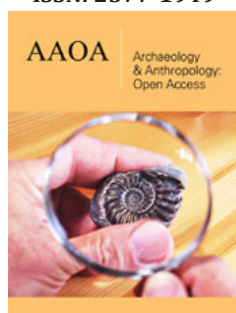


Thinking With Bookworks: The Making and Sharing of Artist's Books to Generate Relational Networks

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ISSN: 2577-1949



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Submission:  October 10, 2022

Published:  October 31, 2022

Volume 4 - Issue 3

How to cite this article: Jo Milne. Thinking With Bookworks: The Making and Sharing of Artist's Books to Generate Relational Networks. Arch & Anthropol Open Acc. 4(3). AAOA. 000607. 2022. DOI: [10.31031/AAOA.2022.04.000607](https://doi.org/10.31031/AAOA.2022.04.000607)

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Abstract

Collaborative practices are common in the making of artist's books, in their fabrication and in the genealogies they establish. Artist's books can foment affective entanglements and foster multiplications, facilitated by their nature as entities working at what Anna Tsing [1] would describe as the 'unruly edges' of the art world. The collaborative nature of making and sharing bookwork's enables diffraction and creates different forms of kinship. Although artists' books form part of many museum collections my focus here lies on what Magali Rabassa, describes as 'organic books', as opposed to commercial books, [2] and how collaborative bookmaking practices can become "become transformative connections-merging inherited and constructed relations [3]. Where the making, sharing and reading of artists books evidence a form of what María Puig de la Bellacasa describes as 'thinking with'. A thinking where the emphasis is placed "not so much [on] who or what it aims to include and represent...but what it generates; how it actually creates a collective and populates a world. Instead of reinforcing the self of a lone thinker's figure, ...Thinking-with makes the work of thought stronger: it both supports singularity by the situated contingencies it draws upon and fosters contagious potential with its reaching out [4]. This article points to how the fabrication and sharing of bookwork's can generate relational networks.

Keywords: Transmitter; Library; Publishing houses; Public museum, Artist's books, Thinking-with

Introduction

The development of artists books involves multiple agencies, from the material to the human, and the collaborative nature of alternative publishing practices, in particular, affords practices of thinking and writing that generate diffraction and multiplicity. Where the publications could be said to work "to make a difference - a diffraction...the ways in which (a) difference is made here do not reside so much in contrasts and contradictions but in prolongations and interdependencies" [5]. I will use a series of examples to point to practices of collaboration across temporalities and social groups, used to fabricate new narratives. They adhere to a writing-with, that as Maria Puig de Bellacasa, proposes is not who or what it aims to include and represent in a text, but what it generates: it actually creates collective, it populates the world. Instead of reinforcing the figure of a lone thinker, the voice in such a text seems to keep saying: I am not the only one. Thinking makes the work of thought stronger, it supports its singularity and contagious potential. Writing-with is a practical technology that reveals itself as both descriptive (it inscribes) and speculative (it connects). It builds relation and community," [6]. The bookmaking practices considered here operate as practices of making-with, that creating on the one hand, a form of artistic genealogy and on the other, an interactive kinship. As Adrian Johns asserts in *The Nature of the Book* 'any printed book is, as a matter of fact, both the product of one complex set of social and technological processes and also the starting point for another' [7]. But in this article, I wish to highlight how the production of artists' books can generate other forms of relational networks. Networks which differ from those traditionally involved within the publication of commercial books (editor; proof-reader; designer; publisher; printer; writer etc.) as they adhere to other forms of

production and interaction. To outline these relational networks, I will consider *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (Ruscha, 1963), *Encants* (Tarrella, 2010) and the wall of books presented by Dulcinea Catadora at the MAR (2013) in correlation with other bookwork's. My conceptualization of these relational processes draws on the assertion of cultural theorist, Johanna Drucker that a future history of the book must "grasp an alternative conception – in which a book is conceived as a distributed object, not a thing, but a set of intersecting events, material conditions, and activities" [8]. Vital to the relational networks established by the artist's books considered here, is their nature as physical objects, for in bookwork's both visual and tactile properties resonate in the hand [9]. My focus is therefore on books made with paper, for artist's books are registers, not just of what they transmit but also how the paper acts as a nexus, documenting the passage of time. Ink fades and paper yellows, holding a "zine from even just ten years ago feels like holding an historical document. It's easier to place it, the writing inside, and the person who wrote it, in a particular moment in time to contextualize it. Words appearing on a computer screen, even if they are date-stamped seem the opposite" [10]. For paper books mediate the connections not just of "people" but of bodies" [11].

Bookworks

There are many denominations used to refer to the book as a work of art, and their resistance to definition has led me to identify them as 'singular publications' to evade their pigeonholing in the articulation of the six annual artist's book fairs organized at EINA, Printed and as 'resistant transmitters' [9]. But as my endeavor here is to highlight how artist's books can be used to undermine traditional commercial practices and generate community, I will adopt the term bookworks [12], as it is a hybrid of noun and verb. For I am interested in correlating the development of bookworks with what the Hispanic scholar, Magali Rabassa identifies as 'organic books' that can function as: "an autonomous object that emerges not from institutional dynamics and structures...but rather from collective practices of experimentation and becoming" [13]. Where procedures of fabrication and distribution are used to "disorganize, unsettle, and disorder (disorder)...the social relations and economic principles that underlie commercial, profit-oriented production" [14]. The bookworks considered here point to their agency within the multiplication of narratives through affective engagements, across temporalities and peoples. Not all of the books considered in this article were realized by multiple authors, but all I believe work with a form of co-authorship, a form of thinking-with that is more or less implicit. This relational thinking "creates new patterns out of previous multiplicities, intervening by adding layers of meaning rather than merely deconstructing or conforming to ready-made categories" [15]. Where different forms of co-authorship seek "to think with: rather than indicating a method to 'unveil' what matters of fact are, ... thus not so much a notion that explains the construction of things than it addresses how we participate in their possible becoming" [16]. This thinking with, is correlated by Puig de la Bellacasa with a speculative affective mode, operating with "a transformative ethos rather than

a normative ethics. ... attuned to ways of knowing on the ground, involved with effects and consequences, with an ethicality involved in sociotechnical assemblages in mundane, ordinary, and pragmatic ways" [16]. In the following, I will outline two branches of networks generated through bookwork's; looking first at how the practices of appropriation and variation are used to generate a form of relational genealogy through a consideration of Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* and then at more socially interactive relations.

Genealogies in Bookworks - The Generation of Kinship through Self-Referentiality

The use of recycling, or appropriation of ideas and materials is a common practice within the art world, but in artist's books appropriation often establishes a form of genealogy or co-authorship that works cross temporalities. This recycling of ideas and materials can take the form of palimpsests, altered books or reinterpretations, but as Sowden [17] suggests, the appropriation of the seminal book *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* by Ed Ruscha is almost a genre in itself. Ruscha's book sowed the seed for the acceptance of the book as a form of art, while at the same time questioning what a book could be. Instantly recognizable by the simple red typeface of the cover, the book documents the gasoline stations on the route driven by Ruscha. Ruscha was not interested in a hand-made book [18], so much as he wanted the book to act as a consumer-friendly transmitter of his ideas. Consequently, he used cheap commercial printing systems, the low production costs thereby enabling him to distribute his book at 3\$ a copy and reach a different audience. The multiple appropriations of Ruscha's book establish a form of genealogy, each reinterpretation generating a new narrative but at the same time establishing an aesthetic kinship. Ruscha is afforded an unstated but fully acknowledged co-authorship. Each iterative transformation diffracts new temporalities and locations in what could become an entangled spacetime mattering [19], a process that continues, with 2022 seeing the publication of Eric Week's *Twenty-six Wawa Stores* (2022). A similar genealogy can be identified in relation to Stéphane Mallarme *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance), published posthumously in 1897. The work, often seen as a forerunner of artist's book, used text to evoke images, for Mallarme envisioned the book as a 'spiritual instrument', in which different font sizes and types could entangle the reader in multiple pathways. The book already pointed to the possibility of multiple readings, but as with Ruscha's *26 Gasoline Stations*, various artists have since reinterpreted the text. In his *Un Coup de Dés* Marcel Brothers (1969) blocked out the text with black rectangles printed on translucent paper, that enable a reading of the lozenges of movement across but also through the pages, an interpretation echoed in turn by the laser die cut version, by Michalis Pichler (2008), where the blocks are reduced to laser cut holes. While Jérémie Bennequin *Le Hasard n'abolira jamais un Coup de Dés* (2013) progressively decomposes the book, erasing the text over a period of days, until the contents is reduced to a white page. Each version entangles Mallarme in an aesthetic kinship and diffracts the original text into variant forms. These relations differ from those I identify in the following

section, where the focus shifts to the engendering of community interactions rather than aesthetic kinships.

Encants (Tarruella, 2010) Cartonera Publishing

Encants (Tarruella, 2010) and the wall of books presented by the collective Dulcinéia Catadora as part of the exhibition *O abrigo e o terreno* (Shelter and Land), although very different in their realization and aesthetic, share a fundamental belief in the role books can play as generators of relations. With this I mean the books generated a network of actants akin to those identified by Bruno Latour [21] in his analysis of scientific laboratory life, where the actants (human and material) and their forms of knowledge and knowhow inform both the fabrication and the distribution. The two projects, operate on what Anna Tsing would call the 'unruly edges' [1] for although presented in public galleries they evaded the restrictions of the art market to generate new forms of exchange. Forms of exchange aimed at generating community and knowledge, for in both cases, the bookworks were the result of a process of distillation and were presented as gifts. Both, Tarruella and Dulcinéia Catadora sought to use books as catalysts, to change the way we look and read but also to remind us of our entanglement with each other.

Encants

Encants, developed in 2010 by Rosa Tarruella, with the aid of a research grant from the Catalan government, was presented in the Espai Barra de Ferro in 2011 in the form of a shelf of books (Figure 1). The covers of the books established a kinship with the Gallimard publishing house, by adopting the colour and format of the editorial. The interior, however, presented a random selection of magazine and newspaper cuttings, prints and other types of paper collated into fragmentary narratives (Figure 2). Each page provided a snippet of some aspect of the collections of the artist and her father, brought together in a "cutting together apart" [22]. The discolored magazine pages, and the advertising styles redolent of the forties and seventies point to times past, but also interweave more recent presents, in the form of proofs of Tarruella's etchings. The title plays on the double meaning of the word *Encants* (in Catalan the word means charms or enchantments but is also used to refer to a flea market) and this underpins Tarruella's articulation of the book. In referring to the *Encants*, the flea market that sits on the Glories roundabout that formed part of Tarruella's daily route, she locates it within Barcelona but also refers to the unexpected delights of foraging. The book exemplifies the unexpected collisions that occur in flea markets, where magazines, textbooks and discarded false teeth can nestle together amidst the remnants of discarded lives [23]. *Encants*, recycled the flotsam and jetsam of printed matter accumulated over years into an indexed publication, officially classified by its ISBN number. Tarruella, however,

undermines the role of this ISBN; visually, by distorting the barcode on its cover (Figure 3) but also conceptually, as each copy identified under the ISBN is different. Each book, although sharing a family resemblance, offers a different collation of printed remnants. Tarruella's play on the role of the ISBN number, resonates with Ruscha's frustrated attempts to obtain an ISBN number for *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*. For though Ruscha sent two separate copies to the US Copyright office and the Library of Congress they were rejected [13]. This rejection established Ruscha's book as officially unclassifiable, and even though Ruscha turned the rejection letter into a five-inch advertisement on page 55 of the March 1964 issue of *Artforum*, the book was not accepted as part of the Library of Congress collection. Tarruella's turn with the ISBN, is embedded in her interest in questioning the nature of published books, for *Encants* was designed to be presented as a unit. In the Espai Barra de Ferro, the 180 copies were distributed on a single shelf, that emphasized their uniformity (Figure 1). Only the numbered spines pointed to their possible differentiation. Placed within easy reach, visitors were invited to forage and pick a copy. The project was described by the anthropologist, Octavi Rofes, as a collation and a propagation. A propagation informed by the act of giving, emphasized by Tarruella's presence at the exhibition. For as Rofes suggests, "that which distinguishes the gift from merchandise is its capacity to generate relations. In merchandise, once closed the transaction, the relation between parts is broken; the gift, on the contrary, opens up a chain of alliances, commitments and debts that maintain active the relation. ... [Tarruella's] presence during the donation meant that this was not an anonymous act, impersonal and facilitated proximity and interaction" [24]. Discarded remains became transformed into treasured gifts, a togetherness generated by the gift, but also through the sharing of memories prompted by the fragmentary texts and images. This generation of relations spawned its own aesthetic kinship in the form of the collaborative project, *Encants, Rosa Tarruella* (henceforth *Encants RT*), developed in 2021 by the research group 13L. Where members of the research group, that Rosa Tarruella formed part of until her death, developed different responses to Tarruella's book [25]. In *Encants RT*, each member appropriated Tarruella's methodology interweaving references to the birds or flowers that populated Tarruella's work, or through photographs and texts of the artist. As in the original version only the spine indicated the different versions, for the purpose of the project was to generate a form of co-authorship in homage to Tarruella's diffraction of readings. The presentation of *Encants Rosa Tarruella* at Arts Llibris, Barcelona in 2020 (Figure 4) triggered a response, in those who perused them, to reconsider what could be fabricated from the printed flotsam and jetsam of their own lives, entangling the narratives of Rosa Tarruella with those of 13L and the public who carried the books away¹ (Figure 5).

¹At Arts Llibris 2021 the decision to sell, exchange or gift the variants triggered debate about the nature *Encants*. The importance of this relational network was evidenced in the fact that many members of the group refused to sell the publications and insisted on gifting or exchanging their copies, in line with Tarruella's original proposal.



Figure 1: Exhibition Rosa Tarruella, Encants, Espai Barra de Ferro, 2011.

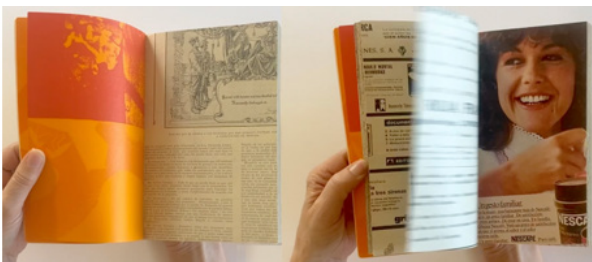


Figure 2: Rosa Tarruella, Encants, 2010. Artist's book.



Figure 3: Rosa Tarruella, Encants, 2010. Artist's book, Edition of 180 Copies.



Figure 4: Antònia Vilá, Encants, Rosa Tarruella, 2021, Presented by 13L, Arts Libris, Barcelona.



Figure 5: 13L, Encants Rosa Tarruella Arts Libris 2021 Encants.

O Abrigo e o Terreno - Dulcinéia Catadora

A similar mechanism of giving was used in the wall of books presented by Dulcinéia Catadora in the exhibition, *O Abrigo e o terreno*, that inaugurated the new Museo de Arta de Rio (MAR) in 2013. Unlike Tarruella's shelf, however, the wall offered a diverse array of publications made by the collective Dulcinéia Catadora. Founded in 2007 by Glycerin, Luis Rosa and three waste pickers, Dulcinéia Catadora forms part of a network of cartonera publishing houses, whose practices challenge and reconfigure the contexts in which they work. Cartoneras distribute handmade books, generally composed of photocopied A4 pages stapled into a hand painted cover made of recycled cardboard, purchased from cardboard collectors, or cartoneros. These publications are often sold at modest prices, with any profits used to facilitate the livelihoods of cartoneros or the cooperative. The publications evidence the locality of their manufacture, in the case of Dulcinéia, the cardboard comes from the recycling cooperative Glycerin where

the imprint is sited. Whereas in the cartonera, Editorial Retazos² (Buenos Aires) fabric remnants, or retazos, are used to make the book covers, in recognition of the multiple workshops dedicated to garment fabrication in Buenos Aires. Here, even the shapes of the fabric scraps are respected “in an effort to preserve the presence of the worker who cut it” [26]. Workshops are a key organizational aspect of cartonera publishing and their productions are often based around workshops or Encuentros. The Portuguese word *Encontro*, can be translated as a meeting, gathering, convergence or conference, “a method of networking, while also disseminating and celebrating work, regularly used by cartoneras” [27]. Lúcia Rosa, the founder of Dulcinéia Catadora, highlights the importance of these networks, ‘of course, it’s all about networks’ [28]. Equally Sergio Fong (La Rueda cartonera,) insisted that “all those who take part in the cartonera movement are interconnected. The network enables us to know, and inform one another, about what’s going on in the cartoner world. It allows us to support one another in a brotherly way” [29]. Composed of a multiplicity of alliances cartoners use bookwork’s as a tool for socio-artistic collectives, their goal, being an ‘affective politics’ [30].

Dulcinéia Catadora at Museo De Arte Do Rio (Mar), Rio De Janeiro

Dulcinea’s installation in MAR, was different, however, in that it was situated within the constraints of the inaugural exhibition of a public museum. Made possible “by a year-long series of face-to-face sessions with residents of the Morro da Providencia” [31], the piece enabled the residents to create their own architectural intervention in the museum, a wall of cartoner books documenting their concerns. The tower of books acted as a monument to the creative vitality of the Morro community, overlooked and endangered by the very process of redevelopment and gentrification epitomized by the MAR museum. The wall reminded the visiting public of the proximity but also, more importantly, the potential of those who lived within the Morro. Among the publications presented in the wall were; *Soluções Providenciais*, (Providential Solutions) that showed photographs and comments from the group about the improvisations that favela residents develop to resolve housing difficulties; *De Lá pra Cá, de Cá pra Lá* (From there to here, from here to there) that documented the desires of the young residents to get to know and move through spaces in the city, collated with the group’s dialogues about rights and citizenship, while *Nós, Daqui* (Us from here) recorded the place threatened by its own disappearance, and the unravelling of the affective ties of about three hundred families. In total, the Morro residents made around 1100 books and the residents received five reals for each booklet assembled. Dulcinéia Catadora’s monument of books did not succumb to being a static display within the museum, however, so much as the viewer could dismantle it, for the books

were presented as gifts. The viewer was invited to discover the narratives generated by the workshops and to take them away, to make them their own, museum staff replenishing the shelves of the wall as they emptied. The reader became an embodied participant, a co-producer of meaning, controlling the pace of the reading [32]. The books acted as seeds, disseminating the voices and concerns of a commonly ostracized community. Unlike Tarruella’s project where the diversity of the contents was concealed under the guise of a Gallimard publication, the wall celebrated the multiplicity of the residents’ voices, the colour and diversity of the books becoming for some an invasive presence. But both examples celebrate the multiple narratives generated through a process of thinking with, and both generated regenerations; *Encants* leading to *Encants a RT*, and Dulcinea’s wall to projects in various other localities.

Feminist Fanzines and Networks of Intimacy

The clunky aesthetic and vibrant painted colour of cartonera publishing, that evidences the physical act that goes into their creation resonates with the handmade ethos of many feminist fanzines or Girl zines. Where the maker’s body is made present, through the rough edges left by scissors, or the remnants of tape that resonate in the photocopy into the final copy. Generated often within the confines of the home, their very domesticity causes “little eddies of artefacts [to] accrue around girl zines, circulating between readers and creators. Zines instigate intimate, affectionate connections between their creators and readers, not just communities but what I am calling embodied communities, made possible by the materiality of the zine medium” [33]. In these productions, as in *Encants* or the cartonera publication, the emphasis is placed on the making and sharing, rather than on commodification. Many zinners admit that fanzines generally cost more to make than they recoup but continue as they delight in establishing relational networks. Gifting also occurs, as in the case of Cindy Crabb who pushed one of her zines into the pocket of an unknown girl, the zine creating community “between two young women who don’t know each other and may not find community otherwise” [34]. Crabb’s gesture described by Piepmeier as the creation of a “currency of intimacy”, in which “the tangible object [the book] transforms an imagined relationship into an embodied one” [35].

Conclusion

In an age of electronic media, when the future of the book itself is often called into question, bookworks enable subtle subversions, in their ability to materialize relations and ethics of horizontality and autonomy [8]. The importance of such relations is evident, for as Avier Barilaro, a member of the Eloisa Cartonera, states, “Affective relations are at the heart of the cartonera movement, since we’re

²In and around the city of Buenos Aires there are over 30,000 small garment factories (called talleres textiles, which may employ fewer than 50 workers). The workshops employ mainly Bolivian migrants, often in precarious conditions, producing apparel for national and export markets. Editorial Retazos was founded in 2010 by Bolivian migrants with experience in textiles, and their first publication *No olvidamos!* (We Do Not Forget) marked the anniversary of a fire in 2006 in a textile workshop in the Caballito neighborhood of Buenos Aires, in which six people lost their lives [8].

outside capitalism and all that, we value everything, affective” (Cartoneras, YouTube). The sharing implicit in the Encuentros and workshops that underpin the practices of the cartoneras, or the gifting of Tarruella’s *Encants* resonate with the flurry of exchanges that occur at the end of artist’s book fairs [9]. The affective agency of making bookworks, the practice of thinking through doing, can “bring people into conversation, provide them with a space to be creative and imperfect, and remove some of the stakes-the dangers of online media, the gate-keepers of mainstream publishing” (Piepmeier, P. 153.) Organic bookworks enable a proliferation of voices to diffract into alternative narratives, acting as nodes of agency for the sharing of knowledge and entangling of communities [36]. For they evidence how thinking with celebrates multiplicity and can create “diffraction”. Where diffraction is seen as a means to multiply, to generate difference rather than a mere “reflection” of sameness [37]. For Cartonera publications, and bookworks like *Encants* propitiate interactions in which everything participates, everything acts, in an ongoing process of world making. Bookworks can offer an alternative to more commercial capitalist Puig de la Bellacasa, and “enact a public pedagogy of hope” [38].

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