

BORROWED SONNET

Sometimes thou seem'st not as thyself alone,
 But as the meaning of all things that are;
 A breathless wonder, shadowing forth afar
Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon;
Whose unstirred lips are music's visible tone;
 Whose eyes the sun-gate of the soul unbar,
 Being of its furthest fires oracular;—
The evident heart of all life sown and mown.

Even such Love is; and is not thy name Love?
 Yea, by thy hand the Love-god rends apart
 All gathering clouds of Night's ambiguous art;
Flings them far down, and sets thine eyes above;
And simply, as some gage of flower or glove,
 Stakes with a smile the world against thy heart.

FOOTNOTE SONNET*

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UNTITLED SONNET

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E	m	mo	e	e	id	tw c s ggslr
R	e	BAe	sWB	n	YAn S	thia't s toh ol
T	tu	ehee		e	lgst	hinnsboo hdttdw
I	it	bh	oiv	s	alsia	yngd erw y 'he
C	m	reus	ni	u,	mk	sg v an rsira
A	e	aean	gd	c	gtpe	esfhisc ne n g
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		tete	on	y	tey	ftrliuln mdm ri
S	t	thni	yft	L	hm,w	htcblad esbe n
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EXHAUSTIVE SONNET

Sometimes thou seem'st not as thyself alone,
But as the meaning, sense, significance, signification,
import, point, tenor purport, frift,
bearing, pith, meat, essence, spirit:
implication, denotation, suggestion,
nuance, allusion, acceptation, interpretation,
connotation, hidden meaning,
arrière-pensée, substance, effect, burden,
gist, sum and substance, argument, content,
matter, text, subject matter, subject,
of all things that are;

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Being of its furthest fires oracular;—
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ULISES CARRIÓN'S EARLY POETICS

THERE IS NOT *ONE* Ulises Carrión. But at the level of poetic experimental writing, from the end of the sixties to the late eighties, there was an impetus in Carrión toward the making of poetic works that replaced an inertial literary expression of referential content with a conceptual mobilization of abstract signifiers.

He shifted from traditional storytelling to experimental writing at the end of the sixties and began publishing (and exhibiting) his experimental work in 1972. *Sonnet(s)* belongs to that opening series. It does not entirely reflect his later bibliopoetics, which was aphoristically formulated in his 1974 manifesto "The New Art of Making Books." *Sonnet(s)* both preludes and eludes that program.

Around 1970, the year that I came to live in the Netherlands, I stopped writing linear literature in order to work with spatial possibilities of language ... In my books, I use language as raw material ... language is an abstract and non-literary system of oral and visual signs, that have no other function than being elements of a given structure.¹

Contrary to many first impressions about his legacy, Carrión did want to not make "artists books."² An artists book can be any book that goes beyond the traditional material plainness of most books. Carrión was militant and programmatic—a fact that has often been overlooked because of both his personal charisma as well as the mainstream's insufficient awareness of the heated and cross-referenced discussions around visual poetics, book-arts, and mail-art in Carrión's circle. Carrión's work grew increasingly experimental and

1 Carrión, "About my work," 6.

2 This edition uses "artists book" and "artists books" without the possessive apostrophe, as is now standard practice, unless quoting from an earlier source. [Ed.]

Mónica de la Torre

SHADOW BOXING

DEAR READER. DON'T READ. Of course you just did, and by doing so, you animated one of the many paradoxes beating at the heart of Ulises Carrión's amphibian, language-based work, adaptable both to the gallery wall and the bound pages of books. While the command makes for a compelling provocation in any form, it might be useful to know that it originally appeared in an eponymous diptych from 1973, and that it was used as the title of Carrión's most recent retrospective at the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid and the Jumex Museum in Mexico City in 2016. In both instances there's a slippage between the subject addressed by the phrase, the reader, and the viewer bound to encounter it in the context of an exhibition. The slippage is sly, almost unnoticeable, and there's more to it than pithy humor or the insouciant reversal of conceptualism's tenets shunning opticality and conventional art viewing in favor of reading as integral to the experience of the work.

As we know, Ulises Carrión was not always an artist, and his involvement with the language arts was a uniquely bifurcated one. In seeking to study literature at UNAM's Facultad de Filosofía y Letras and moving to Mexico City from the small tropical city of San Andrés Tuxtla, Veracruz, famous for its tobacco and cigars, he was following in the footsteps of many an aspiring Mexican writer. (It is the same department of the National University so convincingly portrayed by Roberto Bolaño in *The Savage Detectives*, with its distinctive fervor for literature and political engagement.) Early on, Carrión published the short story collection *La muerte de Miss O* (Miss O's Death, 1966) and the novel *De Alemania* (Of Germany, 1970) with prestigious Mexican presses, but that would be the extent of his publishing trajectory in Mexico. Graduate studies took him to Paris and Leeds, and in 1972, he settled in Amsterdam, where he was eager to cease using Spanish as his primary language and cast aside his identity as a Mexican writer who *wrote* books.

Felipe Becerra

“AMSTERDAM HAS NOT DISCOVERED THE
MIMEOGRAPH YET”: BOOK PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGIES AND THE FORGING OF
COMMUNITIES

THE FACT THAT ULISES Carrión often acted as the author, publisher, and distributor of his works does not imply that he operated in isolation. Quite the contrary, his self-published books and magazines (co-authored or not) usually address the interactions and social framework in which Carrión conceived them. Through a close examination of two of his many publications, this essay argues that far from being incidental, the particular choices of the mimeograph, typewriter, and handwriting used in the publishing process are deeply related to the specific histories and properties of the networks they helped to create. Zooming in on these often neglected technologies¹ not only illuminates the specific ways in which, during the 1970s, Carrión redefined what we understand as writing, a work, and authorship, but also sheds light on how he conceived of his publishing practice as a means to forge a community.

Even if it was broadly losing its place to the photocopy machine, the mimeograph was still a common duplicating tool in schools and offices in the years around 1970. By this time in Latin America, the mimeograph was particularly popular among political resistance activists and marginal literary movements. The typewriter, for its part, was still the preferred writing tool both in workplaces and the literary field. When it was introduced a century earlier, the typewriter began a process of mechanization that would make more uniform and efficient the production of legible texts. Consequently, this technology not only “pushed handwriting to the realm of the personal,” but distanced the author from the text,

1 Following W. J. Ong, I understand handwriting to be another technology of the word.

India Johnson

RESURRECTION SONNET

IN 1975, ULISES CARRIÓN summed up everything I would learn in bookbinding school:

“A writer, contrary to popular opinion, does not write books.
A writer writes texts.”¹

Clearly, Carrión’s audience were not bookbinders, or they wouldn’t have needed the reminder. But as poet and printer Alan Loney observes, at “some of the most sophisticated levels in the discussion”² we still seem to confuse the book and the text. Even though no one is *actually* confused about the difference between the two. Put another way, you are now in the back matter of a republication of a bookwork by Carrión. But publishers, contrary to popular opinion, do not republish books. Publishers republish texts.

What would it mean to republish *SONNET(S)* as a book?

To give his fans and scholars alike a bit of credit, republications of Carrión’s texts usually contend with their initial incarnation: as books. Take Taller Ditoria, a publisher who bothered to letterpress *Poesías* “on an 1887 Chandler and Price platen press.”³ Or Michalis Pichler, who composed *SOME MORE SONNET(S)* on the twenty-first-century type-writer: Microsoft Word.

What no one seems to have done is to mimeograph 200 copies and staple them along one edge.

If you care about *SONNET(S)* as a book, you’re probably

1 Carrión, “El arte nuevo de hacer libros” (The New Art of Making Books), in *El arte nuevo de hacer libros*, 37. Quotations from “El arte nuevo” in this essay are my own translations of the Spanish-language version published by Tumbona Ediciones, where the editors note that “[t]his essay was written in Spanish . . . the complete version was first published in the magazine *Plural*, no. 41 (Mexico City, 1975).”

2 Loney, “What Book Does My Library Make?,” 5.

3 Carrión, *Poesías*, front cover flap.

Annette Gilbert

BORROWED SONNETS

translated by Shane Anderson

SONNET(S)—THE PARADOXICAL CONCURRENCE OF the singular and plural makes perfect sense in the title of Ulises Carrión's first bookwork from 1972. The bookwork contains both 44 sonnets and a single sonnet; that is, there are 44 variations of the same sonnet presented therein. That this poem does not originate from Carrión's pen and was taken from the Pre-Raphaelite poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life: A Sonnet Sequence* (1881) is a fact that is never explicated. The only veiled suggestion of this is in the title of the first sonnet in the series: BORROWED SONNET. Today, a calm argument could be made that this belongs to the common artistic strategy of appropriation and that the bookwork should therefore be classified as Appropriation Literature. But in 1972, this was a clear provocation, especially since Carrión himself called it plagiarism. With the concept of plagiarism, emphasis is then placed on the *unlawful* acquisition of intellectual property belonging to others and it stresses the reprehensibility of this action, a breaking of taboos.

Yet, Carrión's interest was not only in being provocative. For him, *SONNET(S)* was primarily a question of liberation—liberation from the excess of what is already existing and the compulsion to be innovative and express oneself; liberation as well as from the standard interpretative models and the commodity character of art. In a statement published on the front page of the first issue of *Vandagos* in 1973, Carrión provides a short, thesis-like answer to the question "Why Plagiarisms?" He begins with an observation—"because [t]here are so many books / It takes so long to read or write a book"—that is very reminiscent of Douglas Huebler's phrasing in 1968 that "the world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more."¹ Carrión then envisions plagiarism as an

1 Huebler, "Untitled," 117.