NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FINE ART PAINTING

"ARTISTS BOOKS"
THE BOOK IN CONTEMPORARY ART

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Since the mid 60's a 'new' artistic medium has exploded onto the scene of contemporary art..... the Book.

This may be considered a surprising strategy on the part of artists, this intensive preoccupation with a mode of communication which, in the light of the present day explosion of an electronically controlled mass media, has become a virtual anachronism in contemporary (Post Modern) culture.

Television, computers, telecommunications have revolutionised our effiency at storing and transmitting information.

So what is the appeal of such an outmoded medium ? In attempting to supply an answer (if indeed such an answer exists) to this puzzling question it would seem necessary to provide some kind of brief artistic and historical background, against which to examine this phenomenon.

This then is where I shall begin, stopping where appropriate to identify specific developments in the medium as they occur

Perhaps I should add here that although these artists are using as their raw material the book in its traditional form and role. What they are producing are 'Books' which to a lesser or greater extent defy our conventional expectations of what a book, and by implication art, should be.

CHAPTER ONE

MODERNISM

'Modernism' as a term has served for the best part of this century as a basic definition for the economic and cultural conditions in which society functions.

We are currently deemed to have entered a new era, that of the 'Post Modern'.

Broadly speaking, 'Post Modernity' may be understood as a shift in contemporary society from the Modernist age of competitive, production orientated capitalism based on the concept of the individual, to a new age of consumer orientated, corporate capitalism, where the bourgeoise individual no longer exists.

These seemingly opposed definitions also serve to delineate the realms of the 'Modern' in the field of art and that of what we have come to call the 'Post Modern'.

Personally I would suggest that Post-Modernism in art is not a rejection of Modernism as such, merely a re-evaluation of its basic tendencies. Post Modernism as an attempt to reconciliate two divergent theories of art and bring them closer together in a theory of art which is more relevant to our present social conditions, stemming from the feeling of dissatisfaction aroused by the failure of Modern Art to find a solution for the problem of art.

This problem of art is raised by the question 'What is Art?', and is associated with the treatises on aesthetics by Kant and Hegel respectively : the AUTONOMY of art and the WITHERING AWAY of art into social practice or theoretical discourse.

1.1 <u>AUTONOMY OF ART</u>

Clement Greenbergs theory of High Modernism is a neo- Kantian formalist account, based on ideas of autonomy of the art object, humanism, logocentricism (and by implication capitalism and the commodification of the art object).

Greenberg demanded that the work of art should be rendered pure by being confined to the effects specific to its own medium. He made an important distinction between content and form which was the major point of rupture between Greenbergs' theory of Modernism and that of the Modernist avant-garde which Greenberg all too readily excluded from his formalist account. (The latter being mainly content orientated whereas Greenberg was concerned with art as a purely visual phenomena).

> Content is to be dissolved so completely
> into form that the work of art or literature
> cannot be reduced in whole or in part to
> anything not itself.....subject matter or
> content becomes something to be avoided
> like a plague. *14.*

The content of art, according to Greenbergs's theory was considered to be mutable, liable to change and therefore the transcendent value of art must be founded elsewhere. This trans-cendent value was defined as the <u>aesthetic</u> value of art, and form was where this value resided. Thus we have the manifestation of the focus point of Greenbergs' formal aesthetic, the completely self referential, autonomous 'art object', an object of immense ideological density.

Symbiotic with this theory of the art object are two corresponding ideologies, those of 'humanism' and 'logocentricism'.

According to Kant's theory of the aesthetic it is

> .... that fundamentally subjective realm of
> judgements of taste indicating the freedom
> of the autonomous individual. *14*

This 'subjective judgement' is an inherent characteristic
of 'humanism'

> Man in full and spontaneous possession of
> himself and of his own expression, the
> individual presupposed in humanism is an
> autonomous being possessed of self
> knowledge and an irreducable, core of
> 'humanity', a human essence. *14*

This theory works two ways simultaneously. As the humanist
subject applies his subjective aesthetic judgement to the work
of art, the 'art object' itself the stimulus of this aesthetic
response is in turn the representative of the sensibility of the
artist. The art object is the human essence made form.

This concept of the human essence (or theologically, the
soul) is an abstract one, its corporeal representation being the
body. It therefore follows that any mark made by the body (in
painting the brushstroke) is the index, the very trace of this
expressive body, and thus, of the 'human essence' to which it
plays host.

'Logocentricism', is a term coined by Jaques Derrida which
refers to our tendency to refer all questions of the meaning
of representations to a singular founding presence (in this
instance it would be the artist). This is based, according to
Derrida, on a 'Metaphsics of presence' which has dominated
Western philosophical thought for centuries, founded on, he tells
us, the privileging of speech over writing. (Derrida, a major
influence on Post Modern thinking,went on to blow apart this and
other traditions endemic to Western theory with his theory of
deconstruction).

When we consider 'logocentricism' - the belief that all questions of meaning are to be referred to a privileged origin - together with 'humanism'- the view of man in full and spontaneous possession of himself and of his own expression- we can see how the art object manages to exert such a presence and in particular how the disciplines of painting, (and to a lesser extent sculpture) have come to be so highly valued.

The art object, the fusion of so many years of Western ideology is also irrevocably an object of exchange, a commodity against other commodities in a market economy.

1.2 WITHERING AWAY OF ART

The second aspect of Modernism which concerns us here is that of the avant garde, its heteronomous relation to social modernity and the institution of art being a direct reversal of Greenbergs institutionalised formalist aesthetics.

From the start the Avant Garde was largely content orientated concerned with bringing art into consciousness as a social institution and breaking its autonomy. However the problems this concern highlights are those of Hegels'Withering Away' or extinguishing of art into social action, its effects being politically negligable and moreover it loses the exemplary status dependent upon its identification as art.

The emergence of the Avant Garde in the early part of the century brought with it an amazing proliferation of aesthetic manifestos and political and didactic texts that claimed and demonstrated a new role for art in a new social and spiritual order. It was because of the Avant Garde artists desire to intervene directly in society that they began to utilize systems of distribution and communication in order for these manifestos etc. to reach as wide an audience as possible.

It is from this point onwards that we begin to see emerging
the historical and ideological antecedents of the contemporary
multiple and mass produced artists books and periodicals.

1914 saw the first publication in book format of Stephane
Mallarme's poem - Un coup des Des jamais N'abolira le Hassard, /.
a seminal example of visual poetry whose influence extends through
the realms of concrete poetry right up to the present day. The
poems interpenetration of visual and verbal signs, evocative
disruption of a linear text with a dynamic interplay of typefaces,
line arrangement and white space signalled a revolution in
perception of the printed page.

Mallarmes influence spread rapidly, not just to the realms
of visual poetry, but more importantly to the typographic inventions
and subversions of the early Avant Garde, (Futurists, Constructivists,
Dada and Surrealism alike).

The Italian Futurists were among the most militant of the
Avant Garde movements, who adopted this disruption of the letter
and word as a metaphor for new artistic freedom, the rejection
of the old order, and social change. Their founder, F.T. Marinetti,
produced books such as Mots en Liberte Futuristes which embodied
an energy that mimicked the central Futurist theme of dynamism, 2.
dramatically evoked through his use of disrupted syntax and
scattered lettering. These dynamic volumes were a great influence
in initiating the development of books which embraced cinematic
conventions. Russian artists, the likes of Ilia Zdanevitah
and El Lissitsky recognised the potential of the page as a scene
of theatrical drama in which 'printed words are seen and not
heard.... a sequence of pages is a cinematographic book' 19.

Constructivists, with their promotion of the scientific
age of the machine, manipulated abstract geometric shapes, type
and photography, collage, filmstrips and photomontage and
transformed them into elements of book design.

C'ÉTAIT
issu stellaire

CE SERAIT
pire   non   davantage ni moins   indifféremment mais autant

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL
autrement qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL
sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu
enfin
par quelque profusion répandue en rareté
SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la somme pour peu qu'une
ILLUMINÂT-IL

LE HASARD

Choit
la plume
rythmique suspens du sinistre
s'ensevelir
aux écumes originelles
naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime
flétrie
par la neutralité identique du gouffre

soucieux

expiatoire et pubère   muet

La lucide et seigneuriale aigrette
au front invisible
scintille
puis ombrage
une stature mignonne ténébreuse
en sa torsion de sirène

par d'impatientes squames ultimes

rire

que

SI

de vertige

debout

le temps
de souffleter
bifurquées

un roc

faux manoir
tout de suite
évaporé en brumes

qui imposa
une borne à l'infini

Figure 1.

3. **Breton, Andre.** *Les Manifestes du Surrealisme.* Paris:
Club Francais du Livre, 1955. 16 pp. Mixed media. 8 1/2 x 7
1/2 inches. 920/2000. Collection of The Ruth and Marvin
Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, Miami
Beach

Figure 2.

24. **Marinetti, F.T.** *Les Mots en Liberte Futuristes.*
Milan: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, 1917. 5 pp. Soft
cover book. 7 3/4 x 5 inches. Collection of The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry,
Miami Beach

However, with all this apparent revolution going on between the covers these books were not viewed specifically as art-works. Most of these movements were setting themselves up as anti-art and the book format was used only in order to disperse literary and idea information. This point is emphasised by the importance of writers such as Marinetti, Tzara and Mayakovsky in these publishing activities. Idea was not yet art.

It is only within recent years that Dada magazines for example have retrospectively been accorded the aura of Art. Late as this accordance may be it does serve to recaptulate the problems of art as social practice caused by its emphatic promotion of content in opposition to formal concerns.

1.3 **CONCEPTUALISM**

The Conceptual Art movement of the late 60's and 70's was a direct revolt against Greenberg's formalist aesthetic and the historical tendency of art towards complete self-referential autonomy.

Directly preceeded by the neo-Dada, anti-art activities in the early 60's of artists like the Fluxus group, it was only one manifestation amongst others of the feelings of dissatisfaction aimed at the institution of art and a growing need to restore some of the early avant-garde's critical and contextual reflexivity.

The point at which Conceptualism differs from the activities associated with the avant-garde is that it is not anti-art, and thus it manages to avoid the problems associated with the 'withering away' of art into social practice. Art is preserved as a category, however a category that does not necessarily subsume objects, but could be applied to language, events and activities etc.

The main critical target of conceptualism was the aesthetics of the object, based on Greenbergs version of Modernism.

This critique of the object was concerned with a refusal of the commodity status of the art object. Conceptual artists believed that as 'idea' art could be common property. Consequently artists began to work at a purely conceptual level, ignoring phenomena that could be made visible and concentrating upon the processes of thought and representation themselves. The important thing was the IDEA of the work of art. No aesthetic importance was attached to the material media needed to express the idea; the usual media were texts and photographs which were used as mere auxiliaries.

The appeal of photography and written language (text) for the conceptual artist was the anonymity and negative valuation of the media. The smooth, flat finish of the photograph serves to dispel any ideas of authorship from the work and emphasise the medium's documentary role whilst written language as well was documenting the concept or event because of its linearity provides the means of preserving the lived experience of time - of duration.

The pathway for this new direction was laid down by Minimalisms displacement of attention from the object to its physical context - emphasis was moved, from the'purely visual ' presentness of formalist modernism to the phenomenological experience of the percieving subjects body in relation to the modification of gallery space, brought about by objects which were to be percieved as a whole and not in terms of formal part to part relationships. The concept of duration verses modernist instantaneousness.

Central to Conceptual Art was the idea that context is constituitive of art and that self contained art objects are consequently uncritical, complacent and delusional.

By utilising photographic medium to dispel ideas of authorship, conceptualism was planning another assault on the art object with an attempt to dismantle the hierarchy of media according to which painting (also sculpture) is assumed inherently superior.

The surface of the photographic image offers no reassurance of the founding presence of a human subject, which accounts for hostility with which conceptualism art was initially recieved – it was seen as an attack on the <u>object</u>, upon <u>presence</u>, which caused it.

So we can see that photography was certainly not being used in a fine art sense. This documentary use of the photographic image was purely a solution for preserving art that centred on events and process. The image is replacing something else. It is a substitute. At the same time the image used rarely stands alone, rather it typically relies on other codes, mainly writing which sustain or'inform' It. In both these instances the image perse is undervalued, de-valued or valued insufficient as art. It appears that there is some kind of supposition about a photograph that it requires some sort of informative supplement (eg. a caption). Knowledge of the external event denoted by image – document, or, a succession of images can fulfill the same supplemental functions as a caption.

The appropriateness of the book as a medium for conceptual artists is now revealed to us. Artists were beginning to assess the possibilities of processing ideas and images in the form of 'information which could then be transmitted bereft of traditional art objects. Books constituted one answer to this problem of bypassing the art galleries.

Sometimes, the book served as a container for a system of ideas or an event expressed outside the book itself. In such an instance the books emphasis is generally less about the medium of documentation within a systematic format which may echo the systemic content of the event being documented. In this case the linear system of the book may function in the same way as the linear text, to preserve durational time. The books of Richard Long are examples of this kind of documentation function. Long executes many of his works in remote locations and these books of photographs and accompanying texts are the principal means for making these ainaccessible works known. However, Long, utilizing his design skills plus his evocative choice of the captions chosen to accompany the photographs, manages to produce books which supercede their documentary role to become artworks in themselves.

Other artists saw the book more in terms of a structure, a means of presenting original work, emphasising systems designed specifically to be viewed in sequence through the turning of the pages. Michael Snow's 'cover to cover' is an outstanding example, as the sequence of photographs narrate the artists journey from house to car and back again.

There were a number of problems with conceptual art which, although important do not deny the immense impact it had, whether positive or negative, on the whole field of artistic practice which succeeded it.

Firstly, once Greenbergs formalist aesthetics declined in credibility, the meta-language of conceptual art was left without an articulated theory to oppose. The second diffuculty is linked to the problem of the status of documentation, the tokens of which were recuperated by the very institutions the artists were trying to bypass, and were commodified and exchanged in the market.
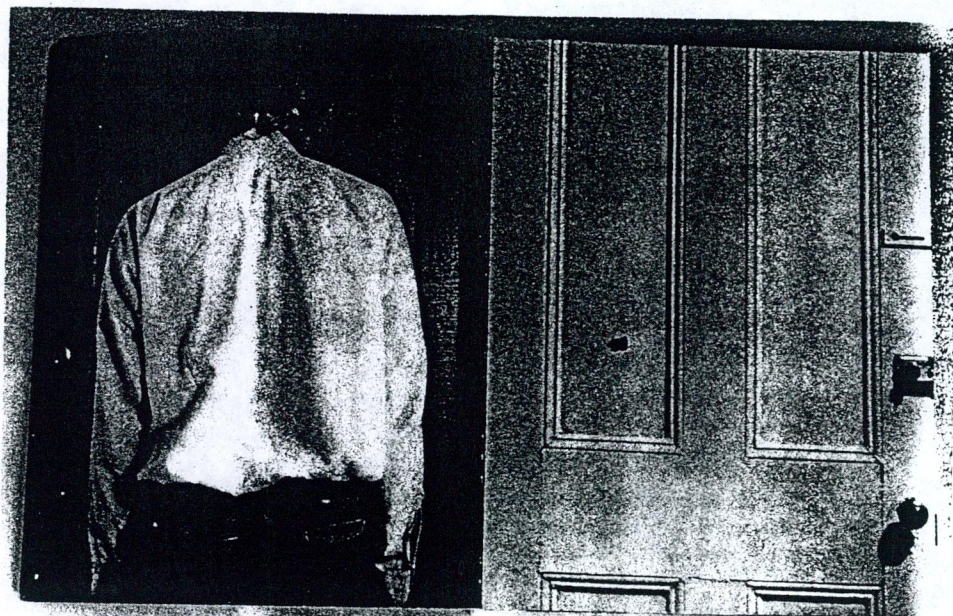
The brook and the clapper bridge are old friends

Stone dance

Richard Long, *Two Sheepdogs . . .*, 1971.

Figure 3.

Michael Snow, *Cover to Cover* (two openings), 1975.

Figure 4.

(The problem being the inescapable objecthood of items like the
book even though they may function solely as containers for
unrealised propositions and lastly, as a rationalisation of art
conceptual art failed to appreciate the problem of expressiveness.

    Joseph Kosuth manages to sum it all up -

> What began in the mid sixties as an analysis
> of the context of specific objects (or propositions)
> and correspondingly the question of function has
> forced us now, 10 years later to focus our
> attentions on the society and/or culture in which
> that specific object operates. 4.

CHAPTER TWO

POST MODERNISM

In order to reach a better understanding of the relationship existind between Post-Modern art practice and that of the modern, the best place to start is Post-Structuralism or the theory of deconstruction, largely initiated by the writings of the French post-structuralists that appeared originally throughout the 60's and70's and then later in English translation during the 70's and 80's.

Perhaps the single most important contribution of post-structuralism is its ability to challenge many of the fundamental principles and premises that comprise the Western episteme, providing post-modern art practice with the highly developed conceptual framework and intellectual substance with which to separate itself from late modern art practice.

2.1 POST-STRUCTURALISM

In order to exorcise the 'metaphysic of presence', the founding epistemology of Western thought, deconstructive tactics have concentrated on written language as opposed to spoken. The phonocentricism, or privileging of speech over writing has deluded us into forgetting that even when we speak, we still have recourse to signs. This denies the concept of the human essence in that with our recourse to signs, we abandon the possibility of an entire subjectivity in that the signs we use are not ours alone but part of the social institution.

Jacques Derrida launched a concerted attack on logocentricism, in which the idea that tha actual physical presence of the speaker is needed in order to substantiate any statement of matters of fact and to, in effect, 'authorize' discourse. The belief that meaning can be referred back to a single founding origin. Derrida argues that 'being in the present' is never complete in itself and therefore can never confirm anything. This is a contradiction of the 'metaphysis of presence' which presumes

that whatever is present to us is wholly and immediately so, grasped in an act of pure intuition which has no recourse to signs. Presence precedes signs. According to Derrida though there is no way to understand the meaning and full import of the concept of presence without acknowledging that the physical presence of the speaker or observer must be supplemented by knowledge of that which preceeded and that which is deferred in the moment of presence.

Put another way, there can be no meaning that something is present. If there is no possibility of it's being 'not present' or absent.

> ONE thus very quickly realises that the
> presence of the present moment can only appear
> as such to the extent that it is CONTINUOUSLY
> COMPOUNDED with a non-presence and a non-
> perception, to wit primary memory and
> expectation (retention and projection)

The present moment therefore is what it is by virtue of its membership of a temporal sequence. The structure of time and language for Derrida are identical, the present moment is not a point but a structure depending for its existence on its relations with past and future. Like any linguistic sign it is 'inhabited by other signs. Every sign contains what Derrida calls a 'trace' of signs other than itself, and leads us on a process of endless referral - what Derrida terms - difference - which means simultaneously, to deter or to differ. Every new signified is also a signifier. There is no such thing as the 'transcendental signified'.

Derrida convincingly demonstrates that normal usage of the concept (being in the present) misrepresents both the complexity of experience and its relations to thought and language.

> We now know that a text is not a line
> of words releasing a single 'theological'
> meaning (the 'message' of the author - God)
> but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety
> of writings, none of them original, blend
> and clash;'' and ''the reader is the space on
> which all the quotations that make up a
> writing are inscribed without any of them
> being lost; a texts unity lies not in its origin
> but in its destination . *3*

This is perhaps one of the most frequently over-quoted sources of the concept of the 'Death of the author' (or founding presence). Barthes here has extended Derrida's argument concerning the privileging of speech over the writing in the Western tradition into an attack against the idea of the author which he dissolves, following Derrida into 'writing' which is 'the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin'. The author is no longer the God-like master of the text,

> '...the voice loses its origin,the author
> enters into his own death, writing begins.' *3*

He argues that it is the reader and not the author who is the point at which the traces of the text achieve their unity.

Western idealism asserts that language does not create meanings but reveals them, implying that meanings pre-exist their expression (the author being their origin). Derrida argues that there can be no meaning which is not formulated - no one who writes is wholly master of the language they use or the meaning which it generates in the minds of those who read or hear it. Language is the real locus of meaning, putting contradictions into the text unawares of the author.

As readers we meet with language in its 'indicative' function and as we read we engage in the reactivation of writing to its 'expressive' function.

An author cannot concievably control the eventual
reactivations to which his or her text will become subject, it
will depend on the knowledge, experience, even mood of the reader.
The gap between authors meaning and readers meaning can never
be fully closed, therefore the text is the locus of an alarming
and unstemmable multiplicity of meaning.

This allows us to slip easily into the concept of
inter-textuality, in which any text contains all manner of
allusions to, or echos of, other texts; and the many kinds of
relations that can be established between one text and others -
quotation, parody, plagiarism, influence - are collectively known
as 'inter-textuality'. This process of referral works in the
opposite direction too. The signs read may evoke in the reader,
not so much a text of his/her own but other texts of which he/she
already has knowledge. The reader is placed in a new relationship
with the text. That of producer and consumer. He/she is no
longer the alienated reciever of a pre-ordained meaning or truth.

Emerging out of this theory of deconstruction we can begin
to substantiate the following, basic tenets of post-modern
theory:

(1)The self is a metaphysical fiction and a rhetorical
construction. It has neither a centre, unity, coherence nor
continuity of its own.

(2)There is no depth to knowledge, experience or appearances;
nor is there 'depth' to psychological phenomena or to language ;
there is only the surface of signs.

(3)Textuality is the basic condition of all communication.
The text is made up of a tissue of codes which are already in
place. There is no originality or discovery - only the
fragments of existing codes.

These extremely simplified statements serve here merely
to present post-structuralism in its most basic form. There are
many difficult and subtly interrelated themes of post-structuralism,
far too many to investigate here. Suffice to say, it is apparent
from this point onwards that what served as the basic tenets of
modernism (logocentricism, humanism etc.) have been put through
a vigorous and intensive scrutiny, which has served to open up
potentially fruitful ways to press the boundaries of just what
questions can be asked and what assumptions can be made into
issues of basic cultural and social relevance.

Post-Modernism as a theory derived from a re-evaluation of the basic tenets of Modernism, principally an attack on the political legitimacy of modernist culture.

With the advent of the post-war boom in mass media communications and growth of the advertising industry, art finally realised the enormity of the conditions weighed against its social visibility and function. The crux of social activity had shifted from production, to distribution and consumption,and this nexus of exchange depended on images, through advertising etc., by which to pedal its wares.

Confronted by a media whose power was held to be hegemonic the idea of art meditating any alternative set of values was seen as simply self deluding. Artists could see only two responses to this situation.

(1) In a world of media simulcra and pseudo-events (especially through TV and advertising) art value could reside only in the intensity of the personal and private vision. This marked a return to fine art mediums of painting and sculture.

(2) A practice whereby signs and images of our media culture are subject to a morally ambiguous reproduction. If the mass media reduces all images of information to the same level, then all art can do, if a pretence of radicality is to be upheld and some vestical public space for art maintained, is to mirror or stage that lack.

However common it is one thing to say that we cannot claim immunity from the logic of this new social space of maximal (mis) information and image production, but it is another to say that the formats of representation are hegemonically in place and may not be influenced by external factors.

The failure of both modernism and the avant-garde is a
determinate factor in the positioning of post-modernism in relation
to the social sphere. Where modernists sought to affirm the
relative autonomy of the cultural sphere against the values
of the market place - the avant-garde sought to undermine the
ideology of aesthetic autonomy, to collapse the cultural back
into the socio-economic in order to translate such values into
social praxis.

Conceptualism on the other hand can be cited as the 'movement'
which, by undermining modernism, paved the way for post-modernism.
Radical (defined here as the most critical of all post-modern
practices) post-modernist practice too sees the language of
former modernist art as remote from the recognisable subject
matter and vernacular of the general culture which this practice
embraces.

Conceptualism's attempted repudiation of the objecthood
and authorship of art, through the introduction of material
processes series, systems and ideas, was in place of an art
based on self expression. This, coupled with a concern for context
and a return to a more critical artistic practice, opened
conceptualism up to the fields of signification and systems
of representation. This was the issue which radical post-modernism
was to extend into a rigorous examination of the issues of repres-
entation and ideological constructs within the entire social
and cultural sphere, (especially the effects of media and
communications technologies).

What we know, indeed how we see and understand the world
around us is largely a product of mass media and the discourse
of institutions.

The intent of many radical post-modernist art (and critical)
practises is to make the presence of this mediation appar ent
and, where possible, to reveal the ideological construct behind
that mediation.

There has also been a growing tendency associated with these radical practices to contest the legitamacy of these dominant systems of representation, and the ideology behind them, from the standpoint of the repressed margins of our current social structure, thus a considerable amount of radical post-modernist art and critical writing centres around the issues of race, gender and sexual orientation. This is characterised by an attempt to re-direct the culture by shifting away from the centre to a more responsible, pluralistic order.

Post-structuralism has been the main support in this contestation of legitimacy, especially in revealing that which was assumed to be natural and or 'given' is the fact a social or ideological contruction, for example, there is no essential self which precedes the social construction of the self through the agency of representation. Similarly the idea of the artist as originator of unique meaning is torn apart through the use of appropriated imagery, images which may be regarded as public property, whilst the pure sign of modern art is replaced instead by the play on the distance which seperates the signified, sign from meaning. To this extent then artistic practice is not defined in relation to a given medium, but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium - photography, books etc. - might be used.

However photography is the most frequently used medium, (being also the main language of mass media representation) in which such issues are raised since it subverts the investment of authority and authenticity preserved in the aura of the unique gesture.

However, while the discourse which privileges the artist as the soul originator of the work of art must continue to be criticised, together with its social determinants, the artist cannot simply be killed off or considered an epiphenomenon of discourse, but should, to a certain extent, remain as a morally responsible agent. A theory based entirely on discourse disallows any autonomy to the artist or the subject. No form of emancipatory social transformation can be envisaged without some degree of

autonomy being advanced, indeed there would be no point in imagining such a transformation, as how would its goals be achieved. Thus, a politically radical art cannot be based on theories which dissolve the subject into discourse.

Finally, radical post-modernism continues to question the position of art in relation to the culture as a whole. The view that works of art represent merely one specific and highly specialised area of culture is gaining wider and wider acceptance within artistic circles, however it is important to note the way art differs from other types of culture. Because of its marginal position it enables politically conscious artists to adopt a critical attitude towards society, through the articulation of an artistic metalanguage.

This leaves us with the peculiar post-modern condition where the institute of art persists but in which valid aesthetic norms do not. In one way or another these artists all accept the inevitability of recuperation into the institutions without allowing that to exclude some kind of critical or subversive potential.

CHAPTER THREE

BOOK AS ART

In Chapters one and Two what I have tried to do is to place the development of the artists book in an (art) historical context in order to identify when and for what reasons the medium was seen to be appropriate to fulfill the artists needs and intentions.

As we have seen, it was not until the radical changes in attitude as to what should or should not be constituted as art (or artistic medium) which occured with the rise of the 'late' avant-garde, that artists began to look elsewhere, beyond the traditional boundaries, for their subject matter and mediums.

A new social concern coupled with the explosion of consumer orientated mass media society was a major influence in renewing artists interest in the mediums of communication, however this time the initial focus on the books function as an alternative space was quickly surplanted (as conceptualisms refusal of the 'object' in art became less demanding) by the recognition of the manifold possibilities inherent in the objecthood of the book itself waiting to be explored.

Thus, in Chapter Three I will look at some of these possibilities and how artists have taken them on, trying to focus on artists who are still using the medium to this day.

3.1 __STRUCTURE__

To quote Ulises Carrion from 'The Art of Making Books' -

"A book is a sequence of spaces.

Each of these spaces is perceived at a
different moment - a book is also a sequence
of moments.

A literary (prose) text contained in a
book ignores the fact that the book is an
autonomous space - time sequence.

A series of more or less short texts (poems
or other) distributed through a book
following any particular ordering reveals
the sequential nature of the book.

It reveals it, perhaps uses it, but it
does not incorporate it or assimilate it.

A book is a space time sequence.

A book may be the accidental container of a
text, the structure of which is irrelevant
to the book: these are the books of bookshops
and libraries.

A book can also exist as an autonomous and
self-sufficient form, including perhaps a
text that emphasises the form, a text that
is an organic part of that form; here begins
the new art of making books.

To make a bok is to actualise its ideal space -
time sequence by means of the creation of a
parallel sequence of signs, be it verbal
or other." _11._

In many cases books as art can be seen as an unusual marriage of sculpture and cinema. They exist not in their traditional sense but in a new sculptural sense.

Sculpture has always dealt with three dimensional objects, with mass as solid form. In the 60's sculpture began to incorporate the idea not only of movement but also of recorded time sequences.

In most books there is an orderly sequence of time; that is a beginning, a middle and an end. Also there is an internal organisation of divided space. The cinematic experience of the book happens because the pages must be turned and what happens from page to page as it were - is an abstraction of time, within a medium of time (time made physical as in sculpture). The pages may be looked at at random of course, but the relationships of the segments (the shots, the stills) are bound at the spine and are held in unalterable order. Whilst the structuring of the space is done by the maker of the book, the time sequence is left with the reader. It is the reader who chooses where to start and where to stop, how and what to read, how fast or how attentively. It is the reader who turns over the pages, guided or confronted by its structure, the reader manipulates the book. The content of the book reveals itself through this interaction between the book and the reader.

The book as art is a hand held sequence which cannot be framed, taken apart and separated into pages, the book ceases to exist for in most cases individual pages are of hardly any interest when removed from this serial context. The art information is accumulated additively and progressively rather than discretely. The whole as an experience is arrived at through the time and the substance of the sequence of pages, even if the pages are identical.

When reading literary prose or even poetry (except concrete
or visual) the book disappears. The reader is enclosed or swept
away by information and rarely does the books physicality
intrude. Page turning becomes automatic and unconscious. Information
is so sparce, so ambiguous, or the format is so unusual that one
is made conscious of the whole experience of the book. The
medium is much more visible.

Paul Zelevansky, in 'The case for the Burial of Ancestors :
Book 1', telescopes time and space in the history of a fictional
people called the Hegemonians who resemble the Hebrews of the Old
Testament. Even the inclusion of 'Book 1' in the title projects
the book into the future with the implication that this is only
the beginning of the story. 'Book 1' corresponds roughly to Genesis
and the cosmic drama it describes is produced directly by the
puppeteer 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. These edges serve simultaneously as
physical, formal, and spiritual guide posts,for Zelevansky
records not only the literal and metaphorical structures of these
markets but also their metamorphosis 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. As
the artist writes, "past, present and potential exist at once"
in this book .

Figure 5.

Paul Zelevansky, *The Case for the Burial of Ancestors*, Book 1, 1982.

2

The plethora of visual imagery and information sends the reader backwards and forwards through the book on a journey of constant referal, not only back and forth but closer and further away too as the text increases and decreases in size and clarity. Each page may be read as a whole, as a single image or as a text, neither reading is constant. Zelevansky uses, manipulates and colludes with all the conventions of the book which are available to him, to create a wonderful adventure through physical as well as imaginary time.

3.2 **IMAGE**

Richard Princes photographs are appropriations of existing media imagery. He searches through books and magazines for images of cowboys, mountains, sunsets, cigarette lighters, whiskey bottles- the fantasy world of advertising which no longer focu ses on the commodities but on their representations. The subject of Princes photographs is consumerised.

Abigail Soloman - Godeau commented that :

> Much of the power of Princes work derives from his ability to make the concept of the commodity fetish at once concrete and visible. The hyped up almost hallucinatory quality of his details of cigarette ads.,expensive watches, shimmering whiskey logos, et al, are made to reveal their own strategies of over-determination. 6. CAT.

The advertisement in consumer society is as much the commodity as the commodity itself, and "it is the advertisement not the product which sells not the product but the desire". It is these images of a fictional reality which consumer capitalism uses to stimulate the desire which is needed to lubricate this mode of social intercourse. Craig Owens argues that -

> Power is not exercised solely through the
> control of the means of production, but
> through the control of the means of
> representation - the code - The depiction,
> conception of identification of people by
> another group is a form of control - to
> represent is to subjugate. *6. CAT*

"Post-Modern" photographers like Prince, acknowledge our immersion in this mediated reality. Victor Burgin writes -

> Representation therefore cannot be simply
> tested against the real, as the real is
> itself CONSTITUTED through the agency of
> representation. *4.*

Prince and others like him try to expose the mediations at work in the culture industry and to explore the blurring effect they have had on our distinction between fiction and reality.

> By functioning as a simulator, by remaking
> and thereby intensifying signs that are
> already fabricated from existing materials
> and techniques, he acts to expose,
> (literally, set forth) the extent to which
> our reality has been invaded by fiction. *15.*

Prince takes well known images from the popular media - isolates, crops, fragments and otherwise alters them through selective focus and coloures shifts. Once decontextualized the images are re-used.

The resultant photographs (or should I say re-photographs) do not require any supplement to assist us in their identification, as they rely entirely on the cultural embeddedness of the images they (re) present.

> By re-contexturalizing these images it becomes
> clear how much they have formed a kind of
> imprint on the unconscious of our media/image
> controlled society. The photographic medium is
> no longer being used as a technique but as a code. *9.*

86. **Prince, Richard.** *Inside World*. New York: Thea
Westreich, 1989. Includes slipcase and 1 original
artwork (one of 3 different handwritten jokes).Offset
lithography, 22 5/8 x 18 3/4 inches (slipcase size).
Edition: 226/250. Courtesy of Thea Westriech, Limited
Editions & Artist's Books, New York

Figure 6.

Prince's use of the book format is interesting in this case as he is not radically altering its convention, or our perception of them as do most of the other artists mentioed here. However, by using a 'Magazine' format Prince is mimicking the original source of the images he as 're-appropriated' into an identical format.

3.3 **FETISH**

When Stephen Mallarme described the folded and uncut signatures of books as 'virginal' awaiting the penetration of the 'paper knife' he identified an erotic quality of the book and of reading that has been picked up on by other more contemporary critics -

> A passage of a text is a way of knowing that a
> 'corpus' or 'body' of material that should lead
> us on, tease us - but not too obviously.
> 'Knowing' a book is not unlike sexual knowing ...
> not only do we experience gratification orally
> as we devour books voraciously, we also respond
> subliminally to the 'rhythms' of the plot,
> looking forward to a 'climax'.

Roland Barthes similarly profiles the text as -

> A diagramatic and not an imitative structure (that)
> can reveal itself in the form of a body, split
> into erotic sites. 3.

Central to this reference is Barthes' identification of the text with fetishism, the eroticised symbol making activity, involving the engagement of reader and text.

Jaques Berrida declared in his manifesto -

> The end of linear writing is indeed the
> end of the book. 17.

Gregory Ulmer, in hisbook on 'Applied Grammatology' cites a reason to disagree -

> ... any attempt to move beyond the book
> must contend with the Ubidinal investment
> in the form of the book. The book is
> probably the most charged, cathected object
> in western civilisation representing,
> according to Freud's analysis of his own
> dream of the botanical monograph, the mother. *17.*

The comparisons between the corpus of the book and its human coutnerpart are easily identified. The topography of an open book is explicit in its erotic associations: sumptuous twin paper curves that meet in a recessed seam. Page turning is a series of gentle sweeping gestures, like the caress of fingers on naked skin. In fact, the behaviour of the reader has much to do with a play of intimacy. Most people read sitting or lying down, and more often than not the reader is in some state of undress and usually fairly, if not completely, relaxed. When we read – the conventional distance between eye and page is around fourteen inches – we often become the lecturn that receives the book, chest, arms, lap or thighs. This proximity is the territory of embrace, of possession; not to be entered without permission.

There is another way in which the book operates as a fetish, playing a part that stands in for a whole.

Multiplicity is the very nature of the book. Regardless of the content, the utilitiy of the book is a function of its numbers, circulating amongst as large a number of readers as possible. For all its graphic or structural variety, the conventional book operates because it is public and can be shared. The appearance of the book would only serve to demand the attention of the book buying public – 'Buy Me'. It is precisely these terms, combined with the uniqueness of the 'book object' – the one of a kind artists book – that redefines it in terms of art.

> The further the object is removed from its use
> value, the more abstract it becomes and the
> more multivocal is its referentiality. *11.*

But unlike the fetish whose advise is independent of its intrinsic qualities or context of origin, the artist's manipulation

of the book object can serve to mediate the scenarios of fetishism.

There are two primary ways of making a book object; constructing some singular variant of the book form and altering a single copy of a found volume. John Latham is an artist who has concerned himself with both methods.

Throughout his career Latham has proposed that it is the event rather than the object which should form the basis of our understanding of the world.

Books have played an important role in his reformation of our ways of thought - as 'skoobs' (literal reversal of books) they were integrated into reliefs and generally subjected to destructive processes not as an conoclasm but rather as a gesture towards the re-thinking of our cultural base.

In 'Great Uncle's Estate' 1960, books are reduced to useless objects - cut, plastered, painted and fixed to a huge multi-part canvas. The pages are kept open with wire to reveal banks of red, blue, grey-black and gold colour. One's expectancy of the book as an object to be read and to be handled is confounded to an experience of coloured paint. In his own terms he has transported temporal objects from their own sphere to become part of the larger 'event' of painting within which their current use and literariness are trapped. Likewise in 'Noit Intercourse' 1960, two books are unseparably fixed and are unopenable, their temporality becoming not only objectified but also given the title 'noit', which is derived from the reversal of the suffix 'tion' by which verbs become nouns or events become objects.

His best known book work would have to be the piece 'Art and Culture' 1966-69, which was the result of the chewing up by invited guests, of pages from Greenberg's text of the same name. The remnants of each page were left to decompose through the addition of yeast as an 'alien' culture, and when the book was recalled by the library a year later the book was returned decanted into a small glass bottle. It was later assembled
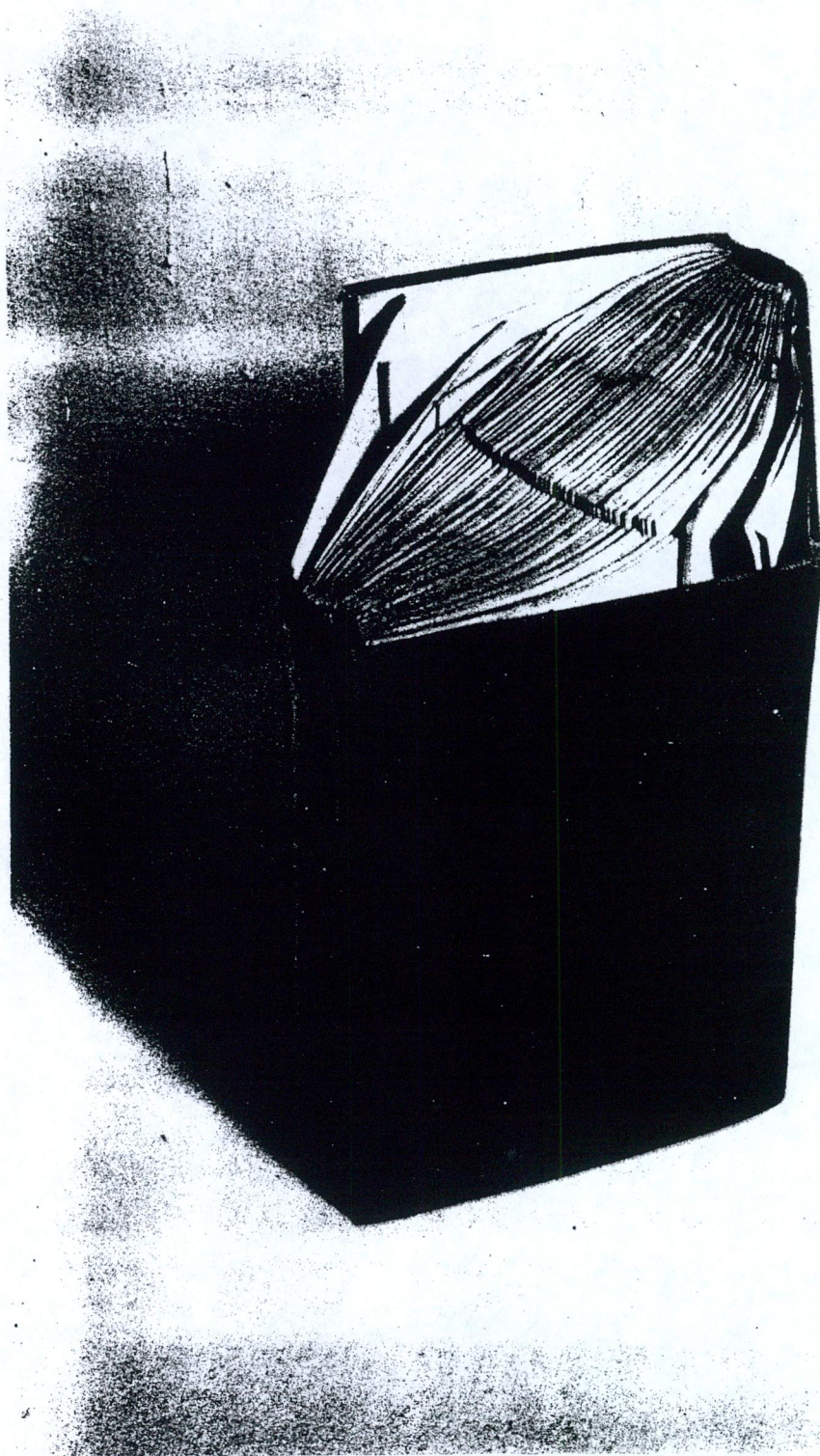
John Latham
Noit Intercourse
1960

Figure 7.

together with documentation of the event in a leather case and now resides in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. (Latham however was to lose his job teaching at the college in London whose library the book had originally belonged to).

3.4 **WORD AS IMAGE**

Jaques Derrida at the same time as undertaking a critique on
the themes of *L*ogocentrism has begun (in theory) to practice a
mode of writing which is no longer subordinated to speech or
thought - a writing no longer functioning as a representation of
speech, in which the hierarchy of thought, speech and writing is
collapsed. 'Grammatology' Derrida maintains must first and
foremostly address the problem of the phoneticisation of writing.

Another name for phoneticisation is linearisation, and by
addressing this problem grammatology confronts nothing less
than four thousand years of the history of the language during
which time everything that resisted linearisation was suppressed.
Briefly stated, this suppression amounts to the denial of the
pluridimentional character of symbolic thought originally evident
in non-linear writing - pictographic and rebus writing.

In non-linear writing, meaning is not subjected to
successivity, to the order of logical time, the determining concept
of all ontological thought. The resurgence of the graphic
element escaping from the domination of the spoken word therefore
can be presumed to be a sympton of the end of the metaphysical
era.

The graphalogical concerns of Stephen Mallarme (the influence
as I have mentioned already behind the typographical revolution
of early avant-garde) have been credited by Derrida as being a
breakthrough in showing the limits of the logico-grammatical
structure of the western language model, offering instead a writing
that balanced the ideographic with the phonetic elements of writing.
Derrid's grammatology, what he identifies as picto-ideo-phonographic
extends this writing, using images, puns and discourse towards
a theory of writing which would not be confined to books, but
be addressed more comprehensively to the needs of multichannelled
performance - teaching, video, film etc.

However, let us remain with the book. We have already looked into the influence Stephan Mallarme had on the futurists, constructivists etc, but whilst the words which they used were referring to things, to ideas, the words of visual and (to a lesser extent) concrete poetry have become the things themselves.

Concrete and visual poetry rely on a mutual rejection of conventional poetic syntax, concrete poetry emphasising the fragmentation of language, visual poetry, naturally, emphasising visual enhancement.

The poetry of Iain Hamilton Finlay is at one minimalist and expansive. Words, letters, and even numbers are explored as objects or signs which may be reorganised in typographical space so that we may see new scope in them as a poetic language.

From an early interest in formal innovation, Finaly's work, based on his overall aesthetic stance of 'new classicism', gradually developed into the encompassing investigation of the transcendance of the sign through metaphor. The publications in the Ocean and Canal Stripe Series from the mid-60's, with their kenetic features and acknowledgement of the semantic elements of the work, marked the beginning of his explorations beyond the accepted visual and literary conventios of the book. Since then Finlay has produced a large number of printed works including over a hundred books and booklets published at his own Wild Hawthorn press.

The most explicit example of the concerns evident in Finlay's booklets, his cultural strategy and his belief that -

> The artist can and must make his
> contribution to the sustenance of a
> socially degraded spirit.

- is the garden of Stoneypath in Scotland which was begun in the autumn of 1966. As with the booklets, references in the garden

sculptures and inscriptions range from the classical tradition
to modern warfare, while the relationships between the objects
and their surroundings parallel the relationships between the
worlds, images and pages of a book.

Ulises Carrion, in his definitive essay on 'The New Art
of Making Books' has dintinguished between prose and poetry to
conclude that poetry is the written language which best suits
the writing space of the book -

In an old book all the pages are the same.

When writing the text the writer followed
only the sequential laws of language which
are not the sequential laws of books.

In the new art every page is different; but
every page is an individualised element of a
structure (the book) wherein it has a
particular function to fulfil.

A book of poems contains as many words as, or
more than, a novel, but it uses ultimately the
real physical space whereon these words appear
in a more intentional, more evident, deeper
way.

For years, many years, poets have intensively
and efficiently exploited the spatial possibilities
of poetry.

But only the so-called concrete or later
visual poetry has openly declared this.
                                        11.

He goes on to talk about language -

Language transmits ideas, i.e. mental images.

The starting point of the transmission of
mental images is always an intention. We
speak to translate a particular image.

In the old art the meanings of the words are
the bearers of the author's intentions.

Just as the ultimate meaning of words is
undefineable, so the author's intention is
unfathomable.

New art's language is radically different
from daily language. It neglects intentions
and utility, and it returns to itself. It
instigates itself, looking for forms for
series of forms that give birth to, couple
with, unfold into space-time sequences.

The words in a new book are not the bearers
of the message, nor the mouthpieces of the
soul, nor the currency of communications.

The words of the new book are there not to
transmit certain mental images with a certain
intention.

They are there to form, together with other
signs, a space time sequence that we identify
with the name 'book'.
                                    11.

Telfer Stokes and Helen Douglas in their book "Chinese
Whispers", solve the problem of integrating words and images by
giving words object status. The phrases "turn over a new leaf"
and "life is an open book" exist in the pictures themselves.
The artists also play with the impage of a bread bin labelled
'bread' so that as the camera closes in the word fills up the page
until only the exhortation "READ" remains visible. In all
these cases, however, the words are embedded in the image. They
do not float on the surface of the page. Stoke's books are full
of brilliant visual anecdotes which exist as separate entities
in the volume but which refer to, or depend upon the book form
time and tim again. There is a great sense of progression through
those books, as well as movement into and out of the page as the
camera pulls away or moves in.

Stokes, particularly when working with Douglas, has amply
demonstrated the capacity of the book to convey complex visual
narratives. These sequences amount to a totally new form of
visual poetry which has more affinities with a cut and edited film
frozen into the pages than with traditional book content.
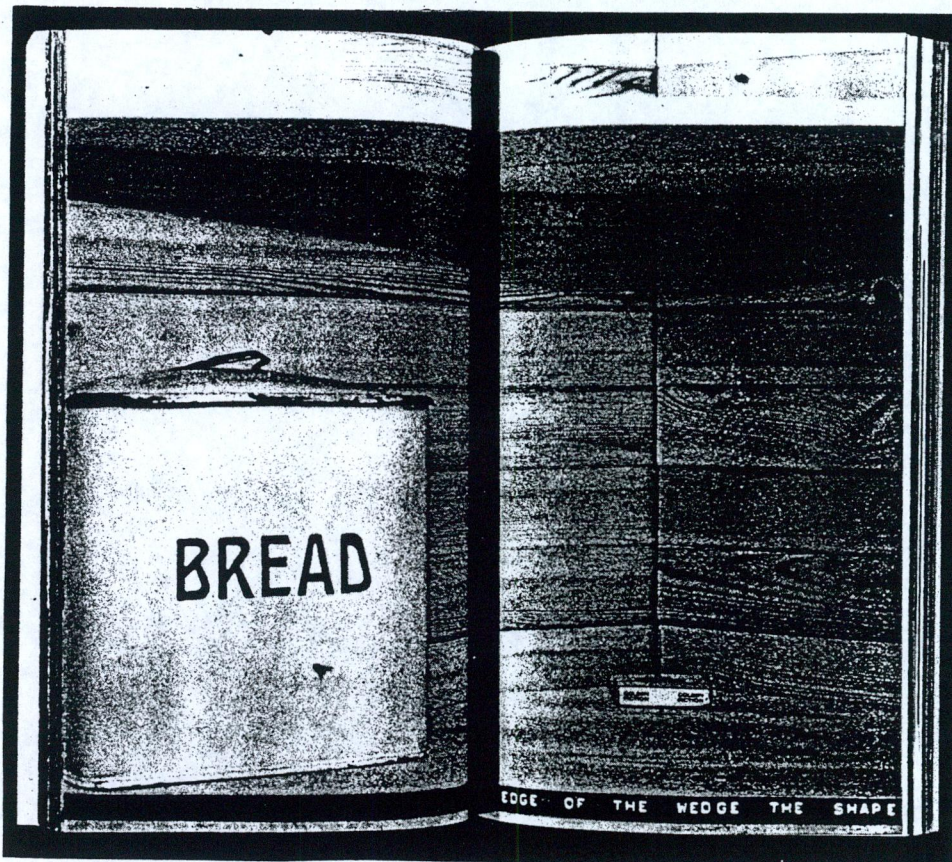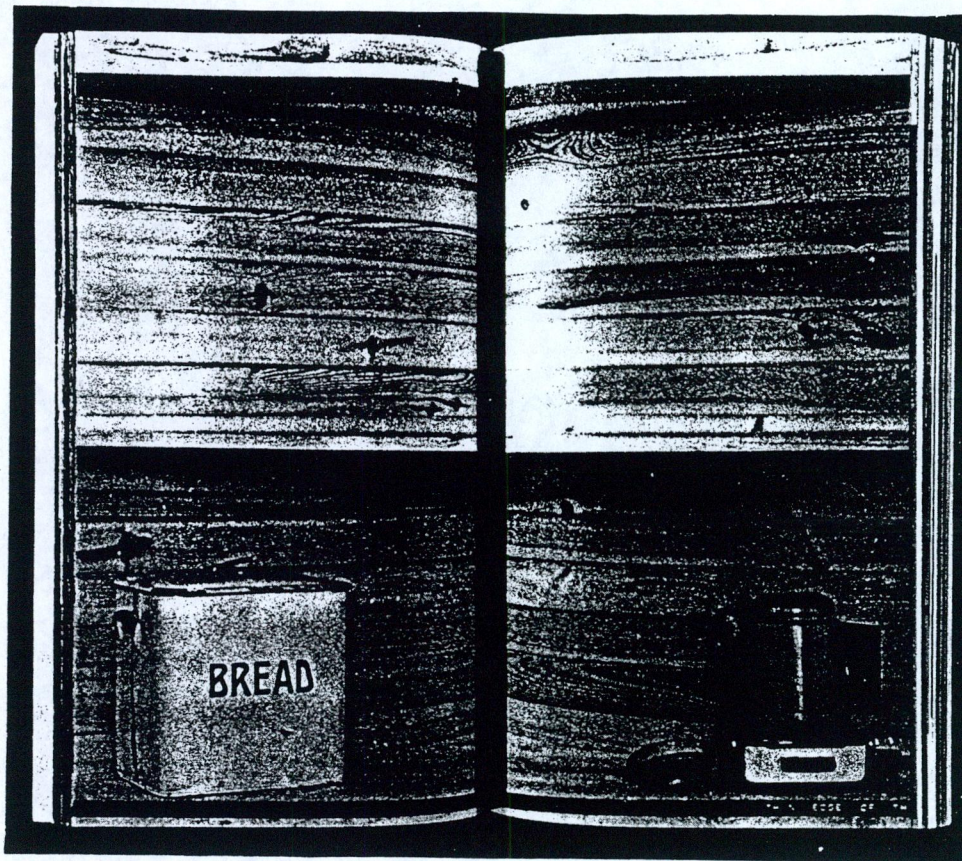
Telfer Stokes and Helen Douglas, *Chinese Whispers*, 1976 (pp. 60, 61).

Figure 8.
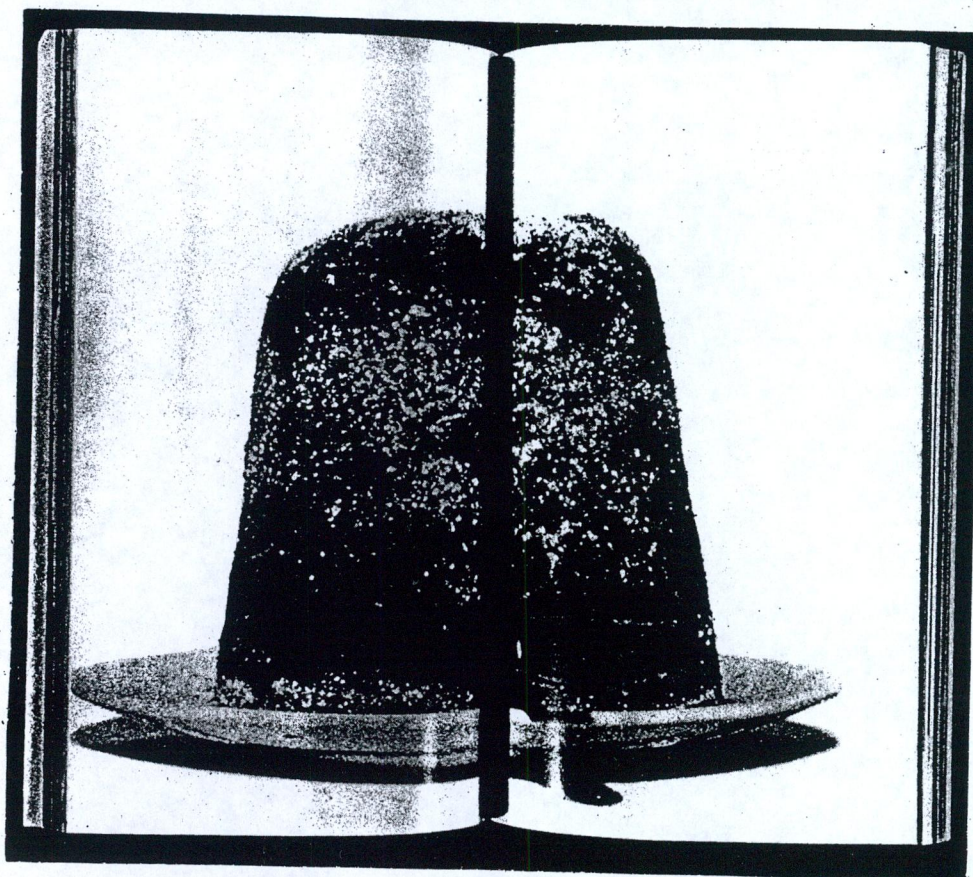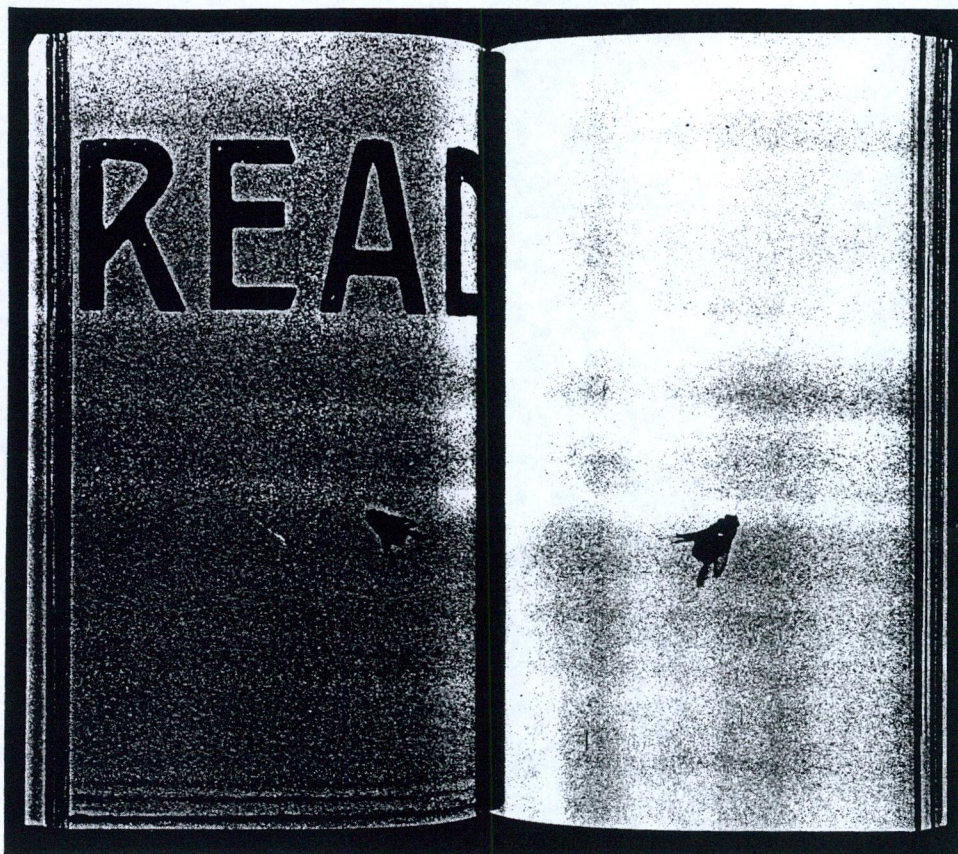
3.5 **HYPERTEXT**

Read this text:

PERHAPS
BOOKS ARE NOT ONLY
AS THEY APPEAR

Once, about ten years ago, I tried to find out. I took Ulises Carrión's **text** The New art of Making Books *which a friend had translated into Czech, and made it into a* **book**. *I typed the text on single sheets of paper, a sentence or a paragraph per page, and* **bound** *the* **pages** *in hard* **covers**. *I then lent this one and only copy of the book to a friend, and asked him not to return it to me but* **to use** *it as if it was his and to pass it on to whoever might like* **to read** *it. The book was changing hands quickly. Occasionally, it would return to me and I would find it had changed. There were traces of its being used among the pages – somebody had underlined a word or two, another had left a tramway ticket in to mark a page, a page was torn . . . Next time somebody would reflect on the underlined passage with a note scribbled in the margin, and somebody else would respond to that note (this time writing his argument on a little card). Gradually, a sort of continuous dialogue between* **the book and its readers** *developed. Every new mark or reader's comment changed the book, and the book in turn presented a 'different story' to the next reader. This dialogue was taking place both in the abstract space of the text and in the real space of the book. The dialogue might still be going on – or is it still* **the same one***?*
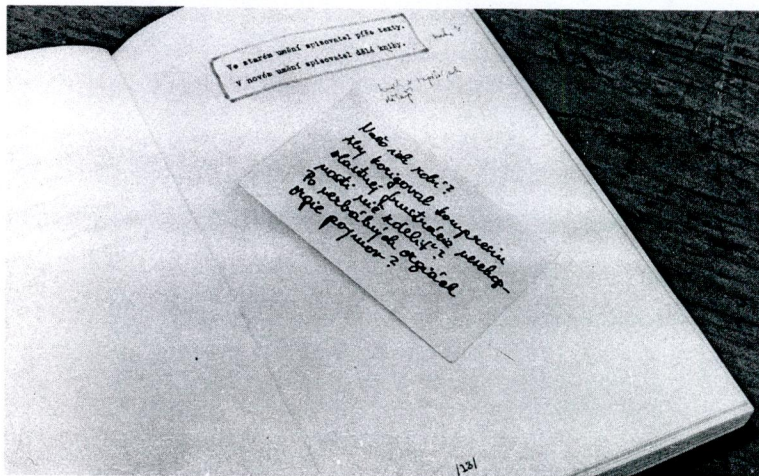
Pavel Büchler's
"Book"
photographed
c. 1978

This is an extraordinarily astute manipulation of the book by an artist who, it turns out, had pre-emptively discovered the directions in which the book was to take in contemporary publishing. The "electronic book".

It is possible to identify the historical developments in writing space and the book with parallel developments in the way we think about and understand the world about us.

> The writing space becomes a metaphor,
> literate cultures root metaphor for
> the human mind. 8.

For example, the medieval codex was a forum for discussion and interpretation as successive scribes added their contributions to the texts they were copying. The codex therefore invokes a pliable pluralistic universe. Since the invention of print, however, the writing space offers a linear sequential and unified writing and reading experience and encourages us to try to envisage the world in the same way.

The "electronic" book as envisaged by Jay David Bolter in his book "Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext and the History of Writing" is based on the idea of the "Hypertext".

Hypertext derives partly from what is known as "footnoting" the process of elaborating on particular ideas contained in the main body of the text.

What we have to imagine in Hypertext is a text so rich in footnotes, and footnotes about footnotes that there is no longer a sinle main argument and the process of reading becomes an active meandering in various directions through the text. In such a book

> The reader calls forth his or her own
> text out of the network, and each such
> text belongs to one reader and one
> particular act of reading. 8.

The 'author' then becomes the person who constructs this network of possible linkages, but it is in the nature of the system that he or she will never be able to know exactly which book any particular reader will read.

This has throwbacks to writers such as James Joyce and
Jorge Luis Borges who tried to modify the writing space of print
in order to make it possible for the non-sequential networked
nature of experience to be communicated within its constraints.
James Joyce is in fact cited many times in post-structuralist
theory, as being a model on which to build a new theory of
'writing'.

This reference to post-structuralism is more than a passing
one. The resemblance of the reading process initiated by
Hypertext to that of intertextuality is no accident.

The electronic book presupposes interaction, creating a new
sense of what it means to be a reader, by diffusing the concept
of authorship to all users of the system. The distinction
between author and reader blurs further as readers actively
intervene in the text adding to,subtracing from and modifying it
from their own keyboards. The idea of the "book" now changes
radically: it ceases to be a finite, furnished statement and
becomes instead a space where ideas are continually gathered,
reassembled and added to. This suggests the intriguing idea of
books that never stop being written,of books that change and grow,
powerful versions of the medieval codex with its layers of
commentary and additions.

Thankfully Bolter's concept does not stop at theory. As
well as hardback and softback versions of his book, he has also
managed to produce his own hypertext version of "Writing Space"
itself.

Bolter obviously has exactly the same intentions for his book
as Pavel Buchler had for his 15 years previously. Bolter
specifically invites readers to copy their modified version of the
book onto another disc and pass it on to friends. It is
conceivable, however, that, whilst Buchler's oringal text(itself,
incidently, already a borrowed text) has stayed intact after a
significant period of time. Only a small fraction of material on
the disc will have originated from Bolter's keyboard.

This whole concept of authorship should being interesting repercussions to issues of copyright. The author is no longer the originator of the book's meaning since the book has been produced in order to be reproduced and reworked by its reader.

Capitalist publishing therefore has no more right to ownership or copyright of an 'original' work, which could in fact signify the beginnings of the end of commodification of knowledge and information exchange.

All this predicted by an unassuming experiment in a little book back in 1978.

Little did this book guest but it was very probably predicting its own extinction. Or was it?
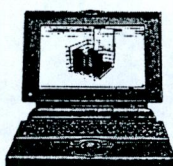
It's not a computer you need,
it's an Apple PowerBook.

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Current context

Current context icon

Encyclopedia of Mammals

File   Edit   Browse   Search   Find   Location   Help

Bats / Modern bats / Bat flight

Free Text
Structured
Edit Search
Save Search

Text

Insectivorous bats also use sense of smell to find food. Greater mouse-eared bats, serotines, noctules, and common long-eared bats, all of which are species found in Europe, find their insect prey not only in midair, but also in the insects' hiding places. However, they find these hiding insects only from short distances. Zoologist Anton Kolb determined that mouse-eared bats distinguish the scents of various species of beetles and that they select their food this way. However, the sounds produced by the insects themselves also play an important role in the bats' recognition of their favoured prey animals. Uwe Schmidt and coworkers studied the sense of smell in vampire bats. They determined that vampire bats are able to distinguish a whole series of scents. Their sense of smell is probably even better than that of mouse-eared bats

Images

Taxonomic Browser

+Insectivores (Order Insectivora)
+Elephant shrews (OrderMacroscelidea)
+Bats (Order Chiroptera)
   +General Information
   +Introduction (by Erwin Kulzer)
   +Phylogeny (by Erich Thenius)
   +ModernBats (by Erwin Kulzer & Uwe Schmidt)

Text
Images
Data
Sound
Biblio
Gloss
Index

Look Up   FirstLines   Comments   References   Data   Caption

Text window

Offers entire text of encyclopedia, in manageable 'hypertext' structure. **LookUp** function enables 'hot' words to be identified

Footer bar

Offers various annotational and hypertext tools related to the current record

Outliner window

Provides "table of contents" of resource selected. It can be alternatively structured according to taxonomic, biogeographic or thematic concepts

Hypertext link

Allows user to retrace his or her route through the encyclopedia

Page keys

Allow text to be paged forwards or backwards

The MULTIMEDIA ENCYCLOPEDIA *of* MAMMALIAN BIOLOGY

CONCLUSION

> And before a child of our
> time finds his way clear to
> opening a book, his eyes
> have been exposed to such a
> blizzard of changing
> colourfull conflicting
> letters that the chances of
> his penetrating the archaic
> stillness of the book are
> slight.

The marginalization of the book predicted by
BENJAMIN seems almost inevitable now, displaced
from its central position by the instruments of techno-
logy. Computer screens ripple with data, fax machines
spew forth messages and televisions hypnotise us
with their incessant visual babble in this, our truly
Post-Modern age.

Even Libraries, those warehouses of accumula-
ted knowledge, have turned to computers to catalogue
and index their stock. Books are linear and one diment-
ional, they have to use vast numbers of lines to carry
teir information. In short, books are innefficient.

Bargain Bookstores have sprung up on every High
Street and in every Railway Station. Ironically, it is
precisely this proliferation of inexpensive "literature"
which signals the death of the book as we know it.

Nevertheless, from the evidence we have gathered
here, it seems that the book has been saved from its
inevitable demise by Artists who have taken it upon
themselves to breath new life into this virtually
redundant form.

The question we asked at the beginning of thesis
was "What is the appeal of this outmoded medium?", and
yet it appears there is actually no definative
answer to this question.

For one thing, the "Artist's Book" resists any

attempts to slot it into any specific category.If a
particular example fits into any one category, you can
be sure it will fit into at least one more,if not all
of the others. After all, if it is impossible to define
precisely WHAT something is, then it must be virtually
impossible to understand WHY it is!

What has happened in the last Thirty years or so
is that disciplines, which up untill the mid-sixties
had existed entirely independantly of eachother, began
to move in increasingly concentric circles and to merge
with one another as barriers were broken down and qu-
estions raised as to what could or (infrequently) could
not be constituted as 'Art'.

A major influence in this breakdown, as we have seen,
has been thetheoretical advancements made in the field
of Post-Structuralism and it's practical applications
of Deconstruction and Grammatology. Not only have these
had a major effect in the area of the so called 'Fine'
arts, what we have discussed here as Post-Modern art
practices, causing artists to extend their concerns
beyond the traditional realms of artand to employ new
strategies (initiated by Conceptualism) such as text
and photography, with which to examine the way in which
the world in which we live functions, in a more open
and discursive manner,using as it were a 'visual'language.

There are two other important fields to which these
influences have been extended which are of importance
to us here. The first is Graphic Design (Typography)in
which Designers are applying a Deconstructive approach
to break apart and expose the manipulative visual
language and meaning embodied in typographic design.
And in the field of Literature, where Deconstructive
tactics were initially applied, advancements are still
being made. These revolutionary forms cannot however
be said to have come about purely from the influence of
Post-Structuralism alone,(Look back to the writings of
James Joyce and the Typographic revolutions of the early
Avant-Guard.) but it is Post-Structuralism which has
supplied them with their theoretical validation.

Whether classed as experiments in Fine Art, Literature
or design, the Artists'Book can be seen as a genuine
exploration of a mode of communication which, now that
it's usefullness has been surpassed by faster, more
efficient technologies, has become the perfect play-ground
in which to discover endless new possibilities ofor
expression and discussion. Sometimes it is the things
which are of the least use to us which provide us with
the greatest source of inspiration.

END.

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