Reading As Event

Matthew Kirschenbaum

Reading is an event, not an act. Books are incidental (in the fullest meaning of the word). Texts are signals, transmissions. This is where I am now when I read, not a place but a mode, not a favourite chair but a state and frame. Think of it as resolution.

Self-Reflexivity in Book Form

Johanna Drucker - *The century of artists' books*

Artists’ books are often self-conscious about the elements of book structure. This can involve self-reflexive humor or serious philosophical interrogations of a book’s identity. Disturbing conventions of reading by calling attention to these structures is often a feature of artists’ books through an emphasis on the features of the page and pointing to the book as a whole. But a book can also be a self-conscious record of its own production — it can simply examine itself as a proposition — one laden with specific ideas about the ways a book can embody an idea through its material forms. There are really two subtexts here. One is the “idea of the book as idea" — the self-reflexive creation of books which are about being books, or what a book can be as an idea in form. The other is the “idea of the book as art idea” — which takes these investigations of the book into a dialogue with the concept of art, and shows that books are an art idea.

THE READING

Ulises Carrión - *THE NEW ART OF MAKING BOOKS*

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.
To read a book, is to perceive sequentially its structure.

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.



A book is a volume of dynamic friction.


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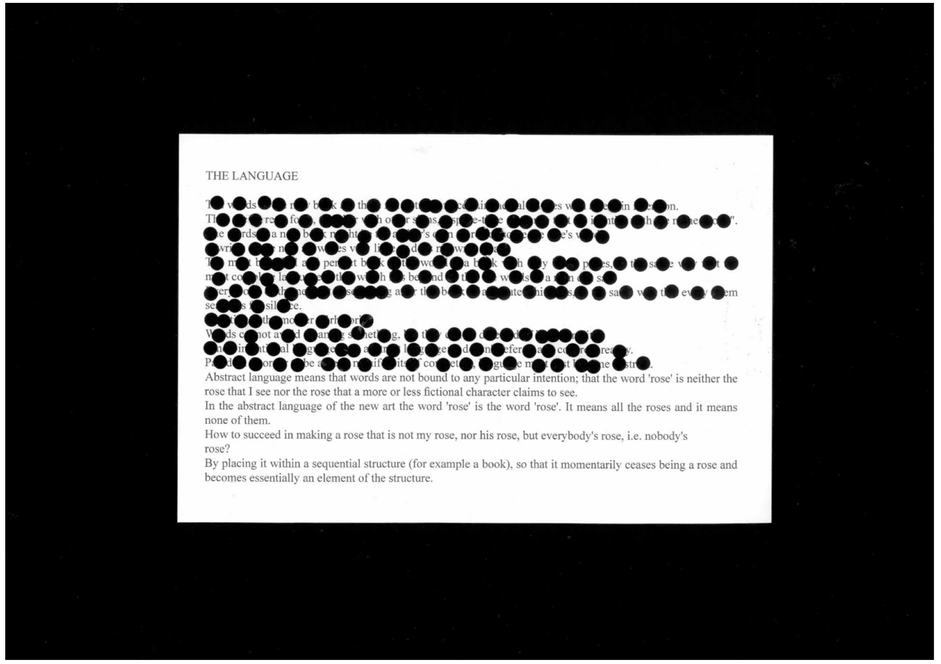
A book is a volume of stilled kinetic energy.

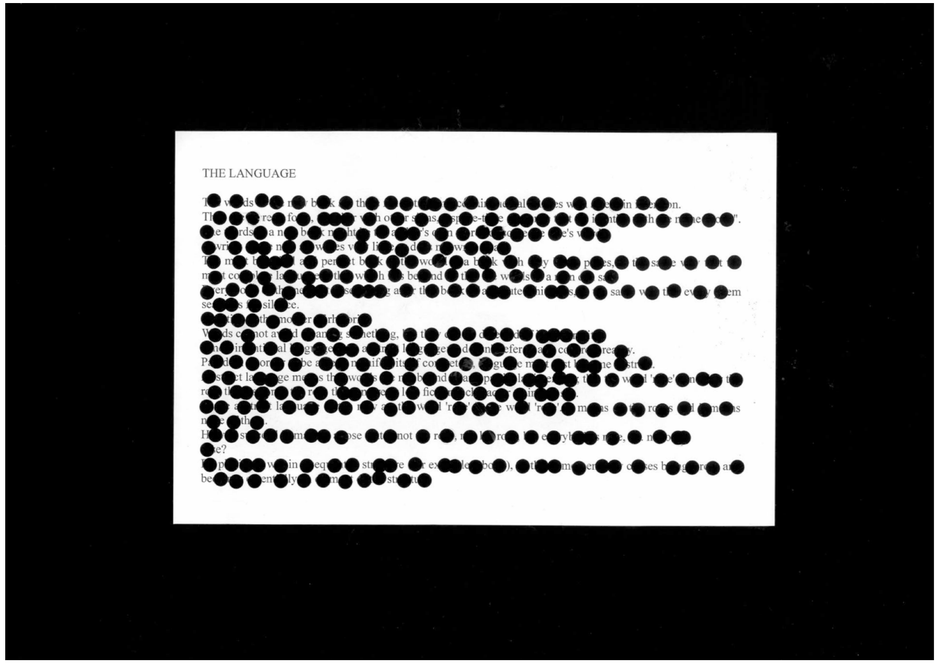


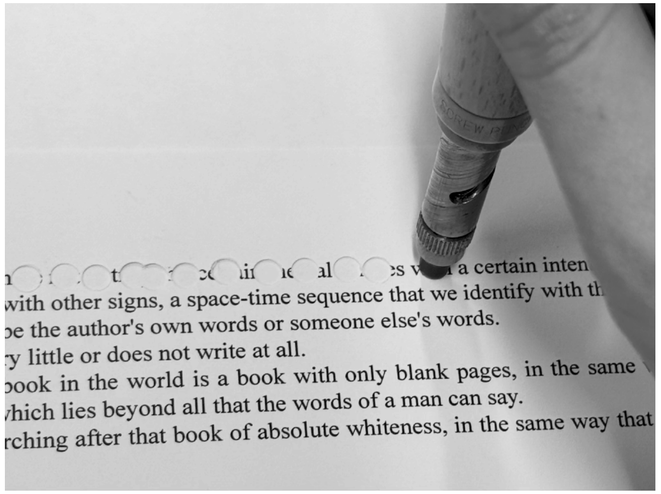












A book is a volume structured by the rhythm of the hand.

reading is an event that unfolds overtime

Context

My research revolves around reading as an event with infinite generative possibilities, which means that it is inseparable from the object of the book. However, books and reading are extremely broad subjects, and I needed to find a point of entry to make my enquiry more specific. I became aware that, in an age dominated by digital reading, the lively and intrinsic experience produced through the friction between people and books is gradually weakening. Therefore, I want to shift reading away from the swipe of fingertips on screens and back toward an interaction between the hand, the body, and the physical book. Borrowing the title of a lecture I admire, *The Book Is Not a PDF*, I use traditional media as a site through which to explore reading. This led me to divide my research into two stages:

Stage One: using conventional book forms to present unconventional reading events.

In this process, my understanding of the book as an object became crucial. Ulises Carrión's essay *The New Art of Making Books*, which serves as both a key reference and textual material for my practice, has been highly influential. By contrasting old and new forms of the book, the essay challenges traditional publishing practices and radically reinterprets the arrangement, space, elements, and structures of books, opening the concepts of the book and reading toward more conceptual and artistic possibilities.

As a result, I began to consider how books that have already undergone structural disruption could be used to express my understanding of reading as an event. As stacks of flat printed and bound pages, how might books themselves shape reading? Yoko Ono's conceptual artists book *Grapefruit* revealed to me the possibility of books triggering reader behaviour. The book contains a series of event scores and functions as a set of instructions or proposals for action, inviting readers to realise, reinterpret, and transform them. I believe this directly responds to the statement: *"In the new art the reading itself proves that the reader understands."*

However, rather than relying on explicit instructions, I wanted readers to understand my themes through the book itself. This led me to distort and reconfigure structures and bindings, while introducing shifts between different perspectives of reading, allowing the book to present not only text and images, but also movement, dynamism, and event-like qualities.

Stage Two: printing onto media beyond the conventional book, disrupting the material properties of the book in order to challenge the conditions through which reading is activated.