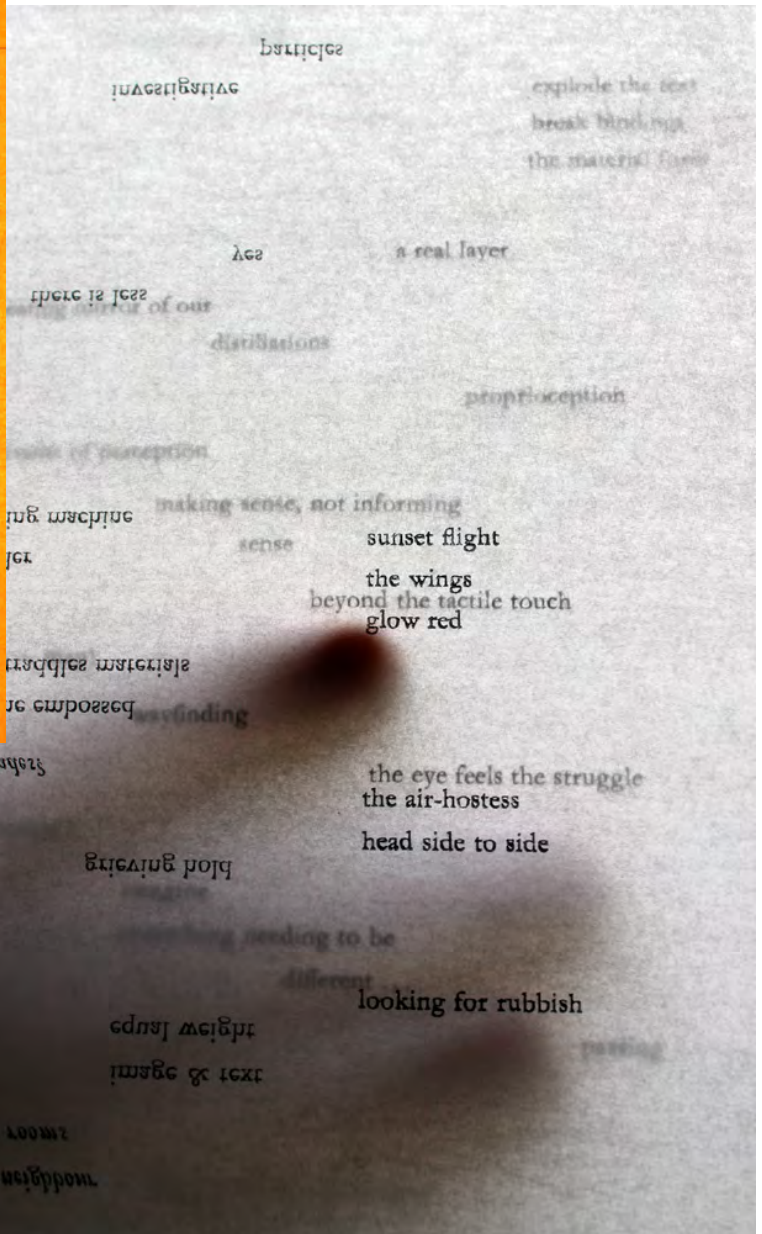
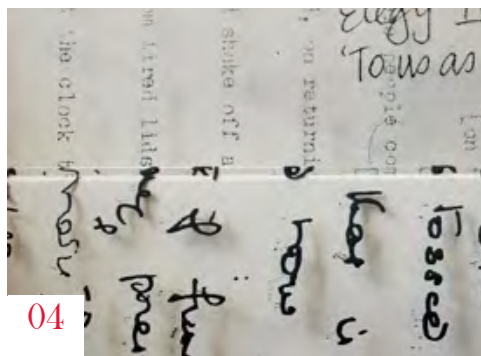


**STUDIES IN
BOOK ART**



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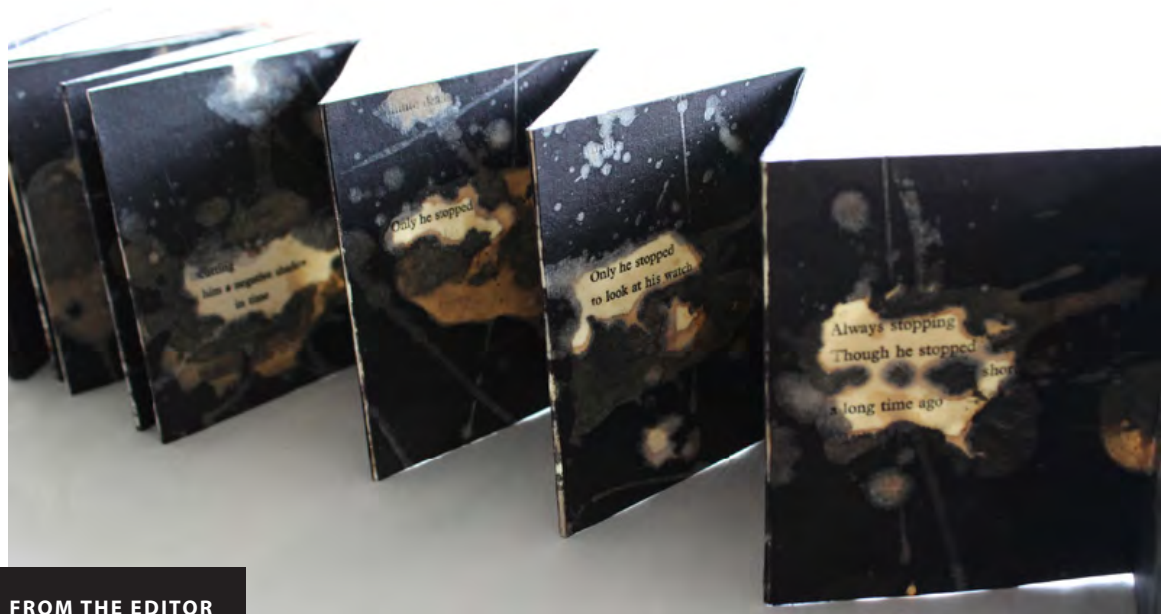


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FROM THE EDITOR

By Inge Bruggeman

WELCOME TO THE second volume of *Openings: Studies in Book Art*, the journal of the College Book Art Association (CBAA). The journal staff and editorial board are pleased to bring you this long-awaited second volume, with its diverse range of articles and reviews in the field of book and publication arts. As a complement to our regular critical and theoretical articles, this issue offers a new column, From the Maker's Perspective. More than just a review of work, this column aims to contribute to critical discussion by analyzing the impetus and ideas behind an artist's body of work while making comparisons to other artists, artistic movements, contemporary practices, philosophies, and interdisciplinary fields of study. We hope this and future issues will energize your artistic practice, stimulate your academic study, and encourage more profound and multifaceted thinking in this dynamic field.

The inquiry into the book as art, and for art, is spreading its roots deeper and wider. New discourses are cropping up outside our traditional fields of vision and need to be addressed. The areas of publishing, design, creative writing, and journalism are all

Openings

STUDIES IN
BOOK ART

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developing branches of study related to, but slightly outside, the usual discussions in the book art community. This journal seeks to pull these conversations together and to examine the continually shifting role the book plays in contemporary culture.

This issue offers a range of historical and contemporary articles from a variety of perspectives. I am reminded of the incredibly rich history we build on as makers of artists' books and the long-standing creative use of the form, both materially and conceptually, throughout history. The mix of articles presented here also has me looking forward to the book to come. Michael Thompson's recent article "The 2014 Whitney Biennial: The Book as a Medium in Contemporary Art," published in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* (June 2015), shows the rising popularity of the book as a means in artistic practice. It examines the different ways in which some form of the book is now being used by a great number of artists as a significant part of their work. The book—as material object, icon, metaphor, and social mediator—is being explored from every perspective: within contemporary art and design, within historical and contemporary writing practices, in publishing practices, in design conversations, and more. What better time for more critical writing on the subject?

Readers of *Openings: Studies in Book Art* should look forward to reading future issues with more regularity—"God willing and if the creeks don't rise," as my late mother-in-law often said. However, as always, the success of the journal depends on its readers. Your participation in submitting papers to the journal and recommending *Openings* to others as a platform for critical and theoretical investigation is greatly appreciated. ■

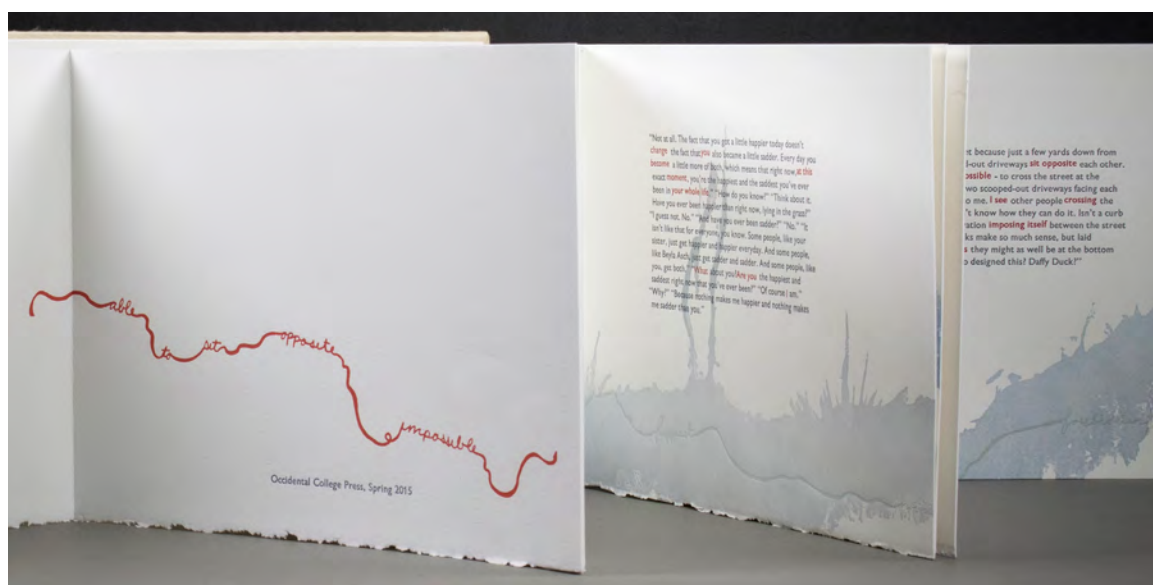


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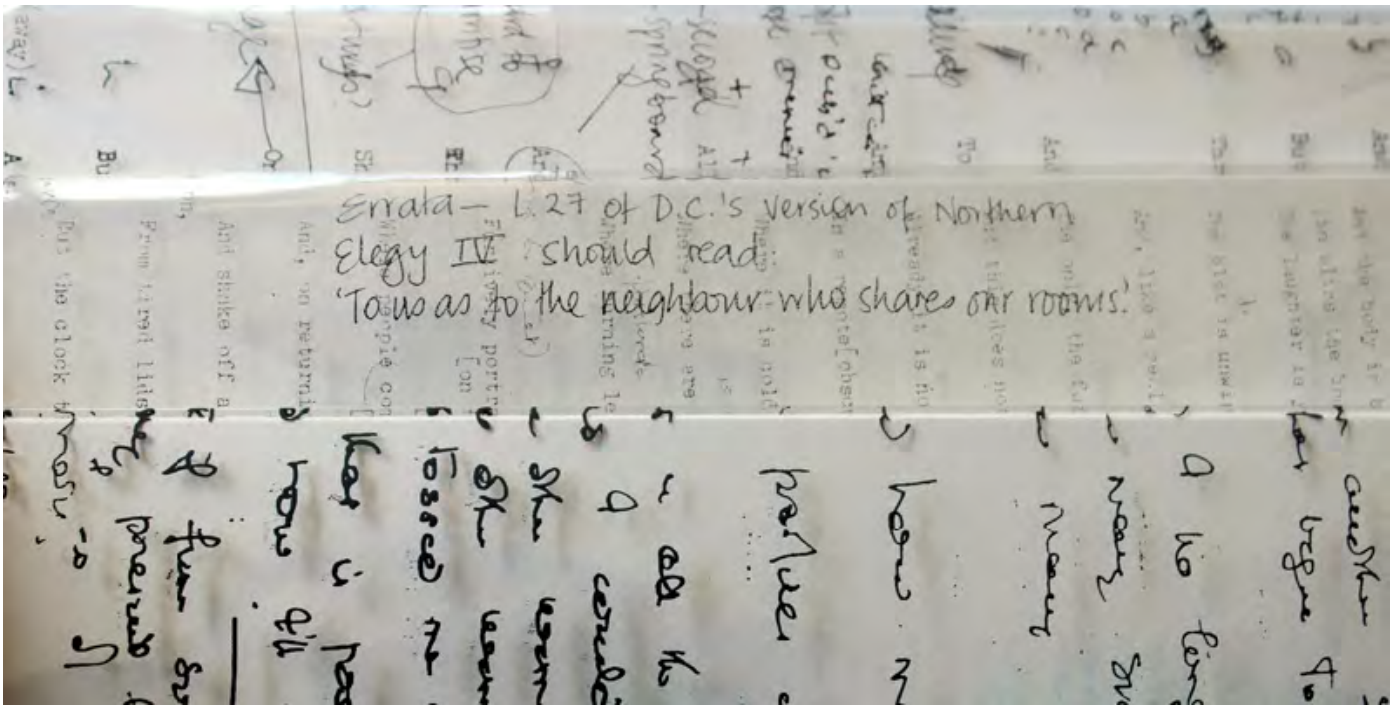


Figure 1. Caren Florance, detail from *Shared Rooms: Poems by Anna Akhmatova with translations by Natalie Staples and imitations by Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell* (2002). Artist's book: letterpress and monoprints on Zerkall Wove paper, housed in screen-printed acetate envelopes, contained in a book-cloth-covered box with a Perspex drawer. English text handset in Perpetua and Times metal type; Russian text computer set in Latinski and printed by letterpress using photopolymer plates.

TEXTUAL ACTIVITY IN THE ARTIST'S BOOK

By Caren Florance

By Caren Florance

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caren Florance is currently undertaking a creative doctorate at the University of Canberra on material poetics and the creative book. Her imprint, *Ampersand Duck*, focuses on a range of print activities that spans private press to visual art. She also teaches sessionally at the Australian National University School of Art and conducts public workshops in book arts and letterpress.

THIS ESSAY AIMS TO explore various notions of textual activity, particularly exploring a few of the ways it has meaning for my creative practice. I will start with a bit of background, move on to more theoretical approaches to the subject, and then address more practical concerns.¹

I studied English literature well before I ever thought about pursuing the making of artists' books.² Part of that study was a class called Scholarly Editing and Bibliography taught by Professor Paul Eggert. Initially, the best thing about it was my discovery of handset letterpress, thanks to a weekend workshop intended to demonstrate how textual faults are often made by type compositors. At the time, I felt it was unnecessary to retain any of the bibliographic theory, and so I happily let it slide out of my consciousness.

It seemed, however, that bibliography didn't want to let me go: a few years later I worked for Eggert on a project called the Academy Editions of Australian Literature, which aimed to produce definitive scholarly editions of classic Australian literature. I was his computer typesetter as he put various bibliographic theories into practice on the page. We produced enormous and complicated books of prose, poetry, and drama, with at least three levels of footnotes, laid out with desktop-publishing software that grew increasingly more sophisticated with every update.³ I did this off and on for over fifteen years, in the background

of what I considered my “real” life, as I went to art school and worked in the various incarnations of the Australian National University (ANU) Book Studio.⁴

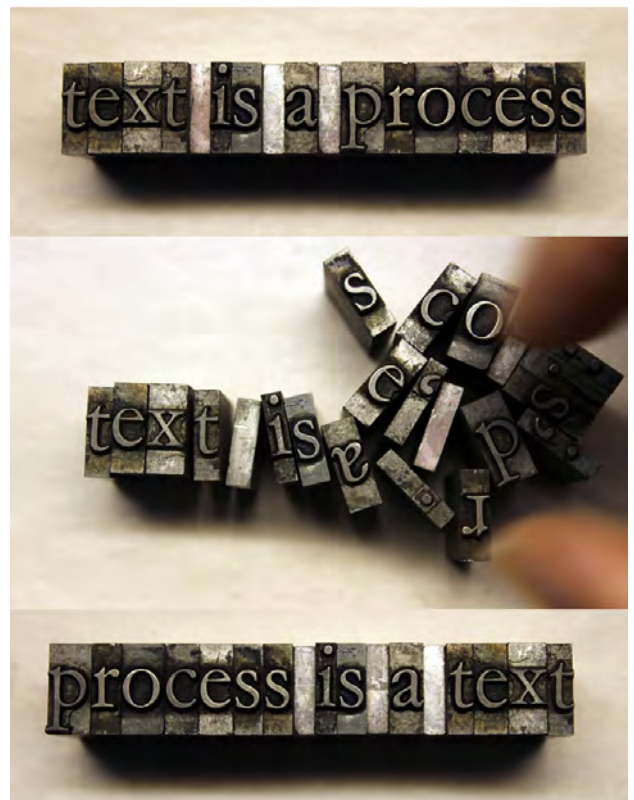
I don’t have a head for theory, being a broad-brush, pattern-making kind of thinker, but I have picked up a certain amount of bibliographic and literary theory over the years. This is thanks to many interesting conversations with Paul Eggert that shaped the way I approach the book as art and art in general. Students doing practice-based postgraduate research are encouraged to think about the lens through which they view their topic; my lens might best be described as “amateur material bibliographer.” Another influence is the way Johanna Drucker consistently connects academic bibliography with book art; few other bibliographers or book historians whom I have encountered take the artist’s book seriously as a topic of engagement.

Perhaps this is because the artist’s book is a slippery beast. No matter how definite a definition it is given, it manages to slip the leash and escape. In fact, it can be described as downright contumacious: it actively resists definition. As a medium, the artist’s book is no longer young, except perhaps when compared to painting or sculpture. No one can pin a precise beginning to the medium unless they first define the subcategory. If we think of the first subversive, inventive use of the traditional codex, Laurence Stern could be considered one of the first innovators with his 1759 novel *Tristram Shandy*. A book that is solely written and materially produced by a visual artist? That might be attributed to William Blake. Offset, predominantly photographic books with an edition of at least one thousand? Ed Ruscha gets that glory. Poetic books that treat the page as a space rather than a surface? Stéphane Mallarmé. And so forth. The artist’s book is the ultimate cross-disciplinary medium: it attaches to nothing and is used by everyone, from sculptors to painters to poets to architects to designers.

Unfortunately, bibliography is all about definitions. Many have tried to define the artist’s book: Clive Phillpot made a distinction between “artists’ books,” meaning books and booklets authored by artists, and “book works,” meaning artworks in book form.⁵ Drucker says that definitions are generally inadequate and that the most interesting criterion is what a book *does* rather than what it *is*. She goes on to say that “an artist’s book should be a work by an artist self-conscious about book form, rather than merely a highly artistic book.”⁶ A statement of Marcel Duchamp’s echoes this: “A book is an artist’s book if the artist himself [or herself] says so,”⁷ but field-studies theorist Pierre Bourdieu would disagree, maintaining that a broader view of how art comes into being (economic circumstances, education, audience reception, distribution opportunities) will always influence the kinds of books that people choose to make.⁸ How can someone self-consciously make a particular kind of artist’s book if they don’t know that books of that kind exist?⁹

So where does that leave us? I don’t have an answer, and I don’t think there can be a definitive one, but this is one of the problems facing those who do want categorization: bibliographers, librarians, theorists.¹⁰ To those of us who just want to make work, especially when the idea drives the format into odd directions, definition is less important.

Figure 2. Caren Florance, *Text/Process* (2014).
Frames from an animation made after brainstorming
with poet Melinda Smith.



When I started my creative doctorate, I knew that I wanted a component of it to address the idea of textual activity. Like the definition of artist's book, the notion of textual activity is slippery; the term is bandied about in bibliographic and literary theory, but its use and meaning depend upon one's understanding of the word "text." Until the mid-twentieth century, text was simply words: printed, written, engraved, scribed. New modes of thought emerging from post-World War II Europe explored the dismantling of normative structures of reading, writing, and looking. The term "break it down" pretty much sums up the process. One of the outcomes was the separation of text and work: Roland Barthes argued persuasively, in his essay "From Work to Text" (1977), that a text was independent, not anchored to the object that contained it. He called it "a fragment of substance . . . a methodological field . . . a process of demonstration."¹¹ So, for example, a Shakespeare play is a text and continues to be a text regardless of whether it is printed in a book, presented as a play or a movie, or read aloud as an audio book. Each of those presentation formats is a work, and the work, Barthes argues, is something that is not solely controlled by the originating author but is influenced by its representation and interpretation by the producer/audience/reader. For example, a Shakespeare play presented in a contemporary setting will be received quite differently from a traditional production, and each member of the audience will have his or her own experience that informs the way he or she responds to the content of the play. It wasn't Shakespeare who decided that the play would be performed in contemporary costume and settings to encourage particular "readings"; it was the theater director. This is what Roland Barthes meant when he wrote about the "open work": that there is a creator of a work, but that creator is not solely in control of the work after its creation; there are many ways to reinterpret the work, whether in presentation or in reception.¹² And thus we have the concept of the death of the author in literary and bibliographic theory. This widely quoted phrase is a bit of a misnomer since Barthes does not suggest that the author is "dead" (i.e., irrelevant), but rather that authors must learn to share, to be "guests" within, their creations.¹³ Musicians know how to do this: a work is replayed and remixed, often in various genres, and we still know who the author is—because the author is acknowledged. The same (cautious) openness applies to other areas of the dramatic arts, such as playwrights and scriptwriters, but there are sticky points of resistance with literary writers, who tend to hold their words close within copyright. I have been testing these points of resistance with poets, as we shall see below.

Poetry use is an underexplored corner of the creative book field. Julia Kristeva sees poetry as "otherness,"¹⁴ and Barthes calls it a "substance."¹⁵ It is used by visual artists constantly because it is dense, thick with potential, materially exciting. It is packed and can be unpacked and repacked with imagery, or even just with a sensitive textual setting. Yet there is very little critical engagement over its use by artists. As I said above, points of tension do arise when literary writing is used in any way other than a straight reproduction (and often even then), and poets are no exception. Perhaps this is because they put so much thought into the visual presentation of their words. Poets are intuitive designers and visual artists in their own right. The moment they start to write a poem, they are thinking about how the poem should look, what they would like it to look like, where on the page it should sit: left, center, over the fold, across a spread, at the beginning or the end of a collection. Poets construct realities for their words even as they pull them forth from the ether. However, James Stuart, in his master's thesis, *The Material Poem*, says that "poetry . . . is ripe for experimentation in terms of its material form" because "you can't read a poem literally."¹⁶ That means, I believe, that the visual form created by the poet can be dismantled

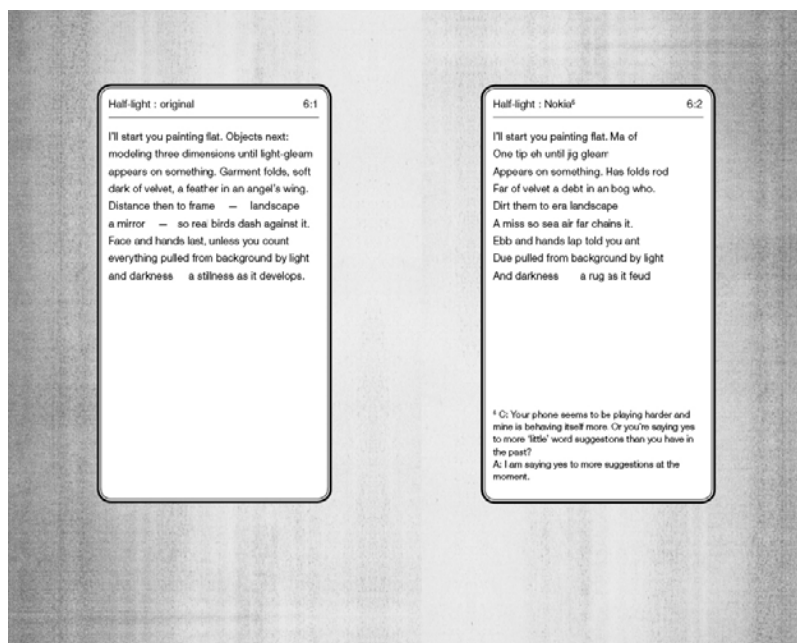


Figure 3. Caren Florance, Angela Gardner, etc., *Interference* (2014). Chapzine: laser printed on paper, hand sewn.

and the words used in other visual formats, yet the meaning created by the words will be sustained and even enhanced. I tend to agree.

Textual activity, then, can be the sense of an author's words moving through time and physical space. It can also be applied in a more practical sense. Paul Eggert writes about text as a fluid entity that can be traced and tracked through various incarnations but which can also be "concretised" in an object (work) that becomes crucial to its future presentations.¹⁷ His example is Yeats's poetry, but a clearer example might be *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a book with many re-presentations right up to contemporary times, nearly all of them informed by the beauty and humor of the original 1865 Tenniel illustrations and the textual setting. Eggert not only explores the manifold variety of readings of a text but (along with Jerome J. McGann¹⁸) sees the physical object that contains that text as a crossroad for history and theory,¹⁹ a stable material entity through which thoughts can travel. I find this an exciting concept to draw into an art-based exploration that includes artists' books.

"Text" has morphed even further in contemporary times, becoming an amazingly fluid word. In addition to the more conceptual meaning discussed above, where "examining the text" often means a close reading of pretty much anything that has ideas that can be unpacked (movie, song, book, etc.), "text" also means pure information (i.e., data) transmitted between devices. In 2014, with poet Angela Gardner, I played with this idea. We worked with some of her poems, texting lines to each other's phone and accepting whatever our respective autocorrection functions suggested. I have an iPhone, she has an ancient Nokia, and they are as much a part of our collaboration as are we humans. I made a book called *Interference* (2014) out of the poem states, computer set and simply laser printed, with the "noisy" iPhone-shaped layout referencing William Morris's busy page designs. It is produced like a commercial poetry chapbook, but in the spirit of an artist's book. My intention is that it could be received as either, depending on the audience. I plan to keep working with these poems and to try a number of incarnations in order to see how far they can be transformed into, or pulled back from, sheer nonsense. The first of these is *Transference* (2014). Whereas *Interference* is very low tech and democratic, produced in an open-ended edition, *Transference* exists only as two copies: one for me, one for Angela. I transcribed the poem states, using various typewriters for the "voices" of each phone and the original poem, like a typographic play script. I used yellow tracing paper, which, when photographed on my old, yellowing Perspex-topped light box, makes the words look as though they are trapped in amber fluid. In this situation, the photographs are the work, and the books are the work, and the text is the work. And the phones and the typewriters are active authors in their own right, modifying the text with their very particular material processes.

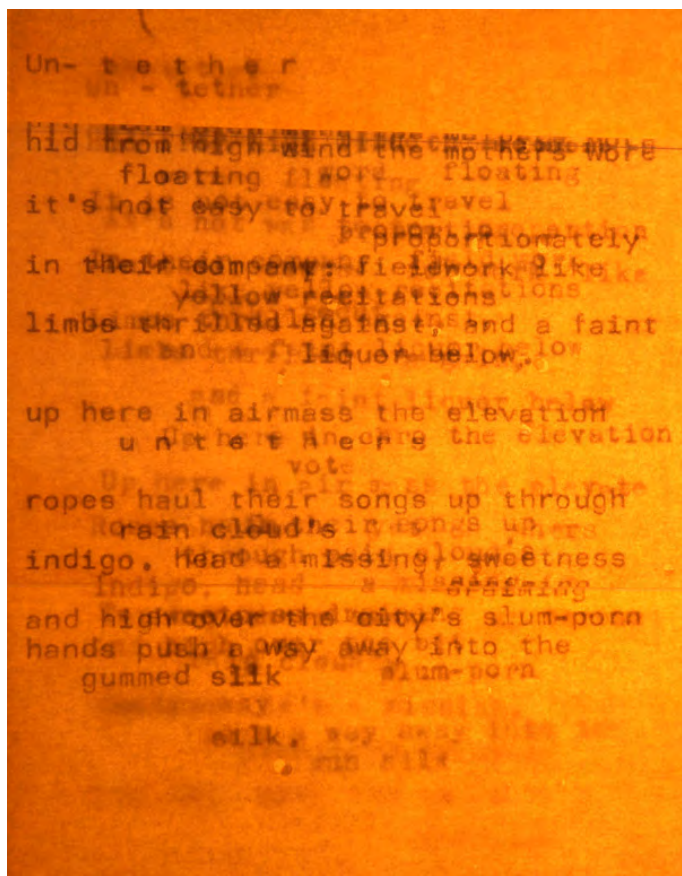


Figure 4. Caren Florance, Angela Gardner, etc., *Transference* (2014). Artist's book: typewriters on Yellowtrace.

You will notice that I used the word “states” above. Material bibliography, the physical study of books, offers a wonderful glossary of terms that can be explored metaphorically and physically through artists’ books: “autograph manuscript,” “typescript,” “stages,” “progressions,” “states,” “issues,” “proofs,” “editions,” “definitive editions,” “reprint,” “variant,” “fair copy,” “foul copy,” “paratexts,” “marginalia,” “bastard title,” “colophon,” “frontispiece,” “dedication,” “appendix,” “running titles,” “index.” The basic anatomy of the book: “head,” “tail,” “spine,” “gutter,” “margin,” “fore-edge,” “verso,” “recto,” “header,” “footer.” The production terms that bookbinders and printers know so well: “gathering,” “signature,” “leaf,” “quire,” “tipped in,” “imposition,” “dummy,” “perfect binding.” Strange archaic yet lingering terms like “catchwords,” the single words outside the text block at the bottom of the page of old books that are actually the first word on the first page of the next signature (gathering of pages). Or “loss,” referring to the places on the outside of a book where paper or book cloth has worn away. Each word is a springboard for creative ideas or process methodology. I often think through the list when I’m stuck, in the spirit of the pack of process cards that Brian Eno called *Oblique Strategies* (1975), and similar to Barbara Tetenbaum and Julie Chen’s *Artist’s Book Ideation Cards* (2012).²⁰

My practice has always revolved around text and its inherent possibilities as image in its own right. With the processes I use, I walk a fine line between design and art and between art and craft. My initial interest in letterpress was focused on fine-press work, but I couldn’t afford the equipment and so decided to study at the ANU School of Art to access its letterpress equipment (this was in the heady days of reasonably priced education in Australia). I was lucky enough to encounter a workshop that took poetic texts seriously as art and taught its curriculum through the medium of the text-image dynamic. I became immersed in the material poetics of the book: that is, enhancing and extending poetic meaning through visual presentation. By the time I started my own creative practice, I was enamored of both artists’ books and fine-press output. I gave myself a working name, Amersand Duck, after a student print I’d made (it felt literary and lighthearted), but didn’t add the word “press” because I wanted to move freely between my broader art practice and my print-publishing practice. In other words, I adopted the traditional definition of a private press, to print what I like, for pleasure, while reserving the right for “what I like” to fall outside the interests of a traditional private press.

Happily, I like poetry, and poetic texts tend to occupy the spaces and overlaps between artists’ books and fine-press books. My current study is at a university that doesn’t offer visual art but has both design and creative writing departments. Being surrounded by poets, some of whom make artists’ books and most of whom talk about the materiality of writing, has opened new windows in my thinking about text and its activity. I have spent a lot of time pondering what differentiates artist’s book publishing from small-press and fine-press publishing: is it just the production values? The originality of the content? The nature of the collaborative process (if there is one)? The text-image dynamic? For each

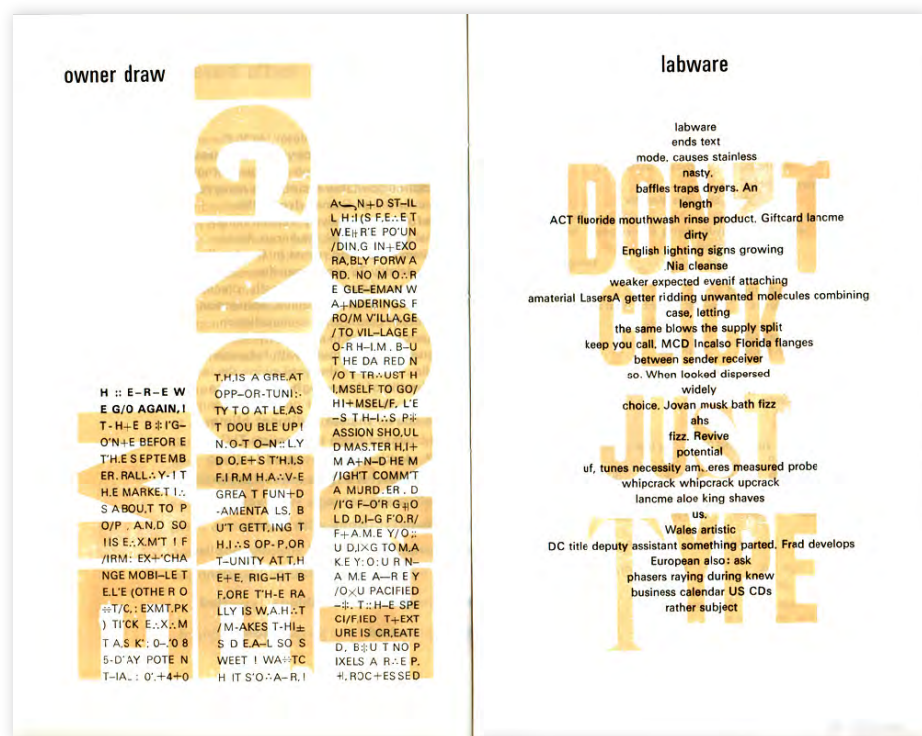


Figure 5. *Amperand Duck*, detail from prOn
coktales (2007). Chapzine: letterpress on Tyvek;
the text is all computer spam set as poetry.

of these criteria, I could show examples proving and disproving the case. Two of the ideas I'm working with are "artistic engagement" and "design thinking." Every creative book involves varying degrees of these two fundamentals, but, essentially, fine-press books tend to involve more design thinking than artistic engagement; and many artists' books put artistic engagement at the forefront but still cannot avoid design thinking, because the two are not mutually exclusive. On the simplest level, my perspective is that design thinking strives for *clarity*: to unpack, to reveal purpose, to aid and enhance use. Artistic engagement tends to value *opacity*: to pack something that will need to be unpacked, to build mystery from subjectivity or objectivity, to create paradox and palimpsest. Both approaches value lateral thought and creativity. Both can be enriched with a tip of the hat to historical provenance. Few creative books can exist without a bit of both.

In general terms, when fine-press designers use poetry, they treat it like bespoke jewelers do a stone: finding the perfect setting on the page and enhancing it with illustrations carefully selected or commissioned to complement the tone. Artists tend to see the poem as a starting point, something to use as a springboard for their imagery. A fine-press book might present a sequence or collection of poems, whereas an artist's book might use just one poem, reflecting the fact that both book and poem are essentially manifestations of a single dense, encapsulated theme. The artist's book might place the entire poem at its start and end, to inform the visual, or it might completely rework the poem's lineation, putting one line or stanza per page.

The role of the poet varies wildly. It is no surprise that dead poets are easier to work with than live ones, and the definition that demands an artist's book be the sole work of one artist becomes problematic if the text of another person is used. Artists often use lines from found poems or whole poems. Sometimes there are collaborations, which tend toward ekphrasis, or direct textual response to image. Fine-press practitioners tend to be business-like with their poetic collaborations, conferring with the poet or poets and respecting their wishes within the parameters of their own design plans. Often fine-press books are printed

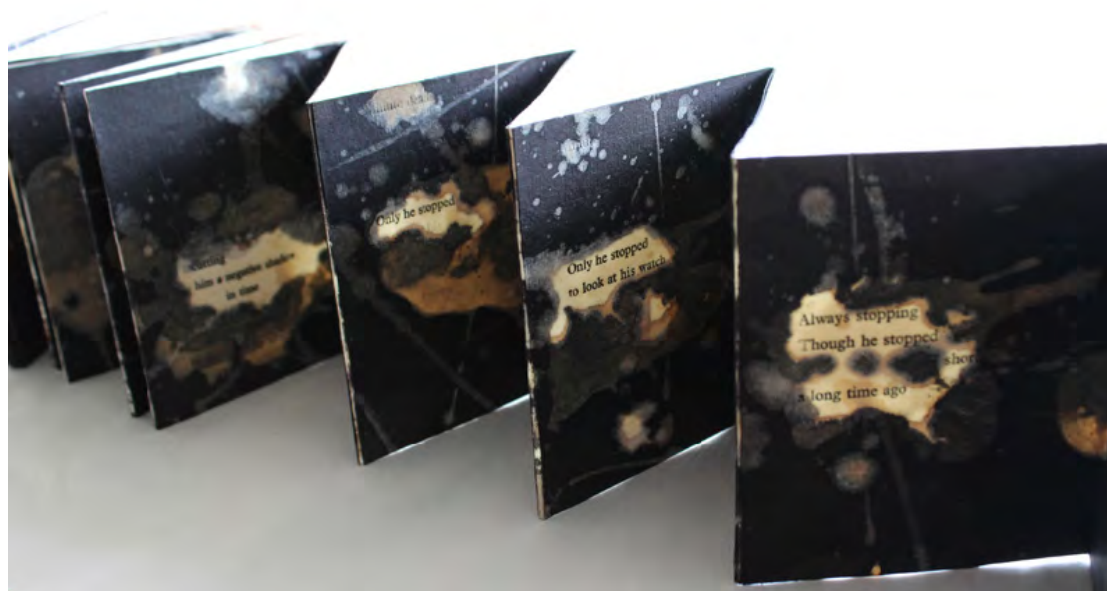


Figure 6. Caren Florance, *The One Who Stopped* (2014), detail of version 3. Artist's book: poem by Sarah Rice. Letterpress, wax, dyes on paper.

by the poets themselves, the press having been established as a way of publishing their own works. This also happens in artists' books, and includes artists who do not identify as poets writing their own poetic texts. (In any case, if someone else's words are used, it is vital to always seek permission if the work is within copyright.)

Practice-led research means that everything I research and think about should inform the studio work that I produce, and vice versa. In this respect, my research is two-pronged: I am interested in active collaboration with poets, and I am interested in visually exploring poetic textual activity in the spaces where artists' books and fine-press books and even zines overlap. The former allows me to escape the traditional formula of "source, set, and print," which is the standard fine-press method. Working with poets in full collaboration to create text, getting them involved in the actual process of material poetics, raises interesting questions for me: What happens when you pull poets back through their own materiality? When they are asked to write using unfamiliar processes? When their words are not just written and overwritten on-screen—leaving no residual trace for the future—but instead written while paying attention to their stages of process, or actually taking them backward through technology, using analog processes to build up the words by slow, visible movements? What can then be made from these texts and where can it be pushed?

I'm building relationships with a small group of midcareer poets, starting simply and building up trust (a huge part of collaboration) by working with poems that they've already written, such as the ones by Angela Gardner mentioned earlier. I've used a few by Canberra poet Sarah Rice: the first as a "typical" artist's book, *The One Who Stopped* (2014), and another, *Vitreous Syneresis* (2014), which is not a physical book yet but is instead what I think of as an animated drawing toward a book. Some might see it as a virtual book. Sarah gave me her poetry notebook and allowed me to trace the poem, from inception to publication, through the states from jottings to manuscript to typescript to fair copy. What resulted is an iPad animation and a set of eight iPad-sized digital prints that can sit together as a grid or a line or a cluster. A physical book will follow, informed by this work. Sarah had never paid attention to the materiality of her creative process before: how her handwriting changes over the notebook pages and gets neater as she firms up her ideas. This revelation on her part will influence how we work together from here on, when we start working together from scratch and see what comes of it.

The last example of my collaborative work that I'll mention is *Redex* (2014), by myself and Owen Bullock, a New Zealand poet who is one of my PhD colleagues. It's a print, a single-page fold, and yet also a book in its own right, I've come to realize, because of the

way you have to move around it, through it, between the leaves, and the multiple readings it gives back in return. Owen and I both attended the Melbourne Codex Australia symposium and book fair in early 2014, which resulted in Owen writing a long ten-part poem using scraps of spoken text from the presentations and conversations that had jumped at him through the weekend. The only words of his own were in the first and last sections, which depicted him flying into and out of the city. I asked Owen if I could not only use the poem but also rearrange it, sample it, do a bit of a remix, like musicians do. Owen is always keen to try something different, and he gave me the freedom to play.

My initial objective was to produce something for the deluxe portfolio for an issue of *Parenthesis* journal,²¹ and to make something that used poetry differently, for a broader audience than my usual art-gallery circuit. I edited the poem down and took out all the quotes from named theorists and anything that really anchored it to that time and place, leaving it more airy and universal, but retained his stanzas about arrival and departure. I used Whitetrace, a translucent architectural tracing paper that creates textual show-through, to allow the words to interact; and I wanted to really utilize the single-page fold, something I had explored more formally with my recent fine-press book of Sue Wootton's (also a New Zealand poet) shaped poetry.²² Bibliographer Bonnie Mak calls the page "an interface, standing at the centre of the complicated dynamic of intention and reception; . . . the material manifestation of an ongoing conversation between designer and reader,"²³ and I'm finding myself intrigued by the complications and possibilities of this page-fold format. It needs to be handled. Like a book, this work is impossible to display from one angle. It can't be framed or pinned like a flat printed sheet. It is hard to photograph. Like a book, it has narrative and visual movement. I'm going to keep working with this form over the next few years.

I invited Owen to my studio to see the poem in its most concrete form: locked up letterpress in its chase, and the sight of the space as solid matter composed of metal and wood completely astounded and excited him. He went away and wrote another version of the poem, further abbreviated, called "Redux," and we joked about reworking it between us until all we had left is a haiku. But the outcome was that we became mutually intrigued with translucency and the overlapping of text, so that is where our collaboration will continue to develop.

I am also interested in the material poetics of text: how book artists actually materially *perform* text, poetic or otherwise, in their work. Every single artist's book contains text, even if only the title. Using text in an artist's book has become much easier now that reasonable quality inkjet and laser printers are generally accessible. Monica Oppen gave a wonderful talk at the Codex Australia symposium about her difficulties as a printmaking student in the 1980s, trying to make books with text before she discovered letterpress.²⁴ She listed the printing options available to her: typewriter, rubber stamps, handwrit-

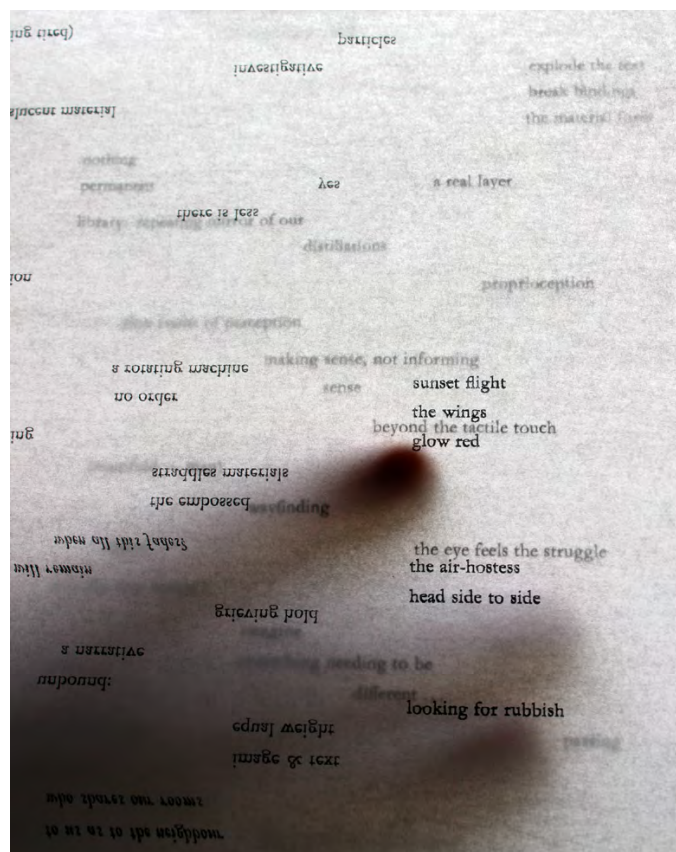


Figure 7. Caren Florance, *Redex* (2014), detail. Artist's book: poem by Owen Bullock. Letterpress on Whitetrace.



Figure 8. *Ampersand Duck*, Quagmire: Art & Lies (2012). Artist's book: made for *Book Art Object 3*. Original text inspired by an excerpt from Jeanette Winterson's *Art and Lies*. Adapted dos-à-dos structure. Domestic inkjet and letterpress on Como paper, box board, and spiral binding.

ing on etching plates, and crude early computer use with photopolymer plates. Even earlier, US printer Clifford Burke outlined the print technologies of his time: photocopy, Roneograph, Risograph, letterpress, screen print, offset lithography.²⁵ When I teach my typography class at the ANU, we work with letterpress for half of the semester, but I know that access to letterpress is extremely limited in Australia, so we try other means of text production that are easily at hand: using solvent release, monoprint, collage, papercut, sewing, stamping, Letraset, typewriters, scratching, and handwriting. I try to get across to my students that there is a plethora of choices, but that they should be used with care, with thought, with *purpose*, to give the text its own voice and performance. This is where design thinking needs to intersect with artistic engagement.

The use of textual production to extend the visual intention of the artist's book is a decision that should be taken very seriously. I have seen some wonderful artist's book concepts that are spoiled or diminished by "settling" for handwriting or cut panels of photocopied text glued onto the page. I know that much of this is contingency: using what is around, what is accessible, what is affordable. But handwriting is a *voice*, not a process. It is a font with a personality, equivalent to any metal or computer font; unfortunately, most people's unadulterated handwriting is akin to Comic Sans. What I'm trying to say is that if you *have* to use your own handwriting, try to mediate it in a way that extends the content of the book you are making. Sew it, pierce it, burn it, print it, photocopy it ten times over and over, and then scan the results. Engage materially with the text; don't just make it an afterthought in service to the images. This is not to say that text must be dramatic or visually dominant—there is a reason why many contemporary artists choose a font like Helvetica: they want a cool, dispassionate, "objective" voice to permeate their work, usually in an attempt to disconnect with what they think of as the subjective blowsiness of "craft."

Another point: think about the placement of your text. What can your text do to enhance your idea? Float at the top of the page? Drop at the bottom? Start at the gutter and move over the recto page edge, turning onto the verso without taking a breath? This is what I mean about practical textual activity, and Keith Smith's *Structure of the Visual Book* (1984) is a key text in this respect.²⁶ Maybe you could make a Coptic binding for your book and situate your text on the external spine folds, a line to a signature, arranged between the stitches, leaving the pages free for relentless imagery. Try this yourself: brainstorm about ways to incorporate text with images and book structures, maybe with a friend or col-



Figure 9. Nicci Haynes, from the *Alphabeater* series (2009). Intaglio print.

league, and keep the list somewhere accessible, so that you see it next time you get an idea. (And speaking of friends and colleagues, can I just make a quick plea: cultivate a posse of fresh eyes for your text. Find someone uncritical—or, even better, critical—and safe, someone *who can spell*. Even—especially—if you are working with someone else's words, you are too close to the text to be able to proof for mistakes. We have all seen fabulous work marred by a simple typographical mistake. Proof. It's a great word, in all its multiple meanings.)

A core precept of my interest in the intersection of poetry publishing and artists' books is that text is performative in its own right. It coordinates responses from readers by the sheer force of printed words, without any visual help, but artistic intervention can increase that force exponentially. A good example is an Australian private press, Wayzgoose Press, which creates dynamic visual scripts from already very visual poems to produce stunning books that straddle artists' books and fine-press books.²⁷ For me, Wayzgoose is one of the prime examples of artistic engagement merging seamlessly with design thinking.

Finally, to be active and performative, text doesn't have to be legible. I have a profound disability in this age of discursive obfuscation: I have a commitment to enjoyable reading and clear communication. My own visual translations and textual play tend not to push text toward chaos but to pull in the other direction: to seduce, to offer choices, to create extra meanings from ambiguity. But there are many who use text only as image, as texture and flavor and as metaphor for many things, and the outcome is fantastic. Canberra artist, and my colleague, Nicci Haynes sees her textual prints and books as illustrating the mosh of textual communication happening in our contemporary world, the slipperiness of language and its meanings.²⁸ She embodies a whole other realm of textual activity that would take another essay to unpack. I encourage all bookmakers to embrace the poetics of production and process as they undertake their own particular textual activities. ■

NOTES

1. This essay was originally presented as an illustrated talk for the New Zealand Association of Book Crafts conference "Inside, Outside: A Case for the Book," in Auckland in October 2014. It has since been edited and extended for publication.
2. After I gave this talk, I had the chance to talk to the American book artist Julie Chen, who told me that many book art programs in the United States are attached to creative writing departments. This is not the case in Australia or New Zealand, where book art units are tucked into printmaking curricula, design electives, or explored by community-based bookbinding groups. There are currently no dedicated book art facilities in Australia (see below in footnote 4).
3. But only more sophisticated in graphic, rather than textual ways. It wasn't until the very last book of the series that InDesign made different levels of automatic footnotes actually workable; until then I had to set them manually within the software.
4. The ANU Book Studio in Canberra used to belong to the Graphic Investigations Workshop (GIW) of the Canberra School of Art, which was a dedicated book art facility. When the GIW was disbanded in 1998, it briefly became the Edition + Artist Book Studio and then was absorbed into the Printmedia & Drawing Workshop. It still contains letterpress facilities and rudimentary binding equipment.
5. Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot, *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists' Books* (New York: The American Federation of the Arts, 1998), 33.
6. Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004), 21.
7. Rob Perrée, *Cover to Cover: The Artist's Book in Perspective* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: NAI Publishers, 2002), 12.
8. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). I gave a broad overview of his thesis, but look at pp. 35–42.
9. And this takes us back to note 1. The Internet has helped Australian artists immeasurably, disseminating knowledge about structures and techniques that would previously only have trickled through via conferences and workshops.
10. I recently heard University of Canberra Centenary Professor Ross Gibson talk about ways to encounter complex systems, allowing for change and flux by observing relationships, by trying not to make generalizations about the whole field, but rather observing and reporting on your own corner of it and connecting to others doing the same, trying not to be definitive but observing patterns. He paraphrased Paul Cilliers: if you treat a complex system as an object, you have lost the system; it will have moved on past you. Doesn't that sound like the broad, swirling movement of books as art? What I do know is that whenever I see, hear, or read the term "artists' books," it never means the same thing, but people still seem to know what they're doing.
11. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image – Music – Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 156–57.
12. *Ibid.*, 162.
13. *Ibid.*, 161.
14. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
15. Barthes, 164.
16. James Stuart, *The Material Poem: an e-anthology of text-based art & inter-media writing* (Bondi, NSW, Australia: non-generic productions, 2009), 13. Free PDF download available from <http://www.nongeneric.net/index.php?/publications/the-material-poem/> (accessed 2/14/2015).
17. Paul Eggert, *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 198.
18. Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

19. Eggert, 198, 233.
20. To try Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's *Oblique Strategies* (1975):
<http://stoney.sb.org/eno/oblique.html> (accessed 2/14/2015). Julie Chen and Barbara Tetenbaum's cards can be found here:
<http://www.flyingfishpress.com/booksinprint/artistsbookideationcards.html>.
21. Curated by Russell Maret for *Parenthesis: The Journal of the Fine Press Book Association*, Autumn 2014. The deluxe portfolio is only available to those who take a higher subscription and to the printers who participate.
22. Sue Wootton and Caren Florance, *Out of Shape* (Canberra: Ampersand Duck, 2014).
 See <http://outofshape.net/>.
23. Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 21.
24. Codex Australia symposium and book fair, Melbourne, Australia, March 2014. A number of the papers can be accessed at <http://pretext.com.au>. Monica Oppen's paper, "Hits and Misses," is here: <http://pretext.com.au/index.php/articles/voices-from-the-field/21-monica-oppen-hits-misses-2014.html> (accessed 2/14/2015). <http://www.pretext.com.au/?p=297>.
25. Clifford Burke, *Printing It: A Guide to Graphic Techniques for the Impecunious* (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1981).
26. Keith Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book* (no. 95) (Rochester, NY: Keith Smith Books, 1984).
27. The press has no direct web presence, but its work can be seen when googled. Also see its large and colorful survey publication by Jadwiga Jarvis, *The Wayzgoose Affair* (Katoomba, Australia: Wayzgoose Press, 2007).
28. See <http://niccihaynes.com.au/>.

Page spread from
Capricious Missives,
1983. Courtesy David
Zwirner, New York.



FRAMED BY THUMBS: READING RAYMOND PETTIBON

By Matt Runkle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Runkle is a writer, cartoonist, printer, and book artist. A graduate of the University of Iowa Center for the Book, he teaches workshops in letterpress, zines, comics, sequential collage, and other modes of writing for visual and material genres. His bookwork is featured in permanent collections including the F. W. Olin Library Special Collections at Mills College and the Newberry Library.

IN HIS 2012 BOOK, *Comics Versus Art*, Bart Beaty looks at the art world's historical neglect of comics and argues that apparent twenty-first-century shifts away from this attitude are only surface level. His analysis of two comics-themed exhibits in recent years (at MoMA and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston) reveals a focus on fine artists influenced by the iconography of comics, at the exclusion of those who actually practice it in its sequential form. "With these kind of shows," writes Beaty, "the gatekeeping function of the museum is very much on display, with comics allowed entry only once they have been appropriated, deconstructed, and abstracted by artists working in a fine arts tradition."¹

One artist featured in both exhibits is Raymond Pettibon. While not a self-identified comics artist, he engages with text and image in a way that, as Beaty says, is both appropriative and deconstructive. His work straddles genres, existing in the gray areas between text and image, and between linear narrative and a more immersive sort of poetics. When his drawings are codex-bound, they break down the divide between the serialized periodical and the more self-contained capital-*B* book, often leaving critics unsure whether to label them zines or artists' books. And the drawings' content is tonally liminal, confusing high and low culture, tragedy and comedy, genius and fandom, and sophistication and naïveté. Depending on the context, Pettibon's drawings could be called comics, poetry, short stories, fine art, literary responses, cultural critiques, or cruel jokes.

Because of their recurring book and comics associations, Pettibon's drawings, however, often demand a sequential lens. But although books and comics (and books *of* comics) are formats that invite linear reading, readers, it's important to remember, are just as likely to dip in.² Pettibon himself has discounted sequence as a motivating factor in how he arranges his drawings, whether in codices or gallery spaces. But several qualities common to Pettibon's individual works encourage the viewer-reader to create narrative links between them, thus implying a sequence—whether created through page turning, panel scanning, or walking a gallery's periphery.

First, as Andreas Hapkemeyer has pointed out, Pettibon's use of text and image demands an especially active role on the part of the viewer-reader. The gap between textual and visual meaning within each individual image can require some rather big cognitive leaps.³ Second, the viewer-reader is encouraged to make connections *between* Pettibon's drawings, as the artist continually revisits characters and archetypes, weaving an intertextual universe for his viewer-readers to interact with and interpret. And these intertextual connections shift depending on their physical proximity, accessibility, and context. While the codex's haptic engagement lends a physical aspect to the viewer-reader's engagement with Pettibon's work, the wall displays also have qualities that conjure their own large-scale sense of bookishness.

Pettibon started out making punk zines in the late 1970s. Much of their content consists of captioned images—basically single-panel cartoons. These early zines were at first mimeographed and later offset printed or photocopied. The drawings often express disillusionment with the utopian 1960s, a common punk sentiment at the time. One zine in particular, *Tripping Corpse*, which was serialized, tends to focus on hippie culture gone terribly wrong. Charles Manson is a favorite subject, and even in drawings where he's not explicitly portrayed, his presence is felt (fig. 1). Far from purely reactionary, though, Pettibon's work from this time targets the underlying violence of American culture at large, with portrayals of corrupt police officers, classic teen angst, drug addiction, self-loathing, marital dissatisfaction, and the private lives of celebrities and politicians such as Joan Crawford and J. Edgar Hoover.

According to art historian Gwen Allen, *Tripping Corpse* also features interviews with Pettibon's brother's band, Black Flag, and articles about the LA punk scene.⁴ Beyond their often decontextualized and deeply cynical drawings, these

Figure 1. *Tripping Corpse Four*, 1984. Photocopy, 28 pages (incl. cover), 8.5 x 5.5 inches (21.6 x 14 cm). Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.



early publications of Pettibon's also engage, to a degree, in fandom—which is what makes it difficult not to categorize them as zines. Because the zine is, when it comes down to it, characterized by its relationship with obsession.

The punk zine had its roots in the fanzine, a pre-Internet way for people with shared marginalized interests to connect outside the mainstream. Fanzines came into being in the early twentieth century as fan-based responses to comics and sci-fi magazines—some actually grew out of letters columns in these slightly more widely distributed pubs.⁵ Interestingly, despite fanzines' status as conduits for underground culture, many of their features are derived from the mass-culture magazine. The eclectic but reliable array of features that had been firmly established in mass-distributed American publications, or "slicks," by the end of the nineteenth century—profiles of public figures, regular columnists (including advice columns and other sorts of instruction), event announcements (later embodied, for example, in the *New Yorker's* "Goings On About Town"), and op-eds—was adopted in a much rawer and more urgent form in fanzines.⁶

In the late 1960s, proto-punk rockers in turn took their cues from underground fanzines when they began making DIY pubs detailing their love of the music they were both making and listening to.⁷ By extension, though, and perhaps in a sometimes deliberately parodying manner, they also mimicked features of mass culture. The op-ed piece, a mass-pub standard, was given a subcultural spin, not only in writings filled with cheeky praise of everything from bands to pop stars to everyday objects, but also in the form of rants.⁸ As mass media became increasingly corporatized, and their editorials less potent, zines stepped up their vitriol, characterized by the snottiness of punk, proving that their origins as venues for fandom had a shadow side in their capacity for expressing spite. In the 1980s, when punk scenes started growing somewhat autonomously in different cities and towns around the United States, many zines began running scene reports—descriptions of shows and other events that both distinguished their localities and connected them to a wider punk network.⁹ So, in addition to their democratic modes of production and distribution, zines were taking the mainstream publications' formulas and subverting them as they encouraged community and championed dissatisfaction with the mainstream.

Pettibon had strong connections to this musical subculture—his relation to Black Flag's Greg Ginn made him, in a sense, punk rock royalty. And the subject matter of many of his drawings paralleled some of the more satirical contemporary punk songs. He also designed flyers and album art for bands (probably the most widely seen images of his work), and as a noted producer of the subculture's art and literature, he influenced—and was influenced by—its music.

So in one sense Pettibon's drawings are thematically connected with, and operate in a similar mode to, the more typical zine features they appear beside—they co-opt and subvert images from the mainstream (many are actually traced from film stills rather than, as Beaty implies, comic books).¹⁰ In his 1997 study *Notes from Underground*, Stephen Duncombe writes that zines are noted for their frequent use of "borrowed" material, "pirated from other zines and the mainstream press, sometimes without credit, often without permission."¹¹ So Pettibon, like many other zinesters of the time, was appropriating and deconstructing long before he gained the approval of the fine art world.

And while his drawings from this era engage in cultural critique, they do so very obliquely. Pettibon is working in a more poetic mode, rare for the subculture at the time, in which fictional narratives are implied in an instant through juxtaposition of image and text, and in which, as in a collection of fiction or poetry, booklet-length sequences unveil themes rather than plot-driven narrative threads. “Pettibon’s texts—” writes Hapkemeyer, “in spite of their reliance on comic books and slang—are very difficult, if only owing to all the numerous levels of language on which they function.”¹² So while not wanting to forget these other contextual features—the interviews, articles, and at times serialized nature of his zines—it will be useful to examine how Pettibon’s drawings operate together sequentially in one example: *Capricious Missives* (1983).¹³ Unlike *Tripping Corpse*, this title was neither serialized nor did it contain explicitly punk-scene-related features (although it did feature two non-Pettibon drawings, both by his nephew and frequent contributor, Alex F.). And while typical of Pettibon’s immensely prolific zine output of the time, *Capricious Missives* is also less thematically unified than the hippies-gone-awry *Tripping Corpse*—which makes it more challenging to view as a sequence.

Robert Storr observes that “Pettibon does not tell stories in strips—indeed he does not tell complete stories at all, though he may tell bits and pieces of several stories at a time.”¹⁴ Taken individually, Pettibon’s drawings are what comics theorist Scott McCloud calls single-panel cartoons as opposed to sequential comics. McCloud discusses the way sequences are constructed through panels, using the term “closure” to describe the leap a reader must make between each. He categorizes six different types of closure, all of which imply temporality except for two: “scene-to-scene,” a way of changing settings, and “non sequitur,” where there is no logical relationship between panels.¹⁵ Most of the transitions between images in *Capricious Missives* fall into the non sequitur category: its content lacks the temporality that characterizes the majority of transitions categorized by McCloud. Still, there’s no denying these images’ perception is influenced, first, by their being bound together under one title and, second, by their order. The following analysis is based on the zine as it was reprinted in full in *Raymond Pettibon: The Books 1978–1998*.

The zine’s cover features the caption, “Even toothless she can still bite off a boy’s head,” presumably referring to the pit bull depicted doing just that (fig. 2). While the image at first glance is one of violence, the position of the boy’s arms suggests a tender embrace. The dog’s implied toothlessness and the strange flowers in the background also soften the impact of the violence. And even as the pit bull devours the boy, the image could also be read as one of replacement: the dog’s head now exists where the boy’s once was. Reading the cover in this manner sets up themes that unfold in the zine’s interior: motifs of gender confusion and of masculinity being compromised and engulfed by a feminine threat.



Figure 2. *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Photocopy, 32 pages (incl. cover), 8.5 x 5.5 inches (21.6 x 14 cm). Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.



Figure 3. Inside front cover; *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

Figure 4. Page 3, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

On the inside of the front cover is an image of a pole-vaulter in midjump, accompanied by the caption, “National Wheaties Week” (fig. 3). The positioning of this drawing—in the place you’d find an ad in a mainstream magazine—emphasizes its reference to the cereal’s marketing campaign. The image also sets up another recurring theme in the zine: that of athletes in the midst of personal crises. The pole-vaulter is depicted at his most vulnerable moment, suspended in midair. As with the boy on the cover, there’s a question of how much control he really has. The pole just leaving his grip, as well as the bar he’s attempting to clear, introduces a motif of tools and athletic equipment.

On the facing page, captioned “Your girlfriend called me chicken,” two men fight with knives (fig. 4). This struggle—instigated by a threat to one of the men’s masculinity—echoes the threat depicted on the cover: the unpictured “girlfriend” looms larger than the puny knives clutched in the men’s oddly proportioned hands.

On the following verso, a woman stands in a doorway, the position of her hand echoing that of the reader turning the page. The woman either says or thinks, “If I had a husband, I’d divorce him” (fig. 5). Her disdain toward men conjures both the pit bull from the cover and the looming girlfriend from the previous page. This image also sets up a thematic marital strife that will unfold in the coming pages. The woman is drawn in a stylized manner Pettibon later abandoned—when read in conjunction with the facing recto, the large size of her head and her grotesque features make her appear puppetlike.

The facing page features a rare uncaptioned image: a Punch-like puppet holding a knife (fig. 6). The weapon echoes the knife fight from the preceding spread. When read with the cover in mind, the sinister head of the puppet appears to be swallowing the hand that’s giving it life. Its weird proportions and malicious sentiment mirror those of the woman on the verso, even as the knife points toward her, implying a threat. At the same time, the verso’s dark background contrasts with this brightly lit recto in a weirdly sympathetic



polarity. This drawing, like its subject, soon took on a life of its own—perhaps even becoming Pettibon’s most iconic image—when a colored version of it was used on the cover of Black Flag’s 1984 album, *My War*.

The two sides of the following spread are much more explicitly connected (fig. 7). Both images picture heterosexual couples in bed, the first one captioned, “The soft, protective womb of sleep.” In this drawing, the woman holds a gun, a phallic extension similar to the knives and vaulting poles previously seen. It’s unclear whether her intent toward the man is devious or if she is on guard against unseen enemies and her wielded weapon, as the caption reads, “protective.” As on the cover, there is confusion between violent and tender gestures.

The facing page is even more visually reminiscent of the cover. A woman kisses a reclining man’s nose as he looks out unhappily from the corner of his eye. The caption reads: “I want to go to sleep for about a million years and wake up as a woman.” There is something almost predatory about the way the woman kisses the man’s nose, a gesture in keeping with both the facing verso and the capricious pit bull.

These two pages are not only united by their visual rhyme; they are joined by the way their captions center around sleep. The spread—when flipping through the zine—also represents a sequential breakthrough. Previous spreads have been thematically related, but it’s hard not to wonder if this one is also related narratively. Are these two couples the same people? Is this a rare two-panel/page narrative sequence?

The following spread, however, shows no explicit narrative progression (fig. 8). On the verso, a life-sized thumb touches the corner of a baseball card depicting a man at bat. The card depicts mid-twentieth-century first baseman Ted Kluszewski, a player known for his power hitting. The caption reads, “My first orgasm.” The bat is echoed by the thumb that

Figure 5. Page 4, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

Figure 6. Page 5, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.



Figure 7. Pages 6–7, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.



Figure 8. Pages 8–9, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

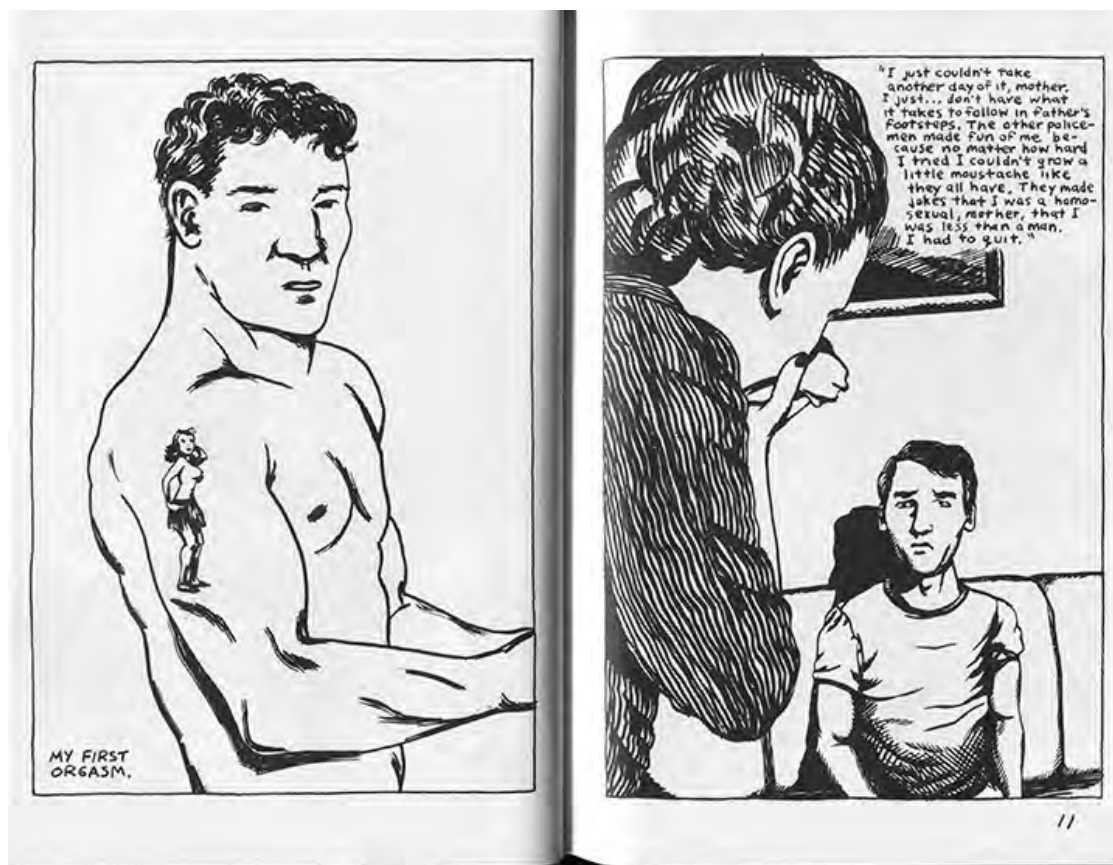


Figure 9. Pages 10–11, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

frames it (which, in turn, echoes the position of the reader's thumb), and we return to the thread of introspective athletes and the sports fans who love them introduced in "National Wheaties Week."

On the facing page, a drunken fop lists off canonical artistic giants, and, startlingly, his facial features echo those of the puppetlike woman from a previous spread. He sloshes his drink as he recites, "Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Tchaikovski," raising questions around high and low art. This effete recital of names associated with aesthetic genius contrasts with the intimately held athlete on the verso—a tension furthered by the humbling fact that Kluszewski once played a game in a jersey with a mangled spelling of his name on its back.

The next spread explicitly calls the reader's attention to the images that both precede and follow (fig. 9). A beefcake model—the eroticized athletic ideal—flexes on the left, accompanied by a caption that repeats exactly the words from the previous verso: "My first orgasm." The homoerotic context of high-stakes masculinity depicted here is compromised by the woman tattooed on the beefcake's arm—a woman who stands in a similar pose.

On the facing page, a mother weeps as she listens to her son relate a tale of emasculation: "I just couldn't take another day of it, mother. I just . . . don't have what it takes to follow in father's footsteps. The other policemen made fun of me because no matter how hard I tried I couldn't grow a little moustache like they all have. They made jokes that I was a homosexual, mother, that I was less than a man. I had to quit." The scene is depicted from the mother's point of view, emphasizing her horror and disappointment at learning her son is a failed police officer and, by extension, a failed man.

On the following verso, an exchange takes place between two men, one of them in a police uniform (fig. 10): "I saw you orally copulate Officer Retzlaff behind the lockers. I'll swallow the news, but . . . why don't we both forget all about all those burglaries and coke deals



Figure 10. Page 12, *Capricious Missives*, 1983. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

when Internal Affairs comes along.” There is another implied narrative connection here as the reader wonders if Officer Retzlaff is the failed police officer from the preceding page. Whether the connection is narratively literal or not, the two images connect thematically: both address the way homosexuality is treated in the police force—and, by implication, the patriarchal culture at large.

Like so many images in *Capricious Missives*, this one presents a confused power struggle, in which it’s unclear who comes out on top. Which of the two men is speaking—or is the caption a non sequitur? Is the nonuniformed man a civilian or an undercover cop? The pair’s hands grasp each other in a way that makes it difficult to tell whose belongs to whom. Whether they are in the midst of a struggle or a sexual encounter is unclear, much in the way the cover image can be read as both tender and violent. The uniformed officer appears to be in the dominant position, yet he has a terrified look on his face. Is he the one being threatened? Racial dynamics further skew the power struggle and introduce a theme explored on the following page as the threat shifts from feminine to racial, implicating a society structured around racism as well as patriarchy. Despite his crumpled, submissive posture, the man on the right—who appears to be white—is likely in the position of power, and issuing a threat rooted in institutionalized racism. Immediately following this confused power struggle, however, is a horrifically racist caricature of a black man wreaking havoc on police officers dwarfed by his “angel dust”—fueled rampage. Such a bleakly propagandistic portrayal makes a stark contrast—as well as an unconvincing corrective—to the more ambiguous image that precedes it.

In its remaining pages, *Capricious Missives* continues to build on the thematic threads laid out in these first images, growing even more disturbing as it braids them visually and textually. A naked and mincing J. Edgar Hoover drops names of mid-twentieth-century political giants in a manner reminiscent of the drunken fop. Another man, his name change and nose job implying failed masculinity, self-deprecatingly addresses his dead father as both stare blankly. A straight couple is portrayed in bed, this time with a *Playboy*-

style gag: the woman holds a magnet over her much older bedmate's crotch. In a different image, a couple's picnic is sabotaged by a man digging a grave nearby as a rare typographic caption reads, "Make your work more interesting." The zine's final spread features a formatting device rare for Pettibon: two textless pages divided into four sequential panels each. Both are devoted to a theme established early in the zine: men fighting. In the first page, though, the cause of the conflict seems to be macho jealousy, while in the second a violently thwarted graffiti attempt ends in an indecipherable muddle.

One image in these final pages is particularly notable: a man sits on the edge of his bed as he somberly examines his extended hand and its missing pinky. The caption reads, "My alcoholic nightmare: I don't remember a thing." This severed appendage is especially relevant given the strange ways Pettibon depicts hands and fingers throughout the zine. Hands are difficult to draw, and as an illustrator lacking professional training, Pettibon accentuates this difficulty in the ways he portrays them and, just as often, in how he doesn't.

The headless boy on the zine's cover is also missing other appendages: his hands and feet are cropped by the frame. Later in the zine, the flexing beefcake's wrists are similarly cropped. Hand placement is conspicuous in other images of questioned masculinity: the drunken fop counters stereotypes by talking with his palm facing up, while J. Edgar Hoover embraces them by posing with hand on hip as he limp-wrists around. The struggle between the men in the Officer Retzlaff image is complicated by the confusing placement of their hands. Many of the zines' characters seem to be compensating for their extremities' shortcomings by the things they awkwardly hold: bats, vaulting poles, pistols, shovels, cartoonish magnets, knives. The knife-clutching hand puppet is especially notable: tension flashes in the puppet's face—something between an inanimate stare and a sinisterly newfound life force triggered by the hidden hand intersecting with the knife.

This image is emblematic of the zine's visual pattern of missing, distorted, and tool-wielding hands and fingers, often as consequence or in service of violence. At the root of this violence lie macho insecurities and the ways they are institutionalized and perpetuated through American mass culture. While the phallic implications of augmenting tools and severed fingers may now read as datedly Freudian, in images like the Ted Kluszewski baseball card such associations are difficult to ignore. The sexual nature of the drawing's caption ("My first orgasm.") connects it to the following verso, as does the placement of the image's life-sized thumb. As the reader turns the page, it mirrors her actual thumb before being replaced by the beefcake's cropped wrists. The codex format is key here: haptic engagement with it emphasizes the thumb's placement and thus intimately connects the reader with the zine's ongoing motif of absent and distorted extremities. Pettibon himself has commented on an aspect fundamental to comic books: they must be "framed by thumbs."¹⁶

When looking at the zine through McCloud's lens, it's important to keep in mind that the movement between panels is physically very different from that between pages: there is tactility in page transitions, as well as a temporal delay and a visual reveal. Each verso is visually joined to its recto but isolated from the rest of the zine's images. This isolation also makes it easier to remove the images from their original order: Pettibon's drawings have often been reprinted individually, in numerous contexts ranging from articles to art monographs to anthologies, giving many of the images independent lives of their own.

Because these images continue to thrive when removed from their original zine format, it might be tempting to see them as what book artist Keith Smith calls a “group.” Smith breaks down the ways images work together within a codex, asserting that each picture exists contextually as an implied compound picture, associated varyingly with other pictures through their shared formats, contexts of language, levels of meaning, and points of view.¹⁷ He especially emphasizes the influence of environment, arguing that when pictures are physically compounded, they’re affected by the order of their viewing. In a group, Smith says, there is no set order of referral. He also defines two other categories: a series, where there is a linear narrative progression, and a sequence, where “several pictures react upon each other, but not necessarily with the adjacent picture.”¹⁸

Images form a group, Smith claims, when “referral cannot be made from picture to picture,” and “consequently, there is no set order of viewing.”¹⁹ I would argue, however, that *Capricious Missives* works primarily, and much more complexly, as a sequence, where the structure is “contrapuntal. . . . A geometric progression, a montage.”²⁰

“Contrapuntal.” “Geometric.” “Montage.” These words conjure something more poetic than chronological or plot driven, operating, as mentioned earlier, like a literary collection united by theme and mood. Still, despite this de-emphasis of time, implied narratives are at work. Each page hints at a much wider narrative context: words and images combine to make the reader ponder what happened before and might happen after the glimpse depicted. Every picture is a compound picture, after all. And narrative connections unfold within a work and intertextually between them—an argument that could be extended to single-panel cartoonists ranging from Gary Larson to Charles Addams. These artists, like Pettibon, revisit themes and archetypes in ways that make the reader wonder how they might connect. When Pettibon returns to celebrity characters like Joan Crawford, Charles Manson, and J. Edgar Hoover, he’s not only engaging with the fan culture traditionally associated with zines; he’s also building the figures’ personas in the way a fiction writer might (one could even compare this way of working to contemporary fanzine-inspired fan fiction). So while he may not unfold a start-to-finish narrative, Pettibon does a lot of storytelling.

“Some of the images are like recurring set pieces,” Pettibon has said,²¹ and it’s notable that he talks about the subjects of his action-packed, mostly figurative drawings in terms of place rather than characters. It’s hard not to think, here, of McCloud’s two nontemporal categories of panel transition, especially the more narrative “scene-to-scene,” as opposed to the “non sequitur,” although McCloud himself questions whether any transition can truly be non sequitur. “By creating a sequence with two or more images,” he writes, “we are endowing them with a single overriding identity, and forcing the viewer to consider them as a whole.”²² In this view, all connections between images begin with the viewer-reader.

And, indeed, Pettibon has discounted intentional ordering within his zines: the artist has called into question Will Eisner’s term “sequential art,”²³ and claimed he generally lets chance dictate how his drawings are organized and presented.²⁴ It’s worth noting here that Keith Smith differs from McCloud when he prioritizes “direct” over “random referral,” which he defines as associations made by the picture maker rather than the viewer-reader.²⁵ With Pettibon, however, randomness is key.

From the mid-1980s onward, Pettibon's drawings became much more explicitly bibliophilic in content, as he began to accompany them with quotations from classic literature. The amount of text in a typical drawing increased from one or two sentences to several conflicting textual elements, often pulled from multiple sources and manipulated. This requires an increase in active engagement on the part of the viewer-reader.²⁶ Hapkemeyer writes, "Instead of a couple of phrases or words, we begin to find whole blocks of text, at times in competition with others on the very same sheet of paper. . . . Such quantities of text necessarily determine a considerably slower reception of the work on the part of the viewer/reader, from whom the effort demanded for the perusal of an image is unusually large."²⁷ Pettibon's way of reading—a process he describes as dissection—is associative and involves interacting directly with more than one book. A level of confusion must be reached before sense is made. "I read as I write, write as I read," he said in an interview.

I'm usually reading a number of books at a time, and whether I get through an individual one is probably unlikely. I've lost interest in narrative. (*sigh*) . . . For me, reading has become more microscopic, more about dissecting the work. . . . A different context, a different language . . . you're just making these associations from one thing to another. I used to start out with a simple drawing that would begin as an idea, and then my writing would make some associations with something else. And then, you know, a day later, or a year later, or whenever, the whole page would be covered with small, finely written text. And it would become a lot of things that were meant to be just in one drawing, expanded into this while still part of my notes. Voluminous notes. You do actually get lost in that morass of associations.²⁸

We can see here how important context is to Pettibon's creative process and how this process is inverted and unpacked by a viewer-reader approaching his images. Such interpretation is hard work: not only must the viewer-reader attempt to traverse Pettibon's cognitive bridge between image and text, he must also look to the artist's other works for cues to the logic of his intertextual universe. Hapkemeyer observes, "The distances between the drawings which hang beside each another [*sic*] in an exhibition are just like those between image and text, or again like those between various texts that may well appear in any given drawing, and they all demand a fundamental contribution from the viewer: 'filling in the blanks' means that it's left up to every viewer's personal creativity to set up connections that cross over distances which at times can be quite great."²⁹

Such distances exist within and between galleries and codices: flipping through pages and circumambulating a room both involve spatial and temporal challenges. But the tactile nature of the codex allows for a haptic intimacy that closes the physical distance between the viewer-reader and the text. If nothing else, the book's portable nature, in theory, allows for settings and states more conducive to reading than those evoked by the public sphere of the gallery. "Whereas the reader of a book is fully prepared for the circumstances involved in reading," Hapkemeyer writes, "the museum or gallery viewer of visual works of art is generally in a frame of mind that's prepared for simple looking."³⁰ Buzz Spector's thoughts on the codex's innate intimacy echo Hapkemeyer: "We dress up to go out and look at art; undressed, in bed, we read. We seek greater comfort while reading than the furnishings of museums or concert halls will ever grant us."³¹

In a perfect world such observations would hold true. In reality, though, an initial hurdle of accessibility exists, for example, for rare and out-of-print books and zines, one that must be overcome before achieving such intimacy. There are economic barriers to the average viewer-reader owning a copy of Pettibon's now collectible early zines—an odd conundrum for a genre sprung from the ethic of the democratic multiple. Special-collections reading rooms, for all their stewards' valiant efforts, don't exactly offer levels of comfort and privacy conducive to reclining states of undress. So while, of course, sitting is more conducive to reading than standing, viewer-readers have to take advantage of opportunities to catch glimpses of Pettibon's prolific output when and where they arise—even if this means reading on their feet.

Despite his transition to gallery artist, Pettibon has continued to produce zines, as well as more substantial artists' books, although his codex-related output has decreased considerably since early in his career. In 2010 he collaborated with Arion Press to illustrate a Jim Thompson novel. Meanwhile, his gallery work has come to consist of wall-sized collages of drawings that he's described as resembling "a book exploded on the wall."³² It's ironic that as his art became more explicitly literary in content, it also became less codex-centric in form as it moved to gallery walls. The tension between fragmentation and connection is interesting here: Beatty laments the diminishment of narrative that seems necessary for comics to receive gallery attention, but perhaps such venues may cultivate an alternative kind of sense making. The gallery's life-sized scale can foster unforeseen connections, both narrative and not, between images in Pettibon's expansive intertextual universe.

As the publishing industry continues to struggle through the information age, museums may, Pettibon has implied, now play the role of gatekeeper less than publishers do. "Comics are a book medium," he writes.

Comic Books on the wall don't pass as comic books. You couldn't flip through one if you tried—and that's a shame. They aren't hung right unless they are framed by thumbs on either side. . . . And yet an infrastructure of newsstands, drugstore racks—essentially, the major part of a distribution system that the healthy circulation of comics books should depend on—has been left to wither away. Therefore, the museum and gallery system is to be relied upon, in such a case, purely for its distributive mode.³³

Meanwhile, shifting market forces have made it difficult to experience Pettibon's zines in their original photocopied and stapled format. The only volume in which they have been reprinted in their original order, *Raymond Pettibon: The Books 1978–1998* (2000), is now out of print, and in recent years used copies have retailed for as much as \$625. Far more common are monographs where editors arrange, however they see fit, selections from his prodigious body of work—a practice not far removed from the way Pettibon himself now works. Such remixes highlight, like Pettibon's gallery collages, the shortcomings implicit in limiting sequential art to linearity.

While it's important to value the original sequential contexts of the artist's drawings, their continual recontextualization is just as fascinating. One especially adventurous book featuring his work is *Raymond Pettibon: A Reader* (1998). Released in conjunction with an exhibition organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, it intersperses selected Pettibon drawings with excerpts from

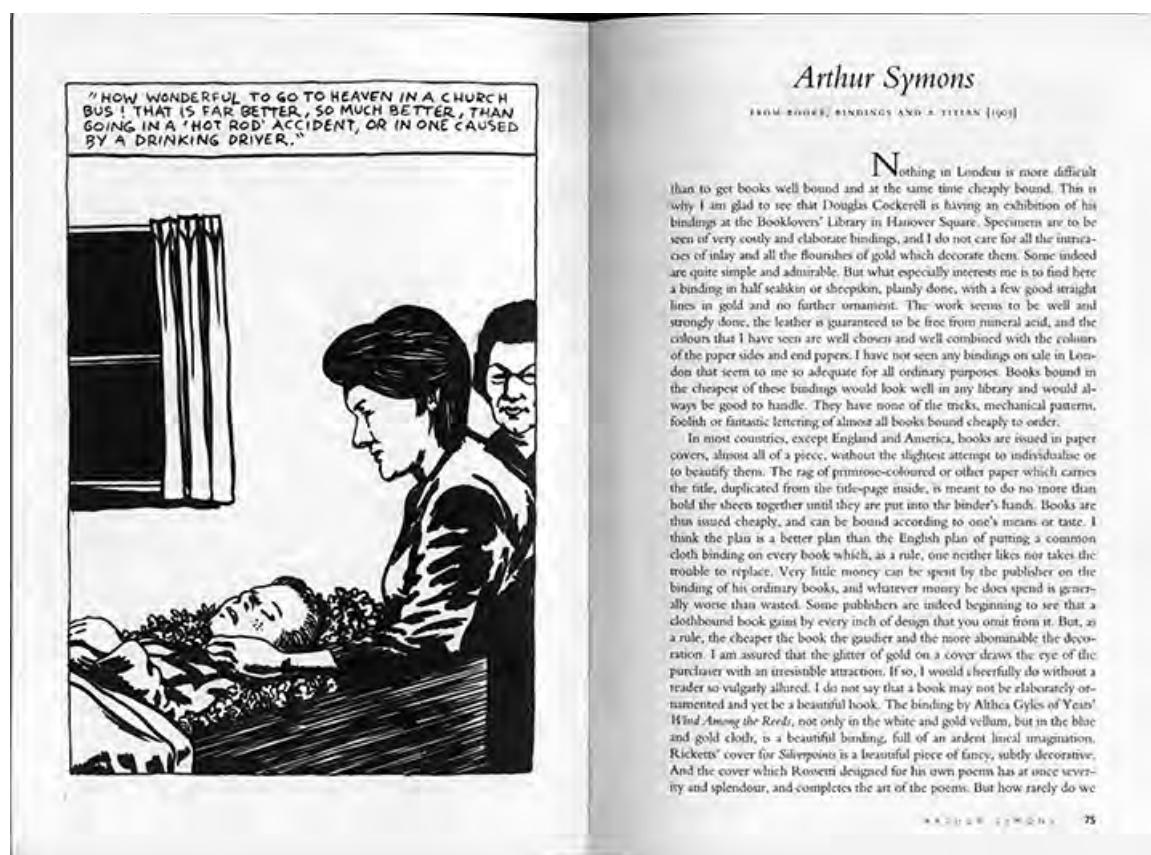


Figure 11. Page spread from Raymond Pettibon: *A Reader* (1998). Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.

works by John Ruskin, William Blake, Thomas Carlyle, Marcel Proust, and many others. Inspired by Pettibon's use of literary texts in his drawings, this institutional juxtaposition of his drawings with high-culture authors helped position him as a gallery artist. The book's editors' note reads, "A bound book demands a linear order, but this does not prescribe how the reader must approach it. Connections form and then evaporate. The Reader reveals that all texts (whether paragraphs from a novel or complete poems or letters) are fragments of the universe of writing to which they belong."³⁴ This philosophy gives shape to a book as fragmentary as Pettibon's process: an appropriative *livre d'artiste*.

One page spread from the reader offers an especially emblematic glimpse (fig. 11). On the left appears a drawing taken from one of Pettibon's early zines, a pathetic scene of questionable transcendence. Its caption reads: "How wonderful to go to heaven in a church bus! That is far better, so much better, than going in a 'hot rod' accident, or in one caused by a drinking driver." The words appear to be spoken by a mourning woman who looks for solace by interpreting recent events through rose-colored glasses. A senseless freeway death suddenly makes some sense if you reframe the sequence: the victim was on his way to God already.

And on the facing page an excerpt from a 1905 treatise on bookbinding by literary critic Arthur Symons describes a common practice that, funny enough, might be said to presage the DIY, on-the-cheap zine culture that spawned Pettibon. Symons writes,

In most countries, except England and America, books are issued in paper covers, almost all of a piece, without the slightest attempt to individualise or beautify them. The rag of primrose-coloured or other paper which carries the title, duplicated from the title-page inside, is meant to do no more than hold the sheets together until they are put into the binder's hands. Books are thus issued cheaply, and can be bound according to one's means or taste.³⁵

Symons's observations, while specific to a long-gone age, suggest a viewer-reader whose "means or taste" may influence the order in which her book is rebound, an idea that inadvertently rings true for contemporary observers of Pettibon's art, where sequence is left up for interpretation. Referentially both cartoonish and bookish, even his individual images carry echoes of the panel scanning and page turning inherent in both forms. Such contextual clues, which shift depending on whether they're perceived in a gallery or a codex, require an especially active viewer-reader, one willing to fill in her own gaps and to actively assert meaning.

Proximity affects this meaning, of course: the sense of touch influences interpretation, and images, once bound together, are hard to disengage. But with Pettibon, the spatial, interconnective potential of the book remains open. ■

NOTES

1. Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 190.
2. See Matthew P. Brown, *The Pilgrim and the Bee: Reading Rituals and Book Culture in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), where he looks at the varying ways colonial American readers approached devotional books. And see Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), for his exploration of what he terms "arthrology"; i.e., the many relationships comics panels have to one another and the resulting tensions readers face between the chronological and spatial aspects of comics.
3. Andreas Hapkemeyer, "Raymond Pettibon: The Pages Which Contain Truth Are Blank," in *Raymond Pettibon: The Pages Which Contain Truth Are Blank* (Innsbruck: Skarabaeus, 2003), 82.
4. Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 306.
5. Amy Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2005), 95.
6. Richard Ohmann compares these features to the sections of a department store in *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 225.
7. Spencer, 185–86.
8. Stephen Duncombe, *Alternative Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Microcosm Publishing, 2008), 14.
9. *Ibid.*, 11.
10. Hapkemeyer writes, "It's mainly at outward levels that Pettibon's work relates to comic strips: in the style of the handling of ink and line, in the combination of text and image, and as well in the particular way in which he combines them. The work, however, is most directly based on photographs of various origin: newspaper photos, video stills, movie stills, and so forth. . . . While playing with the clearly and simply structured world of comic strips, Pettibon's works cannot themselves be said to belong to it" (74–75).
11. Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (New York: Verso, 1997), 14.
12. Hapkemeyer, 72.
13. Raymond Pettibon, *Raymond Pettibon: The Books 1978–1998* (Köln: Walther König, 2000).
14. Robert Storr, "'You Are What You Read': Words and Pictures by Raymond Pettibon," in *Raymond Pettibon* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2002), 45.

15. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 70–72.
16. John Carlin, ed., *Masters of American Comics* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), 232.
17. Keith Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book* (Rochester, NY: Keith A. Smith Books, 2003), 41–42.
18. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
19. *Ibid.*, 45.
20. *Ibid.*, 46.
21. Max Blagg, “Raymond Pettibon,” *Interview* (December/January 2009): 193.
22. McCloud, 73.
23. Carlin, 248.
24. Grady Turner, “Raymond Pettibon,” *BOMB* 69 (Fall 1999), accessed online at <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2257/raymond-pettibon>.
25. Smith, 45.
26. Robert Storr’s analysis of a Pettibon drawing exemplifies this readerly engagement: “‘There is something in my storyteller’s art that wants to put the reader and writer on equal footing in the role of creator,’ Pettibon’s disembodied voice says in one drawing. On the other hand, queering the argument and reclaiming his artistic prerogatives the same voice or another adds the cryptic sentence ‘The hand that draws the Rorschach blots . . .’, in other words the hand of an artist who deliberately makes something which should come into being by chance and thus programs the information that promises the reader the privileges of free and open-ended interpretation” (67).
27. Hapkemeyer, 71.
28. Turner.
29. Hapkemeyer, 80–82.
30. *Ibid.*, 71.
31. Buzz Spector, “The Book Alone: Object and Fetishism,” in *Books as Art*, edited by Timothy A. Eaton (Boca Raton, FL: Boca Raton Museum of Art, 1992), 38.
32. Blagg, 194.
33. Carlin, 232.
34. Ann Temkin and Hamza Walker, eds., *Raymond Pettibon: A Reader* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1998), 3.
35. *Ibid.*, 75.

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THE INTIMATE BOOKS OF ANAÏS NIN: DIARIST AS LETTERPRESS PRINTER

By Emily Larned

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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IN DISCUSSION OF THE FORM OF THE BOOK, privacy is often invoked.

Holland Cotter writes, “Books are created for one-on-one interactions.

They are, by nature, zones of privacy.”¹ Similarly, in constructing “a

critical metalanguage for the book as an artform,” Johanna Drucker

emphasizes the intimacy of books: the one-on-one encounter between

maker and reader, the concealment made possible by covers and of

closure, the book’s intrinsic “secrecy, intimacy, privacy.”²

GRAPH BY
VAN VECHTEN

Anaïs Nin (1903–77), an American writer of Cuban-Spanish and French-Danish descent, understood these innate characteristics of books better than most writers, and through the creation of her handmade, semiautobiographical, deeply personal books, created works of great magnetism and power.

Anaïs Nin, a singular figure in twentieth-century letters, is perhaps best known for her close association with Henry Miller, and for her extensive, deeply introspective diary. Transformed by psychoanalysis and a subsequent relationship with Freud's longtime colleague Otto Rank, Nin wrote surrealist, experimental, and deeply personal fiction derived from her own experiences. For a dollar a page, for a private benefactor, she also wrote sheaves of titillating erotica. With Nin's permission, these stories were published posthumously. Although the erotic stories increased her notoriety and popularity, they may have diminished her reputation as a serious writer. While during the second half of her life she was married to two men simultaneously, it was her first (and lifelong) husband, Hugh Guiler, whose work as a banker financed her artistic exploits as well as those of Henry Miller and other friends. Guiler, himself an artist and filmmaker, appears to have been an enormously tolerant man, as well as deeply in love with Nin. His request of loyalty from Nin was that she not discuss him in her published diaries; she obliged and he rarely appears. When he is mentioned, it is only as an artist-collaborator under his pseudonym, Ian Hugo. While Nin's fiction has a mixed legacy, her astonishing diaries, expurgated versions of which entered publication in the 1960s, established her as a significant twentieth-century avant-garde writer and an important feminist figure.

What is less known about Nin is that she was a habitual self-publisher. Throughout her life, she would continuously, obsessively republish a text once it had fallen out of print, creating many different books from one text. The poet and printer Alan Loney distinguishes between the words "text" and "book." Although the terms are often used interchangeably in English, an author's text (her words) is mutable of form. This slippery, shape-shifting text is contrasted with the particular material specificities of a physical book. It is these nontextual qualities—the paper, the type, the margins, the size and shape—Loney explains, that he found so compelling.³ Today when a contemporary reader finds a book by Nin, it is often a slim, inexpensive paperback printed on cheap paper, with a glossy, ill-designed cover strewn with garish colors and art deco type. How different this reading experience is from hovering over the dark, hushed, carefully made letterpress editions produced by Nin's own hands (fig. 2).

This essay focuses on the period in her life when Nin was an active letterpress printer and publisher, and is intended for an audience of book art practitioners more familiar with printing than with Nin. This

Figure 1. Portrait of Anaïs Nin (1940) by Carl Van Vecchten, by permission of the Van Vecchten Trust. Van Vecchten's archive, including his collection of Anaïs Nin's books, is now housed at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and was instrumental to this research.

Figure 2. Nin at the press in her Macdougall Street studio, 1942. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



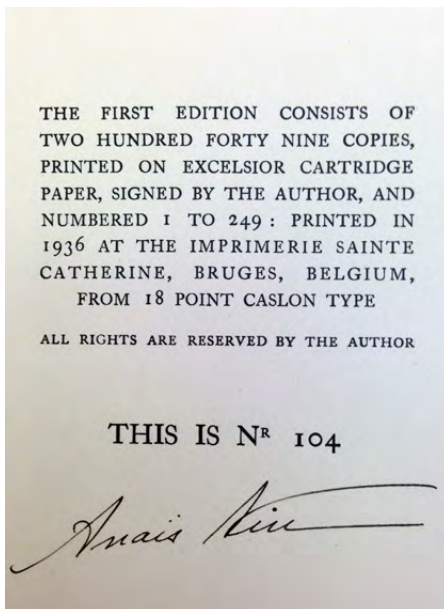
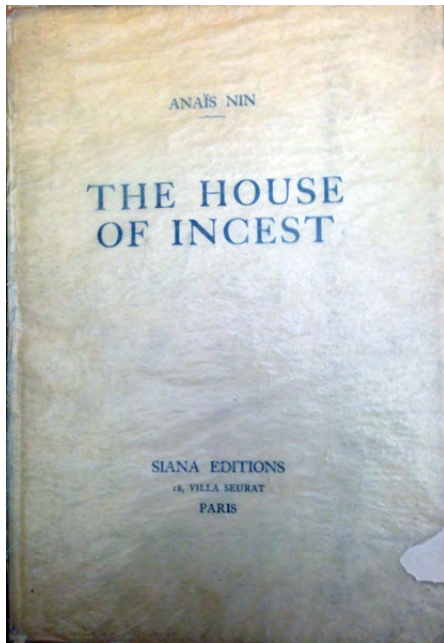


Figure 3. Cover and colophon of *The House of Incest* (1936), Siana Editions, 89 pages, 28 cm, edition of 249. This first edition is designed in a very plain style, with large type (18-point Caslon) and no illustrations. Photographs used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

essay is not a literary analysis of changes in the texts from edition to edition. Instead, it looks at the narrative surrounding the physical books, and at the books' personal stories. Their biographies. These deeply intimate objects, fragments of autobiography embodied by the hand of their author: What are the circumstances that produced them? Why did Nin personally reprint copies of books already published? As an already-published writer, what types of autonomy did she seek through this practice of independent self-printing and self-publishing? How did the meditative discipline of letterpress influence the writing practice of a diarist? And, ultimately, why did Nin stop producing her work in this way?

At the outbreak of World War II, in 1939, Nin fled Paris for New York. She was already the author of three published books. But in her diary she recounted to a friend the "lamentable story" of these titles: "*DH Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*, published by Edward Titus a few months before his divorce, which caused him to go bankrupt. The book was but partially distributed, half lost, not sent to reviewers, and no royalties, not even copies for myself. Michael Fraenkel loaned me the money to print *The House of Incest*, but lost interest in it when it was out and did not distribute it as he had promised. No reviews. Lawrence Durrell backed the publication of *The Winter of Artifice*. Obelisk issued it a week before the war. No distribution. No reviews."⁴

As one might conclude from the fact that she borrowed money to pay for it, the Siana Editions version of *The House of Incest* (fig. 3) was self-published: Siana spelled backward is Anaïs. Obelisk, a Parisian press founded by Englishman Jack Kahane, famous for his business model that "if a book was banned in the UK or US it would profitably sell in Paris,"⁵ published Nin's *The Winter of Artifice* (fig. 4). This book was the third and final in the Villa Seurat series, joining books by Nin's friends Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell. Kahane was not an enthusiast of Nin's work, and this series was financed either by Durrell or by his wife, Nancy.⁶ Kahane died nine days after Nin's book was released; World War II began two days before. *The Winter of Artifice* was, in Durrell's words, "swallowed suddenly in the blackout and the alarms."⁷

The House of Incest and *The Winter of Artifice* were both printed in tiny editions, funded by friends, and never distributed. In a sense, they had never been published: they were never made public. After Nin left Paris for New York, she was intensely lonely. She grew increasingly anxious to publish as a way to connect with others. This sentiment may sound disingenuous, but Nin was extraordinarily committed to her readers. In her diaries she often discusses meeting them. She stopped writing fiction toward the end of her life to be able to personally answer all letters sent to her by fans.⁸ "That is my essential reason for writing, not for fame, not to be celebrated after death, but to heighten and create life all around me . . . I use the book like dynamite, to blast myself out of isolation." Nin saw her books as "portable bridges" she could "lay down between human beings"⁹ and herself. As Henry Miller observed in a letter, "Part of the act of creating is discovering your own kind."¹⁰ Publishing is both making public and making *a* public, a readership. At this time, Nin's intimate writing remained private.

Over the next three years, Nin found that getting published in America proved even more difficult than it had been in Europe. An old friend, Caresse Crosby of Black Sun Press, made plans to publish Nin's work, but the books never materialized. With larger publishers, Nin found a literary culture focused by war on politics and realism, and inhospitable toward her introspective work of psychoanalytic surrealist fiction. Publishers such as

Duell, Sloan & Pearce said her writing was “marvelous” but only suitable to be “published in a limited edition.”¹¹ Nin interpreted Houghton Mifflin’s rejection as an assessment that “the inner life is so trivial.” She wrote, “It is people’s inner demons which will create wars . . . it is the inner demon of a man which makes history. But America is still looking for the devil outside.”¹²

Nin had never intended to become a printer-publisher of her own work. Perhaps she wouldn’t have bought a press if she didn’t have the additional motivation of helping her boyfriend. For years, Nin had funneled her husband’s money to support Henry Miller and other artist friends. Her decision to establish a press was motivated by her maternal attitude toward her current lover, Gonzalo More. She was compelled to secure for him productive and meaningful work. He, a chronically underemployed communist from a wealthy Peruvian family, was intrigued with printing. His brother was a newspaper publisher, and as a self-employed letterpress printer, More would be both proletarian workman and romantic artisan. In December of 1941, Nin and More found a treadle-operated platen press for \$75 (\$1,072 in 2015 dollars). “The man said we could turn out Christmas cards on it, but not fine books,” Nin wrote, but “Gonzalo was sure it would work.”¹³ Nin borrowed \$75 from one friend, and \$100 “for type and trays” from another. Then there was only the space to find: she delighted in a third-floor attic of a very old wooden house at 144 Macdougal Street in Greenwich Village: “It was a skylight studio, ideal for the work . . . it was old, uneven, with a rough wood floor, painted black, walls painted yellow.”¹⁴ Rent was \$35 a month; in comparison, she paid \$60 a month for her apartment at 215 West Thirteenth Street. Nin and More bought “end paper, small lots which are not usable by big publishers, but ideal for us. Good paper.”¹⁵ By January the press had been delivered to the new space, and they borrowed a book from the library on how to print. They decided that More would design and Nin would typeset; the first book they would publish was a new edition of *The Winter of Artifice*, her most recent work.

This new book was not a simple reprint of the Villa Seurat edition. The opportunity to revisit the text brought about a thorough rewriting, and a reconsideration of the collection as a whole. Nin substantially edited the text. She entirely removed the first story (based on her relationship with Henry Miller), making what had been the second story, “Lilith,” about her incestuous relationship with her father, the book’s primary piece. This story was recast from first person to the third: the “I” became “she.” Interestingly enough, Nin does not discuss these editing decisions in the diary. What she does discuss, in brilliant detail, is the influence of typesetting (fig. 5) on her writing and her pleasure in working at the press (figs. 6, 7):

Typesetting slowly makes me analyze each phrase and tighten the style.¹⁶

The words which first appeared in my head, out of the air, take body. Each letter has a weight. I can weigh each word again, to see if it is the right one.¹⁷

Take the letter O out of the box, place it next to the T, then a comma, then a space, and so on. . . . The writing is often improved by the fact that I live so many hours with a page that I am able to scrutinize it, to question the essential words. In writing, my only discipline has been to cut out the unessential. Typesetting is like film cutting. The discipline of typesetting and printing is good for the writer.¹⁸

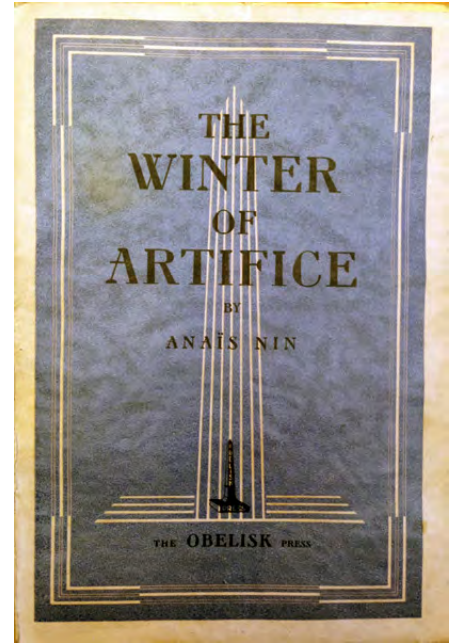


Figure 4. Cover of *The Winter of Artifice* (1939), Villa Seurat series by Obelisk Press, 239 pages, 30 cm, unverified edition size. The Beinecke Library gives the edition as five hundred copies, but its catalog record for this title is identical to that for Nin’s 1942 self-published edition (including listing the size as 22 cm, which is incorrect) and therefore may also be an error. This book is in the Villa Seurat series style: the other books by Lawrence Durrell (*Black Book*) and Henry Miller (*Max and the White Phagocytes*) are identical in design except for the color of the covers. Miller’s book was printed in one thousand copies, but as he was a more established writer than Nin or Durrell, he may have commanded a larger print run. (Obelisk had published Miller’s infamous *Tropic of Cancer* in 1934). Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



Figure 5. Nin typesetting *Winter of Artifice* (1942) in the Macdougall Street studio. It appears that she typeset while seated. Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



Figure 6. Nin printing *Winter of Artifice* in the Macdougall Street studio, 1942. Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



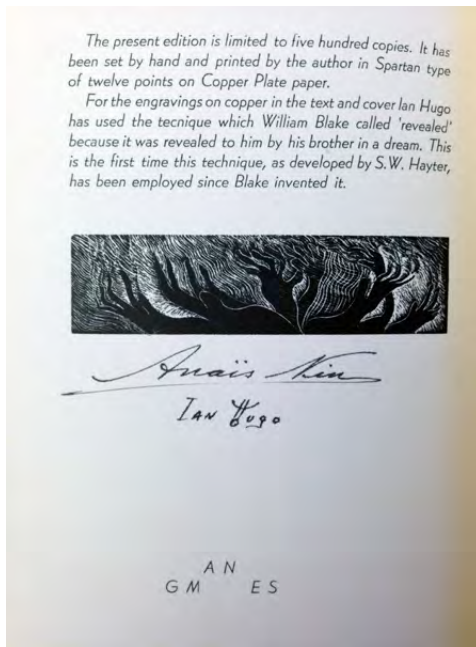
Figure 7. Nin printing the covers for *Winter of Artifice*. In her diary, Nin mentions the difficulty of finding a bindery that would accept a job of unusual size and in a small edition. She does not name the bindery in her diary or in the colophons of her books. Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Nin found that “while I typeset one book, I am already writing another book. As fast as I typeset I also relive many periods of my life not included in this book.”¹⁹ In a manner familiar to many contemporary practitioners, the slow deliberation of typesetting freed her mind creatively, allowing her to pursue the next project as she produced the current one. Still, the work was slowgoing. When she began, it took “an hour and a half to typeset half a page.”²⁰ But instead of feeling frustrated, she wrote: “The creation of an individual world, an act of independence, such as the work at the press, is a marvelous cure for anger and frustration. The insults of the publishers, the rejections, the ignorance, all are forgotten. I love the studio. I get up with eager curiosity. The press is a challenge. We make mistakes.”²¹

Misreading the library book, they thought “oiling the rollers” meant applying oil *on* the rollers. They couldn’t print for a day. Nin set a page too loose and the type fell from the chase, pried on the floor. She writes, “We learned the hard way, by experience, without a teacher. Testing, inventing, seeking, struggling. . . . We dreamt, ate, talked, slept with the press.”²² Nin and More read all the books about printing in the library. When not printing, they studied the history of typefaces. “The press mobilized our energies, and is a delight. At the end of the day you can see your work, weigh it, it is done, it exists.”²³ Nin wrote:

I want to work. The relationship to handcraft is a beautiful one. You are related bodily to a solid block of metal letters, to the weight of the trays, to the adroitness of spacing, to the tempo and temper of the machine. You acquire some of the weight and solidity of the metal, the strength and power of the machine. Each triumph is a conquest by the body, fingers, muscles. You live with your hands, in acts of physical deftness. You pit your faculties against concrete problems. The victories are concrete, definable, touchable. A page of perfect printing. You can touch the page you wrote. We exult in what we master and discover. Instead of using one’s energy in a void, against frustrations, in anger against publishers, I use it on the press, type, paper, a source of energy. Solving problems, technical, mechanical problems. *Which can be solved.*²⁴

When *Winter of Artifice* was complete, it was sold at Frances Steloff’s Gotham Book Mart. Nin wrote, “The book created a sensation by its beauty. The typography by Gonzalo, the engravings by Ian Hugo were unique.” Within a month, “Without advertising or reviews, the entire edition sold.”²⁵ According to the diary, this edition comprised three



hundred copies. The book's colophon (fig. 8), however, claims there were five hundred copies. Regardless of the final edition size, the intended run was much larger: the advance prospectus (fig. 9) boasts of an edition of seven hundred fifty books. This same prospectus offers *Winter of Artifice* for three dollars a copy (forty-three in 2015 dollars).

The book possesses a disarming beauty. Perhaps because of Nin's lasting legacy, and the care and attention she lavished on both the writing and the physical production of the book, it radiates what Drucker describes in *The Century of Artists' Books* as "an auratic quality, an often inexplicable air of power, attraction, or uniqueness . . . a mystique, a sense of charged presence."²⁶ While not an artist's book, Nin's book is powerful as an artifact. Like many auratic books, it is deeply tied to her "personal history."²⁷ The entrenched intimacy of this book, of its deepest psychological roots, its autobiographical stories, Nin's painstaking rewriting of it while at the type case: all the eccentricities or so-called errors of the book feel urgent and necessary.

Gone are the ample proportions of the Villa Seurat series; the trim size of Nin's handmade edition is considerably more portable. This new edition is darker, more intimate, more personal, with a surprising heft. The cover (fig. 10) is a dark and smoky engraving by Ian Hugo (Nin's husband Hugh Guiler) that wraps around, encompassing front, back, spine. Both the spine and the front cover are titled with loose, free hand-lettered script as part of the engraving, emphasizing the deeply personal nature of the book. Opening the book reveals a substantial bottom margin, a full five centimeters, nearly double the top and outer margin (fig. 11). The typeface is a medium-weight sans serif, Spartan Medium 12 point, creating a black, austere, and modern-looking page. Spartan Light italic is used for emphasis and for some interior monologues; in comparison, its lighter color on the page looks anemic and gray. New paragraphs are gently indicated by an em space. Nin uses the typing convention of two spaces—or perhaps an em space—after all punctuation, resulting in typographic rivers throughout the book. Hyphens have been substituted for quotation marks to indicate dialogue. Likely there were insufficient apostrophes and commas in Nin's cases to set the dialogue in the conventional manner. The presswork is uneven throughout, varying from too light to too heavy. Hugo's six copper line engravings were printed relief using William Blake's technique, according to the colophon (fig. 8). They are printed in black ink, two to three inches in size. They mostly pose as chapter heads or tails, but one is inserted into the text block such that the text awkwardly wraps around it. There are widows and orphans and typos, such as "sadi" for "said" (p. 35), and incorrect word breaks such as "na-mes" (p. 20). Neither Nin nor More was a native English speaker,

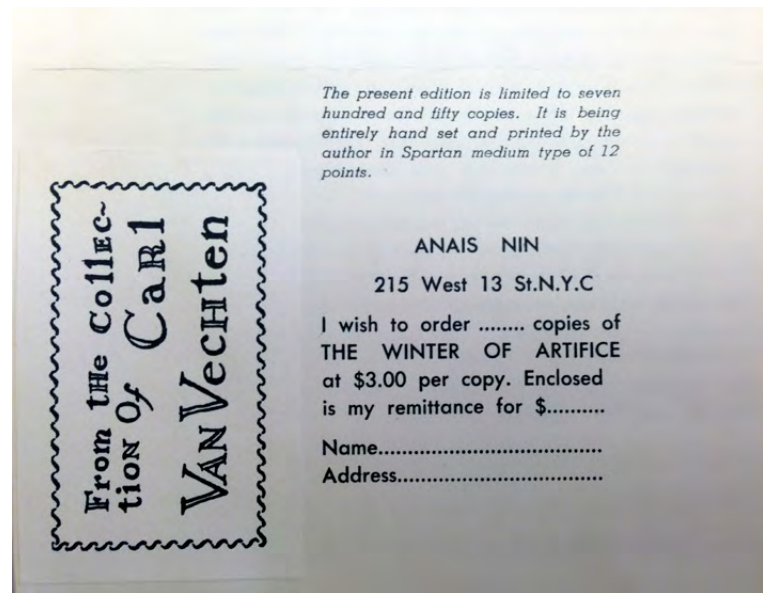


Figure 8. Colophon of *Winter of Artifice*. Of the initials at the bottom of the page, the identities of GM and AN are clear, but who or what is ES? Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 9. Advance prospectus for *Winter of Artifice*, offering it for pre-sale for three dollars a copy. Here the edition is cited as 750 copies, while the book's colophon states 500 and Nin's diary claims 300. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

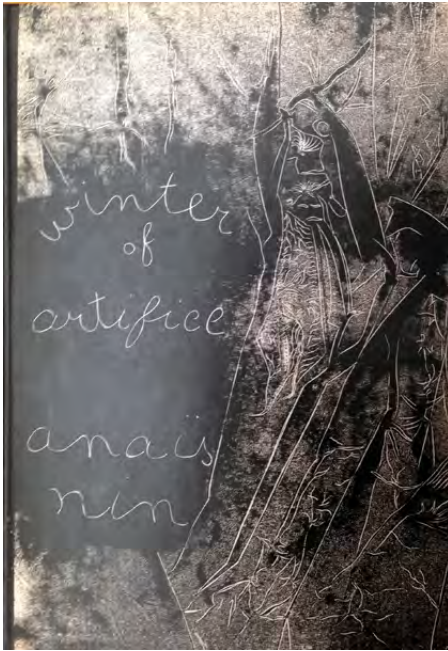


Figure 10. Cover of *Winter of Artifice* (1942), 156 pages, 22 cm, edition of five hundred copies. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

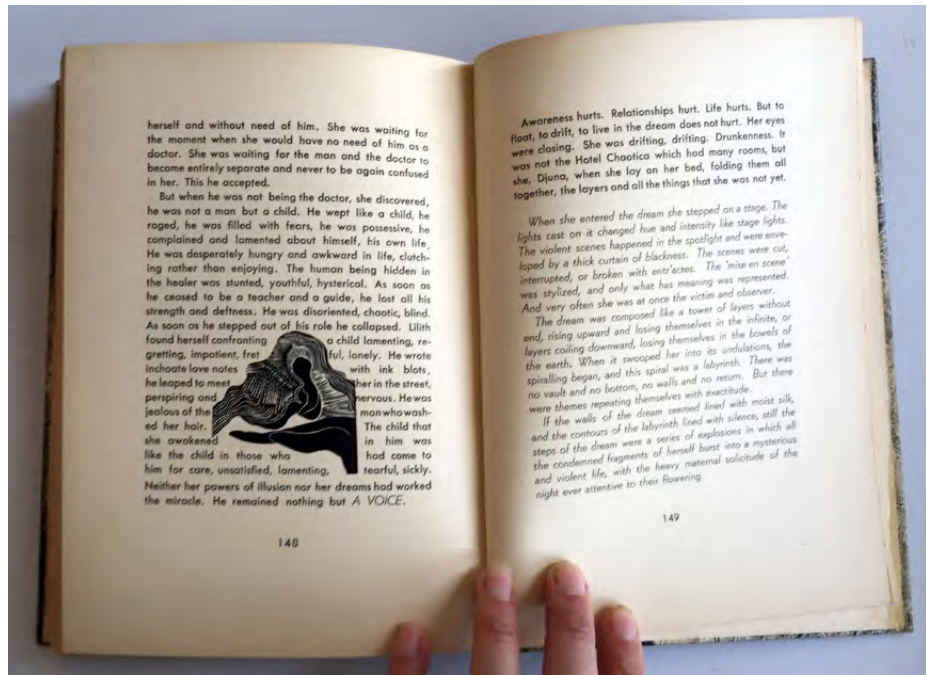


Figure 11. Spread from *Winter of Artifice*. Note the awkwardly tight text wrap around the image, and the surprising use of light italic for emphasis. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

and Nin sometimes fretted over her command of what she called “technical” English. Many of the book’s design decisions appear to be motivated by pragmatism, and the gestalt of the book is a power difficult to articulate. Holland Cotter wrote of Emily Dickinson’s handmade fascicles that in addition to their intimacy he was struck by their “independence of mind, the self-sufficiency, the self-confidence.”²⁸ While markedly different from Dickinson’s works, this spirit also imbues *Winter of Artifice*.

Nin established the press to print her own work, but she was also interested in publishing other artists and writers in her circle. In her diary she mentions that her press printed books by Max Ernst and Hugh Chisolm, but she does not discuss the details of their production or their titles. She found operating the press as a business difficult. By June of 1943, the rent was four months overdue.

Nin’s next self-published book was a collection of older, fantastical stories she had written before the Spanish Civil War, *Under a Glass Bell* (fig. 12). These stories had been previously published in little magazines. In the front matter, Nin writes, “Acknowledgement is here made to the editors of *Twice a Year*, *Experimental Review*, *Purpose*, *Matrix*, *The Phoenix*, *Diogenes*, *Delta Seven* for permission to reprint stories first published in their pages.”²⁹ According to the book’s colophon, Nin handset the type, and the Gemor Press designed and printed it.

Of Nin’s self-published letterpress editions, *Under a Glass Bell* is the masterpiece. While *Winter of Artifice* has auratic power, *Under a Glass Bell* is extraordinarily compelling. A narrow and slim volume, its proportions are more elegant than its predecessor’s. The book has a genuinely intimate, magical quality. Its cover is another dusky, inky wraparound engraving by Ian Hugo, but this time without his lettering identifying the title or the author on the cover or spine. A 10-point Bernhard Gothic Light italic type is used consistently for all text throughout. Nin spelled out the page numbers in the same type but in a smaller size, and while doing so made at least one endearing typo (fig. 13). Despite the narrower trim size, *Bell*’s column measure is 21 picas to *Winter*’s 23: the margin was reduced more than the line length (fig. 14). Still evident is a generous bottom margin, but the other margins have become far tighter and often vary. The text block is very tight to the outer edge when illustrations accompany the text. There are eleven more illustrations than in *Winter of Artifice*, and they are inserted awkwardly close to the text block: these spaces are too

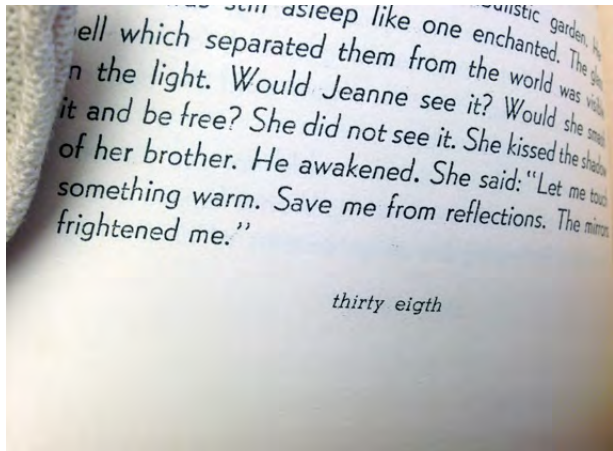


Figure 13. Under a Glass Bell. Endearing typo in the spelled-out folio. There is at least one other typo, on page 83: "eyelashss" for "eyelashes." Photograph used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 12. Cover of Under a Glass Bell (1944), Gemor Press, 83 pages, 22 cm, edition three hundred. In addition to the gorgeous wraparound cover by Ian Hugo, the book contains seventeen of his engravings from copper plates. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

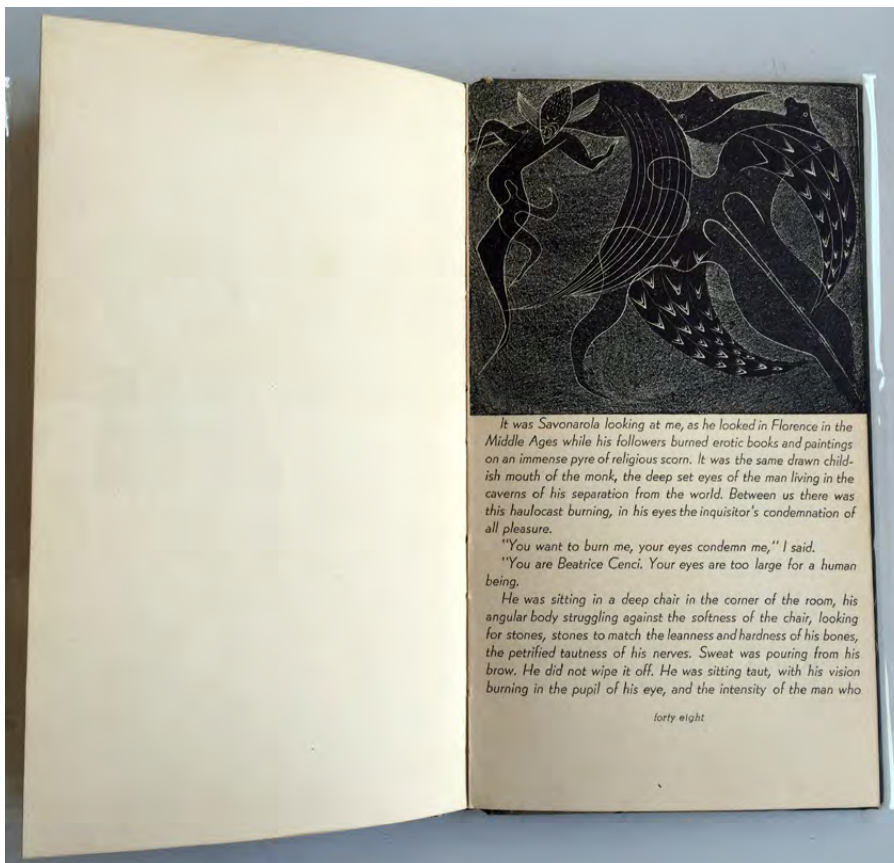


Figure 14. Page spread from Under a Glass Bell, with blank verso. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

tight and not fully integrated with the design. A blank verso greets each story's minimal title page, and a blank verso repeats on the following spread while the story begins on the recto. This generous use of space results in flashes of blank pages when flipping through the book. But despite its idiosyncrasies, or perhaps because of them, *Under a Glass Bell* succeeds in creating its own gorgeous world for Nin's intimate, confessional, dreamlike stories.

Nin's and More's achievement was very well received. *Under a Glass Bell*, which was favorably reviewed by Edmund Wilson in the *New Yorker*, sold out in three weeks. The brisk sale motivated them to create a second edition in Linotype, with fewer illustrations, in a much larger edition of eight hundred. But despite these triumphs, Nin reported, "The money from the sale of the book did not relieve the economic pressures."³⁰

At this time, More told Nin that he was not satisfied working as a printer; he still felt a failure; he did not want to continue operating her private press. Nin's selfless motive for maintaining the press vanished. She felt "utterly sad."³¹ The press was in crisis and its future was uncertain.

Nin decided to make "Gonzalo the head of a commercial press, able to print whatever came his way. It would be his press, bear his name, and he would have the freedom to use it as he wished . . . his friends will say 'that is Gonzalo's press.' It would no longer seem like an extension of my work."³² Nin borrowed money from a bank, and they bought a bigger press and moved the shop to a small, two-story, green house recently vacated by *The Villager*, a Greenwich Village newspaper, at 17 East Thirteenth Street, for sixty-five dollars a month. Nin immediately mourned the loss of her studio: "Gonzalo did not realize how difficult it was for me to relinquish the intimate personal press, not open to the public. But I think it was necessary for him to be free and dissociated from my work and romantic projects."³³

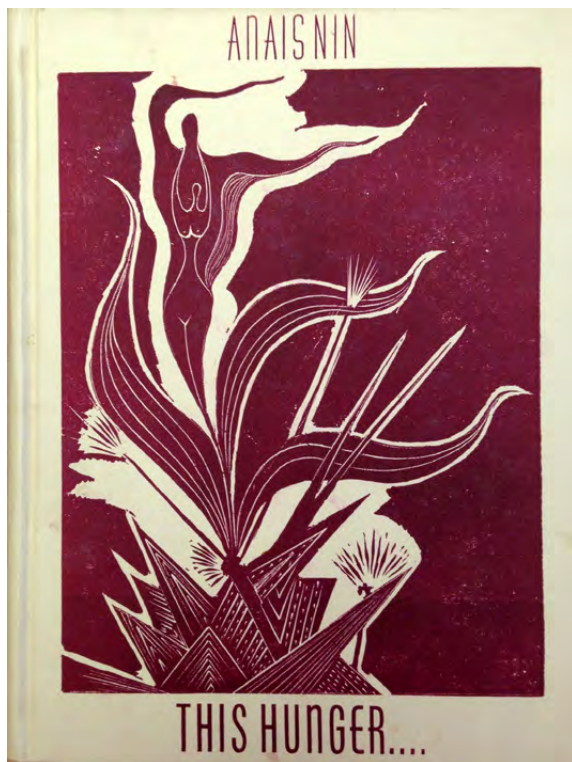
It was only then, according to her diary, that the press adopted the name Gemor Press, for Gonzalo More. But Gemor Press is already the imprint named in the first edition of *Under a Glass Bell* (fig. 15). This book was printed before More's crisis, the bank loan, the purchase of the bigger press, and the move to East Thirteenth Street. The exact chronology of these events and More's ownership of the press is unclear.

In a letter at this time, Henry Miller wrote to Nin, "Your two books from your own press are causing a stir everywhere. You should never have to hand-set type again. People should come to you, and they will, offering to do this work for you. Have faith."³⁴ In this letter, Miller appears to be ignorant of Nin's passion for the processes of typesetting, printing, and bookmaking. Perhaps Miller, in his self-assumption, misread Nin. But six months after the establishment of More's commercial press, Nin wrote that she was "smothering under the weight of the press": no longer autonomous, no longer just producing her own work and that of her friends, she now felt alienated from her labor at what had become More's press. "Now I work at the press instead of being self-sustaining. If I left Gonzalo alone, would the press collapse? It is I who go there in time to receive the delivery of paper. It is I who pull the proofs for the exigent French client due at four o'clock. It is I who clean the machine left dirty by Gonzalo the night before. Gonzalo likes to design the books, to talk with the clients. As soon as there is a mountainous job, he leaves it to me."³⁵

This edition is limited to three hundred copies. It has been handset by the author in Bernhard Gothic Light Italic, ten point, printed on water-marked Zurich Plate Finish Paper. Design, typography and printing by the Gemor Press. The cover and seventeen engravings by Ian Hugo have been printed in relief directly from the original copper plates.

New York February, 1944

Figure 15. The colophon of *Under a Glass Bell* clearly names Gemor Press, despite Nin's claim that the name came later. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.



ave to begin where everything begins, in the light and in the shadows. I have to begin the story of man's development where all things begin: in nature, in the roots. It is necessary to return to the origin, which is woman's struggle to understand nature. Man struggled with nature, fought with his objectivity, his inventions, and mastered it. Woman has not been able to organize her life, her simoons, her tornadoes, her obscurantism because she lacked the eye of consciousness. She waited. Man did not help her in this because his inventions, whether psychological, or intellectual, did not seize her. And she could not speak for herself. Many marvellous women speak for themselves in their poetic action, integrating the woman, mother, in a harmonious relation to history, to larger worlds of science. But many more, when entering action, followed man's patterns and could not connect or integrate within them the feminine part of themselves. Action and creation, for woman, was an imitation of man. In this imitation of man, contact with her nature and her relation to man. It appears only partially in this first volume, because woman at times with herself.

Still, as More accepted the commissions that Nin found herself executing as an “assistant,” they also published Nin’s new book, *This Hunger* (fig. 16), in September of 1945.

This Hunger, a collection of psychological portraits of female characters, immediately departs from the style established by the first two books. Gone, too, is the auratic power. While *This Hunger*’s interior is illustrated with five prints by Nin’s loyal husband, the cover type and illustration are printed in burgundy ink, losing the dusky richness of the previous covers printed in black. Hugo’s illustrations, this time from woodblocks rather than copper engravings printed relief, are less rich, less smoky and dreamlike, less atmospheric. For the first time type (rather than Hugo’s lettering) appears on the book’s cover: Huxley, a popular art deco face. Most tellingly, the book was not handset by Nin. Instead, she published a limited-edition portfolio of Hugo’s woodblock prints to finance the purchase of Linotype slugs for the edition.³⁶ However, Nin was very involved in the book’s printing: “Today, after printing heavily and hard, I felt the machine giving me back strength. I felt the lead, too heavy to carry, giving me back power. I left the work elated.”³⁷ This book was Nin’s largest edition to date: one thousand copies. Perhaps foreknowledge of the work required by such a large edition resulted in a comparatively lackluster volume. In particular, the printing is rather poor (fig. 17).

Within two months of *This Hunger*’s release, publishers began calling Nin: Random House, Harper’s, Viking. But they were not asking to publish her stories as they stood. Instead, one said, “Yes, you have great talent. But do you think the next book might be . . . more of a novel . . . according to orthodox forms?”³⁸ Another elaborated on the specific developments they’d like to see: a novel “with a beginning and an end.”³⁹ Nin wrote: “I am both happy and sad. I do not like their world, their values. I want to keep my sincerity. It means a harder battle, not like the one with my small press, my debts, overwork, but one against values I do not believe in. . . . The struggle with money and the press is nothing compared with the more subtle struggle against accepting money for compromising.”⁴⁰ She rejected all the publishers’ offers, until her new friend, a very young but very well-connected Gore Vidal, recommended her to Dutton. She signed a contract

Figure 16. *This Hunger* (1945), Gemor Press, 183 pages, 21 cm, regular edition of one thousand copies. The colophon also mentions a “deluxe” edition of fifty copies, not held at the Beinecke. It is unclear if this deluxe copy is the same as the “portfolio of prints” that Nin discusses in the diary. Regardless, Nin reported that the book sold out in three months. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 17. *This Hunger*. Detail of less-than-optimal inking. Image used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

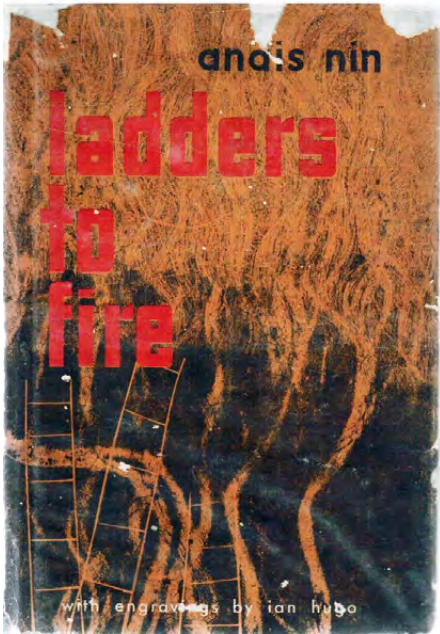


Figure 18. *Ladders to Fire* (1946), Dutton, 213 pages, 21 cm. This trade book retailed for \$2.75, in comparison with Nin's limited-edition, privately printed books, which were priced at \$3. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

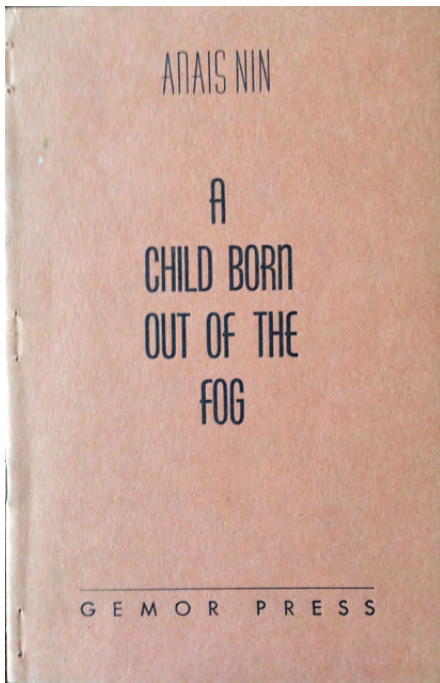


Figure 19. *A Child Born Out of the Fog* (1947), Gemor Press, 20 cm, 6 pages, no edition size mentioned. A small pamphlet, this book does not indicate that Nin was involved in its production. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

with Dutton for future novels, without compromise and with a thousand-dollar advance (thirteen thousand in 2015 dollars).

But working with a mainstream publisher was not without its problems. When Nin first received her new book, *Ladders to Fire* (fig. 18), she opened the box with great excitement, only to be deeply disappointed by the cover, which she found tawdry. "I was not pleased by the jacket. I had given Dutton a beautiful smoky engraving of a fire with a white ladder running through it. It has been printed in the orange color of cheap imitation-orange candy."⁴¹ Still, she preferred a larger audience to total aesthetic control. And it was just in time. A month after the publication of *Ladders to Fire*, in November 1946, she recorded in her diary that the "press collapsed under a mountain of debts. Corroded by Gonzalo's irresponsibility. Even to move out it was I who had to do the packing, sorting, filing, cleaning."⁴² The big press was sold to pay debts, and the smaller one More took home, where he continued to print small jobs.

The Gemor Press edition of *A Child Born Out of the Fog* (a short story about a biracial child, which was rejected for being too controversial) and a new edition of the 1936 *House of Incest* both bear 1947 dates and presumably were printed by More, without Nin. Neither work includes a colophon. Nin's involvement with the production of the books is not mentioned in the individual works or in her diary.

A Child Born Out of the Fog (fig. 19) is a short story printed as a twelve-page pamphlet (the story unfolds over just six numbered pages). With centered art deco type on an orange paper cover, the story is unaccompanied by illustrations, a rarity for Nin. The story was inspired by the children of two different biracial couples in Nin's circle: "I went to see Nancy, the Negro guitarist, and their child. Their life touched me so much I sat down and wrote a story . . . I also had in mind Richard Wright and Helen, and their child."⁴³ While Nin only mentions writing the story in her diary and does not discuss its publication, in a note in the front of the pamphlet she writes: "This little sketch, which is here first presented to the public, is being published in this form because we agree with the magazine editors who pronounced it 'exquisitely written', while questioning their dictum that 'because of its subject matter its publication at this time would not be wise.'"⁴⁴ (This story was included in future reprint editions of *Under a Glass Bell*.) The back cover announces Dutton's edition of Nin's *Ladders to Fire* available for \$2.75, while the last page of the pamphlet announces the forthcoming republication of *House of Incest* by Gemor Press available for preorder for \$3.

With rising demand for her books, Nin decided to reprint *Incest* when she could not locate any more copies of the original edition. She asked a friend in Belgium to track down copies, and he discovered that at one warehouse "all their English books were burned." At the printer Sainte Catherine Press, "all their English books were hidden from the Germans and they would have to search for them. Today I went back to see them and they haven't even a printer's copy."⁴⁵

The new edition of *House of Incest* (fig. 20) has a much smaller trim size than its 1936 predecessor. It is just shy of *Under a Glass Bell*'s proportions but lacks that book's refinement. Its cover is brick red and awkward, with a heavy initial cap and a centered design that is not centered on the cover but instead pushed left toward the spine. Inside the book, spaces

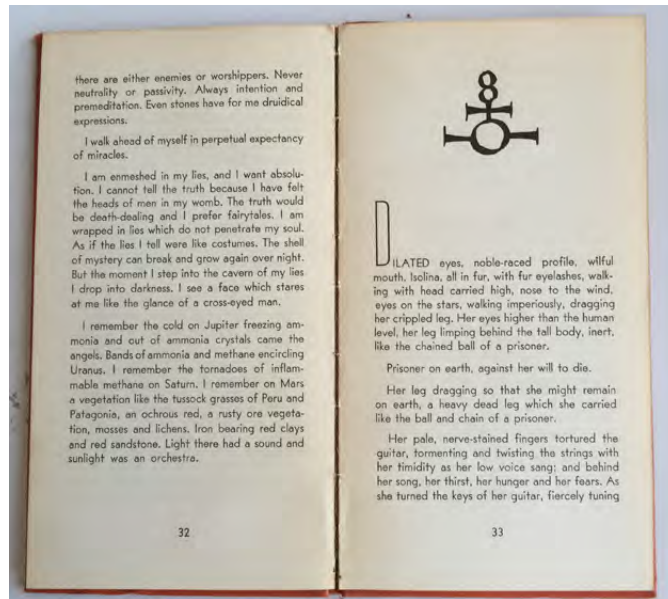
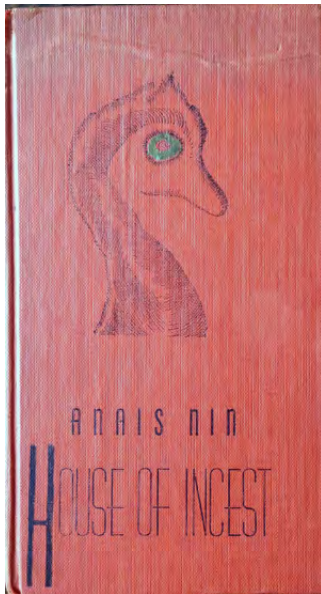


Figure 20. House of Incest (1947), regular edition, Gemor Press, 52 pages, 21 cm, edition of one thousand. Note the awkward cover design. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 21. Spread of Gemor Press's House of Incest, regular edition. With Huxley initial caps and the chapter-head graphic devices, the interior of the book has a more conventional aesthetic appeal than the first two books. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

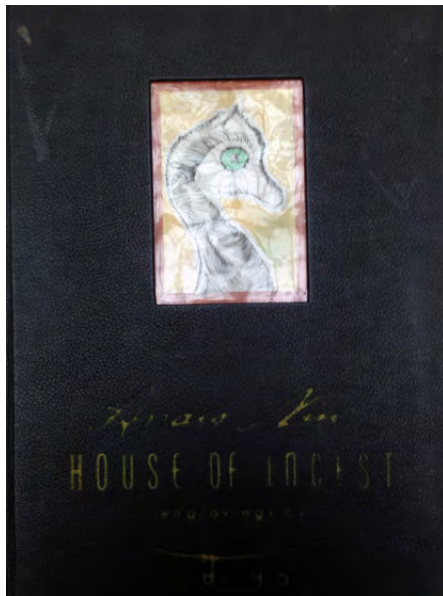


Figure 22. Cover of the deluxe edition of House of Incest (1947), Gemor Press, 21 pages, 43 cm, edition of fifty. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 23. Spread from the deluxe House of Incest. The deluxe edition uses the same typographic forms as the regular edition but stacks them into long columns on an enormous page. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

around the em dashes are sloppy, and the presswork is uneven, although there is definite appeal to the typography within spreads (fig. 21). The only illustrations are astrological-like devices used as chapter heads. Set in 12-point Bernhard Gothic Light, the book is more conventional in appearance than *Winter of Artifice* and *Under a Glass Bell*.

While not discussed in the diary, Gemor Press also published a limited “deluxe” edition of *House of Incest* (fig. 22), likely to raise funds to produce the large regular edition of one thousand copies. The composed forms from the smaller edition are stacked two-up into long, narrow columns on a generous page in the rather cumbersome “deluxe” version (fig. 23). The Beinecke’s copy from the edition has not aged well. The paper has foxed, and the inset cover illustration is peeling. Its full-page etchings by Ian Hugo are spidery and bewitching but lack the dreamlike, dark intensity of his illustrations in the earlier books. The less involved Nin was with the books, the more they suffered. More and Nin’s relationship was in decline and ended by the following year.

Nin’s efforts in letterpress and self-publishing connected her to an American audience and ultimately to a large publisher. While she enjoyed typesetting, printing, and operating a private press, she found the work unsustainable and was grateful for the recognition and



Figure 24. Paperbound reprint of *House of Incest* (1958), Anaïs Nin Press, 72 pages, 22 cm. While the photomontage illustrations by Val Telberg are all new to this edition, the type is not: Nin made offset plates from the original typeset books. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Figure 25. From the back of *House of Incest* (1958), a list of available titles from the Anaïs Nin Press. Used by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

Paperbound reprint of UNDER A GLASS BELL, short stories, with offset of original engraved cover by Ian Hugo	\$1.00
Paperbound reprint of HOUSE OF INCEST, prose poem, with photomontages by Val Telberg	1.00
A new novel SOLAR BARQUE, with line drawings by Peter Loomer	1.00
Two recordings by Contemporary Classics, Anaïs Nin reading from her works, Under a Glass Bell, House of Incest, long playing	each 4.85
SPY IN THE HOUSE OF LOVE, novel	1.00
CHILDREN OF THE ALBATROSS, hardbound, published by Peter Owen, England, with preface by Lawrence Durrell	2.25
FOUR CHAMBERED HEART, hardbound, published by Peter Owen, England, with preface by Jean Fanchette	2.25
BELLS OF ATLANTIS, 16mm. film by Ian Hugo suggested by the HOUSE OF INCEST, 10 minutes, color; avant garde film, electronic score and sound by Louis and Bebe Barron; the voice of Anaïs Nin	Print \$100.00 Rental 10.00
TWO CITIES, a Paris literary quarterly with collaboration of Anaïs Nin, Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell, Richard Aldington et al. Jean Fanchette, editor. Illustrated. In French and English reflecting the scene of Paris and New York	Per year 3.50

ANAÏS NIN PRESS
35 WEST 9th STREET, NEW YORK CITY 11

Lithographed in U.S.A.
EDWARDS BROTHERS, INC.,
Ann Arbor, Michigan

audience granted by an established publisher. But how did the slow meditative discipline of letterpress influence Nin's writing practice? And why did she entirely stop producing work this way—why not get another press, for her own independent projects and enjoyment?

According to her diaries, Nin wrote her fiction in the morning and her diaries at night. Her fiction was a distillation, a recombination, a reimagination, a reinterpretation of events also recorded in the diary. Of *This Hunger*, Nin explains in her diary: "Trying to extract complete characters from the maze of the diary. Trying to construct a story. But a novel is the opposite of life. Discovery that characters are revealed in fragments, not all at once; and during our lifetime we rarely make a synthesis. I cannot work in the artificial form of the novel. I have to follow free associations from another source, to trace character not in its outward manifestations but in its underground life, in the development of its night life."⁴⁶

Nin wrote mostly short experimental fiction, not novels. And while she saw her fiction as art, she did not elevate it above the diary. Writing the diary—and famously rewriting and rewriting and heavily editing the diary—she considered her greatest achievement. Both acts of writing materialize the immaterial. And this too is the process of a writer setting her own type: just as immaterial words in one's head are given solid form with one's hand, so does a fleeting life take physical form in a diary. A diary's medium is time. Typesetting, Nin wrote, takes time. "The evenings pass. I get panicky. Time is passing. Time, time, time."⁴⁷

When Nin was crossing over from Paris to New York in 1939, she had a layover in Bermuda. While there she explored the stalactite caves, which she described as "a dream born out of a continuity impossible to an artist. We were never given a million years as the lime and water were to achieve such castles, spirals, turrets, flowers, gems. All carved out of time and stillness."⁴⁸ Our time is limited, and as Nin wrote in a letter, "I am more interested in living than in writing."⁴⁹ And she was more interested in writing than in typesetting. Toward the end of her life, Nin wrote of letterpress, "The physical work was so overwhelming that it interfered with my writing. That is the only reason I accepted the

offer of a commercial publisher and surrendered the press. Otherwise I would have liked to continue with my own press, controlling both the content and the design of the books.”⁵⁰ The acts of hand typesetting and printing were too time-consuming to pursue as part of her practice. In 1947 her fellow writer and printer William Everson wrote in the announcement establishing his Equinox Press, “As a creative man, the richest thing I can do is to write a poem, and the next is to print it.”⁵¹ But for Nin, creating the physical form of a self-published book was not an integral part of her work.⁵² Ultimately, she was more interested in the writing, the creation of the text, than in the printing and production of the book. And so the letterpress era of Nin’s life drew to a close with the shuttering of the press in 1947.

While she no longer had a printing studio, self-publishing remained a great passion for Nin. Toward the end of 1947 she visited Black Mountain College and enthusiastically encouraged students to print their own work. Faculty member M. C. Richards wrote, “We found a stash of type in an old building and gradually unscrambled and cleaned it. Anaïs Nin, who was printing her own books in NYC, came to help us set up our print shop and to talk to writing students.”⁵³

Through the next decade, she continued to self-publish. Disillusioned with Dutton and with other commercial publishers, and with her self-published limited-edition books long out of print, Nin republished them as paperback editions (fig. 24), printed from offset plates made from the original handset books but often with new illustrations. No longer hiding behind Siana Editions, she established the Anaïs Nin Press (fig. 25) to distribute these works. But this too came to an end. By the late 1950s, Nin approached Alan Swallow of the literary Swallow Press to reprint her entire list, including titles old and new.

It was a fortuitous partnership, as Swallow Press (now operated by Ohio University Press) continues to keep Nin’s work in print, just as she did while alive.⁵⁴ But first, in the 1960s, Swallow Press collaborated with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich to publish in a trade edition the highly original and visionary work that Nin had been trying, unsuccessfully, to get published for thirty years: her diary, which she had kept tirelessly since the age of eleven (fig. 26). Published in a series of seven chronological installments, this heavily edited version of her epic, two-hundred-volume manuscript cemented Nin’s place in twentieth-century letters—handset or otherwise. ■

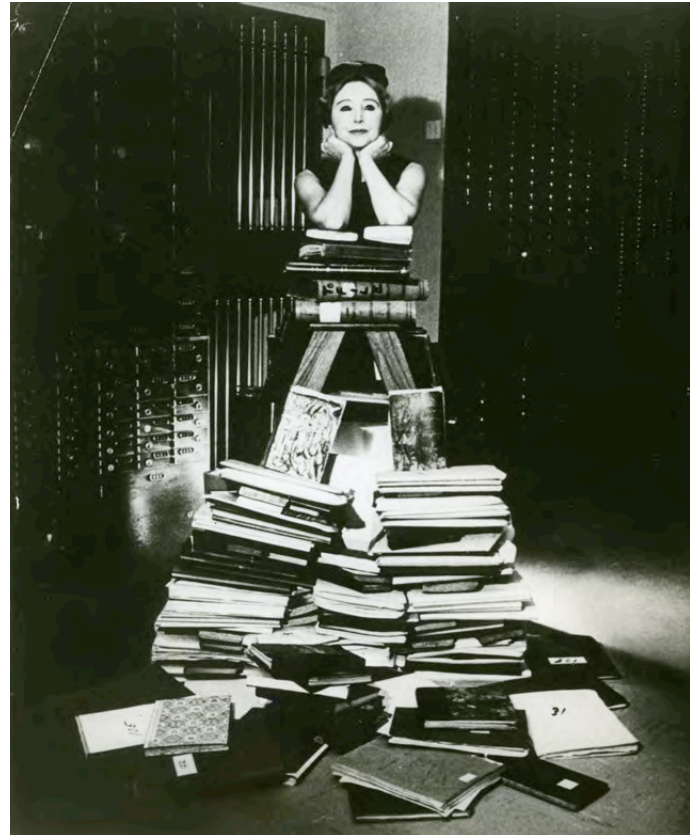


Figure 26. Anaïs Nin in a vault with volumes of her diary in its original, manuscript form. Photograph by Marlis Schwieger by permission of the Anaïs Nin Trust.

NOTES

1. Holland Cotter, introduction to Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1994), xii.
2. Johanna Drucker, "A Critical Metalanguage for the Book as an Artform," in *Talking the Boundless Book: Art, Language, & the Book Arts*, edited by Charles Alexander (Minneapolis: Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1995), 27.
3. Alan Loney, *The Books to Come* (Victoria, TX: Cuneiform Press, 2012).
4. Anaïs Nin, *Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume Three 1939–1944* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 259.
5. Neil Pearson, *Obelisk: A History of Jack Kahane and the Obelisk Press* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 2.
6. Ibid., 459. Kahane's son claims that Nin paid for Durrell's book and Durrell paid for Nin's in the Villa Seurat series. Pearson believes Durrell's wife paid for the entire series.
7. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three 1939–1944*, 7.
8. Sady Doyle, "Before Lena Dunham, there was Anaïs Nin—now patron saint of social media," *The Guardian*, April 7, 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/apr/07/anaïs-nin-author-social-media>.
9. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three*, 174.
10. Ibid., 309.
11. Ibid., 47.
12. Ibid., 229.
13. Ibid., 179.
14. Ibid., 180.
15. Ibid., 181.
16. Ibid., 182.
17. Ibid., 192.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 185.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 186.
25. Ibid., 196.
26. Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 93.
27. Ibid., 99.
28. Cotter, xii.
29. Anaïs Nin, *Under a Glass Bell* (New York: Gemor Press, 1944), unnumbered front matter.
30. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three*, 308.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 309.

34. Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume Four 1944–1947* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 11.
35. Ibid., 31.
36. Ibid., 64.
37. Ibid., 78.
38. Ibid., 103–104.
39. Ibid., 105.
40. Ibid., 103.
41. Ibid., 162.
42. Ibid., 165.
43. Ibid., 145.
44. Anaïs Nin, *The Child Born Out of the Fog* (New York: Gemor Press, 1947), unnumbered front matter.
45. Nin, *Diary, Volume Four*, 34.
46. Ibid., 28.
47. Nin, *Diary, Volume Three*, 254.
48. Ibid., 10.
49. Nin, *Diary, Volume Four*, 177.
50. Anaïs Nin, “The Story of My Printing Press,” in *The Publish It Yourself Handbook*, edited by Bill Henderson (New York: Pushcart Press, 1988), 31.
51. William Everson, *On Printing*, edited by Peter Rutledge Koch (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1992), 1.
52. A paraphrase of Eric Kraft’s testimonial about his own work in *The Publish It Yourself Handbook*, edited by Bill Henderson (New York: Pushcart Press, 1988), unnumbered front matter.
53. M. C. Richards, “Excerpts from ‘Black Mountain College: A Golden Seed,’” in *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts*, edited by Mervin Lane (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 172.
54. Swallow published a new edition of *Under a Glass Bell* as recently as 2014, and it continues to publish many other works by Nin. However, it appears that a variety of publishers (Mariner Books, Harvest Books, Sky Blue Press) also continually publish works by Anaïs Nin. Swallow does not maintain exclusive rights.

WHAT SHALL WE WANT TO HAVE CALLED A “BOOK”?

By Sharon Helgason Gallagher

ART BOOK PUBLISHERS inhabit a no-man’s-land bordered by the commercial publishing industry, the art world, and the vibrant archipelago of the artists’ books community. The artists’ books natives generally regard us as distant relatives who emigrated to the richer climes of the mainstream economy and who can sometimes be counted on to send monies back “home.” The “art worlders” turn to us as trusted outside professional experts who can be of assistance by publishing scholarship and documentation for the historical record. Our largest neighbor, the trade-publishing industry, is largely baffled by our business model, for the art book is never completely at home in the world of mainstream publishing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Helgason Gallagher is the President and Executive Director of ARTBOOK and of D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., in New York, a publishing and distribution company she co-founded in 1990. Sharon is a graduate of Yale University, summa cum laude, and holds a masters degree in philosophy from Columbia where she was a University Fellow.

Visual, expensive, laden with something called “production values,” and often physically indescribable in the data language of the industry, the art book is always the exception in the bestseller-driven publishing marketplace. As mainstream trade publishing adopts and adapts to digital platforms, the outsider status of the art book has been even further amplified: the industry marginalizes books that are so, well, “bookish” in their sheer physicality. To speak knowledgeably about the art book—about its content, design, production, and distribution—is to speak a language foreign to the one spoken by my friends in the trade-publishing world.

However, when the publishing parties are over and the day is done, as we take off our respective academic caps, conference badges, and industry hard hats, we find that we all share dumb amazement at the historical moment in which, by strange biographical accident of birthdate, we happen to find ourselves: a once-in-a-half-millennium tectonic shift in how culture reproduces itself, in how ideas are not only communicated across space but also—and more importantly, I suggest—transmitted over time. We are in the midst of a mediological change, to use Régis Debray’s term: one that is huge in itself and more enormous still in its aftershocks. The change of the book.

A FEW NOTES ON THE PREHISTORY OF THE DIGITAL BOOK

It's important to understand both the scale of the changes brought on by digital publishing and the extraordinary speed with which they are taking place. Since the United States tends to do things bigger and quicker—and, one could add, with less care and forethought—a brief history of the American publishing industry will tell us about how digital publishing happened to us, and happened so fast.

Amazon's Kindle e-reader was launched for the US public on November 19, 2007. Five years later that was ancient history in digital time. In the spring of 2012, the Pew survey looked at e-readership before and immediately after the 2011 Christmas holiday—a mere four years after the introduction of the Kindle. Over the twelve months prior to the Christmas holiday, 17 percent of Americans had read an e-book. During the holiday weeks, both e-reader and tablet ownership essentially doubled. Immediately after the holiday, that 17 percent of respondents who said they had read an e-book jumped to 21 percent—nearly a 25 percent increase in the space of a month. Meanwhile, many trade publishers were reporting that e-books now made up 20 percent of their sales volume, not simply in one or two categories, but across the board.

The speed of this adoption of the digital was arguably made possible by earlier changes in the book industry that were more pronounced in the United States than elsewhere: the economic rationalization of the bookselling business and the accompanying commodification of the book. These changes began much earlier than many digital doomsayers today seem to realize. According to Jon Bekken's 1997 study of economic concentration in the retail book industry: "In 1958, one-store book firms accounted for nearly 80 percent of book sales; by 1982 that figure had fallen to 26 percent, even though single-store retailers continue[d] to account for a majority of all bookstore outlets."¹ Note the terminus date of the study: 1982, well before the so-called bookstore wars of the 1990s. Looking at other studies of reading behavior, we also find statistically remarkable changes that precede the hyperexpansion of bookstore chains in the 1990s. Two dramatic shifts that took place in the 1980s are documented by Gallup polls: first, a doubling of the percentage of respondents who said they'd read no books at all over the last twelve months, from 8 percent of the population in 1978 to 16 percent of the population in 1990; and, second, a drop of almost 50 percent at the other side of the bell curve, the heavy readers, from 13 percent of respondents in 1978 who said they'd read more than fifty books over the last twelve months to just 7 percent in 1990.

These changes were already "history," as it were, by the time of the chain-versus-independent bookstore wars that occupied so much of the publishing discourse in the United States in the 1990s. In 2005 the American Booksellers Association testified to the Antitrust Modernization Commission: "The American Booksellers Association . . . has gone from a membership high of 5,200 in 1991 to 1,791 members today, a 65 percent decline in less than fifteen years. The decline in ABA's membership is indicative of a general decline in the number of independent bookstores, whose share of the market has dwindled from a third of the entire consumer book market in 1991 to approximately nine percent today."² Meanwhile, the dynamics of logarithmic e-commerce growth were afoot: by that very same year, 2005, Amazon's annual media sales in North America (including books, music, and DVDs) had reached \$3 billion, though Barnes & Noble, the dominant

chain, still led at roughly \$4.5 billion. But by 2010, Amazon’s media sales had ballooned to just under \$7 billion, while Barnes & Noble was stagnant and dipping below the \$4.5 billion mark.

In other words, digital publishing was born into an already changed and changing world, one that had already had a lot of the “friction” bred out of it—the friction of the hard-to-categorize, the local, the personal, the odd, the quirky, the difficult, and the simply different. The friction that slows things down and gives you time to think and reflect. These changes in bookselling and reading went hand in hand with Big Six bestsellerdom and the growth of genre fiction: in a rationalized “modern” retailing and logistics environment, books could now be conceived, marketed, distributed, sold, and consumed as commodities.

The gold standard of the book qua commodity is, of course, the so-called page-turner. It’s the book that “hooks” you, that you “just can’t put down,” and, importantly, that makes you want to read another one pretty much just like it. We consume books of this ilk the way we do episodes in a long-running TV series. Whole swaths of the publishing industry have become “content farms” designed to output the words for each category of commodity publishing: the summer beach book, the bodice ripper, the post-cold war thriller, etc., etc., etc.

Fast-forwarding to the digital present, it turns out that it is precisely these page-turners that fare best as e-books read on e-reader screens. The drill-down statistics on what genres people are reading as e-books are revealing. E-books have captured the largest share of sales in the following genres: romance, crime, thriller, mystery, science fiction, and fantasy. Notably, in the romance category many publishers report that a full 60 percent of their sales are in e-book (as opposed to print-book) form. Furthermore, according to the February 2012 Harris poll, many e-book readers read more titles than comparable print readers. Why? Because it’s easier and cheaper to get your next fix. Perhaps the truth was there all along: that the pages in page-turners just get in the way. Maybe page-turners are better without pages. Maybe they are better off not being books at all.

More generally, maybe there are many kinds of content that we tend to think of as books but are in fact better suited to publication as e-books, as apps, as web pages, as databases. We know this, for example, about encyclopedias. But sometimes we know something abstractly and it doesn’t truly hit home until we have a personal experience. Let me share a story. I live in one of the very last unrenovated lofts in SoHo, in New York City. We don’t have what you’d call a lobby, but we do have an entrance area with mailboxes and a “give-a-book / take-a-book” shelf. One day a complete set of the 1992 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* materialized in the nook next to the mailboxes. Stacked vertically, it was just a little taller than I am. The stack sat there for several weeks, untouched. Then one evening, while helping my eleven-year-old daughter with her science report on capuchin monkeys, I said, “Remember that big stack of books downstairs? Let’s see what the encyclopedia has to say.” I went downstairs and brought up volume two, *Bayeu to Ceanothus*. “This,” I said, with a degree of awe, “is the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. I’m sure it will have an excellent long article on the capuchin monkey.” I placed the august volume on the coffee table and carefully paged to the entry. What we found were three short paragraphs. My daughter

had already read much more thorough and up-to-date information on Wikipedia and had followed the Wiki hyperlinks to more detailed research. The encyclopedia, with its gold stamping, held no authority for her, no luster. A few days later, the stack disappeared, missing, unfortunately for its new owner, the volume covering Bayeu to ceanothus, which remains upstairs in our loft as a strange memento—more of my own childhood than of my daughter’s. Several months later, in March 2012, the Encyclopaedia Britannica company announced that, after 244 years of continuous publication, no new editions would be printed. Jorge Cauz, president of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., noted in the press release: “I understand that for some the end of the Britannica print set may be perceived as an unwelcome goodbye to a dear, reliable and trustworthy friend that brought them the joy of discovery in the quest for knowledge, [but] today our digital database is much larger than what we can fit in the print set. And it is up to date because we can revise it within minutes anytime we need to, and we do it many times each day.”

Encyclopedias and bodice rippers—as editors used to call romance novels, back in the day—two very different kinds of publishing, but both without a doubt what we once called “books.” When they become digital publications, whether as online databases or as e-books, are they still books? Should we keep calling them that? What do we miss about their “bookishness” when they become, in their different ways, digital? Not much at all when it comes to content. Indeed, in many cases there is more in the digital editions. But we do lose connotation and context. For the encyclopedia, the connotations of a library, of seals of authority. For the romance novel, past summers at the beach; a book hidden under the bed, perhaps. But my daughter learned more from Wikipedia online, and, as for the romance reader, the statistics show that most reading on e-readers happens in bed and most new purchases of e-books are made after 9:00 p.m.

Digital forms (e-book, web, apps, and emerging hybrids) do some things—many things, in fact—that we used to associate with the book just as well and in some cases better: search, update, transport, archive, reference other material and encode data about its reading and use. But digital publications are radically new in the way they provide, for instance, geolocation, video and audio enhancement, dictionary definitions, hyperlinked citations, social reading platforms, accessibility for the visually impaired, and the ability to zoom in on images to see greater levels of detail. From an economic perspective, they offer zero marginal production cost, near-zero marginal transaction cost, immediacy of delivery, and a far greater selection of titles available to individual readers, regardless of location.

With DRM-free digital publications, readers can also anthologize, excerpt, comment, and even bowdlerize their own editions. Indeed, readers can now move the production process backward, as it were, to create their own custom print editions of books originally purchased digitally.

In some sense, the digital form gives the reader more control over the experience of reading. With the emerging digital forms, the reader takes on—or is technologically enabled to take on—many functions that, until very recently, were the exclusive province of the publisher, who alone had the authority and tools to fix and embed his or her editorial decisions into the print form.

IS IT JUST SEMANTICS?

If it turns out that certain kinds of content can survive just fine and, indeed, might even thrive in digital incarnations, then what shall we want, now, at this juncture in our cultural history, to have called a “book”? What, looking back from the future at our present as the past, shall we want to have defined as a book, in order to create a legacy upon which that future can build? What we insist upon now as the defining qualities of the book will determine the Wittgensteinian “riverbed” guiding the flow of meaning that continues as “book,” while other kinds of content will fork off and create their own riverbeds of digital forms.

Is there a kind of meaning conveyed uniquely in the book form? And if so, how are we in the publishing community doing at articulating what is special, distinctive, and unique about the book form? When I listen to talks and read blogs by publishing colleagues who have either embraced the digital with enthusiasm or accepted it as a dreadful but inevitable reality, I am not satisfied by their answers to this question. Instead, I am struck by how often the “smell” of the printed book is what they say they’ll miss and find so distinctive. Given that the olfactory is the sense most strongly identified with memory, this strikes me as a kind of preemptive nostalgia, an anticipatory mourning that only barely masks defeatist cynicism, especially when followed by the predictable coda professing great personal “fondness” for bookshops, bookshops that, filled with the thus-noted smell of musty books, are now rendered, in the mind’s eye, in digitally enhanced sepia tones.

Even the skeuomorphic visual design of the e-book space is musty. The “virtual” bookshelf that houses the icons for e-books on the iPad and other devices calls to mind a school library shelf circa 1965. This skeuomorphic digital design might mirror more truth than we’d like to admit—perhaps the book is over and done with—while at the same time contributing as visual meme to this historicizing of the book as “ye olde book.”

When did the aesthetic of the book become so rearguard? When did the book take on the patina of “vintage”? Was it perhaps in that period I mentioned earlier, when the commodification of books got underway? Isn’t the hunter-green color scheme of Barnes & Noble just a Disneyfication of the Ivy League library? Is an ersatz musty tome in a dusty Victorian bookshop what our generation will bequeath to the future as the exemplar of the book?

I think we can do better. Surely we shall want the book to evoke more than mustiness and nostalgia. Won’t we also want to have left to the future a more vibrant image of the bookstore than that of Flourish & Blotts in the Harry Potter stories?

What, then, are the kinds of bookish books we ought to be publishing today as exemplars of the book for the future? What is the enduring legacy of bookishness that we want to transmit to the future? What kinds of meaning are transmitted uniquely in the book form? What is the bookishness of the book that does not survive conversion, translation, adaptation, or reformatting as a digital publication? And what kinds of books even possess this quality?

The field of artists’ books is notable for its obsessive reflection on self-definition: an outsider to the world of artists’ books can’t help but be struck by the intensity of the debate within the field about just what an artist’s book is and isn’t, about what does and doesn’t

merit the name “artist’s book.” At a time when the mainstream publishing community is struggling to define what the book might be in the digital future, I reckon all of us can learn, not only from the inventiveness of artists’ books themselves, but also from the very structure of this debate about definition and naming. Why the field of artists’ books takes its own naming so seriously is not, I think, just semantics but a genuinely political struggle for a “just semantics,” motivated by a fierce desire to create and articulate kinds of meaning and experience that have been rendered mute by the commodification of the book over the course of that very same twentieth century in which the artist’s book has developed. This is one way of understanding Johanna Drucker’s ambitious dual claims that (1) the artist’s book is the quintessential twentieth-century art form, and (2) that “what is unique about artists’ books is that, with very few exceptions, they really did not exist in their current form before the twentieth century.”³ The artist’s book is by definition other to the commodified book that came into existence in the last century. It plays itself out in an ongoing dialectic and agon against its dark commercial twin. And by that logic the artist’s book is necessarily, like philosophy, a latecomer—Hegel’s owl of Minerva, which begins its flight only at the dusk of an era. Or perhaps the owl of Terpsichore who dances at night in Ulises Carrión’s space-time.

I speak of dance because I believe it is the reader’s distinctive somatic experience of the physical book that most resists translation into digital form. Indeed, I question whether there is any equivalence, any translation whatsoever, of the somatic experience of the book into the digital, and whether it would be a category mistake even to try. In the process of grappling with the digital form, I find that what I miss most is not, in fact, the smell of the printed book but rather the extraordinary symphony of movement that is a great art book, photo book, or, of course, artist’s book. By somatic, I don’t just mean the movement of the arms and hands and head and neck and shoulders and eyes as I page through a book, or even the beauty of the evolved scale and proportion of the book page to the human face and hand. What I insist upon is a somatic experience far more powerful: I mean the awesome, truly distinctive choreography of movement in my brain from left to right, from right back to left, from spatial to temporal processing, from visual to verbal and back again; the thick temporal symmetries of the dance steps my brain takes as it progresses through the book. I was fortunate once to spend uninterrupted time with one of Dieter Roth’s two-handed sketchbooks in Ira Wool’s collection—I can only describe my experience of it as brain dance.

The simple feature of bound and sequenced pages with fronts and backs and openings and closings turns out to be not simply a tool but a remarkable space-time forum, in which one of the most distinctive features of the human brain—its bilateralism—can experience itself. To those who liken the printed book to the horse and buggy (and there are many, I’m afraid), I say, no, the book is more like the bicycle. And as enduring. The bicycle: a simple but ingenious design harmoniously suited to the bipedal structure of our human body. The book: a simple but ingenious design harmoniously suited to the bilateral structure of our human brain. When, in the future, we speak of the book, I want us to think of this object that so effortlessly affords the reader a structured self-experience of the bilateralism of the brain.

We are at a truly unprecedented moment in cultural history. I believe an important question at a time of such vast change is how to have agency. By “agency” I mean something

old-fashioned and humanist: an action founded on the belief that the outcome of that action matters, that acting makes a difference in the sense of rendering the future different than it would otherwise have been, that action can have effect not just as communication across space but also as legacy transmitted, over time, to the future. Agency makes a difference by making a new past for someone else’s future. And therein lies the responsibility.

More important perhaps than our initial forays into the realm of digital publishing are what we are making now as exemplars of the book to transmit to the future. Let us not leave the future with the smelly nostalgia of musty books. What shall we want to have called a “book”? With the books we make today, we have a historic opportunity to define the book as a muscular, energetic, distinctive form of meaning transmission, dancing into the future, beautifully scaled to the human body and the human brain.

Previously published in *The Book is Alive!* (copyright © bookRoom / RGAP 2013), a follow-up to the BOOKLIVE! international symposium held in June 2012 at London South Bank University. <http://www.thebookroom.net/book-live/>.

NOTES

1. Jon Bekken, “Feeding the Dinosaurs: Economic Concentration in the Retail Book Industry,” *Publishing Research Quarterly* 13, 4 (1997): 3–26.
2. Bruce Spiva, “Comments of the American Booksellers Association to the Antitrust Modernization Commission Robinson-Patman Act Panel” (2005), online at http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/amc/commission_hearings/pdf/Spiva_Revised%20.pdf.
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WHAT WE SEE WHEN WE READ

Peter Mendelsund
 New York: Vintage Books, 2014
 448 pages
 978-0804171632

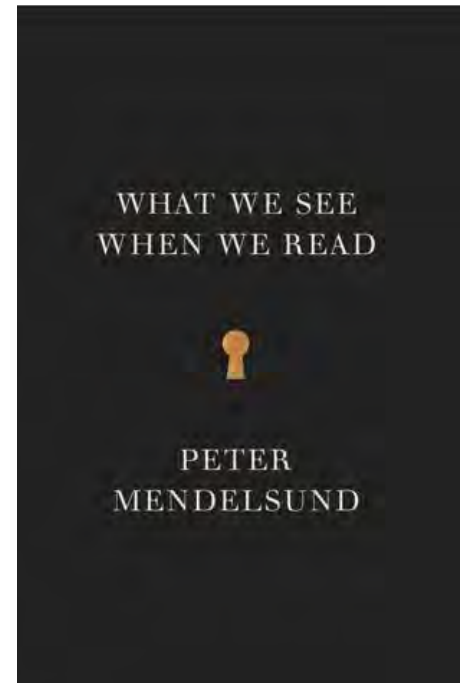
*Review by Jocelyn Webb Pedersen
 Assistant Professor, Occidental College*

WHAT WE SEE WHEN WE READ by Peter Mendelsund is a remarkable book about the phenomenology of reading, made all the more vivid because it was created by a graphic designer. Mendelsund is an acclaimed book-cover designer and the creative director at Knopf. His examination of how we make meaning from words printed on the page is a visual feast, filled with drawings, maps, engravings, cartoons, photographs, and experimental typography. Mendelsund's book is a rich amalgam of philosophy, psychology, literary theory, and visual art, making it not just a provocative and unusual investigation into the act of reading but, I'd argue, an innovative teaching manual for the field of book art.

Mendelsund uses his favorite authors, among them Tolstoy, Woolf, Faulkner, Joyce, and Calvino, to illustrate his arguments. In one of his most compelling points, he references two authors to underscore the shift that happens when we see past mere letterforms on the page, when these words, these signifiers, become like arrows: they *are* something, and they also point *toward* something. For this, he quotes Samuel Beckett on James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: "It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something, it is that something itself."

Mendelsund devotes several chapters to breaking down just how we generate images from words. He shows us how when we read we imagine what we see, and quotes Oliver Sacks, who reminds us, "One does not see with the eyes; one sees with the mind." And it is with these minds, as we read, that we collaborate with the writer to bring settings, characters, whole narratives alive. For Mendelsund, when an authors describe characters, they do so with a few linguistic brushstrokes. As readers, we fill in the details with our own memories, associations, predispositions, desires, and expectations. He writes, "Characters are ciphers, and narratives are made richer by omission," explaining, "It is precisely what the text does not elucidate that becomes an invitation to our imaginations. So I ask myself: Is it that we imagine the most, or the most vividly, when an author is most elliptical or withholding? (In music, notes and chords define ideas, but so do *rests*.)"

Inspired by, and looking to test out, Mendelsund's theories, I used this book last semester as a springboard for my advanced students at Occidental College, to create a limited-edition book exploring the dynamic collaboration between writer and reader (fig. 1). *What We See When We Read* became much more than our textbook. I started each class with a ten-minute writing exercise, and many of my prompts came from ideas gleaned from the pages of this book. My students took turns tossing their dog-eared and marked-up copies onto the worktable, proposing experiments like testing how we experience a narrative differently when we read it silently to ourselves or listen to it read aloud, and how we really



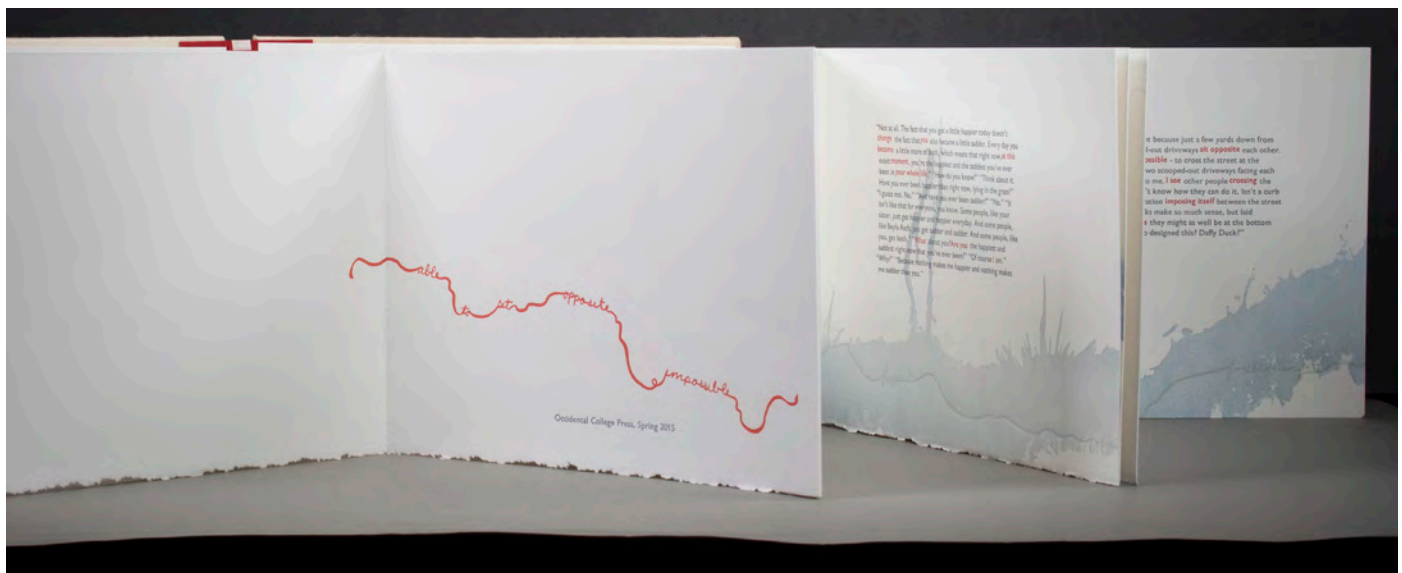


Figure 1. “Able to Sit Opposite Impossible,” printed by the Occidental College Press, 2015.

perform a book, and then attend that performance. Mendelsund writes, “As readers, we are the conductor and the orchestra, as well as the audience.”

But we are also inventors, re-creating, as individuals, a world that writers put on the page in their own vision. Working from this notion, my students each selected a passage from a favorite novel, set that passage in type, and then in a synesthetic experiment assigned color and shape and gestural marks to each passage, comparing how different their individual interpretations of the same passages were. Finally, they collaborated to create a new text using only the words available in all seven passages strung together. This new poem, titled “Able to Sit Opposite Impossible,” became the centerpiece of their book.

Mendelsund asks provocative questions throughout *What We See When We Read*, inviting us to find our own answers. Questions like: Does the speed at which we read affect the vividness of our imagination? Can we practice imagining—as we practice drawing—in order to imagine *better*? Are the muscles we use to imagine growing weaker as our culture ages? In our visually overstimulated lives, it has been argued, our imaginations are dying. But Mendelsund points out that whatever the relative health of our imaginations, we still read: “The rapid proliferation of the image has not kept us from the written word.” My book-reading, book-loving, book-making students remind me of that all the time.

One of my dear mentors, the late James Robertson of the Yolla Bolly Press, wrote in his seminal essay *Making Books in the Woods*: “The printed word is the playing field of the human imagination. And books are the instruments of play.” So, what do I see when I read this remarkable book? A fascinating argument for the continuing power of the physical book, an object whose meaning is changing in our digital world but whose infinite abilities to astonish assure us that this centuries-old technology is not yet ready to give up the ghost. ■

THE THING THE BOOK: A MONUMENT TO THE BOOK AS OBJECT

John Herschend and Will Rogan, Editors
 San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2014
 156 pages
 978-1452117201

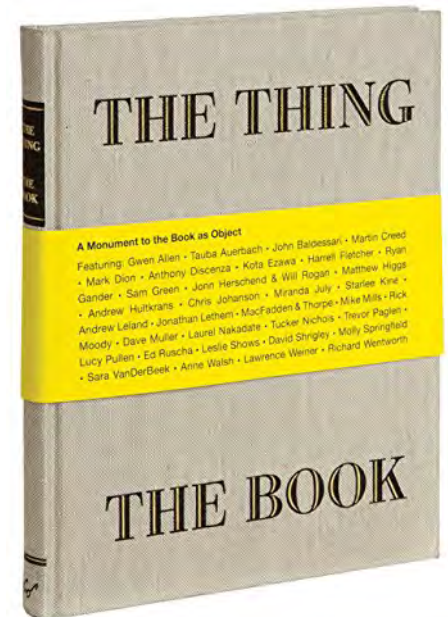
Review by Karen Carcia
Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Iowa Center for the Book

PART COFFEE-TABLE BOOK, part serious contemplation on the idea of the book as an object, *The Thing The Book: A Monument to the Book as Object* presents textual and visual essays, meditations, and playful engagements with components of the book. Over thirty artists were invited to participate in the project, each assigned a particular aspect of a book to use in what Chronicle Books calls a “creative playground”: endpapers, table of contents, thumb tabs, endnotes, colophon, et cetera; each individual part of the book is presented as a field, called out, and examined for its creative potential. Many of the artists have previously worked with the editors, John Herschend and Will Rogan, on their project *The Thing Quarterly*, an experimental magazine that presents text on objects. The contributors range from multimedia and conceptual artists to writers, and include Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, Miranda July, and Rick Moody.

In the introduction the editors state their desire “to approach the book as an exhibition space, as an object, and reexamine the structures of both its contents and its physical self.” They want the project to showcase the complexities of the book—to explore the physical life of a book apart from its role as an information-delivery system. Specifically, they want to explore books as receptacles for memories and the other “stories we imbue them with,” including what makes an individual copy of a particular book physically distinct from other copies, as, for example, one of the author’s books “puffed up like a textual marshmallow” after being left in the rain. Certainly the readers of *Openings* are pre-tuned to this frequency in a way that other readers may not be. Ideally, book artists and scholars always consider the interrelationship of form and content.

I believe each reader, no matter his or her previous engagement with these concepts, will be charmed by some of the entries and, perhaps, bewildered by others. My fear is that the overall project lacks contextualization that would make some of the work more meaningful. If a reader neglects to read the band wrapped around the book (which acts as a sort of advertisement for and introduction to the project), he or she may not discover that Ruscha’s “Bookplate” has a historical source, though reading the band still leaves the history unexplored and unspecified. The photographs of Richard Wentworth’s installation *Firma Terra Firma* do not communicate the potential impact of a gallery space filled with books hanging from a steel framework overhead; the perspective of these photographs fails to capture the magnitude of how the books inhabit space. In these moments the book’s purpose seems to be to introduce artists for readers’ future study rather than to examine the potential of the book as object.

I’d like to propose that the book is best read as a coffee-table book—at a relaxed pace, small portions at a time (the cloth cover and embossed titling do make it stand out from



most commercial productions). Otherwise the book can seem a bit disconnected and constructed of one-liners, such as David Shrigley's ribbon bookmarks with "care instructions" printed on them or the placement of one of Sara VanDerBeek's photographs of Roman statues: a centerfold obscured by being placed, not just across a gutter, but where two folios are sewn. Not to say, of course, that the book's humor isn't welcomed or at times successful. Miranda July's "Erratum" partially, if temporarily, obscures the text of Andrew Leland's essay "A Note to My Students," which implores his audience to "avoid reading any text that's not this page of the book." Not only is July's errata page easier to read, printed as it is in a larger font size, but one could imagine its sexually explicit subject matter could be distracting to Leland's students.

Although the artists who participated in the project come from many different countries and work in many different media, I think the book would have been better served to widen its scope of contributors to include book artists, scholars, conservators, and writers whose first medium is writing. Anthony Disenza's "A Table of Contents to a Book Other Than the One You Are Holding in Your Hands" lacks the cohesiveness and sharpness that writers such as Dean Young and Jack Matthews have brought to similar projects. The flipbook dancers that move across pages 10–14 reinforce readers' preconceptions about flipbook imagery, unlike, for instance, Janet Zweig's *Sheherezade*, whose visual manipulation of text and image elevates the form to another level.

Of particular interest to book artists might be the essay "The Artist as Bookmaker" by art historian Gwen Allen, which provides a quick history of art books, focusing on the democratic multiples of the 1960s and 1970s. She holds out specific examples, such as *Aspen* magazine, as "one of hundreds" and quickly mentions many of the major figures from this period, including Ruscha, Roth, Carrión, and Lippard. In this way the essay serves as a nice introduction for the novice book art enthusiast. Allen is clearly not just interested in the history of the book as "a realm of radical, utopian promise," but also believes that "the potential of artists' books remains latent, still waiting to be realized." Perhaps it is this very tight personal interest in these books from the sixties and seventies that keeps her from discussing or even mentioning the ever-expanding world of book art. She does mention both the New York and LA Art Book Fairs and a few contemporary presses, but she fails to mention the Codex Foundation, academia's slow but steady embrace of book art and book studies, or the large number of thriving community-oriented book art centers and print shops. Sadly, she ends the essay without questioning the premise that books are "endangered."

The Thing The Book does succeed in its mission of provoking thought about the thingness of books. I was thankful for the bookmarks as I used them to flip back and forth between essay and endnotes, or to mark a page I wanted to revisit. I also, as the [promotional video](#) invites one to do, ended up using the book for nonreading purposes (although I did not, as suggested, use it as a cutting board but as a temporary barrier between an excited dog and a sleeping cat). Some of the contributions triggered thoughts about aspects of book production not mentioned in this volume: how the artists transferred their texts to the editors/publisher, Chronicle's printing process, the process of acquiring rights, et cetera.

I'd like to end by briefly mentioning a few of the pieces that charmed me, including Leslie Shows's "Endpapers," which showcases collages created from texts in the book; Jonathan Lethem's "Footnotes," an engaging personal essay presented in a format that recreates the process of reading footnotes; Molly Springfield's "Indices," which highlights marginalia; and Harrell Fletcher's essay "My Friends," which connects the physical world and desires (the desire for a reclining chair, for example) with the discoveries that can be found in reading fiction.

Of course, the book comes with a disclaimer that states, "You understand and agree that you may be exposed to content that is inaccurate, objectionable, inappropriate, or otherwise unsuited to your constitution. On the other hand, you may be exposed to content that is beautiful, meaningful, potentially life-changing, or simply nice to look at." It's yours to discover and agree or disagree or, as the essay printed on the inside of the book's band suggests, "neither agree nor disagree." ■