

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTIST'S BOOK: THE TEXT AND ITS RIVALS

In this issue where critics, book artists, archivists and poets participate in defining the problematics of the modern artists's book, production and reading emerge as the key issues. Contemporary artists have modified traditional practices to such an extent that their readers are hard pressed to give a suitable definition of an illustrated book. By undergoing spatial displacements, text and image exchange or relinquish their respective identities. Many barriers have been crossed and many oppositions have disappeared, notably between handcrafted and industrial artifacts, between theoretical and creative productions, between unity and multiplicity of media. Text and image alternate, combine or wage war on one another. Their various alliances and rivalries give rise to a variety of questions discussed in this issue. Do text and image upstage or enhance each other? Does the shape of the book translate or subvert its message or meaning? Is the binding more than mere decoration and can its absence be revealing? In view of many radical changes, the artist's book assumes multiple functions: aesthetic, political, cultural and social. Frequently it provides a form of protest against either institutionalism or elitism even though it can cater only to an elite. The act of reading becomes complex, the reader, curator or librarian can no longer perform routine tasks, but must participate on another level in the creation or production of the book.

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Renée Riese Hubert, 117–137

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Rhode Island School of Design

Providence, RI 02903

Renée Riese Hubert is professor emerita at the University of California, Irvine. She publishes on Surrealism, the Book Arts, Women writers, and artists and poetry. Her last book, *Surrealism and the Book*, appeared in 1988 at the University of California Press. She is completing a study entitled *Women, Surrealism and Partnership*.

In Rainer Maria Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*, the narrator evokes a moment of extreme happiness and comfort as he sits in a Parisian Library reading Francis Jammes', "I Have a Poet." As reader, he appropriates the text. Reading has nothing to do with routine, since it substitutes itself in this particular situation for the outside world. Undoubtedly, this moment of satisfaction arises not from the text alone but from the book he holds in his hands. Although Rilke by no means refers to a volume that might qualify as an artist's book, the relation of the narrator to the book of poems can be compared to that of a bibliophile handling a *livre de peintre* (artists book with original graphics), for neither could possibly indulge in a commonplace act of reading. Such readings, marked by difference, are comparable to festive occasions and may even stand out as red-letter days capable of transfiguring day-to-day experience.

The history of the book in general and of the illustrated book in particular, as well as the semiotics of the artist's book, have in recent years given rise to important critical studies, for instance Henri-Jean Martin, Roger Chartier and Jean-Pierre Vivet's five volume *Histoire de l'Édition Française*. Gordon Ray's two volume *The Art of the French Illustrated Book*, François Chapon's *Le Peintre et le Livre*, and the Ruth and Marvin Sackner's *Archives of Concrete and Visual Poetry*. The traditional illustrated book, which originated in the Middle Ages, is the acknowledged point of departure of the modern and postmodern artist's book, whose deviations, whether friendly or aggressive, have in no way threatened the survival or indeed the multiplication of the former. Nor is it always a simple matter to distinguish the point of departure from the point of arrival. The difference between tradition and modernity would seem to arise less from changing the usual alternations of text and image than from rejecting the linear parallelism of the text and the fixed assignment of images.

The first work to enter our collection, a 1764 century edition of Pierre Corneille's theater illustrated by Hubert Gravelot, marks a high point in book illustration. However, Voltaire's running commentary together with innumerable annotations scribbled in the margins by Prémontval, an eighteenth-century philosopher living at the court of Frederick the Great, accompany the plays. The book thus consists of four components eliciting a variety of responses. Interactions of the written and the

printed word, interactions of creative and critical elements, interactions of engravings and rhymed as well as theatrical language may all pertain to the artist's book, which by its complexity bypasses simple rules, codifications and generic separations. Curiously, the Corneille-set in its uniqueness as a printed, illustrated, critical, creative and handwritten text—highlights the quandary, not to say dilemma, in which the modern artist's book has chosen to exist. Although it belongs to the electronic age to the extent of taking over such recent innovations as computer art, the modern artist's book nonetheless shows a propensity to do almost everything by hand in the manner of the craftsmen of old, from handcut fragments to the paper itself. Levi-Strauss's conception of bricolage (tinkering) can indeed apply to the artist's book.

One of the great twentieth-century publishers of *livres de peintre*, Tériade, insisted on replacing letterpress by lithographed writing. His readers can thus enjoy, among other confrontations, that of Reverdy's continuous penmanship with Picasso's incisive interventions in *Le Chant des Morts*. More recently, Tom Phillips, in his famous *A Humument*, has grafted his own illustrated text onto a Victorian novel by means of skillful appropriations and expropriations which, by blotting out or covering up parts of the earlier text, bring out astonishing new patterns. His reduced version, which is both textually and graphically new, presents the reader with a series of possible, not to say impossible, responses. But unlike the eighteenth-century edition of Corneille's theater, its layered—rather than simply juxtaposed—parts posit a substratum and form a palimpsest that can elicit only a postmodern response. The reader's conscious confrontation of the two layers provides the text with a certain physicality, almost in a geological and geographical sense. Moreover, readers remain constantly aware of the process of production, for they must follow every step in the manufacture, including etymological meaning, of the book.

This issue of *Visible Language*, *The Artist's Book: The Text and Its Rivals*, examines the eccentric and challenging nature of this book (art) form. My collaborators present definitions, examinations of particular book artists, discussion of team work in book conception and creation and examination of particular aspects of the artist's book such as computer generation, typographic manipulation

and bookbinding. Other authors take on the task of examining the “reading” of the artist’s book as multimedia, as non-book and as performance. Finally, the life of the book in exhibition and library is explored.

Taken at random, any four books discussed in the present issue—for instance, The Arion Press’s *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, the Perishable Press’s *Gabberjabb*, Steve McCaffery’s *Evoba* and Dorney’s *Le Métronome*—would obviously fail to present us with a uniform pattern of any sort. And the addition of Zelevansky’s *Case of the Burial of the Ancestors* and Drucker’s *The History of the/my Wor(ld)* are so far from clarifying the situation—so overwhelming in their variety—that any definition of an artist’s book almost becomes irrelevant. Although artist’s books and *livres de peintre* always come in limited editions, ranging from a single copy to several thousand, statistics can provide very little help in narrowing down the field. The Deguy/Dorny *Métronome* is one of eighteen copies. *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* is one of 150 copies. Such limitations in numbers occasionally give rise to the accusation of elitism, even though an easel painting is one of a kind. And we may even consider an artisanal work a protest against industrialization rather than an enticement for the wealthy. In any case, categories, whether artistic or economic, and genre classifications are not our goal. Do we really increase our knowledge when we label a volume an “artist’s book” or when we apply the term “postmodern” to Frank Gehry, Valerio Adami and John Barth?

In his “From Book to Antibook,” Harry Polkinhorn considers the problem of definition. He invokes the authority of Kostelanetz in his attempt to define the postmodern book. The need to focus on space, even in a historical sense, could validly be added to his cultural concerns because, as in painting, the Renaissance space of the book has been completely deconstructed in our time. This fundamental disturbance, while opening up new possibilities, undermines the conventions governing the production of books. Moreover, his use of the term “antibook” allows us to establish a relationship with designations such as “antinovel” and “antiplay” that emerged in the fifties. The authors set up their anti-works as a radical gesture against the literary and artistic institutionalism to which they were expected to adhere. Not only did

they create new forms and focus on new problems, but they composed texts combining theory with practice. In other words, these texts must be assessed as arising from conflicts which the authors themselves, for instance Robbe-Grillet and Ionesco, did not necessarily set out to resolve. And this same kind of lucid creativity prevails not only in the Mexican books discussed by Polkinhorn but in many of those featured in this issue.

His theories would indeed apply to the Arion Press's edition of Ashbery's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, discussed by Jessica Prinz, and the Dorny *Métronome*, or pyramid, doubly poeticized by Michel Deguy. Because the former book is round instead of rectangular, the art of typesetting and printing had to be reinvented. Circularity can have repercussions on many levels, and indeed the words "convex mirror" are a determining factor in producing the book, housed in a metal box instead of a leather or vellum binding.

But how are we to conciliate Polkinhorn's term "anti-book," made even more political by the revolutionary examples provided, with "non-book," which in Prinz's article suggests an aesthetic approach rather than opposition? Could the examples discussed by one critic serve the purposes of the other? "Antibook," while not precluding creativity, evokes a campaign against an institution, whereas "non-book" deals with the crucial question of identity. Although Prinz gives a vast number of examples—including, for instance, Broadthaers' *Embedded Letters* and Buzz Spector's *Toward a Theory of Universal Causality*—a heap of books from which destructive cultural statements burst forth in rivalry of one another, those she analyzes in detail seem to acquire a different status and perhaps even a higher set of inherent values.

By giving the book artist Andrew Hoyem the place of honor in her essay, Prinz has dealt with another, more aesthetic issue, even if she does not spell it out. Hoyem himself has repeatedly acknowledged his rapport with the *livre de peintre*, while Buzz Spector, in the example mentioned as well as in other altered books such as *Kafka* and the *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, has quite different preoccupations. For Bertrand Dorny, too, other origins must be invoked even though he produced a few years ago a fairly standard but nonetheless attractive *livre de peintre*.

The Arion Press often shows experimental daring, for instance in inviting such a radical artist as Baldessari to reveal the eternal novelty of a great eighteenth-century text, *Tristram Shandy*. Although Baldessari made use of photomontage, an art loaded with political implications, the status of the book is not questioned as it is in Spector's deviations. (The reader need only compare the Arion Press's 41 accordion panels of illustrations with the photograph of Ehrenburg's *Codex* provided by Polkinhorn to become fully aware of the problematic nature of any distinctions.)

Dorny's pyramids lead us to a different world; no special paper has been handmade for the occasion, no team of highly trained or specialized printers has been hired, and not a single engraver or binder has played a part in the procedure even though the artist himself could have functioned to perfection in both these capacities. Dorny carefully assembles his pieces of paper preempted from everyday use, rejoicing in the utilitarian origin of each one. The triangular pages held together by a plastic spiral should be viewed and even perused in several directions, making such notions as forward and backward irrelevant except for the actual reading of the poem, which follows its normal course from beginning to end. Dorny's pyramids have some elements in common with Dada books, but without submitting to chance and to polemics. Whereas the cutouts in *Le Métronome* determine textuality, the highly philosophical poet Deguy produces a verbal sequence whose concise literary rigor matches the geometrical severity of the pyramid, transforming the latter's timelessness into the measured musicality imposed by a metronome.

But the association between Deguy and Dorny has not produced a *livre de peintre* belonging in the same category as Ashbery's poem illustrated by eight American painters, each of whom has produced a single page print, for the French artist has abolished in his own imaginative way the expected confrontation between text and image. Nor is he the first and only one to do so; this particular feature has become crucial in many modern artist's books. Because the text can function as image, because writing can occupy the space usually reserved for graphics, the distinction between them breaks down and the notion

of illustration fails to apply either as a principle of interpretation or merely as an adornment. Moreover, the book need no longer adhere to a prescribed shape. Dorny's triangulation has more widespread implications than the circularity of the convex mirror, for it has not been initiated by a literary feature, not even by Hegel's cryptic pyramid. The book has been assembled so as to constitute a pyramid which can vary its shape by folding itself back to two-dimensional flatness. Dorny, a sculptor, produces books comparable to mobile statues. But to be fully appreciated, their mobility requires the intervention of the viewer/reader's fingers.

Hoyem and Dorny not only produce radically different artist's books but they induce us to review carefully any concepts concerning collaboration that we may have previously entertained. Illustrated books, artist's books, *livres de peintre*, by combining in various ways text and image, usually result from collaborative efforts. As Andrew Hoyem explains, artists and craftsmen, whose signatures may be included in the final product, actively participate in the making of the book. In a publishing house such as the Arion Press, the team varies because for each text a new illustrator is selected and new conditions are established through negotiation. Dorny, on the contrary, always works with a single poet chosen for the occasion: for example, Jean Tardieu, Michel Butor, Bernard Noël, William Jay Smith or Kenneth Patchen. If we think of Dorny as a visual artist, he would probably have left the selection of the text to others, but if we consider him primarily a book artist, then his selection of a poet appears rather typical. As Deguy points out in his article, the writer does not follow usual procedures by providing a finished poem to an illustrator, instead, Dorny prompts the poetic creation. He projects the visual aspects of the potential poem that the writer then actualizes in verbal terms. By locating Hoyem and Dorny within the same section of this issue, I have sought not so much to show different approaches to the book art as to highlight antithetical conceptions of collaboration. Teamwork, so essential in the making of books, can become, as demonstrated by Hoyem, an association with assigned functions or, as Deguy has shown, a cultivated attunement of artistic temperaments as well as a deliberate reduction of the barriers separating visual from verbal creativity.

Seen in this light, the ideal artist's book would be that of a single creator capable of compounding the accomplishments of writer, painter, graphic artist, printer, binder, publisher: William Blake. A few postmodern book artists have emulated Blake's achievement by taking a few short-cuts and short-circuiting the establishment, for instance Sauzé in *Le Livre Ficelé* or Duchêne in his *Livres Boules*. It takes a single artist to produce these objects made of printed paper which actually bars our access to reading, to turn the printed text up with a rope or roll it into little balls. These works made by a single artist have also been called *livres objets*, as they establish a dialectics between their bookish qualities and those belonging to objects or sculpture. Such creations would qualify for Prinz's "non-book," especially those by Broadthaers mentioned in her article. In fact, the wide range of such books in Europe has given rise to several exhibits organized by Caroline Corre under the title of *livres détournés* or *livres condamnés*, (deviant books or condemned books) their main goal being the problematization of reading as a fundamental cultural act. Probably one of the most powerful examples of an unreadable or deviant book, a book functioning as an object, a book created by a single artist, is Kiefer's *Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen*. Pages can be turned but to no avail, for the text itself has been cremated by incinerating the pages to a uniform blackness. The demise of the book corresponds to the death of our culture.

The accomplishments of Steve McCaffery have led Marjorie Perloff to examine the question of the text and its rivals in still another light. McCaffery's books, usually paperbacks issued by Canadian publishers under the heading of poetry, have also been labeled anti-texts. A practitioner, at least in his earlier stages of concrete poetry, and later of prose poems, he has also produced aphorisms reminiscent, in their gnomic brilliance, of René Char's. Perloff makes a strong case for his achievements as a book artist, clearly showing the relevance of his book artistry to his poetry. Above all, he experiments with language on several levels, which include semantics, graphics, phonetics, and logic or rhetoric. His typographical audacities, his creation of collages, are as much a feature of his poetic universe as his overt or hidden critical and philosophical discursiveness. He reverses even more aggressively than Hamady or Zelevansky the cultural

division between highbrow and lowbrow. We have already commented on the self-awareness of other book artists discussed in this issue, but unlike McCaffery, they refrain from creating a critical system where language subverts its conventional, everyday functions and, even more, its poetic status. McCaffery's art is a response to both Wittgenstein and Derrida. The very questioning of literary assumptions by means of multiple borrowings makes McCaffery's recourse to the artist's book almost inevitable.

Johanna Drucker is essentially the only person involved in producing a quite different kind of artist's book based primarily on typographical experimentation: *History of the/my Wor(ld)*. From her comments on the typographic manipulation of poetry, we discover that radical experimentation has rarely been sustained throughout an entire volume and that Mallarmé's theory and practice in such matters has not really been surpassed. The strongest example Drucker provides is Ilia Zdanevich's *Ledentu*. Concerned with the immediate typographic integration of poetic activity, she shows how Zdanevich's visual audacities, provoked by a preexisting text, function mainly as transcriptions and therefore can hardly generate linguistic innovation. Although the end product and the methodology may be radically different, the goal of simultaneous visual and verbal production undertaken by Drucker has much in common with Dorny's pyramids, conceived as visual/verbal fusions. A typographic experiment more recent than those discussed by Drucker is conducted in the German artist Helmut Löhrr's *Visual Poetry*, which may, in spite of its title, be read as a book. Löhrr's typographical experimentation highlights poetic sequences or progressions instead of dramatizing separate poems. What Drucker praises in *Ledentu* seems eminently applicable to the German artist, who reveals the futility of directly translating the verbal into the visual or vice versa. Löhrr's typographical audacities, often comparable to verbal games, give the impression of slippages, of foldings, of an always condensing yet creative regularity forcing the reader/viewer into a constant readjustment in regard to legibility. Löhrr, who has twisted a phone book with its low-grade printed paper into a fetching circularity has, in *Visual Poetry*, endowed his letterpress pages with an extraordinary aesthetic quality which other artists might have considered incompatible with this style of "writing."

Typography plays a significant role in the book art of Walter Hamady so wittily scrutinized by Mary Lydon. But unlike Löhrr's, Hamady's books have many other ingredients. Lydon, like Deguy, stays away from standard critical methodology deemed unsuitable to penetrate into an artistic universe where our reading habits are undermined, if not completely disarmed, from the beginning. From an unexpected angle, Lydon's sprightly narrative turns into a sort of musical accompaniment, thus adding still another dimension to the verbal and visual. Toward the end of her essay, she discusses the presence of collaboration in Hamady's books: "Paradoxically after years of successful collaboration with a great variety of poets, Hamady now faces the challenge of collaborating with himself: at once the most exacting and the most indulgent of partners" (see page 151). The conflict arises, so Lydon explains, between the printer and the writer, both being Hamady—who also manages the Perishable Press, which publishes his books. While Dorny's art in its visible gestures consists in pasting multiple paper fragments, printed or unprinted, onto various colored surfaces, Hamady's bricolage relies on the most sophisticated technology. As stated in a press release,

Each Gabberjabb combines a tour de force demonstration of the possibilities of the print medium with such extra embellishments as die-cutting, rubber-stamping, perforating, blind-embossing, sewing, grommeting and collaging with tags, tickets, labels, stamps, etc.

Paul Zelevansky's *The Case for the Burial of Ancestors*, as described in *The Book Made Art* seems equally complex, consisting of ink, watercolor, graphite, and blue graphic layout pencils, rubber stamping, dry transfer lettering, and typewriter printing over paper in combination with photographs and photolitho-offset reproductions. But this does not mean that Zelevansky's and Hamady's books have much in common. For instance, they differ radically in their treatment of paper. And even when Hamady includes other artists in his enterprises, his signature becomes unmistakable, thanks to his inimitable skills and a brilliant use of parody. By multiplying adventurous techniques—by associating heretofore never combined media, by transgressing borderlines, by criticizing conventions, artistic, academic and scholarly, by borrowing texts or images from other works and "misplacing" them in unexpected contexts—Hamady reveals the most surpris-

ing features of the antibook, where creativity and criticism exploit and undermine each other. Unlike the deviations of other antibook artists whom we have mentioned, his astonishing juxtapositions with their humorous paradoxes have much in common, as Lydon has pointed out, with surrealist practice, particularly with that of Max Ernst. Moreover, Hamady makes his personal presence felt in his books while other book artists tend to remain outside their own creations. In his enterprise, aesthetic, political and social considerations function as means to attain a humanitarian goal.

There are other kinds of collaboration besides Hamady's individualistic teamwork, besides Dorny's and Deguy's, besides Hoyem's with his long-term technical associates. Collaboration can remain an issue when the computer replaces the hand, the pen or the brush. As Zelevansky points out in his article, the interaction of artists and craftsmen, of visual and verbal "producers" can be replaced by that of man and machine. This dialectical relation has, in a way, been foreseen by a number of avant-garde Frenchmen, such as Raymond Roussel and Marcel Duchamp, who invented and sometimes operated a number of *machines célibataires*. As some of you may have surmised, the creation of the artist's book hardly precludes conflicts and rivalries, and it is quite possible that muted and forgotten rivalries will forever haunt some of the books. Clashes of a more overt nature pervade the relationship between the human brain and artificial intelligence. Celibate computers are programmed to make changes, to blend or erase verbal information or images temporarily visible on the screen: pages encased in a window. Zelevansky's article, with its ironic title, "The Computer Made Me Do It," is loaded with diabolical implications. I have already mentioned the technical complexities of Zelevansky's book creations, complexities that make his confession and his reluctant assumption of responsibility in producing them all the more meaningful. Moreover, the title obliquely raises the question of "access" to one's own creation while bridging the gap between a sinful writer and his edified readers.

In addition to the artist's attitude toward conventions, the role of medium and matter in the manufacture of the books plays an important part in this issue of *Visible Language*. Walter Hamady's art can hardly be appreciated

if we fail to take into account his absolute mastery of paper. (In fact, even some of his former students can be identified by the attention they give to its manufacture.) The artist has written a volume on the subject, *Paper-making by Hand. A Book of Suspicions*. His numerous handmade papers—with their various textures, shapes, degrees of opaqueness or transparency, their extraordinary contrasts and assemblages—constitute an art in itself, which, no less than other aspects of his work, transmit messages from the very beginning of book art. Above all, they drive home the message that the book, in addition to being verbal and visual, is tactile. Paper-making, as a creative, entirely manual and never repeatable process, also constitutes a key element of the achievement of Ania Staritsky, a Russian artist active in Paris. Antoine Coron, in his *50 Livres Illustrés Depuis 1947*, states:

Peu d'illustrateurs ont eu, comme Ania Staritsky, le sens des ressources infinies du papier, le goût des pliages, des surprises qu'ils ménagent. (Few illustrators have had Ania Staritsky's feeling for the unlimited resources of paper or her taste for foldings and the surprises they can hold in store.)

Another startling publication, entitled *Mavena*, which joins together a lithograph by Miró with a poem by the publisher, Radovan Ivsic, displays floral elements and debris from ferns and cereals which had been pressed into the paper pulp before it dried. Although their characteristics are completely integrated into the paper, they nonetheless keep their vitality as divergent aspects of nature. By means of the paper, a displacement has taken place; all illustrative qualities have been subsumed, generating a dialectics between the handcrafted, the hand-pressed and the printed. A glaucous colored box, reminiscent of an aquarium, houses the book, endowing and preserving it with lifelike substances.

The cover, box or binding both extends and limits the book. Like handcrafted paper, the enclosure, by rejecting standardized sizes, textures and repetition, focuses on the materiality of the book. It has moved in recent years well beyond its protective and decorative function. Ivsic created with Toyen an unusual box for *Le Puits dans la tour*. As viewers, we face a linen-covered red enclosure with a transparent window through which we glimpse a playable game, enticing us into the world of the book.

Distracted from routine by the shape of a female anatomy with five holes into which we have to roll five marbles, we make ourselves ready for the oneiric and erotic experiences the book will eventually offer.

Such practices are not incompatible with the bindings that Anzalone and Copans discuss in their article "Covering the Text." The traditional hierarchy governing binding, illustration and text has more often than not been rejected and sometimes reversed in modern, and especially postmodern, practice. The more artists assert their freedom, the less illustrations depend on or submit to the text, so much so that in extreme cases they become, to all intents and purposes, fully autonomous. Bindings and boxes no longer play the subordinate part assigned them in the past, for they often impose a disquieting interpretation on the text even to the extent of leading the reader, as Ivsic has shown us, into voyeuristic fantasies. The impressive examples of embossed leather bindings displayed by Anzalone and Copans, some of them asserting their own metaphorical dominance at the expense of the text, unashamedly belong to the rarified world of the bibliophile. They rival in every respect the texts they enclosed, such as *livres de peintres* or limited editions with prestigious provenances.

Bookbinders, like others contributing to the art of the book, have undoubtedly achieved a high degree of sophistication as interpreters and of self-awareness as artists, but it would be difficult to associate them in any way with the trends singled out by Polkinhorn and some of the works mentioned by Prinz, since their craft involves mainly, if not exclusively, valuable books treated as investments. There is, of course, a vast gulf fixed between such bindings and even the most elaborate cloth boxes. I might mention in this connection that some of the most aggressive antibooks are altered canon books, for instance Carol Forget, *VHF. Salvation: a found printed codex (Bible)* altered with cloth ribbons. This conventionally bound book provides the battlefield for a cultural attack.

The artist's book in its multiple manifestations gains in complexity after its completion when it becomes available or accessible to the reader/viewer. Some essays in this issue discuss books that preclude reading (non-books) while others focus on volumes that are merely hermetic,

for instance certain typographical books which demand that the reader redress jumbled letters, fit reproductions into suitable contexts, and decipher incongruous collages before yielding an acceptable coherence. In their articles, both Haskell and Sayre read in this painstaking manner a single book: the first providing, we are told, about the hundredth illustration of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, while the second, almost devoid of any text, presents images that deliberately fail to provide a cohesive narrative or to function as poetic allusions, thus bringing about a breakdown of interpretive means. The juxtaposition of Haskell's and Sayre's commentaries shows that reader response, far from being universal, consists in perpetually revising strategies, at least when avant-garde books are involved. Neither Haskell nor Sayre seeks to provide the only possible reading of his "book," yet both suggest, each in his own way, that reading such works is a creative enterprise. Readers of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, familiar with its poetic ambiguities, its penetrating journey into the self, the unknown and death, may find, perhaps to their surprise, in Bezombes' loud, multicolored collages borrowed from innumerable sources, unsuspected intertextuality and parody. Far from considering the illustration an invasive reduction and a disturbing displacement, Haskell shows the necessity of bringing Baudelaire's text up to date through new media, above all through collage, a major genre in twentieth-century art.

We may, for reasons of personal taste, be unprepared for Haskell's convincing account of how the illustrations, deliberately verging now and again on kitsch, actually fit into the text. Moreover, any objections we might raise about illustrations of avant-garde artists who favor a disturbing blend of discordant media that clash with the original text would also apply to Rauschenberg's Dante illustrations, at least if they were assembled in a book. The *Inferno's* circularity becomes a crazy quilt, a non-pattern highly suitable to modern disorientation. Rauschenberg and, more recently, Tom Phillips visually elaborate a text that they take seriously so as to show its applicability to our present culture.

Henry Sayre confronts a work where text and images can no longer be sorted out. The rapport between the two is in no way comparable to the sort of relationship proposed by either Dorny or Löhr. The word "interpretation" takes

on a disturbingly different meaning, for Sayre must deal with the collapse of "discours" into "figure" capable of producing a disturbingly new kind of space. And he shows how the various components are finally reduced to one: performance, a concept that he has treated in both practical and theoretical terms in his *Postmodern Performance*. Applebroog's minimal drawings showing scenes that barely progress could be described as immobile figures, framed by a curtain, observed by a voyeuristic viewer eager to "oversee" and "overhear." Applebroog would not be the only one to qualify as a performer. Baldessari's *Telephone Book* immediately comes to mind. Sayre not only proposes a radical new way to read such performative works, but also shows to what extent he can be carried away by it. His approach by no means aspires to academic continuity, but proposes a series of lively responses. Aware of the risk of appropriating the text, he strives in many different ways toward participation.

An essential question remains: How and where can readers get hold of such books? The manifold divisions, differences, complexities and uniqueness that characterize these volumes create problems for dealers, galleries, and especially, libraries. The hybrid nature of artist's books, their alternatively semi-popular and bibliophilic propensities, mean that the potential buyer has to discover where they are stocked. Universities and museums in various ways include artist's books in their collections. The Museum of Modern Art in New York houses a rich collection of *livres de peintre* in the Print Room and also owns a more experimental avant-garde and controversial collection curated by Clive Phillpot. This kind of division also prevails in universities. The University of California at Los Angeles keeps books which can readily pass for objects in its Art Library; volumes with original signed prints in the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts; and those where, for varied reasons, the text plays the determining role in Special Collections. A similar division is followed at the University Iowa. As Timothy Shipe points out, librarians and curators face tough decisions in cataloguing and, of course, in acquisitions. The Iowa Center for the Book deals with book art as an active program separate from acquisition and cataloguing: courses in papermaking, preservation and binding are integrated into various academic programs of the University.

Among libraries, the Bibliothèque Nationale, a treasure house for rare, “precious” illustrated, fine press and other books, considers it part of its responsibility to organize major exhibits, either historical or thematic, devoted, for instance, to books involving a single author or by a single illustrator, but more often in recent years by book artists such as Guy Levis Mano and Iliazd. In spite of their versatility and openness, in spite of the fact that Antoine Coron has acquired unusually rare recent books, exposed them and described them in irreproachable catalogues, the exhibitions at the Bibliothèque Nationale remain classic by reason of the manner of their display in cases and on the wall. Everything is somehow placed at the same distance from the viewer: the book remains open so as to display its two most characteristic pages. The book’s origins are accounted for to perfection by the presence of completely relevant manuscripts and documents.

In this respect, nobody can compete with the Bibliothèque Nationale. Controversial confrontations are, of course, avoided. Book arts in this context are reserved for highly trained curators. A few years ago, Anne Moeglin-Delcroix organized an exhibit of *livres d’artistes* without treading in the least on the Bibliothèque’s collective toes, or rather fingers. Other less ambitious expositions have taken place since then, for instance an exhibit at Rouen sponsored by Michel Servièrre. Edition du F.R.A.C. de Haute—Normandie, or Harriet Watts’ exhibits at the Herzog Adolph Bibliothek in Wölfenbüttel. More ambitious and perhaps more conceptual shows were organized by Documenta in Milan and London.

The Pompidou exposition (1985) proved to be a breakthrough, first by its internationalism, for books came from many parts of the world instead of only from Paris—and then by its range: the text could take over the entire space or be dwarfed and subverted while the volume as such might look like a book or some strange object only remotely involving such staples as pages, paper, print or handwriting. Never did the text have to vie with so many rivals. With it came an ambitious program of classification: *livres de poésie concrète et visuelle*, *livres d’images*, *livres sur le livre*, *livres à manipuler*, *livres condamnés*, *livres de performances*, to mention only a few. The question whether such categories are valid in present day experimentation must

go unanswered, for to my knowledge, more than most other exhibits it included a critical evaluation of the book as representative of our cultural heritage, of our efforts to fight for its survival at the same time we contribute to its destruction. An endless game of substitutions takes place, from matter to idea, from violations in good taste to recognition of radical changes in aesthetics. By their sheer number, the examples were at once dazzling and threatening.

A few years later, Martine Saillard, an independent book artist in every sense of the word, was invited to prepare a one-woman exhibit in another section of the Pompidou museum. Her books, by their shape and pagination, look conventional enough to be stocked by standard bookstores. Recently she has often chosen well known but nonetheless revolutionary texts by such modernists as Rimbaud, Lautréamont and Stein, for whom she selected equally avant-garde visual commentators, such as Kolar, Aeschbacher and Ayme. They do not actually illustrate, but pursue the dialectics featured in the text. Her exhibition, which presents to the viewer a simultaneous reading of the entire text by displaying all pages of the book, provides a different way of moving from “discours” to “figure.” She knew how to overcome the dilemma pointed out by Timothy Shipe: in a museum, the artist’s book can only be displayed statically.

“Perhaps the hardest thing about the artist’s book is to find the right way to talk about it,” says Dick Higgins, the great practitioner and theorist of book art, in his preface to Joan Lyons’ *Artists’ Books* (page 12). The quotation sums up the endeavor of contributors to this issue who were in several instances asked not to deal with their medium in too direct a way. But there are also those who were unavailable, who could not be reached, who would have added to the illuminating interactions between articles. At the University of California Riverside, I saw an exhibit of artist’s books made by women prisoners; they were almost all very brightly colored, highly decorated and with complex cutout shapes. Of course, I had practically no access to the texts; what I could see, to my surprise, had a highly spiritual note, whereas I had looked for revolt. I had no success in finding anybody to write about the workshop from which the books came. The “writing” constituted the crux of the problem, an imposition which lay

outside a valuable project, which with the exhibition had perhaps been taken one step too far. Again we might think of Rilke's narrator.

I also contacted Michel Butor. The new novelist or anti-novelist of the fifties and sixties who has written poetic texts for some one hundred books edited in collaboration with painters. Last year, for the first time, they were all exhibited in the city of Geneva; it was not in a set of rooms at the Pompidou, but spread over several galleries. Butor has collaborated on a book with Jacques Hérold which unrolls like a Chinese silk scroll and on a book with Boni where the handwritten etched text is accompanied by three-dimensional plates. He has worked with Alechinski's dynamic sign language and has modestly meandered his text among Staritsky's multifolded, handcrafted and handcolored papers. As we have mentioned, he too worked on a pyramid with Dorny. I asked him for a few pages on the artist's book. The silence of this indefatigable animator is understandable.

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