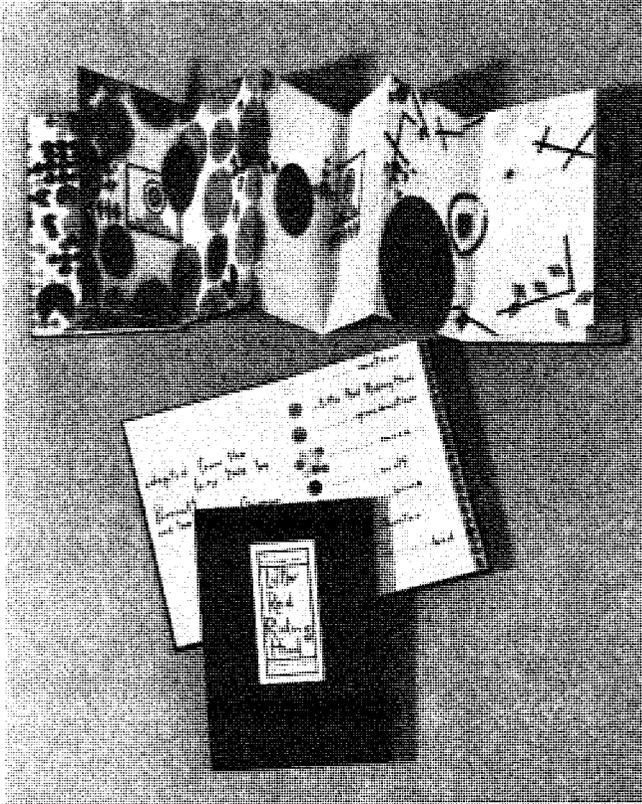


## PROFILE: Warja Lavater, bookmaker extraordinaire



Born in Zurich, she spent her first childhood years with her parents in Russia and Greece. Later in Winterthur, she went to high school and in Zurich she went to the trade school for graphics at the Arts and Crafts School. After studying in Stockholm, Basel and Paris together with her late husband, Gottfried Honegger, she opened a studio for applied graphics in Zurich. Themes of trademarks, colophons, signs are characteristic of her work. Her first children's book appeared in 1949. For several years, she edited and created a typographic and illustrative monthly children's newspaper and gained through her experiences how the reading of symbol is attained.

From 1958 - 60, she lived in New York with her family and discovered while illustrating scientific books and by observations in Chinatown that a symbol, once introduced, will keep its meaning and is capable of transmitting a message. The contact with American painters gave her the inspiration to break away from her inherited ways of representation and to have in her drawings literary allusions.

Alfred Barr, founder and director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, obtained for the museum her first small soft cover book, *William Tell*, and published it as a "special edition." Later, several other books followed that were published by MOMA, including *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Since 1960, Warja Lavater lives partly in her studio in Zurich and partly in her studio in Paris. Through the publishing house of Basilius Presse Basel, a small book appeared between 1962 and 1968 entitled *Folded Stories*, lithographs on stone, illustrated and printed by Emil Mathieu Zurich and in laminated layers partly handcolored.

Adrien Maeght, editor in Paris, and her publisher since 1963 created in collaboration with her a quantity of paperbacks in his print shop, such as *Arte*, and *Imageries*, which has been adopted in the teachers' curriculum, *Animations*, created in the Studio des Enfants, at the Centre Georges-Pompidou in Paris. Other publishers such as Adolf Hurlimann in Zurich and Lafrance Locarno have published her books.

The experimental work by Lavater is always original. She paints thoughts which she wants to transmit as stories in a volume, or as in most cases, on long pre-folded strips of paper. She expresses herself in picture-writing.

Here is a self-interview, which appeared in a handout at her exhibition at the Maeght-Zurich Galerie 3 in February-March 1979:

Book.

It stands in the book.  
Could it also lay?

It stands in the book with letters  
Does it have to be letters?

The letter does not stand alone, many letters build a horizontal line.  
Does the line have to stay horizontal?

The letter is a character  
Could the character in its parts be divided?

Letters from our alphabet are known to all.  
Aren't monuments also known?

Monuments do not belong in a writing.  
Who acknowledges the type of a writing?

Letters in a book are read from left to right, from top to bottom.  
Ought not one to read also from the bottom to the top, or roundabout?

It is in the sentence type-face.  
Must it be so orderly?

Letters do not belong in a volume.  
Why indeed not? Surely their movement is much freer than in a paperback?

After all, nobody pays attention to this depth, one merely jumps over them as one reads.  
Well, it is there, doesn't it bring opposition? but also light and shadow?

Also the turning of the pages are done automatically.  
Couldn't one change it?

On the contrary, the flipping through the pages is a psychic pleasure.  
Yes, but with psychic touch, the book comes in contact with

the hand, it forces the sight, it tears the fantasy.

A book does not live through manipulations, it lives through spiritual contents.

A book is an object, couldn't it add to its from the spiritual?

This object has its traditions.

Every tradition has once been discovered, shouldn't we

This object has a function, the line length for instance, counts for the weariness of the eye.

Why not cheer the eyes up instead of making them tired?

Futuristic type-faces are unreadable, they belong in the department of art.

Aren't symbols understandable when the meaning is already known?

To remember symbols with meanings is too tiresome.

But, where symbols move about like actors on a stage, doesn't something new appear: the performance strength?

The performance strength does not appear through diagrams but rather through representation.

Isn't the representation in the street also a writing?

The performance strength implied by traffic signs is self-comprehensible.

Such signs are a picture, isn't that readable or not?

A picture is interpretative; letters on the contrary mean security.

Is there security? or does security exist?

A letter that will be divided in its whole form, a letter symbol that does not belong to the alphabet, a line that does not run horizontal, a double side to the side. . . a choreography to the ornament. . . structures to the picture writing . . symbols that become a type-face. . a story without an overall publication. . . a volume that changes into a volume. . is that still a book?

There is time. . . It has a beginning and It has an end. . . in the volume.

It is a Book.

--Translated by Debra Burchett



EVOLUTION OF AN ELEMENT  
Compressed in Paris 1970 by Bettina  
Collection Mayor of Zurich, WORDWORK III