

Two kinds of artists' books were presented during the exhibition, accompanied by this catalogue. On one hand there were books published by *Editions Incertain Sens*, a publishing house founded in the year 2000, on the initiative of Leszek Brogowski, at the University of Rennes 2 Haute Bretagne. The books were freely accessible to the visitors, who were able to touch and feel their pages, open the volumes, browse through, look, read... — as if they found themselves in a good library. On the other hand there were many different publications produced by artists, such as books and brochures, posters, flyers, postcards, self-adhesive stickers, etc., which were donated to the permanent collection of Ujazdowski Castle by the artists collaborating with *Editions Incertain Sens*. This second category of publications, considered as objects belonging to the archives, were displayed on the walls of the gallery, framed and glass-protected (postcards, posters, and flyers), or in show-cases (books). But even then, a particularly eager visitor could, upon special demand, gain access to those glass-cased books, so that a book would once more be a book, which may be touched and felt, skimmed through, looked at, and read... — as if it would be in a good library.

LESZEK BROGOWSKI

*I am an interested party in the case of artists' books*¹

Somebody remarked: "I can tell by my own reaction to it that this book is harmful." But let him only wait and perhaps one day he will admit to himself that this same book has done him a great service by bringing out the hidden sickness of his heart and making it visible.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

The practice of art in the form of artists' books is only meaningful as a stance and an activity which are totally radical (*radix*, Latin for: origin, foundation, source). In nineteenth-century Poland the so-called 'positivists' spoke of "Work at the foundation". For the French Revolution human and citizens' rights represented similar foundations; the goal of the revolution was not so much the repetition or repairing of the old models, but on the contrary, the construction of a new society based on a universal foundation, or origin. Thus the revolution was supposed to break with historical patterns, and — at least for the time being— to step beyond history. Jules Michelet or Walter Benjamin both agree on the idea of revolution as time brought to a halt: a way-station of history, necessary for the rethinking of those very foundations,

¹ The following catalogue text was written for the purpose of a presentation of *Editions Incertain Sense* in the Centre for Contemporary Art — Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. The original Polish title: "*Jestem stroną w książce artysty*" is a play on words that cannot be translated into English; in fact, the Polish word '*strona*' means both 'page' and 'side' as in: 'on your side' (or as Americans say: 'on the same page', sic!), or in legal terms: 'an interested party'. Thus, by saying "I am an interested party" the title also conveys the sense of "I am another page in an artists' book".

upon which the new epoch will slowly begin to emerge. Today, perhaps more than ever, we need a reflective pause. However, the act of stepping beyond history became a history of revolution, originating the idea of permanent revolution, of which the only permanent manifestation seems to be, in fact, art. Later, Harold Rosenberg pointed to the paradox of the ‘tradition of the new’ in art, a tradition threatened to some degree by postmodernism.

But of course in art, just as anywhere else, only a radical attitude will be able to open new possibilities and territories, because such a stance can lead to an experience which is fresh yet built on essential values — the values so easily lost in a life struggle between an unwanted compromise and daily news with their emotional upheavals. The “Presentations of artists’ books. Editions Incertain Sens” in the Gallery of Document of the Centre of Contemporary Art — Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw has as its subject experimentation on the field of art’s possibilities and a redefinition of the concept of art, as well as being an essay in formulating practical foundation rules for this type of publishing activity. The idea is that while “aerating the book” (to use an expression of Francesco Petrarca), we will at the same time get some fresh air from art.

During the fifties and the sixties, the *radical* rethinking of the role of an artist in society, and of the place given to art in modern culture, created a condition of many possibilities for development of new artistic practices, such as, for example, artists’ books and periodicals; although it is quite obvious that well established relationships between the visual arts and the whole culture of print, press and bookmaking existed for a long time. However, the almost immediate capitulation of ‘critical’ art to the market economy succeeded, at least to some degree, in disabling or suppressing the new practices as early as the beginning of the seventies. Despite these difficulties, many artists continued to engage in these activities, carrying the radical stance, particularly that of bookmaking, to this day; as an instrument of democracy a book has the potential to be reproduced in an unlimited number of copies, while at the same time, by refusing to yield to the fetishism of the artist’s signature it behaves in accordance with the economy and culture of the book rather than that of the market of art. “No signature or trade-marking [...]”, wrote Ad Reinhardt in 1957. “One should never let the influence of evil demons gain control of the brush”².

Today we no longer have problems finding ways to observe the origins and development of this type of artistic productions, from the early sixties to the present. “Département des Estampes et de la Photographie” of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris contains a large number of artists’ books³; Fonds Régional d’Art Contemporain (FRAC) in Châteaugiron (with whom *Editions Incertain Sens* closely collaborates and has co-published several books) has their own important collection of artists books going back to the beginning of this phenomenon. Artists’ publications are among the primary interests of the

² Ad Reinhardt, “Twelve Rules for a New Academy”, *Art News*, March 1957, reprinted in: *Art-as-Art. The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* edited by Barbara Rose, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991, p.205.

³ By invitation of Marie-Cécile Miessner who is in charge of this collection, *Editions Incertain Sens* organized a presentation of artists’ books in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France called “Livres, imprimés et maquettes” (March 2003). The presentation was accompanied by a catalogue; on the same occasion, the author of this publication wrote a text-manifesto published in the bi-monthly journal of the BNF, *Nouvelles de l’estampe* (n° 187, March-April 2003, pp. 35-37) under the title: *l’Art, le livre, même combat*. The Polish version of this manifesto is soon to be published by *Obieg*.

‘artothèque’ —directed by Françoise Lonardoni— in the Bibliothèque Municipale in Lyon. There are many regular artists’ books fairs, like for example: *Biennale du livre d’artiste* in Saint-Yrieix-Perche, *Small Publishers Fair* in London or *ArtistsBook International (ABI)* with its last appearance in Paris, in 2005. Also, beginning in 2005, the *Suisse Art Basel*, perhaps the most renowned of contemporary art markets, opened a section entirely dedicated to artists’ books, while *Art Monthly*, a British art magazine of an international reach, for many years has had a column devoted to events and publishing news in the field of artists’ books. We must also mention, in addition to this very sketchy list, many monographic presentations and books on the subject of artists’ publications⁴.

Starting in the year 2000, the department of visual arts of the University of Rennes 2 Haute Bretagne slowly began to prepare grounds for the initiation of a special program, which will allow study and research of the phenomenon of artists’ books. *Editions Incertain Sens* is the name taken by this program, which makes the actual publishing of artists’ books an inherent and necessary element. In 2002, in collaboration with the research centre of the philosophy of art of the University of Paris I — Pantheon-Sorbonne, on the joint initiative of Anne Mœglin-Delcroix and Leszek Brogowski, the program originated a seminar entitled “*Papier en Action*” (“Paper in Action”), dedicated to artists’ publications and contemporary art. Furthermore, an international symposium on the subject of artists’ books⁵, organized in the context of this seminar, together with a cycle of one-day seminar sessions, taking place alternately in Paris and Rennes, allowed us to consolidate the above-mentioned research around such topics as the concept of the authenticity and originality of the art work⁶, models of creative act and aesthetic experience, sociology of exchange in the field of art, and ways of propagating art in contemporary society. At the same time, the program initiated an effort to create a network of contacts with the goal of facilitating exchanges of information and international collaboration. Another important intention of the program is to maintain a

⁴ Among the most important are:

— Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, *Livres d’artistes*, a catalogue to the exhibition organized in 1985 in Bibliothèque Publique d’Informations (BPI) in the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou/Éditions Herscher, 1985.

— [Simon Cutts], *The Artist Publisher. A Survey by Coracle Press*, London, Crafts Council Gallery, 1986.

— Michael Gleissmeier, *Die Bücher der Künstler. Publikationen und Editionen seit den sechziger Jahren in Deutschland*, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1994.

— Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artist’ Books*, New York, Granary Books, 1994 (the new edition 2004).

— Ulises Carrión, *Quant aux livres. On Books*, texts collected by Juan J. Agius, Genève, Héros-Limites, 1997.

— Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, *Esthétique du livre d’artiste 1960/1980*, Paris, Jean-Michel Place/BNF, 1997.

— Cornelia Lauf, Clive Phillipot, *Artist / Author: Contemporary Artists’ Books*, New York, The American Federation of Arts, 1998.

— Paolo Silveira, *A página violada. Da ternura à injúria na construção do livro de artista*, Porto Alegre, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2001.

— Anne Mœglin-Delcroix (with Liliana Dematteis, Giorgio Maffei, Annalisa Rimaudo) *Guardare, raccontare, pensare, conservare. Quattro percorsi del libro d’artista dagli anni ’60 od oggi*, Mantova, Edizioni Corraini, 2004.

— Bright, Betty, *No Longer Innocent : Book Art in America 1960-1980*, New York Granary Books, 2005.

— Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, *Sur le livre d’artiste. Articles et écrits de circonstance (1981-2005)*, Marseille, Le mot et le reste, 2006.

⁵ A symposium “*Livre d’artiste: l’esprit de réseau*” took place in Rennes on May 17-18, 2003, with participation of university scholars from Spain, Brazil, Ireland, Italy and France, doctorate students working at the Universities of Paris I and Rennes 2, as well as artists and publishers.

⁶ “The idea is unique, the multiple is original, only the means ceased being individual”, wrote François Barré in 1967, (“Signification du multiple”, *Le Multiple: design, graphisme, éditions multiples, structures polycycliques*, edited by Abraham Moles and François Barré, Bordeaux, Sigma, 1967, pages not numbered.) An old aesthetic order combined the quality of uniqueness of an artwork with the quality of an object hand-made by the artist. Needless to say, in the case of artists’ books the exigency of uniqueness is still in force, which does not prevent a book from existing in a thousand, or more, copies, because neither originality, nor uniqueness of art relies on a physical object. In consequence, we could repeat after Nietzsche who wrote: “art of the artwork is only ancillary”[“*die <Kunst> der Kunstwerke, nur ein Anhängsel*”], *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für Freie Geister*, Zweiter Band, fragment 174, München, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1962, p.92.

close relationship between research and education, as well as to explore ways and strategies of introducing this type of publishing activity into the book culture in the era of mass media. Sharing experience between artists and students, and the process of producing artists' publications in the context of a university, which by now is an integral part of the learning curriculum in Rennes, constitute a direct link connecting academic work with the artistic world and community.

The presentation of artists' books in the Gallery of the Document of Ujazdowski Castle was conceived with the intention of deep rethinking of the intellectual, artistic, and political consequences of inscribing art into the tradition and culture of books, as well as the ethical and practical implications of choosing such a perspective. The book is, according to Marcel Duchamp, a barrage against 'the stupidity of painters'; an artists' book is an alternative mode of understanding and practicing art — this is why it is an inestimably rich experimental field. If we had to describe the innovation which is here made possible, in the most schematic terms, we would say that first and foremost we must take into consideration the specific status of the artwork conceived as a book, that is as an object which can be reproduced and, most importantly, with the act of reproduction written into the very structure and way of its existence, rather than understood as a mere *après-coup* operation, designed to copy an already existing — yet *differently* existing — artwork. A book exists in a large number of copies, all of which have exactly the same original status, or, in other words, none of the copies can be distinguished as 'the original'. Without exception, all of the books published by *Editions Incertain Sens* come out in the minimum of one thousand copies. Of course some of them are already out of print (Eric Watier, *Inventaire des destructions*, Jean-Baptiste Ganne, Karl Marx, *Capital illustré*), yet, as we know, books can never be really *out* of print. The book today is a new face and possibility of art; art is a book set free. But the status of an artwork is always related to the conditions of its making; books are industrial creations, which throws the question of a 'creative act' into an entirely different perspective. The act of creation now becomes a process deeply involved in the material and economic setting of production and, in consequence, there's a need, and there has been a genuine effort, to create alternative relationships between the culture and a wide field of technology, industry, and economy, an effort based on entirely new attitudes than the ones largely used in our times (*sponsoring, marketing, trademark image*, etc.). Also very different is the manner in which the viewer (the reader?) encounters the artwork in the form of an artists' book. He, or she comes into a direct contact with the work, both literally and figuratively. First of all, the viewer *meets* the book by physically taking it in his hands, touching the pages, and, by doing so — refusing its status of a museum piece, the status of 'decoration on the wall' (after all, an artists' book is only another book on a library shelf). At the same time, the viewer *encounters* the work in his reader's attitude, which is oriented toward the interpretation and the quest for meaning, instead of assuming a purely contemplative stance, generally attributed as natural for the perception of an artwork situated in a gallery space, and often reduced to the pleasure-seeking experience of arts.

Traditional art spaces, even those open to experimentation with the book — like for example Ujazdowski Castle, the host of *Editions Incertain Sens* — are nonetheless poorly prepared and maladapted to deal with

the book culture: books, locked away in glass-cabinets, cease to be books and turn into objects, or perhaps, in the best of scenarios, into paintings. Every book can only be itself on the condition of being handled, of having its pages turned and read through; in the ideal situation a book is being taken out of a library so that it can be read in an intimate setting of a home, or ‘as a bedtime story’ so to speak. Despite the financial difficulty experienced by today’s readers, books are being purchased from bookstores, thrift-stores and yard sales, or via the Internet... If only all of that could happen to art! If only art were capable of insinuating itself — so naturally — into the fabric of everyday life! If only art had the power to work its way into every hearth, to inspire lust in a reader who’d be willing to spend his last penny, excited by the newest title in a bookstore window! A library would become a new site for art, and whether private or public, it could be a place where artwork is not put away in depositories, inaccessible to the general audience, distanced or cut off from life, but on the contrary; a one where art objects merge with the mainstream of life, where we can sip our *latte* after work (following the example of Umberto Eco in *De Bibliotheca*) browsing through an [artists’] book, or when we ‘hit the sack’ in the evening with our favourite book in hand. Of course, in some sense, art would have to withdraw from its privileged and exclusive spaces; an artists’ book can be read on a bus (in a crowded bus one could perhaps risk poking somebody with a piece of art...), or in a bar, hopelessly awaiting a beloved yet somewhat negligent person, yet still with a book and with the heart beating faster on the amazing discovery that one can still speak (and read!) of such foolish things as freedom, or freethinking... If a book were read everywhere and at every imaginable moment then the place of art would be equally omnipresent, because the artists’ book initiates an experience in which art is entirely a book, and a book is — art⁷. Art is indeed a book, not a precious object that hinders the normal ways of an entire household, with the eternal question: where to put it? — on a wall, already covered with similar objects? — and do we really need to redecorate the apartment in order to match the colour? — or perhaps (yet another solution) the work can be locked away in a bank safe?... The book is also a complete artwork, and not its mere reproduction; it is neither an improvement of a book with a medium of art, nor a transformation of a book into art.

So-called ‘artistic’ books, *avant-garde* books, and many different, otherwise extremely beautiful types of books, as well as ‘*liberature*’ or the ‘art of book’, etc. are beyond the scope of this presentation. For instance, works of famous poets, illustrated by equally famous painters, have become a well established and fairly frequent practice since the end of the nineteenth century. On a certain level these efforts expand the means of artistic expression, without however aiming to modify the very concept, or status of art. William Blake illustrated his own poetry, as well as the works of Dante, John Milton, Edward Young, and many others. By placing itself outside the inherited context of a specific framework of competence, the artists’ book challenges set artistic categories, such as being a painter, or a poet.

⁷ Everything that Anne Møeglin-Delcroix has written on the subject of artists’ books (see: the bibliography in the note 4) is so essential and suggestive that sometimes I have an impression of simply repeating her sentences and ideas without always being entirely sure where, or when, she formulated them. I know she will forgive me because in the debate about artists’ books we are always ‘on the same page’.

We are not interested in *illustrations* — even the most outstanding — contributed by artists to various book and press publications, even though many artists, from the nineteenth century on, gain more of their public recognition from collaborations with the press than from painting itself. Postimpressionists often published drawings in newspapers and revues; but even though their ongoing collaboration with the anarchist press is indisputably due for a major study of historical criticism, it still cannot be considered as a pre-figuration of the artists' book.

Graphic design also lies outside the limits of this presentation; however, mainly by virtue of constructivism, graphic design played a major role in creating a true mass culture. The artists' book is, in fact, by definition *anti-design*, for the reason of not allowing itself to adopt the attitude, so typical of any *design*, which forces the viewer into a hierarchical structure of perception, imposes an immediate and *unequivocal* readability of the text, the ergonomics and efficiency of communication, and even the specific *tempo* of reading.

We are not speaking of *books considered as paintings or sculptures*, i.e. hand-produced in a single copy by an artist. Needless to say, this type of practice widens the arsenal of forms, but the concern here is quite the opposite: to keep art free from an old-fashioned (and therefore: already transgressed) tendency to endlessly perpetuate new forms. Despite their external appearances, those one-off, hand-made 'artistic books' cannot pretend to constitute books in the full meaning of the term. For the idea and praxis of the book can never be reduced to the form.

The artists' book is also distinctly different from the concept of *bibliophilia*, where the book is being treated as a form of a 'noble' graphic art, or perhaps of an engraving, which goes together with the idea of a limited, and sometimes hand-signed number of copies. From the point of view of the invention of the book, which allows the possibility of boundless and direct democratization of intellectual values, in both the forms of image and text, any attempt at such artificial and arbitrary limitation imposed upon circulation, verges on scandal. *Bibliophilia*, which certainly played a non-negligible role in the history of art and literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a practice forced on art by the mechanisms of the market economy. The signature left by an artist on the hand-numbered copies of a book, despite a common belief in its banality that is on the point of an utter lack of significance, constitutes in fact a gesture of compliance with an unlimited fetishization of art, the goal of which is, of course, primarily commercial⁸.

Finally, the artists' book is not a catalogue of works which it may or may not be reproducing; it is — if the word itself still has any meaning — a work of art *sui generis*, a work written into the culture of books.

⁸ When the artist signs his books during a reading or an book fair, his signature, despite being a fetish, does not carry the same meaning, i.e. does not validate the relation of the systematic character of a 'goods-for-sale' transaction in relationship to art. In the majority of cases, the name of the author printed on the cover of a book is quite sufficient to guarantee its originality. Why wouldn't it satisfy the artist? Nietzsche, for instance, considered that the name of the author on the title page was already too much: "Whenever the artist's name is visible in the title" — he wrote — "the reader delights in diluting the quintessence by all the details which he knows about the author, including the most personal ones, and in this way, he destroys the purpose of the book.", op. cit., fragment 156, p.81. From an ideal point of view, books, according to this philosopher, should be published anonymously, because strangely enough only then would the original intention of the author not be distorted.

The main goal of the present researches, essays, and experiments, is trying to identify, among many other phenomena existing on the fringe of art- and bookmaking, these artistic activities rooted in the culture of books, which oblige us to reflect upon the most basic premises of the art theory, and, perhaps, to redefine them; furthermore, to criticize and dismantle the whole aesthetic ideology that determines the place of art in social reality. It is one of many possible lines of attack in the relentless battle of art for a place in the concrete reality of life, in the times when the only space supposedly left to art is, according to some Anglo-Saxon authors, in an 'art-world' — or a world of art provided by institutions, which by definition only *take into consideration* art makers on the one hand, and art consumers on the other; there is therefore nothing beyond the art world, nothing but a great void, if we were to believe this nearly theological theory. A quite widespread and dangerous *curatorial* tendency is a natural consequence of this attitude: the creativity of an artist is marginalized, what's more, from now on a potential value of any artistic creation can only be perceived if it coincides with fashionable trends in the 'curatorial world'. In 1986, in his forward to the catalogue of the exhibition *The Artist Publisher. A Survey by Coracle Press*, an Irish artist-publisher and founder of *Coracle Press*, Simon Cutts wrote: "There is an undeniably political thrust to the survey, and one whose full polemic is suggested by the title of the opening category - '*Self-publishing as a Critical Alternative*'. Beyond the simple insistence and continued demonstration of an economy of means of production of material that would otherwise not be seen, lies the critical stance of platforms used by artists to replace the existing, or official, means of that which already exists. Also, at times artists have published as the complete alternative to the gallery."⁹

Artists' books are essentially an ideological and/or practical alternative to conceptions according to which all subversive artistic activity becomes instantly neutralized, either by being implicated in the economic laws ruling over the art market, or by the immediate appropriation of every innovative artistic strategy by the wide culture industry, or, finally, by all the artistic and cultural institutions which allow artists to do anything on the condition that their art will remain within the limits on these institutions, and never overstep the boundary with real life.

An interesting and symptomatic event took place during the attempt to install a of Artists' Books reading room in the Central Library of the University of Rennes 2¹⁰; an event, which to some extent provided *Editions Incertain Sens* with an experience illustrating the above-mentioned perspective. Sometime in mid May 2006 the Artists' Books reading room inaugurated its activity, only to be closed, two weeks later, by the verdict of the Rector and Pro-rector for cultural affairs. The librarians, so we were told, "felt that the initiative was too much of a provocation". A week earlier, the same Pro-rector did not feel in the least embarrassed to praise the value of artistic provocation as an expression of political engagement of art in his speech given at the opening of John Armleder's exhibition in the university's gallery. This situation can be

⁹ [Simon Cutts], op. cit. p.3.

¹⁰ Bruno Di Rosa, the artist whose book *Carnet Bleu (The Blue Notebook)* was previously published by *Editions Incertain Sens* was charged with the task of realizing the Artists' Books reading room; making reference to an aesthetics of 'do-it -yourself from junk' Bruno Di Rosa called his installation "Sans niveau ni mètre". The title is a pun on the famous motto of the anarchists: "Sans dieu ni maître" — no god, no master. "Sans niveau ni mètre" means: "no level, no ruler", but at the same time "mètre" = a measuring tool, and "maître" = master, are homonyms.

explained by the power of art expressed in the form of an artists' book, by the unique capacity to maintain its critical and subversive function, always due to the fact that in order to join life the artists' books slip away from institutional authority, identified by such entities as the art gallery, museum, or art centre. It is in this manner that the artists' book can simultaneously increase the use made of books and the art, and become a sort of laboratory of new cultural situations, such as for instance a 'disaccustoming therapy' for paintings, which, by placing them into the context of books and reading shifts the accent from mere consumption to a more reflective attitude toward painting.

The most important Polish scholar, historian and a critic, who devoted his attention to the relationships between the art and books, studying many aspects of this phenomenon, was Piotr Rypson. However, even among his books — like for instance the recently reprinted *Obraz Słowa*¹¹ (*Image of a Word*) or *Książki i strony* (*Books and Pages*), a catalogue, published in a new book format under the subtitle of *Polska książka awangardowa i artystyczna w XX wieku*¹² (*Polish avant-garde and artistic book of the twentieth century*) — it would be hard to find any title that fits the category of an artists' book the way we defined it. During the seventies only Jarosław Kozłowski (for example: *Reality*, 1972) and Marian Warzecha (for example: *Dokumentacja Metazbioru A*, 1971), whose work isn't even mentioned by Rypson, produced true artists' books; and even though the existence of other artists working the field remains possible, at this point we do not possess any reliable survey to prove it.

However, during the sixties and seventies, first — beginning in 1962¹³: Ed Ruscha, Dieter Roth, Daniel Spoerri and Ben — later, nearly all artists related to conceptual art and Fluxus published artists' books¹⁴. There are many studies documenting the subject¹⁵, despite the lack of a more general agreement about the name that could encompass and most appropriately describe the whole phenomenon. In France even the authors of *bibliophile* publications prefer nowadays to use the term 'artists' books', which of course doesn't clarify the issue of terminology, especially for readers; in the Anglo-Saxon tradition we most often talk of *artists' books*, but also of *book works*, *book art*, etc. Germano Celant, one of the first authors of texts dedicated to artists' books referred to them respectively as *Book as Artwork* (London, 1972), and *Books by Artists* (Toronto, 1981); both terms being close synonyms of *artists' books*. In Poland, where the phenomenon of artists' books hardly existed (as we mentioned before), the debate over the best way to identify it simply did not take place. In most cases, the habitual term of 'artistic books' is too wide, and in consequence, misleading, mainly because of the qualifier 'artistic'. We do not need to go as far as calling to mind the story of Robert Demachy and other pictorialists, whose 'artistic' photography was in fact in drastic contradiction to the artistic ethos of its time. The reality of art and work cannot be determined by means of any criterion that would attempt to distinguish an 'artistic' painting or an 'artistic' book from the

¹¹ Warsaw, Akademia Ruchu, 1989.

¹² Warsaw, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski (The Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle), 2000.

¹³ Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, "1962 et après", in: *Sur le livre d'artiste*, op. cit. pp. 345-373.

¹⁴ Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, London, Phaidon Press Limited, 1998, pp. 225-226: "Books were attractive format for artists of this time: they were reasonably cheap, accessible and transportable [...]. Most of Conceptual Artists produced books."

¹⁵ See: same as in the footnote 4.

‘non-artistic’ ones. Artists of today use all kinds of painting, while an artists’ book is simply a book. Artists that came out of the conceptual tradition fought a long enough battle to cast off the notion of ‘artistic’ painting; similarly there’s no reason to stick with the idea of ‘artistic’ book. Rusha for example frequently emphasized that the fact that the photographs he used in his pioneering artists’ books were very specifically ‘non-artistic’¹⁶; Douglas Huebler criticized the status of artwork as any specific object in general, and, by distancing himself from the idea of *art image*¹⁷, he insisted that his photographs were not interesting as photographs.

“And while the use of book among the avant-garde of the sixties and seventies goes hand in hand with reaching for the means previously unfamiliar to art, always in the name of the main purpose of breaking with the past, isn’t this choice simply astonishing? A book”, —writes Anne Mœglin-Delcroix — “which is perhaps the most traditional of all the means of expression, becomes a medium of choice for many artists, who otherwise show a radical involvement with artistic modernity [...]. This is indeed an interesting paradox, especially in this moment, when so many voices continue to prophesize the fall of the book, as though the appearance of new platforms for image and text was a final stroke to deem it anachronistic.”¹⁸

And yet, we can imagine that looking at the art of the sixties and seventies in Poland in the particular perspective of artists’ books could throw an entirely new light on the meaning and status of art in this period, but also at the ways, in which art and politics of those years influenced one another. To what degree the absence of artists’ books on the artistic scene could be perceived as a direct consequence of the methods used by the communist regime to control the content of the cultural landscape (the preventive censorship in the form of the *Office for control of the press, publications and spectacles*, the state regulation of the distribution of paper, the complete nationalization of the publishing market, etc.), and when was it merely a result of the specific conditions of the Polish *artistic* situation, i.e. the problematic considered as essential at the time, together with the alternative means of expression desired by the artists? What would be the global picture of the ‘PRL’ (the *Popular Republic of Poland*) drawn from this point of view? Is it still conceivable to retrace, piece together, and in a reasonably complete way to document the ephemeral prints, artists’ books and other types of publications of those days, which could fall under the category of artists’ publications presented here, a phenomenon radically separate from the engraving and other ‘noble’ prints? Obviously, all these questions entail topics for additional research, specifically ones concerned with later years, for instance: is it possible to identify — as it was suggested to me by Andrzej Kostłowski — publishing strategies resembling those typical of the artists’ books in the underground press of the late seventies and the eighties? If so, it certainly is still an uninvestigated hypothesis and, we might add, one worthy of a further attention.

¹⁶ “Edward Rusha discusses his perplexing publications”, a conversation with John Coplans, *Artforum*, February 1965, reprinted in fragments in: *L’art conceptuel, une perspective*, Paris, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1990, p. 224.

¹⁷ Douglas Huebler, a debate during a symposium Art Without Space, November 2 1969, quoting after Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972...*, London, Studio Vista, 1973, p. 127.

¹⁸ Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, *Esthétique du livre d’artiste 1960/1980*, op. cit. p.7. See also my review of this book in *Format* issue nr 35/36, 2000, pp. 74-76.

What are the new values, ideas and methods of artistic action, which can be inspired by reflection on artists' books in the era of spectacular capitalism, characterized in the following words of Guy Debord: "The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image."¹⁹ Artists' book is, so to speak, a work of art reproduced by mechanical means, taken out of Benjamin's era of the apogee of capitalism. This presentation of artists' books initiates collaboration between the Centre for Contemporary Art — Ujazdowski Castle and the laboratory of research "Art: practice and poetics" of the University of Rennes 2 Haute Bretagne, the program of which will try to focus on the main research and reflection topics discussed in this study. In addition to these elements, we have also attempted to suggest other lines of thought, such as: the status of the artwork in the age of *mechanical reproduction* and the related strategies of *artistic production*, going beyond the limits of exhibition, toward presentation, but also transgressing the aesthetic experience for the benefit of reading. Still another possibility of exploring the potential of art in the context of artists' books is provided by the new networks of art in the social space, especially those connected with the culture of publishing, of the library and reading in general, but also by various ways of coming/being put into contact with art inside these networks. Once again, all the elements mentioned here underline a strong link between art on one hand and on the other: research, followed by the experiments performed in the humanities from the beginning of the sixties, especially as art takes on the form of a book and stretches its own boundaries to enter the domain of thought initiated by the general humanities. This possibility was certainly noticed by the artists themselves, as well as by the critics close to the conceptual art scene. In his text published under the strong title of 'The Next Revolution in Art', Ad Reinhardt conceived the future revolution in art as the further involvement of the academy of art with the university context and its progressive emancipation from fantasies of the market-place. The text in question was published in 1964.²⁰ A few years later, Harold Rosenberg, in his far-seeing essays on de-definition of art, remarked that de-aestheticized art finds a potent medium and a self-centring point in the book ("the result is essentially art for the book")²¹, but at the same time that "the function of art in our time is not to please the senses but to provide a fundamental investigation of art and reality"²². Lucy R. Lippard complained that during its pioneering years conceptual art was unable to forge stronger relations with the humanities, that: "Conceptual art has not, however, as yet broken down the real barriers between the art context and those external disciplines - social, scientific and academic - from which it draws sustenance. [...] As yet the 'behavioral artists' have not held particularly rewarding dialogues with their psychologist counterparts, and we have had no feedback on the Art-Language group from the linguistic philosophers they emulate."²³

However, more recent studies allow us to moderate this harsh judgment, at least to some degree. Tony

¹⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Zone Books, New York, 1995, sect. 34, p24.

²⁰ *The Next Revolution in Art (Art-as-Art Dogma, Part III)*, Arts News, February 1964, reprinted in: *Art-as-Art. The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, edited by Barbara Rose, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1991, pp. 59-63, and especially p.62.

²¹ Harold Rosenberg, *The De-definition of Art*, Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press, 1972, p.34. The publishing house *slowo / obraz terytoria* is planning to publish a Polish translation of this book in 2008.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²³ Lucy R. Lippard, "Postface" in: *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972...*, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

Godfrey states for example that many artists voluntarily took on a role which could be described as “an artistic equivalent of a guinea-pig, or a subject of anthropological and/or sociological studies, in the sense that they spoke of themselves in the manner which simultaneously explained mechanisms of so-called social science”; incidentally, we can assume that the experiments referred to by Godfrey were supposed to detect and expose overoptimistic scientific attitudes, which notoriously tend, in their lack of self-awareness, to ignore the existential and ideological entanglement of the scientist in the subject of his research. On the contrary, art embodies a moment of self-reflection on the hermeneutic involvement of the subject in the object of his quest, and as such it could be of service to the humanities in general, and social studies in particular, as a fresh model of looking at the world.

With regard to the above conclusions, we could risk a statement that in our time the humanities are expected to provide a ground on which artists’ books can arrange new meetings between academe and art. It is precisely in this spirit — or to say the least, with this expectation — that we conceived and have been developing, since the year 2000, the program *Editions Incertain Sens* in the University of Rennes 2. Both the university and the library are considered as two new spaces of art, neither of which threatens its existence by constricting it within narrow frames, devoted to specialized production of objects: neither the book, nor knowledge and cognition, represent specialties; on the contrary, they represent universal dimensions of culture. On the bases of this hypothesis, and taking the history of science and its receivers during the eighteenth century as a model, we could reflect upon the new condition and status of the receiver/viewer of art, which, in this perspective, is identical with the status of the observer in sociological research. The point of view in the eighteenth century was clear (certainly clearer than today): knowledge is the source of freedom; in his *Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Man* from 1794, Schiller lays the foundation for the discovery of the dis-alienating function of art. In this way humanities and art can meet and coexist on a territory of commonly respected values, where the main epistemological challenge will be to determine the manner in which these values can be applied in an attempt to create an objective knowledge of art and reality.

I consider the publishing work, initiated in 2000, and continued ever since with incessant involvement, to be my personal aesthetic experience, and more precisely one of its active aspects. In this very specific activity I can simultaneously determine (delimitate) and contribute to an experimental field which could potentially become a subject of university research and competence. The reception of art does not mean a passive attitude and is rarely, in fact, reduced to a passive act of ‘receiving’ for the good reason that it frequently requires time, effort, inventive interpretation, sometimes even the assumption of a truly investigative stance, especially to back the artist in his faith in the experimental value of his work. All the personal energy I invested in making a particular project take the shape of a book, is only my way of testifying to the essential values which I may see in the work, values I decide to endorse. “I am a monk of the book,” wrote a great book lover Richard de Bury, the fourteenth century author and politician. I am a publisher — I could introduce myself — I conduct research on the subject of artists’ books. This is why in

all the work, experiences, and controversy concerning artists' books I am an interested party (*jestem stroną w książce artysty*).

Leszek Brogowski and the organizers of this exhibition want to thank profusely all the artists for the books and other publications they so generously offered for this occasion. After the presentation the materials will be included in the permanent archives of the Centre for Contemporary Art — Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw and become the core of a future collection of artists' books. At the same time, we want to reach out, with a view to collaboration, to other artists, critics or art historians who may feel an affinity with the premises of this program.

<http://www.uhb.fr/alc/grac/incertain-sens>

translated by Dorota Czerner

Catalogue of books

AAMCQ AIYCI IAOSA QIEIQ MAOSC OIGOO QIMWI WIAGI YAQA, 2005

This is the title and the author of a book which is written as a complete cryptogram, except for the price and an ISBN number.

Robert Barry, *Autobiography*, 2006

There are autobiographies that do not tell the life-stories of their authors. This impersonal *Autobiography* of Robert Barry shifts the reader's attention toward the space of a 'common ground', where the life of the artist connects with the lives of other persons important to him. 'Fellowworkers'. Portraits of artists, friends, family members, whose contours are faded to the point of getting blurred (without, however, losing the tint characteristic of each person) are coupled with concepts brought up with the use of broken, stuttering words. The life (-*bio*-) of the artist is told simultaneously by himself (*auto*-) and by his surroundings; though it is, in some sense, the reader who really writes (-*graphy*) this autobiography, by piecing it together from scraps of poetic relations between words/concepts and portraits/persons, which constitute the real environment of this story.

Denis Briand, *Atlas*, 2007

Coming soon from *Editions Incertain Sens* is a new atlas, which will attempt to explain the rules of a new geography, one written according to TV news: a mixture of ideologies, military strategies and thinking by means of the most simplistic schemes. A critical examination of the meanings of images, especially those dominant in the contemporary mass media, a deconstruction of their ideological content and involvement are among the topics persistently revisited by this artist.

Yves Chadouët, *My Truck is a Boat*, 2000

Because of the impetuous nature of tides in this region, the boat that goes between Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue and the island of Tatihou is an amphibious vehicle. Movement and means of transportation: these are the favourite subjects of the author, which explain his particular sympathy for this truck-boat stuck at the bottom of the seabed for several hours. By a complete stroke of fate, Chadouët happened to be travelling aboard the vehicle when for the first time in its history, and who knows, perhaps in the history of humanity, the boat 'got a flat'. In the form of a concertina-fold the consecutive pages of the book tell a photographic story of the 'emergency road service' fixing a punctured ship tire at the bottom of the sea. Despite its deceptive

simplicity, the form of the book unfolds a complex narrative structure, which allows simultaneous viewings of the event from many different angles.

herman de vries, *argumentstellen*, co-published with frac bretagne, 2003

in this project originated in 1968, herman de vries makes a reference to the famous *tractatus logico-philosophicus* of ludwig wittgenstein; the concept of the book can be said to be a stroke of genius because of the humorous and highly surprising manner in which the connection is made. in *argumentsellen*, the somewhat enigmatic formula borrowed from this mythical work of philosophy is confronted first with a tangible experience described by wittgenstein, then with ‘reinforcements’ — a testimony of the imagination. this work of concreteness, despite its ‘minimalism’, puts the reader on the path of the wittgensteinian mystery. in the heart of the puzzling simplicity of de vries’ approach there’s a suggestion of a fresh reading of wittgenstein, and perhaps also of a radically new confrontation between art and philosophy.

Bruno di Rosa, *The Blue Notebook*, in two volumes: *facsimile* and book, 2005

“I know there are books”, writes Maurice Blanchot. “Books exist provisionally, even if the reading has to open us to the inevitability of their disappearing in which they are hidden. The books send us back to existence.” The project of The Blue Book makes an *implicit* commentary on this space, which is common to the book and human existence, thanks to a very specific discipline imposed upon himself by Bruno Di Rosa — the practice of writing one page a day in a series of successive notebooks, from 1986 on. However, in order to turn this discipline of writing into writing which constructs existence, rather than writing about existence, the author attempted to eliminate the ‘subject’ of his notes by inventing the following procedure: each and every page begins with exactly the same word as the last one written at the bottom of the preceding page. Today he’s at the thirty-sixth notebook, written in this very manner, each book containing about 200 pages. At the point when we first spoke of publishing his project, the last completed book had a blue cover; it was the thirty-first notebook. This is the one published here as a *facsimile*. In conjunction with the book, composed on its theme, the reader gains a ‘*facsimile* access’ to the artist’s studio.

Peter Downsborough, *AND HERE, AS*, co-published with FRAC Bretagne, 2002.

Is this a book about the artist’s studio, the one shown in a slightly enigmatic photograph on the cover? In any case, the pages of this book talk (*AS/IF*, *SET/ABOUT*, etc.) of a place (*IN/OUT*, *HERE/OR/THERE*, etc.) and of the way it can be experienced (*LIMITS/TIME*, *AGAIN/BUT*, etc.), as the book displays a certain *plastic language*, with the unmistakable signature style of Peter Downsborough. Words, the shapes of which get to undergo transformations (obverse/reverse, back/face, cut/stretch, diagonal strikethrough, etc.) are associated with a few simple graphic forms (square, lattice, ‘*aplat*’), creating a structure in which concrete

configurations are as if they were *utterances to be read*. And even if the meaning of these sentences escapes overly concrete determinations, at the same time it invites the reader to take one step beyond what can only be seen, and leads to a paradox: while the hypothesis of the artist's studio remains nebulous, the enigma of the photograph is slowly dissipated — on one hand a thing not known enough is always mysterious; on the other hand, having read the book we know perhaps too much to express it with words.

Patrick Dubrac, *Sculpture: rains*, 2003

Sculpture: rains, constitutes a project, began on the 1 of January 1996, which consists of daily collecting of precipitations (done by the artist, and, on some occasions, by other persons involved in the project), in several places at once, by several people at the same time, during 100 consecutive months. The book, this fragile object made of pages of paper, is turned by Patrick Dubrac into a site of confrontation between the uncontrollable forces of nature (floods or droughts) and the measure which human beings try to impose on them (cartography, graphs and diagrams, urbanism, photography). We can say that the collection of rain obeys the same rules as every great book: it is written by time itself. Time by the way can be interpreted here in many ways; first as *le temps* in a meteorological sense of the weather, as a time of the cosmic and psychological dimensions (nothing can improve our mood quicker than a ray of sunshine in November), and finally, as a time that the artist shares with people who participated in his project.

Gilbert Dupuis, *P.S. by G.D.*, co-published with FRAC Bretagne and Les carnets de l'atelier, Rennes, 2001
According to the explanation given by the artist in a blurb, the title refers to “the pages of calligraphy by Pierre Soulages, transformed into images and a book by Gilbert Dupuis”. The story of this book begins in 1979, when the famous painter of black paintings entrusts Gilbert Dupuis with an enormous calligraph, and agrees for its further use as a ‘*materia prima*’ of a book. The sheet of cardstock, repeatedly folded, cut, trimmed, and in the end, stitched, in the first place becomes a one off book produced in 1982.

P.S. by G.D. is a result of an accidental encounter with a photo-copyist, a meeting which concluded with the birth of a book within a book, a book that can be looked through and the contents of which are pages; but on another, deeper level it is a book written in images which in their own convoluted way lay at the genesis of the project.

Estelle Fredet, *Histoire de bouts de*, book + audio-CD, 2003

The intensity of this book comes from a very ordinary source: oral testimony of Mrs. Landini, an eighty-four year old inhabitant of Marseille, recorded on an audio CD. She tells a story of her life such as it was, entirely impartially dedicated to a certain puppy love. Although unhappy, this early

meeting with a man, continues to give true meaning to her life, bringing to mind words of deep wisdom which at the same time appear to be tinted with a frightening perspectivism. “I simply allowed my life to flow, that’s all”, says she. In her book, Estelle Fredet adds to these words her own documents, poems and reflections. I quote Serge Daney, who once remarked: “The question of an utterance is always connected to the problem of power: the power of speaking, the power of remaining silent, the power of saying differently”.

Antonio Gallego, *Un moment*

A cosmic metaphor of the first word, *Un moment*, takes place on many different planes: photography, typography, poetic resonance, etc. By the virtue of nearly imperceptible shifts happening around words, their meaning, and sound in several languages we can experience a poetic rapprochement between the moment of the first lightning and the first word, which, like a thunderbolt sends an echo in a dark and hostile landscape. “Moment”, now reverberating through its depths sounds similar to the French word “*maman*”. In this project both visual and sound-poetry meet disguised as a book.

Jean-Baptiste Ganne, “*Capital*” *illustrated*, co-published with FRAC Bretagne and Françoise Vigna Gallery from Nice, 2000

The book in question is of course *Capital* by Karl Marx, a work of philosophical but also mythical value, today almost entirely erased from the horizon of intellectual debate. A daring idea of Jean-Baptiste Ganne consisted in providing illustrations to this book of philosophy, known for its highly complex and abstract character; Sergei Eisenstein, we are told, once considered a film adaptation of *Capital*. The book by Ganne is composed of a series of photographs, where each of them is a reference point to a concrete chapter, section, or a paragraph from the work of Marx. The whole operation is run with a delightful sense of humour but equally with surprising intellectual efficiency in the ways by which the reader is provoked to think and inquire about the missing part of the text corresponding to each image, i.e. its philosophical content. In fact, the book explicitly suggests the ‘right’ interpretations of photographs, since each of them is ‘captioned’ with a key notion of the corresponding philosophical analyses. Journalistic pictures, taken out of their original context, provide a witty commentary on the contemporary world. “Anyone who does an honest reportage today”, says the artist, “willy-nilly illustrates *Capital*”. Is this a comeback of the great book onto the scene of contemporary discourse?

Véronique Hubert, *History of FAGM. Hypersensitivity=great fatigue*, co-published with FRAC Bretagne and Présent Composé, 2002.

A troubling testimony of a ‘woman with huge hands’ (Femme Aux Grosses Mains), a patient treated for a condition of hypersensitivity in a clinic for neuro-endocrinology, who serves as a ‘guinea-pig’ in hormonal

tests and builds up this narration by continually reporting to her doctors on all the side effects of her treatment. The author deals with her favourite topics — paranoia, panic attacks provoked by the constant necessity of decision making, games and the factor of chance — which rule our lives, and most importantly, the world experienced through the filter of hypersensitivity. This autobiographical fiction of the eternal ‘galley-slave of sensitivity’, is composed with many differentiated means of expression: pages of a traditional novel, poetic prose, authentic and fictional documentary material, medical records, graphs, anatomical drawings, photographs, collages, etc., ..., and a CD-rom. *FAGM* (which in French reads identically to *femme*, woman) — a CD-rom with an unusual and ironic sort of will, found by the doctors on the kitchen table of a woman who “could no longer go on”, who, as if on the margins of a medical protocol, leaves a poetic testimony to her extreme neuro-physiological states.

LEFEVRE Jean Claude *Pennadou da heul / Textes pour suite (Texts to be continued)*, bilingual edition, Breton and French, 2001

“Friday, June the 2nd 2000,

I discover a website of the organization Editions Incertain Sens, their presentation of a publishing project and a program of publications of artists’ books.

E-mail from my correspondent in Ed.IncS confirming the receipt of *PRO1985879200*, one of two texts of mine prepared for publication. A translation into Breton will be entrusted to the professors and students of the University of Rennes 2.

I have to communicate the title of my book, the number of pages and the preferred format as soon as possible. A possibility of a presentation of the book, same as on the 4th page of the cover. Not to forget about the fragment of the text *LJC Index* for Jean-Charles Agboton-Jumeau, Omnibus, October 1995, n°14, pp. 2-3.

To find out from the office of the Gallery Villepoix and Crousel about the exact site of the exhibition of the stand of Marie-Ange Guilleminot with artists’ books, the stand of which a certain nomadic version was presented in La Napoule, during the meetings organized by Anne Mœglin-Delcroix.

To send the text *L’appartement (The apartment)* + a letter to Yannick Miloux, the director of FRAC Limousin, in response to his question about the exhibition *Le Décor*, shown in Limoges, June 21 — July 10, 1993; the curator was Jean Geslin.

Not to forget about the model of a cover for *Works not to be continued* for Leszek Brogowski. Send him the pages, corrected, proof-read and ready for publication of *52JDC1995*, one of the two texts he’s agreed to publish.”

PINXIT 1997-2003 Laurent Marissal, 2005

In the summer of 1993, painter Laurent Marissal takes a job as a security guard in the Museum of Gustave Moreau in Paris. This alienation of the artist becomes the sole material of his work during the period between April 1997 and January 2002. Time, sold to the Ministry of Culture, is spent for painterly purposes. The dis-alienation, of which the main principle is to claim back the time lost, is made real by activities related to this practice: painting, reading, writing. During the winter 1998 he founds a cell of the syndicate C.G.T., thought of as the painter's tool used for the realization the project: in this case for the introduction of concrete changes to the conditions, time and space of the working museum man. In December 2001, he quits the job with the ministry of Culture and leaves the ranks of the C.G.T. All of his actions carried out in the Museum during the period of April 1997 to December 2002 were documented. Some were published and/or exhibited. In the spring 2003 the artist unveils the mystery. In the winter 2005 he publishes a book about his underground activities.

Roberto Martinez, *Chicago*, 2000

It is a series of photographs taken in Chicago, *the windy city*, of photographic portraits of plastic bags that float on the air, ending their wind propelled wanderings stuck between tree-branches, barbed wires, hung on fences... The ephemeral traces of past shopping sprees they protrude from the ground, reduced to a state of ripped skin, like wrecked decorations, are hanging caught in trees, wire-fences... Entire neighbourhoods of this giant and rich city lie abandoned, allowing the winds to dissipate and scatter the remnants of human existence. The plastic bags, like some weird banners of a destroyed army, are discreetly transformed into a metaphor of contemporary liberalism.

Anne and Patrick Poirier, *Dangerzone*, book and DVD, co-published with La Passerelle from Brest, 2004

For many years Anne and Patrick Poirier have been drawing attention to the critical value of the utopian thought. Their own utopias are strangely 'inverted' in time, being in the majority of cases represented by the concepts projected into the past, rather than the future. Their work, under the guise of archaeological reconstruction, introduces poetic and highly metaphorical hypotheses that explore unknown, alternative modes of existence in human societies. The most recent work, however, especially *Dangerzone*, composed among other elements of a short series of video-films, attempts to picture not so much an imaginary civilization invented by the artists, as our own world, only such as it is known to us in its most feared dimension. The alternative modes no longer display a poetic character; they now assume catastrophic shapes and colours. The short video pieces included with the book show images of the world of technology in decline: the human body becomes either a commodity, or a target for gunfire — other images make a direct connection with destructive realities. The titles do not echo ruins of the past, they point to the ruins of today, or tomorrow.

Anne and Patrick Poirier, *Exotica*, co-published with FRAC Bretagne, 2007

Editions Incertain Sens are preparing a publication of the book *Exotica*, a kind of a tourist guide to the city of this name, imagined and constructed by the artists.

Hubert Renard Stille *Gesten*, 2000

A publication related to, and extending the life of an exhibition of Hubert Renard shown in Kunsthalle, Krefeld, in 1990. The famous artist continues his explorations of the space between reality and its representations. The exhibition attempted to re-evaluate the strategies of interpretation applied to new art: some geometrical solids resembling abstract forms of minimal art can be interpreted as representations of the architecture of the gallery, while compositions of the giant close-ups of macro-photographs of lentil sprouts lend themselves to an abstract interpretation. The book includes drawings, photographs and reproductions of the exhibited material. In 2000, Hubert Renard is invited to the University of Rennes 2; his lecture is filmed and published on a CD-rom under the title of *Conférence des échelles*.

[Yann Toma] Stephen Wright, *Should we abolish Ouest-Lumière?*, co-published with La Passerelle from Brest, 2005

“With tentacle-like spread of the subscribers’ network, a director — hired for life, an odd character out of an old burlesque — who openly manipulates the army of his employees and secretly hired slanderers, Yann Toma creates a vision of heuristic fiction in the body of a company named *Ouest-Lumière*. We say heuristic, because this net-based, non-defined, neo-liberal fiction of a private enterprise, corresponds to a very concrete economic reality: colonization of the basic experience of the world we live in by capital, which becomes true with the progressive dissemination of dematerialized labour of which the artist is a perfect example. A dematerialized company *Ouest-Lumière* is an emblem of transformations of today’s anthropological configuration of work in our society where a Ford economy, based upon production of goods, is replaced by a post-fordian economy in which the foundation is provided by the object-consuming subjects. These ‘subjectivizing configurations’, described by Deleuze, and attributed by the powers that be of the modern art world — half cynically, half innocently; unconsciously and seldom with the full conviction, nonetheless consequently — to the industry of immateriality, are, in the *Ouest-Lumière* emphasized in their real nature, i.e. as new fields of capitalist accumulation. This is a political dimension of the fictitious company invented by Yann Toma; this is also the key to its deep ambiguity. Whence the question: *Should we abolish Ouest-Lumière?*” (—from a forward by Stephen Wright).

Christophe Viart, *Têtes ou queues* and *La Gamme* (two volumes), co-published with Théo, Rennes, 2005

Both books are focused around the famous novel by Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, in the form of a feedback and exchange with readers who agreed to participate in this project, realized by the artist in 2002 in Médiathèque de Saint Herblain. Melville's unfinished but also inexhaustible novel, perhaps by the virtue of its prophecies, is a departure point for two books by Christophe Viart, a point where he can begin the construction of an infinite world of imagination, composed of never-ending associations of images, shapes, past and present events... Short captions, informing us of the source of each photograph, provide the only element that accompanies the image documentation, which constitutes the body of the books — the full meaning of these captions can be inferred from their relationships to other images and texts. Sometimes the correspondences are not obvious and the reader has to show a lot of ingenuity to work his way through the maze of senses. In fact, the images can be most often associated with the particular texts, first of all of course with *Moby Dick* (but not exclusively), with the white whale-Leviathan, a symbol-source of the enormous power of this novel, published in 1851. Despite Melville's great literary ambitions to combine in one book a work of adventure, and a mystical parable, and thus invent a new genre of fiction, with inclinations toward deeper philosophical reflection, the book was not received with the immediate attention it so naturally deserved. But if we read fragments of *Moby Dick* today, after 150 years, we cannot be but struck by its relevance: "The great, contested presidential elections in the United States. TRAVELLING AND WHALING. THE WHALE OF ISHMAEL. BLOODY FIGHTING IN AFGHANISTAN." These intriguing fragments of *Moby Dick*, reproduced on the page 31 of *La Gamme*, which are the keys to the whole series of visual documents, such as the American flag burning in Peshawar on September 19th 2001 (p.3), a man, who throws himself out of a window of *Twin Towers* set aflame on September 11th 2001 (p.5), a military map of Afghanistan combat, published by *Le Monde 2* on September 11th 2001 (p.19). If Leviathan resembles a whale then two similar bodies have just sunken in *Twin Towers*. Both the author and the publisher of the book were surprised when coincidentally with the release of *La Gamme* and *Têtes ou queues*, Peter Szendi published in Paris his book dedicated to Melville's prophecies.

Eric Watier, *Inventory of destructions*, 2000

A collection put together by Eric Watier, consisting of replies given by many artists in response to a questionnaire, in which he formulated several questions focusing around the main topic: have they ever (and if, then when? and how?) consciously destroyed their own work?

We have 99 cases, reported in short, extremely concise formulations only minimally and very discreetly edited by the artist, which by telling of these acts of purposive destructions of the works, invite us to reflect upon the essence of creation: is it the end result, the object? or is it the process of creation? or maybe a certain attitude toward the world? And more: is destruction a necessary element for any future construction? or even, according to Bakunin — isn't destruction in itself an act of creation? In any case, every creation

contains and involves a certain dose of destruction; even Mondrian thought that its role is underestimated. The book of Eric Watier, without a cover or a title page, is conceived as an object prone to destruction. The last page, number 100, is at the same time a self-presentation of the book; its blurb.

Eric Watier, *Those who won't destroy*, 2001

As a sort of *postscript* to Inventory of destructions, *Editions Incertain Sens* published a booklet of Eric Watier called *Those who won't destroy*.

Eric Watier, *A book, a fold*, 2003

The artist transposed a motto of the situationist Gil J. Wolman, quoted upon the occasion of this exhibition: “*plus c'est facile plus c'est beau*” — “the easier it is, the more beautiful it gets” into his own formulation “*Faire un livre, c'est facile*” — it is easy to make a book. “In old art, the writer wrote texts. In new art, the writer makes books”, — noticed long ago Ulyses Carillón. *A book, a fold* by Eric Watier (of which the first edition, *Un livre, un pli*, got published by Editions Incertain Sens in 2003), could be considered a ‘black square’ of artists’ books. A page, folded in half is an atom of a book. In this ephemeral form, Eric Watier — an artist — a publisher — puts out anonymous commentaries to the contemporary world, philosophical investigations, documentary *pastiches*, and many other types of publications, not always easy to identify; some of them appear periodically.

In the VARIA series

Copyleft, “Allotopie” nr 8, 2003

Issue nr 8 of a nomadic artists’ journal *Allotopie*, published by *Editions Incertain Sens* is dedicated to *Copyleft*, an idea that surfaced with the birth of free computer software, especially *Linux*. The main principle of *Copyleft* is completely unimpeded, which also means: free, access to all cultural creations and objects — resources; to this, *Copyleft* has added another important clause: if, for instance, a user of a free software were to invent his own improvement it would become his moral obligation to share it (for free) with other users. The basic aim of the Licence Art Libre is “to promote and protect artistic practice freed from the exclusionary rules of the market economy.” *Copyleft Attitude* strives to respect the author’s rights by retrieving their original and most essential meaning, distorted by the globalization of *copyright*, which is more concerned with protecting the interests or property of mass producers than these of the authors, and which heavily obstructs, by creating financial barriers, the possibility of partaking of cultural knowledge and art creations. The intention is to experiment within the framework of a cultural alternative, not so much a

utopian one, but the *allotopian*, an alternative of art becoming an integral part of life, instead of a list of professional qualifications.

Gilbert Lascault, Jean Le Gac, *The Museum of Jean Le Gac*, co-published with FRAC Bretagne and the Gallery Art & Essai, Rennes, 2005

The entire work of Jean Le Gac weaves together into a large work of poetry, inspired by biographical interpretations, which have made the fabric of art history since Vasari; the work of Le Gac is in fact a subtle parody of this theme. In the form of an autobiographical fiction, the work tells a story of the life, adventures — artistic ones — but also of *Moments of repose of a French painter*, the title of one of his artist's books. By combining text, photographs, pastels, etc., using pastiche, quotations and borrowings, Le Gac creates a saga with the elements of life of his fictitious character, but also with a life of his own. As a direct outcome of these machinations, fiction and reality are no longer distinguishable; in consequence both the apartment and the studio of the artist turn into the Museum of Jean Le Gac, documented by this book, which pictures glass-cases full of souvenirs, bookshelves (displayed frontally, as in a shop window), the oeuvre of the painter as well as the evidence of his friendships with other painters, the artist's working place and his painterly tools — tables, chairs, a fireplace, a sideboard, a typewriter...

Laurent Marissal, *LG CBD 2006*, co-published with the University of Paris I — Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2006

The goal of this comic book is to present the work of Lefevre Jean Claude, a recondite artist who's known chiefly for his conceptualism. "Between understanding and making sure that the work of LJC remains mysterious it is the second interest, which I consider more important".

translated by Dorota Czerner