

*Poetiken des Blätterns*. Christoph Benjamin Schulz.

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Recent transformations of the media landscape have made us ever more sensitive to the impact of the book as a physical object on the transmission of texts. Historians of the book have investigated how producers developed the medium into an increasingly advanced instrument for ordering, storing, and presenting textual information, while historians of reading have revealed in intriguing detail how individual readers could customize their books. Schulz's study, a revised version of his doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Bochum (2012), offers a further contribution to this field by examining a particularly fascinating feature of the codex: the opportunity to leaf through it and flick its pages. Proceeding from the premise that the book as object conditioned the presentation and consumption of text, Schulz offers a diachronic exploration of the phenomenon of leafing, discussing both historical uses of the codex predicated on the practice and literary representations of the phenomenon. The result is a rich and intriguing overview of the forms and functions of flicking through books, ranging from antiquity to the late twentieth century.

Of particular interest to the readers of this journal is Schulz's attention to the early modern history of leafing. An extensive section is devoted to magical applications of the book, such as bibliomancy, rhapsodomancy, and oracle books. Originating in an ancient tradition of oracular reading, particular works (e.g., of Homer or Virgil) were believed to have divinatory powers. By opening the book at random they would provide personal advice or foretell the future. Schulz shows how the Christian tradition remained ambivalent to this practice. Augustine's famous conversion story depended on the oracular consultation of the New Testament, but later church rulings increasingly discredited these practices as superstitious. Critical reflections on the persistence of the tradition can be found, as Schulz shows, in literary representations such as the Virgilian bibliomancy in Rabelais's *Tiers livre de Pantagruel* and Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*.

In contrast to these oracular forms of leafing, other types of books, such as flick books and blow books, sought to create a magical effect by exploiting the potential of page flipping for optical illusions. Schulz traces the use of flick books back to the sixteenth century, adducing descriptions in Girolamo Cardano's *De Subtilitate* (1551), Jean Prevost's *La première partie des subtiles, et plaisantes inventions* (1584), and Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). He furthermore discusses the literary uses of the flick book in Hans Jakob Christoph von Grimmelshausen's *Symplificissimus* cycle, the

eighth installment (1670) of which was supposedly accompanied by a “Gauckeltasche,” and in his *Der Beernhäuter*, published in the same year, in which a literary adaptation of a flick book was presented as an appendix with woodcut illustrations. Schulz interprets Grimmelshausen’s adaptation of the flick book as “a model” for interpreting the literary work and its moral message, an activity that in the end depended on the person “who leafs through the pages” (127).

Arguably less concerned with actual leafing is a section on *Vexierbücher*, faux books, and creative bindings, regarded by Schulz as a conscious reflection on the material form of the book. Although it is not always clear what this reflection can teach us, the chapter presents intriguing examples of bookish *trompe l’oeil*, ranging from a fourteenth-century mock manuscript produced by the Limbourg brothers as a tongue-in-cheek parallel to the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, to a rather more down-to-earth eighteenth-century chamber-pot chair disguised as set of four folio volumes entitled *Voyage des Pays Bas*. In his discussion of excerpting and commonplacing, Schulz skillfully synthesizes the scholarship of Helmut Zedelmaier, Ann Blair, and Ann Moss to present these scholarly reading practices as part of a process of mechanization, which ultimately leads to the “dissolution” of the book. The art of excerpting turned the book into a reservoir of useful fragments of knowledge that could be rearranged flexibly when copied out on slips and stored in a specifically designed note closet.

*Poetiken des Blätterns* offers a treasure trove of examples of the uses of leafing, illuminating both practices and literary explorations of this important quality of the codex. Ironically, Olms Verlag has neglected to add an index to the book, which curiously hampers its own potential for scholarly leafing.

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