



Ulises

Carrion

BOOK WORKS
AND BEYOND

Edited by

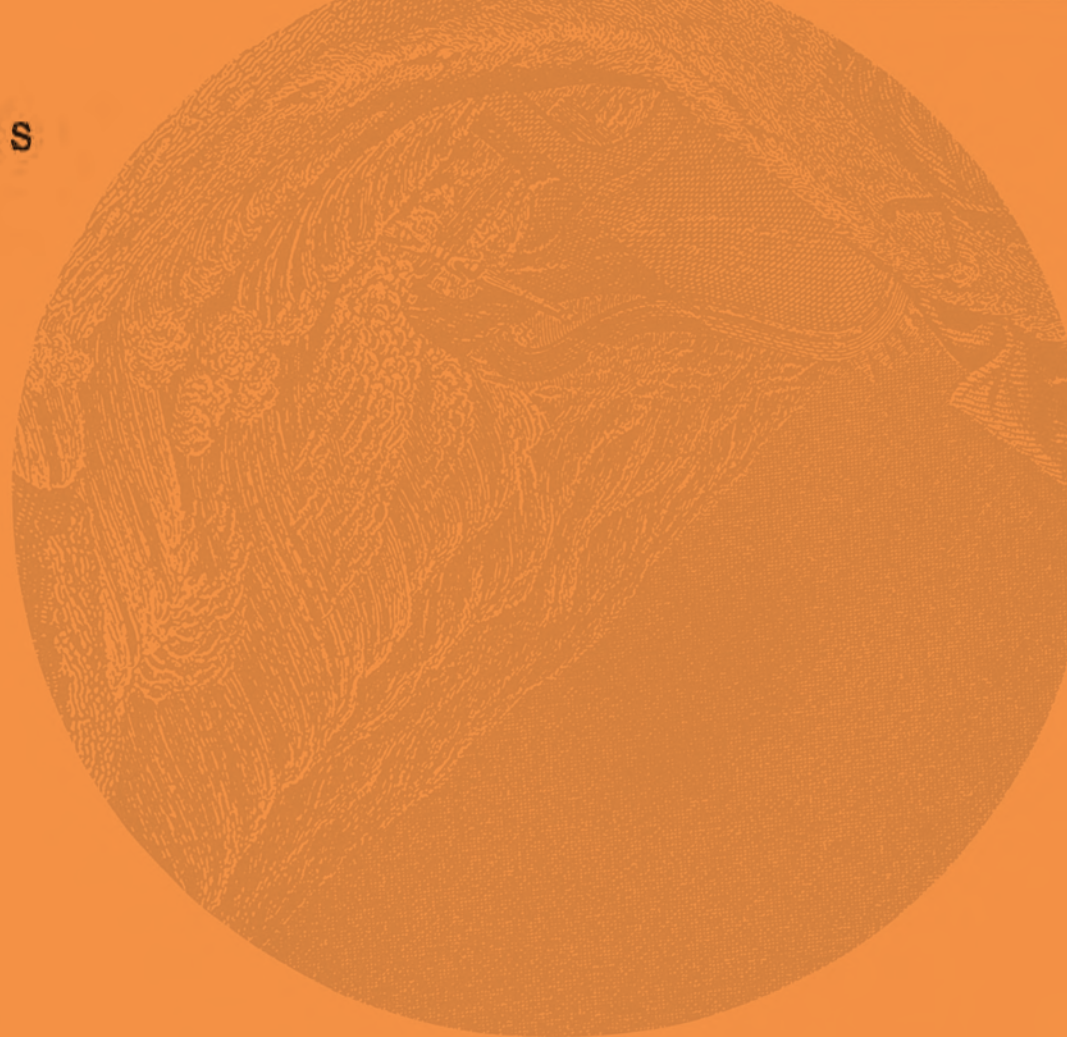
Sal Hamerman and
Javier Rivero Ramos

with contributions by

Felipe Becerra
Mónica de la Torre
Zanna Gilbert

Princeton University Library

Contents



Foreword	6
Anne Jarvis	
Bookworks and Beyond:	8
Ulises Carrión at Princeton University Library	
Sal Hamerman and Javier Rivero Ramos	
An Essay in Nine Bookworks (and Not)	16
Mónica de la Torre	
Communities, Bureaucracy, and Office Technologies	38
in Ulises Carrión's Publishing Projects	
Felipe Becerra	
Plates	71
"The Archive Is Open!":	88
Ulises Carrión's Organizational Logics	
Sal Hamerman	
"The Most Illustrious Unknown Postmaster":	114
The Erratic Networks of Ulises Carrión	
Javier Rivero Ramos	
Plural Authorship as Queer Polyphony in	132
Ulises Carrión's Mail Art Projects	
Zanna Gilbert	
Plates	159
Works by Ulises Carrión and Related Ephemera	172
Held by Princeton University Library	
Contributors	177
Acknowledgments	178
Index	179

An Essay in Nine Bookworks (and Not)



Mónica de la Torre

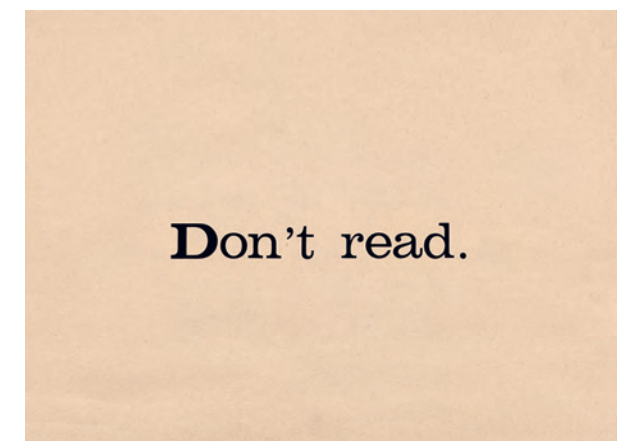
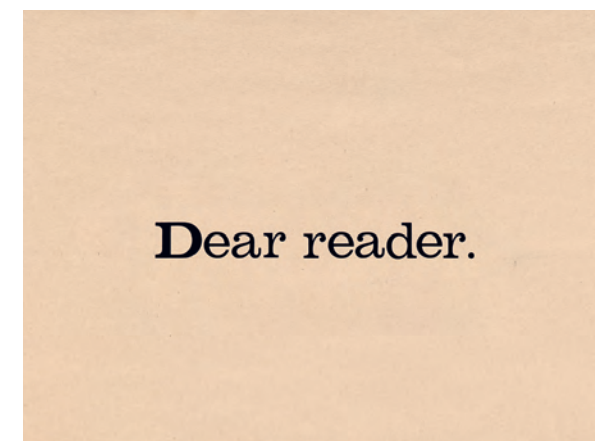
In the new art every book
requires a different reading.

—Ulises Carrión, “The New Art of Making Books”¹

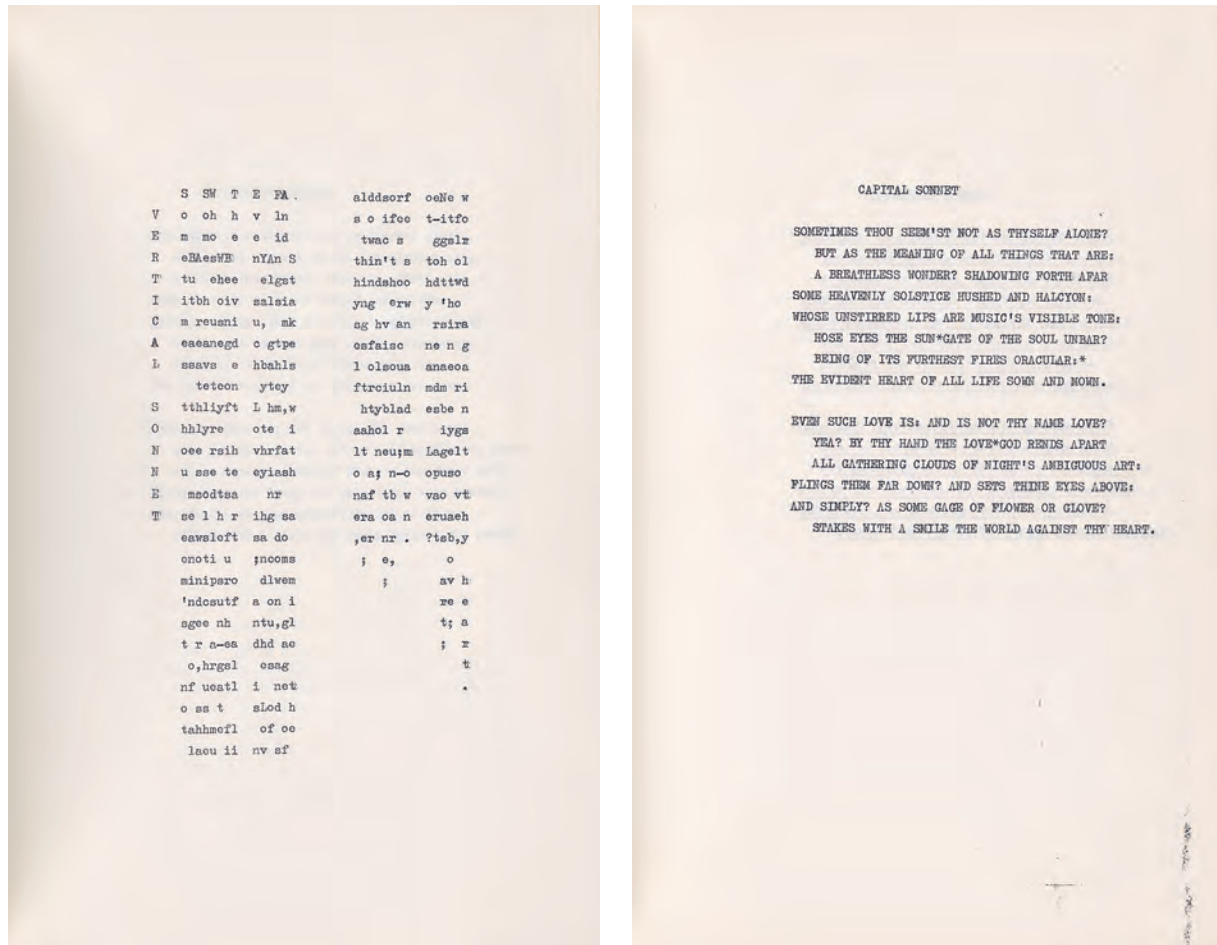
Caesura as Preamble

How not to read the text in Carrión’s 1973 diptych print *Dear Reader. Don’t Read.* (fig. 1) as a single if supremely paradoxical utterance that also happens to sum up his poetics? Blame it on the obstinacy of our reading habits. If poetry concerns the breadth of the detail, “the meaningfulness of the tiny,”² let us consider the implications of the period at the end of the first clause: “Dear reader.” It reinforces the caesura already inscribed in the work’s material support, quietly insisting that we reckon with the phrase’s truncated syntax. It speaks also of Carrión’s shift in orientation away from literary works and toward text-based art, where conceptual art’s drive to dematerialize the art object coincides with concrete and visual poetry’s foregrounding of the materiality of language. The diptych summarily instantiates Carrión’s break with both traditional books and the Spanish language as his primary artistic medium.

Carrión’s last book to circulate as a literary example of the old art, according to the nomenclature he established in the groundbreaking 1975 manifesto “The New Art of Making Books,” is the short-story collection *De Alemania* (Of Germany) (fig. 2). It was written in the late 1960s and published in Mexico in 1970, after Carrión had left the country to conduct graduate studies in Paris, Germany’s Bavaria region, and Leeds, but before he had settled in Amsterdam in 1972. As a whole, the collection shows no adherence to a particular subset of genre; it engages realism while also participating in the postmodern zeitgeist—some of the



¹ Ulises Carrión, *Dear Reader. Don't Read.*, 1973. Diptych print (presstype on paper), sheet (each): 9⁷/₁₆ × 14¹/₂ in. (24 × 36.8 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York, Latin American and Caribbean Fund



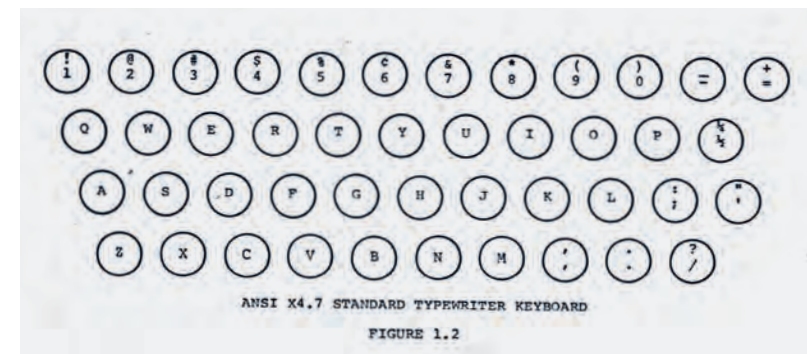
9 Ulises Carrión, "Vertical Sonnet" from *Sonnet(s)* 10 Ulises Carrión, "Capital Sonnet" from *Sonnet(s)*

Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* among them⁴⁹—on whose covers he applied the phrase "The Collected Plagiarisms of Ulises Carrión" and his last name over that of the original author using a labeling machine. A year later, the first issue of *Vandangos* (December 1973), a magazine directed by Marroquín, included "Why Plagiarisms?," a brief manifesto signed by Carrión, accompanied by a reproduction of the modified Shakespeare cover (page 29, fig. 6). Some of the answers to the title question resurrect ideas that its author had announced in his correspondence with Paz and that he would go on to deepen in "The New Art of Making Books." I am referring, first, to the concept of reading as an understanding of the structural sequence of a book rather than as an interpretive exercise based on written communication,⁵⁰ and second, to the aspiration of producing a work stripped of personal and psychological references.⁵¹ The manifesto thus proposes the

appropriation of another's composition as an act that enables the dissociation between a work and its author's psychology. In "The New Art of Making Books," Carrión conceives plagiarism as a way of transferring authorship and originality from the writing of texts to the elaboration of a book structured as a sequence: "In a book of the new art words don't transmit any intention; they're used to form a text which is an element of a book, and it is this book, as a totality, that transmits the author's intention. Plagiarism is the starting point of the creative activity in the new art."⁵² By appropriating someone else's text, plagiarism dissociates that text from its author's intentions, distilling its literary language to make it the raw material—that is, neutral, crude, impersonal—of a new work, a bookwork.

In *Sonnet(s)*, "Heart's Compass" is the raw material—the "starting point"—of the series of alterations that end up emptying Rossetti's poem of its literary content. As some authors have observed, Carrión's election of this poetic form and subject matter is not accidental.⁵³ The sonnet and the topic of love are paradigmatic in modern Western culture—and, therefore, in what Carrión would call "old art." The sonnet tradition, according to De la Torre, bears "the premise that through it readers gain access to the speaker's interiority and most intimate musings, [which] makes it a strategic form in which to intervene."⁵⁴

Conversely, the reason he selected this specific poem and author seems less evident. De la Torre suggests that the abstraction with which Rossetti represents love in his sonnet—and, incidentally, the communication between author and reader—would mark a sharp contrast with the foregrounding of materiality that Carrión sought in his bookwork.⁵⁵ As for the choice of the pre-Raphaelite author, critics agree that his double status as painter and poet highlights the boundary between art and literature that Carrión sought to blur. To this, I would add that the final version of Rossetti's *The House of Life*, the collection to which "Heart's Compass" belongs, has as its subtitle *A Sonnet-Sequence*—a term



11 Diagram of the American national standard typewriter keyboard from 1971, reproduced in Robert F. Nickells, "The Design of an Optimal Typewriter-like Keyboard," 1973

CHA-CHA-CHA

16

BASIC LEFT CHASSE

(Moving to left throughout)

Left foot forward small step

Weight on right foot

Left foot very small step to side

Right foot closes to left

Left foot very small step to side

CHA-CHA-CHA

17

BASIC RIGHT CHASSE

(Moving to right throughout)

Right foot back small step

Weight on left foot

Right foot very small step to side

Left foot closes to right

Right foot small step to side

1 Spread from
Ulises Carrión,
Dancing with You.
Amsterdam: In-Out
Productions, 1973.
Artist's book; mim-
eograph printed and
rubber stamp on
paper, staple-bound

GALLERY

E 20 24
 Entry Logo Seat

GOOD ONLY 1974
THURSDAY
MORN. NOV. 28

THE UNITED STATES SENATE
PRESENTS
"The Impeachment Trial of Richard M. Nixon"
Featuring Chief Justice Warren Burger
CHAMPS OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE
PERFORMANCE
THURSDAY 10:00 A.M.
\$9.00

NOV. **28** 1974
THE UNITED STATES SENATE
PRESENTS
E 20 24
 Entry Logo Seat

GALLERY

M. Arebrook: "A ticket to ride", Indianapolis.

Herman Damen: Golden Fiction. Exp/press News card 4. Utrecht.

SCIENCE=FICTION

est of luck in the future, if any.

ART IS DUMB (Talk Is Cheap)

NOVI

NOVI DAYS

Eric Claptonelli, St. Paulo - An. Franca, 1976.

Medeiros, Natal (Brasil).



Dick Higgins, New York.

a comedy
read this as a tragedy

denver
4.v.77

LACK AND WHITE

UNITE

AGAINST

ALISM AND RACISM

SOLIDARITÄT

INTERNATIONAL

SOLIDARITY

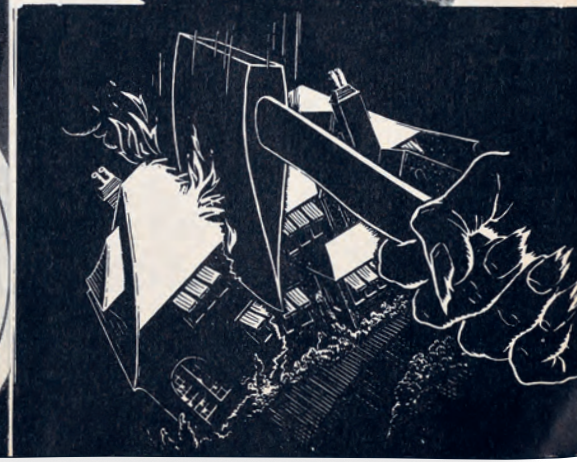


CAPETA S MEN †
1978
IVALD GRANATO

Karel Miler: "Closer to Clouds." Published by E. Politi, Milano, 1977.

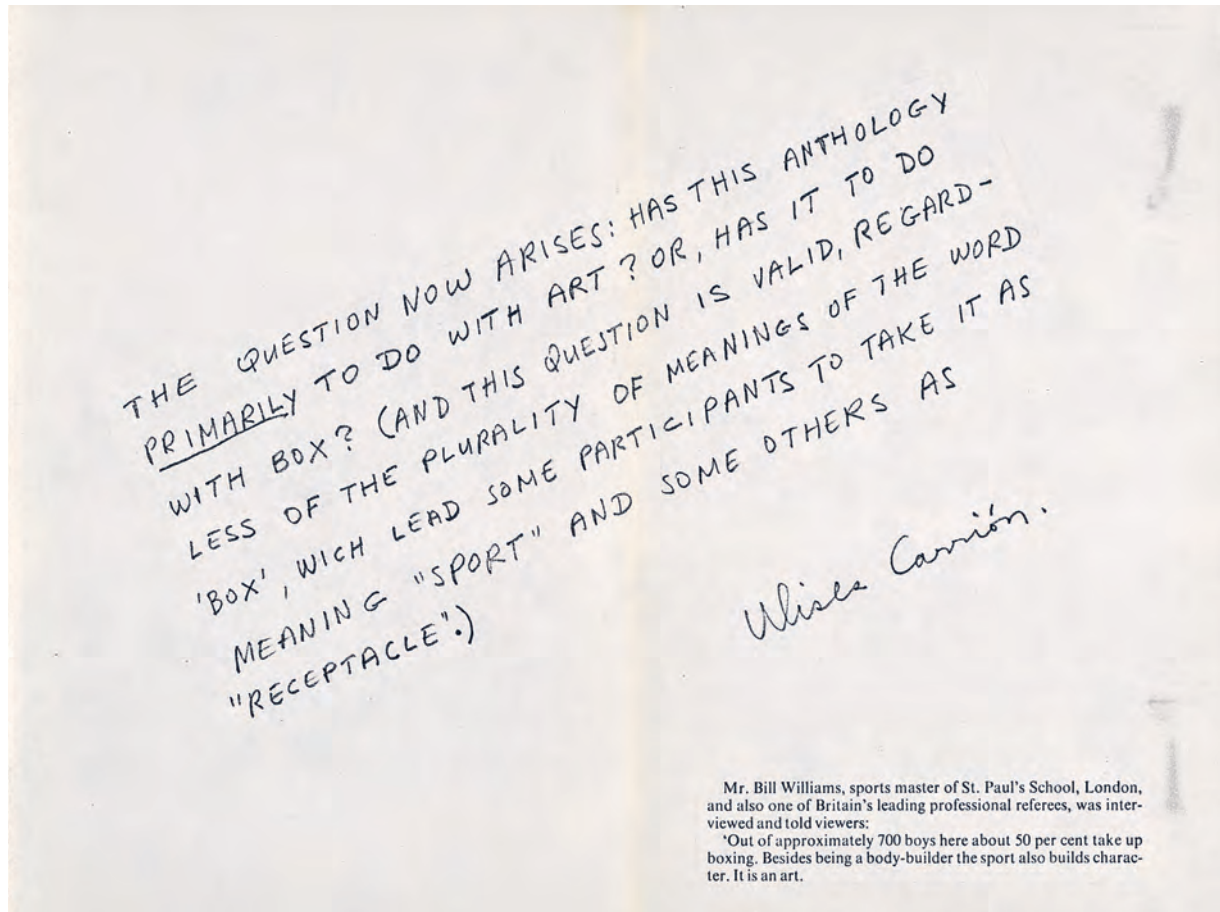
BOMB!

Select your own number, molife



General Idea: "Hot Property" 1977.

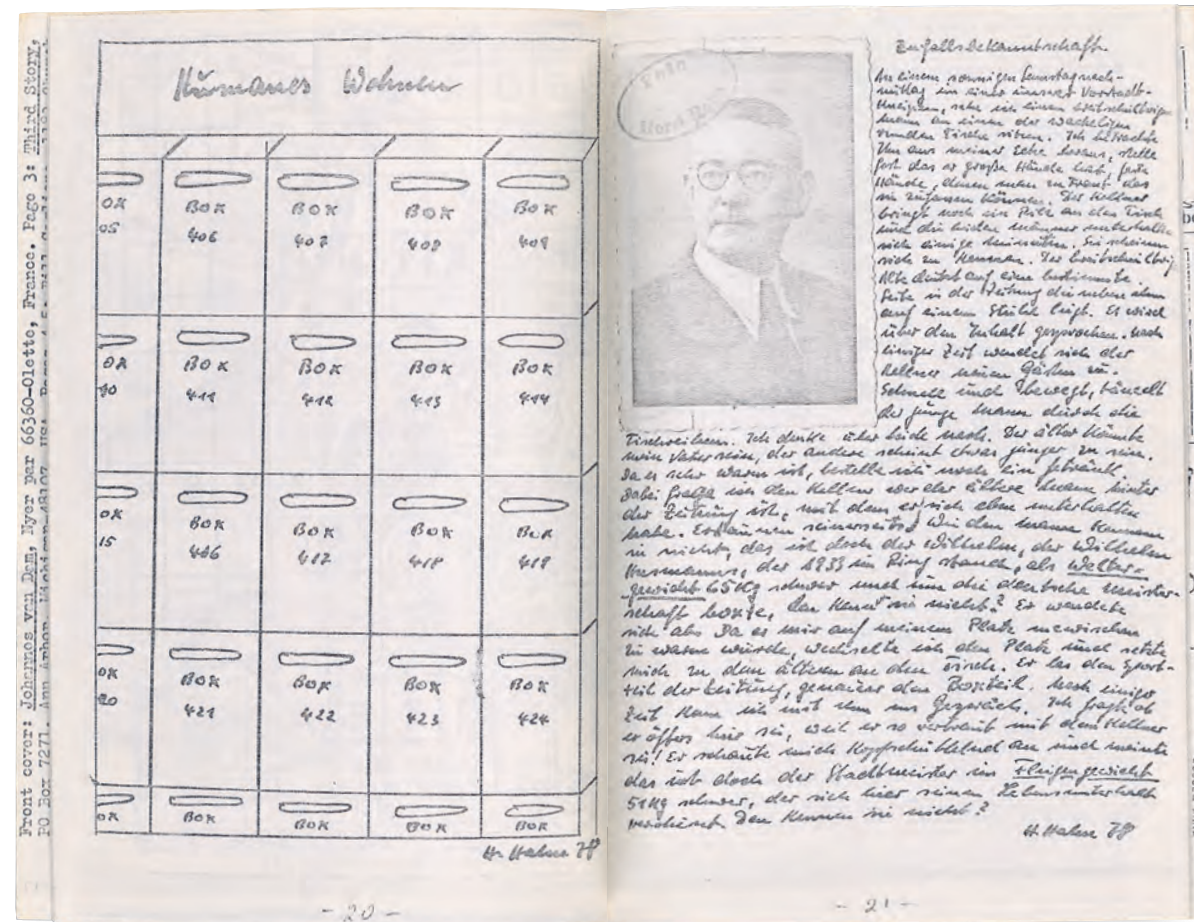
4 Ulises Carrión, Aart van Barneveld, and Salvador Flores, eds., *Ephemera*, no. 4 (January 1978). Artists' magazine; offset printed with original additions (rubber stamps, collages, stickers), handwriting in red pen



8, 9 Spreads from Ulises Carrión, ed., *Commonpress*, no. 5: *Box, Boxing, Boxers* (1978). Artists' magazine; Xerox printed on paper, staple-bound

greater or lesser degrees than Carrión, were suspicious of institutional archives, seeing them as places where the spirit of countercultural and communal play would be extinguished by official narratives and hierarchies. Archival theory, however, approaches something closer to mail artists' understanding of a storage-circulation relay, following Van der Meijden's reading of Michel Foucault: "The archive may be seen to be active: as the agent that shapes memory by selection. [Additionally], the archive keeps discourses in circulation: it does not passively make them available, it actively circulates them."³⁴ The question of selection, of which documents an archive keeps in circulation, is key to understanding their relation to power, and is crucial to mail artists, who operated outside of traditional art sectors and frequently expressed opposition to oppressive political regimes.

Between approximately 1978 and 1980, Carrión issued two postcards—each a conceptual work of mail art—that



8, 9 Spreads from Ulises Carrión, ed., *Commonpress*, no. 5: *Box, Boxing, Boxers* (1978). Artists' magazine; Xerox printed on paper, staple-bound

simultaneously promoted OBASA and critically engaged the archive's organizational strategies. *Table of Mail Art Works* outlines a four-part taxonomy of mail art projects in Carrión's handwriting, breaking down the typology of mail art into the higher-order categories of Format, Scope, Subject, and Anomalies, each containing various subcategories (fig. 10). The table encompasses the breadth of mail art practices from one-off, individually authored works to multi-authored projects initiating complex interchanges across the network. The crucial category here is Anomalies, indicating that not only are the approaches to format, scope, and subject within mail art open to revision and expansion but also that Carrión's entire taxonomic table is open to reconfiguration. The *Table of Mail Art Works* fits into the trajectory of what Helen Palmer calls "speculative taxonomies," noting that "the juxtaposition of the unstable and sometimes ludic operation of *speculating* with the seemingly serious operation of *classifying* may appear

1,50



This our 2nd catalogue - prepared by Aart van Barneveld, Michael Gibbs and Ulises Carrión - appears nearly one year later than our first one. The rapid growth of the stock, as well as the increasing activities organised or held at Other Books & So, are the causes of this delay. We apologise to all our subscribers and declare our firm intention to do better in the future.

This catalogue does not include the items listed in the first one, except for those whose price has changed in the meantime.

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