

## **Books & Images – Art 441**

### ***Project 2: unique book***

Find an old book, at a used bookstore (Edward McKay) or elsewhere. Using this book as your source material, pick one of the topics below, and make both a unique artist's book exploring that topic.

- The book may be of any length, and of any size. - You may use both image and text.
- You can use any combination of the original book and new images, text, etc. as you choose, but the final product must engage the original book in some meaningful way. That is, don't use a single image from the original book in an entirely new creation. The idea is to transform what you've already got.
- You can use any combination of digital and physical processes that you want, but the final product must be a unique work—that is, not just a printed, reproducible book.
- The final book must be bound and finished, but the form of the binding is up to you.

### **Schedule**

*October 9:* maquettes and statement of intent due

***October 16:*** final critique: project and statement of fulfillment due

### **Topics**

All quotes are from Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

#### **Past – Authenticity**

"Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence...The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity...The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced...that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art."

With this project we are creating an "authentic" work, but one with no past yet. What is the relationship of this brand new object to the past—to its own subject matter, or to the history of artists' books?

*Sample problem:* Alter the original book so as to completely alter its original meaning—for instance, a love story into an ad brochure, a textbook into a book of poetry.

### **Present – Absorption**

“The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation [with art]...Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his final painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art. This is most obvious with regard to buildings.”

Most books we read are mass-produced; the absorption comes with our interaction with the subject matter, not with the book as an object. How does this interaction change with a unique book? Does our awareness of it as an object heighten our absorption, or lessen it? In a practical sense, does our experience of the book as an object change how we read the story that the book contains? *Sample problem 1:* create a book that operates in a different way than the typical linear page-bound book, such as an accordion-fold or a foldout.

*Sample problem 2:* Benjamin’s examples of modern ‘absorbed’ media are film and photography. Create a book that translates an absorbing experience in another contemporary mass medium (music, film) to a book.

### **Future – Durability**

“The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society.”

Benjamin was writing at a time of many conflicting predictions for the future, and for the effect of technology on human life. His view, and particularly his view of other people’s predictions, was pessimistic. In the event, though, there has been a backlash against the view of the future as a place of solely mass-produced experiences; our own project in hand-making a book is evidence. Have any of the many potential futures of Benjamin’s time come to pass? Could they still?

*Sample problem:* create a book as a manifesto or artist’s statement for your own practice, or for the practice of art/imagemaking in general.