

wayward books

A STUDY ON UNCONVENTIONAL BOOKS



PhD Thesis
National University of Arts
in Bucharest, 2021

Scientific coordinator
Professor Alexandru Ghilduş, PhD

PhD Student
Adelina Butnaru

README.TXT

1.0 THE BOOK

1.1 HOW A BOOK BECAME A BOOK

Writing

History

1.2 WHAT IS A BOOK MADE OF

Structure

Binding

Design/Layout

Grid

Typeface/Font

Illustration

2.0 THE WAYWARD BOOK

2.1 UNCONVENTIONAL

Accordion Book (Foldout book/Orihon/Concertina fold/Leporello)

Animated Book (Flip Book/Folioscope/Kineograph)

Mechanically animated Book (Mechanical Flip Book/Kinematoscope)

Anaglyph Books/Stereoscopic drawings

Tunnel Book

Moiré Book

Pop-up Book/Movable Book

Cadavre exquis/Exquisite corpse

Cut Out Illustration Book

Cube Book

Multifunctional Book

Miniature book

Fat Book

Special Colors Systems Book

Silent Book

2.2 UNCONVENTIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Unconventional design

Unconventional production

Unconventional content

3.0 PRACTICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Illustrated Books

3.2 Covers

3.3 Internship/Workshop

CONCLUSIONS

Appendix — Creative people attached here

Bibliography

Within the context of book design, *wayward books* is a phrase invented by the poet and writer Florin Bican in 2017, reflecting the desire to create, together with Bucharest-based Pandora M publishing house, a new collection of unconventional books. The motivation for undertaking the current study arises from the commonly accepted consideration that a good book is one that chooses the optimum means for the visual representation of its content. The project thus has an informative dimension, whereby the reader is initiated into the universe of books and finds out new information, thereby acquiring new perspectives on and appreciation for books. A formative dimension is also envisioned, where the reader is able to eventually recognize and decipher himself/herself the elements and characteristics that enable a book to transcend the limits of the ordinary. Finally, the project also aspires to an educative dimension, which develops the aesthetic taste of the reader, who can eventually distinguish between books of different implied quality.

The professional objectives of the project are: a) contributing to the development of the *unconventional* as an independent category in its own right (through understanding the deviations from the norm), b) systematizing of criteria and classifications of the unconventional (which would allow book designers to analyze recurring patterns) and c) exemplifying principles of unconventionality through personal works belonging to the portfolio of the doctoral student.

The limitations of the study are related to the purpose and the scope of the study. Thus, even though the thesis presents a small history of the book, this is by no means an exhaustive treatment up to the level of a design textbook. Also, the study is confined to examining books printed on a physical medium, not discussing digital publishing.

The structure of the book is divided into three chapters.

01 THE BOOK

The first chapter aims to perform a conceptual analysis of books in general. The book represents a triumph of the human intellect, through the act of preserving information throughout time for the next generations, as well as by disseminating culture. Thus, the first subchapter, 01. HOW A BOOK BECAME A BOOK, presents a review of the main historical highlights in the evolution of the book up to contemporary times. The chronology includes both the period before the invention of the printing press, as well as the subsequent progress in the fields of typeface and editing. Finally, brief remarks are added on recent trends towards dematerialization and digitalization of books (audiobook, e-book, augmented reality).

The second subchapter, 02. WHAT IS A BOOK MADE OF, analyses the elements that make up a book. In order to later acquire a better understanding of the process that a book undergoes in print, it is desirable to understand in the first place what are the constitutive parts of a conventional book. Thus, a brief exposition of the structural elements of a book is presented: the dust jacket, the covers, the headband or endband, bookblock or textbook, the free endpaper, the turn-in, and the inner hinge and book spine. This is followed by a discussion of the printing process, namely page imposition, folding, and also by a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each binding method (glued, stitched or sewed, fixed devices, etc.). The standardization of formats (i.e A4, A5) in order to avoid paper waste and choosing the right type of paper (i.e composition, density, texture, opacity) are considerations used to illustrate the increased variety of options available in book production, and implicitly the need to fully know and understand the purpose of the book and the audience if targets. The varieties of printing methods are also detailed in this section.

Next, from an immaterial standpoint, analyzing book design, a literature review documents the opinions prevailing among book designers, who emphasize the importance of aesthetics, both in terms of calibration to the requirements of the author, the reader, and the printing house and in terms of functionality, legibility, navigability and consistency. To ensure consistency book designers use grid networks. These are pre-made templates, split into horizontal and vertical units (rectangles or squares). These allow the unification of work done by multiple people under a set of clear rules. The technique of the grid is also discussed in terms of content: a grid can be constructed in a symmetrical fashion (suited more for books that require a classical look-and-feel) or in an asymmetrical fashion (useful to produce a modern and dynamical look-and-feel, with rhythm variations).

The choice of typeface and font is integrated in the analysis through a short taxonomy. At this point, the distinction between text letter and presentation letter is introduced, followed by a detailed retrospective of the main serif fonts (humanist, old style serif, transitional, didone) and non-serif fonts (grotesque, neo-grotesque, geometric, glific, etc.). The discussion also features an evaluation of best practices in combining different letters. The last factor discussed is illustration. While currently illustration is mostly found in children's books, science fiction books for teenagers, or certain special textbooks, it has been noted by multiple authors that illustration has long had multiple uses throughout time: to inform, to influence, to provoke, to entertain, to persuade.

Going through the list of elements that make up a book, one paradoxical fact emerges: while there is a plethora of options — both physical production as well as design — books for the most part have tended towards a certain standardization. There are well established conventions in terms of paper, format, colour, binding, typeface, illustration, genre of the book, etc. Book design is to a large extent still rooted in the traditional and the conventional. It thus follows that designers need to understand the existing conventions, as they embody functional value. However, limiting the design horizon only to the conventions in place may end up promoting clichés.

02 THE WAYWARD BOOK

The second chapter develops the concept of wayward books, by explaining and exemplifying the unconventional character, and the act of surpassing current limitations in book design.

The subchapter 2.1 UNCONVENTIONAL introduces the notion of unconventional, starting from the finding of the first chapter about the existence of conventions, however delimiting the unconventional book from the artistic book. It is commonly accepted that a book should have, generally speaking, a rectangular shape and the inside of the book should feature some text. Other deviations may suggest something different/unusual is going on. The argument made is that these particularities give a book its authenticity. The idea of the book is not represented solely by the text of the author, but also by its physical shape or the book or its typographic details. Thus, it follows that the unconventional book is not a purely artistic installation but retains its book character.

In order to illustrate the unconventional character, the following categories have been identified:

- Accordion Book (Foldout book/Orihon/Concertina fold/Leporello)
- Animated Book (Flip Book/Folioscope/Kineograph)
- Mechanically animated Book (Mechanical Flip Book/Kinematoscope)
- Anaglyph Books/Stereoscopic drawings
- Tunnel Book
- Moiré Book
- Pop-up Book/Movable Book
- Cadavre exquis/Exquisite corpse
- Cut Out Illustration Book
- Cube Book
- Multifunctional Book
- Miniature book
- Fat Book
- Special Colors Systems Book
- Silent Book

Each category is described and analyzed, with emphasis on establishing the unconventional aspects. Examples of books are provided for each category. Following the presentation of the fifteen unconventional categories, the subchapter 2.2 UNCONVENTIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS proposes a classification of the unconventional, starting from a stronger defining feature that a certain book may have — though, of course, certain books may as well fit in all three categories at the same, depending on the weight attached to each factor. The classification is based on three main criteria:

1. Unconventional design (layout, illustration) — reflected through illustrations that are often ironical or contradictory in nature, treating serious (perhaps even macabre or violent) topics through a humorous lens (even positive or life affirming), suggestive illustrations (that invite the reader to complete the image by his own imagination), the symbolic representation of abstract states (happiness, agony, etc.), non-linear structure (for example one that allows time to flow back-wards), etc.
2. Unconventional production (binding, materials, matrix) — the ability to mix, combine, and recombine parts of the book (for example cards bound together with metal spirals), cut-out illustration technique, page flows (for example as in the accordion system, which plays back an action), three-dimensional effects through paper cuts, perfor lines (for example special matrices that perforates the outline of a character identically on all pages), etc.
3. Unconventional content — can be encountered through a subject that has shock-value (for example treating death as the main subject in a children's illustrated book), through experimental language (as in the case of surrealist or avantgarde representations), through writing techniques that generate illogical or bizarre content (for example writing a novel without the letter *e*), through the structure of the text (for example writing a novel in a dictionary format), etc.

Every criterion is argued with ten examples each, and the particularities of each example are discussed.

03 PRACTICAL RESEARCH

The third chapter presents the personal works from the portfolio of the doctoral student. These reflect the professional interests, as well as the personal efforts undertaken in promoting unconventional books.

The subchapter 3.1 ILLUSTRATED BOOKS presents details on two illustrated books that the doctoral student has worked on. The first book is *Advice to Little Girls*, written by Mark Twain, published by Tzim Tzum. The translation was done by the writer Florin Bican, and the doctoral student did the illustration. The book on the *Grand Prize* at the national event *The most*

beautiful books in Romania in the year 2017 and was part of the international exhibition *Die schönsten Bücher der Welt 2017*, that took place during the Leipziger Buchmesse book fest. The book can be assimilated to the wayward concept, in the sense that the dust covers doubles as a poster. Also, the book is special also from a technical standpoint, as up to the year 2017 there were no other books in Romania that fully printed illustrations in three special PANTONE colours.

The second book is titled *Fables and Wise Words*, being a collection of curated texts involving humour and satire, published by Arthur. The book was selected at the national exhibition *Romanian Design Week* in 2021, within the *Graphic Design and Illustration* section. Currently (September 2021), it is the only book in Romania that was printed in six special colours PANTONE, two of which are also phosphorescent. The book has 5 fore edges of 24 pages each and one of 16 pages. The fore edges alternate colors, when each set of pages change, the colours change as well.

The subchapter 3.2 COVERS presents the graphic design works done by the doctoral student, in collaboration with various publishing and printing houses. The discussion centres around the notion of ‘book collection’, where all book covers must be uniform and have a consistent identity that distinguishes them unequivocally from other collections. Examples are provided by analyzing the differences between collections of psychology/psychoanalysis and those of literature or political analysis. In addition, some pointers are provided as to the development, evolution, and consolidation of the doctoral student’s appreciation of books, as correlated with a holistic involvement in the book creation process.

The subchapter 3.3 INTERNSHIP/WORKSHOP enumerates the seminars and workshops of practical research that the doctoral student was involved in, as well as the outcomes that have resulted. During the year 2017, the doctoral student did a internship with the Wagenbreth design and illustration studio in Berlin. During this time, the doctoral student wrote and illustrated a small book titled *Nine Lives, The First Book Written by Cats*, which aimed to create characters of different proportions. To this end, geometric shapes were recombined to form different structures. The text also had its challenges, with the idea being to have each story be told in once sentence only.

In 2019, the doctoral student participated in a workshop conducted by the Dutch designer Fred Smeijers, which resulted in three fonts being created: *Capătrat* (slab serif), *Pixelpitic* (geometric) și *Unendlich* (dingbat typeface, with interchangeable elements).

The concept was to start from creating a conventional letter (slab serif), followed by progressive geometric digitalization, up to the point where the font has faded into an illustration.

Finally, the personal writings that were the outcome of the workshops are also presented. They are envisioned as being texts that complement the illustration and may highlight the unconventional character but are not meant to be interpreted as independent in their own right. The writings reflect the aspiration of the doctoral student towards a multidisciplinary approach, through which eclectic exploration of multiple creation mediums stimulate individual creativity, an attribute that is so necessary in surpassing the limits of convention. As was shown in chapter 2, an unconventional text can form the basis of a wayward book.

The final chapter, CONCLUSIONS, summarizes the main ideas of the study. The Appendix attaches interviews conducted by the doctoral student for the purpose of documentation with writers and editors. Among subjects included are what makes a book great, the attributes that make a book unconventional, the print versus digital debate, the evolution of the books of the future, the need for books in general, and others.

KEYWORDS

books
editorial design
fonts
illustration
printing
typeface
unconventional books
wayward books