

The Cover of a Book is the Beginning of a Journey A Do-it-Yourself Paper

[image of title page]

Prologue

Julian: Thanks Sarah and Tom for the invitation and thanks for allowing Paul and myself to open the conference.

Hand Clare envelope containing Paul's instructions. Written on envelope:

Dear Clare,

Thanks so much for being here in my place and for representing The Performance Re-enactment Society. In the envelope is the text I'd like you to speak for us, and the instructions for which images to project. Hope it goes well.

With best wishes,

Paul

x.

Julian: [image of hands holding invite] We're going to talk about *The Cover of a Book is the Beginning of a Journey*, a recent exhibition at Arnolfini which Sarah and Tom also worked with us on. Our interests were in artist's books that went beyond the usual conventions of reading; books that unsettle the usual distinction between writer and reader, which distribute and generate action and performance: books to do. The exhibition re-presented canonical book works by Fluxus artists working in the 1960s, through to works by a current generation of artists whose practice returns to instruction-based and interactive books. This type of book work is central to the recent tendency towards producing decentred and distributed artworks that take place across a number of forms and are re-mediated.

So, this paper is a dialogue between me, Julian Warren, Arnolfini's archivist and co-curator of the exhibition, and **[Julian: Put up image of Paul with painting mask]**.

Clare: Me, Paul Clarke, member of the Performance Re-enactment Society, co-curators of *The Cover of a Book*. I apologise for not being here and for making Clare, who's speaking now stand in for me. Clare is a founder member of the Performance Re-enactment Society, along with Tom Marshman, who like me is not here. I'm in Chicago right now, thinking of you, imagining what you all look like from behind this painting. Hoping Clare *is* here voicing my words and that everything is going to plan.

Julian: [Julian: Prologue] As part of the exhibition the Performance Re-enactment Society invited visitors to take part in a series of *enactments* in response to the book works. These took place over 5 Acts entitled 'Things To Do With Books', on Saturday afternoons. Alongside the books, which were central to the exhibition, sculptural, performance and film works they inspired (or documented) were shown. **[Clare, can you put up the first Gallery**

image]. This was an exhibition in process, new works made in collaboration with participants accumulated and visitors added to growing displays. **[Clare: Image of Gallery]** The books were suspended in transparent archival folders and visitors were encouraged to interact with them, as performative objects, following a set of handling instructions and wearing white gloves.

Clare: Drawing on examples from the exhibition, this dialogue will open the work of the book to the actions it calls-for or produces. We want to ask how a bookwork is delimited, where is its frame? As Bruce Altshuler suggests, the identity of the artwork is in question, to quote, “what exactly *is* the artwork here – the idea as stated in a set of directions, the actual words, instructions and diagrams on the page, or the set of realizations?” I would say all of these, that the work is a network, a negotiation between these forms, ongoing processes of circulation and distribution, and the material or immaterial manifestations produced and performed in different times and locations. (Altshuler, ‘Art by Instruction and the Pre-History of *do it*’, in *do it* exhibition catalogue, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist, Independent Curators International, New York 1998. Also available from http://www.e-flux.com/projects/do_it/notes/essay/e002_text.html)

[Julian: Preamble]

Julian: Let’s begin with the title. We were going to call it *Crackers* **[Clare: Crackers! Cover]** Ed Ruscha’s 1969 book re-staging Mason William’s short story, ‘How to Derive the Maximum Enjoyment From Crackers’ using photographs, never seemed to fail in reducing us to fits of laughter. **[Clare: image of Crackers]** Ruscha’s re-make of William’s story is at once instructive, collaborative and documentary, as well as being very funny, and this is what we were wanting this show of artist’s books at Arnolfini to be. With the added bonus that the show was opening a few weeks before Christmas.

But one of us involved wasn’t so sure. There had recently been a couple of exhibitions named after Ed Ruscha books – including *Various Small Fires* at The Royal College of Art in 2007. Another he thought, might be seen as climbing on a bandwagon. But none of us could come up with a better suggestion.

Then, whilst sorting through Arnolfini’s collection of artists’ publications to pull out any that might potentially lend themselves to future art works – anthologies of fluxus scores and colouring-in books, books with games and rules, of stencils, maps and templates, books of instruction - an envelope surfaced. **[Clare: show envelope & book]** Jonathan Monk, *Meeting #13*, was printed in blue ink on the outside. Inside, a length of concertinaed paper opened out to reveal this legend in bold type: **[Clare literally hold up: A la Tour Eiffel, le 13 Octobre 2008 a midi]**. Re-folded, the back page colophon listed the number of the edition as 10,000.

I had seen it before, having bought a copy for a pound sometime around 2002, to send to my then girlfriend. I thought she might like it; this present of an artwork, no less, which was keeping alive for more than seven years the

possibility of a Parisian rendezvous. I recall thinking at the time, carelessly, that we might just go together; a future date. I would have imagined it, the first autumn leaves breezily dancing around our feet as, hand-in-hand, we made our way beside the Seine towards the Eiffel Tower.

But that was then, and this was a different but serendipitous, now. September 2008, only a few weeks before the 13th October, which, in turn, was less than six weeks before the show was set to open. Immediately we were resolved. It was too good a prospect to miss; a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to see this art work through. We would carry out the instruction, attend the meeting, and bring back proof for others to see as part of the exhibition. Whilst there we thought we could also issue our own instruction and ask Jonathan if he would give the show a name: a suitable agenda item for the meeting that would resolve the issue of the title.

A bookwork, an instruction or fluxus-like score, and an event, the scale of **Meeting #13** is striking. Its edition of 10,000 and modest one pound price tag, marks it out as uncommon amongst art objects, setting it against an art market that trades on exclusivity, the expensive, the rare or unique.

Clare: As bdv (bureau des vidéos) say, book works make 'a statement against the traditional distribution of artworks based on the rarefaction of art objects... the copy is no longer different from the original' (in 'A Cheap Line', a discussion between John Baldessari, Stéphanie Moisdon and Nicolas Trembley, in Maria Fusco and Ian Hunt, eds., *Put About: A Critical Anthology on Independent Publishing*, London: Bookworks, 2004, p.93). Like artists' multiples they question the art market's commodification of singular, original objects. Altshuler says that instruction-based works are multiples 'of potentially unlimited variety and number'. Each print of the book art book, each action enacted from the instructions contained and each re-mediation is as original as the first.

Julian: Even within the more equitable, although still niche market of mass-produced artist's books, where editions tend to be widely distributed and affordable, **Meeting #13** appears at once extremely ambitious and absurdly excessive, the envelope purposively lending itself to further distribution – encouraging any one of the ten thousand to be sent on its way again, a repeated art object designed for dispersal, to be read and re-read again and again. Operating like a material version of a digital file published on the internet and licensed using Creative Commons, it offers itself to be passed around and shared; a communal data set for future use. Yet, this "rippling effect" remains balanced by the book's call to its readership to meet at a specific time and place - a unifying event of an art work, as opposed to some singular, originary object of art.

The futurity of **Meeting #13** also stressed the relationship of the reader(s) or viewer(s) to the text or work. [**Clare: next image, On Kawara**] Whereas, to look at On Kawara's date paintings from his *Today Series*, each painting a one-off painted by the artist on the day of the date, is to see fore-grounded the evidence of a unique historical relationship between the artist and the painting

and the date – a kind of temporal On Kawara ‘woz here’ (on the canvas) – Meeting #13 fore-grounded a speculative relationship between reader(s), in which the author or artist becomes lost in the mix. The instruction doesn’t say ‘meet me, Jonathan Monk’ at the Eiffel Tower, or even ‘meet me’: simply ‘meet’. Its futurity meant that, having issued the instruction, the artist stepped back from the work: from here-on-in it was up to us. The audience would make the art, become its eventhood. It was funny to fantasise about the possibility of a crowd of thousands gathered at the Eiffel Tower. **[Clare: Eiffel tower at night]** More likely, of course, it would just be us there, and probably feeling a bit foolish.

Clare: There is a relationship between this kind of book and performance art works, which are re-performed and repeated differently in different contexts. Instruction-based book works enable such ephemeral acts to be re-created; to happen and happen again. In Michael Fried’s terms (‘Art and Objecthood’, 1967), the bookwork - especially those representing instruction art - is an inherently theatrical device. Rather than containing or displaying copies of finished artworks, the work carried by the book depends on the user or reader for literal or imaginary completion. The book is an adaptable tool or instrument, awaiting interpretation. Unlike a sculptural object, the work only appears through its use, it is relational and dependent on repeated interactions.

Julian: Let’s get back to the story. Something else had also occurred to us: supposing Jonathan didn’t appear at the meeting? Our plans for a title were resting on shaky ground. To be sure of asking Jonathan, we were going to have to try and make contact prior to the meeting.

We tracked Jonathan down to Berlin about to see England play Germany with Douglas Gordon, whose own instructive art work, *Three Steps to Heaven* published in Hans Ulrich Obrist’s *Do It* and involving tequila and champagne slammers, co-incidentally, was going to be re-created by Clare and Tom on the opening night (New York: e-flux, 2005). **[Clare: image of *Three Steps*]** Unlike the man in the picture, Jonathan was non-committal, undecided as to whether he would go or not, but nevertheless, he agreed he would think about a title for the show and that one of us could call him from the meeting.

Having left from Bristol the day before, we arrived early at the Eiffel Tower and, with no sign of action, decided to walk up to the second stage of the Tower, for midday. **[Clare: photo of book at Eiffel Tower]** From there we photographed ourselves and the book before phoning Jonathan. He had decided not to come. But he had thought of the title, ‘The Cover of a Book Is the Beginning of a Journey’.

We descended the stairs to the ground. **[Clare: group shot under the Eiffel Tower]** Under the Eiffel Tower, around a hundred people or so had now gathered, many of whom were holding copies of the book, most looking unsure of themselves. Meeting #13 had succeeded in convening a meeting of its community of readers – a one-off book club come together. **[Clare: 3rd**

shot of woman in sunglasses] So, The Cover of a Book *is* the Beginning of a Journey – even the cover of pamphlet containing so few words.

Clare: I wonder what Julian read on his way to Paris? In the Book Works anthology, *Put About*, Alec Finlay, publisher of *Morning Star* writes, ‘for every journey a book’ (Fusco and Hunt, eds., 187). As Christian Boltanski says, ‘The book is something that is always travelling’, encountering and establishing new audiences for the artist’s work by being distributed and displacing the work of art from the gallery (cited in Lucy Lippard, ‘Double Spread’, in Fusco and Hunt, 87). Here, carried by-hand by the remote community of those who bought copies in the edition. Coming together simply to meet, like a lo-fi Flash Mob, planned years in advance with only a single, open instruction to go on. Book works disseminated by galleries and bookstores only to be brought back together in future, back into the same space and timeframe. Relocated to Paris, 2008, go-betweens between times and places, vessels carrying not only works or ideas, but their readers and users. The presentation of the artwork deferred and displaced, its frame opened-up spatially and temporally.

[Julian: Act 1]

Julian: The *Paper Sculpture Book* (2003), **[Clare: Cover of paper sculpture book]** invites its own transformation into another form, from page-based to three-dimensional sculptures. You have to undo the form of this book, dismantling its integrity as a singular object, in order to create the works of sculpture. **[Clare installation image]** Does the resulting exhibition remain within the form of a book work?

[Clare: Act 2]

Clare: Yoko Ono displayed a series of works in process, made from instructions to be carried out by visitors over the duration of an exhibition. Later she exhibited only the instructions for ‘paintings to construct in your head’. **[Julian: cover of Grapefruit]** The book *Grapefruit* (1964) collects these paintings in the form of instructions and, as Altshuler suggests, releases them into the world so that they are distributed and call for participation, not solely in the space of a single gallery, but in multiple places and times, participation in an ongoing creative process and in the production of countless interpretations.

The Performance Re-enactment Society produced a collage of Ono’s instruction paintings, **[Julian: Painting to see...]** citing PAINTING TO SEE THE SKIES (1961 Summer), **[Julian: image]** SMOKE PAINTING (1961 Summer) and **[Julian: image]** PAINTING TO BE WORN (1962 Summer). Recontextualised from *Grapefruit* as spoken ‘perlocutions’, carried out on 3rd January by public participants with landscapes purchased from e-bay:

(We would like to thank Carl Newland and Hannah Chiswell for their beautiful photographs of this work)

[Julian: image to illustrate each line]

Choose a landscape painting.

Take it outside.

Drill or burn eyeholes in the painting.

Hold it up and look at it.
See the landscape and imagine you are there.
Look through the holes in the canvas and see the city.

Wear the landscape as a mask, with the back to your face.
Look through the holes drilled in the painting.
Go back inside wearing it.
Return it to the gallery wall.

These instructions remained, displayed as text alongside the paintings. Visitors were able to carry out their own versions by following this collage edited from *Grapefruit*, or use the words as what Ono called a “thinking machine”, to imagine their own subjective realizations. The wall text could also be perceived as documentation, referring to the Performance Re-enactment society Saturday event and to past versions by Ono and others.

Is this a bookwork, a performance, a painting or photography? A text work re-mediated as performance and transformed again into these documentary photos. The instructions, new versions performed by visitors and photographic documentation coexist in the gallery, such that there is an awareness of what might have been, what is now and what was.

[Julian: Act 3]

[Clare: image of book, instruction, image, image, image]

Julian: This is the Performance Re-enactment Society version of Alison Knowles' *Unfurl*, selected by Clare. This performative text, staged on the page of Knowles' book *More* was re-staged as a participatory act across the brushed concrete floor of the public foyer of Arnolfini, textiles provided by participants were unfolded like the pages of single-sheet bookworks to produce a patchwork.

[Clare: Act 4]

[image of book, instruction/docu, image, image]

Clare: Kaprow's *Effect*, from *2 Measures* functions both as documentation of his past version and instructions for future enactments by other artists. I'm assuming from the differing aesthetics you can recognise which version is from which era. These works are documents or evidence of past events and generative scores for future generations to enact.

Julian: The same is true of Ed Ruscha's *Crackers* that I mentioned earlier, which documents a literalising of Mason Williams' short story, read as instructional, transforming this fiction into a photo-story and providing a photographic score for other re-doings. Ed Ruscha later made a 16mm film version (1971) and this is **[image]** Jonathon Monk's 16mm film version, *Chinese Crackers* from 2006.

Clare: Clare doesn't know this yet, but myself and Julian were discussing a further re-mediation or remake, a live version performed by Tom and Clare of The PRS.

[Julian: Act 5] [Image of newspaper in gallery, image of question marks, couple affixed, then photos on gallery wall]

Clare: Julius Koller's *Instruction* (collected in Hans Ulrich Obrist's *Do It*), instructs the reader to cut question marks from the day's newspaper and affix these to texts in the city that they wish to question. Koller's work calls-for a series of participatory interventions, intertextual acts. Question marks are recontextualised, questioning the authority of existing signs or advertisements, distributing this work beyond the book and gallery to a broader public. Photographs of these question marks in their new locations were returned to the gallery and reprinted in a folder of documentation, displayed alongside the exhibited books. In a sense this was a new bookwork, which documented the enactments of the existing book works. **[Julian passes out folder]**

[Julian: Epilogue]

Julian: We hope we've opened-up the frame of the book work. Are the interpretative acts the readers carry-out part of the work of the book work? Likewise, the realizations of the instructions exhibited and the alternative, possible versions visitors imagine? What of visitors interactions with the images displayed in the gallery, authored by the public?

Clare: These books are artworks that evidence past works and are performative, holding the potential for future manifestations. We want you to consider bookworks as instruments that call for future use, to be actively re-interpreted, re-made and re-performed rather than simply re-read.

Books will not always be around or in print, they are ephemeral and disappear from circulation, needing to be distributed, displaced geographically and exchanged between generations, used and re-used in order to continue to work.

[Clare: Afterword]

Julian: In response to, 'Where do we go from here?' for 'The Cover of a book is the Beginning of a Journey', Jonathan Monk produced a new anthology, 'Selected Meetings Selected'. Anyone up for 'The Empire State Building, New York City, U.S.A., September 16th 2017, noon'?

Clare: See you there. Maybe.

[A bibliography of book works included in the exhibition and this presentation is available here:

http://project.arnolfini.org.uk/?t=2&p=the_cover_of_a_book/Exhibition_Bibliography.doc]