflection of himself. They are his personal world, nothing more and nothing less! Only, he's letting his world gain a social reality by making a show out of it, that is, a cultural event. He's thereby creating models for a cultural strategy.

If this is so, it looks as if I have arrived at an important conclusion without even mentioning the Post Office, and this is quite strange for a text dealing with Mail Art. Or, isn't it? The Post Office provides the artist with a distribution network but it doesn't define the work. The Post Office is not an essential element of the work and it could be replaced by other transportation systems. The Post Office catches the attention of artists and the public because of its strangeness when compared with other media. It is in fact the most complex, the least traditional of all the media that artists are using nowadays. At first sight, compared to telephones or televisions, the Postal System seems rather slow, unsafe, complicated, awkward, inefficient, uncontrollable. But these imperfections leave space for play, for invention, for surprise, those qualities that mail artists have been exploiting for quite a number of years now. And this is natural. When the use of new media (radio, TV) places an old medium like the PTT in a disadvantageous position, then the latter can

I mean, more complex and less traditional than video, if only because the limits of the work seen in time and space are not so definite.

afford to be used for the sake of invention and beauty. In the Renaissance, the appearing of painting as an activity with purely artistic intentions, as compared with the didactic function it had had before, was made possible by the invention of the printed books, that became then a more adequate way of disseminating ideas. In our time, the invention and spreading of multimedia communication allows for the purely artistic use of 'monomedia' like books, postcards, letters, etc.

This in turn triggers a process of analyses and renovation of the used media, that could not be foreseen or allowed when they were being used for purely practical purposes. In the case of Mail Art, such a process hasn't yet finished and we cannot foresee which direction it will take next, which aspect of the process will attract next the attention of the artists. But we can identify some of the supportive of formal elements that have already undergone a deep transformation in the hands of mail artists, like envelopes, letters, postcards, rubber-stamps, cancellation stamps, postage stamps. The present show offers quite a number of alternatives for the last 2 mentioned categories. A detailed study of each particular work would be most helpful, on the condition that it be done within an ideological context which proves to be suitable for Mail Art projects.

## BOOKWORKS REVISITED

This essay was my contribution to the conference Options in Independent Art Publishing, which was organized by The Visual Studies Workshop of Rochester, New York, in November 1979. The text served as an introduction to a series of slides of some 50 books.

On the initiative of Tania Erilj, The Art Institute of Boston invited me to give this same lecture on November 28, 1979.

It was also published in the March-April 1980 issue of The Print Collector's Newsletter, New York.

That version, including all the style corrections suggested by Gerrit Henry, is reproduced here.

1. To speak of books in an art context hasn't been common for that long a time. It is true that bookworks started being produced 25 to 30 years ago, but the history of our awareness and understanding of their existence is less than ten years old. And this history doesn't read smoothly. It has long silences, persistent misunderstandings, omissions, fake heroes. This is probably so for two main reasons. First, the artists' ignorance of bookmaking traditions - and by 'bookmaking' I mean not only the actual fabrication of books but also their conception. Second, the art critics' unwillingness or incapacity to attack the subject in a serious yet non-academic manner.
  
2. I begin with the general principle that a book is a coherent series of pages. Here, and for a time, I will speak about ordinary books, those we see in bookshops and libraries. There is a variety of genres - novels, poetry, dictionaries, comics, travel guides, school manuals, art monographs, etc. All of these books, however, share a common formal element - their pages are numbered. There's a lot to be said on this subject, but this isn't the right occasion. I want only to point out the importance of this usually unnoticed characteristic of books: the pages are numbered. Numbering the pages of a book means that there is a sequence but this sequence isn't self-evident. In other words, from a visual point of view the pages of a book are interchangeable; they all look more or less alike. They all are a rectangle with a blank frame and, in the middle, rows of words arranged in paragraphs. That's the reason why they have to be identified by means of a number.
  
3. When compared to a book page, the newspaper page offers quite a contrast. More movement, more vivacity, even some messiness. You can start reading on different points of the page. Every column can be written by a different individual. Texts can be printed in a variety of types, with or without illustrations.

Contrary to Filip Boel's and G.J. de Rook's view, I don't think it's necessary to include in the definition of a book, that the pages should be fastened together. This would mean the dismissal of a number of beautiful and important works on the basis of dictionary definitions. But I do want to underline the idea of 'series of pages' in order to exclude so-called object books. These works express a sculptural approach and should be treated as such.

Dictionaries and phone-books, for instance, don't require numbered pages, since their contents is alphabetically arranged. Are their pages numbered for traditional reasons?

book -  
page

newspaper  
page

All this means a more sophisticated use of the printed surface and reflects the great complexity of the external world that the newspaper is intended to reflect as compared to the univocal point of view a book page offers.

4. The difference between these two kinds of pages has been compared with that between Cubist and pre-Cubist painting.

book  
page

pre-Cubist  
painting

A pre-Cubist painting offers to the eye only one point of view, and this imposes a linear reading, much in the same way as the book page. Our eyes can wander along the surface if we want, but this depends on ourselves. The painted surface reflects only one point of view, whereas a Cubist painting is composed of and imposes on us different, simultaneous points of view, just as the newspaper page.

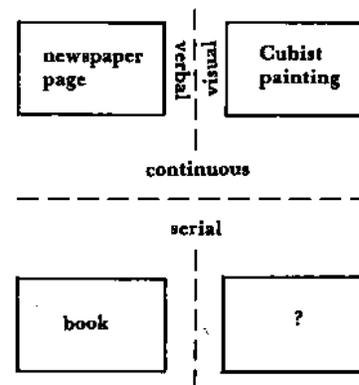
newspaper  
page

Cubist  
painting

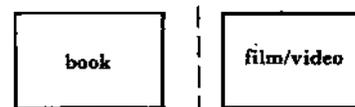
5. It's a remarkable coincidence, by the way, that

pieces of newspaper were a typical element of Cubist paintings.

6. What if we now consider not an isolated page but a whole book? Here we're confronted with a reality different from the page of a book, the newspaper page, the pre-Cubist painting, and the Cubist painting. A book is a three-dimensional structure, a message sent through a sequential support. And 'sequential' means that a new element has been introduced - time. We must draw a dividing line, horizontal, that will separate the two realities, continuous from serial, and a vertical line that will separate verbal from visual.

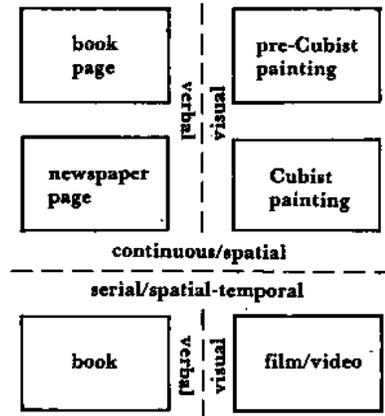


7. If we look then for the missing form in the right side of the diagram, it's obvious that film and video should take this place.

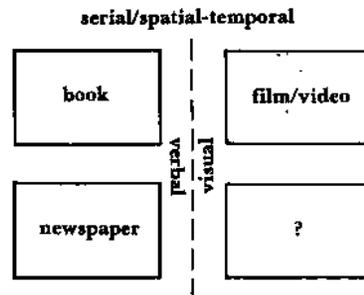


8. Books, film and video impose a serial or sequential apprehension, the first in the verbal field, the other

two in the visual. This in its turn means that the pairs book page/pre-Cubist painting and newspaper page/Cubism are spatial realities whereas the new category of forms, book/film-video, is both spatial and temporal.



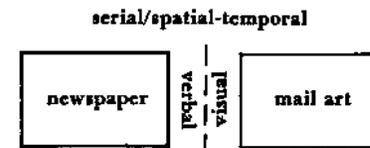
9. This would probably be enough for a discussion of bookworks. But for the sake of clarity I'll draw the complete diagram. The next step would be to place the whole newspaper in the column of verbal supports, under the book.



The newspaper is also apprehended sequentially, therefore it's a spatial and

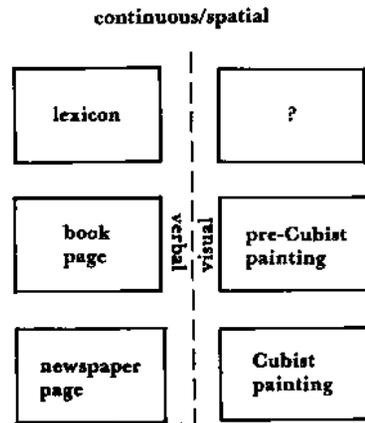
temporal structure. In contrast to the book, it offers a plurality of points of view that's expressed in a varied, vibrating typography.

10. What can its counterpart be on the visual side of the diagram? The answer is, mail art. Mail art occurs serially, as it evolves and changes day after day with every visit of the postman.

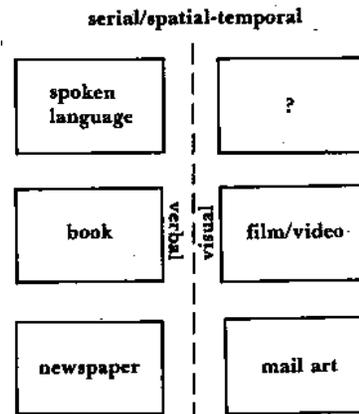


As with books, video, and film, mail art is spatial and temporal. It extends randomly throughout the world and covers an undetermined period of time. Let me remind you that mail art works aren't just isolated postcards, more or less attractive, more or less surprising. By mail art I understand complex projects involving an artist's unique or serial mailings as well as the multiple answers he might receive and, often as well, the documentation of such processes. It includes, therefore, not only the material support of the artist's messages but also the complex mechanism (the postal system) that allows for the transmission of messages.

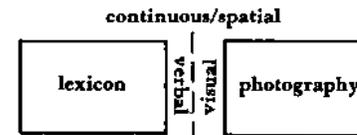
11. It has been necessary to draw these two parallel series of forms in order to realize that there must be a sort of simple, elementary form that, by combination and alterations, gives birth to the others. In the case of the verbal forms (book page, newspaper page, book, newspaper) this elementary form is the lexicon, the collection of all the words of a particular language.



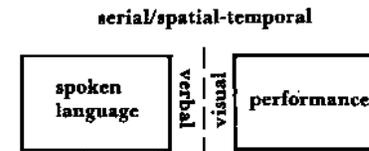
It's a continuous series alphabetically arranged and it has only a spatial reality. The lexicon never occurs as such in reality, unfolded in real time. Words never occur as a lexicon, but arranged in discrete units or phrases. It's therefore spoken language that occupies the first block on the side of the serial, spatial, and temporal forms.



12. The parallel to lexicon, on the visual side of the diagram, is photography.



Photography is able to reproduce or document the other visual forms that are continuous and spatial (pre-Cubist and Cubist painting). It also functions as a sort of potential stock of images in much the same way as a lexicon is a stock of words. By combination and alteration of these primary units we get serial forms that unfold in a spatial/temporal sequence, like video, film, and mail art works. Finally, by enacting or realizing one series of images we get the missing form on the top of the right column - performance.



Performances are series of events that occur in definite space/time conditions. The diagram of forms is now complete. A lot more could be said about each particular term in the diagram and their mutual relationships, but for our purposes we may stop here.

This diagram was drawn in the heat of a discussion with John Liggins.

13. The books of the diagram stand for ordinary books as we see them usually in bookshops and libraries. But, as everybody knows by now, books have been adopted by modern artists, as newspapers and spoken language have also been adopted. We can congratulate ourselves on this development, but let us beware of an unlimited optimism that with a deeper analysis might vanish. Most artists greeted the

new art form with great hope. Here you had a medium that was cheap, that allowed for direct contact with the public, that gave artists a greater autonomy from critics, that would promote social responsibility among creators, that would enlarge infinitely the number of possible consumers, and so much more.

14. This view was obviously based on total ignorance on the part of the artists of the traditional book world that, in its 500-year history (I'm talking here about printed books), has developed with market mechanisms and a celebrity syndrome similar to those that typically oppress the art world. The most evident delusion refers to the alleged cheapness of the book. Even if we could prove that this is true - and that would be quite a job - prices cannot be used as a norm for quality or efficiency in art. More important, this idea suffers from a typical misunderstanding as to the material and thus economic conditions of the artist's creation. If we consider the objectual production of works of art in book format, one copy of the book is not the book. The book is the whole edition; that's why it's nonsense to say that producing or having a book (as artwork) is cheaper than, say, a painting.
15. The same misunderstanding is the basis for another reason for optimism - that books would allow artists to liberate themselves from galleries and art critics. I would like to ask, what for? To fall into the hands of publishers and book critics! Let's imagine a world without artworks, a utopian society where books are the only known possibility for a creator to embody his mental and emotional world. Now imagine that the creators of this world discover the field of the visual arts. We can imagine their enthusiasm as they think: no more literary critics, no more intermediaries between our works and the audience, no more prestigious publishing houses, no more translations, no more best-seller lists, no more handwritten originals, etc.

16. You have only to read Jorge Luis Borges, a man who *knows* about books, in order to realize that books aren't necessarily a panacea, that they are instead a monstrous phenomenon, menacing man's identity and the coherence of his world. In an art context, innocence was valid only in the beginning, when the existence of artists' bookworks had not yet been acknowledged. This is the case with Ruscha's and Dieter Rot's books. Not that they were naive. They weren't. But, in those days, perhaps, anything could have been an artist's bookwork, since making a book implied a choice of such radical nature that nothing else counted. Since a book hadn't any aesthetic pretensions or connotations, choosing such a way of communication was meaningful enough. That is also why those first books intentionally looked like ordinary books, to stress the fact that in spite of their artistic purposes they were, basically, books.

17. Time has passed and our situation is totally different. We are no longer innocent. Now it isn't enough to be an artist in order to produce bookworks. Now it isn't enough to produce books in order to affirm that they are bookworks.

18. Earlier I said that a book is a sequence of pages. This apparently simplistic definition implies a radical shift in our centuries-old understanding of books. During all this time books were supposed to be texts, printed texts. But the Concrete poets of the first hour (Gomringer, De Campos, Diaz-Pino, Fällström, Rühm, etc.) destroyed forever the delusion and made evident, to whoever had eyes and wanted to see, that printed language is space. They went beyond Mallarmé's wildest dreams. They made not only blank pages but also multicolored pages; they covered the surfaces of pages with letters and images; they perforated them and folded them and

Without feeling the need for the pages to be bound in one particular way or another, I definitely exclude so-called 'object-books' since they seem to belong rather to the realm of sculpture. My emphasis lies on the notion of sequence and this doesn't seem applicable to 'object books.'

The Brazilian Wladimir Diaz-Pino showed me, during my visit to Brazil in 1978, some of his early books (unfortunately they are now out of print). They are some of the best and most beautiful bookworks I've ever seen.

burned them out.

19. All this happened without artists taking notice of it. Why should they take heed of what was going on among poets? Some years later Fluxus artists and Conceptual artists were using books as means of expression. But for Fluxus, books were objects too heavily laden with cultural prestige. Therefore they published in alternative formats, mostly loose cards in small cardboard boxes, leaving books and the book world almost intact. As for Conceptual artists, they weren't interested in books as such but in language. Therefore they made their publications look as normal as possible. The fact is Fluxus and Conceptual artists helped make the public accustomed to artists' publications and to take them seriously, but their contribution to the development of the book as form is less impressive, less rich, and less varied than the contributions by Concrete and Visual poets. This is so much so that one feels reluctant to use the term 'artists' books.' I'd rather opt for 'bookworks', which frees these from artists' appropriation, at the same time underlining the book as form, as an autonomous work. For the same reason I'd use the term 'artists' books' for all books made by artists, whatever these books might be, thereby including catalogues, biographies, etc.

20. As an illustration I'd once more like to use the examples of Ruscha and Rot. These artists have been producing bookworks since the early '60s; but, looking at their work from our 1979 perspective, not every one of their books is a bookwork. To use an example, Ruscha's *Royal Road Test* isn't a bookwork. This book is a photographic documentation of an action consisting of throwing a typewriter from a moving car and then collecting the pieces scattered on the ground along the road. Other words by Ruscha are better examples of bookworks - *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, *Various Small Fires*, *Nine Swimming Pools*, to name just a few. In these works Ruscha uses the book not as

I came across this term for the first time in the catalogue *Artists' Bookworks*, published by the British Council, London, 1974.

During her talk for the conference *Options in Independent Art Publishing*, Martha Wilson, from the Franklin Furnace (New York), wrongly used this same book of Ruscha as an example of a bookwork - or rather, she doesn't seem to care for making any clear distinction. This is a typical attitude in the United States.

documentation but as an autonomous form. As for Rot, he has published many books with varying degrees of formal coherence. Some of them are extremely beautiful examples of bookworks, others are doubtful cases, still others are just plain books of texts with illustrations, or series of reproductions of various natures.

21. But on which grounds can we differentiate between real bookworks and all other sorts of artist's publications in book format? Clive Phillpot says that bookworks are 'books in which the book form is intrinsic to the work.' This seems to me an excellent starting point for discussion. Immediately we are confronted with the question: what are we to understand as 'the book form'? Perhaps a coherent series of pages, as I suggested earlier. Joining these two basic ideas together, we arrive at the following definition - bookworks are books in which the book form, a coherent series of pages, is intrinsic to the work. The problem with this definition is that it also includes any sort of ordinary book. Novels, for instance, look excellent in book form. Obviously Phillpot was trying to exclude catalogues and other artists' publications; that's why he uses the term 'intrinsic.' But neither this word nor my contribution to the definition excludes literary works. What we have been trying to say with this definition is that the work cannot but exist as a book. But, frankly, I don't see what better form a telephone directory can have other than a book.

22. What our definition has failed to take into account is the reading, the actual experience of the bookwork by a viewer. Bookworks must create specific conditions for reading. There must be a coherence between the possible, potential messages of the work (what our fathers called 'content'), its visible appearance (our fathers' 'form'), and the manner of reading that these two elements impose, or suggest, or tolerate. This element I call 'rhythm.'

'Book Art Digressions,' *Artists' Books*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London 1976.

23. Take a novel, the most traditional one you can find, separate the pages, and display them on a gallery wall. Why not? This is perfectly possible. There's nothing in its form or content that opposes this. But the rhythm of our reading experience would be inappropriate. That proves that a novel belongs between covers, in book form. Now do the same with a so-called artist's book. Most of them are a series of visual units - the pages. Take them one by one, put them in a row on a gallery wall, and, if the rhythm suffers, it means that they belong together and form an authentic bookwork.
24. But here we are still confronted with the same problem - bookworks and novels seem to belong together. The condition we must impose on artists' books to make an autonomous form out of them is that they don't use linear language like novels, poems, philosophical treatises, and economic manuals. Our definition will then change into something like - bookworks are books in which the book form, a coherent sequence of pages, determines conditions of reading that are intrinsic to the work.
25. The problem with books and publications of Conceptual artists is, just as in the case of novels, that they ignore reading. A comic book, for instance, or a newspaper, creates richer and more varied and changing conditions for reading than Art & Language publications. It is true that 'conceptual art, in that much of it involves verbal matter, or is consciously a dematerialization of the artist's work down to print manifestations, is often better suited for presentation in book form than on the walls of a gallery, simply by virtue of the intrinsic superiority of the book as a vehicle for this kind of information.' Yes, but here book form is taken for plain book, not for bookwork. And that's the case of most of the publications by Conceptual artists,

Clive Philipot, 'Book Art: Object and Image,' Artists' Bookworks, British Council, London, 1974.

- who leave the book form intact and don't create specific conditions for reading that are intrinsic to the work.
26. My purpose is neither to give a detailed account of how books developed historically after Ruscha's and Rot's works, nor to explain the contribution of other artists. I want instead to present a number of European bookworks that I like and that illustrate, in one way or another, some of the ideas that I've been trying to develop here. Some of these examples look at first glance like plain books. Indeed, they even try hard to mimic them. In these cases the purpose of the artist is to use as reference a very particular genre of books, for instance, comic books or dictionaries. But in the manner an artist exploits, contradicts, comments on the existing genres, one can recognize his awareness of the peculiarity of the book form.
27. Other artists avoid any resemblance to plain books, no matter how specific some book genres can be. They exploit the book's sequential nature in order to describe a process, or analyze a process, or embody a process.
28. Still other artists use pages in their materiality. This doesn't include object books, or books as volume, but rather books as a series of two-dimensional representations that, because of their sequential nature, can suggest or reproduce three-dimensional realities.
29. Finally, other books concentrate on the reading process and do this by various means. All these categories are not mutually exclusive. Often a work exploits several possibilities, and there are certain works that are extremely difficult to place in one

The slides included the following titles: 'GENRI BOOKS: G.A. Cavelli in Continuo la serie...; Roberto Altmann, Geste Hype graphique; Niels Lomho and Tom Elling, Mr. Klein Jan Voss and Einar Gunnarsson, Conversation; Hansik Gebert, Life Time No.0; Eugènia Balcells, H milde Homenaje; Paul-Amand Gette, La Plage BOOKS AS SEQUENCE Franco Vaccari, Per un trattamento completo; Helmut Breloh, Uns zu Grau; Jaroslaw Kozlowski, Lessor Helen Chadwick and David Mayor, Door to Door; Carl Balh, Perception of the Line; Pawel Petasz, Pages of Contemplation; Joche Gerz, Recto Verso; Sanja Iveković, Double Life; Erdré Tót, The States of Zero; J.H. Kóekman, Capillarit Book; Francois Morelle; 90 Deux trames; Bruno Munari, An Unreadable Quadrat-Print; Jiri Kolar, Poer R; Ulises Carrión, In Alphabetical Order; Robin Crozier, Portrait of Robin Crozier; Maurizio Nannucci M40/1967; Michael Peep Alphabet; Tony Rickaby Cast; John Murphy, Selected Works; Géza Pernecky; Stamping with Little Objects; Dick Jewell, Four Photos; José Luis Castillejo, The Book of 18 Letters; Alison Blaiski, Twerty Monogram poems; Silvi Defraoui, Perquisition, E Tango; Dieter Hagenbach A House/Une maison/Un casa/Ein Haus; Knud Pedersen, The New Phantas; BOOKS AS SPACE: Joha Cornelissen, Untitled; Sigmund Gudmundsson, Journeys Book; Francisco Pino, Vertana Oda; Dieter Roth, G

sammelte Werk 7; Paul van  
Dijk, Een blad doorblade-  
ren; Roy Grayson, Paint-  
ing Book; Peter Meijboon,  
Geschichte; Kristjan Gud-  
mundsson, Circles; John  
Liggins, Elemental Actions.  
**BOOKS AS READING**  
**PROCESS:** Bob Cobbing,  
Why Shiva Has Ten Arms;  
David Mayor, Auto Book;  
Dorry Sack, Number-Lan-  
guage; Henryk Gajewski, E-  
liza Gajewski.

category or another. Our scheme serves only practi-  
cal purposes and hasn't any further pretensions.

