

The New Art of Making Books

Ulises Carrión 1975

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 or 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. 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 linguistic 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 five hundred pages, or of one hundred pages, or even of twenty-five, 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.

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 anymore because we use them daily. Transcription of poetry, a more elaborate language, uses less common

Critical Publishing

„The New Art of Making Books“

Introduce and situate the manifesto, including its issue, movement, organisation, or author (s)



1. Author:

Ulises Carrión, an influential figure in the conceptual art and artist's book movement, wrote *The New Art of Making Books* in 1975.

2. Issue:

Carrión challenges the conventional notions of books as mere containers of text, proposing instead that books be seen as autonomous entities with their own structures.

3. Movement:

This manifesto belongs to the conceptual art movement, particularly focusing on the form of artist books, which are considered works of art in themselves rather than mere vessels for literary content.

What received ideas, conventions, principles, values, or forms does it challenge? What are its core proposals?

Carrión disputes the idea that a book's primary function is to transmit a pre-written text from author to reader. He criticises the traditional approach to books where the layout is secondary to the content. The traditional narrative, literary language, and the typical author's role as a mere "text producer" are conventions he rejects.

Core Proposals:

1. **Books as structures:** Each book should be considered a unique space-time sequence, with every page functioning as an individual element within the larger structure.
2. **Books without intentionality:** Words in new books should not be loaded with authorial intention. They can serve as abstract signs, detached from traditional meanings.
3. **Autonomous form:** Books in this new art form are independent entities, capable of existing without conforming to traditional narrative structures. The meaning comes from the book's structure rather than just the text.

How is the manifesto structured?

The manifesto itself is structured like a collection of observations, reflecting its subject matter. It moves from a critique of traditional book forms to a presentation of Carrión's vision of the "new art" of book-making.

How would you characterize the style of the writing and the tone of the prose?

1. Style: Carrión's writing is both innovative and philosophical, filled with abstract and conceptual ideas about art, language, and communication. The style is meant to provoke thought and challenge preconceptions about what a book should be.

2. Tone: The tone can be described as passionate and reflective, as Carrión deeply explores his revolutionary ideas about books and language. There is also a certain playfulness in how he handles the relationship between language and meaning, particularly when he questions long-held beliefs about the purpose of writing.

Was the manifesto influential at the time of its production, and is it still relevant today?

1. Influence at the Time: At the time of its publication, the manifesto was groundbreaking for its radical take on books and language. It played a key role in defining the artist book movement, pushing artists to experiment with the form and structure of books as an artistic medium.

2. Relevance Today: Carrión's ideas remain relevant in contemporary art and book-making, particularly in experimental and independent publishing circles. The manifesto has inspired a generation of book artists to view the book as more than a vessel for text, but as a medium of art in its own right.

THANK YOU