

Readable - Visible: Reflections on the Illustrated Book

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ABSTRACT. A product of post-modernism, the avant-garde illustrated book, or the "livre détourné," shares this era's preoccupation with the absence of traditional generic distinctions and its questioning of reading conventions. This is evidenced in the indeterminacy of the text (is it to be read or to be seen?) and its relationship to illustrative elements, as well as in its shape. The "deviant" book, as exemplified by Lohr and Kristofori, has the status of an object and is thus perceived more in relation to three-dimensional artifacts than to paintings which have traditionally served as models for illustrated books. As exemplified by the Kickshaws Press productions, where typography dominates, the text is read, and unread, through the letters that give, take and lose shape as the book progresses. This tension between text and typography, which replaces drawn or painted images, reinforces the underlying significance of the text as *écriture*, thrusting it into the *mise-en-abyme* of *sui-referentiality* from which more pictorial illustration — particularly that which seconds metaphoric or symbolic interpretations in the text — gives the illusion of escape.

Un rouleau, un kakémono l'aurait rendu mieux qu'un livre, à condition de pouvoir se dérouler, ou un volume à page unique indéfiniment dépliée.

Henri Michaux, *Paix dans les brisements*

The range of the illustrated book since the beginning of the century is so vast that by examining models of this hardly codified genre, which manifests itself in popular as well as elitist forms and which more than any other artifact combines the verbal and the visual, it would be possible to trace repercussions of all 20th-century experimentation. Studies on the illustrated book usually stress documentation and historical development.¹ But once the necessary historical data had been established and the conditions of production clarified, scholars ventured into areas of interpretation and established various methods of relating text and image.² Interpretation becomes particularly challenging when its object is the modern book which has, either in its verbal or in its visual manifestation and frequently in both, reduced mimetic and even referential dimensions.

Since illustration ceases to capture action, characters or landscapes, the liberated graphic artist in his response no longer prides himself on remaining a faithful servant in search of visual equivalents to the literary text. He

asserts in his response a stronger form of mediation which enables him to proclaim his otherness and to channel the verbal into new areas. The illustrated book has to some extent remained a marginal genre. Aesthetically it would appear to suffer from a duality in representation; culturally, especially in its most ambitious manifestation: *le livre de peintre*, it suffers from a lack of accessibility, so much so that it becomes a private, if not a sequestered art form. It poses also the problem of reading in a more acute sense than any other work of art; it is composed of text and image, capable of subverting one another or at least substituting tension for harmony.

Recent book artists have gone beyond the substitutions and subversions typical of the avant-garde *livre de peintre*, by asserting as it were an uncompromising marginality. Caroline Corre, in her gallery on rue Guénégaud, entitled one of her exhibits *Le Livre Détourné*. A casual visitor may have concluded that this was a distorted way of challenging a blasé public, more or less capable of being aesthetically titilated by the seductive and mildly erotic displays featured in neighboring galleries. It so happens that Caroline Corre is by no means an isolated case. From the point of view of the theme of her exhibit, museum shows disposing of greater space have been organized in the last year or so.³ Indeed, in June 1985 Caroline Corre herself participated in a show at the Musée Pompidou. This impressive exhibit goes under the questionable title of *Le Livre d'Artiste* which the curator arbitrarily distinguishes from *le livre de peintre*: "*Oeuvre par elle-même, le livre d'artiste est né avec les avant-gardes des années 60. Les mouvements les plus divers y participent (minimal art, popart, etc.)*."⁴ The *livre détourné*, situated at the forefront of post-modern displacement is practiced in variegated ways by many French, Czech, American, German, Swiss and Japanese artists.

In an art gallery we come to see and, if we are experts, read art works; if the exhibit turns out to be books, our reading possibilities paradoxically are curtailed. When a *livre de peintre* is displayed, be it in a museum or in a gallery, we are expected to view at the speed normally devoted to art works, not literature. We are asked to focus on pages selected for us. Text and image, in such great 20th century books as Eluard and Miró's *A toute épreuve* or Lautréamont and Dali's *Chants de Maldoror* provide a context which subordinates our perusal to the illustration and situates the text exclusively into that context, as spatial or typographical units.⁵ In the postmodern era the graphic and the verbal can of course encroach more readily on each other's territory. The illustrated book, whether in its conventional or avant-garde format, is by no means the only art form combining word and image, and displaying by provocative means transgressions rather than correspondences or neutral differences. Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg among others, in their legible or illegible canvases, suggest pages in books.⁶

Le livre détourné by simultaneously operating through visual and verbal signs problematizes legibility.⁷ It is an artifact which assumes the appearance of a book or a series of pages and whose function has been deviated or displaced, but differs of course from those old book bindings transformed by clever artisans into useful boxes. We recognize a familiar object: cover, page, binding, but we cannot "use" it as such. We are kept outside. The object prevents us from being anything but passive or puzzled observers. It eliminates active participation in regard to the "book," a participation necessary to understanding the artwork. The object in one way or other repulses us as readers, instead of seducing us or at least allowing us, according to our habit, to follow our propensity to read. Color splashes may clash with the printing or eliminate it altogether, the book may be tied or locked up in such a manner that opening it becomes an impossible act, a destructive transgression, as in the case of Helmut Lohr's *Livre objet* (Figure 1). The lines of the pages created by Nicole Morello may have been produced by the regular and mysterious passages of a family of famished bookworms or a single mole, whereby writing becomes equivalent to the destruction of matter, and in the literal as well as figurative sense of the word, a trace.⁸ These are representative cases indicating not merely that the books are illegible because we have no access to their signs or codes, but that they have ceased to be books. They are in a sense not unlike Man Ray's object entitled *Gift*. The iron studded with nails has become useless in bourgeois society as it refuses to iron out or to flatten things. It shows an aggressiveness heretofore repressed or inverted. Books we cannot possibly read, the *nec plus ultra* of undecidability, speak perhaps of a defunct servitude to the act of reading, defunct because of our own ambivalence in regard to all cultural acts in an age of nuclear crisis or because of the threat of mechanization. As René Huyghe showed some thirty years ago in his *Dialogue avec le visible*, the 20th century has gradually converted into an age where reading is diverted or dominated by seeing.⁹ The *livre détourné* produces an almost systematic clash between the book as object and its intellectual, aesthetic and cultural dimensions. It plays art against functionalism, originality against intentionality, reading against looking. It ties together the concept of the book and that of illustration or rather self-illustration.

Corre's exhibit does not limit itself to these provocative transformations, to the truly anti-art object. It does not merely spring these examples on the viewer, but makes desacralizing statements capable of reducing the arty *livre de peintre* to obsolescence and turning the niceties of printing, binding and even collecting upside down. Many of Corre's books are boxes, e.g. Lohr's black box in which he encloses under glass and at a distance from the would-be reader an album and a manuscript. These lofty forms, so

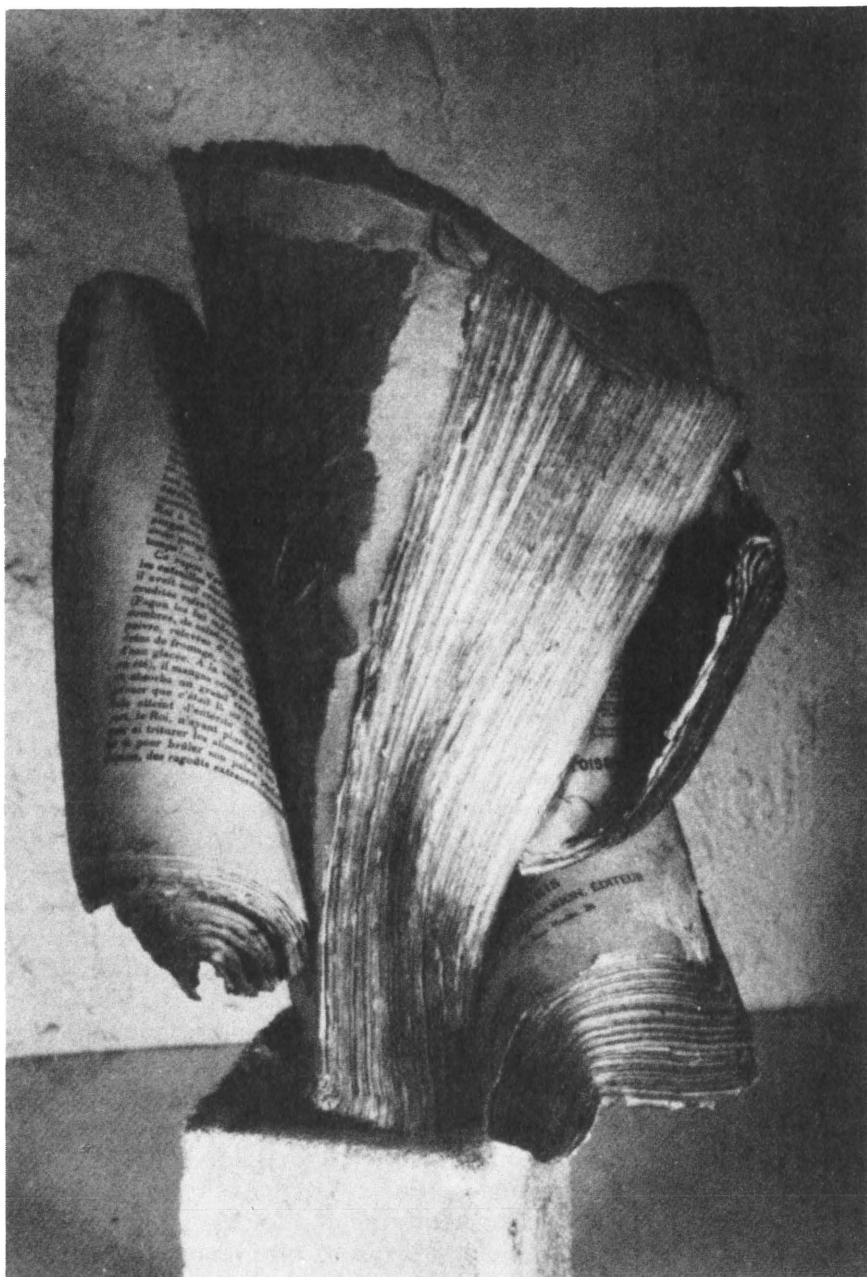


Figure 1. Helmut Lohr, *Livre-objet* (n.d.).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

representative of book art with its claim to individuality and originality have in this box been radically transformed. We as viewers are provided with a double peep show since the glass pane suggests an exhibit of doubtful value in an artshow while the cutting open of a section of the cover gives a privileged view of a document. However, visibility leads away from legibility. The open book, exposed and framed (which prevents us from turning its pages) constitutes a visual representation and its transformation into a mere essence, the visibility of the nonbook.

We can consider Lohr's box a devaluation of the illustrated book which normally requires of the reader a deciphering act capable of interrelating, if not integrating, "discourse and "figure," where the aesthetic and cultural assumptions introduced through the visual corroborate the verbal and bring out much of its potential. It has, however, a considerable number of forerunners, beginning with Duchamp's *Green Box* and its long unread documents and many of Joseph Cornell's boxes. The latter did not consciously replace or modify the illustrated book by creating boxes such as *Les Trois mousquetaires*, but the analogy with the book cannot be denied, especially in an age which constantly stresses the important presence of the object itself.

Cornell's boxes invite us to look inside, to interpret an assortment of fragments of texts and objects and to arrange or complete whenever possible their evocative context or hints. Cornell reduces what could be termed the basic components of the illustrated book so as to encourage the viewer to recreate or restore absent parts of texts or objects. We transform what visibility offers us into an otherness consolidating in many cases distances, relevant to referentiality and memory. Jan Kristofori, who arranged little boxes seemingly lifted from an alchemist's kitchen, perpetuates and transforms Cornell's practices (Figure 2). He participated in the Corre show, but the Flatbush artist, although he uses text and even illustrated texts from such famous works as *Paul et Virginie*, segmenting them, turning them into lining, may appear somewhat out of place in the present context for he does not truly subvert them, but restores them to our memory and preserves them as relics.¹⁰ By the distance he imposes upon the viewer in regard to the object, by the modest size of the printed material, by its signs of erosion and its mutilation by means of scissors, Cornell requires that we modify our conventional act of reading, but unlike Kristofori he does not indicate that cultural progressions or aberrations have fostered such requirements.

There are many *livres détournés* which function both as *livres-objets* (they require that we view them as statues or collages) and as books (they invite us to read them in their own deviant way). A rather appropriate example is provided by Janko Stanovnik's *Les Manoeuvres de Barba Morroko*.¹¹ The book opens like a screen, but we can also turn the pages. Its

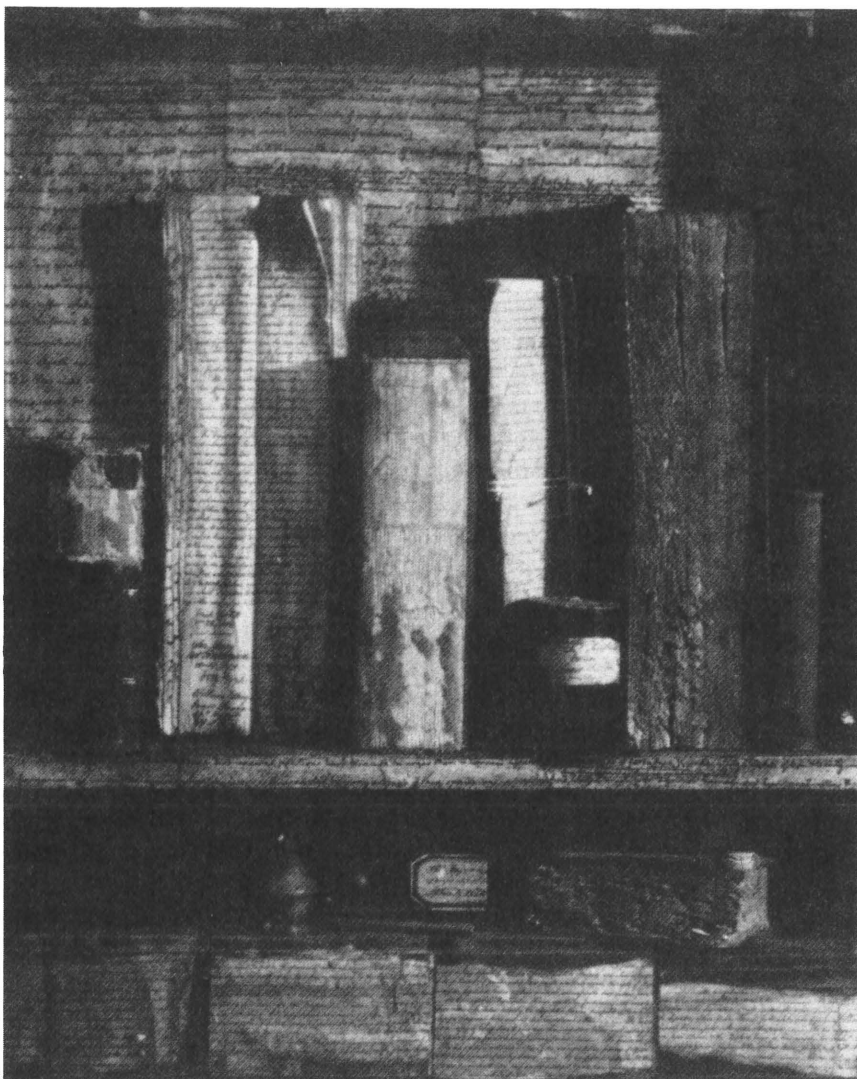


Figure 2. Jan Kristofori, *Livre-objet* (n.d.).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

text is composed of undecipherable graphic scenes suggesting dynamic action and ever revolving processes. Each page is composed of four sub-texts which we can read in a conventional left to right, up to down motion. But another reading is equally possible; decomposing the text into four horizontal sections we would encounter other rhythms, other speeds, other

continuities and ruptures. Both pages are covered by what are simultaneously graphic and verbal signs, but which preclude meaning or tangible codes in either of these languages. Perhaps Morroko aspired to read on a level where verbal and visual, beyond the limits of referentiality, have attained a common denominator.

An untitled volume published by the Kickshaws press happily provides clearly formulated statements concerning recent manipulations and experiments in book illustration: "Kickshaws books are entirely or largely hand made. Illustrations and text are printed by the artist and author from lino or metal cuts and handset type, and the books are also bound by hand."¹² Kickshaws books draw our attention to the importance of their craft rather than to their relation to more popular forms of culture. It seems an enterprise for the happy few. The untitled work by John Crombie and Sheila Bourne presents itself as an elegantly shaped volume. The title might of course be *Kickshaws*, in which case the volume would have simultaneously published and entitled itself! Its lack of title challenges a key tradition both of art and literature as the book remains nameless, almost genreless. The producers' names are introduced in such a modest and unobtrusive way that the work borders on anonymity and non-existence. The cover page, which almost denies its own function, displays a heap of jumbled letters and only the collaboration between John Crombie and Sheila Bourne clearly stands out despite the fact that the nature of their respective contribution remains unknown (Figure 3).¹³ The book not only challenges differentiation between illustrator and author, but might even eliminate any distinction between text and image. Conversely, there are clear implications that text and image have generated one another according to postmodern canons.

Nor can we know which came first: text or image. In fact, this basic question regarding illustrated books may be irrelevant in this instance, for we deal with a truly simultaneous production where precedents seem to be even less of an issue than in *Les Malheurs des immortels*, jointly wrought by Eluard and Ernst.¹⁴ Let us first comment on what we shall at least provisionally call the text, but without in any way suggesting that the book originated from it, for actually the opposite origin may make more sense. The text is possibly the less debatable part in so far as the imagery, if we can define it as such, consists entirely of letters, a fact that problematizes the classification of the work as an illustrated book. Moreover, the text by materializing as image or the image by materializing as text defies the very act of reading. Starting with page 3, the text emerges line by line each time we turn a leaf (Figure 4). Authority thus lapses into its etymological meaning of increment. Written in the first person, it is the autobiography of Miles Grimshaw, almost homonymous with Kickshaw, beginning with

the articulation of his first sounds as he comes into this world, continuing until he is nothing more than a little m. He gives a precise account of his childhood, family, career and authorial ambitions. The autobiography, told in a single long paragraph, in one protracted breath, avoids waste motion, flashbacks, hesitations. But the straightforward text has its most revealing discontinuities which tell us that matters are far less direct than they appear.

Every now and then the typography changes; at the same time the first person narrative shifts to a third person statement. This change of perspective manifests itself in the move from the I to a publicly named person or persons such as Mr. & Mrs. Miles Grimshaw, which means that a confession has become indistinguishable from a public declaration. Public pronouncement undercuts the confession; and the emotional post-romantic voice of the child-father-lover-poet is superseded and displaced by whatever happy occasion requires an announcement, for the prose describing or summarizing the trials and tribulations of Miles remains highly ironic throughout. Confessional literature which normally dallies though hundreds of self-indulgent pages here rushes by at computerized speeds. Through concision, which makes schooling, marriage, divorce almost simultaneous, the text produces a subversive reduction of a certain type of fiction outmoded in the context of postmodernism and thus it serves to deviate and displace the literary genre which it exemplifies. As we read the linear and monolithic narrative, it seems to split open for the speed imposed from the outside runs contrary to the inner need of the narrator as well as the convention of the text he would be prone to write. It rushes by; it grows from a jumbled nothingness with an impeccable mechanical regularity inimical to the autobiographic genre.

But the growth of the text within the same paragraph imposes its limits. The typewriter, or for that matter the computer, which normally does not step out of its linear efficiency, produces one line at a time. In fact, the text hints at a storehouse always readily available at the push of a button. The interspersed announcements — happy or sad family occasions — equate ready-made words with ready-made printing. The text exemplifies not only a certain type of novel which suffers a cultural displacement, but provides a causality which would indicate a naïve and stubborn adherence to values and habits, artistic and bourgeois, without taking into account changing contexts. The voice of the speaker, which we hear through a screen darkly, is interrupted now and again by what threatens an irremedi-

Figure 3. John Crombie and Sheila Bourne: cover page of untitled work published at Kickshaws Press (Paris, 1983).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

done to pace and write to my heart's content. Some days my hand was quite aching by the time she returned, she had only to take it in her own two and tenderly squeeze to bring tears into my eyes. Other days I'd spend more time just crumpling sheets into little balls, for hours afterwards they creaked and squeaked, easing their creases. Slowly, though, the tiny pile mounted, until the great stone paper-weight ceased to look quite so improbable atop it. However, by the time the first ten chapters were written it was clear to me that not the twenty originally planned but at least thirtz ekapbrs akæm&x oqiuplvyse&qm blblahBlœxz&ooqy *EMMA & MILES GRIMSHAW ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THE BIRTH OF A SON GILES* for weeks after the happy event I was still thrusting Havanas into the breast pockets of chance acquaintances!



able halt of operation: the typo or maybe a glitch. Every now and then, the wrong keys have been touched; the expert typist persists; he/she never notices any errors and presents the reader with several lines, illegible because all the letters have been displaced on the keyboard. Thus we face the first type of illegibility. The typos play a significant part. They always precede an announcement so that the latter may result from the malfunctioning of the typing or the machine: the text gets out of joint. The machine age hygienically flaunts its flaws. Wrong letters or false keys appear with such regularity that they equate the official and private text, the error and the intended meaning.

The narrator-poet was not born with a typewriter or computer screen. He has indeed all the shortcomings of a writer who must eternally struggle with pencil and paper. In fact, he was endowed with large ears, behind which at an early age he could store pencils: the modern equivalent of being watched over by a muse. Writing for him was an imperative, almost from birth. His room littered with crumpled balls of paper points toward the infinite reduction of his work as well as his struggle with idiom if not with form. He writes in rimed sestinas, proving his allegiance to the most dignified traditions of literature. He let a persuasive secretary take charge of typing his manuscript and completely lost contact with it as it departed for publication. The text shifted away from its relation with the muse. It ceased to be the immediate transcription of a genuinely lived experience expressed in naïve, tearful clichés: a melodramatic voice inherited from dime stores, tearjerkers and Hollywood movies which have long since overhauled the poetic manifestations of romantics and post-romantics alike. Moreover, as Miles aligns plays, novels and poems, all literary genres collapse by turning into non-literature. Ironically, the narrator makes up for the seeming lack of title by painstakingly informing us of the titles of the books he himself writes. Titles are inside the book, not outside.

So much for the text. Now let us turn to the other part of the lettering, the part we are tempted to consider illustration. Unaligned, jumbled letters, letters shown in what seems to be a bag, precede the appearance of the organized script. The first page presents nothing but huge quantities of letters stuffed in an elliptic if not phallic shaped container. This presents the first and strongest challenge to the reader: the denial of a sense of orientation. The upper part of the page is occupied by an empty white space, a space about which Mallarmé theorized, to which he aspired, which caused him anguish from a metaphysical as well as an aesthetic point of view. In the Crombie-Bourne book the blank space is gradually eliminated by the

Figure 4. Crombie-Bourne (no pagination).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

waxing text. The whiteness of the page is explicitly made functional. The letters in the container are recognizable, tossed about in many directions, often overlapping. Up and down, right and left, the fundamental sense of orientation becomes irrelevant. We have no way of separating or assembling them. We depend on the space between letters to decipher them; its absence makes us inoperative as readers and whatever way we may turn the book we encounter an overabundance of letters which defy readability, because they move in wrong directions from the vantage point of the surrounding text. They are cut off by others before the partial identity of the word can emerge. We are frustrated by our inability to relate our own familiar alphabet which assumes all the more strength as we see our mental faculties diminish in front of this completely dismantled jigsaw puzzle. The letters do not lie flat on the page where we would normally see them from the perspective and distance to which we are accustomed. The act of reading has become impossible.

This overwhelming obstacle is further enhanced as the letters in the bag are endowed with threatening vitality. They stubbornly refuse to constitute textuality. They simply are, they reject verbal subordination. All letters of this alphabet remain intact, but their relation is totally subverted because the reader must depend upon combinations foreign to textuality. The heap of words reminds us of Claes Oldenburg's *Alphabet* with its multiple letters squeezed into a plastic popsickle. It also has affinities with Ionesco's overcrowding of the world by both words and objects. The postmodern reader is a disturbed audience in a dual sense. Alienation is exemplified by the act of reading — at once its cause and its effect.

The cover serves warning that we are in a world of *livres détournés*; it entices us to read while preventing us from doing so. Gradually, as we have seen, if we patiently turn the pages instead of being discouraged by our initial defeat, a legible text will progressively materialize. The juxtaposition of readability and unreadability remains enigmatic. The bag holds in check a dangerous chaos eager to move in unpredictable directions. Nonetheless, this confined and firmly contained menace never invades but merely contrasts with the perfectly aligned, systematic text whose progression is imposed from without. The edges of the bag provide a cutting line where the visibility of the letters ends and shifts into invisibility. The reader moves from illegibility to an invisibility which could at best prolong it.¹⁵ If we turn the pages, the bag of chaotic letters diminishes gradually as the well aligned, well ordered lettering increases. The shape of the container changes, flattens itself, tends toward wavy and ultimately

Figure 5. Crombie-Bourne (no pagination).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

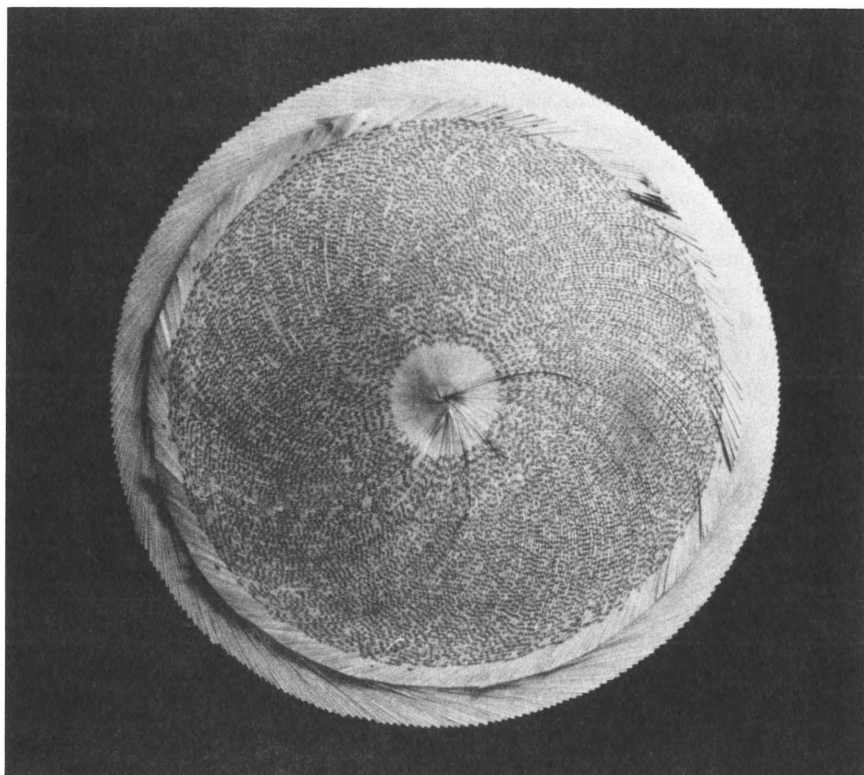


Figure 6. Helmut Lohr, *Telephone Book Circle* (1982).
Courtesy Galerie Caroline Corre, Paris.

zigzagging lines while asserting its separation as well as its difference from the text (Figure 5). The bag full of letters has suggestive outlines: a hand, a ball of paper, a penis, a womb, a truncated glob always slightly distorted and gradually pressed out of shape.

Taken as a whole, Mr. Grimshaw's autobiography has of course affinities with other postmodern, hybrid enterprises. We have noticed the importance of mechanization in this handcrafted work of art together with the undecipherable bag of words, both of them pertaining to various experimental trades in the visual arts, especially those where the verbal and the visual intermix. A palm-shaped figure circumscribed and filled by letters has certain features of the modernistic *calligramme*. As we thumb through the pages we see a succession of calligrammatic figures instead of a single shape. But even on the very first page the words are not constellated in order to outline the physical appearance of the object. The *calligramme* invites a reading ordered not by a linear process but by the spatial contours

of the object; it literally shapes our reading as it attempts to collapse the verbal and the visual. Since the form of the *calligramme* strongly upheld by the form itself promises legibility, the undecipherability of the Crombie-Bourne book would seem to eschew such norms.

Concrete poetry, which insists on the role of the letter rather than of the word, has been rigorously defined by theoreticians such as Bense, Gomringer, Garnier, and Mary Ellen Solt.¹⁶ The range of this poetry is broad; it abandons the mimetic element of the *calligramme*; it undercuts referentiality as much as possible in asserting the concreteness of language itself, yet it also conceptualizes it strongly. It suggests potentials by building visual blocks with letters that usually proclaim their identity through line, shape and constellated patterns. Concrete poetry diminishes the specifically verbal quality of the letters by overdetermining their visibility. This provides an analogy with the cover figure of the Crombie-Bourne book (Figure 3). But whereas concrete poetry tends to stress the geometric aspect of language by the very nature of its lay-out and its spatial relationships as well as by immediately recognizable repetition, in the cover figure the relations of the letters to one another hardly foster geometric stability or dynamism, but unknown organic movements with which we become more and more familiar as we move from page to page. Our association with concrete poetry becomes somewhat flimsy as we feel the dramatic presence of inner stirrings, of wavelike impulses. The organic element so clearly displaced in the text re-emerges in the figures occupying the lower part of the pages.

The frontier between the *calligramme* and the concrete poem is not always as clearly marked. Jérôme Peignot in his book on the *calligramme* includes examples which also appear in studies on concrete poetry.¹⁷ Kriwet is eagerly welcomed by both, perhaps because he succeeded in transgressing even a minimal definition of either genre. Moreover, Caroline Corre has included him in her exhibit, and like Lohr's *Telephone Book Circle*, his volume is represented by a single page (Figure 6). In Kriwet's circular poems, which disrupt our relation to the page, letters subjected to an apparent rotation move toward collision. This tends to obliterate the individuality and the autonomy of the letter; it suppresses space between letters. Kriwet creates a language in the throes of change, a language that becomes disproportionate, for it combines stellar configurations with everyday arrangements, thus twice excluding us as readers. It demands our detachment from the motionless alphabet which it replaces by rotating patterns. Made inaccessible by its circular divisions it offers, as does the Crombie-Bourne book, an impenetrable code. Why should the circle not replace the rectangularity of the page since it is a more fundamental, a more archetypal shape? The question is raised by Kriwet and Lohr (who turns a phonebook into a wheel) and even more so by Gérard Duchêne with

his *Livre-Boule* or Sylvia Echar with her *Livre Sphérique*.¹⁸ And do the books we fail to decipher also cope with the incompatibility of the circle and square which might contribute to its obsolescence? Kriwet, Lohr, Crombie and Bourne withhold readability from the viewer by excessive accumulations of letters, by spatial disproportions. They suggest that many letters remain hidden and invisible, e.g. the open-endedness of the lower edge of the Bourne-Crombie book suggests that letters constitute an unending series. Is this illustrated book not meant to overwhelm the reader instead of luring him on to aesthetic ambiguities, mystery or paradox? The presence of both the verbal and the visual is maintained in all the examples we have provided, but they cease to function as compatible partners. We are disarmed when it comes to the fundamental act of translation, for language can be manipulated and spatial forms can in their turn lose some of their autonomy.

The illustrated book has been modified by a constant series of experiments. Its basic patterns recurred up to the 19th century, that is as long as the verbal and the visual retained their assigned space and function, confront each other on opposite pages or in horizontal juxtaposition. Illustration included both ornamental and stylized parts as well as full page interpretative plates often tending toward the painterly. They all aimed at enhancing the prestige of the text. The illustrations sought to give the visual equivalent of the words to which they were subservient. Cubist books introduced in most cases poetic texts which defied a mimetic approach. As in the paintings of Braque, Gris and Picasso, illustrations introduced multiple perspectives which produced structural analogies with the text. The relation between the printed page and graphic representation became a prime consideration. In more than one case, the spatial architecture of the text was orchestrated with that of the illustration. Cubist painters, who often introduced letters and numbers into the very structure of the work, here and there considered that the visual surface of the text was to be rewritten by them in order to be incorporated into the illustration. Visibility and readability thus assumed closer ties.

Fernand Léger's illustrations of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* provide a rather extreme example of such Cubist tendencies.¹⁹ The poem *H* emphasizes the importance of the letter both in its spatial form (parallel unending lines) and in its inherent mysteries, for it stands for an absent woman, Hortense. It points towards explosion or destruction, "hydrogène" as well as "hygiène," purification. The illustration corresponds basically to a transcription by Léger who handwrites the text; thus he joins visibility and legibility.²⁰ However, he does not by this transcription seek mimesis in merely repeating the printed word. He avoids simple linearity which would nail the word to the page. He animates his text by rhythmic curbs which compose and decompose nestlike forms. Words receive different stresses, dif-

ferent levels of concreteness which correspond to the very duality we have detected in the Rimbaldian text. Three colored panels cut across the page, sliding sometimes under, sometimes over the writing, adding to the written text a poetic dimension characteristic of painting.

In the surrealist book, artists such as Masson, Ernst and Miró asserted every form of freedom and experimentation in order to modify the relation of the written text to the graphic signs, constituting by constant transgression a domain which belongs simultaneously rather than alternatively to the visual and the verbal. Undoubtedly the most remarkable example of linking the two languages so that their barriers become almost nonexistent is Max Ernst and Iliasz's *Maximiliana*.²¹ The words and charts of an obscure astronomer are transformed into the indissociable text and images of the *livre de peintre*. Text and design present everchanging rearrangements, never repeated patterns in which verticality gradually prevails over horizontality. Ernst and Iliasz have studiously avoided the usual parallel black lines of ordinary letterpress on white paper, for they have transformed each page into a three dimensional space. Various types of discourse (scientific, poetic, biographical) are printed in always renewed spatial arrangements and typographical characters. Most pages are broken up into several juxtaposed sections: typography and etching, typography and collage, or two different types of typography, including printed characters, mysterious figures and hand-drawn letters. The pages propose graphic images even when they are primarily composed of a printed text. A secret writing bridges the gap between the visible and the invisible composed as it is of signs which simultaneously belong to visual and verbal codes. The writing which functions throughout as a visual sign creates the momentary illusion that it is decipherable, that the letters or shapes may somehow yield a meaning. On densely covered pages this visible language seems to withhold with even greater stubbornness its message. Its "écriture" transmits the language of the unknown without in any way sacrificing its enigmatic qualities. Such processes disturb our habitual reading. As alternatively we read, decode, decipher, we deviate from the accustomed manner of reading, abandon all parallelism and change our course. We read as we journey through space. The book also embraces a wide range of written or scribal artforms which invite the viewer to create other combinations and constellations. Here, as words illustrate representations which are mirrored in both text and image, the illustrated book abolishes the distinction between verbal and visual.

Do some of the problems we have raised in regard to the Crombie-Bourne book not remind us also of the *Mécrit* by Denis Roche? This famous document is composed of a preface, a declaration of cultural revolution followed by two inscriptions and six pages of text, which puts into practice revolutionary tenets. They are destined to replace poetry,

which conveys meaning, which follows set patterns, which situates itself comfortably in a stable and false cultural tradition: "alors qu'il faut, pour mieux disposer du spectacle de l'écriture, par le travers des données où s'emportent nos signes, tendre à ramener la production poétique vers son point de plus extrême *méculture*, le point zéro, à l'évidence, de la poécité."²³ Roche obviously destroys readability by disruption, discontinuity, displacement. He destroys the conventional page by transforming radically its margins and marginality. The text is composed of a center which is decentered and, in several instances, a margin which provides more text instead of a relieving border. The two interact without establishing patterns of continuity. Constant recurrence of misplaced capitalization, punctuation, intrusions of typographical signs multiply ruptures which invalidate our act of reading. Two pages of inscription in Chinese and Etruscan stress the impact of visibility as contrapuntal to legibility.

We do not claim that the Crombie-Bourne book, which also places different kinds of typography into different spatial arrangements acting against each other, is also destined to function as a document of cultural revolution.²⁴ In the Crombie-Bourne volume we witness the gradual passage from unaligned letters to aligned words. The book opens on a preliterate but not pre-linguistic stage of communication. Letters in a womb are ready to enter the world. The authors and designers of the volume seem to implant a rather conventional concept of language as it comes out by inches as though following a sort of algebraic progression. We have to look at the text beyond its spatial expansion. It moves not only from preconscious to conscious, pre-birth to birth through various stages of life, but it even comments on itself as the bag changes shape and its roundness waxes and wanes. The physical or spatial grouping of words provides an image or illustrates what the text expresses verbally.

If we consider the unorganized verbal reservoir as figure, the illustration precedes the text in this book which we labeled as the simultaneous creation of two artists. To a certain extent it becomes a pretext and as such must peter out in giving rise to the text, which repeatedly refers to the illustration, showing by various devices that one acts as a transformation of the other. Does the heap of words not give the visual image of the many paper balls that Miles threw away as unwanted, unsuccessful parts of his efforts at writing? The text is basically about the trials and tribulations from birth to death of writing. Ironically, the book, which creates a maximum of interdependency between literature and art, between text and image, which questions their autonomy, also brings about a greater separation. The word heap suggests the organic, fluctuating elements of the unconscious, whereas the incremental text shows the organized, institutionalized and reductive aspects of language. It eliminates the invisible parts of both text and image.

As the letters turn into a legible text by a double descending and ascending motion, the viewer faces an emptying out of the chaotic full-bodied language, a verbal and visual denial of its potential. By focusing meta-critically on the very problem which constitutes the illustrated book, by bringing it into a state of tension, it undercuts its status as a work of art for which it substitutes announcements and visiting cards. By problematizing again and again the act of reading, the illustrated book, as so many other genres, may have created its own *mise en abyme*, while shunting off perhaps toward a postmodern impasse.

1. W. J. Strachan, *The Artist and the Book in France*, N.Y., Wittenborn, 1969; John Harthan, *The History of the Illustrated Book*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1981.
2. Thomas Hines, "René Char and Joan Miró: *Ala santé du serpent*," *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, 1981, No. 1, pp. 44-74; Anne-Marie Christin, "Images d'un texte: Dufy illustrateur de Mallarmé", *Revue de l'Art*, 1979, No. 44, pp. 68-84; Ségolène Le Men, "Quant au livre illustré", *Revue de l'Art*, 1979, No. 44, pp. 84-104.
3. *Livres-objets*, Exposition réalisée par Caroline Corre, Paris, Bibliothèque-Discothèque Faidherbe, March, 1985; *Livres mis en scène*, Exposition organisée par le Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris, Jan. 1985; *Livres-objets*, Galerie du Centre d'Action Culturelle Pablo Neruda, Paris, Dec. 1984. In New York, Katrin Markel exposes books made by artists.
4. "A work by itself, the *livre d'artiste* was born with the 1960's avant-garde movements, among which the most diverse participated (minimal art, Pop art, etc.)." Anne Moeglin-Delcroix is curator of the exhibit and author of the catalogue. While admiring her selection, we do not agree with some of her classifications. She sees the sudden emergence in the sixties of a certain type of book originating primarily with the works of Dieter Rot. We believe that these innovative practices occurred at least sporadically much earlier. She opposes the *livre illustré* to the *Livre d'artiste*, omitting from her discussion the *livre de peintre*.
5. Paul Eluard, *A toute épreuve*, Genève, Cramer, 1958; Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Paris, Skira, 1934.
6. Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, N.Y., Abrams, 1977; Robert Rauschenberg, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, 1976; Yvon Lambert, *Cy Twombly: Catalogue raisonné des oeuvres sur papier*, Milano, Multipla Edizione, Vol. 6, 1973-76.
7. One may argue that the problematic of the *livre détourné* is inscribed in the first page of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. "Dans cette dynamique et par elle se définit une nouvelle typologie des lectures et des lecteurs. Le lecteur qui lisant ne lit pas puisque la page est détournement du livre . . .", Michel Charles, *Rhétorique de la lecture*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p. 22.

8. Claude Maillard provides another example. One of her books clamped together in the middle and open on both sides incarnates the almost inevitable secrecy of the book.
9. René Huyghe, *Dialogue avec le visible*, Paris, Flammarion, 1955.
10. Cornell used illustrations based on the Curmer edition, 1838.
11. "Achevé d'imprimer pour Pipette en décembre 1984 et tiré à 500 exemplaires".
12. John Crombie & Sheila Bourne, Paris, Kickshaws, 1983.
13. To a certain extent this volume corresponds to the definition of the *livre d'artiste* given by Moeglin-Delcroix: "Le *livre d'artiste* est, en sa totalité, conçu par un artiste à qui appartient la responsabilité de l'idée et de son exécution; l'auto-édition est d'ailleurs un phénomène fréquent." ("The *livre d'artiste* is, taken as a whole, conceived by an artist who must take responsibility for the idea and its execution; the self-publication is, anyway, a frequent phenomenon.") In *Livres d'artistes*, p. 10.
14. Paul Eluard & Max Ernst, *Les Malheurs des immortels*, Paris, Librairie Six, 1922.
15. In *Overcoated*, Paris, Kickshaws, 1982, John Crombie renders the letterpress gradually illegible by "overcoating" the text with the emerging image of a coat.
16. Cf. Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1970. Both concrete poetry and the *livre détourné* disturb accepted methods of communication, usually by avoiding the semantic aspects of language.
17. Jérôme Peignot, *Calligramme*, Paris, Chêne, 1978.
18. Sylvia Echar exposed at the Galerie Caroline Corre, and Gérard Duchêne at Pompidou.
19. Arthur Rimbaud, *Les Illuminations avec lithographies de Fernand Léger*, Lausanne, Grosclaude, 1949.
20. Renée Riese Hubert, "Graphisme poétique et poésie graphique: *Les illuminations* de Fernand Léger" in *Rimbaud maintenant*, Paris, SEDES, 1984, pp. 149-59.
21. Max Ernst & Iliasz, *Maximiliana ou l'exercice illégal de l'astronomie*, Paris, Le Degré 41, 1964. Cf. Anne Hyde Greet, "Iliasz and Max Ernst," *World Literature Today*, Winter, 1982, pp. 10-18; Renée Riese Hubert, "Max Ernst: the Displacement of the Visual and the Verbal," *New Literary History*, Spring, 1984, No. 3, pp. 575-607.
22. Denis Roche, "Le Mécrit", *Tel Quel*, No. 46, Summer, 1971.
23. *Ibid.* p. 91. Cf. Joan Brandt, "The Theory and Practice of a 'Revolutionary Text': Denis Roche's *le Mécrit*", *YFS*, No. 67, 1984, pp. 207-25.
24. John Cage's *Notations* with its variegated typography assumes both verbal and visual (as well as musical) dimensions, which play against each other.