

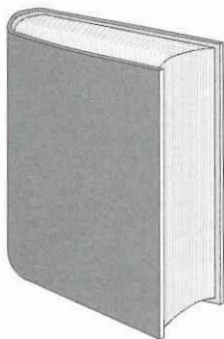


# THE BOOK AS PHYSICAL OBJECT

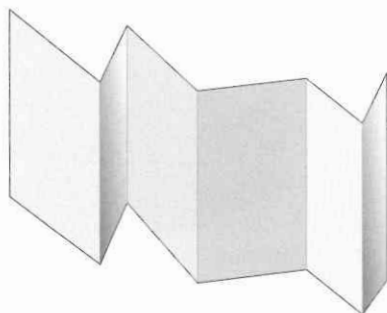
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## TYPES OF BOOKS

I pick up a book. I am holding a bound manuscript. It might be a western codex, an oriental foldbook, a fan, or a Venetian blind.



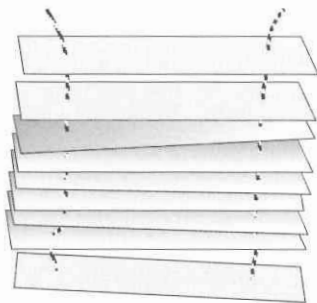
western codex



oriental fold book

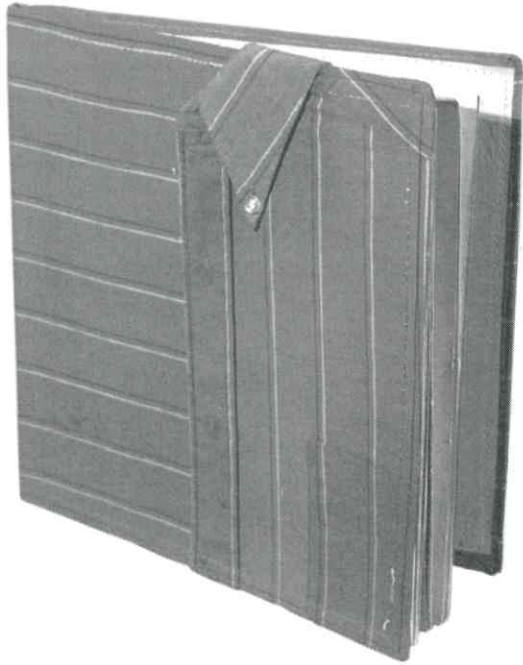


fan

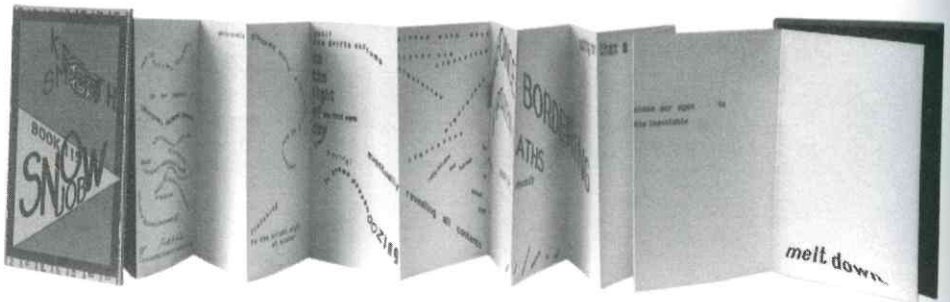


Venetian blind

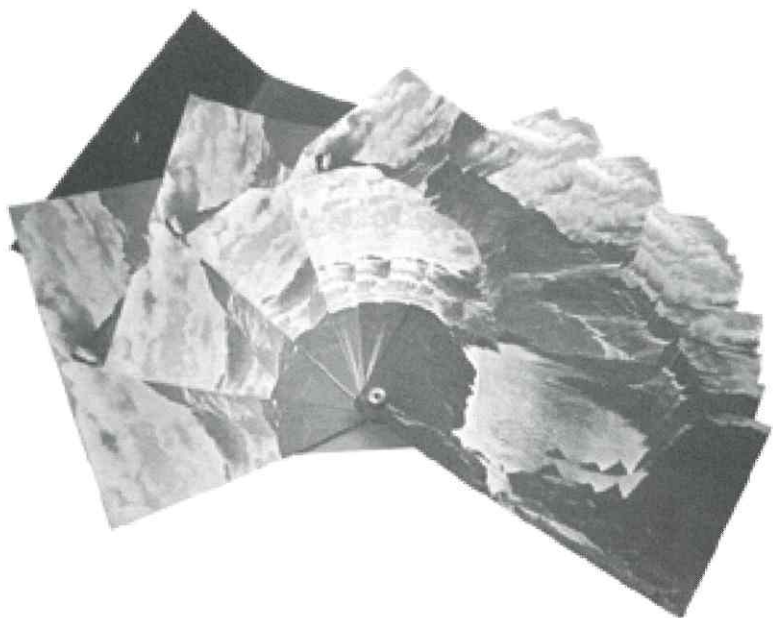
These are the type of books used by various cultures. All are a set of sheets (paper, wood, ivory, cloth, etc.) strung or bound together. The type of book is determined by how it is bound: at one or two points, along one of more edges.



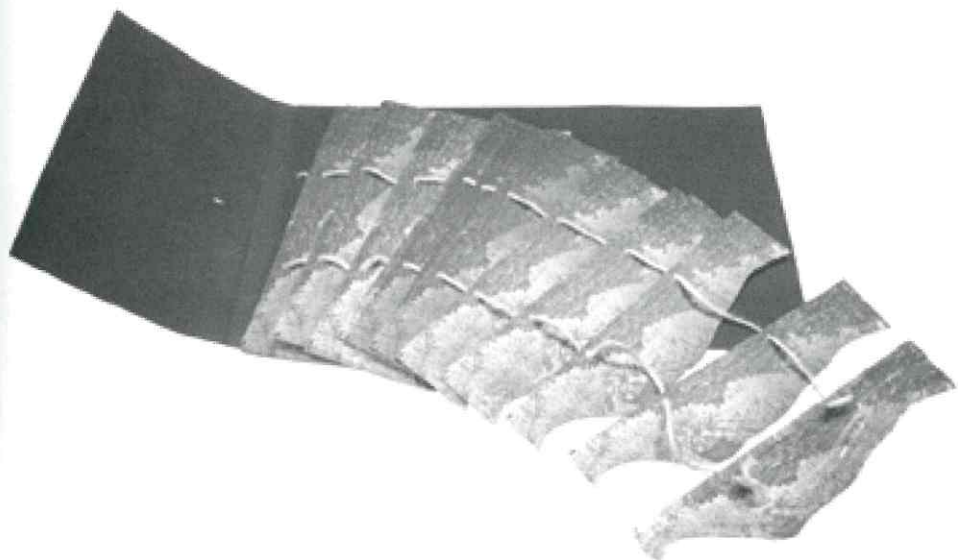
Keith Smith, *Book 27*, 1973: a western codex. One-of-a-kind. 29 x 29 x 1 cm.



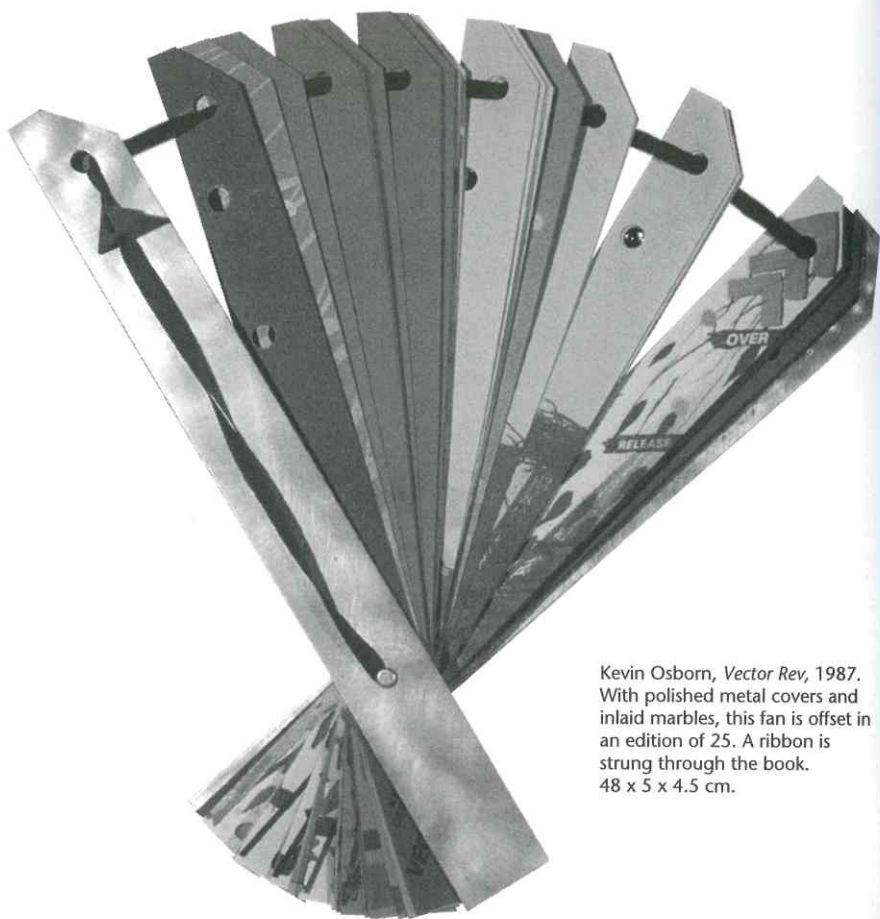
Keith Smith, *Snow Job*, *Book 115*, 1986: an oriental foldbook, edition of 300. Poem of a spring thaw is really speaking of a nuclear meltdown. 15.7 x 11.5 x 2.5 cm.



Joan Lyons, Untitled, 1975: a fan. 17.5 x 20.5 x 1 cm.



Joan Lyons, Untitled, 1975: a blind (or Venetian blind). 17.5 x 20.5 x 1 cm.



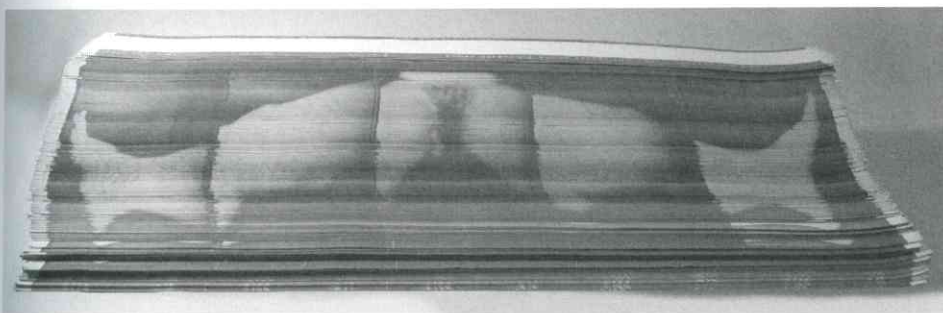
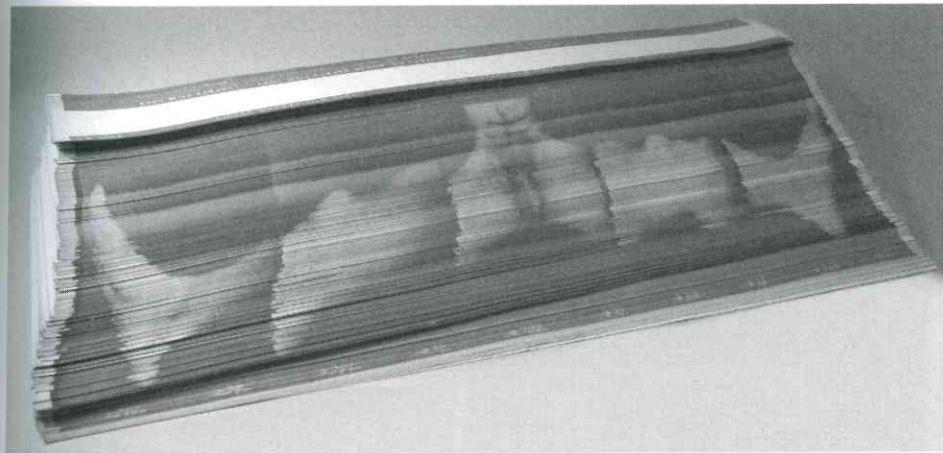
Kevin Osborn, *Vector Rev*, 1987.  
With polished metal covers and  
inlaid marbles, this fan is offset in  
an edition of 25. A ribbon is  
strung through the book.  
48 x 5 x 4.5 cm.

### GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH A BOOK

The best approach to gain a sense of the book is to become acquainted with the book as physical object. Pick up a book, hold it. Feel it. Look at it, then examine it, not routinely or mechanically by habit but make a conscious effort to see at every step in the process, every movement of the eyes or hands.

I often pick up a book and go through this process. I use a blank book so that I am not seduced by this picture or distracted by that composition or those words. I make note of my findings—the elaborate meanderings of my imagination and specific written lists of what to investigate on a physical level in books-as-sketches. I have learned not to take anything for granted. The procedure I am describing can't be learned by reading. It must be experienced. And so I examine a book.

Does a book have to be bound? If it weren't, it would be a portfolio or a stack. Is a stack an unbound book?



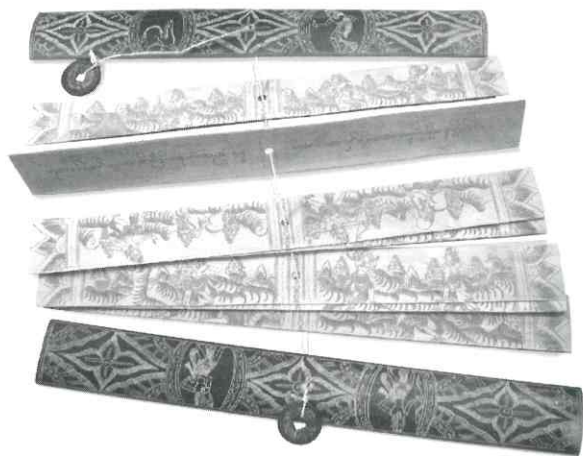
Conrad Gleber, untitled stack of variable size sheets printed offset, 1976. Jogging the stack at the top gives a male image, above. Jogging at the bottom reveals a female, below.

The oriental foldbook is created by folding a long sheet of paper alternately back and forth on itself. There is no sewing or gluing. The binding is mechanical. If an imaged book of this type were not folded, it would be a mural, not a book. However, if that mural is stored by rolling, it is a scroll. Is a scroll a book?

If I make a photograph that is a foot tall and 10 feet long, the result is a single picture. If I roll it up to store it, is it then a scroll, or does it have to be conceived as a scroll? Does convenient storage constitute any book?



This piece was purchased from EBAY with the description of an archaic jade scroll, but technically, it is a Venetian blind since the slats are strung together with two cords. Neither does it roll up in the manner of a scroll. Brown jade, it has incised Chinese text. My godchild, Alpha Lillstrom, speaks and reads Mandarin and Cantonese, but some of the characters are too old for her to translate. 17 x 29.5 x .5 cm.



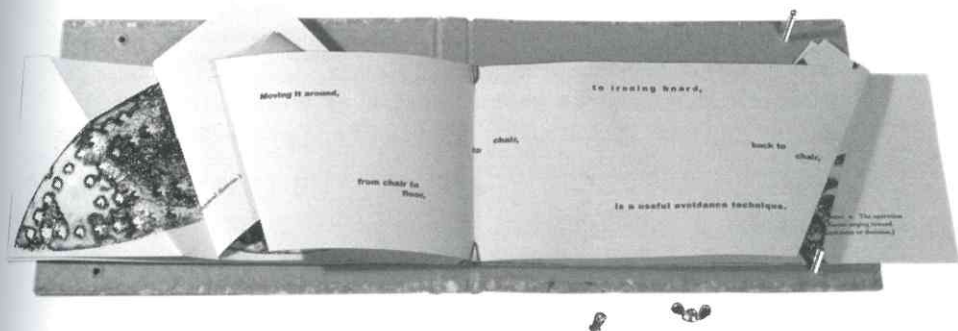
Anonymous nineteenth century fan from Bali. Covers are incised wood; the pages are palm leaves. 25 x 3 cm.



Nancy Brandt, *Pressed*, edition of 15.

"I like the page imaged by a hand iron. The long pages have been folded at arbitrary angles and protrude from the closed cover. Solarplate is a variation of polymer plates, somewhat thinner, and less demanding than polymer plates in terms of density of light resists for making exposures. It's a similar UV exposure, water developing system, and positive artwork will yield an intaglio-type plate. The iron images in *Pressed* were done using these plates: the artwork came from scanning the soleplate of an iron and fiddling around with it in Photoshop, outputting to laser acetate, then exposing the Solarplate."

—email from Nancy Brandt



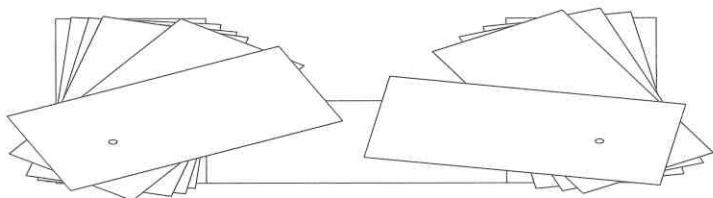
Someone takes a large sheet of blank paper, wads it up, then throws it in a kitchen trash compactor. It is then compressed flat. The paper has been "folded" by a machine. Is it then an oriental foldbook, or is it trash?

It depends upon intention. If that person declares it a book, it is a book! If they do not, it is not. See *Refuse Revisited*, page 260. Definitions are not ageless laws, but current understanding. They grow with usage through insight and error. We extend our knowledge, as well as our false assumptions, and both of these change the way we see, the way we think. Our definitions evolve; they are not cut in stone, like the rigidity of religion.

The theologian, politician or athlete can justly ask, "How can you play fairly when you change the rules in the middle of the game?" But in science and art one must play by the rules as they *currently* stand. Rules are constantly changing. When a new theory is proven in science, all laws previously assumed which conflict with the latest belief must be thrown out. Laws must be re-written to conform with the new theory. A map of the flat earth is useless once our planet is perceived as a globe.

If a book is bound, what are the possibilities?

Must a book be bound completely across one edge? Bound at one point, it is a fan; bound at two, a blind.

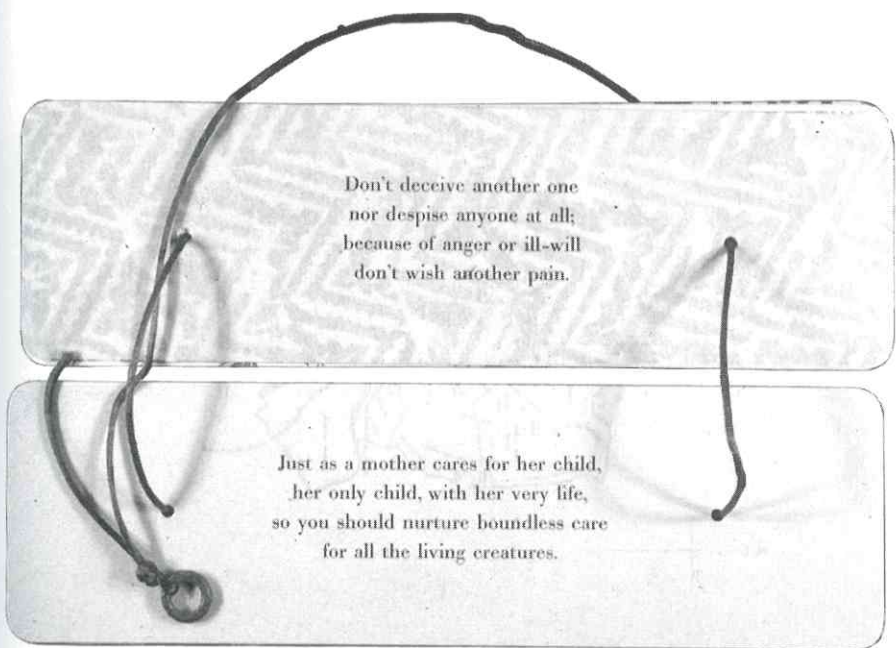


Not necessarily. A fan can have a compound binding. With one sheet in common, a fan can be bound at each end. Two volumes can be separate, obliquely related, or pairs of pages can complete across tangential pages. See *Parisian Encounters*, page 58 and *In the Light of Passing*, page 100.



Archaic Jade Scroll, 14 character plaques with two ending plaques with phoenix birds. The dollar is to give context of scale. 17.8 x 30.5 cm.

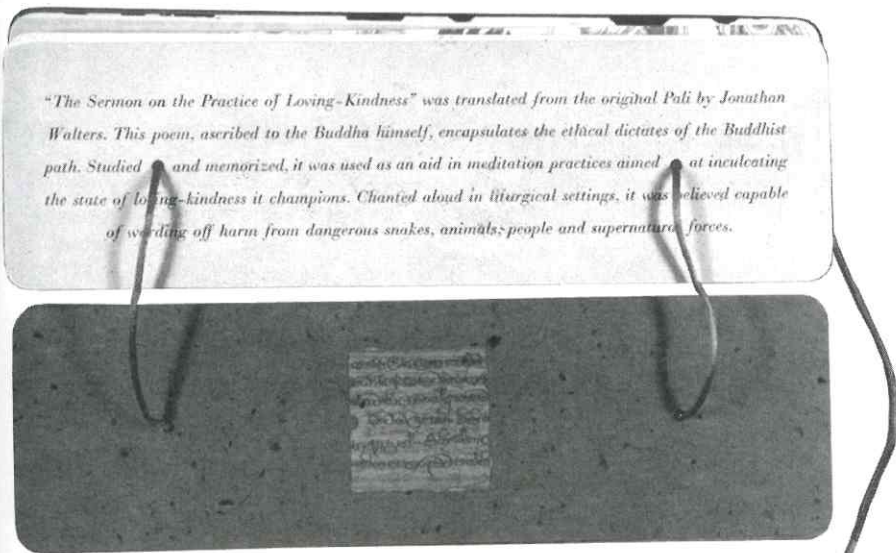




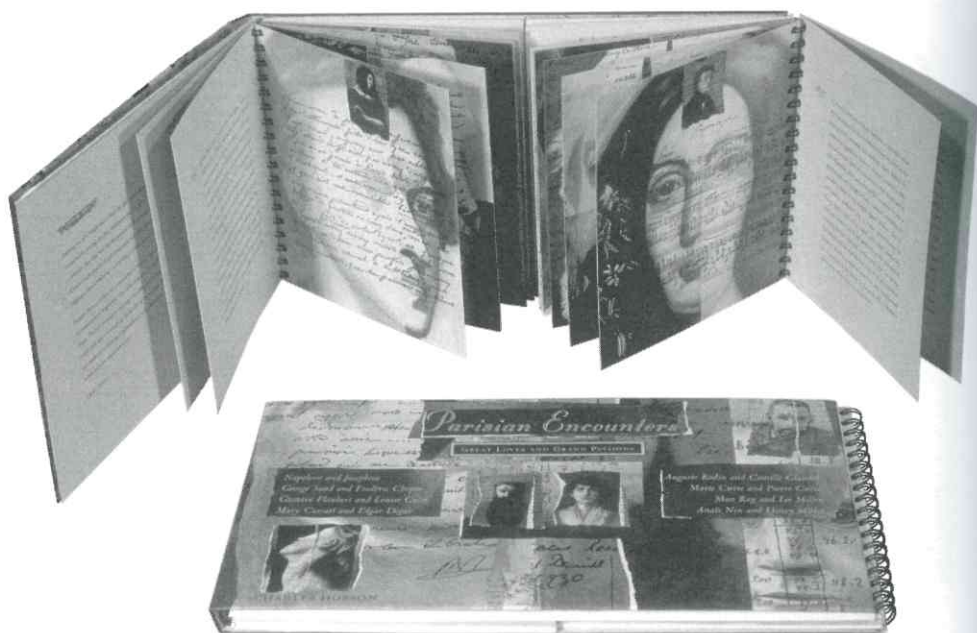
Don't deceive another one  
nor despise anyone at all;  
because of anger or ill-will  
don't wish another pain.

Just as a mother cares for her child,  
her only child, with her very life,  
so you should nurture boundless care  
for all the living creatures.

Above and below:  
Barbara Tetenbaum, *Sermon on the Practice of Loving Kindness*, 1995. Venetian blind.  
Letterpress and collage. 7.5 x 25.5 cm.



*"The Sermon on the Practice of Loving-Kindness" was translated from the original Pali by Jonathan Walters. This poem, ascribed to the Buddha himself, encapsulates the ethical dictates of the Buddhist path. Studied and memorized, it was used as an aid in meditation practices aimed at inculcating the state of loving-kindness it champions. Chanted aloud in liturgical settings, it was believed capable of warding off harm from dangerous snakes, animals, people and supernatural forces.*



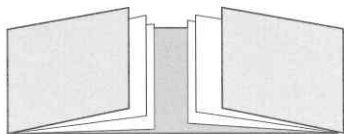
#### FRENCH DOORS FORMAT

Charles Hobson, *Parisian Encounters*, Chronicle Books trade edition, 1994. 15 x 27.8 cm.

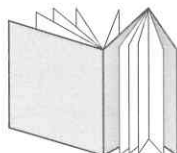
Must a codex be bound on only one side?

If a codex is bound back to back, it is a dos-à-dos. If it is bound on two opposing sides it is the French Doors format, which might have sheets tangent or interwoven allowing permutations in viewing order and contextual reference. Or, two separate, and separately bound books can be conceived to be displayed tangentially to allow reciprocation.

#### PAIRED CODICES



French Doors format



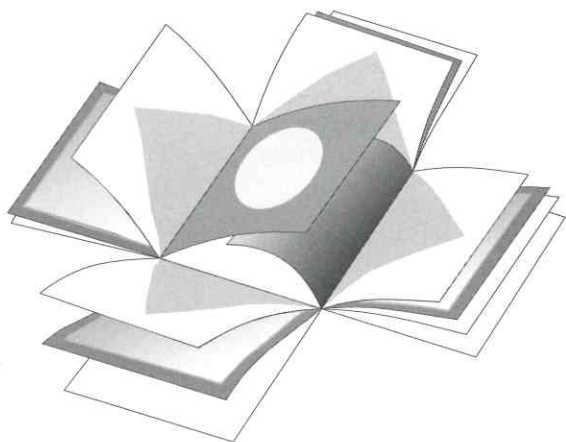
dos-à-dos



#### DOS-Á-DOS


Julia Leonard, Untitled dos-á-dos binding, 1997. 10.3 x 15.3 cm.


Dos-á-dos is a traditional format which displays two related volumes, such as the scripts for *A Day at the Races* and *A Night at the Opera*, or the *New and Old Testament*. The bindings have one cover in common. One volume is read; the object is turned over to read the remaining.



A codex bound on all four sides would have endless permutations of compound imagery/text across the five-page surface of the opened book.

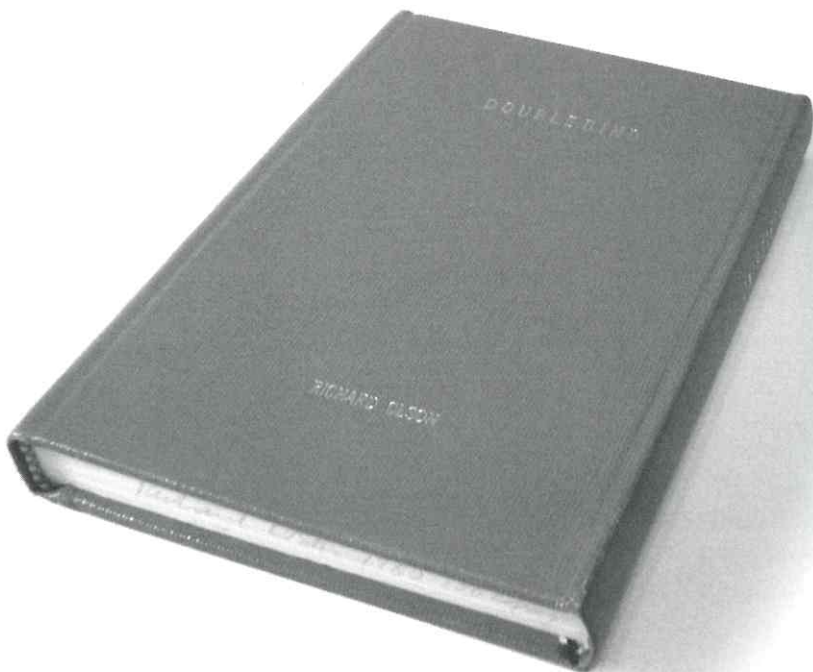
If a codex is bound on all four sides, how does the binding determine the imagery?

If I'm binding a fan, a Venetian blind or a codex, how many sheets must be bound before it is considered a book? Two? Three? If I fold a sheet of paper once, is the resulting folio  an oriental foldbook?

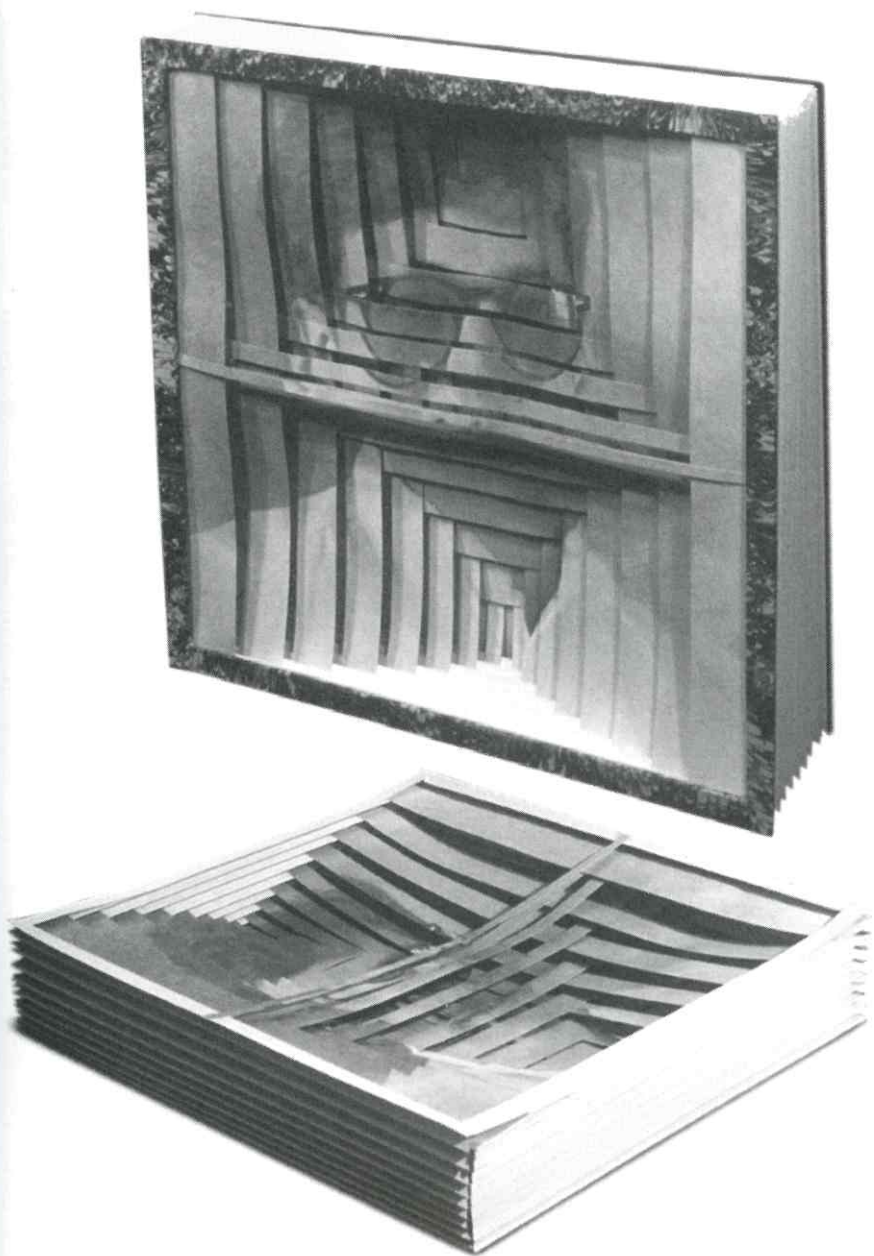
If I fold a sheet twice, is it a dos-à-dos? 

If a broadside is folded into quarters and then eighths, is it then a book instead of a poster?

I ask questions to broaden my knowledge of traditional concepts, not to hold them as dogma, but as a foundation from which I can depart.



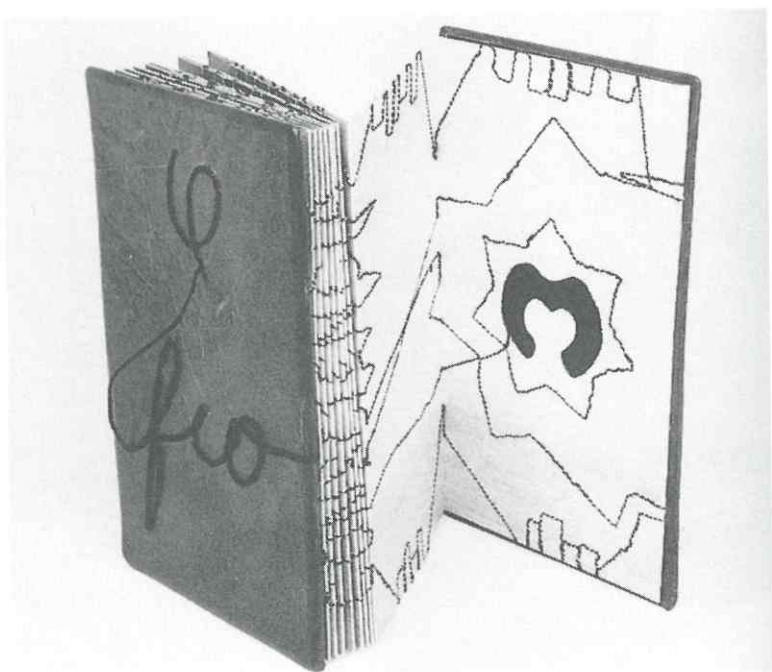
Richard Olson, *Double Bind*, Tongue Press, 1980. Edition of 100. Cased-in codex bound on the foredge as well as on the spine-edge. Signed and numbered on the tail. 18.5 x 13 x 2 cm. Unlike the book on the facing page, this book does not open.



Scott McCarney, *Untitled*, 1983. Foldbook bound on four sides. When this book is 'closed' (pleats compressed) the printed image dominates. When the book is extended, the image breaks up as the form, space and shadows become dominant. 32 x 32 x 2 cm.

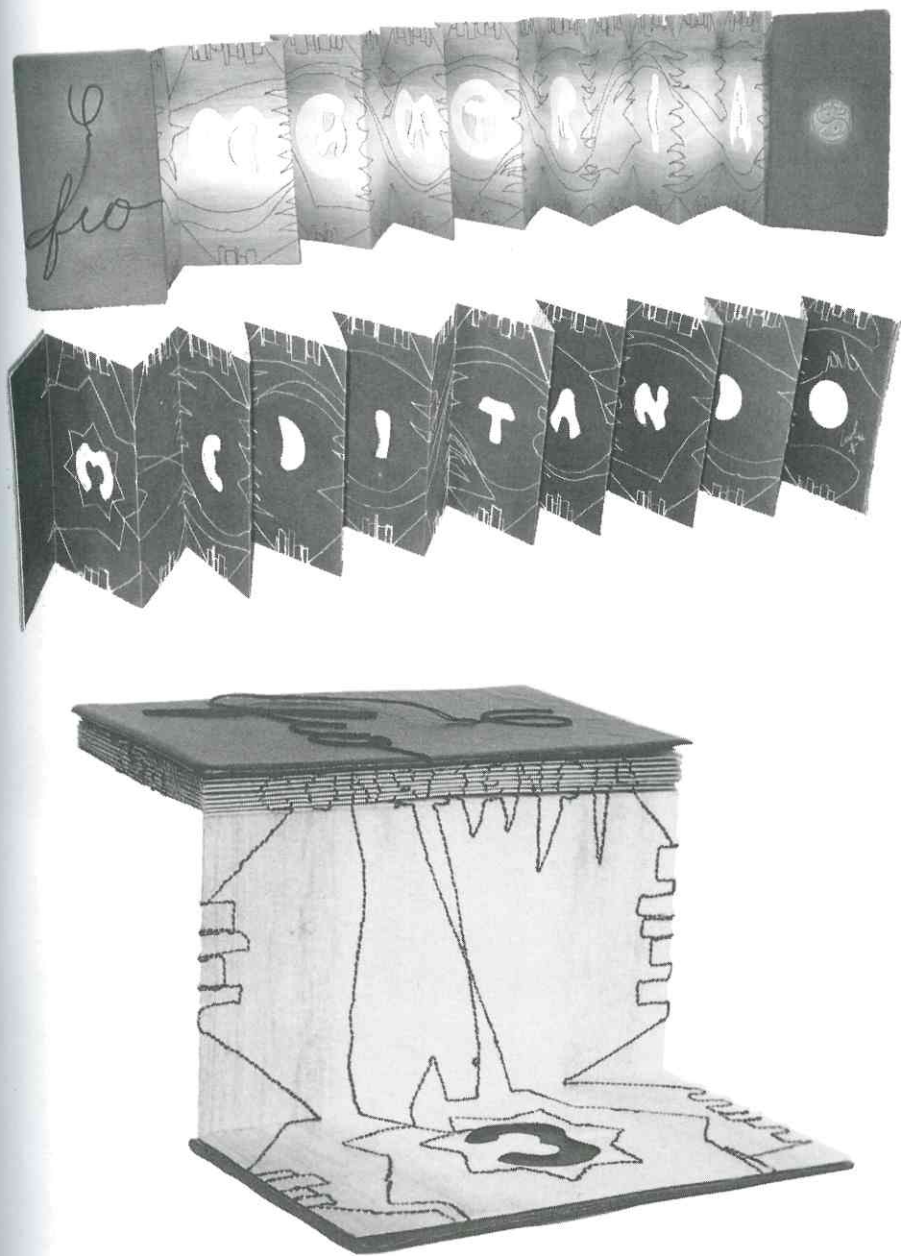
Definitions are not an end, but a springboard. Otherwise, they stifle the expansion of ideas. Without questioning, I would tend to repeat the same solutions, relying on simulated vision and residual concepts.

The French Door format is an unusual manner of relating two books, but the dos-à-dos is traditional. Two codices are bound with a back cover in common. One volume is read, turned over to the front cover of the other. Two related volumes, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are appropriately bound in this manner.



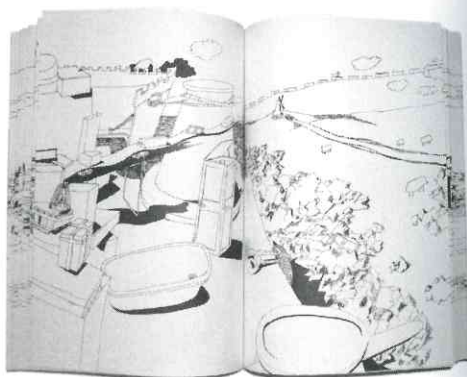
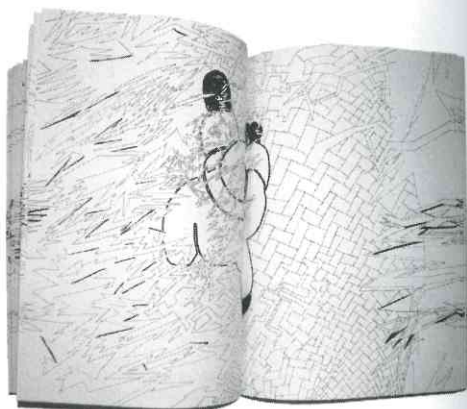
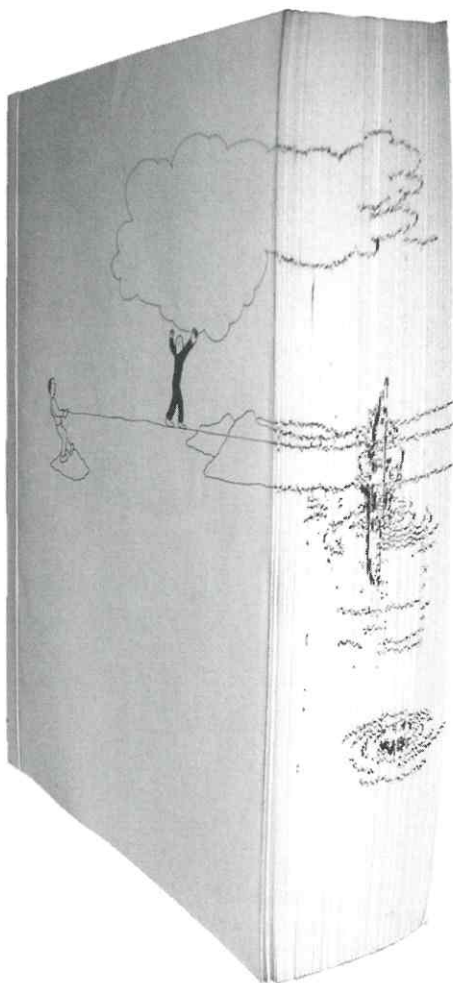
Above:  
Lucila Machado Assumpção, *O Fio*, (*The Thread*) 1990. The "drawing" across the pages of this foldbook appears to be imaged randomly by a sewing machine. When the book is closed, the threads visible on the folds regiment into words.

Top of facing page:  
One side of the sewn foldbook *O Fio* says *MEDITANDO* (*MEDITATING*). The other side says *MEMORIA* (*MEMORY*).



Lucila Machado Assumpção, *O Fio*, 1990. When the book is closed, the threads dot the folds to form a word on each side of the depth of the book block: *une* (*one, unites*); *consciencia* (*consciousness*); *verso* (*verse*; and *subtil* (*subtle*).

Thumb inserts on the foredge of a dictionary are a precise key to what is inside. Compare the Brazilian book on the previous page with the Netherlandish book below. Both dot the foredge with lines which extend as drawing on each page in the book. The former coalesces as foredge text; the latter completes the cover drawing. The foredge of each, although connected to the interior is not a key, as in foredge thumb inserts.

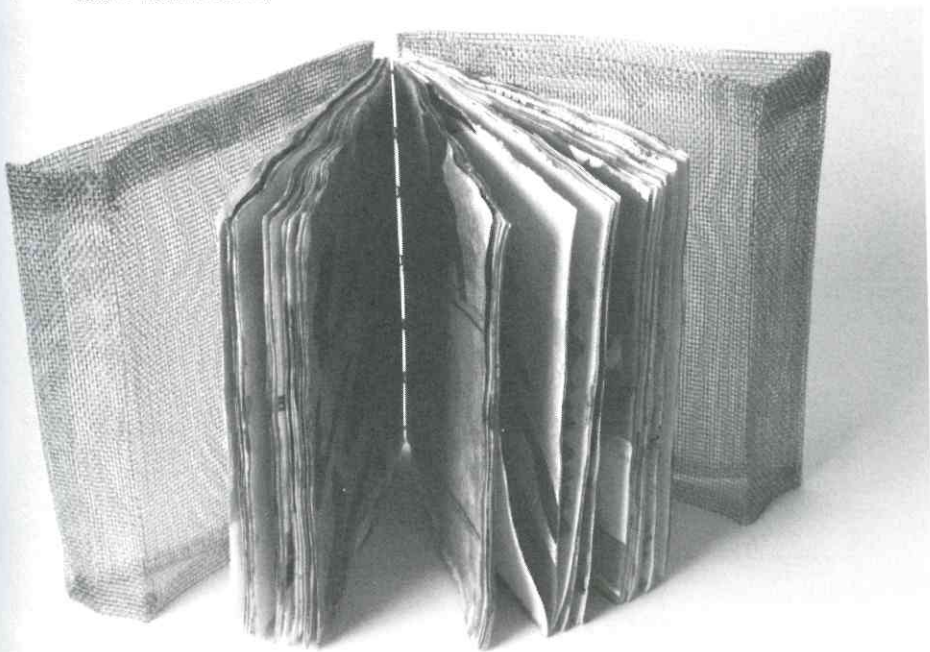


Jan Voss, *Detour*, Boekie Woekie, Amsterdam, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, Köln, 1989. 1000 copies, signed and numbered. 23.5 x 17 x 4 cm.

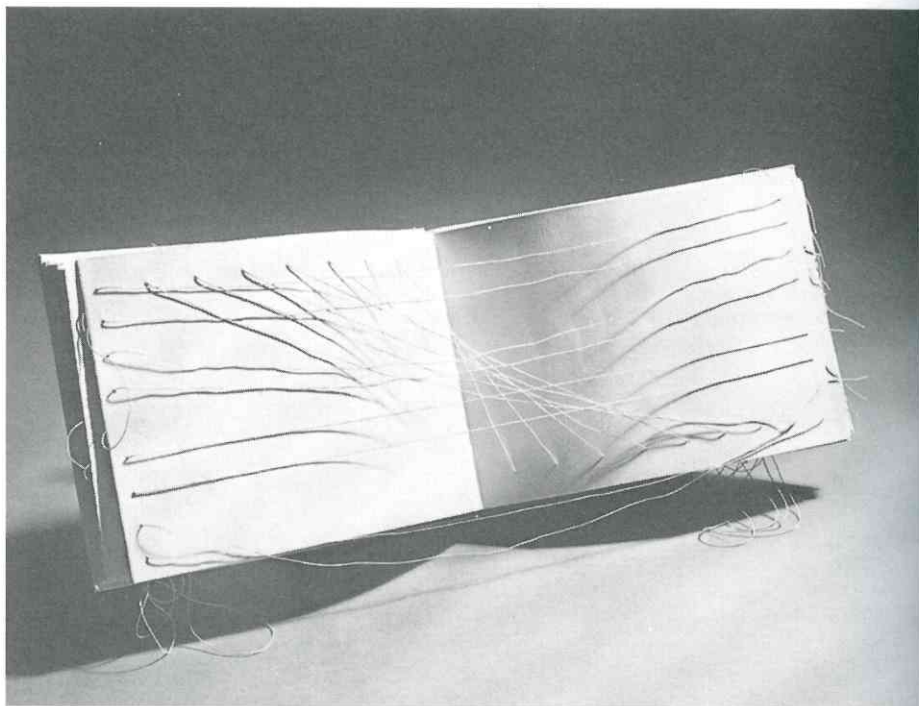




Pamela Spitzmueller Above: *Another Copper Book*, 1992. Copper book pleat-cover, copper supports and sewn with copper wire. 11.3 x 20.4 cm.  
Below: *Pleasure Studies*, 1992. Side-covers are wire mesh. 19 x 12.8 x 10.2 cm.



The book is a physical object. The hand-held book demands touching. Effort must be taken to view it. A print on the wall under glass has no volume, no shadows, little or no texture. It is not tangible. It is almost non-physical. To the extent it can be seen, it is physical, but it is closer to a conceptual idea, a vision. Whereas a book is three dimensional. It has volume (space), it is a volume (object). Some books emit volume (sound). See *In Search of Paradise—Night Vision*, scroll and codex, page 69; *The Rusty Plate*, page 70; *Not Flowing, Draining*, page 71; *Tamashi*, page 91.



Keith Smith, *Book 91, a string book*, produced and published by Space Heater Multiples, 1982. Variable tension in turning the strung pages paces the sequencing of this book visually and audibly. Sound is a minor concern. Punched holes reveal deep shadows. As each page is lifted, the dark holes throw circular spots of light across the facing page and the close environment of the book. The focus of these spots varies according to the distance from the page to the surface upon which they are cast. Like film-transparencies the composition of each page is compounded and altered by the addition of and movement of the shadow forms across the page. The sound, cast light and shadows and their focus and movement are not part of the physical book. They are physical, but they only come into existence during the act of experiencing the book, that is, turning the page. 25 x 36 x 2.5 cm.



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