



Barbara Cesery and Marilyn Zuckerman, *Monday Morning Movie*, 1981.

## Words and Images: Artists' Books as Visual Literature

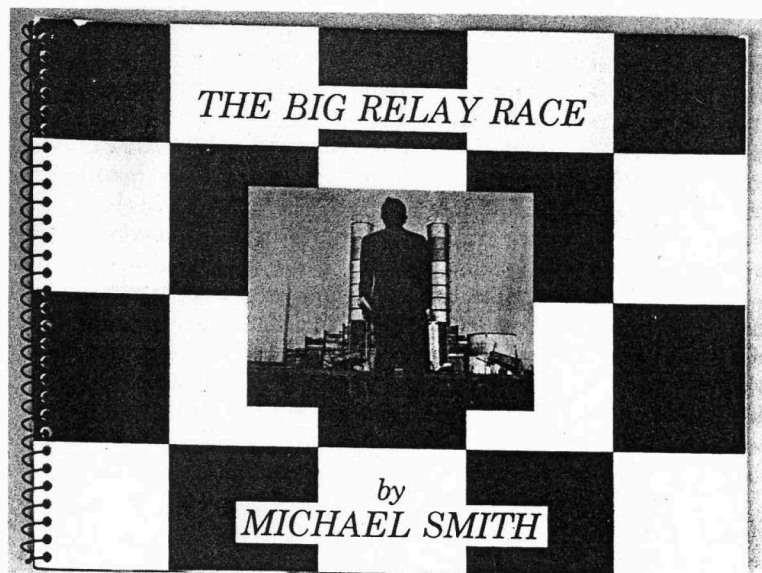
by Shelley Rice

ARTISTS' BOOKS gained a foothold in the art world during the radical years of the late sixties and early seventies, and they are often perceived as exemplifying the spirit of experimentation and rebellion which characterized that era. When discussing this relatively new art form, critics and artists tend to focus primarily on the book's function as an alternative space—an alternative mode of distribution which allows artists to circumvent the gallery system and make their work inexpensive and thus accessible to a large audience. This populist aspect of artists' books is, of course, extremely significant, but it is, nevertheless, not the whole story. The fact remains that artists' books are a new art form which has spawned new expressive and creative means. Now that this art form has a history and at least a few outlets, archives, presses, and publications, it is time, I think, to luxuriate in aesthetics—to grapple with some of the ways in which artists have used the book as an expressive medium and, in the process, redefined its essential nature.

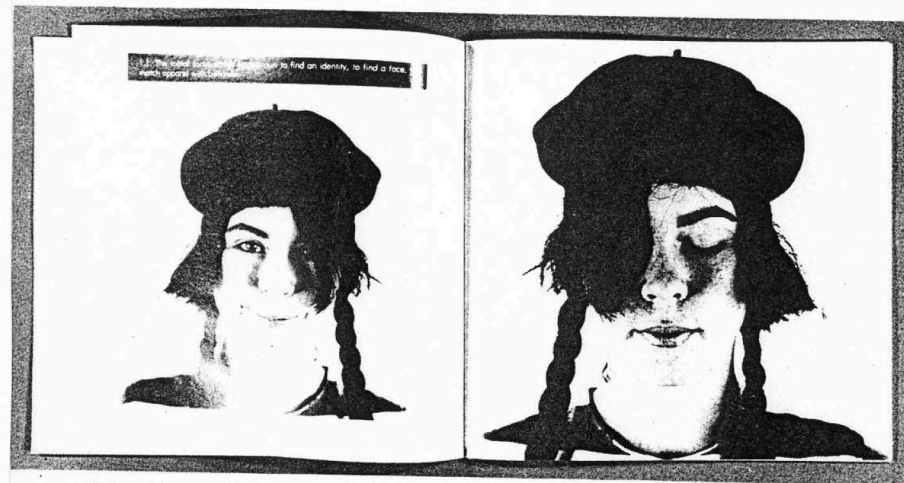
Possibly the most far-reaching innovation of artists' books is their juxtaposition of images and words on a page. Words and pictures have, of course, shared the pages of books for centuries; and every childhood primer, history textbook, and morning newspaper attests to the fact that such combinations are standard fare in our contemporary technological society. But generally the cultural uses of words and pictures share some important characteristics: there is usually a *direct* relationship between language and images—one illustrating the other—most often in the service of a linear narrative. This straightforward relationship, this norm, has been imitated, parodied, altered, undermined, and sometimes completely revamped in artists' books. And, in the process, a new form of visual literature has been created.

There are thousands of artists' books juxtaposing words and images. Some of them are reasonably simple, others remarkably complex; some reflect trends in bookmaking, while others represent unique explorations. While it is impossible to mention all of these books, or even hint at all of the diverse solutions to the picture/text problem, it is possible to give an overview of some of the more important ways in which artists have chosen to use these elements as expressive modes on the pages of a bookwork. In surveying these myriad formal and thematic solutions, one can catch a glimpse of the amazing range of works and ideas which, until recently, have all been lumped together under the generic rubric of "artists' books."

To begin with, a number of artists' books are straightforward narratives, which juxtapose words and images in relatively direct relationships. *The Big Relay Race*, by Michael Smith, for instance, is a story that unfolds through a series of black and white photographs accompanied by short dialogue texts. Smith, who is best known as a performance artist, is the star of this show, and he and the fellows in his club do a practice run for a competition whose rules and purposes are never clarified. The comedy of errors that results involves briefcases, pencil batons, and a solo commuter course and ends up being a spoof on male bonding and the rat race of the business world.



Michael Smith, *The Big Relay Race*, 1981.



Eldon Garnet, *Cultural Connections*, 1981.

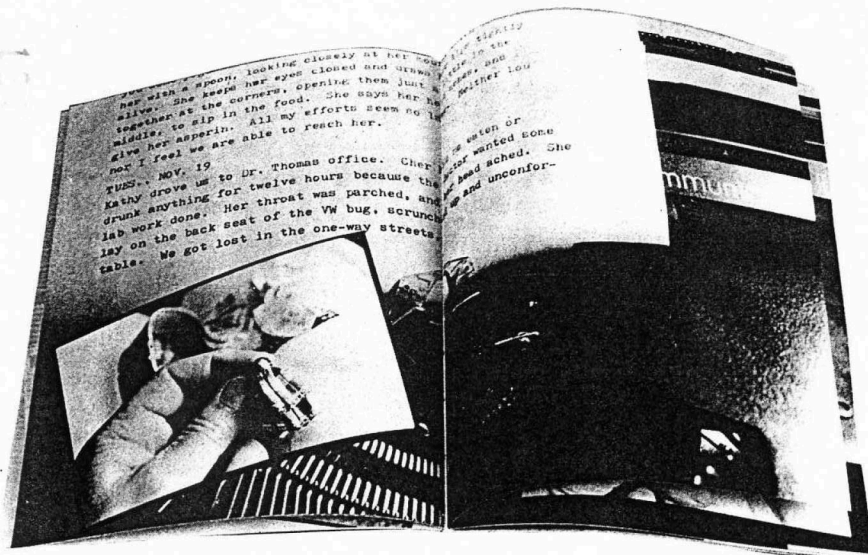
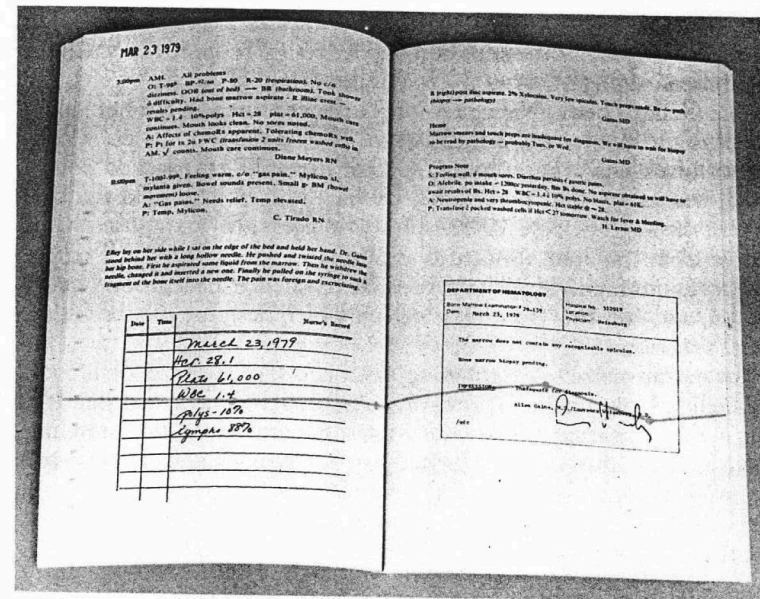
In both tone and format, *The Big Relay Race* resembles a comic book. (A number of artists—like Lynda Barry, Karen Fredericks, Gary Panter, and Mark Beyer—have, by the way, adopted the comic book mode wholesale and use that popular form as a platform for their own ruminations about modern life.) As in a comic, there is a direct relationship between the photographs and the texts: the reader/viewer understands that the pictures set the scene for the quotes printed beneath them. There's also a direct relationship between words and pictures in Eldon Garnet's *Cultural Connections*, a narrative which, like Smith's, is developed through black and white photographs and texts. But whereas Smith's photographs serve a straightforward documentary function, Garnet's are suggestive and psychological and, therefore, complement the text rather than simply illustrating it.

Originally an exhibition organized at the Canadian Centre of Photography under the curatorship of Bradford G. Gorman, *Cultural Connections* (which was published as *Image Nation* #24) traces, in Gorman's words, "the development of its . . . post-feminist heroine . . . through different social and cultural environments." The narrative is divided into five distinct sections, each corresponding to one of the five different personae acted out by the protagonist as she adopts and then rejects a series of social roles: student, word processor, "kept" mistress, photographer, and finally scientist. Each time she takes on a new profession, she subjects her appearance, her environment, and her day-to-day habits to a total overhaul. These transformations are effec-

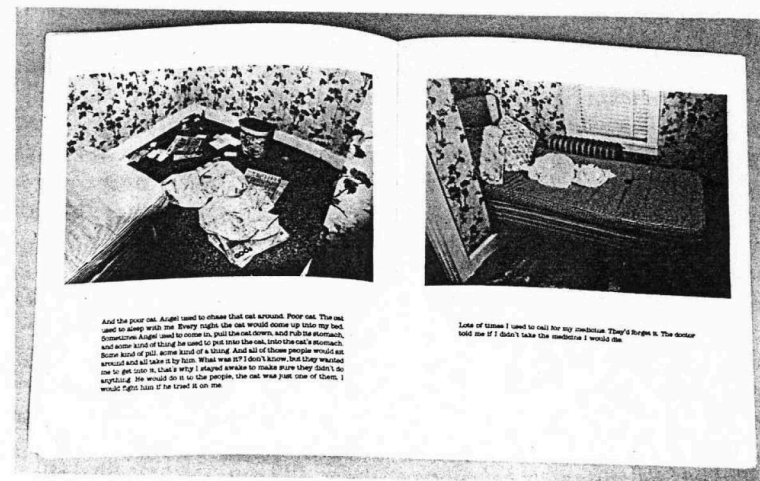
tively suggested by the photographs, which provide the viewer with selective and often metaphoric glimpses of the heroine and of the objects and spaces that define both her visual and psychological landscape at a given time.

Garnet's heroine ultimately finds no real meaning in her life. Three other narrative works—*Difficulty Swallowing*, by Matthew Geller; *Ransacked*, by Nancy Holt; and *Thirty Five Years/One Week*, by Linn Underhill—focus not on life but on death: specifically, the death of a loved one. When examined together, these three works can suggest the range of formal, conceptual, and even spiritual solutions possible in bookworks with ostensibly the same subject.

Matthew Geller's *Difficulty Swallowing* is a medical case history which chronicles the death from leukemia of the artist's girlfriend. The text, which dominates the book, consists of doctors' reports, nurses' notes, and official medical forms, as well as excerpts from Geller's and his girlfriend's diaries; the few photographic snapshots of the patient at various stages of her illness illustrate the deteriorating condition described in the text. *Difficulty Swallowing*, though poignant, is calculatedly unsentimental: its straightforward presentation of facts and



Linn Underhill, *Thirty Five Years/One Week*, 1981.



Top: Matthew Geller, *Difficulty Swallowing: A Medical Chronicle*, 1981.  
 Bottom: Nancy Holt, *Ransacked*, 1980.

documents serves to distance both the artist and the reader from the emotional tragedy of the situation and leaves no room for speculation about the meaning of either the life or the death.

Like Geller's book, Nancy Holt's *Ransacked*, the story of her aunt's last days and death, is straightforward. The first half of the book consists of black and white photographs of her aunt's ransacked house, which was taken over and looted by the "nurse" who held the sick woman hostage. These documentary images are juxtaposed with quotes from the aunt about this experience. The second half of the book contains family snapshots, recorded evidence, background information, and excerpts from Holt's diary which describe the resolution of the situation.

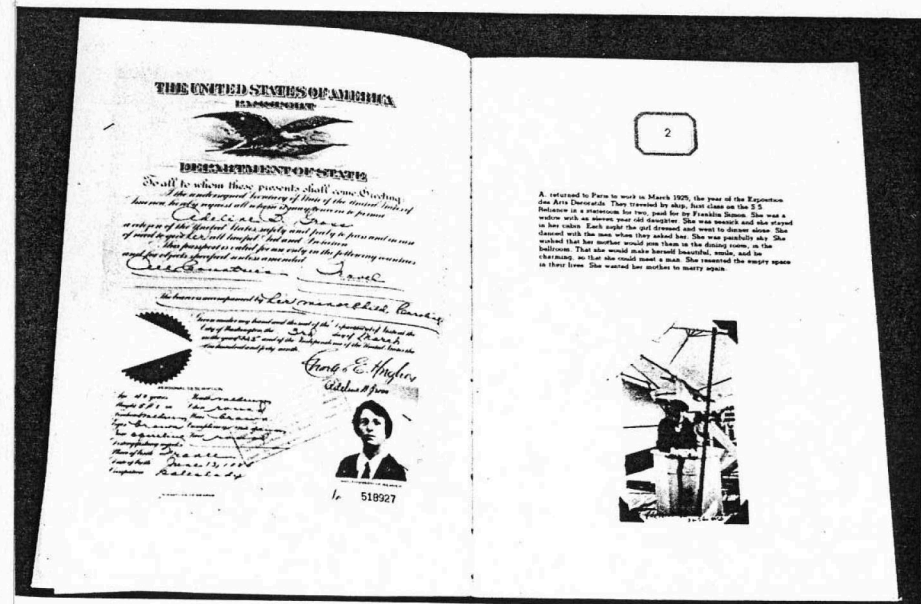
The narrative itself is frightening, yet the tone of Holt's book is cool; like Geller, Holt functions primarily as an observer and a recorder. It is only in the last paragraph that the artist summarizes her understanding of the incident, thus allowing herself to speculate, not only on the death but on the metaphoric meanings inherent in life: "To me the story of the dying of my aunt and the falling apart of her house will always be interconnected, the gradual decline of her body through cancer coinciding with the harsh invasion and deterioration of her long cherished house." In this one sentence, the entire story comes together. The structure of the book resonates with new meaning, and the relationship of photographs and texts—which at first seems simply documentary—suddenly becomes infused with metaphysical significance.

Whereas Holt's musings about the meaning of life and death are a tiny but significant part of *Ransacked*, these speculations are the central concern of *Thirty Five Years/One Week*, Linn Underhill's memorial to her sister. A more subjective book than either Holt's or Geller's, hers is an emotional summary of thirty five years of a life that was abruptly terminated in one week of illness. The clinical, objective tone is absent from this book, which reproduces only excerpts from the artist's diary during the illness. The predominant black and white photographs, on the other hand, rarely deal with the disease at all; they record aspects of the sister's normal life: her daughter, her room, her snapshots, the objects she loved. The pictures, which are often printed in soft focus, blurred, or bleached out, become repositories of memory—especially the series of snapshots of the sister from childhood to adulthood which is repeated continuously and expressionistically throughout the narrative.

Unlike Geller's and Holt's books, Underhill's puts forth no direct relationship between text and photographs: the one deals with illness and death, the other with love and life. But the emotional climate of the book is a subjective bond which unites life and death, images and words, into a unified representation of a full life cut short. There are numerous artists' books which, like Underhill's, depend on a dominant

emotional and/or psychological climate to create links between pictures and texts. Two such works, very different from each other in form and content, are Jacki Apple's *Trunk Pieces* and Barbara Rosenthal's *Clues to Myself*.

*Trunk Pieces* has the look and feel of a family album created during an era of charm and elegance whose glory has long since faded. Printed in sepia tones, the images—snapshots, old postcards, passports, records of places visited, and pictures of objects with special significance to the protagonist—are accompanied by several related narrative texts that chronicle travels: physical, emotional, and intellectual. Centering on the protagonist as well as her grandmother and mother and telling tales of unrequited love, fantasy, deception, and betrayal, the book ultimately uses photographs as evocative mementoes of the "illusions, expectations and lost dreams" described in the texts.



Jacki Apple, *Trunk Pieces*, 1978.

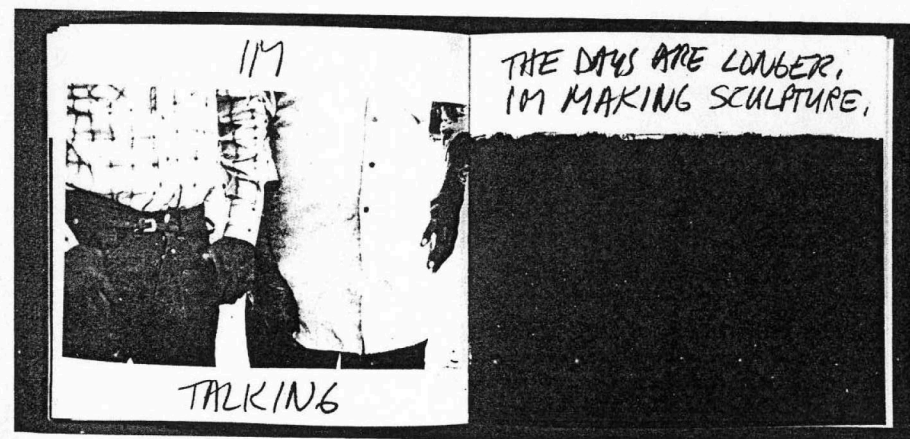
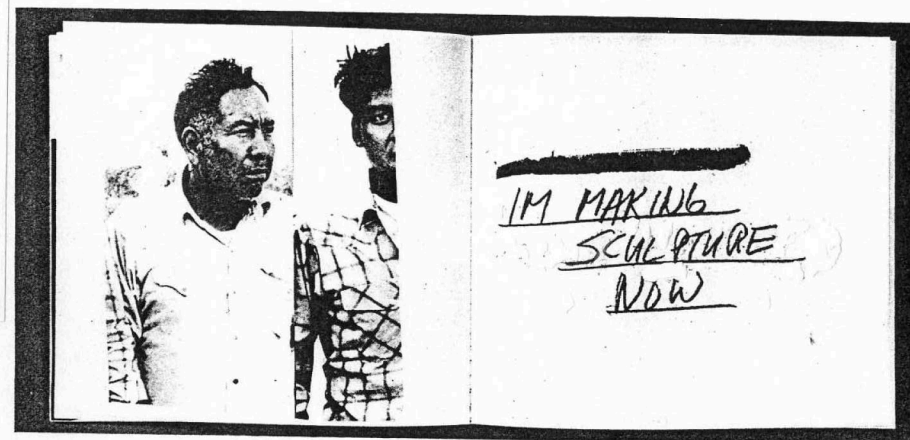
In *Trunk Pieces*, Apple uses pictures as springboards to memory, much as Proust used the madeleine in *Swann's Way*. In *Clues to Myself*, on the other hand, Rosenthal uses photographs in a dreamlike, associative way. This autobiographic journal of black and white photographs and texts, dealing primarily with the internal life of the artist, dispenses completely with unified narratives and direct word/picture relation-

ships. The pictures are evocative visions of mundane objects and vistas: roads, dolls, houses, trucks, dogs, trees. The fragmented texts are diary entries, musings, quotes, dream transcriptions, memories, and stories that are related only indirectly—through mood or suggestion—to each other and to the photographs. Read together, these highly personal images and texts illuminate one artist's subjective world.

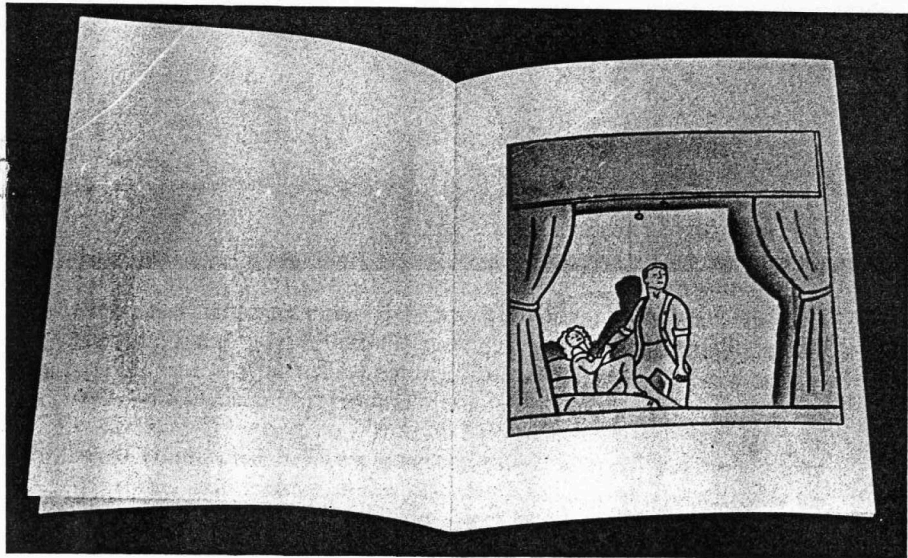
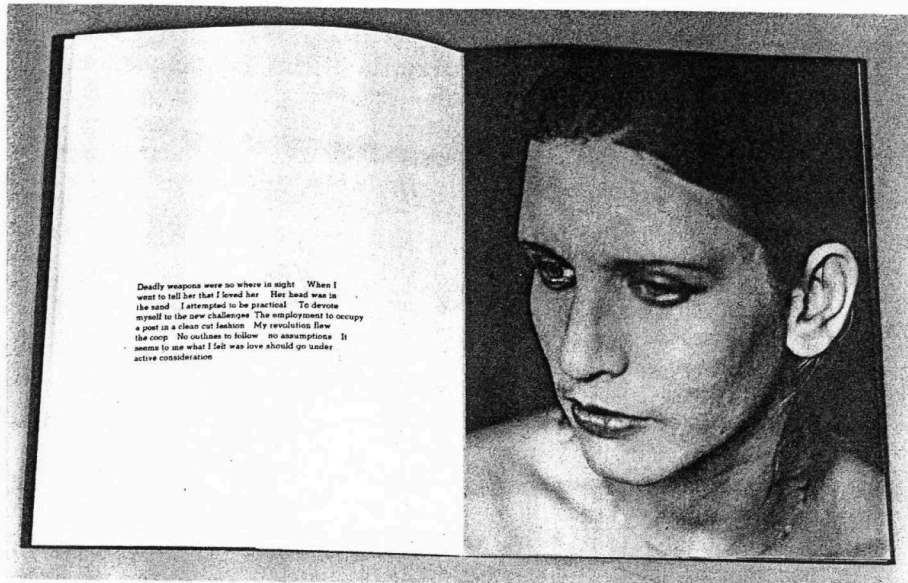
While Apple and Rosenthal use mood and emotional climate to hold together words and pictures, Richard Nonas and Lawrence Weiner count on more conceptual devices to unify seemingly unrelated images and texts. In Nonas's *Boiling Coffee*, the text consists of phrases scrawled large on each page; the size of the handprinting alone gives the reader the impression that the protagonist is consistently shouting. Most of these emphatic phrases simply chronicle mundane urban activities: the protagonist walks around the block, talks to someone on the street, goes home, makes sculpture, and boils coffee, among other things. Yet interspersed among these ordinary activities are intimations of mortality—"I'm young now, but not like it once was"—and these intimations are reinforced by the stark, abstract, and expressionistic black drawings that surround both the text and the photographs, black and white pictures of men and women obviously from a culture different than the protagonist's. Juxtaposed with the scrawled texts, these images, which at first seem to have nothing to do with the words, become more and more insistent, until the narrator eventually identifies so completely with one of the photographed men that the boundaries between them dissolve. In this context, the protagonist's mundane activities become existential assertions of shared humanness: "I'm boiling coffee/to keep me warm/to keep me here/to keep him me."

Nonas's narrative forges connections between seemingly unrelated images and texts. There is, however, no narrative in Weiner's *Passage to the North*. The photographs in the book, printed in sepia tones, are snapshots of the artist, his friends and family hanging out, talking, using the telephone. Yet these ostensibly casual pictures have a stilted air to them, as if they were posed tableaux. The photographs are printed on the right hand pages; on the left are a series of short phrases, usually printed one to a page. The pictures and words are not related in content, yet they become referential by juxtaposition. Thus, the attenuated statement, "grouped by virtue/of being there/what is necessary to bring about/what in fact is a natural phenomenon," suddenly makes the reader wonder how, in fact, the people in the photographs came together in this particular time and place. At this point, these snapshots become loaded with philosophic implications.

All of the above-mentioned artists work, in different ways, to create connections between images and texts, while other artists take the opposite approach and use the book format to underline the disjunction



Richard Nonas, *Boiling Coffee* (two openings), 1980.



Top: Glenda Hydler, *The Human Dilemma, Part 1*, 1978.

Bottom: Ida Applebroog, *Look at me*, 1979.

between pictures and words. Anne Turyn's *Real Family Stories*, for instance, is composed of typical black and white family snapshots—of children, homes, meals, vacations, and the like—which give the reader/viewer a stereotypic image of American family life. The fragmented text that accompanies these pictures, however, is a collage of stories that expose the sheer insanity of family interactions. The book unfolds in the context of a family dinner, during which we hear about secret fetishes for brothers, cousins, or sisters-in-law; about affairs and divorces and feuds; about unrequited love and mental illness and half-dead mice in quaint old houses. Juxtaposed, these pictures and texts point up the huge gap separating our idealized image of “normal” family life from its sordid reality.

In a less cynical manner, Glenda Hydler uses photographs and words to differentiate between internal and external experience. Since November 1972 Hydler has been creating an ongoing series of “diaries” with alternating pages of texts and black and white photographs bound in individual looseleaf notebooks. (Though there are well over eighty such books, only one of them has been published, *The Human Dilemma, Part I.*) These works have usually focused on the relationships between the artist and others in both personal and social contexts. The autobiographical texts, generally typed in fragmented segments without punctuation, maintain stream-of-consciousness intensity and explore the internal states of the artist during the period of time encompassed by each book. The photographs, on the other hand, are repeated variations of images that describe one particular aspect of the visual world on which the artist chose to concentrate during the same time span.

Most of the photographs are portraits of Hydler, although some depict landscapes, scenes, or objects. Sometimes these pictures relate directly, either in subject matter or mood, to the text; sometimes they serve as metaphoric allusions to the emotional states described; at other times they have little if anything to do with the text, and act as visual counterpoints. But always in Hydler's work the juxtaposition of texts and photographs creates a play-off between the intense emotion of the verbal expression and the cooler, more objective description of the world of appearances, and thus makes a statement about the different layers of reality that define personal experience.

The portraits of Hydler included in her books are, in many ways, like mini-performances. So are the books of Ida Applebroog, which were created as a series over a period of years. These small bookworks consist of a single, or at most two, drawings, repeated obsessively. Most often these drawings represent two people frozen in gestures clearly signifying that a crisis point in their relationship has been reached. Since the viewer always sees these figures through a window, with the

shade half-closed and the curtains pulled back (so the window resembles a proscenium stage), an element of voyeurism creeps in. The power of Applebroog's books lies in the fact that they imply narrative but never allow a resolution; the moment of crisis pictured is simply repeated over and over and over again, like a broken record, and is thus almost unbearably attenuated throughout the book.

In most of Applebroog's bookworks the reader is given one or two phrases, strategically placed. These phrases hint at the problem, but never at its final outcome. *Look at me*, for instance, depicts a man and a woman; she, lying down, reaches for his arm in longing while he turns away. The viewer reads the phrase, "Look at me," and sees the picture three times before the next phrase, "We are drowning, Walter." And yet the book ends with the people in the same positions—as if the dialogue only pointed up that nothing changes, and that the real definition of hell is to be frozen in these charged moments for all eternity.

Applebroog perceives her books as theatrical works and, indeed, calls them "performances." There have been a number of performance artists who have turned to bookmaking as a way of preserving their transient art works. In some cases—notably *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals*, by Mary Beth Edelson, and *More Than Meat Joy*, by Carolee Schneemann—artists have chosen to compile retrospective monographs of their collected performances which often include photographs, scripts, and working notes. In other cases, less documentary and therefore more relevant to this study, words and images on a printed page have been used expressively, to transcribe, interpret, and/or summarize the meaning of individual performance works. The resulting book is conceived as a separate, but equal, art work based on the same material used in the original performance.

One such bookwork is Donna Henes's *Dressing Our Wounds in Warm Clothes*, a transcription of a project carried out on Ward's Island in 1980. Done in conjunction with, and on the grounds of, the Manhattan Psychiatric Center, this "energy trance mission" was actually a participatory sculpture project designed to pool the creative energies of the artist and the 4,159 patients, staff members, and visitors on the island. The artist collected beloved old clothes from the art community, tore them into strips and then, with the help of the denizens of Ward's Island, tied 4,159 knots of cloth on trees, bushes, and fences around the Manhattan Psychiatric Center. Since tying knots at healing waters is a widespread custom practiced by women in countries as diverse as Morocco, Scotland, and Armenia, Henes's ritual became a magic rite for the health of project participants.

The book based on this project is composed of transcriptions of Henes's working notes, including conversations, stories, musings, and dream transcriptions. It also contains black and white and color photo-



Donna Henes, *Dressing Our Wounds in Warm Clothes*, 1981.

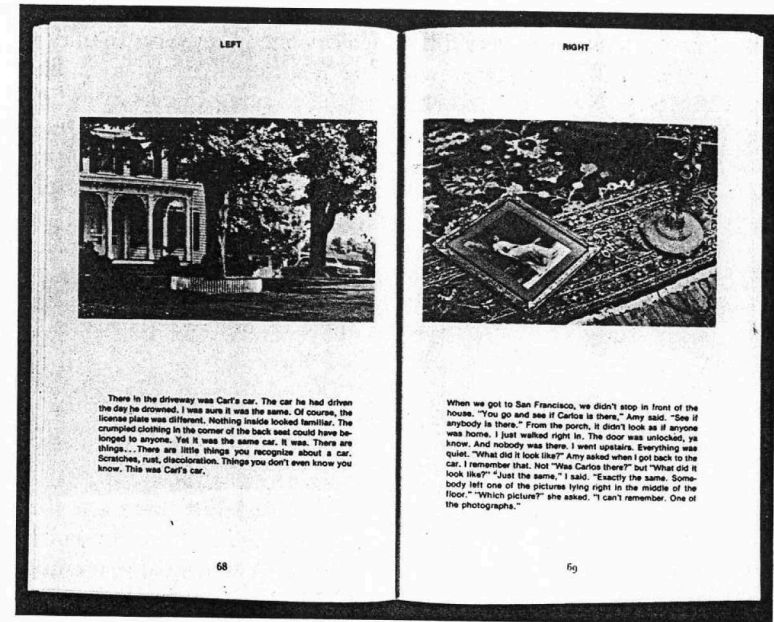
graphs, straightforward documents, and composite images, all by Sarah Jenkins, recording the island, the sculpture, and the artist at work. But the composite images—stunning repetitious montages—transform "straight" photographs into visual mandalas that metaphorically describe the "network (of) . . . connectivity" at the heart of Henes's work. In this case, images become visual translations of this particular artist's world view, another way of expressing the ideals embodied in Henes's sculpture, notes, dreams, and interactions with people.

*Dressing Our Wounds in Warm Clothes* records Henes's ritual in detail, both in pictures and words, serving as both a documentary and an interpretive work. Mary Fish's *The Persepolis Context*, on the other hand, is barely descriptive of the original project. The book is based on a private ritual performed over a period of twelve hours in the spring of 1976 at Persepolis, an archaeological site in Southern Iran. In the artist's words, "The activity consisted of scribing a circle on the ground and dividing that circle into twelve equal parts, one for each hour of the

day that I was to spend there. Each hour on the hour I placed a rose in the circle in one of the parts until at the twelfth hour twelve roses fanned outward to complete the circle."

This is about as descriptive as Fish gets; there are no working notes and no photographs of the site or the artist in this book. Instead, in *The Persepolis Context*, the artist functions almost purely interpretively, by using the bookwork to clarify the meaning of this ritual act. The book consists of a series of texts and drawings sequenced to represent each of the twelve hours she spent in performance. Texts, in the shape of pyramids, occupy the left hand pages; on the right are delicate brown drawings integrating words and pictures. Images and texts merge and become cross-referential, as do subjects and themes. Both the drawings and the texts forge connections, often in free association style, between Persepolis, a sacred capitol of the Persian Empire 2,500 years ago (now in ruins), and the rose. As the book progresses, the architecture and history of Persepolis become analogous with the structures and phases of this flower; in the process, the cycles of civilization begin to be perceived as part of the larger cycles of nature.

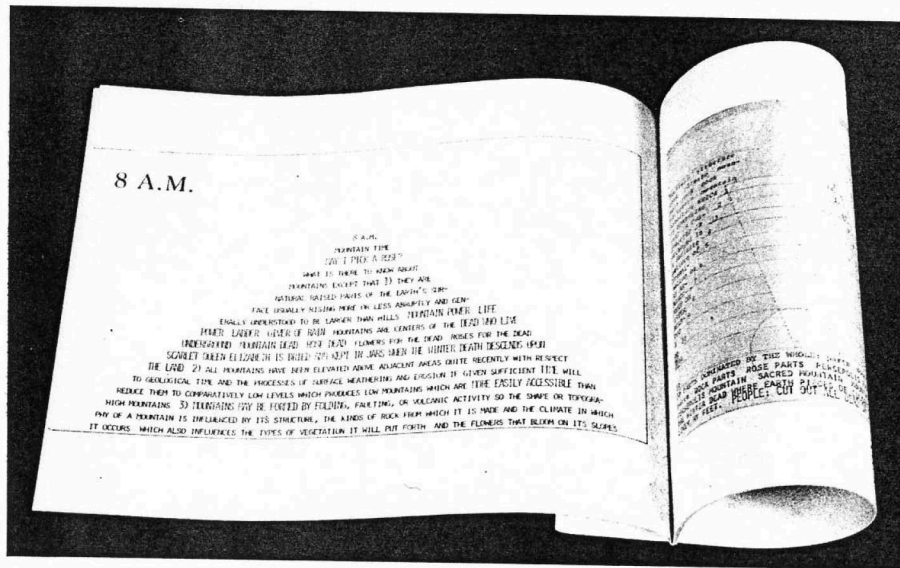
Henes transcribes and Fish interprets; Michael Kirby recreates a performance in book form. *Photoanalysis*, a structuralist play about the relationship of photographs and words, was first produced in November 1976. Kirby, who is best known for his involvement with



Michael Kirby, *Photoanalysis: A Structuralist Play*, 1978.

happenings and avant-garde theater since the late sixties, chose a dramatic format in which three actors—a man and two women, positioned respectively in the center and on the two sides of the performance space—spoke directly to the audience and illustrated their words with a series of black and white slides projected on screens behind them. The actors spoke alternately, each showing slides that related to his or her narrative, so that the spectator saw a continuous slide show while listening to three different, interwoven monologues. The same basic format is retained in the book *Photoanalysis*, which presents the same sequence of photographs, accompanied by expository texts and stage directions indicating which words were spoken by which actor.

The male actor's monologue is a lecture on the new "science" of photoanalysis; the women, on the other hand, tell personal stories as if they were leafing through their family snapshot albums. All three narratives depend for their development on "clues" gleaned from visual "evidence," and this is where the plot of *Photoanalysis* thickens. The three very different monologues are illustrated by the same series of photographs, each arranged in a different order. Considered alone, the pictures—of houses, people, street scenes, nature, and commonplace



Mary Fish, *The Persepolis Context*, 1977.

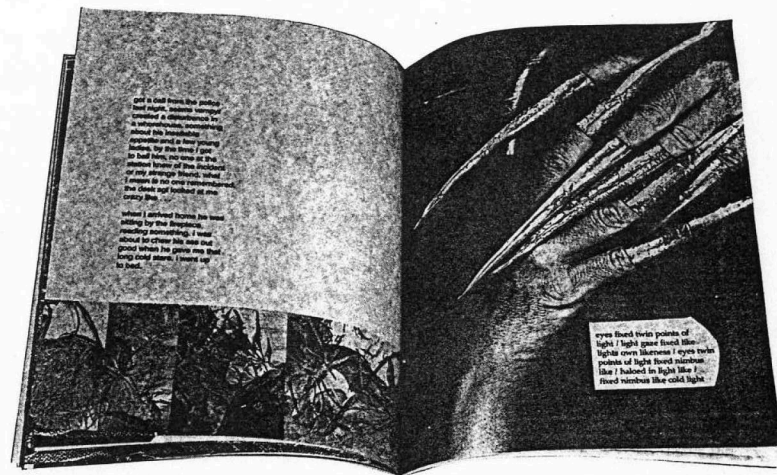


objects—are simply mundane, not very interesting snapshots, but taken as the basis of these three very different story lines, they serve to undermine the very credibility of photographic “realism.” Kirby’s book, like Muntadas’s *On Subjectivity*, which reproduced photographs from *Life* magazine with their original captions—and with solicited interpretations from a number of people who were unaware of the “real” meaning of the pictures, suggests that “objective” photographs may simply be elaborate fictions, always open to interpretation.

Kirby and the other performance artists who translate their pieces into book form are working in a multi-media context. So are the writers and visual artists who choose to pool their talents to create multi-media bookworks. There is, of course, a long and venerable tradition of illustrated books, books in which visual artists illustrate, either directly or indirectly, existing literary works. (Some contemporary examples are Samuel Beckett’s *Fizzles*, with illustrations by Jasper Johns, J.L. Borges’s *Ficciones*, with graphic equivalents by Sol LeWitt; and *Homage to Cavafy*, a work consisting of ten poems by the homosexual poet Cavafy and ten photographs by Duane Michals.) But there are also bookworks which are created specifically as collaborations, in which the words of a writer and the visual creativity of an artist are merged into a single work. Two such books are *Vampyr*, by Stephen Spera and Suzanne Horovitz, and *Monday Morning Movie*, by Barbara Cesery and Marilyn Zuckerman.

*Vampyr: being a diary/fragments of his visit*, is printed on creamy parchment paper and resembles a lush and antiquated album. The text, a prose poem narrative by Stephen Spera, tells the story of a family which lives with a vampire. The pictures, layered xeroxed images of skulls, long fingernails, reclining bodies, and lace, seem to grow around the text like ivy and provide this Gothic tale with an appropriately eerie backdrop. As the tale progresses, the distance between the family and the vampire diminishes, until “the identity of killer/victim merge”; at the same time the words and images become more and more intertwined, their “dreamy fascination” blending into one indivisible collage.

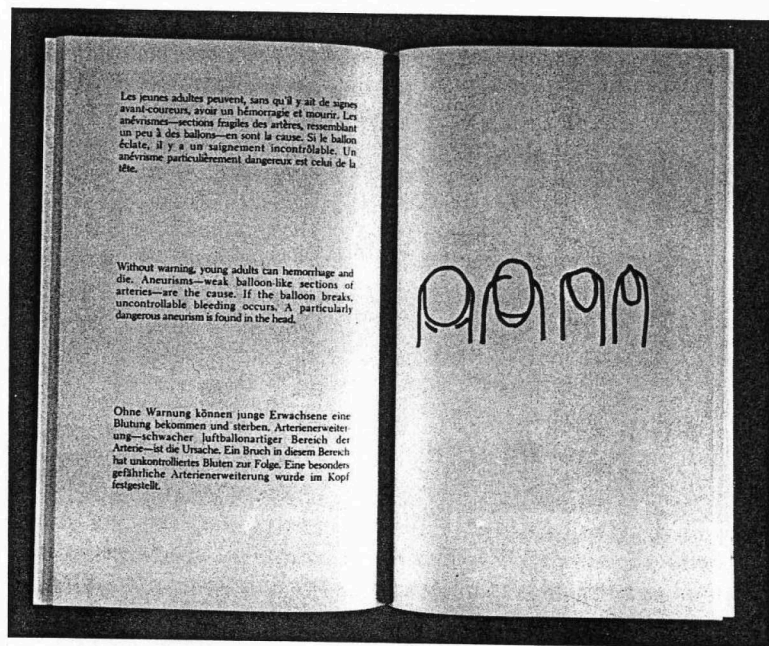
The romanticism of *Vampyr* is brought into the twentieth century in *Monday Morning Movie*. This is a pull-out book, a collaboration between visual artist Cesery and poet Zuckerman. The black and white, sometimes soft-focus images (most of them are photographic snapshots, although some are drawings) are the personal counterpoints to the poetry, which chronicles the rise and fall of romantic love in the movies since World War I. Structured like a filmic montage, the first part of the text deals primarily with male sexual stereotypes, embodied in movie stars like Cagney, Valentino, and Gable; the heroines and mothers (“the girls you come home to”) are always waiting, “sick with



Stephen Spera and Suzanne Horovitz, *Vampyr: being a diary/fragment of his visit*, 1982.

deprivation.” The second part, by contrast, presents verbal images of strong, self-sufficient women—Lupino, Mae West, Crawford—and explores the resilience of, and bonds between, women alone in the modern world. The text is either juxtaposed with or superimposed upon the pictures, and, as a result, the book suggests the subtle blend, in each of our lives, of popular stereotypes and personal emotions.

*Monday Morning Movie* deals with romantic love from an obviously feminist perspective. Artists’ books have often been used, in many ways, to make ideological or political statements; the inexpensiveness and accessibility of these works makes them the perfect platform for distributing ideas on a popular scale. In many of these books, the message is communicated primarily through language: photographs or drawings are used essentially as illustrations of, or metaphors for, verbal statements. Martha Rosler’s “in, around and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)” in *3 Works*, for instance, describes political situations and uses photographs to illustrate her arguments; Nan Becker’s *Sterilization/Elimination* and Greg Sholette’s *The Citibank Never Sleeps* (which metamorphosizes the Citibank logo into an image of a screw) make their statements with words and then use cultural images as emblems symbolizing the circumstances under discussion. Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin’s *Living—Daytime* is a series of



Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin, *Living—Daytime*, 1980.

aphorisms about modern malaise, political powerlessness, and social suicide; the cumulative impact of these verbal messages is reinforced by the anonymous-looking line drawings of Everyman, Everywoman, and brick walls interspersed throughout the text. There are other books, however, in which graphics are an integral part of the political message. Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger, and Mimi Smith, for example, have all created bookworks which use the visual elements of popular culture and the mass media to criticize contemporary social policies.

In *Der Trompf Pralinemeister* (*The Chocolate Master*), Haacke turns the corporate image against itself by appropriating the format of corporate advertising. Each page of this book is designed as if it were a public relations poster. The pages on the left all depict Peter Ludwig, Chairman of the Mondheim Group of chocolate manufacturers. Beneath this business tycoon's idealized image, small and centered at the top of the page, is copy about the man and his career as an art collector and museum benefactor. At the bottom of the page are pictures of diverse brands of chocolate manufactured by his Group, and these chocolates are also featured on the bottom of the right hand pages, which have the same format. These pages, however, are topped by pictures of factories

and workers, and the texts deal with the often greedy and insensitive history of the Mondheim Group. Haacke's parallel verbal reports are factual, but as the book progresses, Ludwig's two "images" begin to merge, and the reader gradually comes to understand that this man is attempting, so far successfully, to wield the same tyrannical control over the European artworld that he wields in the chocolate industry. And at this point, art, industry, and public relations start to seem indistinguishable—in the "real" world as they are within the format of Haacke's book.

Graphics are also central to Barbara Kruger's feminist *No Progress in Pleasure*. In Kruger's earlier book, *Picture/Readings*, words and photographs had been separate, though juxtaposed; in this work the two are integrated in slick graphic configurations making obvious references to mass media advertising and design. The verbal messages are short, generalized, and punchy, the pictures to the point. The text, "Your manias become science," for instance, is superimposed on an image of a bomb explosion, and the combination strongly criticizes patriarchy: men's actions among themselves, in relation to women, and, by extension, within the political arena.

Whereas Haacke appropriates the look of corporate PR imagery, and Kruger alludes to Madison Avenue design, in *This is a Test Mimi*

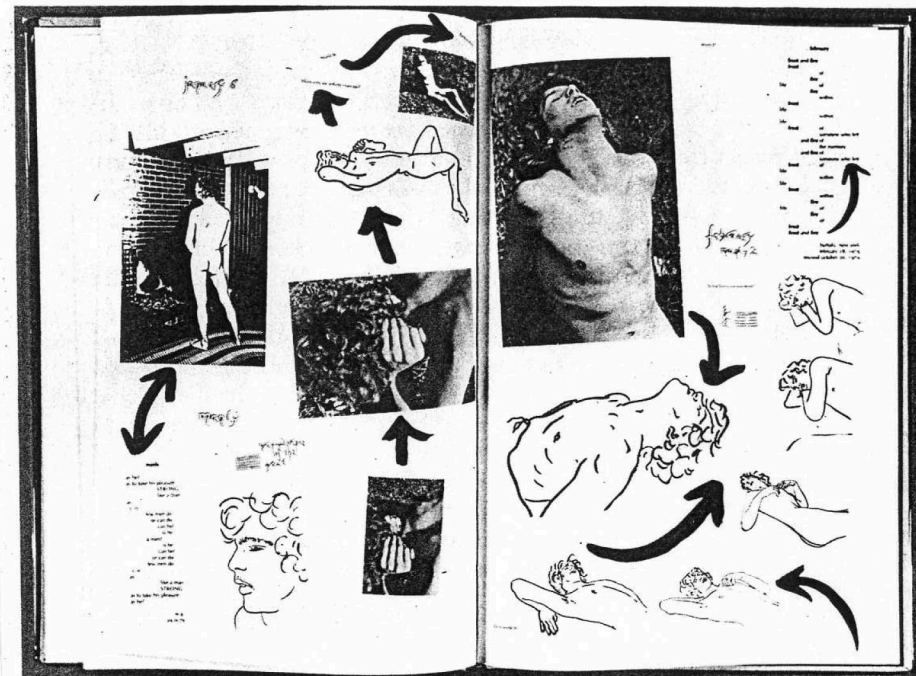


Barbara Kruger, *No Progress in Pleasure*, 1982.

Smith refers to broadcast television. Basing her work on the nuclear "test" signals with which we are all familiar, Smith gives us five pseudo-broadcasts describing "possible" bombings of Washington, D.C., Peking, Paris, Moscow, and Tripoli. Each of Smith's broadcasts is handwritten on a TV screen, yet the television set itself is "drawn" with words, scrawled in script, such as "Listen. This is a test . . . a warning." The book is obviously an anti-war political statement, but its format encompasses more. By completely integrating her words and pictures, Smith is telling us that we cannot separate form and content—that in this information-oriented society, the medium is indeed the message.

There are several artists who, like Smith, have taken that maxim literally, and created books which completely integrate words and images in unique and fascinating ways. These artists have rejected the linear format of most bookworks, and have instead used book pages as arenas for the expression of non-linear, multi-dimensional visions of a time, space, and experience. Eileen Berger's *A Novel in Progress About a Woman Named Sylvia*, for instance, is not a novel in the traditional sense; the narrative is non-linear, and specific situations and events are never described. Instead, Berger compares her work to the writings of literary artists such as Proust, Joyce, Woolf, and Nin, since her novel progresses as the heroine undergoes certain mental processes and shifts from one state of consciousness to another. These states of consciousness are reflected in arrangements of contemporary words and images, which Berger "finds" in the popular media, photographs, and then arranges in tight graphic montages.

Berger maintains a precarious balance between the controlled graphic order of each page and the unpredictable, seemingly chaotic interplay of disparate visual elements. The structure of each page is different (as of this writing, over thirty pages of a projected 200 have been completed, and these are now exhibited rather than bound), since none of them are preplanned. The artist allows her visual elements to suggest their own orders and relationships based on the associations they trigger in her. Within these tight configurations, fragments of a contemporary woman's visual experience—advertisements, dress patterns, art reproductions, illustrations, anatomical parts, phrases from books and magazines, etc.—appear and reappear, connect and disconnect, and alter in scale and importance. The completed pages document Sylvia's odyssey through her inner life as she confronts her various personae; longs for escape into a Garden; initiates a betrayal; and suffers a Fall and its consequences. So the life of a particular woman converges with the archetypal patterns of myth, and these shifting fragments of information formulate a multi-dimensional vision of reality—of time and space, of emotion and memory, of the conscious and the unconscious mind.



Dick Higgins, *of celebration of morning*, 1980.

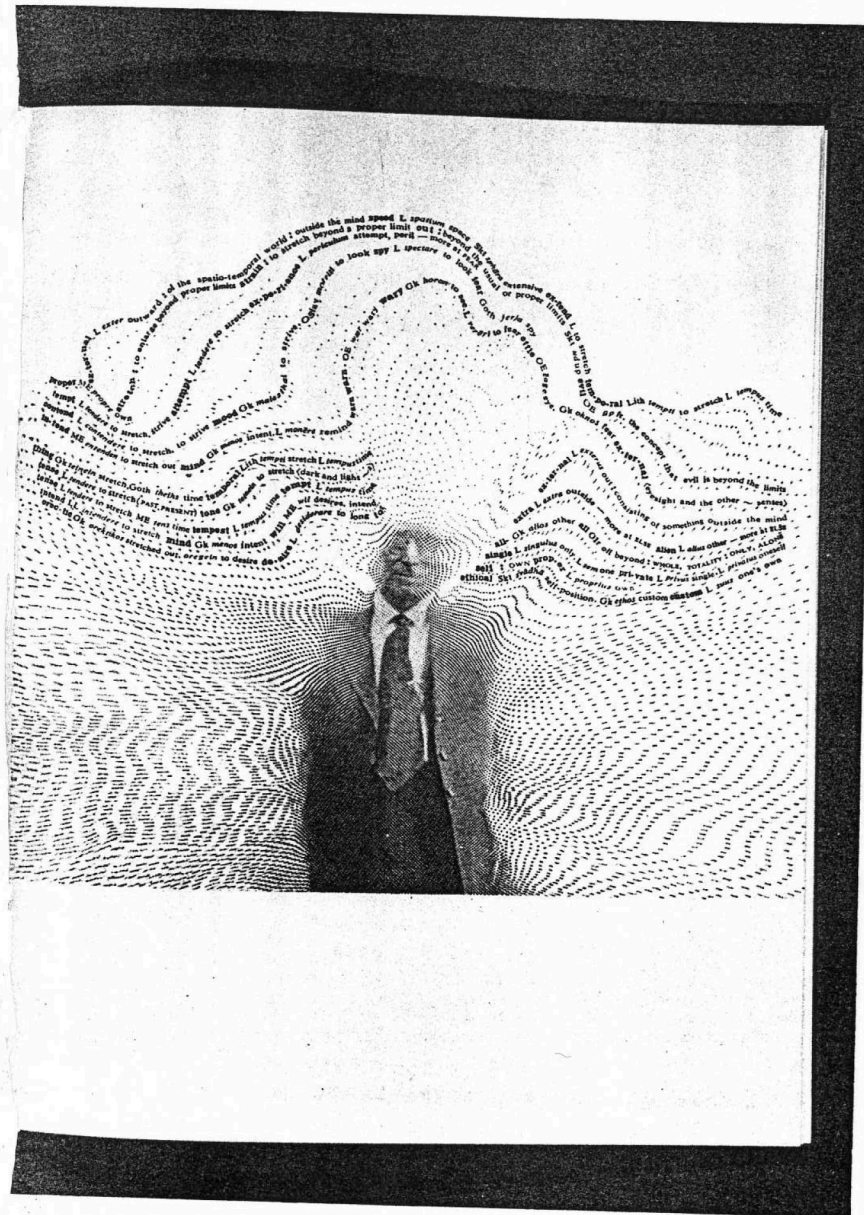
Dick Higgins's *of celebration of morning* is also designed to give reader/viewer a multi-dimensional vision of reality. Each of the eighty pages of this large, beautiful book is a montage of photographs, photo derivations, line drawings, poems, musical scores, rhetorical questions, and symbols from the *I Ching*. Together these pages compose a narrative (or a "polysemiotic fiction," as Higgins describes it) about a young musician/dancer named Justin who overdoses on drugs while struggling to make the transition from youth to adulthood.

The "polysemiotic" format allows Higgins to depict his protagonist from different points of view and within different contexts, and, as a result, the viewer/reader experiences a cross-section of the spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical, psychological, and social forces that converge to define Justin's world. The book is divided into monthly sections that document a year in the young man's life. This chronological narrative is counterpointed by, and interwoven with, a number of non-linear elements and organizational devices that provide alternative readings to the story. The individual pages, or "worlds" in Higgins's

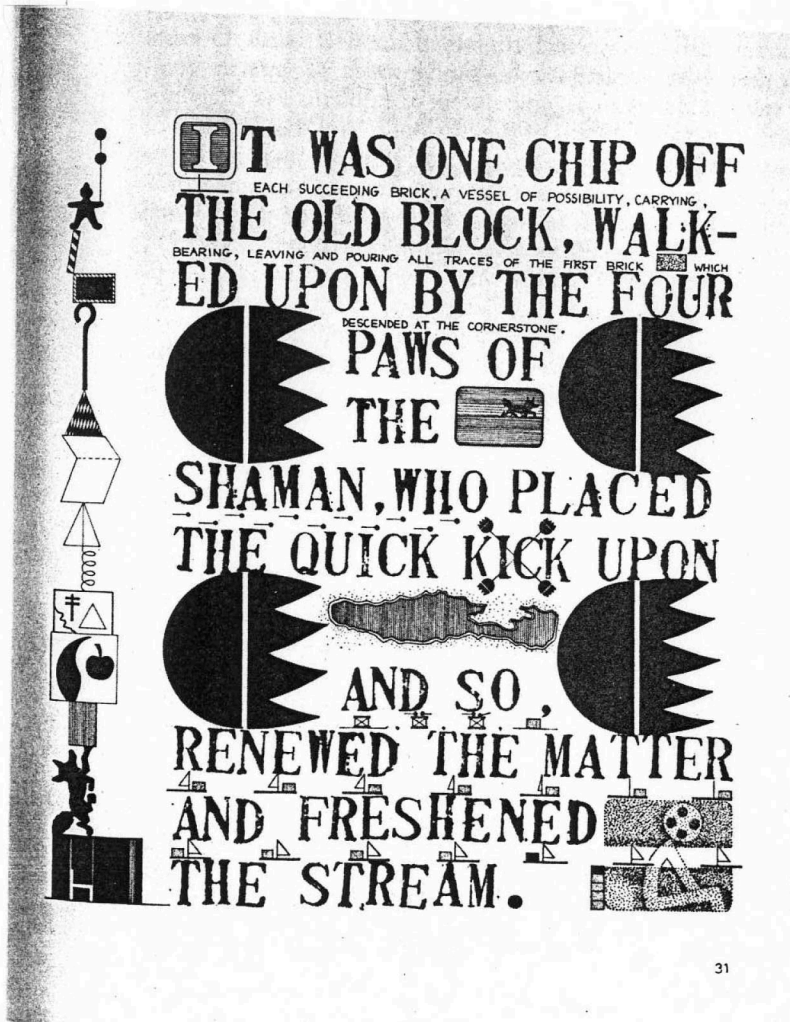
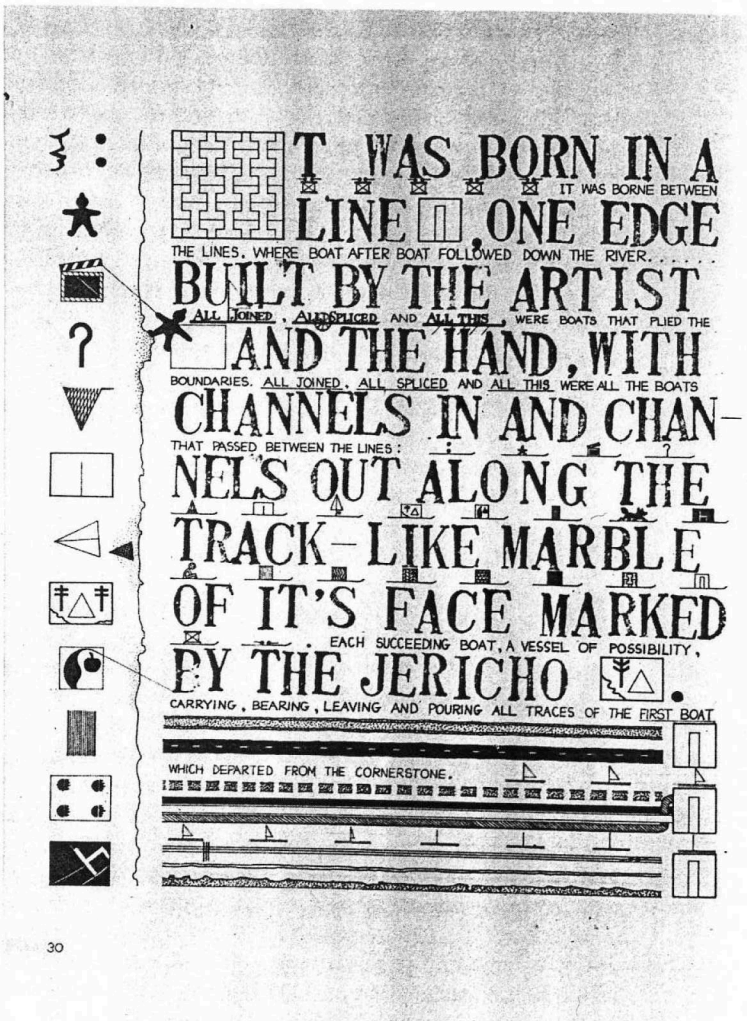
words, are self-contained in both form and content. Combining diverse media in random arrangements, they suggest open-ended, shifting meanings and can be interpreted independently or cumulatively. Higgins recommends a non-consecutive, indeed a cyclical, reading of the book. So the meaning of *of celebration of morning* is constantly in flux, as the reader chooses between different relationships and progressions.

Many of the images in Higgins's book depict Justin frolicking in the nude within natural settings and, thus, place his passage from boyhood to manhood within the seasonal cycles of nature—as well as in relation to the cosmic forces represented by the *I Ching*. Paul Zelevansky, in *The Case for the Burial of Ancestors: Book 1*, is also concerned with cosmic spiritual forces, but his book chronicles the history of a fictional people called the Hegemonians who resemble the Hebrews of the Old Testament. *Book 1* corresponds roughly to Genesis, and the cosmic drama it describes is produced and directed by the Puppeteer, who plays with his Forty Shards in the four hours before lunch, and is acted out by twelve Co-Creators, who include the Artist, the Narrator-Scholar, the Shaman, the Hatmaker, the Jericho Mapmaker, and the Projectionist. The narrative develops episodically through a sequence of graphically designed pages that function as geographic grounds for text, pictograms, diagrams, symbols, and maps framed in constantly shifting relationships. This format makes it possible for Zelevansky to explore his subject from a number of different perspectives and to adopt different historical viewpoints on the historical processes he describes. The main events traced in the book are the creation of the Four Edges of the known world: the Bindery Wall, the boundary between the old and the new worlds; the Waters of Separation, which serve as an arena for exploration and dispersal; the Ground, the physical plane of existence; and the Hill, the place to which the Hegemonians may ascend. These edges serve simultaneously as physical, formal, and spiritual guideposts, for Zelevansky records not only the literal and metaphorical structures of these markers but also their metamorphoses in time: the “layers of understanding” that are uncovered as these sacred locations become mythic rather than functional, and are transmuted into legends, rituals, books, parables, pictures, songs, and such. So the whole history of these Four Edges—and, by extension, of the Hegemonian geography—is contained within the story of their creation. As the artist writes, “past, present and potential exist at once” in this book.

Zelevansky telescopes time and space; Bonnie Gordon, in her “Image-Maps,” telescopes time and culture. Her recently published work, *The Anatomy of the Image-Maps*, is not an artist's book in the conventional sense; rather, it is a reference work explaining the genesis of her imagery, and as such can be compared to Marcel Duchamp's



Bonnie Gordon, *The Anatomy of the Image-Maps*, According to Merriam-Webster's *Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, 1982.



*Notes and Projects for the Large Glass.* For over a decade, Gordon has been exploring the contents of *Merriam-Webster's Third Unabridged Dictionary*. By examining the etymons of words and by grouping together dictionary definitions which contained identical words, Gordon discovered that "the recurrence of similar tales of human commonplaces suggested that an organic system of emblems and allegories might underly the overt content of the dictionary and that linkages of identical words might be able to reweave and restore some semblance of that hidden structure." Since her word groupings inevitably suggested analogies to human forms, Gordon combined these verbal clusters with a stretchable halftone photograph of an anonymous adult male. The result is a series of "Image-Maps": word pictures which represent a merger of these two forms of language and thus attempt to recreate the primal roots of human symbolic communication.

*The Anatomy of the Image-Maps* is an explanation of one of the most far-reaching bodies of work being produced by an artist today. And it is, I think, appropriate to end this essay with this book—because by tracing the roots of words and pictures, *The Anatomy of the Image-Maps* probes the conceptual and imagistic origins of all artists' books which combine words and images.

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