

JAB 12 EXPERIMENTAL NARRATIVE & ARTISTS' BOOKS

TIME	TRK	DESTINATION	REMARKS
9:20	00	CENTRAL WARMON	
9:55	30	FRANCOIS-DEE/STE	
10:20	37	CENTRAL WARMON	YONKERS-1ST STOP
10:20	37	CENTRAL WARMON	NORRIS HEIGHTS-1ST STOP
10:20	37	CENTRAL WARMON	ONKERS-1ST STOP
10:20	37	CENTRAL WARMON	NORRIS HEIGHTS-1ST STOP

PRODUCT INTEGRITY

just in time, rises like

STEAM

or arrives with the vernal equinox,
raising predictable questions of reliability.

Remedial effects are felt everywhere and paid handsomely.

Robbed of alternatives, they were

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SPECIAL ISSUE: Experimental Narrative and Artists' Books

Foster Hall Gallery, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge

September 5, 1999 to September 30, 1999

"TURNING THE PAGE:**A CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS OF THE BOOK"**

As we "turn the page" to the 21st century, interest and even concern about the future of the book in a world where electronic communication becomes more and more commonplace is ever increasing. The Libraries and the School of Art at Louisiana State University have developed Turning the Page, to create community awareness of the book as an art form. Ten Baton Rouge organizations have cooperated to create the first city-wide celebration of this kind, which is aimed at increasing our appreciation and broadening our definition of the book and its place in the evolving world of contemporary art. These events celebrate the rich tradition of book making and highlight works of today's most prominent book artists.

Books demand the synthesis of two important literacies: linguistic and visual. Public forums will address the transformational power of the book in community and curriculum. Exhibitions, workshops, video presentations and lectures will highlight vibrant aspects of the arts of the book and discuss how the fusion of the various disciplines of artists, writers, graphic designers and crafts people results in this unique and dynamic form of artistic expression.

"Turning the Page: A Celebration of the Arts of the Book" is the perfect vehicle to implement and support fine printing in Louisiana, a region where traditional crafts and storytelling have deep roots. Exhibitions such as "Experimental Narrative" reinforce the storytelling nature of books, and storytelling has the power to transcend race, culture, age and educational background. In essence, the book is a crucible for conversion, and our hope is that "Turning the Page" acts as a bookmark signifying an important opportunity for examining this rapidly changing genre. It will also create lasting partnerships among arts organizations, and serve to bring the artistic and literary communities closer together.

Leslie Koptcho
School of Art
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge

CURATORS' NOTE

JAB₁₂ is entirely dedicated to the exhibition, "Experimental Narrative and Artists' Books," Foster Hall Gallery, School of Art, Louisiana State University, September 5, 1999 through September 30, 1999. It contains statements by the artists whose work is featured in the exhibition and catalogue: Bill Burke, François Deschamps, Helen Douglas, Johanna Drucker, Brad Freeman, Ruth Laxson, Clifton Meador, Judith Mohns, Bea Nettles, Gary Richman, Clarissa Sligh, Telfer Stokes, Philip Zimmermann, and Janet Zweig.

As part of the opportunities afforded by his position as Visiting Professional at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, for Fall semester 1999, Brad Freeman was invited to curate an exhibition on some aspect of artists' books. He chose to focus on the topic of experimental narrative, primarily on account of his own interests in using books and their structure to comment upon his own experience, and also on account of the considerable amount of interesting contemporary work produced in this area in the last decades. Johanna Drucker collaborated with him on curating the exhibition, as well as on this catalogue, which is issued as JAB₁₂. Since its founding six years ago, JAB has found an increasingly wide readership and also, happily, an array of writers interested in developing the critical discussion of the field, and we will return to our usual format in the Spring 2000 issue, JAB₁₃.

We are most appreciative of the assistance offered by Leslie Koptcho, in the School of Art, and Elaine Smyth, in the Library, at Louisiana State University, and for the opportunity to put this exhibition and catalogue together. Thanks to Charles Bae for scanning slides of the artists' works, and to the artists for their participation. Additional thanks to JoAnne Paschall of Nexus Press for various kinds of assistance with regard to Bill Burke's work. And finally, thanks to Ken Strickland, Dean of the School of Art and Design at Purchase College, SUNY, for permission to use the Center for Editions in producing this issue of JAB.

guaranteed to change your consciousness

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Todd Walker (right), photographed with Joe Ruther, (left) in 1981, while on the road.
Photograph by Brad Freeman.

Dedication to Todd Walker 1917-1998

This exhibition and catalogue, issued as the *Journal of Artists' Books* #12, are dedicated to the memory of Todd Walker. His extensive and sustained work in the form of the book inspired us to investigate its potential, to enjoy its complexity and specificity, and to understand print technology as a creative tool.

EXPERIMENTAL NARRATIVE AND ARTISTS' BOOKS

Johanna Drucker

Stories, as literary historian Karl Kroeber says, are as old as humankind, and the telling and retelling of tales is a fundamental feature of social behavior.¹ Personal and collective narratives serve to render coherent the inexplicable and random features of lived experience. According to the cultural anthropologists and structuralists of the early 20th century, the formal coherence of a narrative provides an individual or a group with a version of existence that it can inhabit in its imaginary, psychic space.² Mythic tales form the core of cultural identity whether told around the fire, etched in stone, printed and bound, or viewed on the screens of televisions and theaters. These stories forge a bond between individual experience and collective frames of reference. Our belief systems are created by the stories they embody, our lives shaped according to the narratives we come to expect and imagine. To a great extent, the sense we make of the world we inhabit is formed by the culturally specific shape of our capacity to imagine it, and in turn, each story contributes to the culture's own narration of its identity, values, and history. Narrative not only gives coherence to our lived experience, it also has the capacity to transport us out of the limits of our own perspective through the accounts or adventures of others.

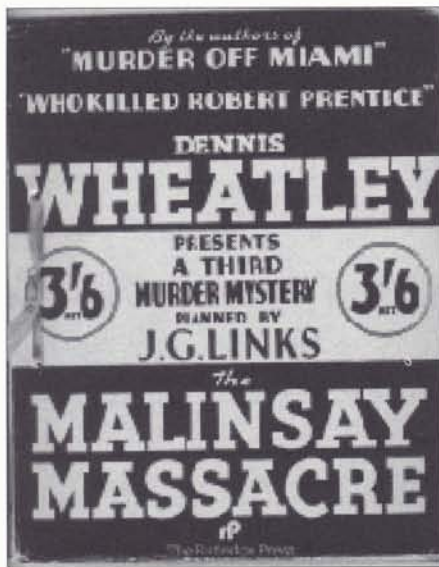
But stories are not simply or only the tales that they tell. The unfolding of a narrative involves the act of telling as well as the substance of what is told. An audience receives a tale in an act of reading, watching, or listening but focuses on the story: the absent events take center stage as the circumstances of the telling disappear.³ The information in the actual text, the sequence of words, phrases, and/or images can be sketchy or replete: the story imagined between and among these elements in the mental reception of the viewer fills in these gaps, creating continuity and dimensions resonant with emotion and vividness. There is often a disproportionate relation between what is given in the narrative and produced in the imagination: in some ways the minimal accounts of ancient mythologies or folk tales are capable of suggestions that exceed those wrought by the heavily detailed descriptions of high realism. Even illogical forms of narration, the strange events of a Native American story featuring the complex character, Coyote, or a surrealist poem, can carry coherence through the compelling quality of our investment in belief, in the new sense that is made through surprising turns of narrative event. The unlikely text can produce an acceptable tale, and contrariwise, the most familiar and formulaic story can still engage us in the event of its telling even when we know, as in most modern films or television dramas, the predictable outcome that is scripted into the piece from the first scene. In experimental narratives, the tension between what Plato termed *lexis* (the mode of telling) and *logos* (that which is told) is often heightened and the discrepancy between the fragments of image

or text and the production of a story become a focus of the work.⁴ This is nowhere more true than in artists' books where a self-consciousness about the aesthetic potential of a familiar form is explored in imaginative use of the usual materials of storytelling (words and images) as well as the exploitation of the structures according to which they are offered to our eyes in the openings, turnings, and sequenced pages of a book.⁵ In artists' books, narrative negotiates between the finite real estate of the page and the vast territory of imagination making use of all and every possible tool of verbal and visual invention.

Narrative coherence offers a believable explanation, a workable story, a version of one's life that serves as a viable image of ongoing existence, a tale of continuity and disruption, of trials and tribulations with oneself or one's family, tribe, community, or people as the central figure whose tale is being told. Anthropologists and psychologists such as Joseph Campbell in *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Carl Jung in *Man and his Symbols*, trace the commonality of specific themes across cultural and historical boundaries and into the interior and dream life of individuals. The creation myth, the story of a flood, the hero's journey to the underworld, even the fall from grace and casting out from paradise by an angry god—many of these are stories that form the core of tales from prehistory to sacred texts and find their way into secular tales. Vladimir Propp, the Russian folklorist, suggested in his 1928 publication, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, that all narratives could be mapped onto a limited set of schematic outlines, and that these reductive formulae provided the fundamental devices of storytelling. Such a broad scope, and the generalizations to which it inevitably gives rise, blurring the boundaries of every era and situation into a vague sense of a "human spirit" must be tempered with the critical recognition of the social role of stories. Narrative has the capacity to function seductively and coercively as a force of control, concealing the stresses of lived experience behind the neat resolutions of tales told as entertaining distraction, that can conceal real conditions behind insidiously consumable clichés.⁶

In the absorption of oral tradition into written and then print culture, the possibilities for narrative techniques develop in dialogue with the potential of each technological innovation. Texts find their counterpart in painted images in wall paintings, codices, scrolls, manuscripts, books, newspapers, film, video, and then electronic media. Each mode of production offers its own characteristic qualities from intimate detail to monumental scale. Contemporary artists have a staggeringly wide range in their choice of approaches to the making of narrative works as well as to conceptualizing their content and premises.

Narrative stretches and bends, pulls at its conventions and is constantly reworked in every instance and instantiation. The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, written in the 1st century BC, are as dramatic an example of mutability of form as the violent 19th-century fantasies of Edgar Allan Poe. The first person voice of St. Augustine's 4th century *Confessions* are as revealing as the



Dennis Wheatley, *The Malinsay Massacre* (1939) Cover (left) and interior page (right) showing use of printed "artifacts" to document the events in a murder mystery. Wheatley's work enjoyed considerable popularity; the blurbs on the back of this volume boast that his stories had been translated into eighteen languages.

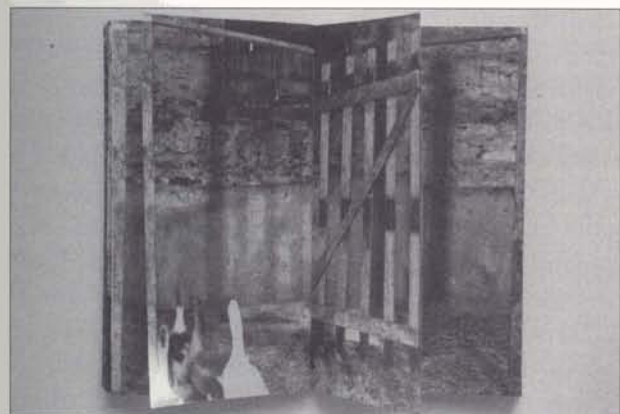
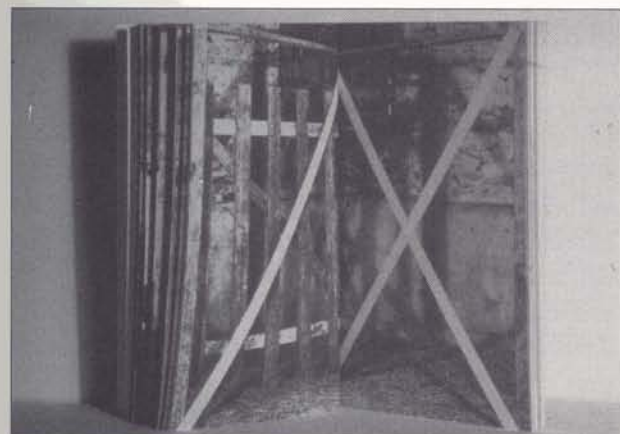
scandal producing stories of D.H.Lawrence or the erotic diaries of Anaïs Nin. The blend of fantasy and reality are as complex in Apuleius's 3rd century *The Golden Ass* as it is in the 18th century gothic tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann. The richly handpainted images of western medieval scribes who complemented their texts with a visual commentary often inflects the meaning of the words with more personal perspective than that expressed in the editorializing of contemporary mass circulation magazines. My point is simply that no claim to innovation can be sustained as exclusive to the modern practitioner, no surge of imagination belongs entirely to any point in history. And yet, each story engages with its time, is made of and helps to form the specifics according to which a context of belief is created and sustained. Narratives reflect the varied possibilities of the human mind to sustain and resolve contradictions between the telling and the told, and to weave a coherent tale from the most meagre offering of fragments or within the most richly nuanced texts, and to link the individual imagination into the cultural fabric.

While narrative is a fundamental feature of historical tales and a constant within traditional cultures, its place within the forms of western modern art is more problematic. Narrative became a negative term in (especially) French avant-garde art practice of the late 19th century. In response to the mythological, historical, and literary references of earlier eras, the artists of modern art turned their back on story as they turned their eyes away from realism and illusionistic conventions of pictorial representation. Visual modernism is replete with non-narrative subjects: abstract, innovative, formally daring and resolutely refusing to tell tales, these works flaunted their break with tradition in every possible way. Within modern literature the narrative also comes in for critical reassessment. The avant-garde writing of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is characterized by tales which take apart author, reader, and characters, working to undo all the classical terms of Aristotelian unity of place,

time, plot, and person in the telling of a story. The great monuments of modern fiction are all paens to the critical interrogation of narrative—James Joyce's monumental labyrinthine texts, Gertrude Stein's elaborate prose, even Virginia Woolf's articulate novels, like those of Marcel Proust, Robert Musil, and Samuel Beckett are structured to undo the expectations of a tale told in order and coherence as a mythic reflection of a reality held up for inspection. Gone were the great realists and romantics of the earlier epoch with their exhaustive chronicles of family, society, and spirit: Emile Zola, Honoré Balzac, the Brontës—Emily, Anne, and Charlotte, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, and George Eliot—all banished not only for their subject matter but for their form.⁷ In their place, after the devastating critical revamping wrought by early modern prose, came all manner of experiment: surrealist tales of dreamlike improbabilities; blunt, brief narratives of modern life and times; political novels tediously adhering to convention; and the rigid order of the new realist writers banishing subjectivity with a positivistic dependence on fact; and so on. But narrative had slipped from prime place within the dominant literary culture. It was compelled to be self-conscious about its mode of telling and adopt the fragmented phraseology of experiment, or else be pushed to the margins of high art and into the popular mainstream where it functioned as mere pulp for ready consumption in the genre mills of mystery, melodrama, science fiction, and romance.

Thus the history of narrative within the modern avant-garde is one in which the potential of lexis (the mode of telling) is exploded and expanded, remade into fragments and then tossed back out again so that the widest possible distance is introduced between the strategies of telling and the realization of the told. The history of artists' books' engagement with narrative is even more extreme in form—for not only is the textual or visual integrity of a prose work taken apart, but manipulations are also wrought upon the object of the book. Paper is sliced,

images and texts wrapped around edges and into margins, typographic arts engaged in the massage of meaning, and every other possible advantage taken of the material form as matter to be worked as artists continually invent new vocabularies in which to structure their experimental tales. In Raymond Queneau's famous *Cent Mille Millions de Poèmes* (1961) the pages are cut into strips allowing for continual remaking of the sequence of the text—a device that combines the surrealist penchant for chance juxtaposition with the writer's desire to free the poetic lines from their usual fixity. In Carolee Schneemann's novel made on cards, *ABC* (1977) the characters advance their interpersonal intrigues according to the sequence in which the lines of the story are drawn. In John Crombie's *Spreading the Word* (1987) the interwoven lines of narrative wrap and weave through the book and return the reader to the beginning again and again in an intricate pattern of textual sequence. And the artifacts that provide evidence in a Dennis Wheatley book, such as the *Malin-say Massacre* (1939) each printed as if they were unique letters, clippings, telegrams, and other originals, create a story in the cumulative sum of their parts. In every case just cited, the distinction between the discrete elements that the reader experiences and the story that is created by making connections among them is exaggerated by degree. But this tension exists at



Telfer Stokes and Helen Douglas, *Chinese Whispers*, 1975

ARTISTS' STATEMENTS

TELFER STOKES

1. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN NARRATIVE & BOOK FORM IN THREE BOOKS PUBLISHED BY WEPRODUCTIONS BETWEEN 1975 & 1998.

Right from the beginning with the first book *PASSAGE*, in 1972, my attempt was to establish the formal way "the book" worked, left & right page, back & front of the page, a sequence of pages, as in a short narrative sequence, always photographing the everyday objects, or making treatments to the page—whose selection depended on their aptitude to demonstrating book form.

However, even before that first book was completed I was aware that the rigours of book form might limit what was possible—there would be no chance of building a set to shoot, for instance, which I was very keen to do, if an object that went into the book had to be the same scale as it was in life—this would be severely limiting.

So it was quite intentional to build in that first book a series of sequences which had a progressive happening or story or narrative if you like, that bore only a secondary relation to book form.

The sequence from *PASSAGE* that I think more than any other relates to subsequent books and particularly to *CHINESE WHISPERS*, 1975 and *REAL FICTION*, 1987, is where the corner of the room is constructed over the existing corner, it is re-built with brick and lathe, plastered, painted and then knocked down, in twenty pages. The area that was viewed through the camera lens was the area that was constructed. So in the book, the construction is seen in camera proportions to the page and not to the book page proportions.

I always felt this was awkward, the corner should have come in the spine of the book—and the significance of the wedge shape that is so specifically the shape of an open book (the corner of the room)—at the time I was putting *PASSAGE* together, I had not seen it like that.

There is no doubt that the construction of the corner cupboard in *CHINESE WHISPERS* and the various constructions in the page in *REAL FICTION* where the spine of the book is the pivotal point to everything that happens not only followed as a point that had to be made in relation to that sequence in *PASSAGE*, but it was a surprisingly creative impetus through the 70's and 80's in the books that we made during that period.

It was as if as soon as *BOOK* could be found within the wedge of the pages of *THE BOOK*, there was within *BOOK*, an open field. Anything could happen.

This was very much the feeling with *REAL FICTION* as we constructed the page set and shot with the camera from page one and two onwards, one person manipulating the set the other looking down the lens of the camera.

2. *CHINESE WHISPERS*: Being committed to working with the spine of the book so each double spread was a crossover image meant that we were taking a big risk with something going wrong with the page alignment. It didn't take into account:

a. We printed eight sides backed onto another eight every page being a bled image



(Stokes, continued)

b. Each page required overlap for the trim including in the spine.

c. That the book was to be perfect bound.

d. That Joe Weldon, the printer, however sympathetic was still a commercial printer who had other jobs lined up behind us.

I suppose we took for granted that the book in embryo was bigger than any risk that would have to be taken when it came to printing it. We entered into a very intense period, the book being the focal point of our life together. We were in an empty farmhouse at a place called Cairn Holy, close by to a Neolithic site of the same name, in the SW of Scotland. Next door, was another abandoned farm house with all sort of useful things, like some chairs (we had a table) an imposing bed with a fantastic mattress and then all those things that are familiar from the book, the bread bin etc. etc. We found everything on site that we needed to make, *CHINESE WHISPERS*.

We started with the corner cupboard, that was the part that occupied our thinking most, that and the two colour vignettes (as we called them) printed on different stock. But then we started to think backward to what might be before the cupboard's construction. To the thing before that, and the thing before that, and the thing before that which was cutting of the hedge and before that which was the boot brush which we called the hedgehog—that was where the book started. Then we started to photograph from that point forward, through the book.

This was the first book to introduce a text which was punched out on dynotape and stuck to the outside of the shelf. By moving the camera back and forwards we were able to view a group or single object on the shelf to a few words or a phrase of the text. We were very literal in the way we shot film. What was viewed through the camera frame was converted to page proportions in the head and that would be the page of the book.

REAL FICTION: Between *CHINESE WHISPERS & REAL FICTION* there are six other books. Whereas I have always believed in each book being a step forward, I can think of no book that is as almost retrospective as is *REAL FICTION*.

What had happened was that a different book had come along that no longer depended on the development of each page being another step in a sequential visual narrative. This other book was a visual narrative where each page was a construction of similar elements but each time the combinations were different. In lots of ways this sort of book gave more freedom with a text to image relationship and whereas with the step by step visual narrative the text tended to come on alternate double spreads, it was possible with the constructed page to combine the image and text on the same page or the same double spread much more easily.

The books that used this way of working that proceeded *REAL FICTION*, were *MIM* and *YOUNG MASTERS & MISSES*.

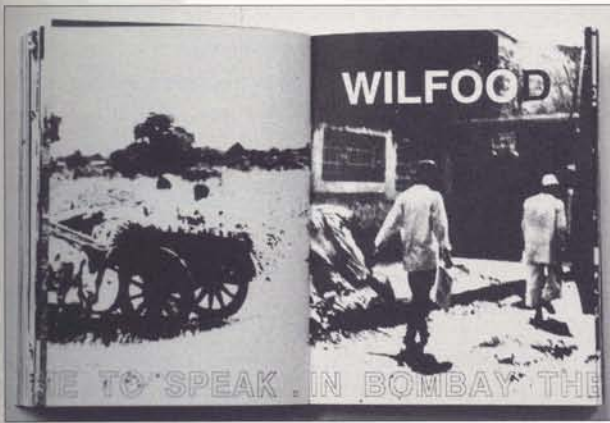
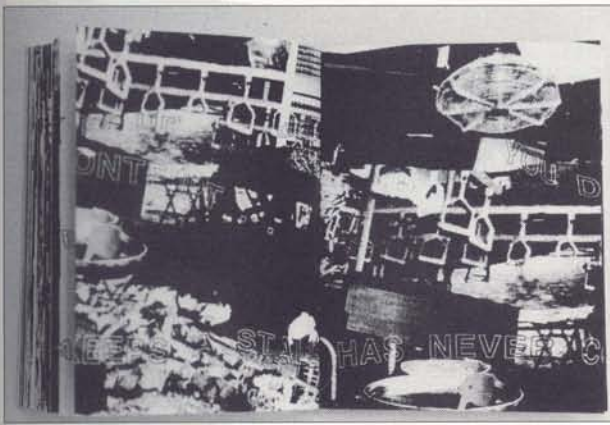
3. I remember quite vividly how we started *REAL FICTION*. We both had ideas for the forthcoming book and we both rejected each other's ideas. This was a shattering experience. There had never before been any doubt what the book we would be working on would be. On this occasion everything was different, I remember saying in complete despair— "Well I will just have to start thinking about making some sets," with no idea what to do with them and suddenly we both realized that what was getting in the way was these ideas for books. Letting something happen



the most basic level of story telling between what is termed the plane of discourse (what you see, hear, read, look at) and the plane of reference (the constructed narrative you create from these parts). In artists' books the gap between discourse and reference is often widened, increasing the active engagement required to create coherence and continuity. The invisible qualities of the material support that makes a normal act of reading into a situation in which the book practically disappears (when the telling is displaced by the told) become central to many artists' books.

In its structure a book is more like a film or symphony than a painting or print. Its sequence and form allow for dense and complex production of meaning. At the very minimum, the highly demarcated, emphatic division of opening from opening reinforced in the dramatic act of turning a page in a book is an essential act in narrative construction. The narrative events unfold through the doubly-articulated time of reading and of the tale being told. At its simplest, the book is a linear form, tracing a single storyline through a fixed sequence. At its most complex, the book is a spatial and temporal field of interwoven themes, motifs, and recapitulated references. Texts, images, or text and image relations structure meaning on every page. Whether mechanically produced or autographic, manipulated or as unmediated as possible, the components of the narrative carry meaning in the codes of their production as well as in the carefully orchestrated interactions of craft and artistic vision.

If story telling and the narrative impulse can be traced into the prehistory of oral tradition and early humankind's capacity to give itself identity through language and myth, books have a more limited and more accessible history. Like writing, books and texts comprise the very history to which the oral tradition is the elusive antecedent. The history of books is a history of conventions and artistic interventions. Can we call the book of Genesis an experimental narrative? Or Gilgamesh, the even earlier Assyrian tale of a king and his wild companion? The term experiment has very little value until these monuments of culture accrue to themselves the status of canonical texts against which transgression and deviation register as significant. Is there any contemporary hypertext more complex than the interwoven commentaries of the Talmud, that body of rabbinical and scholarly commentary upon the sacred Jewish texts? Does the sly intervention of a medieval scribe, making an ironic comment on a moral tale through the gestures inscribed in an illumination count as an artist's idea of a book? Is the Bayeux tapestry a comic strip? Are the *Yellow Pages* a great found narrative of concrete poetry and surreal texts? The history of convention and the role of the artist can be defined as broadly or narrowly as the moment requires, but for the purposes of this exhibition we have made our definition narrow indeed, funnelling our interests into a look at the last quarter of a century and defining artists' books as those self-identified artist-driven works in which the book form is central to the production of the piece.



Telfer Stokes, *Song of the Thrush*, 1998

One school of criticism dates the inauguration of artists' books as a specific form to the work of conceptual artists (usually Ed Ruscha) who discovered the offset-printed multiple and claimed it as their own invention. This moment, at which the art-world becomes aware of books as a form, is fraught with amnesia about the longer history of modern artists' engagement with books. Whether traced to the work of William Blake in the late 18th century or the innovative work of arts and crafts artist/authors (renowned among whom is William Morris), the book as a work of art has an irrefutable place within the history of modern art (and, as per my examples above, could arguably be traced into pre-modern periods as well since there have been artistic interventions in the book form for as long as books have been produced).⁸ And in the early 20th century, among the many avant-garde movements in Russia, the emerging Soviet Union, Germany, France, Switzerland, England, Italy, and the United States, books were recognized as a major mechanism for distributing works of strategic interventionary force—or at least, of surprisingly individual format—into the public sphere. But by the late 20th century, artists' books have become a widespread phenomenon with a significant institutional identity among presses, special collections in museums, libraries, galleries, and in educational programs, at conferences, and in specialized publications.

(Stokes, continued)

without any preconceived ideas WAS the new idea.

As with SPIN OFF each alternative double spread was the text spreads, which were shot with lights in the same way as the image sets. The text was first printed on film then strung up with sellotape and cotton thread to the configuration that was wanted and shot again. I knew in advance that we could exploit the shadow casting with the lights, both the text sets and the image sets which were also held together with sellotape & thread, had to have an equivalent dimensionality.

Early on in the shooting we went out with a camera in search for more material to continue the book, this event only occurred once and we shot less than a film, otherwise we seem to be able to provide all that was needed for the book in and around the studio.

SONG OF THE THRUSH : 1998, I have never seen the printing on the press as the final realization of all the preliminary stages that it takes to produce a book. More and more the printing plays a significant part with the use of colour, and colour in its own right is as significant as image, as text, as the way a narrative works in a sequence of pages, as the way a book works formally, as the way a book is bound and the textural quality of the paper it is printed on. If all of this is significant how is it possible to think these things while you are still out with the camera looking for material to make a book? The answer I can give is that there is an appropriate kind of imagery that works with book and it is something you can feel and recognize and at the back of that is an awareness off of the possibility of all those other things operating, or at any rate leaving room for the possibility for them to operate. I remember emerging from some Buddhist caves in India and coming into sunlight and realizing that it isn't really photographing things especially in caves where there is no light, it is the incredible quality of light itself when it hits an object and it creates a particular property or quality. It isn't so much the thing itself, it is its attributes that are significant.

I have been asked why the title of the book is *Song of the Thrush*. I had heard a bird singing at a significant moment and I named it. Later it became the appropriate title for the book. But on consideration, in a literal, factual sort of way, if I really wanted to identify what bird was singing it probably was a blackbird. As far as I was concerned the factual information was irrelevant, the naming process could never have been "blackbird" it simply wasn't right. Every title in the covers section is using this same naming process to the image that it is paired with. Also the way the card is folded as a series of possible title pages or alternative covers and the unfolding of the sense of these things is anticipated by the sequence of titles and images until the title page of the book proper is arrived at.

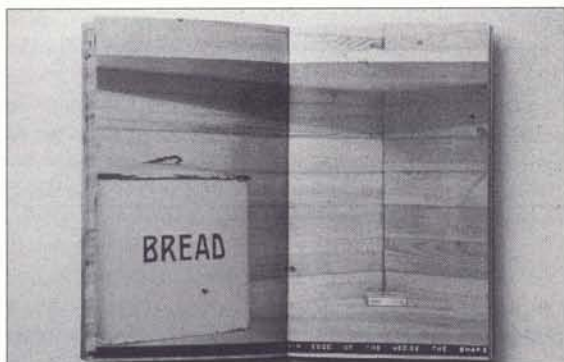
4. The naming process continues into the next section of the book. From being alternative covers to the book the pages come as French folds or Wrap arounds; the images terminating in the gutter and thereby in juxtaposition to the next Wrap around. This is a different kind of narrative sequence if compared with REAL FICTION. All the printing is two colours overprinted, the range is a variation of different greens and a range of different reds. The connection between each juxtaposition becomes stretched but never severed even towards the end of the book, where the image comes to an end or begins with a space before another starts up. There is also a balance held by the very physical binding, almost crude, with quite a delicate light touch with the



(Stokes continued)

single colour coming through behind the overprinting.

I think book artists stand on the threshold of the most amazing development. It is almost as if AppleMac's & Photoshop were just invented for us. The only opportunities that we were offered in the past were worn out machinery handed down or simply thrown out that had come into the hands of some creative people. I'm talking about darkroom equipment, process cameras, plate makers, hand and automatic feed presses. That was not only fine, it has been a priceless experience, thank you very much. Now there is this NEW tool that is very much part of the cultural climate and moment that we live in. It is a tool that is not impossible to own. And you look around and you realize that it is through the practice and experience with book making that the computer places book artists in a unique position to do some really exciting things. ←



Stokes/Douglas, *Chinese Whispers*, 1975

PHILIP ZIMMERMANN

I am interested in using narrative structure in my books, but I try to incorporate some sort of non-linear aspect to the narrative.

In *High Tension*, the die-cuts that form the serrated edges and the diagonal shapes of the pages allow one to see further into the book without even turning a page. One can also see back into parts of the book one has already viewed, sometimes four and five layers of pages back in either direction. This creates a richer viewing experience in that it can form a narrative structure that can echo and comment on material one has already viewed—in another context—and parts that one has not yet reached in the natural page-turning sequence.

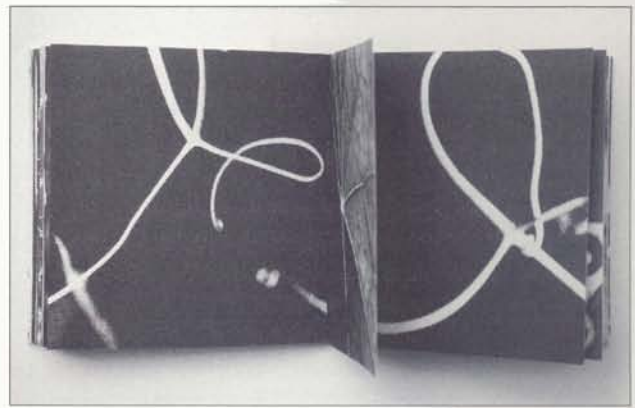
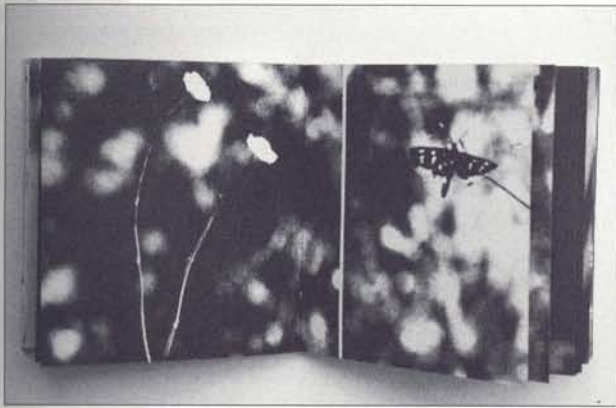
Long Story Short works slightly differently, with the use of gatefolds (that can be left unfolded and open), and by the way the text lines echo back to earlier text bits that form the parts of the clichés that are used to drive the narrative.

Part of what the viewer does when viewing a book as described above, is due to one of the most appealing aspects of the nature of books, and that is that books allow for an intimate viewing experience. By that I mean it is one-on-one, with the viewer able to easily flip back to earlier pages, and then forward. This is an important part of "reading" the book in terms of both non-standard narrative text and narrative image, and is part of that rich non-linear aspect that appeals to me. ←

There are many classics in the history of artists' books, whose innovative format or successful use of a particular strategy or device, concept, idea, or combination of these establishes a term of reference for the field as a whole. In addition to the handful of artists cited above (Queneau, Schneemann, Crombie, Wheatley), there are many others whose contributions help define the exploration of narrative in the book format by using cards, unconventional formats, compelling combinations of text and image, or other highly sensitive investigations of sequence and structure in pushing the conventions of narrative into new and innovative form. A much longer discussion of such works could be readily sustained, but here these few examples were invoked as a framework against which the themes of this exhibition come into focus.⁹ As the field of artists' books has widened and the number of practitioners proliferated, it is interesting to note the extent to which narrative in traditional and experimental form dominates production. This seems logical, since such work combines the authority of an important cultural icon, the Book in all senses, with the important opportunity for individual expression and personal voice that redeem us individually and collectively from a sense of alienation in the culture of late capitalism. The precept of early avant-garde activity, that art had the capacity to produce at the very least an epistemological defamiliarization, a moment of surprise in which a reader or viewer is momentarily destabilized from conventions of thought, continues its life in the realm of artists' books.

This exhibition is organized to feature the work of a dozen artists who have worked extensively—in some cases almost exclusively—with the book format. Their work is narrative in the specific sense that it produces a coherent tale through either text or image or some combination of the two in a manner that uses the form of the book in a self-conscious articulation of sequence and break, discrete element and synthetic whole. They all work very differently from each other and the degree of personal revelation, individual voice, and creative storytelling varies as considerably in these pieces as do the range of aesthetic perspectives. The very mutability of artists' books allows them to be produced from any place within the spectrum of contemporary arts from the most formal to the most conceptual, or in any combination thereof, and our curating policy was motivated largely by our desire to have work that was, as much as possible, artist-driven in its form, format, and content. There are no commercial publications included and no publisher initiated works. Each of these books is the vision of the artist or artists for whom the format in which it is realized is essential to the meaning and structure of the piece.

Telfer Stokes began working in the book format in the 1970s; *Passage*, produced in 1972, exemplifies his rigorous exploration of the tension between the literal space of the book as structure and form and the unfolding events of a narrative sequence. Keenly attentive to the means of articulation, the flat quality of the page and its capacity to exhibit literal as well as



Helen Douglas, *Between the Two*, 1997 (left and right)

illusionistic representation, Stokes has made sophisticated use of the repetitive variations sustained within a book's format. *Chinese Whispers* (1975), his first collaboration with Helen Douglas, struggles (usefully) with their shared interests in creating a work that unfolds in the actual structure while playing with the metaphoric suggestiveness of the book. Recording, as it does, a physical transformation of a real space enacted for the sake of its representation within the book, *Chinese Whispers* is the story of a making and unmaking that challenge a book's boundaries. The capacity of a story to be told, but one which has been motivated by the need for a book to be made about it, is an idea curiously at odds with the usual sense of book as fiction, narrative as its own device. Stokes and Douglas used the book, and subsequent collaborative works, as a staging ground for their own communication, accepting the difficulties and complexities of such a project as a premise.

Independently, Stokes and Douglas continue to find the book form viable: Stokes' *Song of the Thrush* (1998) reflects his commitment to the transformative processes of photographing and printing as phases equally available for contributing to the final work. He describes the initial phase of collecting images as only one stage, and emphasizes the extent to which the printing press is used as a tool to add color as a significant element and effect. Thus story evolves from the orchestration of tone, the pitch of emotional excitement, the subdued quality of a pigment, as well as from the links between the images as patterns, fragments, or depictions of the visual world. Sense is created through the sequence and timing of pages within the whole, rather than imagined in advance and then expressed through a strict record of events. Narrative is the effect of sequencing in Stokes's work, not the precondition for production.

In *Between the Two* (1997) Douglas worked with roughs of her images, inexpensive copies of her originals, as she created a narrative structure that reflects as closely as possible her sense of the body's movements through the process of dance. The intuitive and physical coherence of that experience, spatial and temporal, dynamic and complex, is translated into the textural physicality of the book. Douglas pushes the tactile perception of grounded reality into representation as far as she can, trying to

HELEN DOUGLAS

Narrative and Book

Book provides the container and place for me to put my thoughts and feelings. Without the book the narratives that I have expressed would not have taken shape. Through an identification with the book I have been able to give myself to its exploration, it in turn giving itself to my searches, giving shape to my journeys. The book's tangible physical form, its open/closed and sequential structure, together with its established relationship to print and reproduction enables me to make concrete the narrative within me. It enables me to draw//thread, hinge and construct together in some distinct way conscious and unconscious experience, past and future within the present. To make concrete, at particular moments something of my life, its unravelling journey as complete. The finality of the gathered pages, threaded signatures and bound book guillotined to its final shape embodies for me these moments of completeness within the continuum.

Over the past five years my experience of dance and movement has helped me, through following my body impulse to understand how narrative resides not only in the head but also within the body. This has encouraged me to trust in a new way, the unfolding and peeling of narrative within book. *Between the Two* (1997) is an example of this new found trust.

Experience of movement has also encouraged me to look anew at my past work to apprehend how my earlier work in book, much of which was made in collaboration with Telfer Stokes, also drew on my own body feeling as well as intellect to make manifest narrative in concrete physical form. Both *Real Fiction* (1987) and *Chinese Whispers* (1975), are such works. In past talks and writings I have focused attention on *Real Fiction* in my discussion of narrative, so for the purposes of this exhibition addressing the relationship between narrative and book. I have chosen to look specifically at *Chinese Whispers*. In this way I hope to show from the specificity of my discussion of this book how totally inter-related I have always found narrative and book form to be. For me they are a way of being, whether this is experimental or not is not for me to judge.

Chinese Whispers was made by myself and Telfer Stokes in the summer months of 1975. The book came about quickly after the publication of *Loophole* in April '75. An aspect of the narrative in *Loophole* described by the loop of the camera as it

(Douglas's statement continues on page 20)

BEA NETTLES

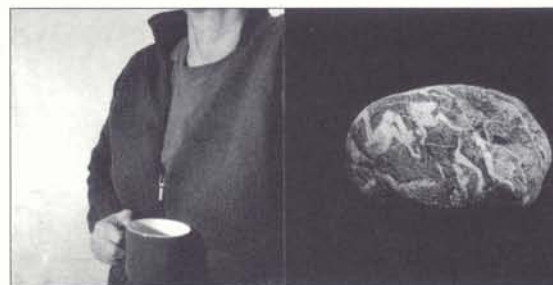
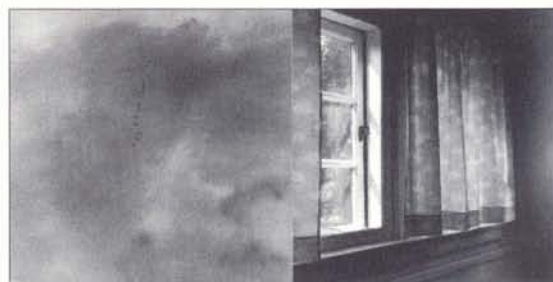
Turning 50 and Seasonal Turns represent two approaches I have taken to the narrative over the past thirty years. In the book *Turning 50*, it is the use of images with text. For *Seasonal Turns* it is my interest in the formal and metaphorical relationships of photographs. My use of the narrative dates back to my earliest unique artist books. In 1970-1, I made stitched collages that were loosely sequenced in ringbound notebooks such as *Ghosts and Stitched Shadows*, *Neptune and Lake Lady*, and *B and the Birds*. By 1972 I started arranging black and white photographs into sequences and producing small edition books. One of these was called *Escape* and was reproduced in *The Woman's Eye* edited by Anne Tucker.

Throughout the middle 70s I was totally immersed in the production of limited edition books with offset printing on various papers, and in some cases screen prints on mylar. It was at this point that I began to incorporate words. Initially the poetry of my mother Grace Nettles ("The Imaginary Blowtorch", "The Elsewhere Bird", "Of Loss and Love") and a children's story written by my sister Connie ("The Nymph of the Highlands"). I learned to make halftones, make plates, and to operate an offset press. This was excellent training which I built upon in the years that followed.

During the 80's I created my last collaborative book with my mother's poetry, *Corners*. It was also my last book without benefit of the computer. Since the 90's I have published nine titles in much larger editions. Slowly I began to incorporate text of my own, and by the time *Complexities* came out, I was writing more and more. For whatever reason, I needed to grant myself permission to write. I discovered that I love to.

Turning 50 is a three part story devoted to my present, my past, and the future. Most of the triptychs came first, and once the idea of devoting a book to my thoughts about turning fifty formed, more followed. The text tended to follow the creation of the images and was used to enhance and make accessible the ideas they contain. Some of the text was pre-existent in my sketchbooks. In addition to the number three reinforced by the triptychs and the three chapters, the theme of the tree is found throughout the book. I compare my body to certain aging trees, I describe seeing the pine trees of Rome, the myth of Daphne and Apollo, and end the book with two shots of a tree taken decades apart. One last device is used in the book to subtly allude to the process of aging and that is background color on the pages. As the book progresses, the tint on the paper increases slightly. By the end of the book, the color has become rich and different. Much like life itself.

Seasonal Turns reflects the importance of returning to certain places in my life and my interest in the cyclic nature of time. The challenge was to convey this spiraling notion in a visceral manner. The accordion book was the natural choice, small images that roll through one's hands. I had struggled with these arrangements of images for well over a year, unclear as to their purpose or final form. Images were juxtaposed for their evocative potential, through their formal relationships and in some cases their content. Once the idea of the four seasons surfaced, I was able to finish the layout in about a day. The long gestation process had finally paid off. ←



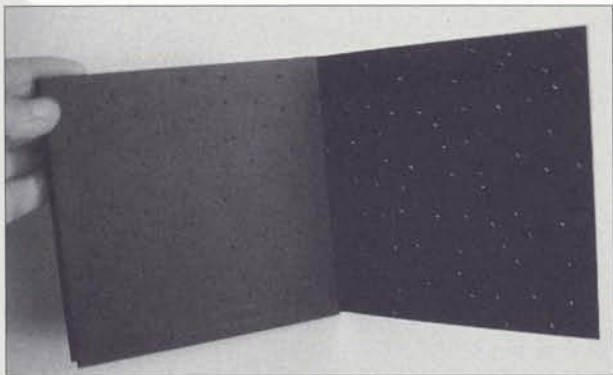
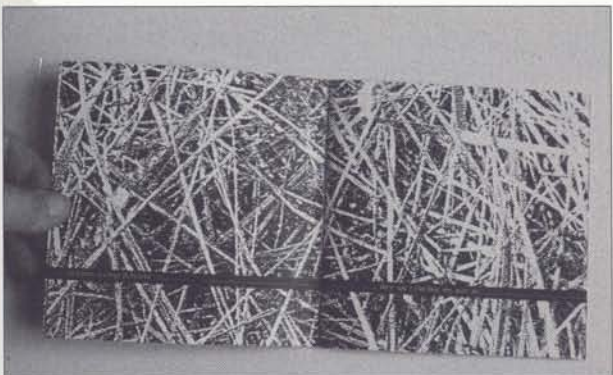
Bea Nettles, *Seasonal Turns*, 1998 (three sequential spreads from the first volume).

create a physical effect as direct and powerful as the effect of movement. Her sense of narrative is closely linked to the idea of sense (both as cognitive coherence and as sensation) rather than story, to the unfolding of a sequence of phenomena that, taken as a whole, communicate an ordered experience that is not strictly defined as a tale. *Lexis* takes precedence over *logos* in both Stokes's and Douglas's works, and their books have a dramatic effect as sites of dynamic interaction.

The approach of Bea Nettles has certain similarities with that of Stokes and Douglas, working as it does within the most careful considerations of basic book structure. Both the books exhibited here contain the word "turn" or "turning" in their titles. Each makes maximum use of that most fundamental property of the codex book, its capacity to articulate meaningful relations through the act of encountering one page after another. *Seasonal Turns* (1998) is a collection of four folded books, each a long strip of printed photographs whose juxtapositions exploit what Nettles calls the combination of "metaphoric and formal" properties of the images. One after another, the images emphasize qualities in each other as the reader moves from one juxtaposed pair to another. The sense of continuity that is created has to do with the skill of Nettles's sequencing, the way she reigns in the

multiple levels of photographic meaning enough to anchor the viewer's experience in connections from one image to another. The full effect of the photographs escapes these links, of course, allowing them their more expansive resonance as memory fragments and personal records. The use of color in *Seasonal Turns* and *Turning Fifty* (1995) adds to the emotional richness of the works, establishing thematic moods and reinforcing the sequential emphasis of the parts within the whole. These works attempt to embody a sense of time, and in their own temporal expanse, to inscribe the irreversible passage of human seasons against the accessible archive of memory.

There are certain correspondences between Judith Mohns's *Quartet* (1995) and the books by Nettles. Like *Seasonal Turns*, *Quartet* consists of four small volumes, each independent of but related to the others. Yet while Nettles uses seasonal divisions to demarcate her work, Mohns sets up four different moods within her work, letting the sum of the parts emerge from the combination of their distinctly different qualities. Narrative becomes a stretched membrane of continuity, fragile as the sense of identity that is made across the boundaries of one part to the next in this dark, lyrical, interior book. Mohns creates a deeply personal space, revealed through fragments and textures, tones and partially disclosed images. Throughout the four books of *Quartet*, pages are often made from manipulation of a single image blown up and manipulated to the point of near disintegration as if



Judith Mohns, *Quartet*, 1995

JUDITH MOHNS

Quartet is a set of four books which variously describe issues of personal history, genetic predisposition, and self-determination in diverse, yet connected voices. Taken together, these books use personal stories to address universal issues of identity and self-worth. Conceived of as a tactile experiment in narration, each book in *Quartet* combines specific physical qualities of the page with text and images to create distinct visual experiences and emotional associations for the reader.

In January 1995, I traveled to New Zealand as a Visiting Artist at the Elam Fine Arts Printing Research Unit at the University of Auckland. During the four-month residency, I had an extraordinary opportunity to work experimentally with offset facilities and master pressmen. As a printmaker, I hoped to explore technical possibilities of offset printing which are not easily obtainable (or feasible) within the commercial printing industry. My other goal was to make intimate book works in a large edition that maintain a unique, hand-crafted quality. At Elam, the emphasis was on creating the desired art product by using ingenuity, sweat-equity, and generously donated time and materials to get beyond budgetary constraints. As the artist, author, and bookbinder for *Quartet*, my challenge was to design economically: by incorporating "free" paper stocks, limiting each book to one or two press sheets, and by doing almost all of the construction and binding processes by hand.

The academic environment at Elam's (now defunct) Printing Research Unit encouraged a sense of experimentation with only a secondary focus on budgets and press time. The printers had a curiosity in the aesthetic possibilities and high-quality printing capabilities of offset lithography and a desire for a one-on-one collaborative approach, which made *Quartet*'s production process akin to pulling *bon à tirer* prints using traditional printmaking processes.

Quartet was printed between March-May, 1995, on a Heidelberg KORD one-color offset press. The primary printer was Graeme Chicken, whose background in the commercial industry made him highly knowledgeable, yet enthusiastic about using the offset process artistically. Without his advice, encouragement, and assistance at every level, this book would not exist. Similarly, I am grateful to Robin Lush, who printed *The Black Book*, for his wealth of information, his understanding of printed books and their form, and for his profound generosity. John Turner, the Director of the Elam Fine Arts Printing Research Unit, deserves the most credit for facilitating the residency and providing infinite support on very limited resources, for everything from day care to paper stock. Although our roles in the project were quite different, *Quartet* is as much a result of their efforts as it was mine.

Quartet was published in an edition of 500 copies, and was hand-bound and constructed by the artist. The books measure 4 3/4" x 4 3/4" and are housed in a 5" x 5" x 3/4" folder made of a die-cut, purple cover stock. Each of the four books in the set uses a different approach to narrative, imagery, and physical, tactile communication, as a way of discussing issues of identity and personal happiness.

Life Line is printed in duotone (black and silver) on a dull-coated stock, using gate-folds and die-cuts within, and a silver fingerprint impression on the black paper cover. The main source of imagery is generated from a computer scan of the artist's



(Mohns continued)

hand, with text from palmistry books which address human destiny.

She could not feel the ice... is a combination of prose writing and image printed on a translucent vellum with a Japanese unryu paper cover. The book was printed as one run of black ink on a single side of one press sheet, which involved outputting and stripping some of the page impositions with "wrong-reading" text. This book also uses gate-folds. The imagery of this book is the result of a single scan of a family photograph which was enlarged to various degrees and then printed on an ink jet printer and enlarged again to provide a crude halftone dot.

It is obvious as i enter... is a single run of black ink on a smooth uncoated stock. A band of text runs through this book, which intends to perceptually move the viewer by using high-contrast photocopier enlargements of photos of natural forms and landscapes. The enlargement is so crude that the image breaks into abstract forms that convey feelings mirrored in the engulfing text.

The Black Book is printed on one side of black paper with three "hits" of black ink and one of over gloss varnish. The paper cover is hand-punched to imply a Braille-like quality that, when opened in front of a strong light, reveals a star-like effect. The legibility of the text and images is dependent on the lighting and angle from which the book is held. The book works with tactile sensations and visual illusions to speak of one's dreams, their elusive quality, and the difficulty in assessing one's own ambitions.

Narrative is a significant component in all my artwork. In my prints and wall-installations of prints, processed photographs (photogrammed, silkscreened, or drawn in graphite or on monotype plates) imply a silent narrative derived from juxtaposed images and/or levels of information. Often there is a level of text which is super-imposed on an abstracted photographic image, which is further combined with a layer of monotype color and physical markings that intend to elicit an emotional connection with the viewer. By using representational imagery and the aesthetic seduction of the physical printed object, I aspire to speak with narrations that occur on non-verbal, as well as textual levels.

Artists' books are one of several forms my artwork takes. I am interested in the process of printing, not only for reproduction purposes, but because of the way a matrix fixes and transforms visual ideas. A book is a vehicle for personal communication which has the capacity to extend beyond an art exhibition. Offset books in large editions can be priced so that an audience other than "art collectors" can be reached. All the other advantages of multiple artists' books also apply: portability, flexibility in the "reading" of the work, and the intimacy generated by the book's physical contact with the viewer. I especially like the scale of artists' books which contrasted with my large print installations.

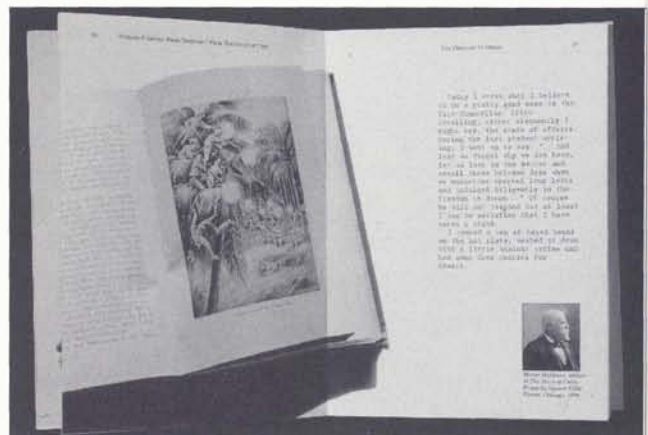
As a book artist and collaborator on previous book projects with François Deschamps, I do find the process of making artists' books to be painful. The book is a powerful medium which drains me when I consider the various stages of the process. Truthfully, I have yet to make enough books to feel fluent in the process, and the ever-changing technology requires me to constantly "upgrade" and learn from project to project. Because of this, I don't work with books exclusively, but rather when my ideas dictate a book form. ←



François Deschamps, *Mémoire d'un Voyage en Océanie*, 1995

invoking the delicate condition of individual coherence and identity. Narrative is elusive here, an implied rather than stated development, more evident as a suggestion of continuity than of any unfolded tale. The work is unstructured as a story, offering figments of experience as intimate as a dream diary, but far less explicit in their textural surfaces and fragments of revelation. Mohns stretches the definition of narrative in this work, pushing the boundaries of linear coherence to accommodate the passages of mood in a tactile manner. Much is communicated through the physicality of Mohns's work, through choices of ink and paper colors, as an effective embodiment of meaning. A tale is told, but mainly in hints and whispers, as if it can only be disclosed by being immediately put away again into the shadowy regions between dark paper covers.

If Mohns's work recedes from the surface, into the nuanced realm of suggestion in its narrative mode, then François Deschamps, her sometimes collaborator, explores every possible trope of fiction and storytelling in his enthusiasm for artifice. Deschamps's narratives are mercurial, polymorphous, and diverse. *Mémoire d'un Voyage en Océanie* (1995) is typical of



François Deschamps, *Sombras Rojas*, 1999

his work in this regard, for Deschamps creates his fictional account of an early 20th-century ocean voyage by using the multiple voices and documents of a pantheon of characters, personae, and texts. Deschamps interweaves actual historical themes and records into a maze of stories told in and around each other, until they are interwoven, layered, nested and embedded in a tangle of actual and fictional texts. Deschamps has a love for the artifact, for the bit of found material redolent with age and wear, displaying its characteristic features of form, design, and vocabulary as part of its role in the narrative whole. And *Mémoire* is largely told through the device of a facsimile journal account of a journey into the South Seas. Deschamps's work has a fanciful quality, but there is a darker undertone in it as well, grappling with the realities of history and violence, colonial power and revolutionary response. *Sombras Rojas* (1999) is comprised of documents from a fictitious archive, but the nature of the fiction forces the question of the real as its missing term. If we accept this story as untrue, then is it because Deschamps work posits the existence of a real history (in this case, part of the history of revolution in Cuba and South America) that is always outside of any text or account? Or does the fiction suppose the opposite, the impossibility of any narrative except that which we piece together from these fragments, struggling to find some version



Janet Zweig, *Heinz and Judy*, 1985

of history that can be reconciled with narrative coherence.

Janet Zweig is also concerned with storytelling devices, and in both of her books, *Heinz and Judy* (1984) and *Sheherazade* (1988), she makes the strategies of telling a part of the story. *Heinz and Judy*, punning on the classic Punch and Judy puppet pair, is a story of gender and moral dilemmas, of the ways character and action are coerced by social conditioning and expectations. The visual form of the work is highly theatrical, as is the text. Shadows cast on the page suggest the presence of full-bodied actors, referencing shadow plays and theatrical conventions. By this trace of their existence they move the action forward in a

FRANÇOIS DESCHAMPS

The Story of my Narrative Books: (with reference to *Mémoire d'un Voyage en Océanie* and *Sombras Rojas*)

In 1994, I was invited to produce a book at the Elam School of Fine Arts at Auckland University in New Zealand. At the time, I had been working on a book about the idea of change through revolution and violence, based on a 1991 trip to Cuba. I was developing a narrative through multiple voices (a psychiatrist, a professor, and a revolutionary): the idea was intriguing to me, but the subject seemed inappropriate to a South Pacific publication.

So I began creating a fictitious memoir which would have been written in 1914 by a South Seas expedition photographer on the yacht *Curioddity*. This expedition was led by an evil German sausage maker, Ernst Schlotte, who represents all that is vicious in Western civilization. His prurient interest in cannibalism culminates in himself partaking of this taboo activity. This narrator/photographer, who by a strange coincidence bears my name, is marooned by Schlotte on one of the remote Kermadec Islands only to be eventually found by a World War II military convoy and brought to Auckland. This explains why the book is produced in New Zealand from the (fictitious) Auckland Institute archive. The story is presented as a facsimile reproduction of the journal along with scholarly research by a Maori professor. An epilogue by the nurse who took care of Mr. Deschamps completes the narrative. I wrote the text and created the visual material for *Mémoire d'un Voyage en Océanie*. I did the stripping at night in a generous and enlightened pre-press business in Auckland owned and managed by a Graham Shaw. Robin Lush, a wonderful, dedicated and talented printer, did all the press work. John Turner, a photography professor at Elam, initially invited me to print the book and did an enormous amount of production and begging (for paper and the pre-press film shooting.) The book was published by PhotoForum in 1995.

The idea of a book about Cuba persisted, so from 1996 to 1998 I continued to develop the narrative that I had started in 1994. As I was learning digital imaging and page construction, it became clear that this would be a good project to test my developing computer skills. The book, *Sombras Rojas* is, an exploration of a fictitious archive concerning a schizophrenic political science professor, Mr. O, who imagines that he was with Che Guevara in the Bolivian campaign and that he also has ties with the CIA. The narrative is constructed by the interplay of an omniscient narrator's voice, the documentary writings of the psychiatrist Dr. Gwen Ryberg of the Institute for Personality Study, and the insightful writings of the deranged professor. The book examines issues of political violence and its validation by history. I did all the writing, illustrations, design, and electronic prepress. The book, *Sombras Rojas*, was produced by Joan Lyons at the Visual Studies Workshop and printed at Thompson-Shore of Dexter, Michigan in May of 1999. ←

CLIFTON MEADOR

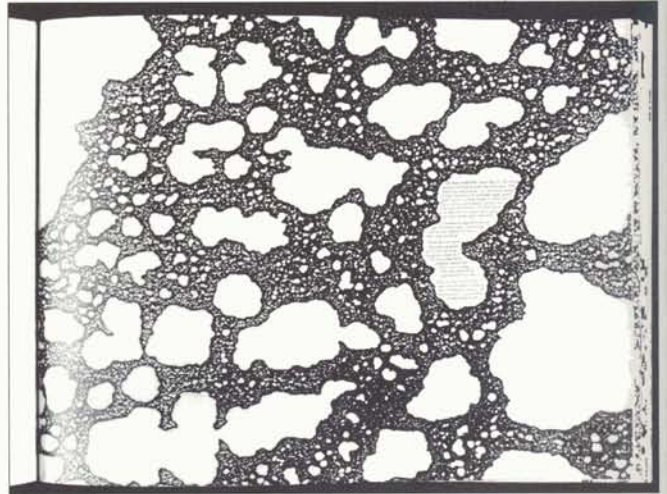
I often think that many artists misunderstood Ulises Carrión and his essay, "The New Art of Making Books," particularly when he says it will no longer be necessary to read every word in a book. Taken out of context it seems anti-reader, anti-intellectual. But he is making a case for a new understanding of books, where every physical aspect of a book is an important part of the reading and where the visual conditions of a book are equal in importance to the typographic text. And so, once some of the structure becomes clear, it is no longer important to go on reading the book. I have to admit that in the case of many artists' books, I don't read every word. It isn't necessary! The structural conceit of many books is so painfully obvious that prolonged investigation of the book becomes boring and pointless. Consume the book in a gulp! A small artistic snack! Many artists' books are just one-liners, simple one-idea books. But the idea that you don't have to read every word in a book to understand it seems to lead some artists to miss some of the possibilities inherent in the book. A book is an experience in time (well, most books), and books that ignore the possibilities of narrative miss much of the point of books. Simple books are just too simple to stay engaging.

Of course, I have myself made many one-liners.

The development of my work has drifted at a snail's pace along a muddy road. With incredible torpor I have slowly realized that books by artists are more interesting when complex narratives are allowed to arise. Books develop over time, and given sufficient time, it is the narrative that makes books engaging. Not the fancy printing (as diverting as that can be), not the clever pop-ups, not the embedded microchips that recognize the reader and alter the book each time it is opened, nor even the pleasantly scented inks. It is what happens over time that engages the reader and offers a potentially transmogrifying experience. The accretion of experience is what holds my attention. Each little image, each bit of text, every juxtaposition adds to the total, and with each small addition the reading shifts. It was when I finally started dealing with the accretion of narrative detail that I started to make books that really explored what books can be.

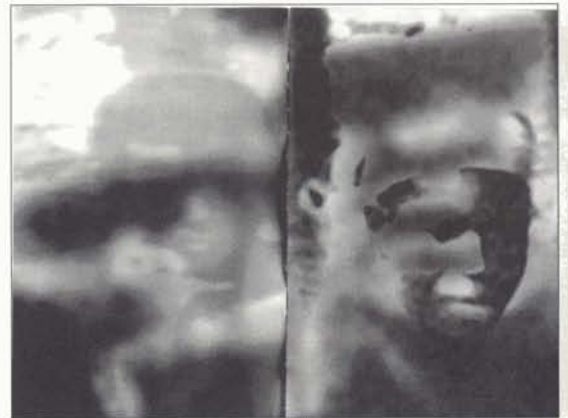
Long Slow March weaves together multiple narratives focused on a theme: the African-Americans' struggle for civil rights. The Selma march (itself a narrative structure) forms the backbone of the book; the limbs of the book (primary source texts and photomontage of slavery and the civil rights struggle) hang on either side of it. The first section is a typographic lift of an old form, the polyglot bible. Polyglot bibles presented an original text in its original language, with commentary in translated languages surrounding it. This form seemed suitable for combining slave narratives with slave owners' rationalizations for slavery, since this typographic form preserves the autonomy of the texts while suggesting that the reader consider the texts together.

Having presented the history of the struggle (in warped abbreviated form) as a prelude to the central issue, the heart of the book is literally the road from Selma to Montgomery, photographed every mile or so. Title pages from slave narratives begin to hang in the air, floating overhead, witnesses to the march. Eventually, as the march (road) nears Montgomery, mainstream newspapers start publishing attacks on the march, on the participants in the march, and on the idea of civil rights. It was a shameful rearguard action on the part of people who should have known better; the evidence hangs in the air over the road. Using



Janet Zweig (with text by Holly Anderson), *Sheherazade*, 1988

gestural dialogue. The narrative is fragmented here also, elaborated more through the motif of character than through any specific storyline. One senses that there are histories to the

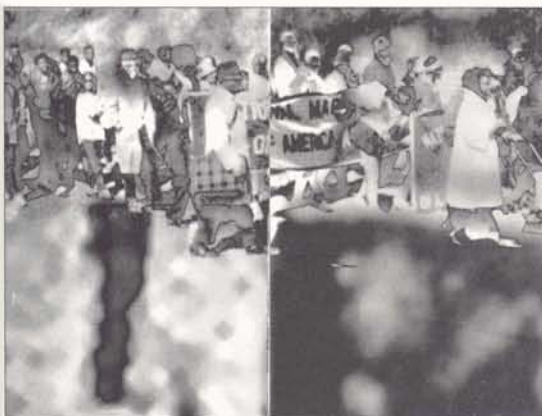


Clifton Meador, *Long, Slow March*, 1997-99

speakers, that their relations have the complexity of long-standing patterns of interaction, individual and cultural in their form. In *Sheherazade* the embedded narrative of the classic tale is given physical form, using five stories by writer Holly Anderson, each concerned with women and the revelation of secrets. The book cycles upward in a change of scale: enlarged type exploding to fill the page turns out to contain the next chapter in the story. A simple device, book-specific, relating to the process of photographic and print production, this means of looping the stories one to another, succeeds in replicating the theme of the *Sheherazade* story at the level of the book's physical structure and design, emphatically stressing the embedded quality of continuity on which the renowned narrator's survival depended. The stories in Zweig's works are not personal, they reveal the artist only as a point of view, an attitude, and a critical stance. The same is true of the most recent books of Clifton Meador,

which are not about him, though they reveal a distinctive attitude toward politics and public memory.

History plays an important part in Meador's new works, *Long Slow March* (1997-99) and *Memory Lapse* (1999). They both investigate the processes by which significant events are transformed into the shared icons of public knowledge, woven into the cultural narrative of a collective vision. *Long Slow March* documents the history of African-American struggles for civil rights in the United States, taking the concept of narrative into the social domain where it creates both real and imagined histories of lived events. Meador uses photographs he made of the route of the famous march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama led by Martin Luther King in 1965 and other documentary material. He collages and splices his version of this history into a single book, but one that refuses to coalesce around a simple line. His identity as a Southern white man, raised in the era of the civil rights movement, is the point of departure for the work. There are no easy ways to tell historical tales, no singular perspectives from which to objectify the interwoven subjectivities that form our past. The ongoing bur-



Clifton Meador, *Long, Slow March*, 1997-99)

den of historical pasts refuses to stay placed in some remote time period, and the book is a means of making evident the



Clifton Meador, *Memory Lapse*, 1999

(Meador continued)

a shift in color to indicate a shift in narrative, images from the actual march in 1965 end the section of the book that addresses the march itself. Pictographic Klan warnings are knocked out of the documentary photographs, emblems of the persistent repression that impeded the struggle for civil rights. The last section of the book is a conflagration of all the forces and interests that collided over the civil rights struggle.

History itself is a confusing narrative, continually rewritten from the viewpoint of the reader.

My newest book, *Memory Lapse*, is a question about the nature of monuments and attempts to build a monument that exists in the mind of the reader. One of the functions of a monument is the effort to insert a particular understanding of an event or a person into the narrative of history, to create a permanent reading through the text of the monument. Glorious victories become glorious through the heroism of the monument. Brave warriors are proven brave by a statue. Our understanding of the past is written, to some extent, by monuments. But how do we remember the horrors of the past? What kind of monument can we build to our errors?

Russia is full of examples of dreadful terror, governmental actions that killed millions and millions of people. The GULAG, or prison camp system, absorbed people, exploited them in forced labor, and then killed them through neglect and mistreatment. The very first camp was situated in an old monastery on an island in the White Sea, very near the Arctic Circle. The transition of this monastery from one of the holiest monasteries in Russia to one of the most dreadful camps (the arctic Auschwitz according to Solzhenitsyn) is a fascinating shift in reading/meaning, a narrative of uses and signification. *Memory Lapse* is an inquiry into reading architecture as a shifting narrative, from the beautiful to the horrific, using the Solovetski monastery as its text.

I no longer feel the need to make books which investigate the physical structure of books. The complexities possible using even the simplest book structures seem inexhaustible. Sequence, text, color, placement, pacing, typography, and the other traditional characteristics of the book are enough variables to produce an infinite series of engaging books. But to understand this kind of book, a book that uses every nuance possible to articulate a narrative, you do have to read it closely.

In this new art of making books it is mandatory to read every word. ←



Clifton Meador, *Memory Lapse*, 1999

JANET ZWEIG

In my artist's books, I experimented with narrative structure in several ways. For *Sheherezade*, I created a linear visual narrative in the form of a flip book where text rises up out of text. The embedded texts are recursive in that each of the five stories is nested in the previous one. There is a parallel narrative on the verso pages of a woman removing her dress to reveal an identical dress underneath; this also cycles recursively five times. But the linear narrative can be broken up by the reader; to read the texts, one must enter the book in five specific places. For *Heinz and Judy*, I used several parallel narratives running through the entire book. On each page, the reader can see a slice of all the narratives as they intersect. This intersection invents the new narrative where Heinz and Judy meet. While the intersection in *Heinz and Judy* was not random but planned, I took a different approach for *This Book is Extremely Receptive*. I allowed the three linear texts and the two flipbook events to randomly fall together creating a new reading that was accidental. I have continued to use this combinatorial approach more recently in some of my computer-driven sculptures.

Production notes for *Heinz and Judy*, a play:

In 1984, I stood on a friend's terrace in Boston and cast shadows onto paste-ups of each page spread of the book. The spreads had little snippets of paper scotch-taped to them, placed to correspond to the text blocks. These snippets cast their own shadows, too. Various friends and objects also cast their shadows according to the script of my play which conflated "the Heinz dilemma" and *Punch and Judy*. I photographed these shadows every day at the same time for a couple of weeks. I also made some marks on paper and set some type. I gave this all to a printer in New York (Kwik International); they made color separations, stripped in the line art and drawings I provided. They printed the book on a very small four-color proofing press, one spread at a time. The shadows were hard to match, page to page. Cross-overs would have been impossible to match; instead the bindery glued the spreads back to back making pretty hefty pages. The whole thing was funded by the Photographic Resource Center in Boston, MA.

Production notes for *Sheherezade*, a flip book:

In 1987, I asked the writer Holly Anderson to write five stories-within-stories about women withholding or revealing information. I had the title set in letterpress, blew it up successively by about ten percent intervals on a copy machine until some openings appeared in a letterform. Then I had the first story set in letterpress in the shape of one of the openings. I pasted the story into the opening and blew that whole thing up in the same successive way until one word, then one letter, then another opening in a letter form filled the page. I repeated this five times. Then I asked a dancer to pose wearing two identical dresses, one on top of the other. I photographed her in an animation sequence of 32 pictures taking the top dress off and throwing it away, leaving the other dress revealed. When sequenced five times on the verso pages of the flip book, it appears that she is taking off five successive dresses and throwing them out of the book.

The book was printed in black ink by Carl Sesto in 1988. The cover was printed with black ink on purple paper, gold stamped with the title, and perfect bound. It was funded by an NEA Visual Arts Fellowship. ←



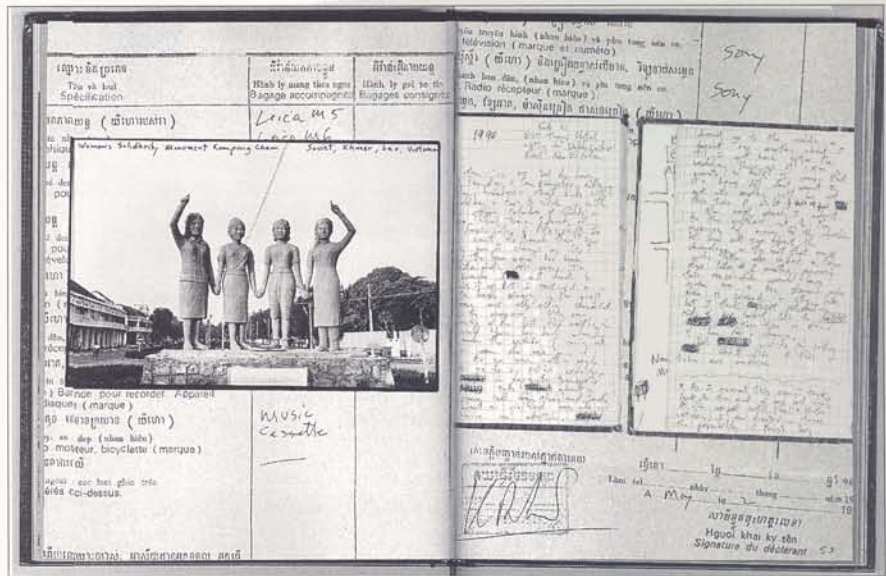
Clarissa Sligh, *Reading Dick and Jane with Me*, 1989

ways in which meaning in the present (the time of reading, moment of viewing) is always imbricated in the web of other elements that have occurred before. The pages of these works don't describe a single fixed sequence of events, but work against and across the separations formed by the physical structure of the book (its fixity and discrete spaces) to offer the viewer the possibility of complex interconnections. *Memory Lapse* asks for recollection, for the uncovering of lost history and concealed pasts, by addressing the perverse transformations that befall specific locations (in this case a monastery near the Arctic Circle that served as a GULAG in the former Soviet Union) so that their original purpose is betrayed and subverted by events. There is no way to fix meaning to a site, any more than there is a way to determine the effect of a book's images and text on a reader, but in these charged narratives of historical transformation Meador avails himself of the capacity of a book to function in its conventional structural form while reworking the reader's expectations on a conceptual plane.

The tension between the personal and the historical spheres, the costs of history and the social price of insight, are important features of Clarissa Sligh's work. Seeing the book as a vessel, or a room, in which memory can be stored and revealed, Sligh works with these metaphors as a means of unleashing the

Clarissa Sligh, *What's Happening with Momma?*, 1988





Bill Burke, *Mine Fields*, 1995

psychic constraints that lock portions of one's own self away. The book as repository permits tales that have been smothered or repressed to be retold. The book appears as a safe spot, a place in which to offer some glimpse into histories that are otherwise unwelcome by the price of their revelation. There is an interesting point of commonality here with Mohns's *Quartet*, in which the book's capacity to close again over its contents keeps it safe. *What's Happening with Momma?* (1988) and *Reading Dick and Jane with Me* (1989) are intent on reinserting the personal into the received narratives of cultural history. The discrepancy between the images and stories of Dick and Jane readers, those standard textbooks of the 1950s in which idealized suburban, white children acted out banal, homogenous existences, and the experience of a young African-American girl raised in a working class environment is striking. Sligh's reworking of the bland text brings its ideological underpinnings into sharp focus. Sligh's work makes evident the important point that all narratives must be received as well as produced, and that the reader's role is crucial in making the meaning of a book. The active emphasis in her title, *Reading*, returns this issue to the full corpus of works here.

By contrast, Bill Burke's work is dense with personal information and revelation.¹⁰ In *I Want to Take Picture* (1985) and *Mine Fields* (1995) Burke has a very different sense of relations between personal and social domains, and of the decorum according to which one is kept from the other. Burke perceives of his self as an instrument of strategic intervention, of the world as filled with potential for disruptive encounters, and of his psyche as the battlefield of self and other (where this term refers to the the external sphere of experience, not merely people). Burke's work has an overt narrative line created through the use of transcripts of lived events, personal experience, and his travels. But there is a deceptive simplicity in describing his

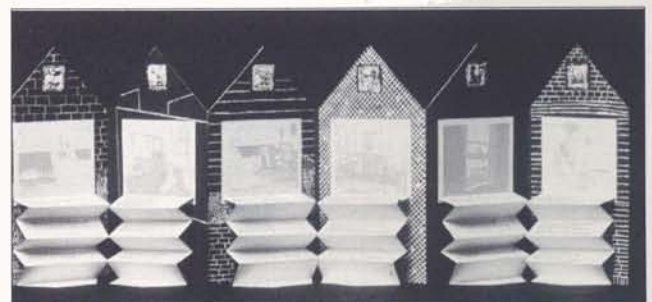
CLARISSA SLIGH

I originally made *What's Happening with Momma?* using the Van Dyke brown alternative photographic process at the Lower Eastside Printshop in New York. Using that process, however, I could only make a couple of books. Additionally, the image fades when exhibited in the bright light or sunlight.

About a year later, I received a grant and an artist's residency to make a different version of it at Women's Studio Workshop. There I made the films for the screens, made the screens, reclaimed the screens, and made numerous dummies with various ink and paper combinations. For the edition, the big screens were pulled by Ann Kalmbach. I pulled the smaller screens. I set the type and printed the words on their small press. It took several years for me to cut out and assemble the books. The edition of 150 was being sold as I put them together.

Reading Dick and Jane with Me was made at Visual Studies Workshop during an artist's residency. I did the artwork before going there. Once there, I set up a portion of the text on the computer and the rest was handwritten. After laying the book out, I shot and developed the films, touched up the films, and made the plates. The book was printed on the press by Stuart McCauley. The rest was done by the bindery. ←

Clarissa Sligh, *What's Happening with Momma?*, 1988



GARY RICHMAN

At the Talmud Torah on Dumont Avenue in Brooklyn, I could read and write in the language of the patriarchs, but I understood nothing. I was there to voice, not translate. I read in tongues and was introduced, long before my confirmation, to the inevitability of misunderstanding.

I am wary of language used to justify the irrational, rationalize the phenomenal, and complicate the simple. Even the images and symbols I think I know and I want to trust beguile me. They divert my attention from the true state of things. They are a false comfort, an illusion of control—suspicious, particularly because they seem so indispensable.

I sang by heart when I was young and acquired enough Hebrew to articulate the cadences of my Bar Mitzvah. The written words of the Sefer Haftorah impressed me with the authority they seemed to hold over so many people in my neighborhood. And I was mindful of the perceived authenticity of this book, which so many had recited at their executions in Europe.

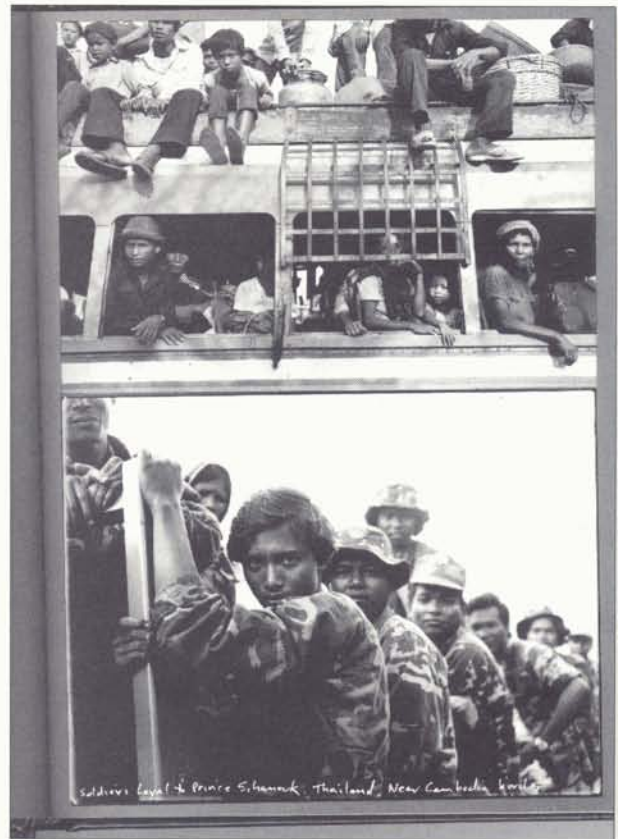
I try to use the textual and compositional possibilities of the page to address culturally constructed realities that motivate human behaviors that feel uncomfortable and alien to me. I use text and image in the way an earlier eclectic hand might have used a shard of bone to lance a poisonous bite, a piece of tree bark to fashion a shield or a stone to make a useful tool. If I am in good form, I can sometimes make a shelter out of the incredibly diverse realities of a chaotic and occasionally monstrous contemporary environment.

My schoolmates and I were compliant in our chanting and felt complicity in our survival. Members of a ruined choir, we were cut off from the comprehension of earlier generations. Insult was added to injury. Those who memorized least were silenced and sent to the furthest rows. It was not punishment, but a call to observe and to corroborate the fate of others who were truly mute in the city of immigrants—heroes with stories to tell who lacked the vocabulary of revelation.

My contiguous surroundings are global, and the input is relentless and fierce. The scope is encyclopedic, and the ideational process is inevitably collage. My images are not my own, I appropriate and recombine from a growing cache of discarded diagrams and photographs. I consolidate from our shared planetary stockpile, already too much. I may tweak an edge here, break a copyright there, and I am guilty of eccentricity and vulgarity—misdemeanors, at most.

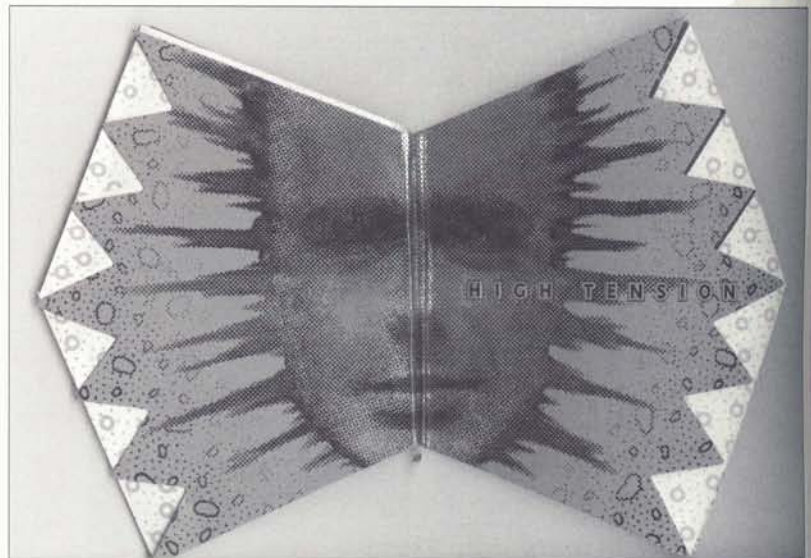
My choice to be an artist was old testament fallout. It had come down, like sawdust, from the second floor studio of a reformed idol sculptor in Ur named Abraham, by way of my pious and reassuring Russian grandmother. My father is a vegetarian craftsman. He designed original pieces of baroque jewelry for omnivores of his generation who were touched by fame and wealth rather than angles. What ever the motivation, there have been reverent artists in my family before me. Maybe I didn't even have a choice.

The immediate appearance of my books may seem absurd and hermetic which belies their cognitive substance and serious intent. Perception and cognition are suspect. Content and meaning are at best illusive. I can live with that, but not because I am tolerant or insincere. I have been teaching art for thirty years and I've become inured to a variety of highly resistant pathologi-



Bill Burke, *Mine Fields* 1995

approach this way since in many instances he seems to use narrative to launch himself into events as much as to record them. Both of these books move between the private sphere of Burke's interior and personal life and an encounter with South East Asia. Burke's desire to push himself into the sites of war-ravaged towns and communities, is a direct extension of his sense of cultural history, and of the place within the American collective psyche of the memory of the war in Viet Nam. Probing these territories is an exercise in overcoming social amnesia, in seeing

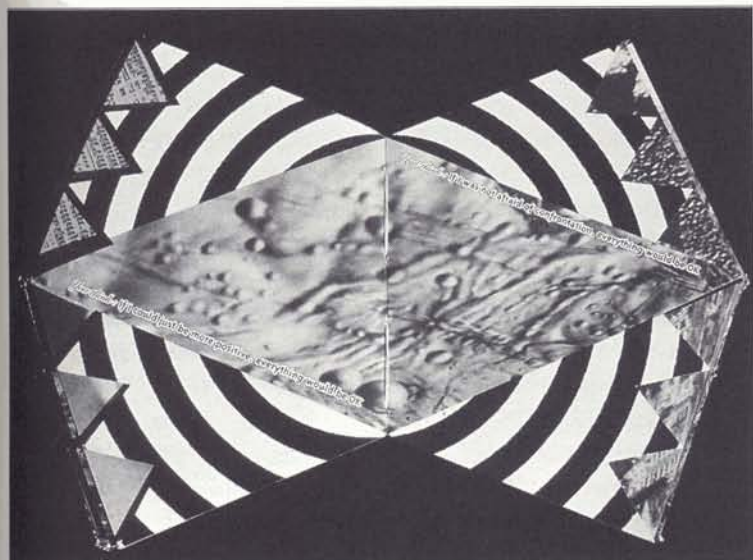




Bill Burke, *Mine Fields* 1995
(detail from endsheets).

the role of America in its non-heroic phase, and of recovering a relation to his generational identity. Burke's photographs form the core of his work, but they are interspersed with found materials, printed ephemera, money, passports, posters and photographs from newspapers and public places. The visual quality of his pages is layered and dense with references. In *Mine Fields*, there are visual themes that announce themselves in the endsheets where still frames of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* are interspersed on the endsheets with Burke's personal photos. Intensely aware of his own photographic influences, particularly the work of Robert Frank, Burke quotes and reworks images from canonical photo history, calling the question of authorial subjectivity into its postmodern frame. Burke's "personal" voice is a product of social and historical forces as well as an individual position within them, and the narrative he weaves is charged with the inextricable integration of self with social context.

Philip Zimmermann is focused on an aesthetic exploration of the notion of a self that is narrated at the intersection and confluence of various forces and pressures. But he banishes personal information from the pages of his work, letting his story out in the lines of text that tells a tale according to shifts of emotional temperature as much as through the recounting of events. Zimmermann's *High Tension* (1993) takes full advantage of his graphic skills to create a book whose unusual object qualities explore the narrative theme. The book's pages were die-cut into sharp points in such a way as to allow motifs and patterns to show through at the fore-edge. Each alternate opening flashes



Philip Zimmerman, *High Tension*, 1993 (cover, left, inside opened, right)

(Richman continued)

cal interpretations of reality.

It seemed to me that the undeciphered was somehow sacred—part of that vast arcanum of unassailable utterances which includes all sincere, albeit imperfect, attempts to communicate—aboriginal petroglyphs, lost Andean codexes, manuscripts corrupted by the floodwaters of the Arno—dead poets buried in their native lands, unread.

I don't believe there are more than one hundred people who really read my books. Cozy for me. I can test the symbols and languages I know and verify the modalities I employ. And I can do it with relative impunity because I believe that I can learn from the ways in which I am misunderstood—up to a point.

Eventually, I learned, by reading between the lines of even my favorite professors, to doubt the printed word. The graven image having been previously proscribed by custom and Mosaic interdiction, I approached everything that was authored with suspicion. Everywhere the word was misused—cynical obscurantism, false prophecy, journalistic blather, professional jargon, vainglorious legalese, mindless psychobabble, and disingenuous perjury—the narrative and exegesis of an age.

My iconography and my syntax isolate me. If a few mainstream Peeping Toms care enough to strain they will likely conclude that what they have before them is just plain irritating—too abstract to follow, too introspective to share, too ambiguous to understand. In my book, pun intended, an apparent failure to communicate is signal evidence of a precipitous decline in the general ability to empathize—a broad and pernicious cultural complicity which ultimately impedes the will to remedy.

If books could promulgate such grievous illusions as easily as they might relieve us of our most recondite errors then making a book that remained true to my experience, no matter how inexplicable, was the only secure pilgrimage. Confession was the only honorable discourse. The lone story worth telling would be my own.

I begin my books with images and end them with words. The process seems right when, at last, it places me dangerously between the lights a familiar tabernacle and the flames of an unknown and dreadful bonfire. I am done when I feel that I have disclosed something about my immediate condition—made witness to myself. I try to finish one book each year and that book must open a critical passage for me before it will be published.

RUTH LAXSON

For me, artists' books are a chance to condense and decipher some of the glut of information in today's world.

The pithy, direct comment is sifted and honed through my flexible process of starting with a theme, then allowing it to shape itself at all stages—while setting the type and then composing text as image on the press bed.

Even when the printing is done there is still a chance for other marks such as hand stamping, palimpsest, or maybe some rebus.



(Douglas continued)

panned through shifting frames of reference was in its exploration of the loop form one of the starting points for *Chinese Whispers*. In this book the camera movement was conceived in three panning loops, which moving up with each pan through three levels (defined in relation to the three shelves of the cupboard) described the form of a Spiral. This aspect of book form, the movement of the camera creating a spiral journey through the book was fundamental to the narrative of *Life in Chinese Whispers* and was influenced by Jill Purce's book *The Mystic Spiral, Journey of the Soul* (1974).

Another fundamental starting point for *Chinese Whispers* was to construct and establish a stable sense of place within book. This place took shape as the cupboard. Having seen how sets were created in the making of *Loophole*, I wanted this creation to become part of the narrative journey in *Chinese Whispers* and in so being establish a place more tangible and grounded in book. In *Loophole* the outer edges of the attic hovered at the edges of the page, poles marking the edges, hovered as a proscenium of the set. For *Chinese Whispers* I wanted something more real, concrete, the space to be place, and this place to be centered. Just as the spiral movement of the camera was conceived in relation to the cupboard to describe the spiral journey of *Life*, so the centered Cupboard was conceived in relation to this as the Tree of Life. Another inspirational book in same series as *The Mystic Spiral* was *The Tree of Life, Symbol of the Centre* (1974). With this conception another aspect of book form explored in previous publications, that is the In, On and Over (the page) got transposed in *Chinese Whispers* into the investigative discovery of the three levels of the Cupboard/Tree as a narrative journey of under, on, and over ground.

In addition to the spiral form of the camera movement and the centered cupboard with their associations to the mystic spiral and tree of life was the hedgehog point of view. I had always identified with the hedgehog. By 1975 with the first issue of *The Fox* (Art Language publication, N.Y) which we had bought in New York in April 75, I had felt more identified than ever with *The Hedgehog*. In the Greek belief the hedgehog knows through snuffing its way through life, putting its world together from primary snuffly experience. The fox by contrast casts its eye wide, is conceptual in approach and has an over view. Thus committed to *The Hedgehog* point of view for snuffing out narrative, *Chinese Whispers* begins with the hedgehog, the first open spread a close up textural experience, of grass and bristles. This view point also alludes to that of Van Gogh's in his remarkable paintings of grass, which painted after his breakdowns, would (as I see them) seem in their close up focus to reestablish his vital, tangible connection with life. In this way, as with Van Gogh's vision where the vision opens upwards and outwards, so in *Chinese Whispers* the viewpoint of the camera focus opens up, from hedgehog to hedge and then through the snipping of the hedge to take in the view of the barn beyond. Most importantly the hedgehog eye snuffing out narrative meaning, spots the door. With hedge spanning the planar stretch of the open spread, the book is placed so that the barn door hinges on the spine, focusing that place where from now onwards the whole narrative journey hinges. In this way the spine, that central column of feeling, becomes the crucial aspect of book form to be explored in relation to the spiral.

Pressing on with the narrative, the book moves with the hinged page as opening the door for the viewer from outside to inside, into the soft dim light inside the barn. In making *Chinese Whispers*



Gary Richman, *The Confession in the Garden of Licked Wounds*, 1996

through these cuts, letting connections form from page to page, rather than making the punctum division absolute at each turning. The weather report on Zimmermann's condition, or that of the narrator, is the only information revealed in the text, and the precipitating events that cause this state of mind are conspicuously absent. The difficulties that are evident in the increasingly stressed state of mind are evident in the intense patterns and designs on the pages, readouts on a condition of psychic uneasiness that produce vibrant but disturbing visual noises. The regular timing of the book, its repeated pacing and repetitive structure, offer a counterpoint to the disintegrating condition of the narrator. *Long Story Short* (1999), communicates through a pattern of gestures, begging the question of communicative efficacy and frustration through the attempt to read body language outside of context.

Gary Richman's use of images is strikingly varied and eclectic, and his textual strategies highly complex in their capacity to produce meaning at the intersection of image/text relations. Richman plunders the print world for materials, finding his images in every possible source of black and white and photographic illustration. His means and methods have been refined to a specific way of working, evolved over several decades in which his approach (though not his subject matter) has been refined. Richman arranges his found images in regular patterns, rows or side-by-side arrangements, and then places his text underneath, next to, or across from the visuals. *Helianthus Beseiged* (1998) and *Confession in the Garden of Licked Wounds* (1996) are typical of this working method through which Richman pushes the limits of narrative continuity to include the endless improbabilities of encounter. On the page, Richman's narratives look conventional enough, the series of images neatly accompanied by well-ordered lines of text. But at the level of meaning the results warp both components, forcing them into a relation that accomodates both terms—which are often far apart thematically. Richman's capacity to unfix meaning from its conventional boundaries is his strength. He makes good use of his



IT SEEMED TO ME THEN, THAT
AT LEAST ONCE IN ONE'S LIFE
A TOTAL BREAK SHOULD BE MADE,
NO MATTER FROM WHAT—

FAITH, COUNTRY, CONSOLATION,
HOME, FAMILY OR THOUGHT,
AND THE SEPARATION MUST BE
ABSOLUTE AND SEEM INEVITABLE.

Gary Richman, *The Confession in the Garden of Licked Wounds*, 1996

wariness about the capacity of cultural norms to dull the defamiliarizing insights of critical aesthetics, constantly offering the possibility of new versions of what seemed to be the usual tales.

In the *Confession in the Garden of Licked Wounds*, for instance, the narrative describes the task of making a major break, an interruption in the habitual course of his own life. Whether real or fictive, based on actual events or constructed as a tale, this story is told in short, concise text blocks: "It seemed to me then, that at least once in one's life a total break should be made, no matter what—faith, country, consolation, home, family or thought, and the separation must be absolute and seem inevitable." On the page, this sentence is split into two chunks, set in majuscules, and placed beneath two found photographs whose halftone dots have been enlarged to the size of a small checkerboard pattern. The images, one of a woman, one of a man, have each been slightly altered to intensify the grotesqueness of their expressions. Between them, a line drawing of a dog with unnaturally extended toes is inserted like an inadequate bridge. The dog is elsewhere referred to as his "poor and once neglected hound, whose tongue has always been on my licked wounds." On the facing page, a snapshot, masques, gargoyles, and a woman's buttocks form a complex pattern of expressions and forms. Meaning accumulates in the assembly of parts, the visual elements playing their graphic ambiguity against the stark, simple-seeming quality of the prose. The tale plays out, detailing his acquisition of some outmoded correspondence course. But throughout, the book suggests the dark impossibility of coming to terms with contemporary existence—unless one is willing to pay the price of the pain of mediation and reinvention.

The work of Ruth Laxson, like that of Richman, is concerned with contingencies of meaning, the fragility of sense as it is made upon the page. Laxson's books are created through a process of accretion, made in the decisions of design and production that are set into motion by her focus on a theme and variations.¹¹ Each page in *Muse Measures* (1998) has the quality of having been figured out in relation to the others, not in advance, but as

(Douglas continued)

we took much pains to preserve this chiaroscuro of light and shade in the developing of the photographic prints for the pages. This quality of light was something about coming home, a warmth of dim light, a sense of well being that I knew well from feeding animals in the barn, deep in straw, deep in Winter, deep in childhood. The shedder also inspired by my experience of swinging the gate, shedding the sheep in the folds, was here in *Chinese Whispers* deliberately chosen. Sorting being a process necessary to any journey, the shedder was constructed to the proportions of the book page, to sort the ground, in preparation for constructing the central book. With the shedder openings to the left hand and right hand side pages of the book, the shedder gate is interleaved and hinged from the spine to actively engage the viewer through the turning of the page in the process of sorting the narrative. In this way the narrative journey now hinged on the spine, does not nip through the one or other of the openings but instead is constructed/played out in front of the openings. The illusionistic space of in the page is barred by new slats of wood nailed to the old, exploring, marking the geometry and plane of the page, and the dynamic wedge of the open spread. The shape of the narrative to come.

The cupboard, inspired by the built in corner cupboard in the kitchen in my childhood was here a new cupboard. Built to the proportions of the open book, the corner cupboard was of our own making. It was the book. It was the narrative. This was a constructed place that Telfer and I could share in book. It was not one of those god damn cupboards in his London house with the remains of his past two wives. Neither was it the cupboard created by me in a book I made when I was thirteen to make sense of childhood experience. In that book the cupboard was always placed behind the page plane; secretive, half closed and removed. (Albeit the alchemy of the cupboard playing its part in the narrative, a story about hedgehogs.)

Now in *Chinese Whispers*, the cupboard constructed before the viewer's eyes with no hidden corners, was to be read quite literally as Life, as open book. The cupboard's centrality and symmetry emanating from the spine I considered much like Pere Tanguy, whom Van Gogh painted as a Buddha, connected and grounded with the lofty Mount Fuji rising behind him. Thus as I will show later at the apex of the narrative and cupboard on the top shelf is the embodiment of balance in the scales with the mountain of flour as pinhill (see bag of flour) miniaturization of Fuji.

The cupboard as constructed book, now enabled a clarity of expression of the narrative to come, with the contents of this cupboard (all chosen for their narrative relationship to the Spiral and Tree of Life) creating the alchemy of the unfolding story. With the narrative text embodied within the objects, the story of the book was to be revealed through the spiral form of the camera in conjunction with the hinged spine and open spread. In this way through the activation of the book the narrative was to take root, flourish and fly as Tree of Life.

Divided into three levels of existence, the bottom shelf of the cupboard established with the Bread(bin) and coffee making, the basis of every day living and with the cropping of objects by the page a way of reading narrative (READ, Fly leaf Bookworm) embodied in objects. In this way the packet Golden Fiction announces the first of three book flourishes positioned at the apex of each spiralling loop to explore the narrative of in, on and over ground. These three inner book flourishes we conceived as vignettes. However, unlike the traditional vignette which creates



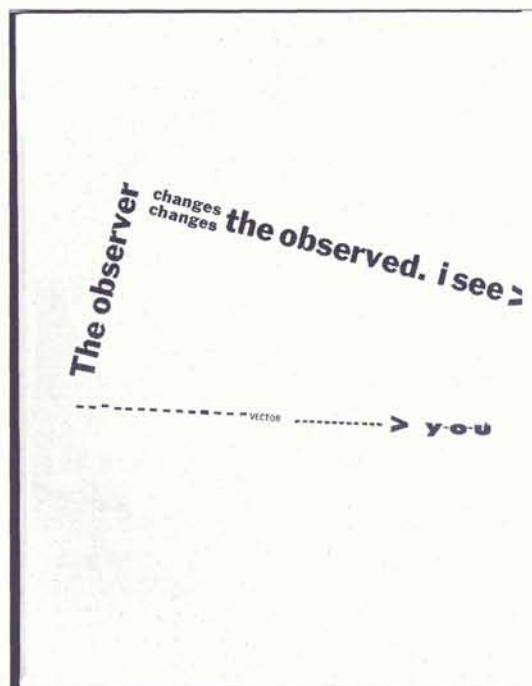
(Douglas continued)

on the page a window into a miniaturized world beyond, here the small books were to flourish, as sprouts from the spine, out from the book. Just as the traditional vignette, these booklet sproutings worked as escapades revealing secretive inner goings on, here escaping the outer dominance of the open cupboard to reveal its inner workings. Each of the three vignettes were designed to 16 pages, 8 back and front, to enable them to be printed separately in colour and on glossy art paper. Utilizing this aspect of book form, it was thus possible to tease out narrative in shorter playful bursts within the continuum.

The first vignette to be explored with spine and open spread was the Earth Cake. A majestic mud pie, this was sliced to reveal within the open cupboard/book the inner center, the inner workings of roots. Sliced by the knife protruding like Chardin's, the knife to cake connects object to viewer in a tangible one to one scale way; the viewer once more connected and activating the narrative, taking a slice with the turning of the page into Life, to the center.

With the earth cake gone the viewer rejoins the cupboard and journeys onwards with the spiral, the camera pulling outwards to nose upwards and finding the second shelf, moves inwards to its objects and their story. The can/bottle opener with spiral positioned against the film spool mimic a snail carrying its shell, while the internal (darkroom) clock, set in motion ticks from this point onwards its own way through the narrative. All the objects, the yeast for fermenting, the siphoning juices to connect levels and seeds for sprouting, being embodiments of that spiral growth and movement of Life. The Suttons' seed packet literally providing with its picture a window vignette into the second vignette of bursting life from the spine. In this vignette the backs and fronts of the pages are activated so that the reader physically un-peels the cabbage folios to its heart. This was a complete reworking of a book I had made in 1972. With the prising open of the book by the viewer the pea springs open, hinged from the spine, while the blackberries and the green fingers referring to the vital green growth of the vignette, entice the viewer to follow with their handling fingers and viewing eyes the green fingers transferring the blackberries from left to right page, to move the narrative on and back to the black ink printing of the outer book. In this vignette the final labelled jar SNOTTUS (Sutton's backwards) refers to the loop form of the vignette as it rejoins the cupboard, and also to a more subtle self effacement that was going on, it'S NOTT US. Written in Telfer's bold hand writing, the rest of the text we introduced was executed on dyno tape to give it detachment and object status. This detachment had originally been suggested by the chilling use of dyno tape for ransom notes by the child murderer Nielson. Concurrent with the initial scheming of Chinese Whispers was a shadow book *Murder in the Dark* which never took shape. However its slinking presence in Chinese Whispers is made manifest by the dyno tape, zipped along the shelves of the cupboard with its ominous, foreboding messages....THIN EDGE OF THE WEDGE THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME....TURN OVER A NEW LEAF LIFE IS AN OPEN BOOK....IN THE MIND'S EYE THE BIRD HAS FLOWN. The dyno tape also appears on the title page, where our own names as authors do not. It gives the date 22nd SEPT, my birthday. So coded I was identified with the title page of Chinese Whispers.

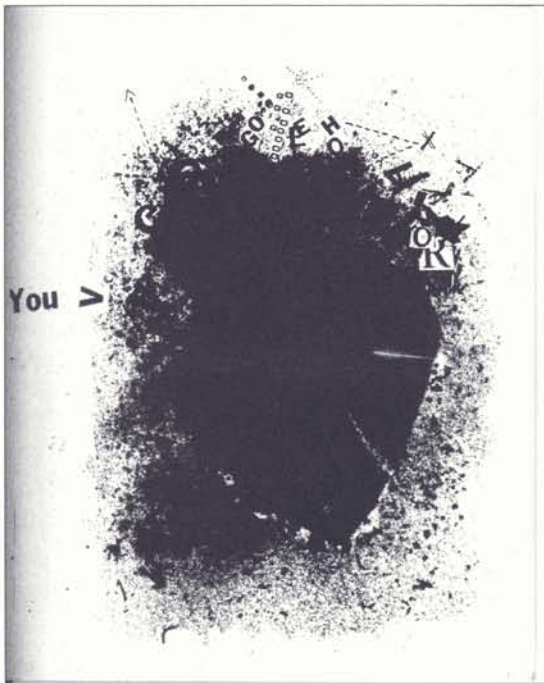
The third and final loop of the narrative spiral embraces the third level of existence, the soul, inspiration, flight, and flouring.



Ruth Laxson, *Muse Measures*, 1998

a process. In this work, as in *Wheeling*, (1992) the narrative is often hanging by the most tenuous thread of interactive production. From each statement to the next, Laxson's work is dramatic in the sense of surprise as if the moment were just then, in front of one, to be had and made through the material effort of getting the image or text to happen in the very form that it takes. There are stories here, served up in bits and fragments, those snatches of thought and conversation through which we find them in our minds and lives. The book becomes a field in which these elements are suspended momentarily in order to be put back together in the process of reading. Massaging her language with typographic invention, Laxson bends and pulls at her words, letting their emotional impact show in their form. The personal voice is everywhere in these books, but there is no easy access, no simple telling of tales as if they could be transferred in some simple exchange. Reading Laxson's work is a process of intimation and extraction, of sifting and absorbing the observed nuances of her delicate lines, drawn and written, and remaking them into the impression of a story wafted wraithlike into the spectre of a form. Narrative is made through the schematic production of bits and fragments into the illusion of a whole, as meaning is made from the diverse and disparate sensations and events of a life. Everything is real here, a fact on the page, and the process of the telling moves inexorably towards the goal of the told. But Laxson's story is never separable from the dynamic movement of the book: the shifting ground of page to page creates the figures of her tale.

In one spread in *Muse Measures*, for instance, the left page contains the statement, "The observer changes / changes



Ruth Laxson, *Muse Measures*, 1998

the observed. I see" continued across the gutter "You / Seeing seeing seeing." The first line breaks after "The observer," which is set at a radical left to right upward angle, so that the repeated word "changes" doubles up in a smaller typeface. The effect is to enact the notion of "change" as well as to objectify the distinction between dynamic "observer" and more static "observed." By using the gutter to separate the speaker/author from the "you" who is seen, Laxson uses the book's structure as part of the meaning of the text, isolating the two fields of first and second person point of view from each other. This distinction is further reinforced by the fact that the left hand page is spare, the type clean and readable, while the repeated word "seeing" is overprinted on a dark cloud of visual activity that also contains fragments of type, words, marks, and letters leaping off as if to reach escape velocity as language emerging from a raw mass of matter. The phrase "Knowing, not knowing" arches across the top end of this dark mass, and the philosophical problem of the link between knowledge and language, perception and articulation, takes physical form here. Laxson's work has been reduced to essentials, and yet, has a visual richness and textual complexity to it, creating spacious narratives that are highly specific and yet sufficiently general to function almost as metanarratives, describing the structure of stories while enacting them.

In its resonance, narrative plays to individual memory and collective witnessing, to the need to communicate one's own experience (real or imagined) beyond the limits of immediate audience. In the current climate of inundation by culture industry products—the mega-discourses of late 20th-century enter-

(Douglas continued)

The mountain of flour as discussed earlier taking shape, and scaled in the apex and spine of the book. Lofty light and distanced, it is different from the tangibly sliced core of the earth cake and the vivacious sprouting of the cabbage and bursting pea. Next to the flour, it is the pointed scissors which open in sharp practice with the open spread. Lifted from Martin Attwood's paintings, these scissors were directly associated with Martin who had left and flown to Italy. Beak open the scissors snip the pages of the book and create within the viewer's hands the butterfly that flies with the opening and closing of the book. As inspiration the butterfly literally came as a dream. And here in the book, it becomes detached to lift the narrative off the book, to hover as shadow presence over the opening and closing book. In this way the cupboard and that first series of Weproductions paper hovered to a close, the melancholic bat image of Goya's *El Capriccio* somewhere deep in the recesses of my mind.

On closing the cupboard so to comes the closing of the book, with its constructed narrative held securely within until the next opening of the book. Once closed, it is the cover that holds the final word in this narrative. In April '75 at The Gotham Book Mart we had been struck by the way the proprietor Mr. Slopnik had looked at our book *Loophole*, feeling it out by weighing it in his hand, banging it like a butcher would a slab of meat on the table, and declaring it a piece of Concrete Poetry. We had liked this sense of concreteness. The cover of *Chinese Whispers* drew on this experience, for here the reader holding the book, holds a solid sod of earth. The front grassy side up, the solid content within, and then turned over, the back, the underside of earth and roots. And there on the back just to be seen is a stone oblong in shape that we pressed into the earth as an embellishing gem for the cover. As a finishing touch this gem closely connected to the earth, holds as touch stone for the hand this moment of narrative completeness, of concreteness within the continuum, Life.

Between the Two

I gathered the images for *Between the Two* using colour film, for easy processing and instant feed back. From the beginning I was thinking black and white, pages and book. To this end for an immediate transformation of the images into black and white, change of scale and most importantly into instant paper copy, I used a photocopier. This provided me with paper roughs, the ready material that I could handle, group, and gather together. In this way I made small booklet—flutterings, nuggets of ideas, holding within myself the feeling for the larger whole.

In January 1997 I began to put that whole, the book together. Still working with rough paper copy I worked on and across the floor and let the areas of feeling unravel in both directions. In this way I found the narrative journey as I had found in dance. There were three distinct areas of narrative; the snow white pages with sparseness, coldness and angularity. A middle part of tonal softening and drifting. And a third area of sensuous feeling and arabesque, with the flowering. Trusting in the unravelling and connecting of these areas across the floor I realized in the making that I was shaping the material into phrases, as breaths from the chest, as open arms' spans of about six to eight pages. I encouraged, nudged and teased out the images in relation to the visual nuance, mark, pace and shape of each of these phrases; static, brittle, harsh, rush, criss/cross, dense, open, weave,



(Douglas continued)

float, suspend, loop, arabesque, explode etc. At the same time as working the narrative in a continuous way across the paper (and floor), I also worked it in relation to the cut vertical and horizontal edge and crease/spine of each double spread, to concentrate each spread and intensify the phrasing and meaning. I always conceived of the continuum of *Between the Two* in relation to the intense finality of the cut edge. This gave me the freedom to interject into it: the tuft of grass, the flower within the fence, the gathered flowering within the arabesque, the leaf and butter flyer.

Having established the narrative journey and page, I then folded this into a concertina, with the flowering signature sewn within. As the latter had been conceived as one whole signature, I worked from this point backwards to the front of the book to find the other signatures of the book. Sometimes in this process a phrasing got tightened or lengthened to make better sense of the central double spread, e.g. the suspended cobweb. Once the dummy book in signatures had been made and finalized the next stage of book production began.

Returning to the original color photographs, I worked direct with the process camera to produce film, as black & white (clear) copy to the scale of the dummy book. The first section of black line on white, was starved of tone. I wanted the cold whiteness of the snow to be transformed into the bright whiteness of the page, to lead the viewer into the book, but visually hold them out. The fine delicacy and starkness of the dead grasses, wire fence, stalks etc. to be stripped and pared. Startling against the white. Like the piercing cry of the black and white *Oyster Catcher* and Egyptian hieroglyph. Working positive to negative back to positive film, it was possible to eliminate anything that interfered with this vision. It was also possible to join these images together in a seamless way, to enable the visual narrative to cross and wrap around the edge of the cut pages.

The second section was different and conceived to be more giving, to take the viewer into the page through tone and drifting. I used a mezzo tint screen for producing this quality in the film copy. Because of my desire for this continuous soft drifting tone I had devised to join the images together with fine vertical lines, as zips. These varied in width to play off the images and in some place mimic the stalks they were bringing together. In this way the images and rectangular half-tone shapes float across the page, spine and edge: metered in a similar way to those in *Water on the Border*.

The final section with arabesque line of pea and vine tendrils was pushed to greater contrast, to simplify and accentuate the light highlight and movement against the dark. Originally I had conceived of the white line as starker, but in the process of making I was led by the sensuous velvety line that emerged from the dark in the camera work. It felt like my *Authentic Movement*, I loved it and I followed it. As in the first section with solid clear/white, in this section I achieved areas of solid black to enable seamless joining of one image to another, to allow the line as mark to scribe the narrative. In all the making I realized how fortuitous the intuitive phrasing had been for the successful joining of one image to another and the handling of this in the darkroom. In built interjections, such as leaves, flowers, butterfly etc. also provided breathing spaces where error could be swallowed up.

By early September I had all the film copy ready for the printer. Months previously I had chosen to work with the com-



tainment and commercial manufacture—the artist's voice offers an important counter point of view, an individual perspective in opposition to the often formulaic strategies of dominant culture. But artists' books, like any other aspect of contemporary art, are situated in a dialogue with larger cultural forces. The artist's voice is a product of that dialogue, not outside of it; that voice is individually articulated and socially situated, motivated by those same forces that drive us each and all individually and collectively towards creating a story according to which the real may be redeemed with sense. The experimental aspects of artists' engagement break the molds, create alternative visions, rethink the possibilities for assembling the fragments of phenomenal experience into a coherent tale so that it may be experienced again. And again.

It has become a commonplace in the late 20th-century to invoke the "end of the book" in apocalyptic terms, to suggest that the invasion of personal and public life by electronic media has eliminated the need for print forms with their low-end technical requirements, their long shelf-life, and their portability, accessibility, autonomy, and intimacy. It has also become an unexamined banality to suggest that artists' books are the self-conscious outpouring of attention to an about-to-be-extinct form—an attention that heralds and signals its demise. I would suggest the contrary, that the vibrancy and imagination of artists' books arise from the ongoing history of the book as a specialized form, one whose future we have yet to imagine and whose potential we have yet to fully explore in its usefulness as a means of narrating imaginative coherence as an aspect of our lives.

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Notes

- ¹ Karl Krober, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).
- ² Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, Viktor Shklovsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Claude Levi-Strauss.
- ³ Paraphrased from the preface to Jeremy Hawthorn, ed., *Narrative, From Malory to Motion Pictures*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1985). p.viii.
- ⁴ Gerard Genette, "Frontiers of Narrative," *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.128.
- ⁵ Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (NY: Granary Books, 1995).
- ⁶ The classic analysis, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, trans. by David Kunzle (Valparaiso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaiso, 1971; English edition: NY: International General, 1975).
- ⁷ Forms is more like it—heterogeneous as even this small group is in its range.
- ⁸ My preference is to consider artists' books as part of modern art and literature since their expression of individual subjectivity is consistent with the critical paradigms of modernity—individualism, innovation, and formal self-consciousness.
- ⁹ See *Century* for my discussion and other references, including works edited or written by Joan Lyons, Robert Morgan, Nancy Princenthal, Renée Riese and Judd Hubert, Buzz Spector, and Anne Moeglin-Delcroix.
- ¹⁰ See Brad Freeman, "Documentary Photography in Books: a brief glance," *JAB5*, Spring 1996; pp.18-23, for a discussion of Bill Burke's work in greater depth.
- ¹¹ Pattie Belle Hastings, "Cosmological Wit: The Books of Ruth Laxson," *JAB8*, Fall 1997; pp.10-16.

(Douglas continued)

mercial printers Mc Queens (now Sykes) in Galashiels, the same firm that had printed *Threads* in 1974. Originally a family business, these printers had expanded beyond all recognition: they print all the Adobe literature e.g. Photoshop manuals and seemed efficient. Originally when I approached them and showed them my dummy book, they seemed intrigued, but advised me that I should not have worked the fine images across the spine. I said 'that's the book, and that as I intended to do all the layout work myself, as long as they were accurate printers what was the problem?' They took the book on and me too. To ensure accuracy etc. they allowed me to work in their originating department, to use their mechanical guillotine and light box to produce the final layout trannies. All men in the department, and staunch members of the Glasgow print union, this was quite a coup. The book was laid out, 16 pages per sheet 8 back and front, and was printed offset on a Heidelberg in shifts. Having made myself part of the works I was allowed to look on, but after making clear with the press men printers my intentions for the book, I decided to clear out and let it run. Actually it was my birthday, so we had a picnic and the next day someone took me up in a light aeroplane, and for a few hours I got a bird's eye view over my life.

Back on ground, there were some disappointments with the printing, but not bad. Then with the book sheets printed I gathered up a book in preparation for the binder. It was at this point that I became unhappy with the flower. The Nova Scotia paper with the printed image did not have the lightness and feeling I had anticipated. I worked on this into the night and chanced on the tissue paper and interleaved it. The tissue transparency gave the flower the visual cohesion between the back of the semi-translucent printed Scotia Translucent and its printed face that I had anticipated, and provided the visual lightness I had sought. The paper also gave greater erotic teasing in the peeling opening of the flower and I was pleased with this tactile reading.

The next morning I bought up all the tissue in the local Art shop in Galashiels, and went on up to the binders in Edinburgh. With a certain cajoling they had agreed to put the velvet on the cover, so the tissue was just another extra. Perhaps the most difficult extra was to get them to change their cotton reel and thread the book with black thread. With the introduction of white paper in the first signature, black thread appears as the narrative thread in the first center. This was important to me, it connected back to my first publication *Threads* and visually connected this forward to the sparse grasses in *Between the Two*. To get consistent accuracy in the gathering, binding and final guillotining of the book was a continual worry as I received and checked batches of the book. But as I wrote at the beginning I had conceived of the book intensity in relation to this so I had to live with it! I began the book 1st January and the first copies were out on the 1st October: it felt like quite a birth. ←

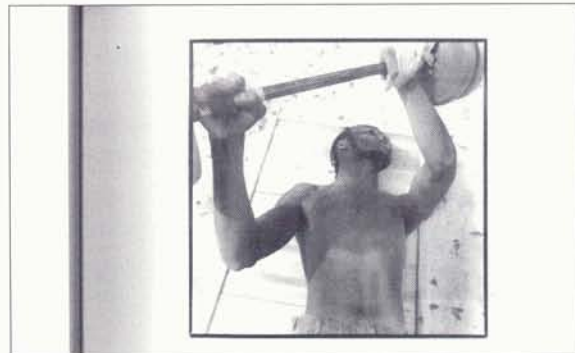
NOVA REPERTA: NEW INVENTIONS AND DISCOVERIES

Johanna Drucker and Brad Freeman

Nova Reperta: New Inventions and Discoveries, a contemporary response to the original 1638 publication based on drawings by Johannes Stradanus, is our most ambitious collaboration to date. Crucial to this project and to the exhibition we have just organized for Louisiana State University, the work reflects both of our concerns with systematic experimentation with narrative. Nova Reperta is a profoundly collaborative work: from original conception through every stage of development and execution, it has embodied our shared concerns and ideas, overlapping points of view, and also the differences in our working methods as artists. In the work we are exhibiting here, that engagement with narrative is evident from each of our earliest works—Brad's documentation of the people he knew and worked with as a house counselor at the facility for multiply handicapped adults that serves as the basis of *Lake House* (1980), and my perverse prose fantasy, *Dark, the Bat-Elf* (1972)—to the decisions that have determined the shape of *Nova Reperta*.

My [JD] sense of narrative is deeply rooted in literary traditions, clichés, tropes, and forms that I absorbed in the process of reading the great classics of prose fiction starting in my early teens. Having inhabited those stories, I also felt them shape my expectations for the scenario of the life I thought I would live. Reinvestigating these narrative lines has been a crucial part of my interrogation of the links between my own internal life and that of the cultural context in which my psyche intersects with the social imaginary—ideas that informed *Narratology* (1994) and *Simulant Portrait* (1991). Brad works in a far more contingent and constructive manner to make narrative as a form of coherence out of relations of disparate perceptions that he has rendered into representational form. Though his primary mode of mediating his relation to the world is through photographs, even when he is photographing he seems to think in terms of books and the relations among images (and textual elements) rather than the single photo. This approach is clear in his books *MuzeLink* (1997) and *Program* (1990). For both of us the term *experimental* with respect to narrative implies a questioning of received forms and a critical interrogation of the function of fictions of coherence as a social and personal operation.

Our working methods are somewhat different, and that contrast of approaches has been the source of strength as much as tension in our current collaboration. My tendency is to work through a project into a nearly complete mockup before I begin printing; Brad is far more sensitive to the printing process as a way of thinking creatively as his project progresses. Whether working in letterpress or on the computer for digital pre-press, I will change a text on a piece to make it fit, give it a particular visual shape, or, in the case of letterpress, accommodate running out of certain letters as I am setting the type. But this approach reflects the fact that I have a layout in mind and that much of my bookwork is format driven. On the other hand, I've watched Brad rethink a page entirely after it has been printed with one or more runs and come up with a printing solution (another plate,



Brad Freeman, *Lakehouse*, 1980 (above left: three photographs of resident Walter, working, lifting weights, with girlfriend Mattie).

halftone screen, color area or pattern, or other application of ink) that pushes the sheet into a direction that wasn't foreseen. I've watched him transfer this sensibility to the production of a book—*MuzeLink*, to be precise. That work, which is an extensive and almost monumentally scaled project, was not all laid out and set in advance of the production. Much of the way the book looks in its final form is the result of Brad's continual rethinking of relations among the elements in the book that only became apparent as he was producing it. He would sequence photographs in a section, then sketch them into the dummy, then project forward for a few days work, all the while letting the next sections begin to emerge schematically. In some areas, whole sequences were worked out while the intermediate pages were still blank, and he was also able to introduce events that occurred in his life as he was working into the still malleable form of the piece. This difference—between working the book out largely in advance and working through the book in progress—is about as fundamental as can be. Sometimes this has introduced

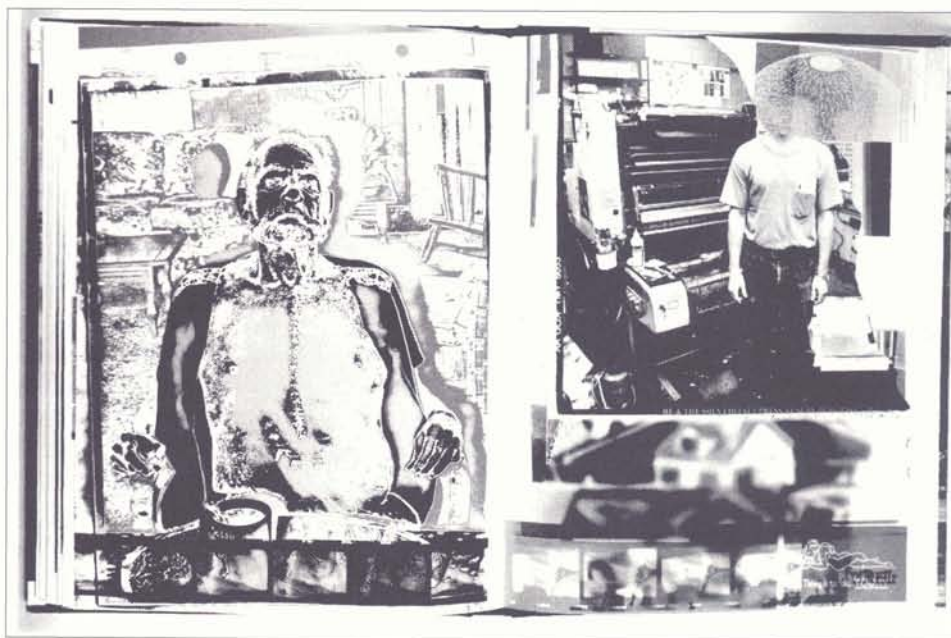
a certain tension in our working process, but overall, it has been beneficial in developing *Nova Reperta*.

We began *Nova Reperta* more than five years ago, in 1993, when we were selected to participate in an exhibition initiated by the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. Contemporary artists were invited to make books in response to works in the Bern Dibner Library of History and Technology. We looked at a number of books: original volumes by Vesalius, for instance, but we were both eager to find a work to which our response would allow real, direct, engagement with the possibility of transposing its substance onto a contemporary reality. We didn't want to make a simple homage or imitation (it seemed outrageously pretentious when the original of Vesalius is so unapproachably superb), but rather to be able to say something about our times by using the historical distance from whatever original we selected. We were struck by the *Nova Reperta* of Johannes Stradanus for a number of reasons—and I think each of us for different reasons, some of which led to ways of working that had to be let go in the collaborative process. I would have stuck closer to the original images, with a more literal rework, left to my own conceptualizations and I think Brad might have stuck closer to the original themes and tried to find their contemporary counterparts. The final result is stronger for our having made these changes, but our original attraction was to the visual complexity and fineness of the original prints and the information about technological inventions that they contained. Our response was conceived as a dialogue with the original, rather than an imitation, so it makes no attempt to mimic the pictorial strategies of Stradanus's work, nor to be consistent with his celebratory spirit. It is a critical reflection upon the extension of that worldview of progress from a perspective possible more than four centuries later.

The original *Nova Reperta: New Discoveries and Inventions*, is a suite of engravings made from drawings by the Dutch artist Jan van der Straet (Johannes Stradanus) in which he cele-

brated those innovations that had shaped the modern world in the latter half of the 16th century. Not all the inventions are from that period; many date much earlier (such as windmills and watermills), but were still significant in their impact and effect. Produced in an era of rapid-seeming development and considerable global exploration, the spirit of Stradanus's work reflected an unqualified embrace of progress. Celebrating change wrought by various mechanical and technical inventions, including the reproduction through copper engraving that fostered the printing of images, his drawings documented many specific discoveries in pictorial formats. Though not considered by art historians to be a first-rank artist (barely deserving of mention in general histories of Dutch 16th and 17th century printmaking), Stradanus's scope, skill, and specificity make *Nova Reperta* an imaginative and compelling work of creative art and cultural history.¹

Known by the Latinized version of his name, Stradanus (1523-1605) achieved considerable popular success during his lifetime through the printed versions of his work. The Antwerp publishing houses with whom he collaborated issued his prints singly as well as in sets. As copper engravings proliferated in the later 16th century, with their capacity for longer runs and finer lines than the woodcut blocks that had preceded them as a means of reproduction, the popular appetite for prints increased.² The publishing of visual images became a thriving business, with specialized markets in different geographic locations catering to the tastes of Dutch audiences for cartographic subjects, Flemish for architecture and ornament, fencing and military subjects, and so forth.³ Stradanus's images, engraved by Johannes Collaert, Theodor and Johannes Galle, (and issued under the imprint of the major Netherlandish printing house of this father and son), were issued during his lifetime singly and in thematic series.⁴ The favor they continued to find justified their being issued as a single volume in 1638 (three decades after the artist's death), consisting of 186 plates, of which *Nova Reperta* comprises but a



Brad Freeman, *MuzeLink*, 1997

small section.5

Only a few of the activities depicted in the plates of Stradanus's *Nova Reperta* can properly be called "discoveries." For instance, many show familiar elements of the natural world whose properties or characteristics had been newly revealed, radically altering their identity and use. But much of what Stradanus offers in the prints is a record of human technological ingenuity and engineering application. Remarkable for their visual detail and compositional imagination, the prints bespeak a late Renaissance sensibility enthralled with the power of rationalization to improve and extend human power over the natural world, harnessing its latent resources with an unequivocal faith in the positive benefit to be accrued to humanity in the process.

In his 1953 introduction to the Burndy Library reprint of *Nova Reperta*, Bern Dibner wrote, "The boon of the physical sciences stands unquestioned."⁶ His sensibility was closer to that of Stradanus, nearly four hundred years earlier, than it is to ours. Half a century later it is as difficult to share Dibner's unqualified endorsement as it is to feel a sympathy with his opening statement, "Today we are impatient with Science for not yet having done the things we expect from it." Invoking the term "science" as a monolithic whose contributions are unqualifiedly positive can no longer pass without question. Our distance from Dibner and Stradanus is marked by a poignant awareness of their lack of any sense of the human price and ecological consequences of the global expansion of consumer culture combined with unregulated exploitation of the environment.

Our approach to this project evolved as we worked on it, particularly with regard to the distance from literal analogies to the original prints and their subject matter. For instance, we had at first considered extending the image of book production into the depiction of web publishing, the study of gunpowder into various weapons of mass destruction, and so forth, but this approach felt too literal and too constrained by repetition of the thematics of the work—rather than an extension of its conceptual underpinnings. As we began to work, it also occurred to us that much of what was intriguing about the Stradanus images had to

do with their metaphorical complexity and the unexamined cultural values they embodied as much as the pictorial structures. Instead of copying Stradanus's descriptions of technology, we chose to attempt a more poetic approach. What assumptions about time, value, labor, virtue, and power lurked in these naturalized images of the world around us? How could we use a poetic visual mode to create an imaginative response in dialogue with the original?

Though we had to forego work on *Nova Reperta* in 1994 for personal, logistical, reasons, the conceptual foundations we had put into place remained viable when we returned to it. We used the opportunity of applying for an artists' residency at Djerassi Foundation in August 1998 to return to *Nova Reperta*, and that trip to California provided an opportunity for a portion of the photography Brad wanted for the book: images of the windmills in Altamont Pass, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Port of Oakland, and views of the oil refineries in Richmond—all sites in the Bay Area. Djerassi's dramatically beautiful landscape provided the final image in the book—a time exposure of the night sky in which the stars trace concentric circles defined by the earth's axial rotation. While at Djerassi we were able to work extensively on writing, darkroom work, conceptualizing, and, most importantly, finalizing the vision of production through which to realize the project. We entertained many possibilities before arriving at a solution that would work for all aspects of the book—which we also wanted to have function as a wall piece. Brad had considered producing the images as gum bichromate prints, but decided that their image quality was too soft and miniscule edition size was more precious than he wanted. It was also unclear how the text and images would integrate in such a method. We considered producing polymer plates to print letterpress, but worried that the photographic resolution would suffer by being printed relief. The question of where and how the text would sit in relation to the images also posed a problem since the Stradanus original used language only at the lower margin, outside the image area. The resolution occurred when we agreed on the offset production of duotone prints at a fairly large scale (16" x 20"), on single sheets that could be post bound, though that printing solution has been modified as well during the production process. The post binding eliminates the need for a spread joining pages at the inside fold allows for individual, unfolded sheets to be hung on the wall.

While Brad's photographic vision clearly stands out in the formal quality of the images of contemporary landscape and cultural life, the book is collaborative by the synchronization of our sensibilities as well as by the interaction of text/image on each page. This is the result of long-term conversations about the issues that the book is concerned with: the skews and inequities of contemporary life in its social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Stradanus's original *Nova Reperta* communicates largely through visual means, working on a premise that such apparent presentation of information was sufficient to show the impact of the inventions on which he focused. We realized at a certain point that for all their visual repleteness, the photographs required a gloss, an additional textual commentary, in order to indicate the non-apparent information concealed within the

Dark the bat-elf, dauphin to a leaf, our prince, licked his leaden lips and spewed back to them the piecemeal come of their misgivings. Come with me, he hissed enticing, shower fringe like liquid grail to grill yourselves loss earthbound stupid trust bespice its banal crush the seized substance, spit sence past the wings and come They knew that saliva and profound issue, his hands and that inertia, the subject tissue. The labial fold appears as vapor and that emission for the droplets' sake is cool, very very cool and damp: the understated friction on the skin, unscaled but not quite imprintable its masked flexibility does not derive from evolution but from malice and the taut religion of his energies.



Johanna Drucker, *Dark, the Bat-Elf*, 1972

NARRATOLOGY



HISTORICAL ROMANCE

SWEET ROMANCE

SCIENCE FICTION

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE

SUPERNATURAL

HORROR

SENSUAL ROMANCE

ADVENTURE

THRILLER

GLITZ

BY

JOHANNA
DRUCKER

Johanna Drucker, *Narratology*, 1994 (title page)

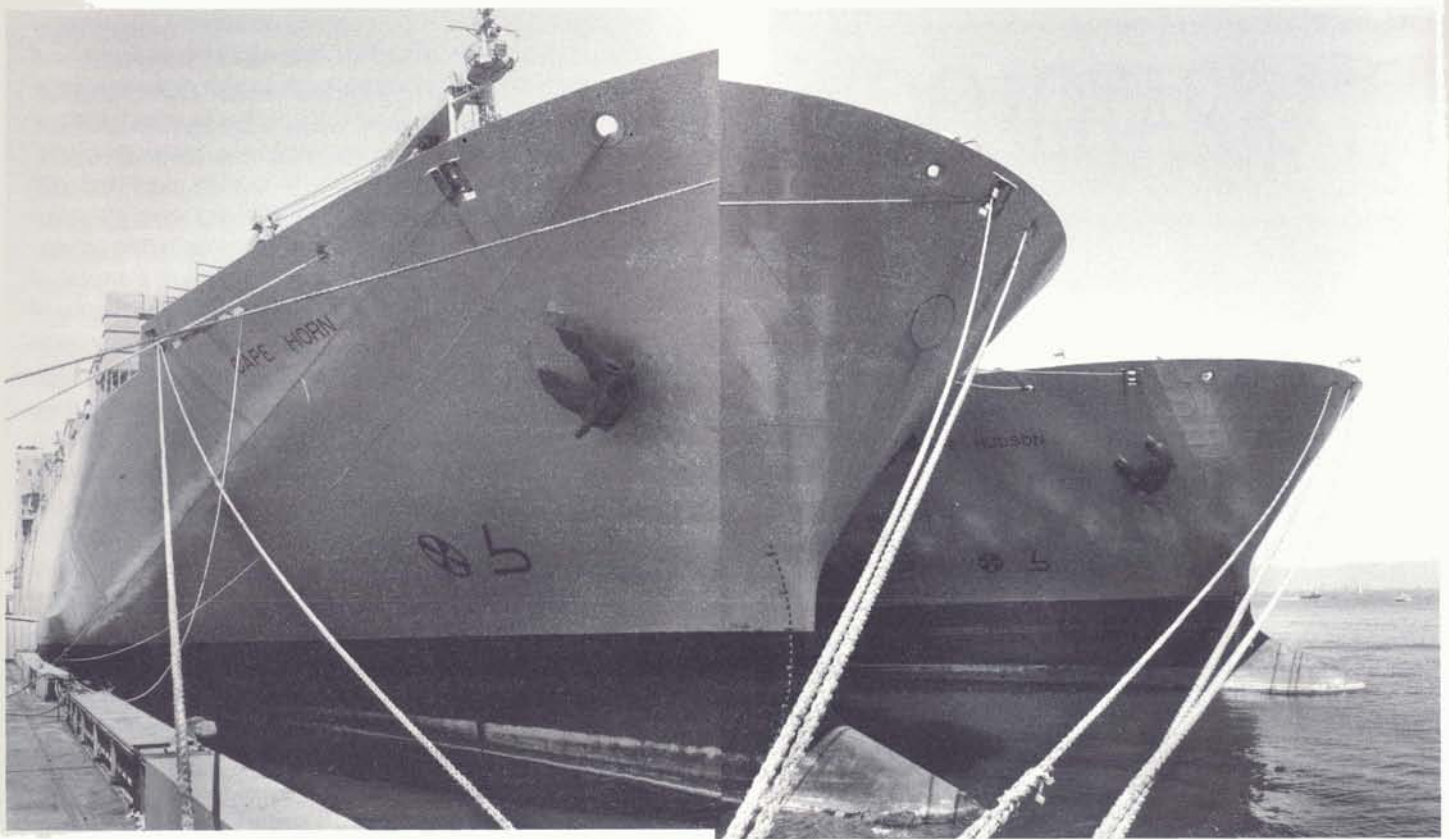
photographic images. In other words, it became clear that much of what constitutes contemporary networks of power, social relations, and economic structures cannot always be imaged in any direct sense. While much information about late 20th century culture can be shown visually, much of the social subtext simply remains hidden—and so the function of the language in the book is to return these invisible elements to the page and to the work as a whole. The production phase of *Nova Reperta*, still in progress, has brought into focus the flexibility required to accommodate available technology. The Solna press at the Center for Editions introduced certain limitations into the production, particularly because of the way the form rollers deposit the ink and leave a pattern on the sheets, that has required rethinking the final design of the pages.

The first decision about the content and layout of the text and images was that nothing in the book would be appropriated, and that no attempt would be made to imitate the visual characteristics of the Stradanus originals in creating the new response. His works have a striking proscenium stage-set organization within which the architectural elements serve to structure images within the whole. Brad's photographs are dense with implied as well as explicit meaning, but their visual and conceptual structures are subjective and photographic, not graphic and illustrational. I wrote the text in a dialogue with the themes of the plates and brief commentaries in the original *Nova Reperta*. In the second stage, I combined these with responses to the pho-

tographs that Brad had made and sequenced. The images progress through a landscape of increasing cultural density and then, in the final spread, culminate in a vision of the heavens in a night-time, time-lapse image that inscribes a human subjective point of view humbled by contemplation of a cosmological scale. For the text to work, it needed to be lapidary, suggestive, and typographically integrated into the images as a visual element. I used the typography almost as if I were drawing, setting up visual relations with existing elements in the pages in a process of rhyme, extension, and counterpoint emphasis. The production of the film from the digital files took place courtesy of the Institute for Electronic Arts at Alfred University where Joseph Scheer, Peer Bode, and Jessie Shefrin have been involved in establishing a cutting-edge, industry-sponsored facility for educational and artistic use. Brad went to Alfred to output the files, with assistance from Scheer and his technical staff. We worked on the binding together, with assistance from intern Chris George and Justin Tesa, and Brad and Chris were responsible for all phases of offset production at the Center for Editions at Purchase College, SUNY. The Solna press there introduced certain changes in our production approach when it became clear that the limits of the form rollers inking distribution resulted in a pattern on the final printed sheets, so additional color runs were added.

The aesthetic considerations that guided the development of *Nova Reperta* are a direct expression of shared concerns that we have: to engage a documentary tradition while insisting on a personal point of view as artists. Each of us feels committed to the idea of a synthesis between trying to understand "the real" and making an artistic statement that is highly subjective. The point of this is not to mythify the "individual" artist as a unique voice, but to emphasize the continual need for artists to question the received cultural norm through providing an alternative vision. *Nova Reperta*, like *Otherspace*, *The Century of Artists' Books*, *Offset*, and other projects we have undertaken, is a work that neither of us could have produced independently. In planning *Nova Reperta*, we wanted to make a work that could also exist in a gallery setting, so it is designed for display as a wall piece. This determined the binding and physical structure of the book: the post binding allowed us to print the pages as single sheets, rather than as spreads, so that they could be mounted in sequence on the wall.

Finally, in rethinking the project through our own iconographic references, the greatest obstacle is the overwhelming enormity of the original *Nova Reperta*. Stradanus aspired to the encyclopedic, producing an exhaustive image of the world around him. This might be an impossible challenge in an era in which the complexities of technological integration with every aspect of contemporary life is such as to render itself highly conspicuous and almost invisible simultaneously. There is no area of contemporary existence in which technology is not an integral aspect. There is no place on earth, no single daily activity, no vista imaginable or imagable without some reference to human engineering. The full transfiguration of the resources of the material world through the mutating crucible of technology constantly erodes any real or fictive line dividing nature and culture. To list the many new forms of energy production, scientific



Johanna Drucker and Brad Freeman, *Nova Reperta*, 1999 (page spread shown here without the type; original size 20" x 32")

discoveries, innovations in transportation, communication, and their application would take a massive tome. Better, we thought, to concentrate on an artistic response to certain key themes in *Nova Reperta*. We were struck by the difference between the immediate physicality of the technology under investigation in Stradanus's view and the highly mediated processes of our contemporary lives. The gear, the press, and the machine elements of fulcrum, wheel, and other mechanical parts, are still with us, but have been given a kind of intelligence by the incorporation of electronic circuitry, chips, current, and non-mechanical parts. The social order of technology shows a different face—including the bodies of women, children, ethnic and cultural groups whose division according to the ever emerging logic of global capital remaps not only the world's relation to technology at the macro-level but the specific organization of every shop, factory, and production facility. Instead of expanding exponentially from Stradanus's original, we have opted to respond within the parameters framed by his prints and his series, and to attempt our interventions in a synthetic manner that references his work as our point of departure. Continuity and disjuncture are the two poles that define the visual and verbal responses in our invention, the one presumes the possibility of shared perception linking Stradanus's era with our own and the other acknowledges the impossibility of making analogies that hold across the distance of so much marked change. Nothing in our world guarantees us any certainty about the future, least of all assumptions

about the past. We can only look and look again at the complex imagery that Stradanus offers us, hoping to imitate—not his subjects and his visual manners—but his intuitive sensibility and blind insights. It is through such visions that we work toward some understanding of the curious illogics of our own universe of new inventions and new discoveries.

- 1 Clifford Ackley, *Printmaking in the Age of Rembrandt*, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts and New York Graphic Society, 1981).
- 2 James Cleaver, *A History of Graphic Art*, "Copper Plate Engraving," (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1963); pp. 52-53, 54-70.
- 3 Philip Hofer, *Baroque Book Illustration*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951); p. 9.
- 4 Cock, Galle, and Passe were the three great printing houses of the Netherlands in the late 16th and early 17th century. Arthur M. Hind, *A History of Engraving and Etching*, (New York: Dover, 1963 from the 1923 edition); p. 118.
- 5 Bern Dibner, *Nova Reperta* (Norwalk, CT: Burndy Library, 1953).
- 6 Dibner, *op.cit.*, unpaginated.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION: EXPERIMENTAL NARRATIVE AND ARTISTS' BOOKS

Bill Burke

I want to Take Picture
1985
Offset Lithography
15 1/2" x 11 3/4"

Mine Fields
1995
Offset Lithography
11 1/4" x 8 7/8"

François Deschamps

Mémoire d'un Voyage en Océanie
1995
offset lithography
7" x 9"

Sombras Rojas
1999
offset lithography
7" x 5"

Helen Douglas

Chinese Whispers (with Telfer Stokes)
1975
Offset lithography
7 1/2" x 5"

Between the Two
1997
Offset lithography
4 1/2" x 4 1/2"

Ruth Laxson

Muse Measures
1998
Letterpress, offset lithography, and
type high engravings
10 1/2" x 9 3/4"

Wheeling
1992
Letterpress, offset lithography, silk
screen
9 3/4" x 8 1/2"

Clifton Meador

Long Slow March
1997-99
Offset lithography
8" x 5 1/8"

Memory Lapse
1999
Offset lithography
8" x 5 1/2"

Judith Mohns

Quartet
1995
Offset lithography
5" x 5"

Bea Nettles

Turning 50
1995
Offset lithography
4" x 8"

Seasonal Turns
1998
Offset lithography
4 1/2" x 4 1/2"

Gary Richman

The Confession in the Garden of
Licked Wounds
1996
Offset lithography
9" x 12"

Helianthus Beseiged
1998
Offset lithography
9" x 12"

Clarissa Sligh

What's Happening with Momma?
1988
Silkreen and letterpress
11" x 36"

Reading Dick and Jane with Me
1989
Offset lithography
8 1/2" x 7"

Telfer Stokes

Passage
1972
Offset lithography
8" x 6 3/4"

Song of the Thrush
1998
Offset lithography
8 1/4" x 6 3/4"

Chinese Whispers
(with Helen Douglas, see above)

Philip Zimmermann

High Tension
1993
Offset Lithography
8" x 5 1/2"

Long Story Short
1998
Inkjet
10" x 8"

Janet Zweig

Heinz and Judy
1985
Offset lithography
11" x 8 1/2"

Sheherezade
with Holly Anderson
1988
Offset lithography
6" x 9"

Johanna Drucker & Brad Freeman

Nova Reperta
1999
Offset lithography
16 1/4" x 20 1/2"

Johanna Drucker

Narratology
1994
Letterpress
12" x 9"

Brad Freeman

MuzeLink
1997
Offset lithography
11" x 8 1/2"

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The horizon yawned at the



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8:50	100	NO. 100 PLAZAS	FORDHAM-1ST STOP
9:25	30	NO. 100 PLAZAS	FORDHAM-1ST STOP
9:47	30	ORCHARD BL.	CONNECTION TO ROVER PLAZAS
9:50	100	NO. 100 PLAZAS	WENT DENVER NEXT-1ST STOP
10:25	114	NO. 100 PLAZAS	FORDHAM-1ST STOP

HARLEM			
TIME	TRK	DESTINATION	REMARKS
10:47	36	BRENSTER HIG.	WHITE P.
10:50	42	NO. 100 PLAZAS	WENT DENVER
11:25	41	NO. 100 PLAZAS	FORDHAM-1ST STOP
11:47	42	BRENSTER HIG.	CONNECTION TO
11:53	104	NO. 100 PLAZAS	WENT DENVER