

A Manifesto for the Book

Book - artist's book - artist's publication – book art?

Ulises Carrión's *The New Art of Making Books* begins with:

A book is a sequence of spaces.

If it is to be argued that a book has to be a sequence of *pages* inside a container, and if a container is considered as a physical entity – then as well as covers, a container must also be able to be a computer monitor, a mobile phone screen, a room, a box, the Internet. A series of pages can exist on paper or on a screen. On screens we scroll through the pages reflecting an original, historical book format. The big mainstream publishing houses have no problem terming screen-based works as books. Just look at the recent push for e-books from publishers and hardware manufacturers alike.

One of the key points of this project was to try and include all the book related activity that artists engage with. To include work that was being produced on, and exclusively for, digital technologies within the book arts field, and not leave it floundering uncomfortably on the edge, or given a different terminology altogether, if the artist considered what they were producing to be a book then we felt it should be included. For example the artist L. Vandegrift Davala whose recent work has utilised interactive digital technologies in the production of book works, and whose use of iPods is based upon a study of ancient Ethiopian scroll books and the idea of portability (Investigating the artist's book: L. Vandegrift Davala, <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm>).

At the start of this project we tried to draw a classification diagram, ABTREE, for the discipline that is generally known as artists' books. To be able to encompass some of those disciplines that relate to books or hang around on the periphery, perhaps straddling more than one discipline; we felt that a more inclusive term was needed. Inevitably the classification was drawn up based on process and working practice, rather than content. We tried to think of a title that was loose enough to encompass the artists producing multiples, screen-based work and audio books, as well as fine press, livres d'artistes and just plain old books. In the end we plumped for a term that was initially proposed via the online forum (<http://artistbooks.ning.com/group/21stcenturybook>) 'Artists' Publishing'.

It was a quick diagram, done on the hoof and considered only as a starting point, not a definition. The idea was to generate further debate, invite criticism and see if we could draw-up a more concrete picture of what can be considered an artist's book. We also requested that those who took a diagram explored it and altered it according to how they would classify the subject. The response was good and we received back many diagrams that had been changed according to taste.

What became apparent to us later, was that the diagram was already wrong. As a tree diagram it was too rigid and too concerned with process. There couldn't be the cross-pollination that is often required as an artist - when you allow the content to drive the process, rather than the other way around. The diagram was missing the links between areas that would inevitably be needed to describe the working practice of many who produce books. Many who altered the diagram did just that, adding in connectors across, up and down to bring seemingly disparate disciplines together.

We also curated three exhibitions as part of the project under the term ‘Artists’ Publishing’. Although the exhibitions were well-received, the term itself was not. Publishing was welcomed by many artists as a term which allows Internet and digital output, but their main grievance with the term ‘publishing’ was that it removes the word ‘book’ from the subject area. We felt that ‘publishing’ would serve as an inclusive term for works produced with newer technologies, and works made around the notion of the book. Artists can publish their work physically: paper, book, pamphlets, and virtually: e-books, mobile-phone based, bluetooth, blogs, websites, and include multiples of ephemeral works such as badges, stickers (for example the *Wlepki* stickers with short stories on them in Poland – see Case Study 31 Wojciech Wegrzynski). The most resistance to the term ‘publishing’ was from traditional book makers. They felt that the term was too slanted towards digital and ephemeral works at the expense of the physical, finely-produced book, and excluded them on the grounds that they did not ‘publish’ art. This was perceived as diluting the field through a deluge of e-publishing.

We too were slightly uncomfortable with the term Artists’ Publishing. As much as we appreciate work that is ‘published’ by artists, it was not quite the inclusive term that we had hoped. By its nature, publishing tends to define work that is produced in multiple and distributed. For many, that is not what they do. Unique and sculptural books are no small part of the artists’ books world and the term publishing does not appear to include these works. Neither does it seem a correct term for books produced in very small editions, which is again a significant theme within artists’ books. As the project progressed we considered other terms that could be broad and inclusive enough to encompass any artist producing book-related work, but at the same time clear enough to be understood and appreciated.

We encountered examples of alternative publishing which we felt should be part of the study. Zenon Fajfer, Katarzyna Bazarnik and Radoslaw Nowakowski who fall under Fajfer’s terminology umbrella of ‘liberature’, consider themselves as writers not artists, and do not think of the books that they produce as artists’ books, Fajfer in particular is quite adamant that his work is liberature and not artists’ books. “...despite their unconventional appearance, in fact, we have never thought about our books as artists’ books, as their origins were literary. They grew out of texts (out of telling stories and expressing emotions) – that were seeking space to accommodate themselves in it ... [in liberature the] physical object ceases to be a mere medium for the text – the book does not contain a literary work, *it is the literary work itself*” (transl. KB)¹. And I specified elsewhere that the shape and structure of the book, its format and size, layout and kind of typeface, kind and colour of paper, illustrations, drawings and other graphic elements can be valid means of artistic expression.”²

Radoslaw Nowakowski exhibits his books at European artist’s book fairs, and has recently shown a selection of works: *liberATorium, free books*, December 2009 in Galeria AT, Poznan (http://free.art.pl/at/pl/ang/nowakowski_2009.htm). We feel that Fajfer’s, Bazarnik’s and Nowakowski’s publications all sit within the field of the book arts - what they produce is liberature, but it is also art. Their reluctance to be classified as producers of artists’ books is partly due to the way the term is perceived in Poland. If you say ‘artist’s book’ it means a unique or sculptural book (often both), and this is not something that they associate their work with.

Liberature involves the consideration of all parts of the book as equal in value: original text, image, concept, format and presentation, and most importantly the creator’s original intention of how the book should work, in particular with Fajfer and Bazarnik’s work with authors such as James Joyce and Stéphane Mallarmé (<http://www.liberatura.art.pl>). In this respect, liberature is very much related to the intentions of an artist producing books.

Artists' books, book arts or artists' publishing?

Artists' books as a term refers only itself, it is the least inclusive term for the subject which does not even stretch to embracing zines, livres de luxe, fine press books or multiples. It is perhaps the end product and not the discipline.

Although we have looked for plenty of alternatives, it seems that 'book arts' is the most appropriate term to use to as the umbrella heading under which all those who are working with the book format, in its many guises, can be classified. It is with some reluctance that we put forward this term, and feel it needs some explanation. For many, and perhaps particularly in the UK, there are connotations with the term 'book arts'. The immediate connotation is of a book produced from a background of little historical knowledge, wrapped up in the craft of producing the book with scant attention paid to content. Essentially the glitter covered, one-off, experimentally bound book made at home. Or the book shaped, wax-dipped, lead cast lump that is useless as both book or sculpture. We are generalising here and please don't take offence if you produce your books using these methods. We take each artwork on its own merit, but they still need to be that - artworks. If too much emphasis is placed upon the craft of the book, then the message gets lost. If what the artist is saying is important, it doesn't matter if it is written or printed on paper, screen or a photocopied piece of paper.

It has become apparent that Book Arts is the most inclusive term. It includes 'book' which is of great concern to many of the practitioners we spoke with; it helps them to place their work, identifies their realm of practice, and is the most generous title through the sum of "arts" + "book". This allows the genre to extend its previous limits; if you can add arts to book it implies all works surrounding and related to the subject – 'art' adds an extension to the definition of a book. Instantly you can include: zines, multiples, livres de luxe, livres d'artiste, pamphlets, altered/reconfigured books, sculptural works, unique books, downloads, e-books, mobile-phone based books, blogs, Bluetooth, video, podcasts, performance, and any ephemera such as badges, stickers, postcards etc. Perhaps even liberature? It also allows for one-off works. For example, it is the only term under which this unique badge by the artist Becky Adams fits, where a book has been used to create another artwork. The text has been cut from the pages of a romance novel and made into a badge. It could be argued that the page sits between two covers – the double-edged metal surround and metal back, it has text, it implies a story and the possibility of further occurrence, the text reads: *Excuse me, one moment*. It is not an artist's book, and as it is unique it has not been published in an edition, so all it can be is book art.

There is an implication though, that 'book arts' becomes not fine art but 'of the arts'. Traditionally, the term 'graphic arts' includes printmaking, illustration, and graphic design, which were perceived as inferior to original 'fine' art, until fine art print became appreciated as digital printmaking emerged. Previously 'commercial' processes of lithography and screenprint became part of the 'fine art' print processes, incorporating the hand of the artist against the possibilities of mass reproduction offered through digital print processes.

We now have distinctions between 'original digital prints' and the French term Giclée to better disguise the process of inkjet as a method of producing limited edition prints and books, and 'digital print publishing' through companies such as Blurb and Lulu, where there is the potential for an unlimited supply of the book as a democratic multiple.

There is also the question of whether this is necessary at all, do we need classification? Have these debates not raged on since artists started producing books without ever seeming to be resolved, yet books continue to be made, bought, collected and catalogued? Never mind trying to explain what an artist's book is to someone who has never seen or heard of one before. We believe that there is a need for a classifying terminology. We're not looking at a definition of artists' books – we are making a plea for the purposes of including both the

traditional and emerging formats. Recognising a rich history and looking to the future, and being open enough to see how new technology can redefine what a book can be in the 21st century (as mainstream publishers are doing, if only because of the extra revenue that can be generated).

E-books

In the 21st Century we have to accept that artists will use any of the processes that are available to them to create and distribute their books. We have been very surprised by the amount of artists who have asked us if their books 'qualify' as artists' books as they have been produced using Blurb or Lulu. Surely artists can produce a book using whatever means are available to them?

Inspired by Maria Fusco's *1982 Doom Knots* (see - Alternative methods of distribution for artists' books and 1982, DOOM KNOTS essay at: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm) we invited the US artist EF Stevens to produce a book in the style of the Japanese *Keitai Shosetsu* for the project. Keitai Shosetsu, or mobile phone novels have made it into the best-seller lists in Japan. They consist of very short stories broken down into bites. The book was written and sent by the artist in 160 character instalments to people who responded to the offer of the free transmissions, for 6 days from 31st October 2008 (see: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/efstevens08.htm>).

Andi McGarry is an example of an artist who previously eschewed digital technology in favour of the hand-produced, only to be seduced by the possibilities of it "In 2007 several things occurred which changed the way I was publishing, what I published and how I published it. Sarah Bodman had sent me a questionnaire asking me amongst other things "Did I think computers would impact on the way I produced work?" the Luddite in me chortled as I picked up the quill pen to produce another hand made copy. Then I won a Folkatronica bursary with Visual Arts Ireland, this enabled me to run some Ideas in a DVD Video format and produce a DVD with a soundtrack. The DVD featured lots of underwater imagery and was also turned into a book - but this got me thinking - making movies was such fun, and there were a host of new challenges. Simultaneous acquisition of a laptop and a digital camera allowed me to explore the possibilities of movie making using a simple editing programme (Movie Maker) it had all become possible. I began making movies at a feverish rate. ... The movie camera allows for a different kind of landscape appreciation, via editing and with inclusion of sound track the synthesizer makes an entirely new form of artwork. I want my films to retain a notebook scrapbook journal feel. ... I have published a number of films on YouTube and as an outlet YouTube and similar sites are an interesting starting point. The work is available for free - thus the return of a kind of cheap multiple.³

The only problem with our attempt to include purely digital books (and e-books in particular) is that not many artists seem to be producing them at the moment. E-books as a mainstream rival to paper books also don't yet seem to be completely taking over the market. They are certainly gaining in popularity, but last year they accounted for only 3.3% of the trade sales book market.⁴

In part this has to do with the hardware that is available. Looking at the e-reader equipment at the Frankfurt Book fair in 2008 was a distinctly underwhelming experience. The technology has been awkward, expensive and limited, and apart from Amazon's Kindle™, was not being embraced by very large numbers of users. What became apparent to us, seeing these clunky machines in Frankfurt, and often quoted in the media prior to January, is that for e-books to really take off, Apple needs to design and produce the hardware. Is the iPad the solution to boost e-book sales and start replacing printed, paper books? It is of course far too

early to tell, but with its iBooks application that most major publishers have signed up to, it should surely give e-books a lift.

This could be seen as of little consequence to the artist working with books, even e-books, but what Apple has done since the inception of the iPhone is allow anyone to become a member of their developer programme. Anyone can write an 'app' for distribution, and this is set to continue with the iPad. So even if the iBooks app will not allow for distribution of artists' books (and we're not sure it will), there is still an avenue available to anyone so inclined. If nothing else it could be the push to make artists realise the possibilities of pushing artists' books into screen-based technologies.

The most pressing concerns or issues around books produced using new technologies are still:
How can they be collected?
How can they be stored and future-proofed?

We found no convincing answer to either question. Many curators and collectors, both public and private considered digital books outside of their remit. For example, Maria White (Investigating the artist's book: an interview with Maria White Chief Cataloguer at Tate Britain: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm) was adamant that digital books were not something that would be collected under the umbrella of Tate's artists' books collection.

Many artists, collectors, dealers and curators were unsure how outlets can – or even will – adapt to digital media, who would purchase it, and how it would, or if it should be collected. Many artists consider digital output via mobile phones, Internet, screen-based and e-books as a means of producing a democratic multiple, and are not necessarily concerned about monetary recompense, the longevity of the piece, or any archival possibility.

Utilising the Internet also opens up the potential for artists who make performative works of or around the book, allowing greater access to their performance or documentation via video, live streaming etc. But who will archive these works - what will collections of digital books be? A list of links to websites? And if so, these will never be stable collections due to the transient nature of many Internet sites and the artworks produced there - as IP addresses change, host sites disappear, and technology rapidly moves on. How will any collection be kept up to date?

Of course, it is not usually artists who concern themselves with the archival stability (or lack of) of their work - this is left to the collectors and curators to worry about.

A book work which explores the issues of Internet instability is *Deciphering Human Chromosome 16: We Report Here* by Sarah Jacobs. The *Deciphering Human Chromosome 16* bookworks use text in a visual way to document the ethical, economic, political and philosophical polemics associated with mapping the human genome. *We Report Here* is an e-book which contains links to about 250 websites collected in the months following publication in the journal *Nature* of 'The sequence and analysis of duplication-rich human chromosome 16' (Vol. 432, December 2004). Its contents change over time as the websites change, migrate or disappear. Published by information as material. You can download the e-book free from the link at: www.informationasmaterial.com/Work/Jacobs.htm

Another example of the instability of Internet applications in the face of constantly evolving technology is the Domesday Book project, conceived in 1983 as "a modern-day equivalent of the Domesday Book that would harness some of the potential of multimedia and provide a detailed snapshot or time capsule of British life in the mid-1980s".⁵ Material was collected, including 200,000 photographs, 24,000 maps, 8,000 data sets, and 60 minutes of moving pictures, all to be viewed on a specially developed videodisc Domesday player, which is now virtually obsolete. The original Domesday book (1086) of two million hand-written words, still survives.

Artists often see e-books and the Internet as a means to distribute free versions of existing physical books, for example:

Clifton Meador's *Internet Police Uniform Sites*

www.lulu.com/content/2375523

Chip Schilling's *Panthers*

www.indulgencepress.com/Books/Books.html

EF Stevens *Awaiting Transmission*

www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/efstevens08.htm

Tim Mosely's discussion in Case Study XXXII

www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm

Andi McGarry's YouTube books

www.youtube.com/profile?user=AAAAAAndi#g/u

Angie Waller's Internet works

www.couchprojects.com

Radoslaw Nowakowski's hypertext works

www.liberatorium.com/liberlandia.html

www.liberatorium.com/emeryk/emeryk.html

Foundry Press downloads

www.foundrypress.co.uk/foundryarchive09.html

www.foundrypress.co.uk/foundryarchive08.html

www.foundrypress.co.uk/foundryarchive01.html

A book arts history

As important as it is to set parameters, a canon is not just a definition. It also needs to contain the iconic artworks and key historical references that can be used as the standard by which all can be judged and aspire to. In the case of book arts this has been done all too little, but things are changing. In the first Artists' Books Seminar which we ran as part of this project ('How are artists using and investigating new media for publishing? Where are we going with this? Where will the books end up?'), Francis Elliott spoke of the need for bringing the key works together and how he is doing that through Wikipedia:

'My basic idea, then, is simply to write a series of articles on artists' books, artists' multiples and exhibitions. Firstly, attempt a workable definition that sets up a contrast with *livre d'artiste*, secondly choose a series of works that exemplify the genre. Thirdly, cross-reference them to create a network that can act as a beginner's course as well as an archive to help research. In my experience, few of us are aware of many other artists' books and multiples, and there are few accepted iconic examples. In a reversal of post-modern orthodoxy, I think that we need to begin defining a workable canon.'⁶

With some exceptions, books have not been seen as being as important as painting, sculpture and latterly performance art. Consequently books have also not been as well documented. What is needed is a bringing together of key works in one place, just as Francis Elliott is proposing. Wikipedia has its problems - a page can be doctored and falsified, as demonstrated by Emily Artinian at our conference in July 2009 (see Artinian's presentation at <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/contrad09/artinian.htm>), or removed completely, but as a means of distribution it is unrivalled. The canon should be an introduction and guide to be followed and challenged and where better to do this than Wikipedia? Yes there should perhaps be less ephemeral versions 'published' (printed) along the way, but this is a predominantly modern history in flux, that needs the input of many, and the point of publishing is perhaps not yet upon us.

We personally feel that Francis Elliott is picking out the correct works to define a book arts history, but many will disagree. This again is where Wikipedia has its advantages. It is open to

anyone with Internet access, and anyone can upload a page about the works that they feel need to be included in this history; in fact Elliott is appealing to people to do just that. It also allows for many different strands of artworks to be networked together. If people consider that having this knowledge is important in establishing an understanding of book arts, and to further discussion, then it needs to be uploaded and linked in. Providing it doesn't grow into an untamed monster, we would say that the more varied the output, the better. What a book *is* can be challenged, and its perceived history could change, and all of this needs to be included in the canon to further the discipline.

Book arts has its roots in an ancient tradition, but really only emerged as a major discipline in the 20th century; taking an established, culturally-significant object and manipulating it for artistic purposes. As we proceed further into the 21st century, and the notion of what this object can be changes, so too will the work that is produced. If an artist is producing a book in one of its now many guises, then we want that work to be included in a broad and varied field. Book arts needs to open, interdisciplinary and flexible enough to allow all who wish to join a place. The process needs to be of secondary importance, and the ideas need to come to forward, then anything can be considered a book if that is the artist's intention.

To paraphrase Ulrike Stoltz: the discussion about artists' books might end up with a question that Sartre used to ask Simone de Beauvoir when she started writing: *What do you have to say?*⁷

Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden, February 2010

Notes:

1. Zenon Fajfer, "liryka, epika, dramat, literatura", *Od Joyce'a do literatury*, ed. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Universitas, 2002) 233-239. Read the English text at: www.literatura.pl/teksty-dostepne-nastronic.html
2. Katarzyna Bazarnik, "Zamiast wstępu", *ibid.* v.
3. *Artists' Publications* – Andi McGarry. A presentation at this project's conference *Traditional and emerging formats of artists' books: Where do we go from here?* (09/07/09-10/07/09). Audio or text download from <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/contrad09/andim.htm>
4. *eBook Sales Up 176% in 2009* by Craig Morgan Teicher, Ebooknewser, 23rd February 2010. http://www.mediabistro.com/ebooknewser/statistics/ebook_sales_up_176_in_2009_152894.asp?c=rss
5. *Lost in Cyberspace: The BBC Domesday Project and the Challenge of Digital Preservation*, by Douglas Brown, 2003. <http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/cyber/overview.php>
6. *Possible Strategies For Exploiting Wikipedia For The Dissemination and Profiling of Artist's Books and Multiples on the Internet* – Francis Elliott. A presentation at this project's first seminar 'How are artists using and investigating new media for publishing? Where are we going with this? Where will the books end up?' Thursday 8th May 2008. Audio or text download from <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/seminar08.htm>
7. For the interview with Ulrike Stoltz for this project see Investigating the artist's book: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm>