

Lecture from *Why Book Art?* Series, sponsored by the National Endowment for Humanities and Carleton College, at Open Book, Minneapolis, 2002

Why Book Art?

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The question from the postcard announcing the lecture series, *Why Book Art?* is as if in the middle of a casual conversation.

I think that question is so big it might as well be “Why life?”

I could list what I think are 10 reasons why, and explain each one. But that would be too easy. Instead, in the spirit of this lecture series of relating books to the wider context of art, I will circle through 5 chapters of ideas, issues and artists who work in a variety of forms, but not exclusively the book.

CHAPTER 1

Before why, what?

the book

the book as an artform

the book as a neutral format

the book as vessel

bookness

book object

the sculptural book

artist's book (apostrophe s)

artists' books (s apostrophe)

livre d'artiste

book arts

book art

What is book art?

And what is this question?

It assumes that there can be, should be a singular, agreed upon definition- something not asked for in other mediums. “What is Painting?” is a rhetorical question that often is answered with a rhetorical answer, “Painting is dead.” While some think the book is threatened, it is far from dead.

Is Book Art different than Book Arts?

Book Arts, plural, seems to refer to singular categories, such as illustration, papermaking, binding, calligraphy, or printing. The singular, book art, seems to refer to the field, that is- some, all, or none of the above. I say “seems” to because not everyone agrees.

And then there's that pesky apostrophe- artist's book- apostrophe--s or s--- apostrophe. I've never understood the problem there, because I think it's a simple grammatical issue- it's either

an artist's book, singular possessive, or it's a category, plural possessive. I don't see how definition enters into it, but for some it's pivotal to understand the field.

Why is this question of definition important?

It is perceived that a lack of recognition of book arts, particularly in a larger art context, or adequate critical dialogue, or commercial exhibition venues, or recognition for the artists, are all hindered by these ambiguities. Naming and classifying are means of taming the unruly beast. But what if we all decided on the correct spelling, punctuation and definition? Would Art Forum put Nancy Leavitt on the cover? Would Brad Freeman write reviews for Time magazine? Would collectors empty out MCBA's shop, secure that their investment would reap retirement rewards?

On a recent trip to New York, I talked to people from three influential organizations in books- a distributor, a publisher, and a director of a book arts center.

David Platzker is the director of Printed Matter, self-described as "the world's largest non-profit facility dedicated to the promotion of artists' publications in a book- like format. Founded in 1976, it carries more than 14,000 titles. As their web site states, they explicitly do not deal in books arts or book objects.

Platzker explains, "At Printed Matter we think of Artists' Books as something done in large, inexpensive editions, disseminable, disposable, democratizing, and anything that one would classically define a true book that you would buy in a literal "book store." This definition derived from founders such as Sol LeWitt and Lucy Lippard, who were engaged in thinking of the book as an alternative space, performative space, narrative space, as a means for democratizing the art world."

These ideas gelled through the writing and collecting policies of Clive Philpot, the then director of the Library of the Museum of Modern Art. Choosing artists' books described as above, he added thousands of titles to MOMA's library. This was and still is a strong influence. So much so that it was one of the first things that Steve Clay talked about.

Clay is also the founder and publisher of Granary Books. Granary began in St. Paul as a distributor of fine letterpress books, books that paid attention to the crafts of printing, papermaking and book binding. The Philpot mission was so accepted as the definition that Clay was unable to get librarians to look at his books. He said, "Philpot's dialectic set up the way that librarians across the country have taken what he said as gospel. (Since his retirement) that is kind of eroding without him there to bang on it. The boundaries between the genres of books that can be made aren't as important."

Clay began publishing when he moved Granary to New York in 1989. He brings writers and artists together in beautifully designed and crafted publications, some offset, some letterpress printed by Phil Gallo and bound by Jill Jevne, both from the Twin Cities area. His interest in books started with writing and avant garde poetry while he was in college. "I was looking for particular writers in Special Collections Libraries, and this other kind of publishing was revealed- the attention to the page and the total production of the work. There were incredible physical objects- photocopied, typewritten, mimeoed, letterpress, stapled, sewn. Their ultimate beauty as aesthetic objects didn't matter that much- it was the degree of sophistication the makers brought to it." Clay still finds his main audience is in the writing world.

At the Center for Book Arts in New York, the craft is emphasized. CBA was founded in 1974, was the first non-profit of its kind in the nation, and served as a model for others, including MCBA, which was started in 1983. In many ways its mission is totally opposite of Printed Matter's. CBA's mission is to "preserve the traditional crafts of book-making, as well as explore and encourage contemporary interpretations of the book as an art object. "This is accomplished through three main areas : Education- which involves teaching the craft, its exhibition program, and providing working studio space for artists.

Said Rory Golden, the current director, "Because of the different programs we have, we have an audience interested in literature with our poetry competitions and that's a whole separate audience from teachers who want things, from artists who just want bookbinding, from people who come to see our exhibits."

These three organizations have separate definitions, missions and audiences. They circle around each other, making occasional connections. (I'd like to point out what a great job MCBA does in being inclusive, bridging many interests yet being critically aware at the same time, as with this lecture series.)

The early issues of JAB, Journal of Artists' Books, tried to force the issue of definition. Good artists and bad were named, there were letters of defense and counter commentary. The verbal fencing led to more polarization than clarification. Even so, the dialogue pushed artists to consider- and defend- their work in ways they had not been asked to before.

Eventually Johanna Drucker wrote, "It's not so much that I want to see Artists' books canonized as that I want to see this complex historic development- and the major individual artists within it- recognized and appreciated as a late 20th century artform. ... To speak of Artists' books is to suggest just as wide a spectrum of activities as to use the term Painting or Sculpture."

Steve Clay incorporates that spectrum when he says "Artists' books are best understood within a wide context nurtured by several lineages and as such, they quickly change guises as soon as any one definition seems certain."

It is precisely that which interests me about books made by artists- the changing guises, the fluid interchange of ideas and forms translated from one medium into another, the combination of contemporary content with a rich dense history that defies easy categorization. The book arts, concentrating on medium and technique, are the building blocks used to create form, whose purpose is to support content. Each is an extension of the other, an integration of concept, content, and context.

CHAPTER 2

How does the past and the future come into play?

Many artists are drawn to the book because of personal history. Buzz Spector talks about books as steps to an endless beyond, a child sitting on a parent's lap, reading a book, both facing outward together. Harriet Bart works from a lifelong passion for books, a connection both to her father as an avid reader/thinker and to the Jewish tradition of the word, the book, and learning.

The history of the book itself plays an important role. And that history includes the Word and the Book with a capital W and B. When I was asked to do this lecture, I was on sabbatical from the College of Visual Arts, with three months in London, and four months from Berlin to Italy. Among other things, I searched out historical libraries, particularly medieval chained libraries. In almost all cases I was looking at religious books, precious as artifacts, art objects, and as carriers of the Word. I was often moved to still, silent awe and not quite tears

In Padova, I boldly invited myself into a monastic library, la Biblioteca Antoniana, where a kind monk speaking only Italian patiently worked through my rusty Spanish to tell me about the collection of manuscripts and leather globes, unwrapping the fabric coverings from each book. In Cesena, during another private tour of the second oldest established public library, my host touched the chains, the books, the Venetian glass windows as he emphasized that everything was original. The books are still stored chained to the bench shelves, and rotated out for exhibition. Bibles, psalms, torahs- the careful preparation of the vellum, the meticulous lushness of the illuminations, the carved wood and wrought metal bindings, the intimate enclosure of the libraries themselves- I could feel the hand of the makers and the importance and depth of the meaning.

But I was dumbstruck by these relics at the Basilica del Santo in Padova. Here the incredible power and mystery of the word is in the very physical metaphor of the reliquary of St. Anthony, known for his preaching skills. The sanctification of the Word is embodied in his vocal cords, jaw and tongue, the fiery oratory cleansing and renewing. Because of my Catholic upbringing, I could be drawn into the horrifying beauty and understand the passion.

But I am not a historian, I don't make historical book structures, and religion does not play much of a role in my life. As a contemporary American artist, I am not bound to a canon of any kind- religious or secular. Extending beyond the book objects themselves, to the Protestant destruction of most of the illuminated manuscripts in Britain during the Reformation, or the Catholic fetishization of the relic as divine word during the Counterreformation, or the commemoration of books that were burned by the Nazis in Berlin, I was aware of the incredible transformative power of the book, then and now.

For example, chained libraries were not only ways of cataloguing and ordering the books (the row's contents are listed on the end of the shelf or bench), they were also a way of protecting precious books when they were made available to the small but reading general public. I thought of reading as a seed of revolution. In my collage thinking, the chained books bring up questions of who has access to information and the power of having it, and from access its counterpart, censorship, or ideas chained shut. Or how far the first amendment can be stretched. Or how an artist constructs a voice when not protected by the first amendment. Wars are still being fought through interpretations of sacred texts.

Thinking critically of what has been is an invitation to what else could be. I can't help but believe that all books are imbued with this history, a genetic code of sorts, so that each contains reflection and aspiration within it. It is impossible to look at any contemporary book, or be a contemporary practitioner, and not also connect to hundreds of years of development.

Another dominant discourse has been about the future of the book in relation to electronic media. For many this is more threatening than a lack of definition. The book will disappear, as

data replaces literature and pixels replace ink, or as 'SmartPaper': an electronic programmable plastic paper replaces pulp.

In cyperspeak books are called "treeware" or a "dead tree edition."

The installation of full filing cabinets by NY artist John Morrison, at the Soap Factory in Minneapolis this past summer, is titled:

"A nostalgic composition
or an archival passage
or the architectonics of an obsolete information technology
or information once had mass."

Information once had mass. What a striking statement. For those of you who experienced this piece (because it was experiential as well as visual) walking through the architectural alley of file cabinets was a palpable and subtly jarring reminder of how much has changed, and how quickly.

As a comparison, the US Embassy in Iran shredded all its documents before it fell in 1979. Revolutionaries worked in a back room, untangling bags of shreds to piece and tape them together. They were eventually able to publish 50 volumes of their reassembled finds.

Information is no longer contained in reams of paper but micro data, billions of 0s and 1s in a computer, or the three billion repeat of only four letters- A, T, C, and G that comprise the compound building blocks of DNA.

And as the digital world progresses, even data as text is threatened. James Lilacs, writer for the Star Tribune and author/editor of the Web blog "Bleat" says that "We're in the golden age of text on the internet. When everyone has broadband and digital video, it will be streaming video, not text."

So once upon a time, image stood for text for the illiterate, and now again image replaces text, but for the aliterate, those who know how to read but choose not to.

Textless information.

Paperless paper.

Leadless leading.

The book, the body, this is a proposed antidote to an ephemeral electronic world.

However, a real threat to the vitality of the field is to hold the book up as the stalwart counterpoint to the computer, the exquisite handmade object that sits dead in its material beauty, devoid of content, bearing the weight of nostalgia- which at the same time denies the history of the book as one technological advance over another. Not just the advances from manuscript to printing press to digital output, but writing and reading itself, literacy, education, and democracy. Progress can be read in both the technology and the metaphors.

Contemplating an electronic future does not deny the incredible depth of history of book arts. One does not replace the other, it is additive, an accumulation, hence we scroll down a computer screen.

Turning Leaves of Mind, by Nora Ligorano, Marshall Reese and Gerrit Lansing, is described as a “testament to the book as the most elegant information storage and retrieval mechanism ever invented,” it digitally combines photo documentation of 13th to 18th century Spanish manuscripts and contemporary poetry.

Here the connection of the past with current concepts and technologies is overt, but even if unconscious and unacknowledged, the history of the book charges the present. Artists can and do envelop its history as a reference or departure point, or to consciously deconstruct it. Painting and sculpture also carry their histories, but since modernity primarily as opposition or the one-up-manship of avant-garde strategies. Contemporary artists working in books may do the same, but it is the sanctioned possibility of having both choices available that provides such a fertile field to play and work in.

CHAPTER 3

What is the intersection between book and art?

I don't know any other medium that encompasses such a wide range of approaches, design and material options, and still be identified as that medium.

There is the paper, a choice that is not just a substrate but is integral to the tactile experience of a book;

The page, a single sheet format with all the issues of 2D composition;

The folio or spread, where margins, full bleeds and gutters interact with the tandem relationships between two pages;

Multiple pages, akin to a body of work, but involving order, sequence, and time, including things we relate to other time arts such as film: foreshadowing, flashback, narrative, the blank page or the pause:

There's the text- poetry, story, lists, facts or memories;

And the image- drawing, painting, printmaking, illustration, photo, digital compositions;

And the type- calligraphy, hand writing, lead type, digital type, rubber stamps;

The object- the material body, structure, space and form, as with sculpture;

And not to be ignored- aesthetics combined with function, not unlike architecture.

Making a good book is daunting- each of these elements needs individual integrity, at the same time that it must be relational to all the other elements.

All this before content, concept, voice, audience address, interactivity, and many other concerns. This intersection of so many areas in the arts provides an open invitation to artists who have multiple interests and talents. The book allows for a changed but connected experience for both the artist and the audience. It may serve to heighten awareness due to the

intimate and radical change of scale of the book, or it may allow the artist to say more overtly things that are more discrete in other mediums. The artists I am going to talk about cross areas to do what they do. Content driven, they cannot take for granted that what works in one medium or scale will work in another.

CHAPTER 4

Crossing the intersection.

I'm going to start with a book by an architect because of the close affinity between books and architecture, despite scale differences. I associate doors with covers, walls with pages, a corner with the gutter. A book is a building block. We construct and deconstruct the text. We pass through an exterior that gives clues to the interior, and then make passage through place and space. Function is essential but most often invisible.

S, M, L, XL is a collaboration between Dutch architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas and graphic designer/book designer Bruce Mau. Although ostensibly about architecture, it is very much about the book. The shape, color and weight of its 1,345 pages is akin to a concrete block. Embedded within a visually charged mix of photographs, collages, narrative, theory, comics and site plans, are 30 projects by Koolhaas's firm, Office of Metropolitan Architecture.

Bruce Mau is the exclusive book designer for publisher Zone Books. You may be familiar with his series *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*. Influences for his work are Russian movie director Sergei Eisenstein and avant-garde filmmaker Chris Marker.

A review in *Graphis* magazine noted:

"Mau's designs, with their bold and cinematic verve and tactile finesse, were uncommonly successful, and the work quickly became an essential item for style-conscious cognoscenti everywhere." (I'm not sure if that is a complement or not.)

When reading or looking at this book, you never forget it is about architecture- the weight alone reminds you. But there also is a constant transference of meaning through scale, a destabilization of what small medium large and extra-large means when you hold it in your lap, when a gutter bisects a room, or text crops the frescoed sky. Despite the separation into chapters, each size blends with another, all scales working together.

However, this is not without some counterpoint. The Koolhaas quotes that follow are from a 1991 lecture about escalation of scale, four years before the publication of this book. Substitute the word book when you hear building, and we can use his own words to deconstruct *SMLXL*.

"The first observation is that, in a building beyond a certain size, the space becomes so enormous that the exterior can no longer hope to make any precise disclosure about the interior." (Or you can't judge a book by its cover.)

"(The second observation is that within such a building), the distance between one component and another, ... also become so enormous that there is an autonomy of spatial elements." (Books rely on memory, the reader keeping track of what came before to contextualize the present page. Koolhaas notes that this book can be read in any order, therefore memory is in some way irrelevant, the elements are independent of each other.)

“(Another observation) is that the building (of enormous scale) is impressive simply through its mass, through its appearance, and through the dumb fact of its own existence. It appears impressive, if not beautiful, whether the architect influences it or not.” Architectural Review noted that this book is designed to attract attention by the sheer absurdity of its size, an encyclopedia with no common logic.

There is a struggle to understand this book in terms of traditional modes of accessing information, of what a book should be, of how it communicates its message, maybe even what the message is. And ultimately, that is the point- Koolhaas and Mau confront and force us to grapple with our notions of both book and building, of reading and experience, within this complex and contradictory space.

Harriet Bart often uses architecture as a reference in her work. It represents structure, a physical metaphor for culture, language and learning. Her work centers on memory, examined from many points of view, how we remember what we choose to remember. Her lifelong passion for books is integral to her art, so much so that even when in art school, the written word and literature dominated over still life, figure or landscape.

Coming to books from painting, Harriet describes a moment of epiphany when she was doing a large complex painting about memory, language and markmaking. She was wrestling with it to make it work, when she asked herself, “Why am I doing this?” She began pulling books off the shelf- and everything was there- books as architectural elements, as icon, as cultural signifiers. She never tuned back. In this piece, *Strata*, installed at Dolly Fiterman Gallery, she connects the book and architecture as the column, the spine, and the spinal column- that which both defines and supports the physical structure.

The textured and painted altered books, seen in the architectural spiral, were transitional works from painting to sculpture, moving away from the familiar. This was not just a material or object transition, but an exploration of the book as icon- the building block of culture and society. These signifiers are additive in *Cultural Narratives*, on the right. Here Bart examines the relationship between German artist Joseph Beuys and the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers. Iconic materials of these two artists- lead, felt, and mussel shells are layered onto books influential to Beuys such as *Man as Symphony of the Creative Word* by Rudolf Steiner. The concrete books give solidity and weight, like a concrete block or more importantly, a concrete idea.

In doing *Garment Registry* as a McKnight fellow in 1999, Bart found an ideal way to work from one form to another- doing an installation first and then an editioned book that correlates to it without being dependent on the installation.

The installation began with a collection of cotton dresses. Each belonged to an individual unknown woman, the details of her life read through the colors, patterns, and button. But it was when she found an old ledger, *Garment Register* that it all gelled. Ink from a steel pen inscribes each line with a woman’s name and amount of dues paid. Old photos from flea markets, clothing, overlays of tissue with phrases from women writers of the first half of the 20th century and early feminist movement of the 70s- all of these elements combine in a personal, intimate commemoration of those ignored in history. Grouped together as an archive, the piece memorializes and honors these anonymous women.

Because Bart's work is content driven, the research comes first, then the material. She enjoys the collaborative process of designing and making the books with others. *Garment Register*, the editioned fine press book, was letterpress printed by Phil Gallo and bound by Jill Jevne. The search and discovery through books that she found when she was growing up continues to inform her process as an artist, an intellectual curiosity that finds form through reading, thinking, questioning, and making.

Harriet's new public art piece for the Walter Library at the University of Minnesota will be in place by early spring. A wall mounted grid of stainless steel is the binding for glass folios inscribed with architectural details and words and images related to science and discovery.

Brooklyn artist Janet Zweig has also worked in books, sculpture, and public art. This Book Is Extremely Receptive is a multilayered flipbook. Telephone dialogues, computer messages and TV transmissions are simultaneously discharged as visual wave lengths cross the pages, the satellite dish beaming or receiving messages. The 336 lines currently expurgated from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in ninth grade textbooks are the lines cut from Scribners and Prentice Hall books. *Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days (Act 1, scene iii, line 106); You will set cock-a-hoop, you'll be the man! (Act I, scene v, line 81)*. The book comes with directions to cut out the word blocks, paste them back into the textbook, and pass it on to another student. 336 Lines was a transitional piece from books to installation, a giveaway with her first installation, at the List Center in Boston.

Permutation and variation inform much of Zweig's work. Her interest in set theory and combinations is at the heart of her computer kinetic sculptures. The pieces are like books that compose their own text in the gallery space. They are time based, sequential, and are programmed to generate the text.

For *Mind Over Matter* Zweig programmed the computer with these three sentences:

I think therefore I am
I am what I am
I think I can

moving from Descartes to Popeye to the Little Engine That Could.

She also programmed grammatical rules, and tasked the computer to write out every possible sentence combination from the original three. From that it generates philosophical conundrums like

"I am what I think, I think."

"I think I can think."

"I can think I am therefore I can think I think."

The sentences fell into a basket suspended by ropes and pulleys; the rock counterweight was slowly lifted by the weighty thoughts of the computer.

In *Everything in the World*, the computer systematically permutes the infinite combinations of binary code, as if writing code for everything in the world. The giant roll of paper has a landscape painted on its edge that unrolls as it feeds into the printer. Eventually the picture will be gone, the world turned into code.

Although she intends to make books again, Zweig has moved away from them because she found the discourse in the field to be too limiting. As she puts it, she “wanted to be a littler fish in a bigger pond” and be part of the larger art world discourse. She recently completed a participatory public work for the University of Minnesota and is currently working on a system-wide interactive piece for the Hiawatha Light Rail project.

Sol LeWitt’s work is permutation to the nth degree. His work is in keeping with his definition of Conceptual Art, a term that came from his writing in *Artforum* in 1967, “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.” (Paragraphs on Conceptual Art)

LeWitt’s drawings and books at this time are like simple math, with sequential permutations as if working out the formulae. The objective is clearly stated in the title and clearly presented in the logic of the images, such as *All 4 Part Combination of 6 Geometrical Figures*

In the late 60’s LeWitt began drawing directly on the wall, or at least he provided the directions for others to do them:

An example:

“Lines, not short, not straight, crossing and touching, drawn at random, using four colors (yellow, black, red and blue), uniformly dispersed with maximum density covering the entire surface of the wall.”

In his retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, every wall was a gigantic page, and entering a gallery was like walking into the center of one of his books. The obsessiveness of the system and the mark was delightfully overwhelming. You could imagine the scores of people who worked on the exhibition for weeks, rulers and pencils in hand, the instructions taped to the wall they were working on. There was a physical after affect, a residual energy, that charged the conceptual constructs. The change of scale forced a change in perception.

From Sentences on Conceptual Art, he writes:

15- Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken), to physical reality, equally.

Moving to gargantuan scale, LeWitt was commissioned to design a crosswalk between the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. If you don’t recall seeing it, that’s because despite much planning for compliance to city regulations (as it is a working city street) it has been removed because it did not wear well in Minnesota winters. Salt and snowplows are had on art.

On one side of LeWitt’s accordion book *Lines in 4 Directions with All Their Combinations* there are 18 images of lines, all black and white but the last two pages. The last pages with color come as a surprise. Bold geometric patterns fill each page, full bleeds push your eye from one pattern to the next. Then you turn it over.

And what you thought were drawings on paper are actually huge paintings on loading dock doors, and the scale changes everything. No longer a 10” image fitting easily in your hand, it is a ten-foot door and you are not looking at it close up, but far away. It is brilliant in both its visual simplicity and spatial complexity.

In the late 70s LeWitt began to publish photographic books that were progressions within groupings, that were not limited to a mathematical solution. *Sunrise & Sunset at Praiano* is from the Amalfi coast of Italy. The innocuous photos capture the changing sky and weather, a visual account book of lived moments that could be anywhere, any year.

The cataloguing of the moment that is evident in *Sunrise and Sunset at Praiano* is numbingly present in *Visible World* by Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss. They have collaborated since the late 1970's on work that re-presents the commonplace through sculpture, photography, film, and video.

The book is a documentation of an installation. This collection of 3,000 photos taken by the artists over a 15-year period is an encyclopedic travelogue from city to desert, Las Vegas to Mount Fuji. Through formal relationships like color and texture, each image leads to the next, taking us on a world tour of the beautiful and the banal. The individual moment of the snapshot is subverted to the continuous stream of images, implying time, motion and connection between places that are nowhere near each other in real life. The pages of the book provide geographical proximity. You cross the gutter, not the English Channel to go from London to Paris. You begin to anticipate the segue, try to predict the connection revealed on the next page. Thousands of fragments unite to become a whole- a completionist strategy that in turn reveals how much cannot be captured here.

The installation is another thing entirely. The collection of transparencies is displayed on a 90-foot-long light table. The light table divides the gallery on a diagonal, a barrier that is crossed by squeezing through a narrow gap at each end. Reviews mention the shift between nature and the built environment as mundane yet sublime. None mention time or sequence, elements that are quite clear in the book. In the installation, the eye skips across the pictorial plane, an image pops forward, something is recognized a few feet away. By contrast, grouping the photos in sets to fit the pages of the book, the order is made more explicit and the binding fixes the movement.

In both his visual art and writing, Buzz Spector probes the book from every possible perspective – the object and content, the social and psychological conditions. The large format Polaroid is from the series *My Library*. Different than Fischli and Weiss, but also a completionist strategy, Spector is documenting all the books in his personal library as a metaphor for the order of things in the world. *My Fiction* includes all the novels and short stories in his collection; it is a self-portrait seen through both the titles and the parody of the book jacket photo of the author. *My Metaphysics*, the installation of the books between ceiling joists implies the metaphysical is possible.

The author's photograph is the subject of another series of offset printed books. The reader looks for something distinct within the author's writing- the voice, the story, yet the staged poses are unoriginal. The individuality of the book is negated by the formulaic pose of the image. *Towards a Theory of Universal Causality* is a stepped wedge of 6500 books arranged into 168 stacks. With the tall end at human height, it reverses scale from the hand-held book to the architectural. The obsessiveness illustrates his concept that libraries are not about reading- they are about appetites for reading, which are boundless.

Freeze Freud documents an installation of 24 volumes of Freud's collected works embedded in ice in a glass-walled freezer. Frozen in time, captured perversely, the works are preserved for their iconic value rather than their usefulness. Reading is denied.

For *A Passage*, printed by Phil Gallo, Spector wrote the text and tore down the printed edition by hand. His altered books are variations on a theme of removal: pages torn or cut out in sequence- leaving a cross section of the original text. The word fragments take the form of a readable printed page, but in the end are incomprehensible. Memory cannot fill in the spaces.

From 1978 to 1987, Spector was the publisher and editor of *Whitewalls*, a Chicago-based magazine featuring writings by artists. He said he would much rather make art than write about it, but he thinks he's a better artist because he writes. He is Chair of Fine Arts at Cornell.

What do I do with all of this?

The fascination began when I first learned to read- how lines and circles stood for particular sounds; I was drawn into the mystery of the dark narrow school library, where the books I wanted- the lives of the saints- were reached by climbing a ladder. I no longer think a halo will appear over my head if I'm really good but I do believe in ascendancy through knowledge (1st grade on left). The seminal moment came when I was 10, seeing Andy Warhol's Brillo Box at the Milwaukee Art Center. It stopped me in my tracks, mind racing. Text, image, and object- it was all there. I decided then that I would be an artist, and when I got home, I made a book of art ideas.

So, there has always been a seamless relationship between language, books, and art. I did not set out to be a book artist. But books or their conceptual and physical components are integrated in almost all of my work. The concept always comes first; form and material follow. I pay attention to material for its intrinsic meaning and how it further develops the concept. The abstractions of language and reading are the basis for many works. The ephemeral language of symbols painted on a sidewalk is a slide projection over nearly weightless handmade paper cast rocks; or a geological creation myth transforms from text to relief map to landscape in cast bronze, iron and lead.

Whether it's an edition or a unique work depends on the message and the intended audience. In a one-of-a-kind book, *You Are Here*, a 10-foot square paper landscape unfolds from an 8" cube, the map becoming the territory as signage and text replaces geography. *Nude Youths* was a political action piece in reaction to the Helms amendment. The text from the amendment that is the framework for censorship of the arts is printed on a black band across the genitals of Michelangelo's male youths from the Sistine chapel. I mailed out 300, including the White House, members of Congress, the Supreme Court. I got a few form thank you letters in return, but it was reviewed in 3 national art magazines, and was almost used by the Whitney Museum of Art for their international holiday card that year- but the CEO thought it too controversial.

How to make an Antique, was done in collaboration with Robert Lawrence for an MCBA Jerome fellowship. It sets up a compare/contrast relationship between the book and the video. Both time-based and sequential, the reader determines the pacing, rhythm and direction as the pages are turned, while the TV sends its stream of images regardless of viewer interest. As with the odd idea that one can "make an Antique" it explores the malleability of time, the timeless moment.

The abstractions of language are counterbalanced by the physical body in *In the Beginning*. In Genesis, in the beginning is The Word. But the body asserts itself, the root of a tree becomes a red vein and then a snake, its copper tongue forged into the word Word, the tip points you to take an apple from the bucket on the floor. *Spatial Geometries* starts with another creation story, an Aztec myth about the sun poking out the eye of the moon because she was too bright. The book examines the balance between male and female by combining veiled sexual language of space exploration, and astronomical information about balance between the planets.

The body is very much the subject in *Viewpoints*. It was made in relation to Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, published in 1655, one of the first books about the wonders of looking through microscopes and telescopes. *Viewpoints* pushes that further, with images of the interior body from electron scanning microscopes and satellite photos looking back on earth. Each page becomes its own viewfinder, as each contains a Fresnel lens. The verso side is like an X-ray of the front, looking through from one view to the other. The two books were shown together at the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

Changing scale, materials and subject, *If Not This* is a room sized compound book structure that was made for the Walker Art Center in conjunction with the Ed Ruscha exhibition. If not this, if not then, if not there compares Ruscha's California with the Twin Cities. The two sides of the accordion are read not by moving your eyes but by moving your body through space.

The real time video of *Every Building on Lake Street* pays homage to Ruscha's *Every Building on Sunset Strip*. Rather than unfolding a long strip of an accordion, the images scroll by in a 20-minute sequence. The geography of Minneapolis and St. Paul is depicted in the similarity of the signage, the Mississippi River bisecting them, a wave of a blank book connecting them.

The book and architecture are ready companions, as noted earlier. Each also address the body directly but in different ways due to scale and function. *The Ten Books of Vitruvius* uses the text from the ancient Roman architect as if shoring up a wall. Texts edited from Vitruvius are debossed into tarpaper pages with steel covers; to turn the pages you straddle the 2 x 6s, making overt the relationship between the structure of reading, body, and architecture.

Structure also provides a means of dealing with more ephemeral qualities. Line, plane and volume are three basic elements of both sculpture and architecture. *Line* is a handmade paper accordion book, with a binding of steel threaded rod and cable stretched from ceiling to floor; *Plane* has a fragile handmade paper box suspended on thin steel cable between two heavy pieces of slate. This installation was about loss, about absence, and I let the strength of the sculpture speak for what I could not name. There are no words.

Volume, from that same installation, comprises 5 hollow columns of tarpaper, not quite touching the floor, supporting no weight, their function denied. In another piece, *Sheathe*, the column is a welded steel exoskeleton, the tissue paper skin fragile inside its armature.

Building Books is an installation that deals with various notions of "building," including architecture, language, and the body in space. In what may be also be a piece about renewal, steel columns encircle a centered space, your body is small within it. Step out of it, and you face another circle of more than 100 steel books. You reestablish an intimate relationship to the scale of the books. Words are found again through the abstraction of letters. Schematics for

drawing letters are matched with photos of building details. Scale and proportion affect body relationships; spatial arrangements guide movement. I am critically concerned with this creation of experiential space. The interaction of the viewer with the materials, structure and composition all add layers of meaning.

Form, function, the book and architecture are synonymous in the staircase for this building, done in collaboration with architect Garth Rockcastle. The viewer/reader enters into the space of a book while climbing the stair. 85 six-foot pages splay open from its steel spine, the pages unfurl from its welded, stitched binding. The translucent pages reveal and conceal through the overlapping structure and are animated by people's shadows. The landing is a pause, the space between, and a place to read the text that is based on word games. The stairs are a path forward in either direction, and like books, are a serial progression from one point to another through time, structure, sequence and space.

Vertical Location is the piece I am working on now- which I start installing tomorrow for the at Intermedia Arts for the McKnight Interdisciplinary exhibition. It is a reflection of that year away. Time and journey are captured in thousands of moments: footsteps, rubbings of stone letters, the sky, morning noon and evening every day for a year. Earth and sky, experience and aspiration. A staircase of books as connection.

CHAPTER 5

Why Book Art?

1. They are inclusive rather than exclusive.
2. They integrate structure and function with meaning and message.
3. You can touch them.
4. They are transportable, a pocket of power
5. They are distributable to a wider audience, you can bypass the gallery system
6. They reveal themselves over space and time.
7. They extend and sustain the life of an idea.
8. They have a voice and direct address to the reader.
9. Making and reading them is an act of discovery
10. You can't be a king, you can't have a castle, but you can have a book