
some forms of availability

Critical Passages on The Book and Publication by Simon Cutts

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some forms of availability

Do you please, as soon as possible
send to me in my box all things
which remain in the room again

Arthur Rimbaud, *Momento d'expression anglais*
Londres 1874

Somewhere to begin, with the most available of formats, the book. At times merely polemical or critical, using such availability as comment on itself—an intimate object in a public space.

The potentiality of publication as a form is inexhaustible, and I want to elevate the idea of its availability beyond the mere pragmatism of economics, warehousing and distribution. Having built such means, by economic frugality, by persistence, by the way you live, it is possible for the small publisher to move deftly for each new publication.

As the editorial process can change the nature of the work towards a different generality, it also reinforces the whole platform of publication: the control of the simple means of production and the empowerment of the small self-published edition. To extend the situation, I have often thought that through gardening, cooking and making books there was an entire directive as the course of education, encompassing mathematics, the natural and physical sciences, poetry, literature, visual art and design, and construction.

But the model I begin with here is that of the small poetry press with the probable acoutrements of a magazine or journal, individual cards and announcements. and other bits of printed ephemera. These are the particularities of my own development and they begin with my meeting with Stuart Mills at the Trent Bookshop, West Bridgford Nottingham early in 1965, and with him the subsequent excursion into making publications as Tarasque Press. Later on it took other guises, Coracle, workfortheeyetodo, and the issue of developing a bookshop for the warehousing and distribution of such material has never been far away.

There we taught ourselves, with few examples around us, the economics of formatting, about paper, sheet sizes and weights, the use of off-cuts, print, ink, and not least of all printers, and the means of handling them. We had heard the early rumblings of Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press, and we were to become at least as materially and visually orientated.

In the summer of 1963, I had the chance to spend three months reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* and to following through many of its antecedents and influences by way of late nineteenth century Symbolism and stream-of-consciousness prose workings. Somewhere along the lineage of it all, perhaps even away from its intense *literariness*, I discovered Mallarmé and the prospect of *making* a text on the page, and thereby Apollinaire and visual arrangement. Back home, it was the Imagists and Ezra Pound that allowed me to feel a movement forward, even T. S. Eliot's drafts of *The Waste Land* on an old Olympia typewriter. By the late sixties, I had missed Concrete Poetry from the sidelines, but I had learned to print on a treadle-platten letterpress machine that meant I could change odd lines of colour in my texts. It also taught me about the divisibility of a sheet of paper and the format of a book.

Perhaps all this has led to the conviction that the poems' ideal manifestation is the book itself, even to the extent of book-form being the physical metaphor for the poem itself, as might be my *Waterfalls of New Hampshire in Winter*, 1993 and *A History of the Airfields of Lincolnshire*, 1990–2000.

This book brings together isolated pieces written over a period of time. It begins with the extended interview with Wolfgang Görtzschacher from 1994 which was edited for publication in 1997, together with a questionnaire from Steve Clay in 2004, largely in response to it.

The Process of the Book attempted, in its time, to begin to fill the bottomless pit of introducing books and book making to art education, where it has now become a surrogate for the luxury of printmaking. It is, incidentally, something more evidently of value in the teaching of poetics, where its practical use is seized on with great vigour.

Critical Publishing and **A Hypothesis for The New Publication** are projectile musings in the field, as **The Artist Publisher** is a collection of introductory pieces, reviews, affirmations.

Dislocated Paragraphs is exactly what it says, and gathers single statements, addresses, and tangential detritus, which might extend

in pertinence. The overlong **A Selection of the Critical Writings of Edgar Allan Poe** from 1967 is included as an indication of the direction and formation of my concerns at the time.

Some Coracle Ephemera arises from a correspondence with Steven Lulber in his preparations for 'Extra Art: A Survey of Artists' Ephemera 1960–1999' in 2001, but here is illustrated by the particular examples cited, as a scattering of such material within the Coracle oeuvre.

Homage to Seurat takes a little further the irony and dilemma of the distributed work in its availability.

For the **Polemical Postcards**, the postcard has always been one of the most available of formats, its ease of production, its self-circulation, its accidental discovery, and there have been many attempts at a cryptic use of this form over the years.

A Partial Bibliography is exactly what it says. Here I have tried to cite items which give a sense of the platform of publication as a vehicle, at least in some part, rather than the museology of interminable examples, and the division of classification.

Beyond Reading is a critical reduction of the underlying nature of this arena, at least of an approach to it.

Simon Cutts, October 2006

the process of the book

Address to the Art Education Association of Western Australia,
Perth 1980.

This piece will attempt to introduce the idea of books and book making by artists and for artists in both an educational and an art context in general. In the educational context, I will try to put together some of the possibilities for the making of visual books in art teaching. In the overall art context, I will try to suggest some of the reasons why books by artists must be given attention as an activity of intent and purpose.

Whilst I will continue to use the word 'book' as an operative term for the issues I am discussing, I am in no way fixing a definition of the various printed formats that have been used by artists. In general however, I am referring to a vehicle of paper, folded and held in place by stitching or gluing, which present a series of opening and folding sheets, with text and/or visual image. This is usually fixed inside a nominative cover of some description.

In very broad terms, there seem to be at least two kinds of books made by artists, together with their various degrees of combination. On the one hand there are the informational works sometimes made as extended catalogues for exhibitions, which may record aspects of an artists work. On the other, there are works which are manipulated in some tactile way by the individual reader; often much consideration has been given to the method and the qualities of material by which the book is made.

The presence of the book is invitational. The individual reader opens the closed pages of a book in an intimate setting. The book reveals its sensation as it is unfolded at a pace controlled by the reader. Its exquisite psychology is not over-burdened by technology.

In considering the nature of books and bookmaking we must also

consider the nature of the edition. Books are made in editions for their availability, and this editioning factor is often built into some of the purposeful limitations used by artists in books.

2

I'm more interested in books by artists which can be had by anyone for the price of a couple of movies. Art cannot really be bought and sold, but only understood. The gallery works best as publisher. Sol LeWitt

Prints were once a means of access to the work of an artist, before they were discredited by dealers and greedy artists. To some extent, in the late sixties and early seventies, the use of books by artists began to supplant the world of the print. In so doing, an acknowledgement is made of the world of commercial print in the production of works, beside that of so-called 'fine print'. Alongside the rise in interest in books ran the parallel interest in 'multiple' artworks in the form of editioned objects. The book, like some of the more reduced multiple artworks is capable of being produced in theoretically unlimited quantities, and the idealism of a decade ago suggested that the distributive means was already established by way of bookshops, thereby avoiding the galleries which were restrictive in their distribution of work by artists. A decade later, it seems best that books by artists are perhaps best displayed and sold from gallery-bookshops. The idea of books in the gallery seems to be taking hold.

Of course books are also distributed directly through the mail service, and an entire art arose from the possibilities of sending to an audience by posting, that of 'Mail Art'. I am never sure where Mail Art went to beyond the format of the postcard; the viewable faces of a stamped and franked postcard sent through the mail are seen not only by the recipient, but also by all of the people handling it on its route to a final destination.

For reference I will list some of the many Artists' Book exhibitions of the last ten years. An exhibition organized by Germano Celant

entitled 'The Book as Artwork' took place at Nigel Greenwood's gallery in London in 1972. Moore College of Art in Philadelphia organized their Artists Books show in 1973. The British Council put together a touring exhibition entitled Artists' Bookworks in 1975, which was closely followed by the Arts Council of Great Britain's 'Artists Books' of 1976. This year the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented a most integrated exhibition under the title 'Printed Art': A View of Two Decades.

3

Let us grant to dreams before beginning to read a book in a garden the attention demanded by some white butterfly—at the same time everywhere, nowhere, it disappears.

The French poet Stephane Mallarmé, from whom the above quotation is taken and translated, referred to the book as 'Instrument Spirituel'—a spiritual instrument—and it was his assertion that all the world existed to be put into a book. Perhaps the final accomplishment of his work was a text published in the 1890s entitled *Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais l'hazard*—a throw of dice never abolishes chance. The texts of this single poem are arranged across the page with differing weights and emphases of type to produce an orchestrated whole. Mallarmé had on several occasions spoken of the need for poetry in particular and the language of literature in general to avoid narrative, and to come into its own, regaining from music 'its right'. I would offer up 'Un coup de dés' as an early example of a book controlled entirely by the artist in a very clear sense, and also as an important forerunner of the use of the space of the page which came to be later associated with Concrete Poetry. This was a serious re-evaluation of the book and its format, its appended pages and their sequence. Eugen Gomringer's *Konstellation* of 1954 was meticulously printed in Helvetica type on white paper with a simple cover of the same device. The work is perhaps the most important synthesis of elements which came to be known as 'Concrete Poetry'. At this time, Gomringer was working as secretary to Swiss artist Max Bill whose earlier

postulations of a 'Concrete Art' were transferred and fused by Gomerlinger's work. Later the poem-booklets of Ian Hamilton Finlay began to use the arrangement of pages and the transparency of papers to produce both *Cythera* in 1963 and his *Canal Stripe* and *Ocean Stripe* series of the following years.

I should like to look at some examples of his work at the appropriate time, but before that I would like to deal with aspects of the practice of bookmaking as it might affect you.

4

Seen in this light, the idea of books and bookmaking can be a most useful developmental area of activity in both schools and colleges. The demonstration of some understanding of sequence and its control, of the principles of the edition and the generalisations and reductions that have to take place to accommodate or provoke it, can be much more interesting than looser ideas about 'expression'. At the same time it is important to have a width of practice in the art area, something which may approach by implication the concern with an art and design education. Finally it is important to give pupils and students a tool which can serve the movement of their ideas at least as much as the learning of a craft facility. It is to this end that various craft activities can be honed. Bookmaking in these senses can be a complex of visual and linguistic sources and their development, and is something which is sufficiently attuned to our contemporary understanding.

5

To begin with there is probably the photocopier or even small offset lithography equipment used in the school office. Armed with this, there is really nothing that cannot be done. Used alongside the carbon ribbon typewriter and Letraset, a whole world of books and their possibilities is opened up. Artworks for plates for the small offset machine can use both line and tone work, for the reproduction of type, drawing, and photographs. For photographs, decisions about

their qualities in sequence can be important complements to the understanding of individual pictures. Even the office duplicator with electronically-made photo-stencils has some function. Most certainly the photocopier can be used as both originator of images for further reproduction, and as a reproducer of images itself.

Silk-screen printing seen in this light can begin to take on different aspects, and its playfulness become attached to some more fixed and finite end.

Small letterpress printing machines often seem to find their way into school art rooms, but rarely get much use. Often local printers are happy to give away machines as offset lithography takes over most of commercial printing. Such letterpress machines are useful for full hand-setting of metal type, printing and part-working from custom made printing blocks, using cutting and creasing dies, or simply for printing hand-cut wood and lino blocks. Perhaps from the same source, a discarded and renovated small momentum guillotine, can be a most useful instrument, both for cutting paper required from larger stock, but also for perfect binding. This is one of the simplest binding methods; under the guillotine clamp, several interleaved book interiors can be edge-scored and glued with P.V.A. and allowed to dry; they are then separated and the individual book interior is re-glued and placed in a cover scored and folded with a spine of the thickness of the interior. The books can be finally trimmed on three sides. Used with care and understanding, a small semi-mechanical momentum guillotine is no more dangerous than a hand-held cutting knife.

Perfect binding as here described may at times seem a rather elaborate method, and a simple sewn binding done with a single folio stitch or metal staple will often prove the most useful device. On the other hand the possibilities of cloth case-binding, with various degrees of traditional use can be appropriate to a more craft-based course. I have myself often used a domestic sewing machine to sew folios of books and other items to good effect.

Operatively, it seems reasonable to have editions in these contexts of around 25 copies. With larger groups of students, a figure just above the total number of students seems appropriate. This very

arbitrary figure seems to be almost the smallest quantity of production that avoids the use of the more overt hand-made possibilities, puts the production clearly into the realms of an edition. As it is, I have often found that initial projects tend towards the hand-made, but this tends to change with an increasing understanding of what is available. At this early stage, work often tends towards the elaboration of embroidery, which can be interesting. It is perhaps arguable that the fusion of mechanical production with hand-finishing gives works in this field great resonance.

There are many further aspects of beginning to work with books, booklets and arrangements of pages that I have not gone into here, because I am not at present writing a textbook, but merely looking at general aspects of the field and relating them within the contexts I outlined at the beginning of this piece.

6

Finally, I feel that art only works by example and by being exemplary. In a situation like this where I feel there is a dearth of work of a very high quality, either through purchase or support schemes and their problems, or through an absence of focused stimuli, it is important that every imaginative possibility is explored. I feel that this lack of quality is somehow linked to the rather unchallenged mythologies of the Fine Arts as painting and sculpture. I don't think that photography is yet considered seriously, and certainly books may not come into it. It may be necessary to build from a succession of 'minor' arts of less portentous merit, and in so-saying I am not relegating areas of activity to 'craft' bases, but attempting to re-evaluate every possible tool of the sensibility.

Some examples

1. Ian Hamilton Finlay *Ocean Stripe 5* Tarasque Press 1967
2. Ian Hamilton Finlay *30 Signatures* Tarasque Press 1971
3. Brian Lane *Some Improbable Chess Openings* London 1978
4. Steve Wheatley *Stamps of Many Lands* Brian Lane, London 1979
5. Colin Sackett *Totems and Signals* Suet Pudding Press 1978
6. Robert Lax *3 or 4 Poems about the Sea* Journeyman Books, New York 1966
7. Richard Long *A Straight Hundred Mile Walk in Australia* John Kaldor Project 6 1977
8. Richard Long *River Avon Book* Anthony d'Offay 1979
9. Martin Rogers *Instruments for Outdoor Use* Coracle Press 1979
10. Coracle Press *Miniatures 1977* catalogue
11. Coracle Press *Fo(u)ndlings 1978* catalogue
12. *Aggie Weston's Nos.2-16* Coracle Press
13. Richard Wilson *Twelve Pieces* Coracle Press 1978
14. Richard Wilson *Wind Instruments* Coracle Press 1980

critical publication

1999

a hypothesis for the new publication

1992

The ideas of publishing that arise from the small presses, poetry publishing, the little magazine, the remains of fluxus and conceptual art of the nineteen sixties, are in need of crucial re-evaluation.

The act of publishing is one of making available, the making of a platform from which a related series can arise in relationship to each other, and to a historical body of discrete work in this field.

Some of these issues have more recently been subverted by an emphasis on the so-called artists book that has from time to time gained a certain currency. The art historical orthodoxy of the ascendance of the artists book beginning with Ed Ruscha in 1966, is not only too narrow a reading of the development of the book historically, but condemns it to a cul-de-sac in which it is finally only a hybrid in the production of multiple art works to be sold in galleries. Whereas the productions of critical presses may more often be sold in bookshops and distributed by mail from a listing. The issue of the small bookshop has never been far from such production.

Critical Publication comes to represent the plethora of activity and platforms gained by small presses over the past forty years. Particular books and publications have been made throughout the development of modernism, through Futurism and Dada, and poets and artists since Mallarmé have been the originators if not the producers of such publications.

The Artists Book in opposition to the Critical Publication, is often only concerned with itself as an individualized item of production; its current interest produces very little critical climate, and only one of self-absorption, as most of the producers seem only interested in their own book. This thrust towards the singular production leaves little of a discursive forum.

The other polarity of the field is the belle-livre, the livre d'artist,

predicated on the luxury of the limited edition, the print in book form, the illustrated book, often issued by the so-called private presses, often working against the concern for availability which is usually achieved by the economy of the simplest possible means.

At the same time there is much confusion about the relationship of book making to the crafts of printmaking, paper-making and elaborations of binding. All of these ignore self-publishing as a defined critical stance.

Hopefully, self publishing can constitute not a vanity, but a freedom. Instead of being dependant on some weighty external agency, an industry, the poet can take the whole thing into his own hands. The means can become creative. Everything can be exact but also light, since production is a way of life, an activity rather than an occasion.

Thomas A Clark, Moschatel Press

It may be time for an arena of books, printed marginalia and ephemera to assert itself as a prime means. No longer to be found in our museums of applied art, but as suitably reticent and unflamboyant replacements for the so-called fine arts. It is a moment to seize the generality of the book, to use it, and to assert its primacy in a theoretical and practical field. For too long it has been buried by division. From the illustrated book, the livre d'artiste, to the artist's book, the last distraction, all these have distorted its real potential.

Some of the monoliths of these genres have always seemed far too eccentric: the Shakespeare text that is illustrated by a Michael Rothenstein, and even worse, any old book-stock that is embossed and encrusted by some master-binder. These all lead to the unsavoury lectures I came to hear of, given by Rigby Graham in Leicester in the seventies, 'Binding with Human Skin'. I also wrote my own *Ode to the Society of Designer-Bookbinders*: hide-bound.

Or the banal notion of sculptures built with books as physical units; this might pass in the climate of late Punk in the earlier eighties, but to be making such edifices in these necessarily more critical times is so pointless.

All these are so far from the transparency required of the book that the existing edifices become private sculptures to adorn their collectors, whose own self-definition seems to be one of the most disturbing features of the yet unwritten art-history of the nineteen eighties. There are times when it seems such a form of cultural imperialism that it holds the artist in an assumed disadvantaged place as a means of control.

The issues to be dealt with are those of editing, publishing and warehousing, of making available. In 1986 we looked at this field under the title of *The Artist Publisher*, and the subsequent survey was

published as a series of headings which still seem valuable. Its overt polemic was stated in the first instance as Self Publishing as a Critical Alternative. This was followed by sections of Manifestos, Little Magazines, Artists' presses, Gallery Presses, Fluxus, Mail Art and the New Ephemera, and finally Published Musical Scores. These still seem to be a way of discussing these activities, but more importantly, they aimed at a conception about the process of the book well beyond the over-playful divisions of text and image. Before we can move further, we have to get beyond this simple linearity of text and image and the fascination that words and pictures have some unquestioned significance.

Perhaps an historical model for this conceptual whole for the book is provided by the parallel with Concrete, as opposed to the indefinite Visual, Poetry. In a late work of Lewis Carroll there is a single simple transformation of a 'river' to a 'shore'. This is not a pattern-poem as Dick Higgins has referred to them, or a poem in a recognisable overall shape. In this transformation, the syntax of the work changes by its presentation on the page, and we have an entirely new arrival, where the written text is no longer a representation of the voice-directed syntax of speech at all. The entire linear field of illustration is denied, and we have the emergence of Concrete Poetry.

Within the economy of means available to us in this critical moment in time, the book and the publication present the most adaptive position. A new austerity may arise, beyond a stylistic adoption, and one which places the superfluosity of design outside the process of production, as unrequired as in the hey-day of letterpress printing. Working with students of fine-art now, they sometimes know of this integrity, this potentiality. In a time when the gallery has abandoned any developmental dialogue on its format and become a mere shop in the most available of mall-culture or the most stylistic impasse of interior design, the book has its place. It is a moment when the absurd physicality of many media and processes is evident; the massiveness of sculpture has no place, nor the manneristic game of painting. The failure of installation as space has left the book in a clear position to develop a genre of representation and reference for it; the concern with space may be reducible.

It is this adaptability rather than the insistence on a given form or medium that now seems so important. Talking with someone in an artists bookshop recently, they said that if artists now started to work with film-scripts, for example, then that is what would be evident in the store. And this seems should be the case. There is no issue about artists books left to discuss: there are just books. There is no issue about book artists: there are just artists, who and whatever they are. There are only books, whatever they are.

Gallery in Edinburgh; some of the more portfolio works from the late Christopher Hewitt at Taranman. I could go on. Not least Sylvie Turner's own work. I'm a little surprised at such a good artist spending so much time propping up the curatorial defence here employed. She is one of the few artists who have made any sense of the idea of papermaking as a medium and her books show it; they have a conceptual grace and formal rigour that is missing from the conservatism of this exhibition.

Whilst I was thinking about this show in Wapping, I had its exact polarity revealed to me at Franklin Furnace in New York where I saw an exhibition devoted to the work of many contemporary Icelandic artists working with books. Something seems to have settled to these new works from the general characteristics of a nation with an extraordinary need for books in the long hours of winter. Made with very ordinary means, photography, cheap offset, xerox, perfect binding, staples, several of them turned out to be very special and considered, every nuance of their brief fabric held in place. *British Artists Books 1970-1983*, in this particular selection turned out to be very ordinary for all their elaboration of papers, typography, autographic print process and bindings. Quality is not guaranteed manifest in the artists' holograph; rarity is also a quality of profusion.

Atlantis Gallery, March–April 1984

Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press

By the sixties the little press scene had largely become an ethic of duplicated sheets, smudges and absence of layout—a harbinger of the 'underground'. The possibility of inexpensive circulation made dizzy literally hundreds of new editors exchanging sofas for guestners in their living-rooms. Unlike their forerunners in the earlier part of the century, most of the new little presses sought to abandon scrutiny and discernment and foster a completely unconscious brand of expressiveness to attract what remained of an unrecruited audience. There were, and are, of course, noble exceptions to this general pattern. For these exceptions the only real distinction a small press might have from a commercial publisher should be that it choose to publish seemingly unsaleable goods in small editions, and that this difference in role should not lower the quality of production.

Wild Hawthorn Press is not only an exception in the general dreary scene just mentioned, but is also an exception to all categories of publishing classification. With a range of work and standard of production equalling and often matching those to be found in any kind of publishing, it is a singular achievement.

Ian Hamilton Finlay wanted to do two things. Firstly, make available the work of good poets whose work demanded but was not receiving presentation, and, secondly, to provide a platform for his own work. It was a case of wanting the best and producing it himself, for the sake of quality and not just quickness, Wild Hawthorn Press has published I.H.F.'s own work largely because he does not feel that any other publisher or press could do it successfully.

An outstanding achievement is the magazine *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, publication of which is now temporarily suspended but which ran to twenty-five issues almost as regularly as any commercial publication. One must compare what Finlay produced for 9d (plus postage and packaging 3d) with what the little press editor at large would consider the price of his stencil. He managed to do this by making use of inexpensive printing techniques suited to seemingly elaborate illustrations and layout, often combining hand written poems and illustrations with offset lithography. The achievement is

also due to the wide-ranging collaboration with designers and artists not usually thought of as being within the scope of a little press. Finlay has maintained this width of collaboration not only in his own work for this medium of print but also in solid and three-dimensional work.

The scope of *P. O. T. H.* was formidable. It is difficult enough to think of any other poetry sheet so simple and yet delightful, let alone consider that it brought together such names as Ad Reinhardt, Earl Haig, Charles Biederman, Pierre Albert-Birot, Theodore Enslin and Bridget Riley. Also, before production was suspended numbers embodying work by Vasarely and Mathias Goeritz had been planned. This bringing together is even more delightful when one considers that the poems were presented in issues going under such headings as 'Lollipop Number' (No.11) and 'Teapoth' (No. 23). Poems used have often been rescued from oblivion: who besides Finlay cared to remember, for instance, Hamish Maclaren after 1929, whose poem 'Little Sea House' was used in *P. O. T. H.* 15 (Boats. Shores. Tides. Fish. Anthology issue.)

Little sea house	I remember it well:
When I found you,	The Salmon nets drying—
The yellow poppies	Laugh, violin-shell,
Were nodding round you.	And cease crying:

Your Blue slate hat	For I will return
That the four winds	Through the sea haze:
Came to tug at	I am sailing back there
Over the tamarinds:	Always, always.

P. O. T. H. had far more variety and range than the combination of Ian Hamilton Finlay and concrete poetry might suggest. This variety ties in with Finlay's aesthetic of all art, which is something beyond and before the compulsive modernism of the avant-garde often propagated by the small press.

The list of books produced by Wild Hawthorn Press runs from Erik Satie to Jonathan Williams, and includes Lorine Niedecker, Robert

Law, Augusto de Campos as well as Finlay's own magnanimous collaborations with many designers, illustrators and typographers.

Perhaps the press's greatest contribution to publication has been the poem/print, corresponding more to book publication in the large number of the edition, rather than to prints from fine art publishers. This particular contribution has not as yet been truly credited to Finlay, and Christopher Logue seems to receive continued notice for its development, although he did not use his first poem/print until 1965, whereas Finlay's series began in 1963. This mode of publication is a logical development of the concrete presentation of a poem, and it is interesting to note that Wild Hawthorn has produced the only consistently successful series of prints done over a period of years.

In the later sixties, because of the tightening concerns of its founder, the press has become the platform solely of Ian Hamilton Finlay himself, producing further prints, cards and books at an equal rate and with even more developed production than in the earlier more various list. And so, the tiny applecog gears of Wild Hawthorn Press have turned over to become his personal circulating point; as such, with a range almost equal to that of the generalised list, it continues.

Ceolfrith 1969

The Idea of Making A Table

You can telephone the instruction for making a table to a friend, a simple table, of its essence, platonic, of tableness. A table unlike a book can remain platonic. There is nothing platonic about a book, 'bookness' does not apply, as it has constant and continuous interiority. Certain shapes of books may be more platonic than others; the portrait book, more archetypal than the landscape one, which always wants to aggrandise itself as such a tome whose pages open like the sea (and TJC who wanted all his books to open gate-fold like it)

This particular table I told Laurie Clark about for the room in her gallery. First measure the floor and draw on it a square or rectangle that will allow you to circulate in the room, but still give the most surface possible.

Order the blockboard cut to size, the legs of plain deal, the rails, the edging strip for the sides of the top, and glue and nail them into place.

Books can be placed on the table.

the sky is too high / the earth too low to stoop / only a table is the right height

1995

Public Art in A Critical Space

I have no idea what constitutes Public Art, but I know there is a critical space that might question it. My interest in this area lies in the possibilities of a more minor intervention, well away from the monumental, and almost nothing to do with sculpture. It will involve the process of things rather than what the finished work can come to symbolise. These fragile possibilities, these bits of ephemera might only reverberate in the mind.

The activity of publishing, of making available, is a public work, and one in which we can all participate.

If there is a polemical point I could make about Public Art, it would be that space between the work which reverberates in the mind, perhaps from very little physical or material existence, to the experiential assimilation of a complete environment, there is no longer any possibility of working. The focal or nodal work with all its compositional intensity no longer engages us. When it is as sculpture, the world is littered with it, like Mount Everest is littered with Coke cans. We must opt for a metaphorical space, not one to be filled with perjoratively valuable objects.

2000

Perhaps in the current climate of enthusiasm books should not be seen in isolation from other forms of published production, like postcards, invitation cards, posters, magazines and other ephemera.

Books are not necessarily a form but a reflection of activity that relates critically to other pre-occupations, and the book is just one of the ways of locating that centre.

Not as craft, but as interpretation: when Pierre Boulez holds a music workshop, he doesn't talk about making violins.

There is no issue with artists books or book art, only with publication, whether printed production and production in general is intrinsic to the work.

1995

The collective work, the magazine, the published artifact, the platform made by artists is unique to a history of modernism. It began with *The Germ* in England in the middle of the last century, and it is still a functioning field.

And yet I cannot think of a time when artists both collectively and by themselves were so content merely to watch themselves operate rather than delight in making, even in ideas, perhaps an understanding of critical process, or perhaps a bit of history. I suppose it's a particular late phase of punk we're living through, our own tedious fin de siècle.

Were Pictures ever the corollary of Words, I ask myself?

The concern might be to find another independent means, beyond illustration or its ingredient parts. The title is too functionary and yet it still misses. Don't be afraid to chance something truly irrelevant. I have the feeling that each issue needs something more ritualised than its mere presence in the art scene, something perhaps of the self-parody of Rubber Stamp Art, a new use of the Postal System or The Internet even. The locatable humour and scurrility of Fluxus.

That way you can guarantee being dismissed by the serious victims of Culture. "Oh, they're just the people who like sending things to each other in the post", the critic Waldemar Januszczak said of our endeavours at Coracle in the early eighties. It was an important and formative rejection.

Introduction to *Words & Pictures No.7*, 1996

Throughout the entire period, from 1980 on to now, I had the feeling that the issue was not the individualized artists' book in splendid isolation (and with very little interest in anything outside itself) but a whole platform of publishing in which books of a kind might be available. Once again I realized that the model for such activity would seem to be that of small press publishing, from *The Germ* of The Pre-Raphaelites through the Futurists and Dadaists, the Vorticists, to the artists' book of conceptualism, to the continued and still current small press poetry publication.

The art historical orthodoxy of trying to pivot Ruscha, Weiner et al as an apogee of the activity, seems to me to be both flawed and sentimental, on the one hand fixing it as history whilst on the other adequately authenticating something classic of its kind for the dealers' lists. Yet even within this canonical evaluation, it is the platforms of publishing that persist rather than the individual excursions towards some convenient form of book on the part of artists. Herewith I offer an annual selection from *Coracle* for the years 1980–2003, with an emphasis on the plainness of the simple bound book, the home-made, and also a self-reflexive concern for the publishing of its kind, with all its inherent problems of availability and distribution.

Outside of a Dog, Baltic, Gateshead, 2003.

An Anthology of Small Poems

This anthology has been compiled by two editors as an attempt to suggest a concentration of area amongst poets of a diverse and otherwise unconnected nature. For this reason the reader may find it necessary to read between the poems selected and approximate for himself the common region.

The slightness of the anthology is indicative of how few poets have contented themselves to work in this region. A word may be necessary to account for certain omissions which on the surface would seem to be obvious choices for inclusion;

a) It is rumoured that William Carlos Williams once said that his poems were often short because he had written them down on his prescription pad. This arbitrary nature of their size accounts for many absences.

b) The other sort of omission is exemplified by Tennyson's 'The Eagle'. This is the poem of sixty lines of which the poet eventually decided only six were valuable. The poem is intensely open-ended, and is in no sense an attempt to deal within a definitive area.

Nonetheless, this anthology was compiled believing that the essence of selection is concentration, even in the face of absence of material. Where a poem signifies an effect frequently used by a poet, the poem felt to be most representative is used.

The descriptive adjective of this poetry is small, not short; small purely a delineation of size, simultaneity, which is felt to be a conscious part of its production.

"If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression..."¹

The sense of artifact entailed in the production of the small poem brings the poet nearer to the plastic artist...

Sculpte, lime, cisele

Que ton rive flottant

Se scelle

Dans le bloc resistant,²

...than the narrative poet. Its effects cannot carry philosophy, the weight of the reasoning mind. Words exist as themselves without implying a sensibility of their creator. "...all words should efface themselves before sensations."³ The reader must appreciate receiving a small item of artifact, for its own sake.

1. Edgar Allan Poe: Philosophy of Composition.
2. Gautier: *L'Art*.
3. Stephane Mallarmé: Letter to Cazalis.

Introduction to *Tarasque 6*, 1966

In terms of literature, my interest always went to the French. The concern for a material aesthetic, as opposed to an expressive system of language, led me through Baudelaire to the Symbolists, centering on Mallarmé. His dictum *peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit* was my first understanding of an insistence other than narrative. Mallarmé's prose contains so much with which I had and still have sympathy. It is in these writings that I was given the reassurance that language is its own artificial system, which can refer less well to anything outside itself than to itself.

From as far back as I can remember, I had used the typewriter as an essential part of the transfer process, and some of the writing, if not all, up to *Claude Monet in His Water Garden* in 1967, has a conception of line and line space that has come from placing such importance on the spacing of a typewriter. But this was never a playful thing, never a Dom Sylvester Houedard; it was always instrumental, finding that the poem did not really exist until it had been produced visually by the objectifying means of the typewriter. But there must be dozens of poets who have no concern with the visual who have adopted this means of working.

So the perfectly orthodox poem only gained the objective value I was looking for when it was a visually presented thing. The reading of a poem depended on too many loose and indeterminate factors, like audience reaction, the vagaries of the poet in concert. I have always been uninterested in the emotional directness that the voice conveys.

The visually directed poem began to suggest a hardness of substance which could not be found in the utilitarian communicative value of language or in the transience of the spoken poem. That the eye following the printed line should so unconsciously be the remains of the ear following the spoken voice, seemed contradictory.

Syntactic structure in the written language gave it the narrative linear quality of spoken language. Description always employs narrative, and therefore the condition of the narrator. To remove this personal factor was a purificational move for me.

I remain committed to what I describe as the Impressionist

some coracle ephemera

Some responses to questions asked by Steven Leiber in preparation for the book and exhibition *Extra Art: A Survey of Artists' Ephemera 1960–1999* for The California College of the Arts and Crafts in San Francisco in October 2001. In a letter from the publishers of the book, they begin "This exhibition curated by Steven Leiber isolates artists' ephemera as a distinctive, specific class of art ephemera. Of all art ephemera created during the last forty years less than one percent are within the purview of this inquiry; the vast majority are otherwise conceived and/or designed by someone other than the artist."

It is perhaps the narrowness of this claim that prompted these responses, the failure to recognize the collaborative nature of the project since the beginning of modernism, and certainly in this specific instance, how we worked at Coracle.

It is also the sheltering of the artist as an isolated autonomous figure rather than a collaborator in a more generative situation that seems so inappropriate.

I'll go through your questions point by point, but I wanted firstly to say that you have some fixed concept of ephemera that might not fit the Coracle bill in many instances.

Nonetheless we made these things and circulated them, and I think it may be more interesting to extend the notion of ephemera than to treat it as fixed and the basis for academy.

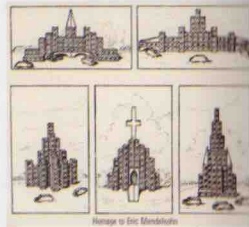
With the Coracle pieces there was no clear designer in many cases, and items arose out of the critical mode of the Press and Gallery*, the context and possibilities of previous work and materials, especially the use of a small letterpress printing machine and its way of formatting and using other materials economically. Often the things you might call multiples are in fact some versions of trade samplers, fitting a completely different tradition of issue, and they are all printed and manufactured in some way. It is often less a question of design than an understanding and use of idioms that lie outside our own immediate context.

As you will notice, we are very involved in postcards, folding cards, and cards in general. These were often issued for their information, their announcement, their polemical statement and their dogged humour. They may have been sold eventually as postcards, but that was never the sole reason for existing in the first place. Often these cards came about because there was some space on a printing plate being run for some other purpose, or we could just make them very cheaply in-house.

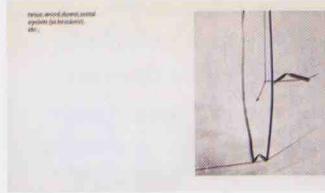
Sent, given away, left on public transport, sold; it's all the same thing, all a form of distribution.

* Coracle was begun in 1975 by Simon Cutts, together with Kay Roberts. In 1980 she left and Coracle was joined by Colin Sackett and John Bevis, and slightly later by Clare Rowe, Ian Farr and David Gray. Through the early 1980s, until about 1988 in fact, it worked as a collective even though Simon Cutts had gone into a gallery partnership with Victoria Miro separately in 1985, which lasted until 1991. Erica Van Horn started to work with Coracle in 1988 and continues to do so.

1. Simon Cutts, 'Homage to Eric Mendelsohn' 1975. How was this folded card distributed—Given away, now in its rarity, sold.

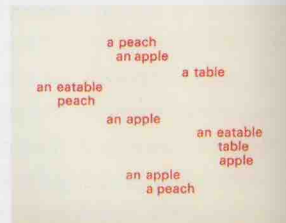


2. Richard Wilson 'Eleven Pieces' 1976. A repro of a work in a show? Did the artist conceive of the invitation card?—A piece in the show, but previous to the show. Joint conception. These early



cards from the gallery had a fixed format for a while. That's because we had the card already cut to size. Coracle work is very anti-design: there is no separable function of design at this stage.

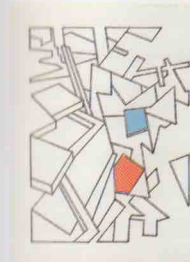
3. Ian Hamilton Finlay invitation 1976. Appears to be selection from Rapel. Did Finlay select this poem/image for the card? I am asking these rather pedestrian questions as we are concerned with a very particular sort of ephemera (artists' ephemera works)—No Finlay did not



choose the piece for the card, but I did. He was most annoyed by it, but it was a piece in the show.

4. Kay Roberts 'A View Over the Skirting Board' 1976. What is the story with the die-cut... whose idea?—We had a very cheap die-cutter maker at the time, and its always a very satisfying thing to do, hearing them pop out as the press clicks.

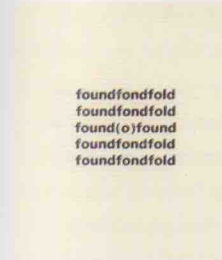
5. Simon Cutts 'Letterwrack for an Old Pal' 1976. How was this folded card construction distributed? For money or gratis? What is the approximate edition?—Sent out, a form of mail-art, as with much of this material, eventually sold as it got rarer. Approx 2–300 copies.



6. Martin Fidler invitation 1977. That is an established gallery format for invites does not exclude an invitation from my project purview as who and what is done within that format is the inquiry. Fidler design?—I don't understand your sentence. By this time there is no gallery format for invites as you can see. In-house design, that is me at this time in discussion with the artist.

7. Williams/Meyer flyer 1977. Seems like a primary document and not an artists' ephemera work.—What is the primary document? It's a poster, all be it small.

8. Foundlings exhibition 1978 invitation to artists. Designed by you?—In-house design, probably in discussion with

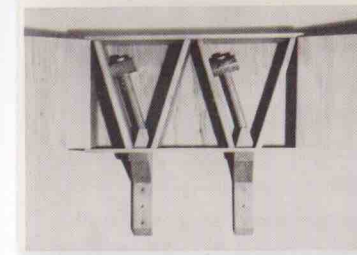


Brian Lane, who I haven't mentioned thus far, but who was a big influence on all this, being a small-press man.

9. Les Coleman 'Chalks'

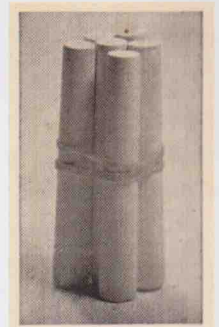
1978. Is the repro an image produced for the invite or was it a work in the exhibition?—A card of a work in the show, for no particular reason, as it was not the invitation card.

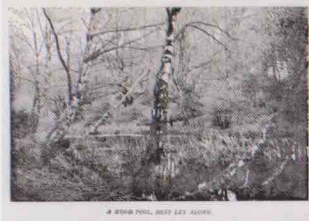
10. Martin Rogers 'Instruments for Outdoor Use' 1979 is this a repro of a work in the show?—The Martin Rogers work was placed outside the



gallery so that you could use it as a door-knocker to gain entrance.

11. Moschatel Press exhibition 1979. Is this a work made for the card or a repro of a work in the show or a page from a book etc?





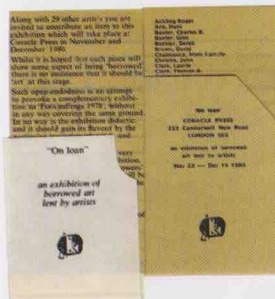
—Image is a frontispiece from a Gertrude Jekyll garden book, used as the invite for its polemical statement at the bottom.

12. New Year card 'Waddington's' 1979. I see this as a booklet how about you? Who is the author artist of

this item?—Simon Cutts poem, issued as a new year card. Booklets are sometimes ephemeral too, and since nothing made by an artist fulfils the real definition of Ephemera, we might as well ride with it. Given out initially, mail-art like, sold eventually when rarer.



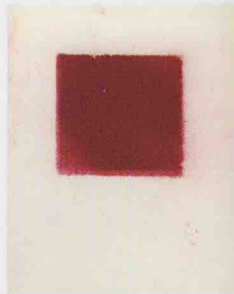
13. 'On Loan' Exhibition card 1980. Who was responsible for the design



idea?—In-house: totally idiomatic, given its subject matter. Library readers-ticket for a loan to an exhibition; but more importantly for the way Coracle worked. Here you can see how design is not a separate function, but something which comes out of the idiom or context of the idea or designation of the invitation.

14. Anish Kapoor '1000 Names' 1981.

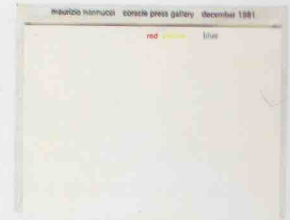
What is the edition of this invitation card drawing? Did Kapoor do the drawings or give directions on how to make them? I know this question can be answered by reading on Coracle but I am going through the material without the reference material.



—Is this a drawing? I don't want to be argumentative about the definition of that, all I can tell you is that Anish Kapoor, Karl Simmons and myself sat on the floor and made these cards on an already photostatted card-stock with its date and place already printed, squeezeing PVA glue with a piece of card, and then dusting on the pigment, blowing

it off where there was no glue. It's a work, not a drawing! Around 300 copies.

15. M. Nannucci. I always assumed that 'Who's Afraid of Red Yellow and Blue' 1981. Is an ephemera work by the artist?—What is your question? Who's afraid of red yellow and blue is a quotation from



Barnett Newman, used as a work by Maurizio Nannucci, in neon primarily, but hardly an ephemera work by him. This is the invitation card for our exhibition which sites the quotation in coloured type,

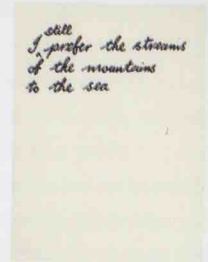


which is different from the neon, which is as usual in Nannucci's holographic script.

16. Les Coleman booklet 'Kinds of Clouds' 1981. Is not within, the

purview of the show. Was the balloon a Coleman idea.—The Coleman booklet was launched by balloon and was returned to Coracle from places as far away as Knokke in Belgium. Is that not ephemera? Discussive idea with the artist.

17. Simon Cutts postcards 'I prefer the streams...' 1970 onwards. (this one 1982) How were these distributed? Free?—Free at first, later sold.



18. Simon Cutts rubber stamps, holder and postcard. 'L'artiste n'a pas le droit de disposer inutilement du temps de son auditeur' 1979. What is the edition of this box set? Figure you charged



for the stamp set. Looks like you may have generated the card image special for card purposes.—There were six copies of rubber stamps in their holder, some of them in a specially made wooden box, stamped on the lid. Whilst you might say it's a multiple, it was really a machine for its owner to produce their own cards, a kind of ephemera machine. The card stocks were printed with the image of the machine and then stamped.



29. *John Cage poster 1984. Image ditto?*—The John Cage poster was produced from an image taken from his studio window in New York. There is also a print of the same image done by four-colour letterpress as is the poster, but this image is so much richer than the almost identical print from Crown Point Press. You could say that this is not ephemera (the print that is), except this is the

poster and the image is about decay.

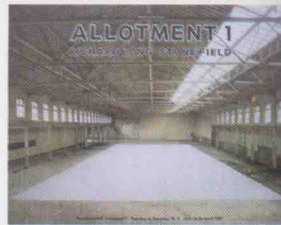
30. *Hamish Fulton invitation card 1987. Image ditto as above three entries?*—The Hamish Fulton card is a work, but not in the exhibition. It is a print that exists in two versions, the postcard, and a larger letterpress print, added to as he does more Coast to Coast Walks.



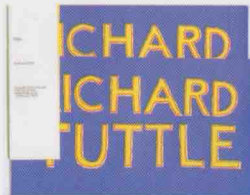
31. *'Furniture Sculpture' poster 1987. Who designed it?*—This is the first truly 'designed' work to date, done and brought together as an amalgam of parts by Colin Sackett, using the image of Brancusi that I managed to get from Centre Pompidou.

who?—Once again designed by Colin Sackett, in the proper functioning of designer, which he is by now.

32. *Richard Long poster 1987. Was designed by*



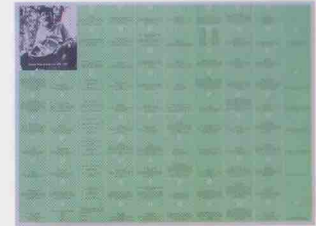
33. *Richard Tuttle invitation 1987. Do you think of this as an invite or booklet?*—I think this is an invitation with a built-in booklet, which went out in a transparent envelope with the mailing label stuck on.



34. *Coracle Press Archive List 1988. Poster was designed by?*—The Coracle Archive list was designed by Colin Sackett to see what we had left at a time of serious change,

after a dispersal of past material to big collections.

35. *Simon Cutts 'Deaf to Art' 1988. Was a for sale item?*—'Deaf to Art' was primarily a comment on the critical situation we were faced with. As with other entries herein, it was first sent out to the applicable incumbents, and then spasmodically sold.

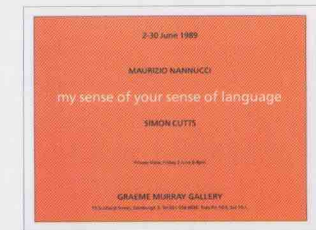


36. *Simon Cutts and M. Nannucci 'My Sense of Your Sense of Language' 1989.*

Doesn't really look him but a little like you. Is this just a primary document?

—'My Sense of Your Sense of Language' is a joint work by Maurizio Nannucci and

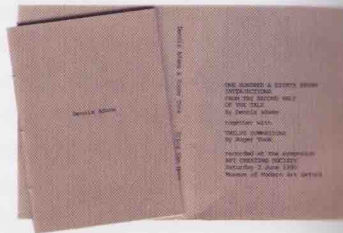
Simon Cutts, that was made for the exhibition at the Graeme Murray Gallery in 1989, and the invitation card is designed by Colin Sackett. I don't know about all this primary document business. This is an invitation card, as much else we've discussed. The card was printed in orange as the work was in orange. I'm sure this work has been made again by Nannucci, as either of us has the right to make it. The text of the work is Simon Cutts trying to emulate Maurizio Nannucci, almost as a translation of a Nannucci platitude.



37. *'A Duster Party' 1990. Who designed it?*—The Duster Party came from Erica Van Horn and Simon Cutts playing in the workshop, with some notions of the V&A being a dusty old place, and the need to have a party rather than an inadequate display, after the V&A had bought a set of the Coracle Printed Archive to date.

38. *Erica Van Horn '187 Interjections...' 1990. Conference wallet is too bookish for the project.*—The two tiny booklets of Erica Van Horn are precise recordings of deliveries at a conference, and as such catch

the ephemera of the occasion, the stumblings and gaps between the lines that are the ephemera. Once again, just because it's a booklet doesn't mean its not a form of ephemera. A document to catch the ephemera of speech.

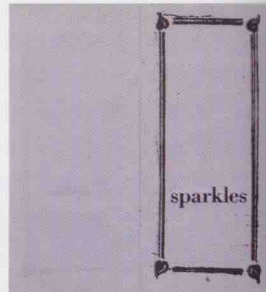


39. 'For a New Coracle' 1991. Was this a give away? What is the edition?—A give-away indeed, sent to a mailing list of about 100, with a few spares, to celebrate the return to books, after a prolonged stint of gallery work, and also realising that we had this Concrete address that we had to try out. The one-egg balloon

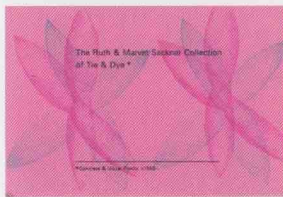


whisk in the box is also perhaps a high-tech paddle for the Coracle.

40. Richard Tuttle booklet 'Eight Words from a Reading at Brooklyn College' 1990. Not within purview of the project.—I now seriously have to take issue with you on the true nature of the booklet as ephemera. This Richard Tuttle work, Eight Words from a Reading..., is one of the most stylised pieces of ephemera ever issued. The artist sent the border drawing



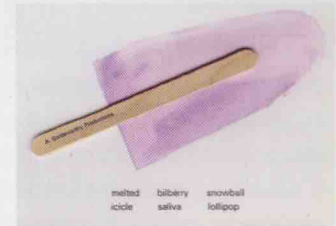
reproduced throughout the book by fax, asking for it to be printed on newsprint in lilac colour. The eight words were then blocked in silver-foil on the newsprint. Already copies of the booklet left in direct sunlight have begun to crumble, leaving eventually only a dislocated confetti of the eight words in silver.



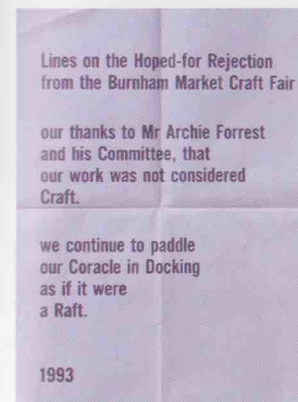
41. 'The Sackner Collection' 1991. Postcard polemic pretty, but I don't get it so please explain. Who was responsible for the postcard work?—The thrust of the polemic of The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Collection card is the

suggestion that Concrete and Visual Poetry in their hands is as ephemeral as a collection of Tie and Dye from roughly the same period. The card stems from a conference I once attended with them and was shocked at the lack of critical definition attached to their activity as collectors. It is therefore all mine, as no one else would be so cheeky.

42. 'A Goldsworthy Productions' postcard 1991. Was he responsible for it? Never had to spell icicle before but I love how the word looks.



Giveaway?—With The A. Goldsworthy Productions we are entering a minefield of critical ephemera. Do you really think he could be responsible for it? If so you enter the field as certain Belgian Collectors who list these works in Andy's bibliography. It's his kind of superfluous language, and tangentially his kind of subject matter, but that's about it. In any case there's too much of it.



43. 'Lines on the Hoped for Rejection...' poster 1993. Who designed it?—This poster was made at our letterpress printer in Kings Lynn, Norfolk, in the manner of posters they made for Dances, Cattle Markets, Whist Drives etc. Design as such falls outside the letterpress forme, which takes care of itself and often uses a pre-existing idiom as a context. The poster was placed in all the shops and windows in Burnham Market at the time of the Craft Fair, and sought to make an irony of our relationship to Craft.

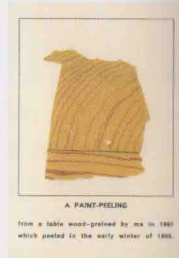
44. Erica Van Horn 'Skegness Rock' 1991. How was this card distributed for sale?—Skegness Rock was sent, given away and sold in a small envelope for mailing purposes.



45. Coracle at the Kings Lynn Arts Centre 1994. Was designed by?—This invitation card lists all

blotting paper bone folders boxes broadsheets button badges carrier bags case findings catalogues cigarette cards coat hangers condiments covered sawn sections drawn on covers dry cleaners polythene covers dusters envelopes eye baths egg cups eye shades flannel dusters fly posters grey board glass paperweights invitations leaflets library cards longspines sticks luggage labels magazines manuscript paper mini printers mp3 prints neon newsletters paddles paper bags perfect bound blocks photocopies plaster biomaterials poetry postcards price lists raincoats readers tickers rice bowls rubber stamp carousels self adhesive labels sewing paraphernalia shovels spectacles sugar tins tinned paper tufflers vases/wastepaper vases/wastepaper whisks wine labels Coracle books at the King's Lynn Arts Centre 27-29 King Street King's Lynn Norfolk PE30 1HA Telephone 0553 774725 Facsimile 0553 770991 March 28th - May 14th 1994

the things Coracle made that were not books. Once again its design came from letterpress printing, on the cheap and acidic pulp board that suits it so well.



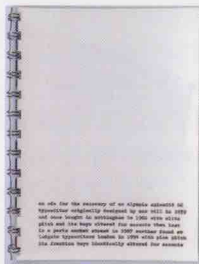
46. Erica Van

Horn 'A Paint Peeling' 1993 folded card. How was this distributed?—'A Paint Peeling' was given away and sold through selective bookshops.

47. Coracle at The Irish Museum of Modern Art 1994. Designed by?—The invitation was designed in-house, again coming from the logic of letterpress, the simple fold hiding an exemplum, that you have to open.



48. Simon Cutts 'An Ode for the Recovery...' 1994. is too booklet-like to be within the purview of the project.—I would like to argue the case for this. It's hardly a booklet, merely two laminated cards held together by a wire binding. But is that also not ephemera?



49. Erica Van Horn 'Italian Lesson No.4', 1992. A book thus not within the purview of the show.—'Italian Lesson No.4' of Erica Van Horn is a booklet edition made of the torn up notes for her learning Italian. Sounds like ephemera to me.

50. 'Italian Lesson No.11' 1993. Fine but how was this

card distributed?—Usual answer about distribution, although this one has run to several editions, so I guess most of them

IN ITALY ONE IS ONLY ALLOWED ELEVEN WORDS PER POST CARD

have been sold. What is of interest is its self-reference to the Postcard as a genre, which we've always been working at.

51. 'Italian Lesson No.13', 1994.

Awfully close to a booklet. Was this a giveaway?—Italian Lesson 13 is



a concertina or laperello, not a booklet, and contains the fingerprints of the left and right hands of Erica Van Horn as a form of identity. There's a whole genre of false identity cards which would firmly sit in the world of ephemera, not least of all because their authorship

is unknown. This raises the question on the whole nature of Artists' Ephemera?



52. 'Italian Lesson No.16' 1996.

More multiple like than

printed matter.—It's a found item of ambiguity with a printed box label to recontextualise it.

53. Simon Cutts 'A Smell of Printing' 1996. Same

question as to distribution?—Similarly. Most of the text postcards are around 300 copies, sometimes more, seldom less. The 4-colour cards are usually 500 or 1000 depending on which printer, and which cheap colour card producer we used.



54. Coracle at The Irish Museum of Modern Art 1996. Was designed by? Is this work available in another format? What came first?—This is the only format of this image, which is of two doors at the Marsh Library in Dublin.

55. 'After Frank O'Hara and Morton Feldman' 1996 [overleaf]. Seems more like a booklet than anything else. Edition?—Another New Year offering. Booklet it may be, but it celebrates ephemerality in its fragility, as maybe does the music of

