THE MENTAL OBJECTIVE

ONE ONE-FOLD BOOK

Day one:

The first bindings are the most difficult. The beginner has a far greater challenge than the expert. The more simple the binding, the greater the challenge.

Fold a sheet of paper in half. The surface for display of text or picture has now been removed from the two-dimensional world of the single-sheet format. The resulting folio is now two connected planes, movable, able to arc in space because of the created hinge. The hinge-fold also delineates four surfaces as four pages.

The concept of using paper for text or pictures has been totally altered by the simple act of folding a piece of paper *and* understanding the consequences. Learning to see requires vigilance so that actions are not taken for granted.

I examine the paper I have folded in half. The term for this is a *folio*. Where the two planes meet, the fold creates a valley. That is not true. It is equally a mountain peak. It is my point of view which creates the valley. If I turn the folio over, the fold then appears to be a mountain peak. I must be alert, not to assume a "truth" but to understand that *fact* is dependent upon context.

That *act* has created four pages and two implied sheets. Building comprehension requires paring down to bare necessities. Again, I look at the sheet I have folded. I concentrate on the crease-as-hinge: The valley is referred to as the *gutter*. The mountain peak is called the *back*, or *backbone*.

Since the sheets are connected, this is a hand-bound book. I think about how these pages are seen. Their display is interdependent: there is no "front" side, as the surface in view is the front only while it is being viewed. It becomes the back when the page is turned. Context. I need no longer concern myself with single, unconnected sheets of paper imaged on one side, which have a front and a back. I must not think in terms of one-sided display. The fold has created a book – a totally different stage upon which to perform.

Recto means the right-hand page of an open book. *Verso* is the back of *that* page. An opened book presents, on the left, a verso of the previous recto. On the right is a recto. It is important to understand *both* pages in view are *front* sides until the page is turned, then each becomes a back side. *Verso* is not synonymous with *back*. A recto in view is always on the right of the gutter. A verso in view, on the left.

A single sheet imaged on one side has a fixed front and back. In the codex, fronts are pages in view, which become backs when the page is turned. The *now* of a book is the opened folio.

Since the four pages cannot be seen simultaneously, they are experienced *in time*, like a play in four acts, a symphony with four movements. Time and movement are a necessary part of this format. Any art form revealed in time must be paced. Rate of turning pages is not standard or arbitrary. Each page is paced by the maker. The viewer can perceive the precise pacing of each page.

The fold *physically* holds together this blank book. Anything added to the surfaces in the form of text or pictures must conceptually tie the surfaces together. Otherwise, each surface is treated as an island where content is marooned, isolated, rather than acting as a multi-directional navigation. *Island* is a concept relevant only in the single-sheet format.

A book may be bound using single sheets rather than sections, but organization of the content has nothing in common with the single-sheet format. I must make concerted effort to remove myself from single-sheet mentality. This is a whole new world. A book is not the act of compiling information, but the process of timely construction of an organization.

Bookbinding at its ultimate realization is not a physical act of sewing or gluing, but a conceptual ordering of time and space. It is not sewing but structure of content that ties together pages of a book. Binding must begin with the concept of text and/or pictures.

The single sheet allows an overall view of everything; it has a narrow sense of time. Movement in the single sheet is limited to scanning. The viewer moves to the next single sheet, takes in a general view of everything and scans scant bits of information or carefully plows row by row this flat field.

This is not the manner in which a book should be experienced. It is not an easy transition from working in the single-sheet format to moving into the book format. To treat a book as no more than a stack of sheets would be a denial of inherent movement as fronts

evolve into back sides. A codex is more than a *group*. The progression through a codex is more than a *series* in which the eye absorbs one page then moves in a straight line to the next, to the next. Such structure is linked, each successive idea dependent upon the previous.

With the content referring back and forth and the fronts evolving to backs, the structure of ideas *and* the pages are contingent upon events other than the adjacent. This is in addition to contiguous movement forward.

Single sheets can have common theme. But every page of a book is totally dependent upon every other, necessitating a complexity of movement. Content of pages moves back and forth by cause and effect in addition to the steady linkage forward. This movement is within the boundaries of what is stated, and beyond by what is implied. The book artist structures the gap between the pictures just as an author speaks between the lines. But what is even better is for the artist and the writer to compose the space between the pages as thoughtfully as what is printed upon the surface. A book is *not* a running manuscript or compilation but a structuring of pages as an integral part of the content. This creates a gestält.

The multiple-page format has its own demands based on the inherent properties of the book. The multiple-page format also has options, totally new possibilities unavailable in single sheets. These new possibilities of movement stem from an understanding of how the multiple-page format differs from a collection of single sheets. The key is not to "add" in the sense of treating the book as an empty vessel into which things might be stuck. Rather, learn to see the blank book for its power and its potential.

The p o w e r of a blank book is that it is not *blank* in the sense of being empty, but is an entity complete in itself: It has a beginning and an end. Turning pages move through time and space. Even a blank book presents a group, series *and* a sequence. Every book is a format. The western codex utilizes two-sided display bringing new definitions to patterning, pacing. It is far removed from the single-sheet format. Since this format exists in space, it is nearer to sculpture than painting. Since it exists in time, it has more properties of cinema than the still-photography it might contain. A book of text or prints is *moving pictures*. Rather than a compilation of single sheets, each book is an organized totality, a union of states, each sheet subordinate to that union.

Folding a sheet of paper has created the most basic of book bindings. By understanding the power of *what* has been created, I can begin to appreciate and investigate the potential of the blank book.

The p o t e n t i a l is not to stick things *in* , but to allow ideas to emanate *from* the format as text and/or pictures. It is to revel in the book as action, to reveal the plane of activity, then help it relinquish center stage as it curls in the light and turns on its hinge into shadow, to disappear. In its place comes forward the next plane to entertain and inspire.

At any point in time, the reader is at the opened folio, at the fronts of pages. Indeed, it is impossible to ever realize the "back side" since on turning the page, the verso changes into an opened folio and, like magic, becomes a front.

This movement through pages is timed. The bookmaker builds in a rate of page turning. Yet, unlike cinema or dance, the reader can override the pacing of the author and linger at any point, retreat to some other page, or sneak a preview of what is yet to unfold.

Content is the process of coming to understand the essence of a blank book and to proceed from any inherent characteristic as a point of departure.

The power is *what;* the potential is *how.*

What is binding? One thing I feel strongly is that text can be so written that the words create the pages. The pages, as well as the writing relate back and forth, tying together all the elements into a unified flow. One would ask no less cooperation from all the instruments of an orchestra.

This inter-connection of all the elements of a book is conceptual bookbinding, sewing on the ultimate level.

TWO TWO-FOLD BOOKS

SKETCH NUMBER 1: two *folds in opposite directions*

Day two: Today I take another sheet of paper. This time I make two folds, reversing the direction of the second. The result is an Oriental fold book. How does this differ from the one-fold book which is a codex? That one-fold book merely suggests an Oriental fold book.

By making two alternating folds, I have the essence of a fold book. This book I have hand bound can also be seen as a compound codex. Back to back, it is what is termed a *dos-à-dos.*

There are *simple* bindings (meaning the elemental *types of books,* as opposed to easy to make.). These are the fan, blind, codex, and the fold book.

There are *compound* bindings, which are a combination of two simple bindings. Concertina binding, page 217, is a codex/fold book. The dos-à-dos, page 211, is two connected codices. Any dos-à-dos can also be thought of as a single Oriental fold book with side issues:

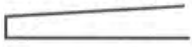
SKETCH NUMBER 2: two *folds in the same direction*

I fold another sheet of paper twice, this time both folds in the same direction. What do I see? My question ought to be, "Where did I make the folds?" How did I *determine* where to make the folds? I must not act without thinking. I may spontaneously respond and then think, but I cannot take for granted. I made the folds equidistant. What are the permutations of folding a sheet twice, with both folds the same direction? They are the following:

1. creating three leaves of equal width, folds equidistant:

2. creating three leaves, two of which are equal in width, the third much wider than of the total of the other two:

3. creating three leaves, two of which are equal in width, the third far narrower than either of the other two:



4. creating three leaves, two of which are equal in width, the third the width of the total of the other two:

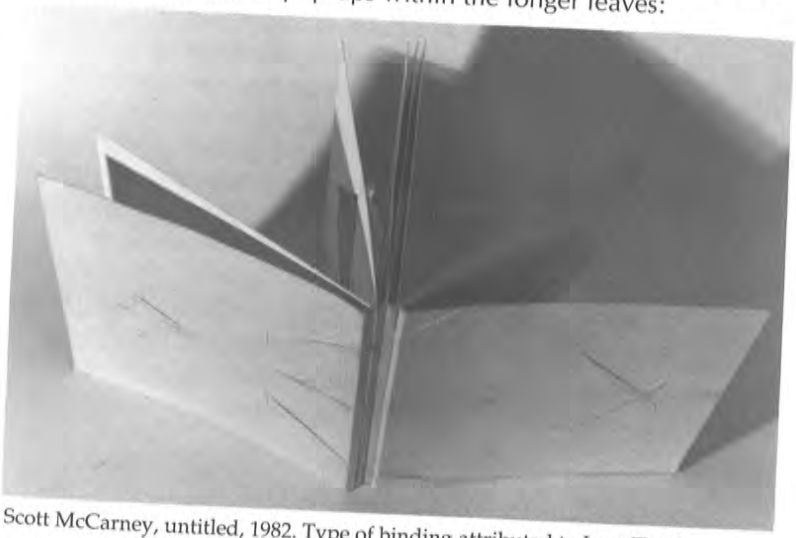
5. creating three leaves, each a different width:

Each of the five examples represents a compound binding, a codex/codex. What can you do with permutation 1, *equidistant folds* as a book? I might use this as units to be stacked and sewn. Each unit is a folio with a foredge throw-out:

Example 2 does not interest me, at least not as much as 1 and 4, because it does not completely hide the third leaf in the unit. There are more possibilities of content combination when the third page can be hidden by closing the other two. Opening and closing the pages allow some information to come forward while other imagery completely disappears. This permits the element of surprise.

I dismiss permutation number 5 because the action of the two hinges is limited. The movement is flawed because the longest leaf cannot be turned to rest within the opposing fold. The shortest leaf must always be positioned between the middle and the longest leaf.

Example 3 ═══ seems useless to me as well. It will not close flat, so I summarily dismiss it. However, some other bookmaker will take time to see, finding this to be the most ideal permutation of two folds as units for binding. The third shorter leaf would become part of the backbone rather than a leaf. The accumulation would swell the back deeper than the foredge accommodating fold-outs or pop-ups within the longer leaves:



Scott McCarney, untitled, 1982. Type of binding attributed to Joan Flasch.

In fact, example 3 has even more potential I have overlooked. Still another book artist would look at example 3 and see the shorter leaf as the foredge rather than the spine. Units would be compiled and bound at the opened ends of the longer leaves:

Rather than assuming the binding of the units should be a codex, Lisa LaLonde has bound the units as a fan book, allowing the units to telescope open to a tunnel formation, and collapse shut.

Lisa LaLonde, *They Say*, self-published 1990.

In "turning" the pages, partially telescoped units overlap. At certain points in this movement a partial image on one unit is completed by the remainder of that picture on another. At these same points, incomplete text on one leaf is completed on the next. This creates precise points of pause positioning the leaves in the act of examining the structure.

Pages create their content.

Example 4 is a potentially strong format. Like example 1, this hybrid could also be stacked as units and sewn. However, in compiling and sewing, units lose their original character. Now, it becomes a book with every other leaf short, alternated by a longer leaf with a fold-out. The pages of such a book do not evoke or extend the essence of the unit:

I must take time to investigate example 4 for the quality of the single unit. Observation takes great effort. The artist is aware more than most that all of us are blind. We only truly see at brief points of inspiration. One way of seeing the unit is as two facing codices with a large back page in common. The two front pages are equal in width and tangent.

Tangent is the key, for it is the essence of this format, a feature unique to all the examples. What does it mean? Tangential pages offer two facing stages instead of one. But any codex opened to any point has two facing pages. This is the opened folio. However, example 4 has two hinges, compounding the action.

The two shorter pages can be imaged separately. One image or text can cross from one to the other page. Opening, that is turning either the right or left page, reveals half of what is on the third (or back) page. This half must function compositionally with the remaining front page which has not yet been turned, as well as with the back side of the page which has been turned. Opening the second front page will further complicate the movement basic to this format.

I see the potential of example 4 *not* as units to be compiled and sewn, but as a *what* to exploit the inherent movement of this format, which is the interplay of tangential pages. This format is referred to as *French Doors*. It is described on page 213.

Adding additional tangent pages to each facing codex extends the interplay of permutations.

1. *Related Volumes* One facing book can be viewed while the other remains closed. It is a play in two acts. Or, instead of two related volumes, the two might be a before and an after or an either/or concept.

At every point in turning the pages of one volume while the other remains closed, each opened folio must incorporate or juxtapose with the closed cover of the unopened book.

2. *Implied Single Volume with Double Opened Folio* Both books can be viewed simultaneously like opening double French doors. Both covers are opened at once, both first pages are opened at the same time, et cetera. This sets up a series of compositions across the four panels of the two opened folios.

3. *Interacting Volumes* The two books can be seen alternately, intermittently randomly, turning one or more pages first of one book, then the other. Compositionally, this requires every possible permutation of combined imagery and/or text.

The artist and the craftperson must always find the essence of an idea and extend it to its full potential. It's like telling a joke. You don't reveal the punch line at the beginning. You build on it for all it's worth.

Bookbinding is not a mindless task of rote repetition. Bookbinding as an art is severely limited if it is after the fact, rather than part of the statement.

I tell myself to

take another sheet of paper.
think of what you are holding.
think as you are *folding*.
think as you.
think.

The essence of refining a binding is getting it down to bare necessities.

TRIADS

When I think about bookbinding, I cannot determine *how to* without addressing, again and again, the question, *why?*

Why must be answered before *how to* can become meaningful.

What is needed will determine *how.*

It is one thing to learn mechanically how to sew a particular binding. It is much better to begin binding from a far more fundamental approach in order to see the process in its simplest terms, for only then can the imagination leap to invent the complex.

What is meant, what can be bent to be seen as the term *binding*? The most obvious answer is to dwell on the various means of constructing an order of pages.

Binding is the activity of folding down and/or attaching to. One sheet can be folded to construct a book. Various ways of folding and cutting will create different bindings which allow longer journeys and other itineraries through the format.

Sewing and adhesives are obvious ways of connecting. What about interlocking slits, weaving pages together, hinges, pockets, snaps, grommets and velcro?

What is the most obscure, seemingly irrelevant definition of basic terms for sheet, cover, adhesive, sewn and bound? Terms must be defined, but not confined; they must be expanded. The first tools to pick up are not a bone folder and needle, but time, thought, pencil and notebook.

Yet, for others, it is best to jump right in and make a binding so that the product encourages continuation. Later comes introspection on how to approach the concept of binding.

NUMBER GAME

Understanding ways of attachment in bookbinding may not come from making lists *or* hands-on labor. At times I take an indirect approach to a problem. One way is by equation. I think of the book in numerical divisions:

The number one concern is the totality of a realized book. Orchestration is not possible without each element relinquishing sovereignty to its union.

When I think of the number two, many pairs come to mind: recto/verso; text and pictures; space and movement; planned itineraries and random reading. Order and chaos are intertwined. The preconceived is balanced by the intuitive. There is the shelved book-as-receptacle, with its latent content in opposition to the book coming to life as it is read. There are practical as well as aesthetic concerns. If I had to choose the most basic two-of-a-book, it would be the content and how its order is maintained, displayed, revealed, protected and properly stored. This is its binding. Content plus binding equals book. That does not mean binding and content are of equal value. Binding serves content.

Three-of-a-book is an easy answer for me:

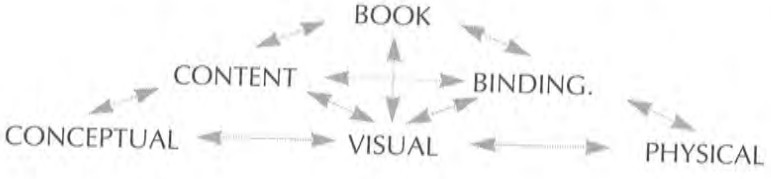
- Concept of the content and binding.
- Visual aspects of both.
- Physical needs of the object.

The BOOK is organized.

The order of the CONTENT is maintained by the BINDING. Each is revealed through

CONCEPTUAL VISUAL and PHYSICAL transitions.

There are many paths that can be taken through this pyramidal hierarchy:



Visual:

BOOK is centermost.

concern in the

The VISUAL

Conceptual: BOOK.

of the

determines the CONTENT

CONCEPTUAL

Physical: BOOK

the

BINDING

aspect of

The PHYSICAL

The book, constituted by everything in the pyramidal hierarchy, is always top and center, the totality and must dominate. Each decision on any element within is subordinate to the realized book. If the binding dominated, the book would be superficial. If conceptual, visual and physical organization were not considered, the content of text and/or pictures would be merely a compilation of islands, rather than an orchestrated totality.

It would appear that at one extreme, the content is quite separate from the process of binding. For me, nothing could be farther from ideal. I sometimes think about the *physical object.* There is concrete space between words and/or pictures. Movement is constructed through content, which determines the rate of turning pages.

At other times I think about *conceptual approaches.* There is the implied space within ideas of simple or complicated content. This requires creating a binding structure which can best facilitate revelation of the content. The itinerary may be straightforward, convoluted, cyclical, or overlapping. At times, this requires an unique, non-traditional binding.

Still, other times I concentrate on *visual concerns.* Do I want to work with the book as spartan or elaborate, use a range of materials or processes, texture, pattern? To what extent do I want emphasis on graphic design, typography, the layout of the pages?

It quickly becomes clear that any visual concern is also a concern for conceptual ideas and the physical object. Modifications of the physical object affect the conceptual and visual aspects.

Whatever I conceive determines the look of the end-product. Although one element may dominate, the physical, conceptual and visual decisions are interwoven. Each of the three areas speaks of both content and binding. That is why it is farce not to consider the binding until after the contents are completed. Each element of the hierarchal pyramid is essential and interdependent:

Binding: In the display of a BOOK

CONTENT is facilitated by its BINDING which relies upon the

CONCEPTUAL to materialize the VISUAL as form, and upon the PHYSICAL

to function as *ACTION*.

Content: The BOOK is ideal

when CONTENT is served by the proper BINDING to reveal

CONCEPTUAL as well as VISUAL, and sometimes PHYSICAL

transitions.

Movement

Some people could relate the pathway through content to ideas found in cinema or patterns in dance; but for me, I see so many parallel terms in musical composition.

Organization

Structure of the binding is similar to collage or a picture puzzle. The intended order of the content is maintained, or can be reconstructed. A stack or portfolio dropped, like a raw egg, is irretrievable. Binding and content are movement and structure. As Gary Frost of ***Book****lab*[1] says, it is the-book-as-action.

This brings me back to thinking on the most simple basic level of what is meant by maintained: glued, sewn, folded, interlocked, bound and layered information: sheets, covers, text, images.

In collage, puzzles and binding, maintaining is a concern for attaching or interlocking. Unlike collage, the binding must allow access to the layered information – attached single sheets or the introduction of folded sheets. This is the concern for action.

One of my favorite artists is John Wood. He makes books and collages among other things. John sometimes gives workshops in collage and stresses ways of attaching. Gluing is an obvious solution. The activity of investigating attaching disparate elements demonstrates how function affects form. This is true in collage; it is equally true in physically inventive binding procedures.

The physical action in proficient binding of traditional formats influences the content. Unique means of attachment result in a binding which alters content: subject matter, mood and pacing. Non-traditional formats offer more radical opportunities of binding/imaging. Physical movement through the object may not take a straight path because of folds other than at 90°, or because of compound hinging. Hybrid bindings require new ways of seeing and rethinking itineraries through a book. See pages 208-9.

Dwelling upon numerical divisions to define a book, I do not make it past the number three. Just as well. If I got much higher it would mean I was not allowing my imagination time to become engrossed in order to find that for which I am searching.

AGGRESSIVE BOOKBINDING

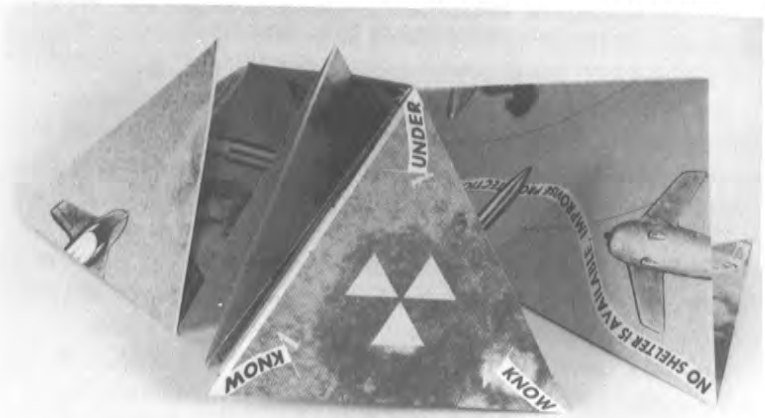
The best bindings are more than craft which facilitates turning pages and providing a protective cover. Bindings should never be an afterthought; they are not independent of content.

If the binder is not the author, care must be taken that the binding is appropriate to style, mood and intentions of content. The binding should not be intrusive. It should not be too much nor too little. That is the advice of the renowned accompanist Gerald Moore. He says that in German lieder the piano is an equal with the singer. Sometimes he is accused of drowning the singer, but he replies that the piano must support the voice, creating a duet. Balance is the art of the accompanist. Not too much, not too little. And so it is with binding.

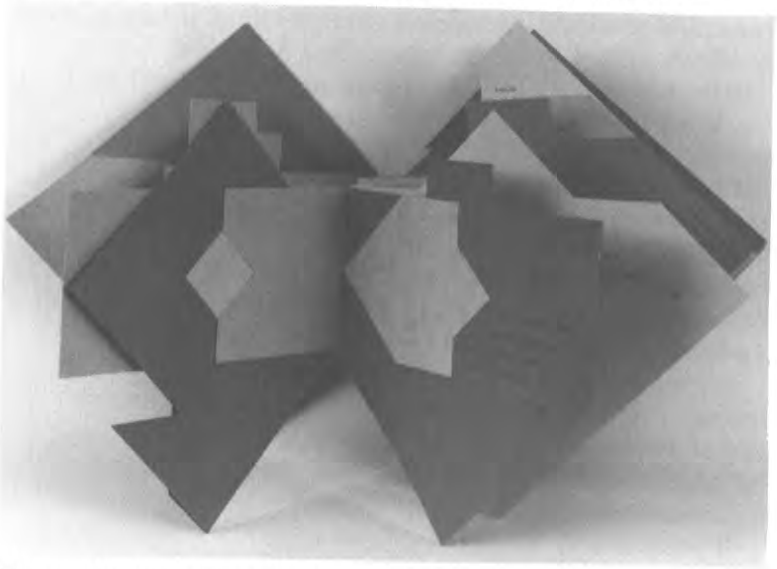
If the binder *is* the author, or works in collaboration with the author, there is far more leeway. Binding becomes a broad horizon of potential. In producing a new book as opposed to re-binding an existing one, content and binding evolve simultaneously in a give-and-take situation.

Binding ideally is an integral part of the total experience, an element of the content, part of the statement. Mass-produced or one-of-a-kind, a binding should at least work in harmony from conception to finished piece.

Binding should be more than just appropriate. Sometimes, imaginative approaches to binding influence and reinforce content. In the ultimate collaboration, binding determines content.



Scott McCarney, *In Case of Emergency:*, Nexus Press, 1984. Two intersecting fold books are pamphlet stitched together. Pages are folded on a 60° angle to further compound the itinerary through the book. The complication of reading reinforces the subject matter–evacuating a large city in case of nuclear attack.



Margaret Kaufman, *Aunt Sallie's Lament*, Janus Press, 1988 Book design by Claire Van Vliet based on a binding structure developed by Hedi Kyle and made with Linda Wray. Box is by Judi Conant. The spine strap can be removed. The codex transforms into a fold book, allowing all the pages to be seen at once.

VOLUME I

NON-ADHESIVE BINDING

BOOKS WITHOUT PASTE OR GLUE

KEITH A. SMITH