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REVIEWS & PRESS

Jerome Rothenberg and Steve Clay, eds. *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the Book & Writing*. Granary Books, 2000.

Includes:

Beam, Jeffrey. "Three Books about Books." *Oyster Boy Review* 14 (Winter 2001): 52.

Shultz, Susan. "Review of *A Book of the Book*." *Shark* 4 (Summer 2002).

Bergan, Brooke. "A Book by Any Other Name." *Samizdat Magazine* (Winter 2001).

Alexander, Christopher. "Boundless Book." *Rain Taxi* 6.1 (Spring 2001): 12.

Highfill, Mitch. "Review of *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the Book & Writing*, Edited by Jerome Rothenberg & Steven Clay." *JAB* 16 (Fall 2001): 27-28.

Rubinstein, Raphael. "Review of Books: Poets and Painters." *Art in America* 90.2 (February 2002): 42-43.

Robins, Corinne. "If This You See, or Of the Making of Books." *American Book Review* 23.1 (November/ December 2001).

Thompson, Norm at CultureNet@CapilanoU. "Review of Rothenberg and Clay's *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the book & writing*." Oct. 8, 2009.

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Beam, Jeffrey. "Three Books about Books." *Oyster Boy Review* 14 (Winter 2001): 52.

Jerome Rothenberg's always original and thought-provoking work within language and poetics

has established ethnopoetics as a discipline encouraging expanded definitions of cultural artifacts. In these two books, he and his co-editors explore the meaning of "the book," envisioning a primal book written "out there" from which all manifestations of language spring. Proposing a book as a metaphor for imagining opens its interpretation to something more than a vessel for words; it becomes a communal theater of experience and instrument for action, facilitating invention and belief, communication and ritual, revealing itself as a spiritual conduit for human becoming. In *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*, essays on theater, the *Torah*, the Mayan *Popul Vuh*, and tribal sounds, intersect with interviews, photographs, and works by writers such as Edmond Jabès, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Eluard, performance artist Alison Knowles, and book artist Karl Young.

This intersection between visual, oral, and published language constitutes the basis for a vividly entertaining and instructive exploration of literature, aesthetics, and books as philosophical, notational, and revelatory instruments which cannot be replaced by other modes, even newer high tech ones. Dick Higgins states "The book is, then, a container of provocation. We open it and are provoked to match our horizons with those implicated by the text."

A Book of the Book extends and amplifies *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*. Here Stephen Clay, publisher of Granary Books, joins Rothenberg and segues his experience as bookmaker into Rothenberg's language explorations. Subtitled "Some Works & Projections about the Book & Writing" it succeeds in manifesting materially the spiritual pattern imagined in the previous work. It also evaluates positively the value and necessity of maintaining actual books in the new continuum redefined by virtual ones.

A Book of the Book amply offers essays on literary notation in various cultures, printing as an art, Modernist and Post-Modernist literary movements, the book as religious object, Emily Dickinson, Blake, Mallarmé, Art Brut, shaman Maria Sabina, tribal songs and visual poems, Chinese calligraphy and other Asian aesthetic principles, bookmaker Adolf Wolfi, Jewish mysticism, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and even novelty books (including children's pop-up books). Alongside appear generous excerpts from writers and visual and book artists such as Anne Waldman, Gertrude Stein, Edmund Jabès, Max Ernst, Keith Smith, Antonin Artaud, Whitman, Blake, Tom Phillips, Jess Collins, and others. A special treat is a gatefold of a poem by Blaise Cendrars illustrated by Sonia Delaunay.

Charles Bernstein concludes his essay which closes the volume thusly: "Poetry's social function in our time is to bring language ear to ear with its temporality, physicality, dynamism: its evanescence, not its fixed character; its fluidity, not its authority; its structures, not its storage capacity; its concreteness and particularity, not its abstract logicity and clarity."

Bernstein brilliantly summarizes Clay and Rothenberg's intent. Well organized, wide-ranging across time and space, *A Book of the Book* is an engaging read for anyone interested in the aesthetic, literary, historical, technical, and anthropological development and meaning of the book. It would make a fine textbook for a class on book arts or the evolution of the book. Scholarly, yet accessible, it is an important contribution to our appreciation of the importance

of books. Working on many levels it provides a profound mediation on the book as living thing, growing out and into us.

When Will the Book Be Done? celebrates fifteen years of publishing by Steven Clay's Granary Books and serves as a delightful accompaniment to the two previous works. Featuring complete lists and descriptions of nearly 100 artist's books, writer/ artist collaborations, and books of theory pertaining to books, writing, and publishing, it illustrates Clay's devotion to the book as object, and as the repository of poetic language and revelation. Handsomely printed (as are the previous works), with generous color reproductions from Granary's publications, the viewer discovers a museum in a book, and finds one's appetite to touch the works therein whetted, but not sated. Steven Clay's books are destined to be some of the most cherished works of the last part of the 20th century and the first part of the 21st.

While publishing books of great literary, social, and aesthetic value, Clay also convinces of the necessity of the book's centrality as a cultural artifact. These three works form an essential library for anyone interested in the book arts.

Original URL:

<http://www.oysterboyreview.com/issue/14/BeamJ-RothenbergClay.html>

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Shultz, Susan. "Review of *A Book of the Book*." *Shark 4* (Summer 2002).

Given Shark's suggestion that I read *A Book of the Book* in encyclopedic terms, I performed an on-line search for definitions of encyclopedia in encyclopedias. This search netted me several kinds of encyclopedias, from the Britannica (which now charges by the month for information) to a Wikipedia, which advertises itself as "fun, education, social," and a place where "you can correct other people on the spot without asking their permission!" Obviously, my quick internet search merely skims the surface of the "encyclopedic," a concept better defined by Shark's editors in their call for work, but the stark difference between "valuable information" (for which the reader is charged money) and a virtual site where anyone can participate, provides a clue to the ethos of contemporary encyclopedias. They run the gamut from a closed shop, like Britannica, to an open one, like the Wikipedia, from information closed off within covers (or within a fee schedule) to information that is (at least theoretically) never stable, never closed off, forever free. This stark contradiction interests me on a more abstract level, as well: historically, the "closed book" has been the site of canon creation, and canon creation has, at least until recently, locked out groups that cannot "pay" their capital dues, whether they be actual or cultural. What worries me about the new anthology by Steven Clay and Jerome Rothenberg, is that their book is more closed than open, less diverse than it might be, while

remaining provocative and vital in what it lays out as experimentation within the format of *The Book*.

The closed model has its able exponents: Marjorie Perloff casts a cold eye on cyberbooks, when she writes: "Interest in the Book... is at an all time high, perhaps because the Book is now threatened by the disintegration cyberspace may pose for it." The editors themselves write (less apocalyptically) in the "foreword": "The hegemony of the material book... was in some danger of being superceded by that of the virtual non-book—much as the book and writing had challenged the dominance of the oral technologies that came before them." Against such disintegration we are faced with a book whose heft is nearly as big as its intellectual reach, a book entirely material in its construction and conception. That it comes from Granary Books, whose products are now the most beautifully made on the market, and whose list includes many of the finest poets now at work, only emphasizes the bookness of it all. It's no mistake that the co-editors Rothenberg and Clay allude to their "recognition that the physicality of the book was a necessary concomitant to Mallarmé's proposition of the spiritual book that we were still eager to further explore."

A Book of the Book is an open and shut affair, as are all non-virtual books, but it also runs anchor to a series of anthologies Jerome Rothenberg has put together, from his first well-known collocation, *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, & Oceania* (1968) through the two large *Poems of the Millennium*, volumes he co-edited with Pierre Joris in the 1990s. Rothenberg makes an argument in all these anthologies that is best stated in the "Pre-Face" to *Technicians of the Sacred*, namely that there are "intersections & analogies" between the so-called "primitive" and the modern. He enacts these intersections by using two columns, one for the "primitive" and the other for the modern; they run like a poem down two pages of my Anchor edition. In the "primitive" column one finds "the poem carried by the voice"; in the modern, "written poem as score/ public readings"; in the "primitive," "the animal-body-rootedness of 'primitive' poetry: recognition of a 'physical' basis for the poem with a man's body" and in the modern, "dada/ lautgedichte (sound poems)." Finally, "the poet as shaman" meets his modern equivalents in the projections of Rimbaud, Rilke, and Lorca. The nervous quotes around the word "primitive" (to say nothing of the rather defensive first subtitle to the preface, "Primitive Means Complex") speak to Rothenberg's reach beyond categories and toward a non-binary way of looking at world poetry, oral and written. The metonymy created by setting the two columns beside each other suggests that world poetry is unified, rather than di-versified.

Poems for the Millennium continues this project some thirty years later. In the introduction to the second volume (1998), Rothenberg and Joris "translate" the language of the 1968 column-poem into 1990s' critical vocabulary. Their emphases involve "an exploration of new forms of language, consciousness, and social/ biological relationships, both by deliberate experimentation in the present and by reinterpretation of the 'entire' human past," among many others. We see again an emphasis on ethnopoeitics, and its intersections with the postmodern, a privileging of the oral, the performative, and a "move toward a new globalism, even nomadism—an intercultural poetics that could break across the very boundaries and

definitions of self and nation that were a latent source of its creative powers." The implicit universalism of the first volume is now presented, in avowedly contradictory fashion, as a nomadism that exists within a frame of globalism, as differences that share global space. Yet there's a sense that the farther we've traveled from *Technicians of the Sacred*, the closer we are to its liberal, and in many ways entirely admirable, goal of unifying world poetry.

To think self-consciously about "the book" is to acknowledge certain limitations to one's enterprise. My colleague, Juliana Spahr, and I joked one day this past year about how impossible it would be to create an anthology of local poetries, when such a collection would run against the very grain of the local. The anthology is local only when it contains one local literature; once it reaches out to other locations, it globalizes the local; presupposes a metropolitan eye that is aware of different locations and wants to link them. Difference can co-exist within the covers of the same book, but that book cannot argue for cultural or real nationalism. The book or the journal creates what Rob Wilson calls a "mongrel" space, one that insists on a lack of purity rather than on singular voices. Rothenberg somehow argues for purity within mongrelization, and that is my major problem with his argument. Because the structure of the book itself makes an argument, sets a frame of limitation around what is anthologized, it strikes me as especially crucial that the anthologist reach beyond the usual limits of such books. In *Technicians of the Sacred*, perhaps, Rothenberg did just that. While his argument in that book is a modernist one (see T.S. Eliot's use of Jessie Weston, for example, or Ezra Pound's collocations of eastern and western and "primitive" traditions), Rothenberg in 1968 sets the argument forth without putting the western tradition in play, except in the "pre-face." The material in the book is all "primitive." This was a radical step, to suggest that different traditions belonged together, but to do so without privileging the European/ American tradition. Compare this to *The Waste Land*, which ends, "shantih shantih shantih," but uses those Indian words to shore Eliot's western ruins, rather than make a call for a unified tradition. If one is to "mongrelize" tradition, the central question remains: "who is mongrelizing it?" "Who has the authority to do this work?" "What writers/ artists are being included, which excluded?" Over the decades since Rothenberg collected the work in his *Technicians* anthology, these questions have become more important, more highly charged, as liberal humanism gave way (for better or for worse) to a literary politics of the multicultural.

A Book of the Book begins by citing some key terms, "oral, material, virtual, spiritual," and "ethnopoetics," which are by now familiar to readers of Rothenberg's anthologies. The first essay in the book, *The Poetics and Ethnopoetics of the Book and Writing*, by Rothenberg, revisits his earlier collections and then joins them to this latest one. In "A Final Note" to the Pre-Face, Rothenberg lists the members of his tradition, an eclectic and charismatic bunch: Blake, the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, Emily Dickinson (as read by Susan Howe), Mallarmé, Cendrars and Delaunay, the Russian Constructivists, the Italian Futurists, Duchamp, Artaud, traditions of the Indian Americas, the postmodernists. This is the tradition that Rothenberg and his co-editors have advocated for decades now. *A Book of the Book* is innovative because it presents a poetics of this tradition, not simply examples and exemplars of it (although there are some of those, too, including a beautiful color fold-out of "La Prose du Transiberien et de la Petite Jeanne de France" by Cendrars and Delaunay). Here we find essays and manifestos about

the book by poets like Mallarmé and Marinetti. There are also works of art, such as "O!" by Jess, which enact ideas put forward by the writers of the essays. We see the book as container of ideas; an idea in itself (for Mayan shamaness); a machine (for Steve McCaffery and bpnichol); as life itself (for Anne Waldman); as art; as material for other books or works of art; and we read about these discussions as part of a long intellectual tradition (Charles Bernstein).

So this anthology unfolds between the abstractions of Mallarmé, who writes a poem about creating a book he never wrote, and the concretions of the artists discussed by Thomas Vogler, including Helen Lessick's *Poeme* (a cow with a "poeme" "written" on its side) and Buzz Spector's *Toward a Theory of Universal Causality*, a terraced mound/ installation of books. It wavers between Keith Smith's physical objects (accordion books, fold books, one of a kind constructions) and the theorizing of Blanchot and Derrida.

What haunts me about this book are a series of question by the African American artist, Faith Ringgold, from her essay, "The French Collection, Part 1, #3: The Picnic at Giverny." Section eight of this essay around Claude Monet (she, too, addresses the western tradition) asks: "Can a woman of my color ever achieve that amount of eminence in art in America? Here or anywhere in the world? Is it just raw talent alone that makes an artist's work appreciated to the fullest? Or is it a combination of things, la magie par une example [sic], le sexe par une autre, et la couleur est encore une autre, magic, sex, and color." "Number 11" asks, even more pointedly, "What will people think of my work? Will they just ignore it or will they give it some consideration?" These questions, posed toward the end of the book, by a colleague of Rothenberg's from UC San Diego, could from one point of view, threaten to sink the ship. I allude to her being Rothenberg's colleague only because this is but one way in which the logic of "raw talent" inevitably fails. What rises to the top in anthologies is so often friendship, not the search for diversity that is required to find it. For, if one looks at the anthology from the perspective of power, at the encyclopedia as a machine for moral improvement, at the book as something denied African Americans during slavery (see Frederick Douglass' narrative for a compelling account of how he "stole" reading from his "masters"), then this anthology argues for a kind of personal power that its editors themselves would likely argue against. No longer is the duality "primitive/ modern" the engine that runs our literatures. Instead, under—and despite—the globalization that Rothenberg and Joris allude to in their *Poems for the Millennium*, the engine that runs our literature explodes the book. Were there more American minority writers and artists than Faith Ringgold in this book, representing a diversity that exists within the modern, the postmodern, and the American, the *The Book* might well dissolve into "a book." The real danger for anthologies like these comes not from cyberspace itself, but from the openness that cyberspace promises, if only rarely honors. The absence of more artists like Ringgold means that the work of this anthology becomes a belated defense of Modernism, rather than an argument for a postmodernism that is larger than the binary terms "primitive" and "(post)modern." For, while Rothenberg and Joris are not above bashing T.S. Eliot and the formalists in their Millennium anthologies, their books participate in a tradition more like Eliot's than like Amiri Baraka's or Kamau Brathwaite's or any number of other world poets at work today. I'm thinkinh especially of Brathwaite's creation of Sycorax font and his explosion of the book form in his recent *ConVERsations* with Nathaniel Mackey, where the book transcribes a

conversation, then enacts it through the medium of font (a punster might call this the "font metaphor" of print). In Rothenberg's and Clay's anthology, Ringgold's questions are answered for her, but for her only, and that's a problem.

The encyclopedic, then, is a mixed blessing; while it stretches the boundaries of our knowledge, presenting us with imagined worlds where shamans sing with postmoderns, it also enforces the boundaries whose aptest metaphor is the covers of a book, however large it might be. But I'd like to return to the opening essay of *A Book*, where Jerome Rothenberg rehearses his own career as an anthologist. It strikes me that one of the great values of this book is not so much its "authority" as a dispenser of truths about the state of the book at this historical moment, but what it tells us about the anthologist himself. As it unfolds, *A Book* clearly becomes the book of Rothenberg's career, gathering together the ideas he's propounded and guarded for some 40 years now. These ideas have, in many ways, shaped recent literary history, and helped to usher in the very era that makes this book seem less innovative than historical, autobiographical, a book that is more archive than prophesy, more memoir than cultural manifesto.

Note:

I've had a more recent communication from Lytle Shaw, who aptly points out that this notion of "local vs. global" is terribly absolute and non-relational. As the editor of a journal—*Tinfish*—that tries hard to work the blurred lines of the local and the international, publishing "local" work from Hawaii alongside work from the Pacific that represents what I would call "regional experimentalism," I could not agree with him more. As someone who is an "outsider" to Hawaii and whose journal is often read here only for its "local" content, however, I can attest to the force of the resistance against the outside that is shown by local literatures like those in Hawaii. Such localized poetics may simplify, but that is what gives them their power, at least at their points of origin. One might call this a "strategic localism" to go along with politically-minded "strategic essentialisms" and identity politics that are necessary to burst the glass ceilings (or glass book covers) of the dominant politics and culture. It's no mistake that I, who am white, have the mobility to edit a journal that calls localism or nationalism into question, a luxury not afforded the editors of, say, *ōiwi*, a native Hawaiian journal.

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Bergan, Brooke. "A Book by Any Other Name." *Samizdat Magazine* (Winter 2001).

You are not reading a book. What makes you so sure of that? Is it the size of the page? The number of pages? The paper? The content? The title? Samizdat is Russian for self-publisher, which is what you have to become when the government controls the press (or when commerce, careerism, or community morals do). The first samizdat were typed carbons, definitely not books, just as the Samizdat you are holding now is definitely not the usual literary journal. Does that affect how you read it? Does it change the meaning or value of these words?

I am reading a book called *A Book of the Book*. It is a book, not the book, which suggests it is not definitive. But it is a book of the book. Is that The Book, as in the Good Book? Or, perhaps, the Book of Nature, God's creation (as opposed to man's)? Or, maybe, some version of Mallarmé's "ideal Book, the Book to end all books," which is described and excerpted by Richard Sieburth in *A Book of the Book*?

Is it, mayhap, none of these mighty Books but simply "The Book as Physical Object" (Keith A. Smith)? Or, more complexly, the book as social construct? The conventional book? The unconventional book? The book as trope? The trope as book? The medium as message? (Like the message you hold in your hands: a literary journal that vaguely resembles a newspaper and is called *Samizdat*—or, in this instance, *Jacket* [a magazine without a jacket.])

A Book of the Book poses all these questions about the book and raises many others as well. Can Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden be a book? (Read the photographs of Robin Gillanders to find out.) Do paintings that simulate African-American quilts (like those of Faith Ringgold) qualify as books? Do man (and woman)-made tracks that tell a story? (The stories are retraced in Nancy Munn's "Guruwari Designs" for your appraisal.) Can a book be made of soap or of cows? Thomas A. Volger ("When a Book is Not a Book") suggests they can. Can one be made of beans—or is that full of beans? (Consult "On The Book of the Bean" by Alison Knowles for some answers).

How about 150 copies of a 7-foot sheet of paper folded into 22 panels that when unfolded and lined up vertically are as tall as the Eiffel Tower? Would it be a tower of books? (Check out *The Book's* 4-color, 2-foot version of this Blaise Cendrars/ Sonia Delaunay collaboration, *La Prose du Transsiberien*, and decide for yourself.)

Dear Reader, have you had it with all these questions? Do you want to "run like water from steep shores after a storm, when [you] hear *Question's* horn beblown," as Dieter Roth does in "Introduction to Books and Graphic?" But Answer is fat and mad, too," adds Mr. Rot (his alternate spelling). It affixes you unless, emulating Keith Smith, you ask "If a broadside is folded into quarters and then eighths, is it then a book instead of a poster?" not for the definitive answer but "as a foundation from which [to] depart."

And what of the unnamed questioner in Jerome McGann's "Composition As Explanation (of Modern and Postmodern Poetries)" who repeatedly interrupts the discourse? McGann calls this "textus interruptus," a dialogic form of literary criticism, he says. In "Edmond Jabes and the Question of the Book," Jacques Derrida extravagantly calls the Question "our freedom" from God, which is what allows us to speak and to write, making Jabes's intractable *Book of Questions* "a book on the book."

But I am reading *A Book of the Book* not a book on the book. That preposition of is more important than either of the articles (a book, the book). Derrida inadvertently explains why when he describes "man's writing as the desire and question of God." He adds parenthetically "(and the double genitive is ontological before being grammatical, or rather is the embedding

of the ontological and the grammatical within the graphein.)" Embedded in *A Book of the Book* is the ontological book, and that is its genius. It is the genius of the two editors, Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay, who chose the texts and, as important, arranged them.

A Book of the Book is, not surprisingly, structured like a poem, a modernist poem whose exigent form is message and method. That being so, it is best to ignore the random access capability of the book and read this one start to finish—to ensure being of the book.

Why create an anthology of the book? "*A Humument*," says its author Tom Phillips, "exemplifies the need to 'do' structuralism, and (as there are books both of and on philosophy) to be of it rather [than] on it." Rothenberg and Clay likewise want all of the bookish effects and potentialities they address to be experienced not merely envisioned. The genitive of bespeaks possession, internalization, an unmediated immediacy and self-referentiality that about and on do not. About and on promise theory, history, classification. The *Book of the Book* offers this and much more: Derrida, Barthes, Blanchot (the usual suspects), Borghes, and Bernstein for theory. A chronology of essays on writers from Blake to the Postmoderns for history. And for classification, an array of book types described by experts (the artist book by Johanna Drucker, novelty books by Martha Carothers, Max Ernst's *The Hundred Headless Woman* by Andre Breton).

There are also exempla in abundance: an illustrated page from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, photographs of installation books, even complete books within the book. "Gifts," Rothenberg calls them: the "Cendrars/ Delaunay" broadside and "Jess's O"! These alone make the collection worth having.

You also get an old-fashioned plethora of "Pre-Faces": Rothenberg on the poetics and ethnopoetics of the book (and of this book); Derrida on Jabes; Jabes himself; a poem by Anne Waldman; essays about printing, reading, and the materiality of books. These multiple prefaces conjure bookishness, of course. More important, they initiate motifs that appear in various combinations throughout the collection. The motifs contribute to the genitive immediacy and fluidity of *A Book of the Book* by virtue of their apparently artless intertextuality. The theme of text as score, for example, first surfaces in Karl Young's marvelous "Notation and the Art of Reading." Young describes the reading conventions of Mexico in 1500, China in 810, England in 1620, and North America in 1983. In the first three times and places, slow reading and meditating were the norms necessitated by orthography: iconographic in Mexico, calligraphic in China. In seventeenth-century England, quill pens, the vagaries of early printing, and the lack of orthographic standards made alphabetic English slow going as well. Since the oral culture had not yet been supplanted by the book culture, "A written poem was essentially a record of spoken verse and a score that could enable a reader to recreate it".

Young's reminder that reading is not always and everywhere silent, solitary speed-reading provides a context for the complexities of contemporary poetry, for both performance poetry and concrete poetry, and for other textual scores, like Mallarmé's *Un Coup de des*, which Maurice Blanchot describes as "a musical score or a painting to be read and a poem to be

contemplated."

Mallarmé runs through *A Book of the Book* like a song in your head or a river, sometimes underground, but often visible and turbulent. It is Mallarmé, after all, who predicted the *crise de vers* in an age of mechanical reproduction, who conceived of the book as spiritual instrument, who said the world exists to end up as a book. Mallarmé understood the tension between the liberating question and the entrenching answer as the tension between chance and necessity. "A throw of the dice will never do away with chance," he wrote.

The tensions inherent in the book—between what it contains and what it unleashes, between its material limitations and the experiments that explode them, between the spoken and the written word—are motifs here as well. Behind Susan Howe's contention that "'Authoritative readings' [of Emily Dickinson] confuse her nonconformity," for example, is the tension between fluid manuscript and codified book. Howe is speaking of the editorial erasures of Dickinson's punctuation, word choices, and what might be called "scoring" marks. Like *A Book of the Book*, Dickinson's writing, "is a premeditated immersion in immediacy," but one that the slavish application of publishing conventions largely destroyed. As much as anything else, *A Book of the Book* is an argument against narrow definitions of book that lead to codification at the expense of genuine (and therefore fluid) authenticity.

It is this argument against the definitive that explains the rather diffident subtitle: "Some Works & Projections About the Book & Writing". Diffidence to the contrary, *A Book of the Book* clearly speaks its message: the primacy of poetry (prose works are barely mentioned) and the need to think outside the box of the book. The precedent for such thinking is the book as conceived in other cultures and times, examples of which abound in *A Book of the Book*. Ironically, this message is loud and clear exactly because it is in a book that when read conventionally from cover to cover is cumulative and therefore compelling.

There are books that take a lifetime and books that are a lifetime: Anne Waldman's poem "My Life a Book"; the illustrated and fanciful multivolumed autobiography created by Adlof Wolfi while a patient in a Swiss asylum; Tom Phillips's *A Humument*. Phillips draws his work from the writings of a relatively unknown British essayist named W.H. Mallock, in order, he says, "to write poetry while not in the real sense of the word being a poet."

For nearly half a century, Rothenberg has been, in every sense, a poet. He is also, according to Charles Bernstein, "the greatest American anthologist of the postwar years." Indeed, his greatness as an anthologist is the product of a poet's gift for assembly—combined with an acutely modernist sensibility and a samizdat compulsion to put into books what has never been there before. For over a decade, his coeditor, Steven Clay, has run Granary Books and been an equally adventurous publisher of poetry and artists' books, many of which he has conceived and commissioned. Together Rothenberg and Clay have had a lifetime of preparation for the making of this anthology.

The memorable result is a book that, like a great poem, casts its light on everything else you

pick up to read after you put it down. It is, in short, a true anthology—a book of the book.
<http://jacketmagazine.com/18/berg-r-roth.html>



Alexander, Christopher. "Boundless Book." *Rain Taxi* 6.1 (Spring 2001): 12.

Books are everywhere—and like laundry, we do not think much about them, though they might be called our cultural cornerstones. Who does think about books, in terms of what they are and have been, what they might be, how they mean, and why we should care? Here poets, critics, philosophers, and a few book artists are gathered to contribute to the fledgling field of book arts criticism and theory. So fledgling, in fact, that this collection might be considered a primer in the field. Some of the most interesting works of art in the last 30 years have been either works in books or works that are books; yet a significant criticism in and of the field does not exist, despite key individual works, particularly Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artist's Books*. *A Book of the Book* does not provide, on its own, that significant contemporary criticism, yet it may just lay the groundwork out of which such a legacy can grow.

What composes such a groundwork is extensive, defining the parameters of a field that includes manifestos of the book, book and writing theory, presentation of individual artist's books of the past century, critique of bookworks (including artistic and literary works)—writings that, in this context, extend the definition of book to encompass performance works, artistic installations, landscape works, writers' manuscripts, and a good deal more. Many of the works considered blur the boundaries between book and other genres of writing and art, and in doing so, agree implicitly with the writer/ philosopher Edmond Jabes's persistent presentation of the world as an unknowable book about which we never cease to ask questions.

Among these heady ideas, one might do well to abandon the sequential process (after all, books are the first and most effective hypertext, allowing movement anywhere within them at any time) and begin with an essay that grounds the book in its physicality, Keith Smith's "The Book as Physical Object." Smith writes of close experience with type, design, paper, printing, the turning of pages, and other tangible aspects of the book. As an artist, he sees such dimensions as fluid and therefore evokes a book that is "more than the sum of its parts," yet one that is best experienced as we "Pick up a book, hold it. Feel it. Look at it, then examine it, not routinely or mechanically by habit but make a conscious effort to see at every step in the process, every movement of the eyes or hands."

Another work that encourages us to see what is physically present is Susan Howe's marvelous essay, "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values." Howe espouses, in coming to Dickinson's work, the primary value of looking at the only evidence left us by the poet, the manuscripts from her sewn fascicles, with all their textual multiplicities, including "word lists, crosses, blanks, and ruptured stanzas." Howe insists of the manuscripts, "This space is the poet's space. Its demand is her method." We must know, as Howe shows, that our perception of Dickinson has been extensively shaped "by

an assumptive privileged Imperative" imposed by editors and critics, and that Dickinson's radical nature is much more apparent to us as we attend to the books she left the world, rather than to how others have domesticated those works in Dickinson's publication history. A true reading of Dickinson leads us to the revelation that "meaning is scattered at the limit of concentration."

The meaning of a book, similarly, cannot be domesticated. A great delight of *A Book of the Book* is its fully presented artists' books, acting out the editors' belief that it is not enough to talk about books, one must experience them. Thus the inclusion of Blaise Cendrars's and Sonia Delaunay's "La Prose du Transiberien" in its unfolded full color, as well as the explosively delightful collage book *O!* by Jess, and Cecilia Vicuña's *Libro Desierto/ Desert Book*. Readers who care about books but are unaware of artists' books can learn much about the possibilities of the book simply from these three included books. The editors claim in the preface that such inclusions are here "for the pleasure it gives us," but behind the pleasure stands a measure of method. For a work so clearly forwarding the explosion of the book in the 20th Century, the need to show exceeds even the need to tell.

Of the many ways of considering this volume, one can see it as a portrayal of the book breaking its bindings by embracing permeable borders between the "lexical and extralexical," "literacy and post-literacy," the verbal and the visual, "meaning and indecipherable variation," and finally, the book and not the book. It is a bit surprising that *A Book of the Book* is so much about the past of books rather than the future; even the final section on "The Book to Come" is about what we already know, albeit through recent evidence. Yet attention to the past is part of book history. Gutenberg and other early book printers in Europe who helped create the future, after all, looked backward, creating sumptuous volumes whose models were manuscript books and whose subjects were the classics of religion and philosophy, including the Bible (book). While *A Book of the Book* does not so much look ahead, it does make evident that books and bookmaking have a wide open future. Many of the artists and writers who create that future will have read this volume.



Highfill, Mitch. "Review of *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the Book & Writing*, Edited by Jerome Rothenberg & Steven Clay." *JAB* 16 (Fall 2001): 27-28.

Jerome Rothenberg has edited some of the most important anthologies of our time, including *America: A Prophecy*, *Revolution of the Word*, *Technicians of the Sacred*, *Shaking the Pumpkin*, and the *The Big Jewish Book*. Now he has turned his attention to the book as such, and particularly, the artist's book. With publisher Steven Clay, Rothenberg has managed to compile a book which will be required reading for book artists for years to come. Rothenberg's strategy here is to show a multiplicity of approaches, including non-western and avant-garde projects, which inspire the reader even as they instruct the student.

No such anthology would be useful without an attempt to open up the term "book." The most

elementary essay in this regard would be Keith A. Smith's "The Book as a Physical Object." Smith's attempts to define what a book is, discussing the effect of different kinds of bindings and papers, including cut and transparent papers. Smith asserts, "I ask questions to broaden my knowledge of traditional concepts, not to hold them as dogma, but as a foundation from which I can depart. Definitions are not an end, but a springboard." Thankfully, this is the spirit in which the editors do their work. The editors include a part of Steve McCaffery and bp Nichol's essay, "The Book as Machine." Their definition of the book would include a broad range of objects, focusing on the book as a storage device for information. Their section, "Twenty-One Facts That Could Alter Your Life" alerts the reader to various works that subvert both the readers' notion of what a book might be, and even how a text might work on (or off) the page. Using examples of works by Rabelais, George Herbert, Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein, Bill Sissett, Peter Garnier and John Furnival, McCaffery and Nichol put the book on the defensive, invoking Ian Hamilton Finlay's notion of the book of nature. "Poems become sun dials, gravestones, the page's traditional material opacity becomes the window's clear view into the objects signified. Any traveler through Finlay's garden has to be a reader too; it is a book involving participation of the feet as well as eyes."

There are critical readings of specific writers, such as Jacques Derrida on Edmond Jabes, Susan Howe on Emily Dickinson, Marjorie Perloff on Blaise Cendrars, Gerald Janacek on Kruchonykh, and Richard Hamilton on Diter Rot. Derrida's gloss on Jabes is informative and provocative. Susan Howe sheds much light on Dickinson's compositions, comparing the handwritten fascicles with the various published versions. The world of difference between the originals and their published versions becomes visible, and Howe struggles to clarify what it means to read Dickinson's works as intended. Marjorie Perloff puts the famous broadside of Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay ("The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jeanne de France") in historical context. Gerald Janacek describes and discusses the first six manuscript books of Aleksey Kruchonykh, the great Russian futurist. Janacek illuminates the political and economic circumstances surrounding these books, and many pages are reproduced here, including collaborations with Khlebnikov and Malevich. These works seem utterly revolutionary even today. Rarely have I seen such a thorough marriage of form and content as one sees in Kruchonykh's pages. Richard Hamilton's essay on Diter Rot is particularly interesting because Rot reverses the usual relationship of author to typographer, to quote Hamilton; "an evidently typographic mind ordering type into poetry rather than the essential poet wrenching the printer's form into art."

John Maizels contributes an overview of the works of Adolph Wolfli. Wolfli was a patient in a mental institution in Switzerland at a time when psychologists were especially interested in the creative process as a therapeutic activity. When Wolfli began to draw and write, his keepers provided him with art supplies and let him have at it. In 1908, Wolfli began an illustrated epic of 45 volumes, 25,000 pages long with 1600 drawings and 1500 collages. These books contain Wolfli's unique musical notations as well. Academic studies of Wolfli and his contemporaries in various European asylums gave this kind of art a name, art brut. Wolfli was its most prolific artist, and his inclusion in this anthology is crucial to any serious examination of the book.

Karl Young's "Notation and the Art of Reading" explores pre-Colombian screenfold format books, differentiating their traditional use from the European use of the book. That ceremonial readings of such books prefigure performance-based texts such as Jackson MacLow's "Gathas." Young then examines Chinese calligraphy with an eye to the subtlety of deciphering such texts in light of the near infinite variations of interpretation available to the reader of Chinese poetry in manuscript form. Having established the pictographic and other visual elements of these texts, Young points out the ambiguities of 17th century English verse, as it was printed at the time. Different ways of spelling words contained in one text imply shadings and nuances in the oral delivery of the poems, and cognitive analysis is affected as a result. Young then makes a case for postmodern poetries as continuous with this phenomenon, with multiple readings built in just the same way as their ancient forbears in Mexico, China, and England.

In his essay, "The Chinese Art of Writing," Jean Francois Billeter updates and corrects many of the ideas first stated by Fenollosa in his book, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, which inspired Ezra Pound's lifelong interest in Chinese poetry, and played a large role in the development of Imagism. Billeter has a much more sound methodology, and he takes advantage of more advanced linguistic studies than Fenollosa had at his disposal. Oddly enough, the conclusions both writers draw from the differing data are similar.

Dennis Tedlock performs a close reading of some passages from the Quiche Popul Vuh, or *Council Book of the Maya*. He compares various aspects of Quiche compositions with the writings of Gertrude Stein and Lyn Hejinian. However specious these comparisons may be, if they inspire new readings of either, that is all to the good. Similarly, Nancy Munn looks at Walbiri track prints, showing how the Walbiri can read stories from them, implicating all of nature and man in the construction of the text.

The medieval European idea of the book, or codex; that is the book as a carrier of vital information, differed from concepts of non-European cultures which were colonized such as the Maya. What was the difference between painting and writing, for instance, and what about the colonization of language which took place wherever the Europeans went? These issues are elucidated in Walter D. Mignolo's "Signs and Their Transmission: The Question of the Book in the New World."

One of my favorite essays is Jerome McGann's "Composition as Explanation (of Modern and Postmodern Poetries)." Readers of Ezra Pound and David Jones might have had premonitions of the typographic resonance of such works before, but McGann identifies the actual printing and binding techniques as compositional factors in poetics; starting with Pound's Cantos. Citing specific typographic issues (font, font size, inking), McGann suggests that Pound consciously chose the various typefaces used in the first editions to place the Cantos within certain historic streams, specifically Renaissance and Vorticist streams. McGann goes on to implicate Yeats and Zukofsky in the same typographic project. He then describes the work of Bob Brown, a major avant-garde poet of the exile period, whose visual poems were actually handwritten. He quotes Brown, "Writing has been bottled up in books since the start, it is time to pull out the stopper." The essay closes demonstrating how some postmodern poets have extended typographical play

in their poetry, especially Jackson Mac Low, Clark Coolidge and Susan Howe.

Another favorite essay is Martha L. Carothers "Novelty Books: Accent of Images and Words." Ms. Carothers describes a range of books with various features such as pop-up children's books, accordion-folded books, 3-D and panorama books, books with interlocking sections and self-contained separate folios, many of which have little or no "literary" value.

Thomas A. Vogler's survey of book-objects is also highly entertaining. He discusses a lot of truly unusual pieces, such as David Antin's [work with] sky-writing, Helen Lessick's "Le Paysage Vivant", involving a word shaved into the side of a cow! Several marvelous works by Buzz Spector are cited in this essay, which convincingly demonstrates a possible future of the book as universal art form.

The idea of the book as a metaphor for the world is articulated by book artist Barbara Fahrner in an interview about her *Kunstkammer* project. This idea is revisited again by Richard Sieburth's essay on Mallarme, Blanchot's piece, "The Book to Come," and the tiny Barthes excerpt, "The Written Face." There is a Borges statement, "On the Cult of Books," and David Meltzer's notes on the Kabbalah reflects a deeper version of the same thesis.

Then there are the bookworks presented in this anthology. We see examples of William Blake's illuminated "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"; selected pages from Max Ernst's collage-novel, *The Hundred Headless Woman*, a photo of Marcel Duchamp's "Boite-en-Valise"; notes and photos of Alison Knowle's *The Book of Bean*; notes and photos of Tom Phillips' *A Humument*; part of Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Little Sparta*; notes on Carolee Schneemann's *Up To and Including Her Limits*; Ann Waldman's poem, "My Life A Book"; and Jacques Gaffarel's "Celestial Alphabet Event". More amazingly, an entire book by the West Coast artist, Jess, is reprinted. Titled, *O!*, this collage-narrative has been out of print for over 35 years, and would easily be worth the cost of the anthology for Jess fans.

The most impressive reprint in this book is the fold-out insert, "The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jeanne de France", a broadside written by Blaise Cendrars and illustrated by Sonia Delaunay. Originally published in the Paris of 1913, what we see is a full-color photograph of the entire broadside (considerably less in size than the original), translated on the back of the insert by Ron Padgett (whose *Complete Poems of Cendrars* is definitive). A marvelous poem in a gorgeous format, with an amazing translation to boot. Walter D. Mignolo quotes a 16th Century definition of the book by Alejo Venegar (Toledo 1540)."

"A book is an ark of deposit in which, by means of essential information or things or figures, those things which belong to the information and clarity of understanding are deposited."

At a whopping 537 pages, this is the ark of deposit. Rothenberg and Clay have created a veritable smorgasbord of the book, while challenging previous lexical definitions. Along with Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artist's Books*, *A Book of the Book* is essential reading for

book artists, readers and fans of the artist's book. More important than having all the answers, this book asks the right questions. What a pleasure.



Rubinstein, Raphael. "Review of Books: Poets and Painters." *Art in America* 90.2 (February 2002): 42-43.

Drawn & Quartered, by Robert Creeley and Archie Rand, New York, Granary Books, 2001; 100 pages.

To Repel Ghosts, by Kevin Young, Cambridge, Mass., Zoland Books, 2001; 350 pages.

Purloined: A Novel, by Joseph Kosuth, Cologne, Salon Verlag, 2000; 120 pages.

A Book of the Book: Some Works and Projections About the Book and Writing, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay, New York, Granary Books, 2000, 537 pages.

Poetry Plastique, edited by Jay Saunders and Charles Bernstein, New York, Marianne Boesky Gallery and Granary Books, 2001; 96 pages.

The most recent golden age of American poet-painter collaborations was nearly half a century ago, in New York City in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was the period when, to cite just a few examples, Frank O'Hara was making "poem-paintings" with Norman Bluhm, lithographs with Larry Rivers and collages with Joe Brainard; Joan Mitchell was contributing illustrations to a volume of her friend John Ashbery's poems; the indefatigable Brainard was making collaborative comics with seemingly every poet he encountered, including James Schuyler, Kenneth Koch, and Ted Berrigan; and even Andy Warhol, later to worship at the altar of Eurotrash, was pursuing dialogue with serious poets such as Berrigan. The era has been recently chronicled in exhibitions such as "In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art" [see *A.i.A.*, Feb. '00] and last year's retrospective devoted to Joe Brainard at P.S. 1. Warhol's unexpectedly extensive involvement with poetry is examined in Reva Wolfs 1997 study, *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s*.

This creative density appeared to diminish in the decades that followed. The poetry scene changed as poets entered academia in increasingly large numbers and were dispersed from the Lower East Side to college campuses around the country. At the same time, styles of art arose—Minimalism, Conceptual art, Earth art—that seemingly offered less scope for poetic collaboration than those which had preceded them. By the 1980s, not only had the presence of poets been dispensed with in some sectors of the art world, but even a sense of community with other artists was under threat. Speaking during a 1993 panel on artist-writer collaborations, Neo-Expressionist painter Eric Fischl described how, compared to the 1950s, "the 1980s were darker and more alienated, we lost that romantic feeling. One worked alone. Then because of the explosion of media you didn't hang out the same way you used to, you read about each other." And when successful artists like himself did hang out, it was at

expensive restaurants. "Poets are poor," the pragmatic (or perhaps just hard-hearted) Fischl pointed out and thus had a difficult time keeping up socially with the prominent artists of the day. What distinguished the 1950s from the 1980s, apparently, was the difference between the price of a beer at the Cedar Bar and the cost of a dinner at Barocco.

This is not to suggest that poet-painter collaborations abruptly came to an end in the mid-1960s. The 1970s saw impressive (though at the time practically clandestine) collaborations between Philip Guston and poets such as Clark Coolidge, William Corbett, and Bill Berkson [see *A.i.A.*, Sept. '95]. In the 1980s, the independent French publisher Collectif Generation brought together a wide range of poets and artists, many of them Americans, to create experimental volumes in limited editions. There have also been isolated cases of painters such as Francesco Clemente, Trevor Winkfield, and Jane Hammond who have a passion for working with poets. Lately, however, there have been signs of a wider rapprochement between the realms of poetry and visual art.

In contrast to the 1950s, when painters and poets often turned out collaborative paintings, prints, and drawings, these days the book seems to be the favored form for such interactions. An excellent example of a recently published book made by a painter and a poet is *Drawn & Quartered*, a volume that reproduces 54 drawings by Archie Rand, each of which is accompanied by a quatrain by poet Robert Creeley. A New York painter known for creating image-rich canvases, often at mural scale or in lengthy series, Rand here exercises his virtuosic drawing abilities. Each vignette, usually showing one or two figures, is a little anthology of effects, combining contour drawing, crosshatching, chiaroscuro, graphic boldness and delicate detailing. The atmosphere is rarely contemporary, with many of the scenes evoking a 19th-century Europe of salons, shtetlach, military campaigns, and eccentric scholars. There are also occasional sorties into the biblical Middle East. Rand fields a wonderful cast of characters and architectural backdrops, all drawn with an unmatched wit, vigor, and sense of art history.

Creeley, who wrote the accompanying verses in a single session as Rand passed him the previously completed drawings, varies his approach. Sometimes he puts words into the mouths (or minds) of Rand's figures, as when a naked female model says to the man making a sculpture of her, "Am I only material/ for you to feel?/ Is that all you see/ when you look at me?" For other drawings, the poet provides condensed commentary. Underneath a drawing of an anxious-looking woman and child, he writes, "Are they together?/ Grandmother and granddaughter?/ Is there some fact of pain/ in their waiting?" Rather than straining to compose perfectly finished verses, Creeley responded to the impulsive spirit of Rand's drawings. Occasionally the speed shows, as when Creeley has a farmer lamenting the death of his horse when the deceased animal in the drawing is clearly bovine, but more often he comes up with pithy, plausible captions, sometimes of wonderful elegance. My favorite, accompanying a dramatic drawing of a man kneeling before a stack of paper sheets, is this memorable expression of how, in life, futility and exuberance can go hand in hand: "All these pages/ to turn,/ all these bridges/ to burn."

Created under very different circumstances, Kevin Young's collection of poetry, *To Repel*

Ghosts is also a testament to the common ground still available to poets and painters. In this case, the artist in question, Jean-Michel Basquiat, was no longer alive when Young sat down to write poems in response to his paintings, but the results are nevertheless intensely collaborative in nature. Taking advantage of the fact that Basquiat's work is densely inscribed with words and names, lists and phrases, trademarks and abbreviations, Young incorporated large quantities of the artist's painted and drawn words into his poems. Indeed, this is as much a meeting of two writers as it is a posthumous encounter between a poet and a painter: Basquiat's use of language was highly distinctive and nuanced, not just in graphic terms but also at the level of structure and sound.

When Young samples words found in Basquiat's works, he always makes the source clear by setting the words in small caps. (Perhaps not since James Merrill's ouija-board-inspired trilogy, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, has an American poet opened his work so bravely to another voice.) As well as giving the poems an additional graphic punch (Young also visually activates his short lines with frequent dashes and ampersands), Basquiat's words work like cross-cuts in a movie. In one especially cinematic poem, Young quotes lines from a Basquiat painting that happens to appear in a film about Dennis Hopper:

HEART AS ARENA

Hopper in a docu-trauma
discussing Warhol

After his own comeback,
Seated before
his giant Basquiat—

PROMETHEUS.

BLACK TEETH.

Andy's already bit

the dust
& Basquiat's just
about to...

As Young describes it, Basquiat's life and work served "as a bass line, a rhythm section, a melody from which the poems improvise." While he borrows inspiration from Basquiat's distinctive prosody, Young is a resourceful poet who can make a lyric from something as inauspicious as the name "Langston Hughes" repeated twice somewhere in Basquiat. For all their formal experimentation, the poems also lucidly chronicle Basquiat's rapid rise and fall, from his beginning as a graffiti artist to his apotheosis as the wild man of Neo-Expressionism to his desperate, drug-plagued final years. Although Young never met Basquiat, he sketches a knowledgeable portrait of the now-vanished downtown milieu of the early 1980s. At the same time, he places Basquiat in a broader historical context. Some 20 pages in the middle of the book are devoted to boxer Jack Johnson, and figures from African-American cultural life such as

Charlie Parker, Max Roach, and Richard Pryor are evoked. One poem focuses on Harlem photographer James Van Der Zee, who made a portrait of Basquiat in 1982. The poem begins with an allusive description of the shot:

Antennae, antlers,
rabbit ears
for better reception—

Basquiat's hair
a bundle of dreadlocks,
coiled, clenched

in two fists
above his head.
A matador's hat.

A few poems come across as set pieces, such as one about Warhol attending a 1985 party for Roy Cohn at the Palladium nightclub, but set pieces are hard to avoid when dealing with the lives of well-known people, and they hardly affect the overall power of this 117-poem tour de force. This is not only compelling, innovative contemporary poetry, it may be the best interpretive study yet of Basquiat's art.

Approaching authorship from the other end of the artist-writer equation, veteran Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth has recently published a book that adopts a much more extreme version of the appropriative method employed by Young. Every page of *Purloined: A Novel* is, as the title hints, derived from the work of other authors. Kosuth's procedure is shamelessly direct. He simply made photographic copies of single pages from over 100 different novels—ranging from works of serious fiction to popular crime novels—and combined them to produce a collagelike book. Kosuth hides nothing about his method. Each page retains the typography and layout of the original and the author of each page is given credit in a page titled "List of Characters" in the front of the book. The only things withheld are the titles of the books Kosuth used and the original page numbers.

Purloined, which was published in an edition of 750 numbered copies, isn't an easy book to read. The constant shift of styles is initially interesting but the novelty of having a new plot and set of characters every page quickly pales and Kosuth seems not to have worked very hard at establishing smooth syntactical transitions. If readers are interested in seeing a more developed and satisfying instance of textual appropriation, they should take a look at Walter Abish's *99: A New Meaning*, a 1990 volume that consists wholly of quotations. While Kosuth simply sticks together complete pages from other people's books, Abish, an innovative novelist perhaps best known for his volume *Alphabetical Africa*, carefully trims and tailors his borrowed phrases so that they coalesce into a revelatory—and readable—whole. Kosuth's appropriative "novel" may possess a conceptual purity but it remains an art work, an artist's book, rather than a work of literature.

But are these mutually exclusive categories? It seems to be the thesis of the recent anthology *A Book of the Book* that they are not. Subtitled "Some Works & Projections About the Book & Writing," this 500-plus-page compendium brings together texts by and about literary figures such as Stephane Mallarme, Emily Dickinson, and Edmond Jabes with others on visual artists such as Faith Ringgold and Carolee Schneemann. Throughout the selections, there is an emphasis on the blurring of categories. Scholar Richard Sieburth, examining Mallarme's *Le Livre*—202 pages of notes for an unfinished work—finds "a kind of 'action writing,'" whose random jottings, scrawlings, scribbings, graphings, diagrammings, and erasures reminded me of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings or Cy Twombly's works on blackboard or paper." Citing text-installations and performances by Allan Kaprow and Kenneth Goldsmith, another contributor, Thomas A. Vogler, insists that "we sorely need a new definition of the concept of text that has been separated from its immediate association with the specific form of the book—the codex—that some 17 or 18 centuries ago replaced another form, the volumen or scroll."

Much of the anthology addresses the history and esthetics of the artist's book, broadly defined to include pre-Columbian codices, 19th-century novelty books and the illustrated volumes of outsider Adolf Wolfli, as well as more familiar examples by William Blake, Dieter Roth, and Tom Phillips. In addition to numerous illustrations in black and white, there is a full-color foldout of "The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jeanne of France," the famous 1913 collaboration between Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay. Recent figures are also touched on, such as Xu Bing, for his calligraphic installation *Book from the Sky*, and Buzz Spector, a visual artist who uses books as his chief material. Co-editor Jerome Rothenberg idealistically sees the late 20th century as the period when, through self-published books, "artists & poets took control of their own work apart from the nexus of dealers and markets." The final section of the anthology, "The Book to Come," ends with a thoughtful consideration by poet Charles Bernstein of the changing role of poetry in the digital age.

"Why aren't poets more central to contemporary visual art?" This was the question posed last winter by "Poetry Plastique," an exhibition curated by Bernstein and Jay Saunders. Held at Marianne Boesky Gallery in Chelsea, which copublished the accompanying catalogue, it sought to present poems as visual objects, ranging from one of Carl Andre's concrete poems to a Guston-Coolidge drawing to a hypnotic digital poem by Tan Lin and an intriguing 'poem-sculpture' by Bernstein and Richard Tuttle. Perhaps not since the heyday of O'Hara and his painter friends had a commercial New York gallery been the site of so much poetry-related activity. We may be nowhere near a new golden age of poet-painter collaborations, and poets may be as poor as ever, but "Poetry Plastique" suggested that contemporary art, having recycled every modern style and attitude to the point of sheer inconsequence, may be turning to poetry as a source of more productive ideas and inspiration. When it comes to current poet-artist collaborations, I suspect that "Poetry Plastique" and the books reviewed here represent merely the tip of the iceberg.

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Robins, Corinne. "If This You See, or Of the Making of Books." *American Book Review* 23.1 (November/ December 2001).

Writing in terms of letters and alphabets; the book as a container of words; the book as a shape-become-art-object; reading, reciting, looking and/ or seeing; orality and oral writing—today the flag of the spoken word newly flies above our heads. Jerome Rothenberg in his first anthology, *Technicians of the Sacred*, celebrated "a range of poetries" that included ceremonies of the African bushman and statements of the Nez Perce Indians. The anthology was in part dedicated to rescuing the oral poetries of many primitive religions and simultaneously providing an appendix of avant-garde writers. "Primitive means complex," Rothenberg explained. And *Technicians of the Sacred* launched the idea of ethnopoetics and helped make translations of early writings by the Aztecs and the Egyptians take their place in studies of contemporary poetics. Early poetry, the songs of aborigines and picture writings by American Indian tribes, were printed along with an ode, for example, by Pablo Neruda. In *Technicians of the Sacred*, the concept of the "now" became 5,000 years long.

Thirty-four years later, Rothenberg's new anthology *A Book of the Book*, edited with Steven Clay, ends with the poet Charles Bernstein's essay, "The Art of Immemorability." In it, he discusses writing in various alphabets emphatically not as a tool for remembering. Gertrude Stein, who looms large in this anthology (despite that her literal inclusion is limited to a small, abstruse poem), wrote a book titled *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, which is all about remembering, about fixing a child's continuous present on the page. Remembering her famous "when this you see/ remember me," the issues raised by Stein's writing are omnipresent here.

In *A Book of the Book*, "the book" means cuneiform tablets, scrolls, stones, paintings, and sheets of paper sewn together that at the moment may be giving way to cassettes and digital screens even as email takes over snail mail, as it becomes harder and harder to be unreachable and indulge in forgetting. Included in the anthology is an excerpt from "The Book as Machine," where Steve McCaffery and bpNichol list 21 facts that could alter your life, announcing "[t]he front page of a newspaper is the paradigm of typographic cubism." In the film *Painters Painting*, Robert Rauschenberg, unrolling a scroll of newspaper sheets pasted on a wall-size canvas, announced, "The newspaper is the best book there is, and my piece (wall work) is all about how to read your newspaper."

What is the difference between reading and looking? I took a poet friend to an exhibition of the painter Kitaj at the Marlborough and watched while she rushed about reading the titles on the wall before she stopped to look at a single painting. Words were her locators, what she literally sees first in the world, which in turn define for her visual meaning. And think about cubism. Think about words on the wall. Reading, as opposed to seeing, slows you down. Bernstein writes, "A medium is an 'in-between' in which you go from one place to another." And it seems to be beyond question that written words are that kind of medium.

According to Albert Manguel in his book *A History of Reading*, the oral tradition that stumbled and fell out of favor with the printing press first began to be undermined in St. Augustine's time with the "discovery" of silent reading. Silent reading is not a group activity. Silent reading is private, secret. And more and more this became the way, the end goal as people were taught to read. First you read aloud by way of learning, and then when learning was successfully completed, you read to yourself. Meanwhile, in twentieth-century avant-garde land (and in all of Rothenberg's anthologies), that oral tradition has become the writer's golden fleece.

The 69 writers—poets, painters, performers, scholars, critics, anthropologies, and historians—in *A Book of the Book* unearth the changing significance of the page surface. Johanna Drucker sketches a history of the artist's book as opposed to the tradition of *livre d'artiste*, which was a commercial endeavor promoted by various art dealers. "Artist's books," less easily understood phenomena, according to Drucker, "take every possible form, participate in every possible convention of book making, every possible 'ism' of mainstream art and literature, every possible mode of production, every shape, every degree of ephemerality or archival durability." Meanwhile, Cecilia Vicuña's *Libro Desierto/ Dessert Book* sings of the lines (written or drawn) imprinted in the Nazca Desert. Are those marks "[w]ritings or drawings to be danced," Vicuña asks in a note on her poem.

Seeing becomes reading. And in several essays in *A Book of the Book*, earth and sky are equally surfaces to be read. But also there are writers included in the anthology that will have no truck with such generalization. Jorge Luis Borges, not unexpectedly, sets forth as an unarguable distinction between the eras of the spoken and the written word. "One speaks of telling the story and the other of books. A book, any book," he says flatly, "is for us a sacred object." And he ends his essay, "The Cult of the Book," saying, "We are the versicles or words or letters of a magic book, and that incessant book is the only thing in the world: more exactly, it is the world."

As opposed to—or alongside—Borges, there are half a dozen bookmakers or printers discussing the craft of the book, the Chinese art of writing, manuscript books, and the shaping of the book into a visual non-readable sign. The book's final essay by Charles Bernstein chooses to deal with the concept of writing "as a storage medium, in that it stores verbal language," and this brings us back to the book's original purpose... almost. I see that purpose as at once an investigation and celebration of avant-garde literature and art (book) objects. But the further question—for whom is the celebration intended?—is not easily answered. Unlike Rothenberg's earlier, more straightforward *Technicians of the Sacred*, *A Book of the Book* manages to be maddening and delightful at the same time. It sports a foldout of the collaboration between Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, "La Prose du Transsibérien," an essay on futurism, and writings by Roland Barthes and André Breton alongside Dennis Tedlock's "Toward a Poetics of Polyphony and Translatability." So my guess would be *A Book of the Book* might be useful in literature courses focusing on avant-garde ideas. At any rate, it is a book full of enlightening and curious writings whose real value maybe lies in its open-endedness and refusal to be pigeon-holed.

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Thompson, Norm. CultureNet@CapilanoU. "Review of Rothenberg and Clay's A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the book & writing." Oct. 8, 2009.

Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay's "A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the book & writing" is a collection of essays and articles by noted writers that argue for and against whether a book can even be considered a book. It asks what makes one so sure they are in fact reading a book? Is it the number of pages? The Font? The Content? It questions the criteria that outlines what a book is.

To prevent the reader from becoming lost in the many fascinating, confusing, and sometimes frustrating opinions expressed through the many essays and articles in the collection Rothenberg and Clay divided the works in to four sections: "Pre-Faces", "The Opening of the Field", "The Book is as Old as Fire & Water", "The Book To Come". These sections combine to show the fact that the book is still to this day without a clear definition.

Rothenberg and Clay's presentation of this collection is revealing to the intangible nature of the book's definition. They also explore the difficulty defining writing, "IN THE Beginnings of our research into narrative we ran up against the inescapable fact tat there exists no standard definition of narrative in the sense that writers seem to use the word." They further dive into the difficulty in defining writing in the section titled "The Book To Come". It opens the reader to concepts that far exceed traditional guidelines of what the book and writing are in the present day. "Notes On A Humument", by Tom Phillips, explores new possibilities of what the book and writing can be, "I merely scored out unwanted words with pen and ink. It was not long before the possibility became apparent of making a better unity of words and image, intertwined as in a mediaeval miniature." The artwork presented in this piece is similar to if a child was to draw a picture over a page of a book and only leave a few words still legible. This Artwork could be the writing of the future and content of the future book.

In Thomas A. Vogler's, "When a Book is Not a Book", the concept of what constitute a book is furthered explored. Allow it is a confusing and disorientating essay it does make the reader ask the question whether a book is a psychical object or the embodiment of knowledge? This essays combined with the others in the collection create an endless stream of possibilities of what the book and writing really is to the reader.

Rothenberg and Clay's collection in "A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the book & writing" draws from literature, anthropology, and avant-garde art to break down and then rebuild the understanding of the book and writing. It is a intriguing read and eye opening experience to the possibilities of writing and art that have yet to be explored by the masses.

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