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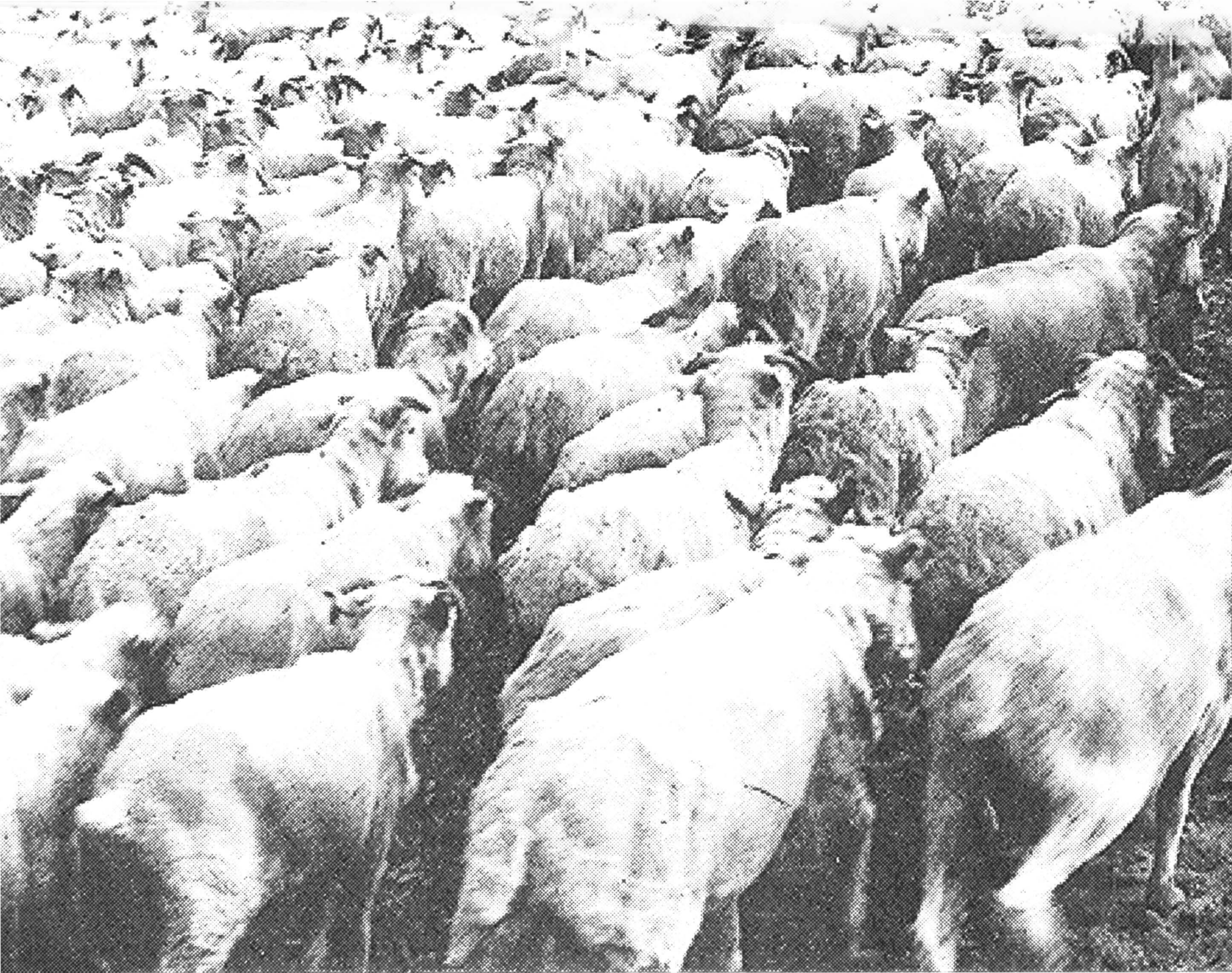
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**Synthesis as a Method for Elaboration**

*Exploration of the intersection between entities*

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8 July 1994



**Synthesis as a Method for Elaboration**

*Exploration of the intersection between entities*

POLLY JOHNSON

MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University 1994

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of the Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University

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## **A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S**

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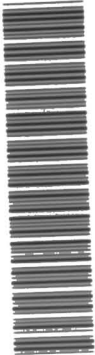
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One of the seven

daughters of  
Zeus

breath of inspiration

creative endeavor





P R O B L E M  
S T A T E M E N T

This thesis is the documentation of a **journey** through the **fluidity** of meaning, a **search** for relationships between entities, and the synthesis of those relationships. Selected encounters of Odysseus from The Odyssey of Homer have been extracted as a model for the development of an **elaboration** process for verbal and visual problem solving.

## A B S T R A C T

Before I began this thesis, I examined my previous work and a consistent quality emerged. I tended to assemble (synthesize) things (entities) that were seemingly unlike (disparate). I **questioned** my approach and its validity as a design methodology.

I found, through investigation into the nature of my **process** and the process of other artists and designers that specific methods of synthesis could be defined. In this thesis I have outlined three synthesis methodologies. They are not the only methods that exist, but were the ones I focused on for my thesis project.

After I defined these methods of synthesis and did visual and verbal explorations, the possibility of developing a process for generating visual and verbal content occurred to me. I was not sure what the effects of the process would be. It was not until after the thesis exhibition that I realized I had developed a process of elaboration.

For the thesis exhibition I created two and three dimensional exercises based on **visual+verbal** combinations. These studies were then applied for the purposes of the exhibition.

In this thesis I investigate ways **meaning** can be altered through the elaboration of semantic relationships. It is possible for a designer to enrich constructions of meaning if he/she understands how these relationships effect one another.

**Meaning** does not reside in isolated elements, but emerges through the **interpretation** of elements by the viewer. Each entity exists in relation to others. These relationships are in a constant state of **flux**. Consequently, we are always **interpreting** relationships to **understand our surroundings**. The relationships that exist between entities will be defined as **synthesis**.

Synthesis exists in personal **relationships** and in our desire to interpret and understand the world. It is an integral part of our everyday lives; politics, technology, society and culture all have an impact on how we perceive and interpret meaning.

Because **synthesis** is such a part of our psyche, it is a strong communicative catalyst. For the viewer it can **stimulate** the imagination, **encourage** participation, and pose **questions**.

The viewer is drawn in and asked to make a personal discovery.

Interpretation that is achieved through the synthesis of disparate entities

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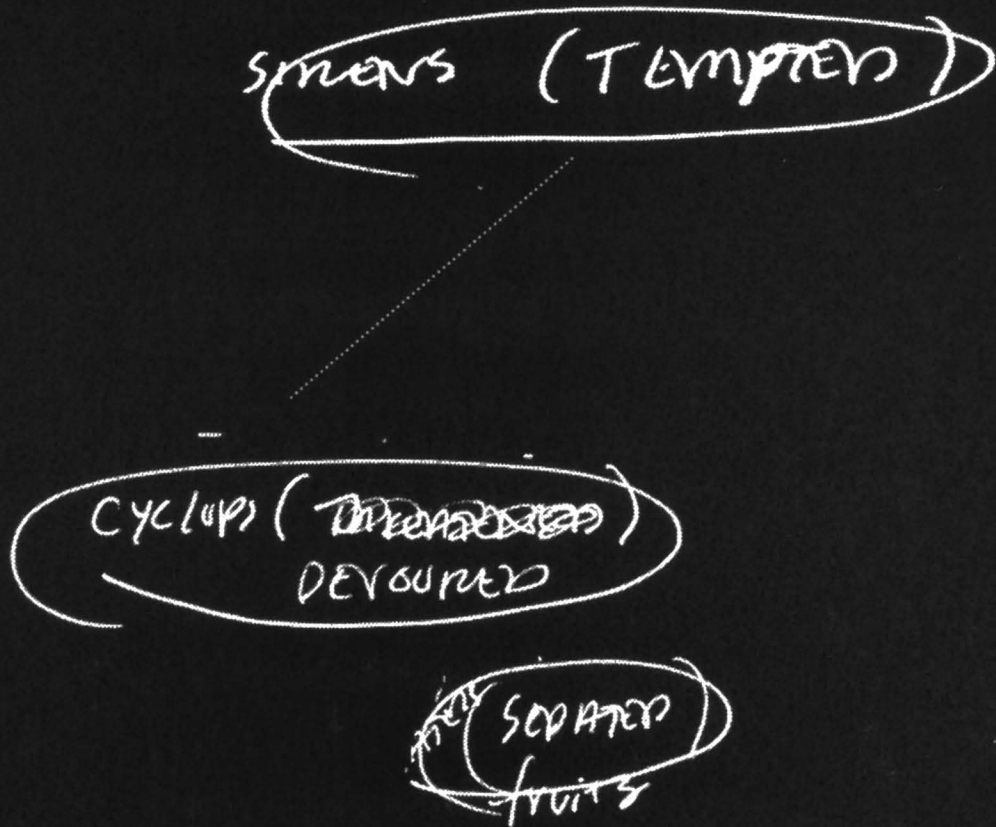
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S

can range from diverse levels of interpretation (open), to focused messages (closed). The visual communicator who carefully considers synthesis as a method for generating visual-verbal content can yield a solution that leaves room for the audience to experience multiple levels of **emotions** and **conclusions**.

**Synthesis** is a central aspect of all design methodology, but each designer approaches it in a unique way. When a designer consciously explores possibilities through the synthesis of disparate entities, solutions can emerge that raise questions rather than provide answers. The possibility for **unexpected** meanings to arise encourages a playful pursuit of problem solving. When combining **entities** room is left open for a designer to explore various avenues that can alter the course of a preconceived solution. When the entities are disparate there is greater potential for unexpected relationships to emerge because we are required to stretch beyond linear associations to making non-linear connections.





I used the following methods as a process for the elaboration of content: **juxtaposition** (entities placed next to one another), **integration** (entities combined into a unified whole), and **contextualization** (entities placed into an environment).

The process began with a search for synthesis in the narrative structure of the *Odyssey*. The presence of juxtaposition, integration, and contextualization in the narrative structure of the poem showed that these models of synthesis exist not only in the realm of visual messages, but in literature as well.

## O D Y S S E Y

The **space** between *what is*, and *what could be* is where the fluidity of meaning lies. Odysseus interested me because the separation he experienced from his family and home created a need for personal synthesis that led him on a **journey** back to Ithaca and his wife. Throughout the odyssey, Odysseus retained his homeward direction, but each situation he encountered redirected his course toward a successive encounter. Therefore in the context of my investigation he is an appropriate model for the **effects entities have on one another**.

The generation of visual materials for the thesis exhibition led me to the conclusion that a concept could move through a process of **variables** in much the same way as Odysseus. The elaboration process would result in variations that alter the designer's course from a preconceived or fixed direction toward more variable possibilities for problem solving.

VESSEL

Once the content was established I selected an object for the elaboration process. The "vessel" appeared in each passage of the poem either literally or as a metaphor. Because of the "vessel's" constancy and semantic range, it seemed a suitable concept for transformation.

In order to maintain a consistent thread linking throughout the process and exhibition, I felt it necessary to assign a structure for the arrangement and support of visual and verbal content. **Vessels** are rarely excavated in their entirety, but usually found as shards. Archaeologists synthesize these disparate fragments of information to **reconstruct** clues about people's lives during ancient **civilizations**. I define the reconstruction of **fragments** into a unified whole as the methodological structure retained throughout the visual studies.

After the structure was defined I began generating visuals through the process of elaboration. As I moved the visual · verbal content through juxtaposition, integration and contextualization, altered forms emerged.

CONSTANT

VARIABLE

D E L I M I T A T I O N

Section one of this thesis documents the research process that was used to generate visual components for section two.

The primary intent of the thesis exhibition was not to interpret the Odyssey, but to demonstrate synthesis as a method for the process of content elaboration. Because the poem was the content source, however, some interpretation fall-out naturally occurred.

This thesis is a **personal** exploration. I do not assume all designers work in this manner, or that the results I have found to be the only possibilities or solutions.

J U S T I F I C A T I O N

At the time I developed the content for the thesis exhibition I did not intend for the process to be used as an instructional **t o o l**. However I have since found the methodology beneficial in the classroom. When I encourage students to elaborate on content through synthesis, their solutions are generally more resolved and varied. The variety structured into the methodology provides an opportunity for students to tap into one method or another they find most natural for their own way of problem solving.

Rudolf Arnheim

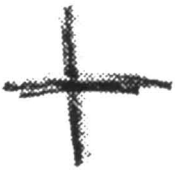
from the *important ones and warily watching the effects things have upon each other.*

M E S S A G E  
E X T R A C T I O N

After visuals are generated through synthesis, levels of meaning can be extracted from the visual-verbal information. The level of information a message contains is variable. **Density** of diverse information leans toward multiple **levels** of interpretation; less information has potential to be more focused. For example, clarity is imperative in hospital signage, due to the urgency involved in deciphering a message. In the American Red Cross logotype, meaning is denotative or explicit. The visual and verbal syntax relationship, (literally the crossing of two red lines) and the familiarity of the logo, create closure in the interpretation of meaning.

**Redundancy** and **distribution** reinforce **recognition** of the American Red Cross logotype by most everyone throughout the world. When the verbal information is removed, the sign becomes more fluid and subject to interpretation; it is no longer specific to the American Red Cross organization. The meaning of the sign can be altered depending on its context.

When an image has multiple levels of meaning, interpretation becomes more open. Because a viewer does not understand completely the creator's intent, interpretation comes more from the viewer's personal experiences.



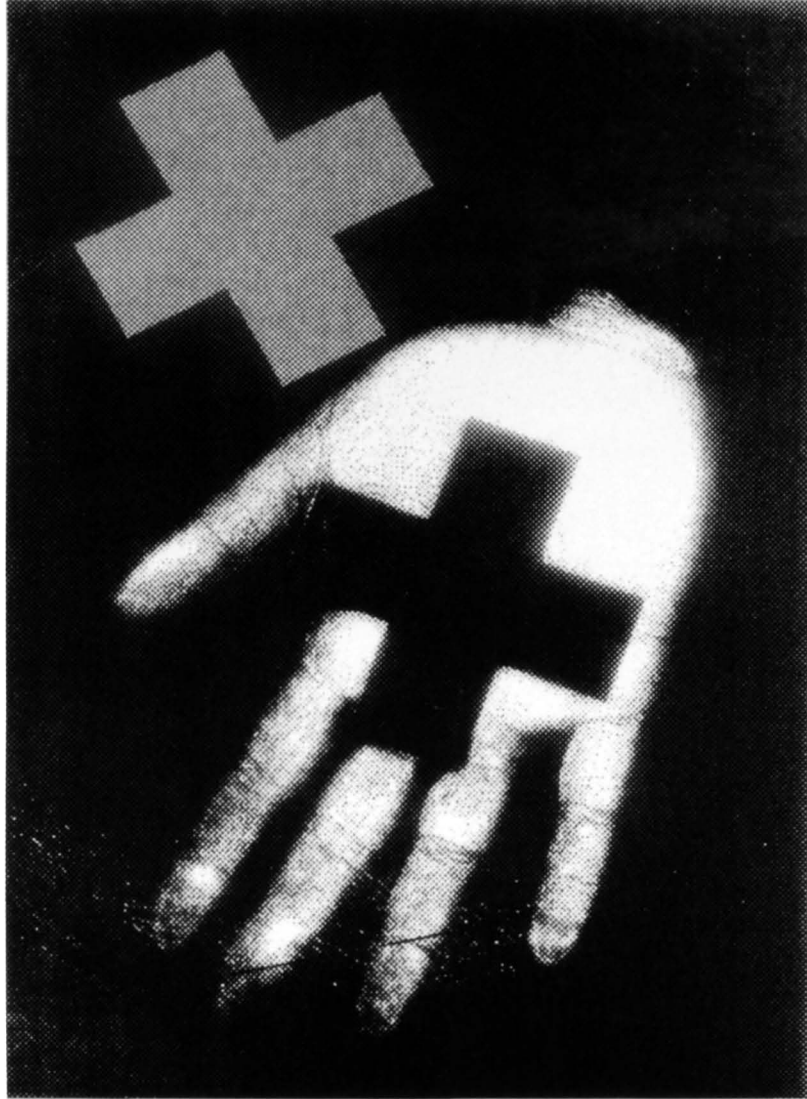


Figure 1

the clearer the message, the smaller the amount of information.

Umberto Eco<sup>2</sup>

# RECOGNITION



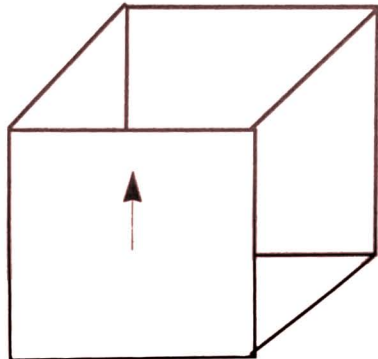
The meaning of a message is a function of the order, the conventions, and the redundancy of its structure. The more one respects the laws of probability the clearer and less ambiguous its meaning will be.



# REDUNDANCY

American  
Red Cross

# DISTRIBUTION



# DISORDERED

# IMPROBABLE

S  
U  
B  
J  
E  
C  
T  
I  
V  
E

the more improbable, ambiguous, unpredictable, and disordered the structure,  
the greater the information—here understood as potential, as the inception of possible orders.

Umberto Eco <sup>3</sup>

# AMBIGUOUS



figure 2







S Y N T H E S I S I N  
T H E O D Y S S E Y

BEAUTY    D E S T R U C T I O N

S I R E N S



F O L L O W THE PICTORIAL TRADITION <sup>4</sup>

M Y T H



The lack of direct **contact barred** the way to an expansion of geographical and ethnological knowledge. <sup>5</sup>

The following diagrams demonstrate how synthesis occurred in the narrative structure of The Odyssey.

**juxtaposition**

Residing on the rocks, the sirens lure passing sailors to death and destruction with their seductive voices. Juxtaposition alone does not necessarily constitute a relationship. If Odysseus had passed the sirens and they were not singing, or if he had filled his ears with wax, a relationship would not have emerged. There must be a catalyst between entities in order for relationships to emerge through juxtaposition. These catalysts could be similarities, polarities, or cause and effect relationships. The sirens' voices (cause) initiated a response from the men (effect).

The absence of a catalyst between entities leaves excessive room for the interpretation of myth. The Greek historian Herodotus confirmed the existence of monsters. His story could not be disputed due to limited geographical contact; therefore, the myth of monsters was perpetuated among popular culture in ancient Greece.



BIRD

SIREN

WOMAN

### integration

The sirens represent an example of integration because they were the synthesis of half grotesque bird and half woman.

They had beautiful voices  
and lured men to death and  
destruction but they were  
half grotesque bird and  
half



woman

And they entrance visitors. Whoever  
unaware comes close and hears the  
siren's voice will nevermore draw near  
family, home, or infants: never share  
such joys again.

Knead sweet wax and  
stop your shipmates' ears so  
none of them will hear the  
sirens sing. But if you wish to  
listen to their song, have  
your men lash you to the  
mast, you can delight in  
the sweet chant.<sup>6</sup>

C i r c e

## DIALECTIC STRUCTURE

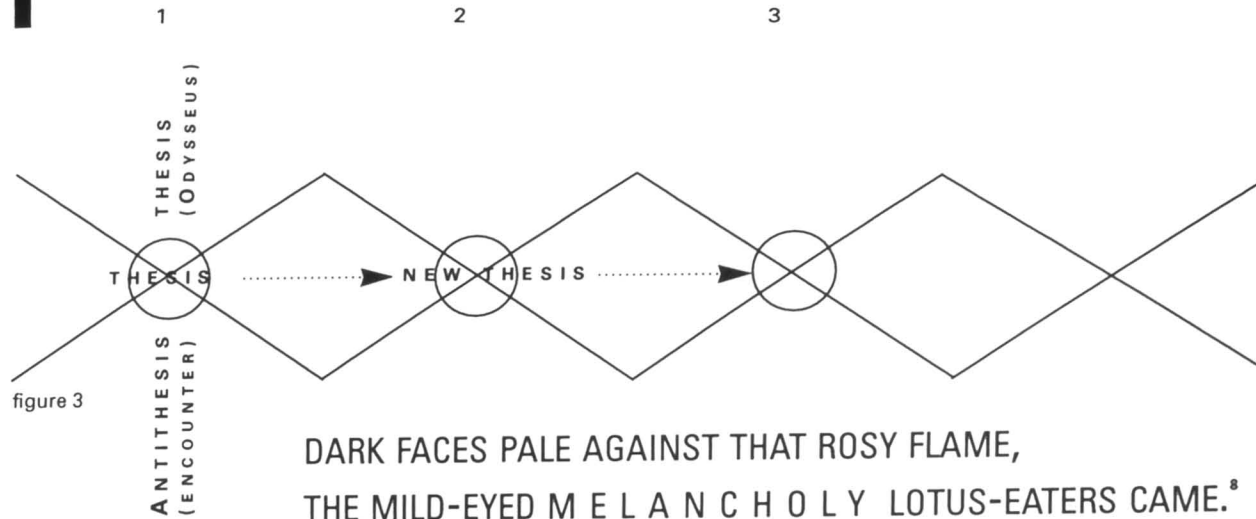


figure 3

DARK FACES PALE AGAINST THAT ROSY FLAME,  
THE MILD-EYED M E L A N C H O L Y LOTUS-EATERS CAME.<sup>8</sup>

Those who feasted on the honey-sweet, enticing lotus fruit had not the least **desire** to bring back word or soon return.<sup>7</sup>

### dialectic structure

The dialectic structure is based on oppositions. When these oppositions meet a new situation is created that is the sum of the two where the new situation (thesis) leads to another situation. Odysseus (thesis) encounters experiences (antithesis). Each encounter is a transformation leading him to a successive encounter.

The Lotus-eaters succumb to a dull existence due to the habitual ingestion of a berry which causes them to lose all ambition. In this passage a dialectic structure exists through the synthesis of: the crew member (thesis), and the lotus berry (antithesis). When the crew members were enticed into eating the berry they no longer wanted to return to their homes. The synthesis of the berry and crew member redirected the journey course from Ithaca to a passive life on the island of the Lotus-eaters. When a thesis is met with an antithesis a dialectic structure evolves.

### contextualization

Context can be defined as a physical environment where entities are placed, and can alter the experience an individual has in that environment. The individual becomes recontextualized when their environment is altered.

V E S S E L

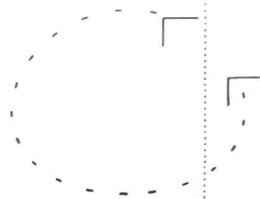
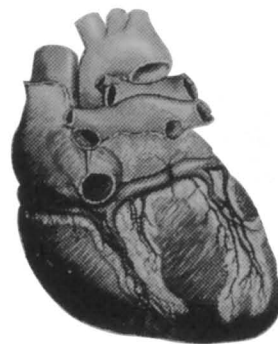
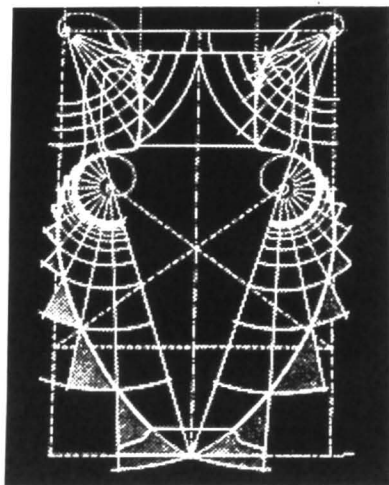








Figure 4

The search in The Odyssey for an object to begin my visual exploration led to the vessel. In the passages I selected it remained constant, but its form and function changed. Because of the **multiplicity** of its functions and meanings I felt the vessel adapted well to visual exploration and elaboration.

The vessel was a complex and **multi-functional** object in the everyday life of the ancient Greeks. It was used to **transport** goods and was a vehicle for **communication**. It fulfilled the function of utilitarian objects like buckets, saucepans, toys, feeding bottles, roof tiles, beehives, light bulbs, clocks, jewel boxes, perfume sprays, wine bottles, vases. Water, wine, oil, honey, grain, brine, vinegar, fish, and olives were stored in them. Often times the vessel was in the form of a human leg or foot.

Decoration of the vessel depicted potters and painters at work. In addition to mythical subject matter scenes from everyday life were often depicted. The vessel could depict a scene from a work of art, patterns from buildings, temples and tombs, history, literary works, theater, and myths such as The Odyssey or Iliad.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 6

Nothing was wasted, if the vessel broke the shards were kept. They were used for making domestic lists or voting ballots.



Figure 5



In addition to various shapes and images, the vessel was **inscribed** with verbal **information**. For example, aristocrats' names could appear along with the inscription "is handsome." Signatures of potters, and the names of festivals where the pot would have been presented as a prize might also appear on the vessel. The burial urn **communicated** the deceased person and father's name, city or country of origin, and the date of death. The name of the vessel, such as the hydra (for water), or the kylix (drinking cup), might be written on it. The cup could also have an inscription such as: "Nikesermos made this kylix, if anyone breaks it, he will pay a drachma as it was a gift from Xenylos." The cup would often claim its owner or might say "Whoever dances most saucily, will receive me."<sup>9</sup>



"S O C R A T E S , Y O U R T I M E I S U P "





One function of the vessel was the **water clock**. It consisted of two vessels: on the top was a water-filled vessel with a hole in its bottom; below it was a vessel that received the water flow. When the contents emptied from the top vessel to the lower, a lawyer's time was up when speaking in a court of law.<sup>10</sup>

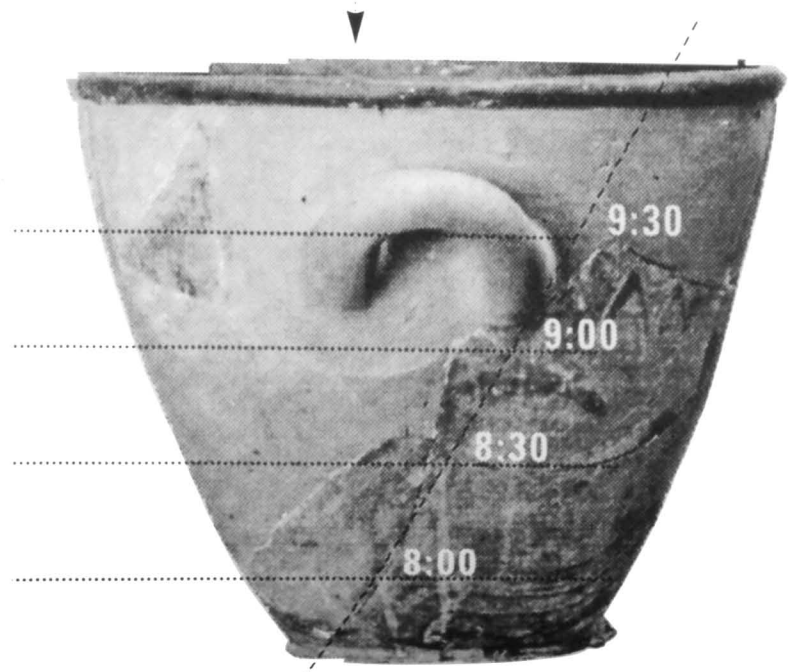


Figure 7





## S T R U C T U R E

Structure is the **framework** that holds entities together. Successful structure is both firm and flexible and allows for interaction and **transformation** to occur between fragments. The structure acts as a container in which pieces and parts can be moved around. Usually successful structure is invisible to its content, unless the structure is the content.

They could never persuade the soul within my breast, for if a man is far from his own home and parents then even if he is housed in opulence within that foreign land no thing can be as sweet than what he left behind.<sup>11</sup>

Structure can be defined as an arrangement of entities which embody the following ideas: 1. the idea of **wholeness** 2. the idea of **transformation** 3. the idea of **self regulation**.<sup>13</sup>

**Wholeness** is internal coherence. The sum of the parts is greater than the individual entities. The parts may have no specific meaning on their own, only through the **arrangement** and relationships that they have with other parts.

Structure is subject to **transformation**. Material can be **processed** by it and passed through it. Through the structure of language words and sentences are transformed into new utterances while retaining the inherent structure.<sup>3</sup>

Structure is **self-regulating**. It makes no appeals beyond itself in order to validate its transformational procedures. Each structure is unique and exists independently of the rules and functions of other structures. Each has its own set of rules which separate it from other structures.

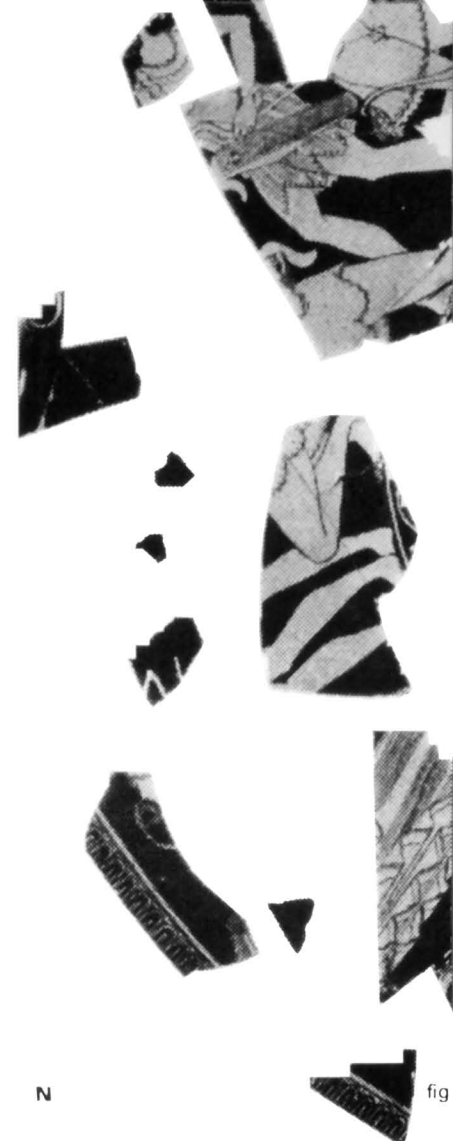
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24



figure 9

S K E L E T O N



fig



## F O R M

Form is supported by structure. The structure is the skeletal support. Form like a human body can be of infinite proportions and types but the skeletal structure, if it is healthy, remains the same in each person.

Form contains style, a personal fingerprint, unique to its creator. Each **individual** leaves a recognizable trace with their work. Personal experience, life, spirituality, and personal interpretation of the world are the driving forces behind the forms we create.

The visuals generated for this thesis take on various forms even though the structure remains the same. When the visual-verbal content is elaborated upon through juxtaposition, integration, and contextualization, a coerced alteration of form occurs.

# UNITY

# UNITY

The first man was  
"quite round" and had four arms  
and an equal number of legs,  
and two faces  
on a round neck, exactly alike.

## SUCH UNITY

though did not endure,  
for Zeus became angry  
and decided to weaken man  
by slicing him  
"down the middle"

and left the remaining half

wanting and searching for the other



cup  
shards  
figure

P l a t o n



paper  
collage  
figure













## D E F I N I T I O N S

**Connotative:** To suggest in addition to literal meaning.

**Content:** The thought behind the form.

**Contextualization:** Context is the placing of an entity into an environment. When an entity is placed into an environment meaning can be altered. An environment where a situation or experience emerges.

**Denotative:** To refer to specifically, explicitly.

**Diachronic:** That which occurs through time. Such as language.

**Dialectic:** Occurs when a thesis is met with an antithesis. When oppositions or conflicts collide, the result being conditions for another dialectic to occur.

**Design:** To plan to create something incorporating a process of analysis, definition and synthesis.

**Elaboration:** To express in greater detail; provide further information.

**Entropy:** Visual noise. Derived from communication theory. Excess information clouds the interpretation of a message.

**Form:** the shape something takes.

**Integration:** A new form is created through the combination of separate entities. The component's original characteristics are transformed into a new entity. The new entity retains a varying degree of the characteristics of both entities but stands on its own.

**Hierarchy:** An order of priority which is established through the positioning of things. For instance: when something large is placed next to something small, the larger is given more visual hierarchy.

**Juxtaposition:** Each entity retains its own form. When the entities are positioned next to one another the following could occur: new meaning through juxtaposition, semantic and syntactic similarities enhanced, semantic and syntactic polarities magnified, or entropy.

**Matrix:** A structure within which patterns or connections can be developed, or contained.

**Meaning:** Not to be confused with the content or the message. Meaning emerges through interpretation by the viewer.

**Objective:** A sign which is denotative.

**Paradox:** When the opposite of what one expects to be true occurs.

**Personal:** A sign whose meaning is less denotative. The creation of the message has more to do with the intent of the sender rather than the interpretation of the receiver.

**Semantic:** A sign whose primary function is meaning.



**Simultaneity:** When an image can be read as two different things at once it has a simultaneous reading.

**Sign:** According to Peirce, a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.

**Synchronic:** That which occurs simultaneously, such as music.

**Syntax:** Signs and their formal relationships to other signs.

**Synthesis:** Disparate entities combined together to create meaning.

**Subjective:** A sign which is based on personal interpretation and is more connotative.

**Universal:** A sign whose meaning is more generally agreed upon.

**Visual Metaphor:** When one sign is substituted for another to describe the original sign's form or meaning.

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## P L A T E S

**Figure 1.** Hand artwork by Karen White, Graduate Seminar, Richmond, 1993.

**Figure 2.** Art work by Joseph Beuys, *Joseph Beuys Life and Works.* (New York, 1979), 54.

**Figure 3.** Diagram of dialectic structure, Katie Salen Instructor, Graduate Seminar Richmond, 1993.

**Figure 4.** Circe Cup  
*Greek Pottery.*  
(Manchester, 1991), 120.

**Figure 5.** Banishment ballot  
*The Greek World.* (Oxford, 1976), 72.

**Figure 6.** Leg Vessel  
*Greek Footwear and the Dating of Sculpture.*  
(Madison, 1985), 14.

**Figure 7.** Water Clock  
*The Greek World.* (Oxford, 1976), 71.

**Figure 8.** Vessel Fragments  
*Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum Vol 5.)*  
(Malibu, 1991), 76.

**Figure 9.** body diagrams  
*Body Criticism.*  
(Massachusetts, 1993), 149.

**Figure 10.** detail from  
"Brutus Killed Caesar"  
*John Baldessari.*  
(New York, 1990 ), 98.

**Figure 11.** "Roller Coaster"  
*John Baldessari.*  
(New York, 1990 ), 160.

**Figure 12.** "German Natural History"  
*The Dialectics of Seeing, Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project.*  
(Massachusetts, 1990 ), 61.

**Figure 13.** R. Mutt Urinal.  
*Marcel Duchamp Ready-mades, etc. (1913-1946)*  
(Milan: 1964).



**The exhibition space:**

vessel context the cave of Polyphemus  
 small room one doorway exit enter  
*page 22*

**The viewer:**

enter sheep of Polyphemus followers leaders  
 gaze graze  
*page 23* family friends familiar stranger exit

**The message:**

"The first man was "quite round" and had four arms and an equal number of legs, and two faces on a round neck, exactly alike. Such unity though did not endure, for Zeus became angry and decided to weaken man by slicing him "down the middle" and left the remaining half wanting and searching for the other. *we are remaining*  
*page 9*

**The three hanging screens:**

transparent a message incomplete individually complete in totality  
*page 9* individual's position integrated

**The cubes:**

vessels obscured four matrix  
*page 10* metaphors position complete fragments

**The animation:**

visual verbal an odyssey loop morphology

**The stranger:**

Odysseus us sheep them travelers  
*page 24* . . . detached from the community by virtue of mobility. . . judges, confidants

**The photos:**

individuals journey contexts vessel  
 paper body  
*page 25-28* painted

## C O N C L U S I V E                      T H O U G H T S

This book is a vessel of words and images

it is constructed that way

a running verbal path

into which I have poured the contents

from objective to subjective

an organic flow of

thought fragments

elaboration

exploration of a poetic,

a pragmatic nature

senders

receivers

misunderstanding

misinterpreting

words and images change course

not everyone agrees



Odysseus disguised himself as a beggar by not bathing and wearing tattered clothes. It was necessary for him to return to Ithaca unrecognized so he would not shock those who thought him dead, and to assess the changes that had occurred during his absence. Because he was a beggar no one paid attention to him. He was devalued. The criteria for evaluating him was his appearance. It was an inaccurate portrayal. Consequently, he was overlooked.

Evaluation can be achieved through the comparison of one thing to another. Aesthetics as criteria for evaluation is inappropriate. Because both the beautiful and the ugly are aesthetic and each is subjective, there is nothing concrete to compare.

I could evaluate craft, or what something looked like, or remember what someone said, but of more importance is what was communicated visually, or what was experienced. How can I evaluate what was communicated if my intent was for interpretation to be open?

Those tangible objects from the exhibition are in a heap now, deteriorating.  
I cannot stop the process.

Process transcends the time and distance between the objects and the present. The process evolves. Someone else would have a different experience with the methodology than I have. Each time the process manifests itself in a tangible object the intangible leaves its fingerprint. I cannot help that. I have come to the realization that the process is who I am, and how I think and see the world.

*To travel hopefully is better than to arrive....gilbert and george*

Objects are not a reflection of me but they are necessary as the concrete realization of the intangible me.

#### EVALUATION OF SYNTHESIS AS A METHODOLOGY

Contextualization is the most complex and multifaceted of the three methods I explored because:

*now I live in a different place*

Context is the synthesis of perception and place  
perception occurs in our minds  
our minds are complex

perception directs interpretation  
of those things juxtaposed  
of those things integrated

Perception is context dependent  
*You must ask yourself: Where am I now?  
and now?*

Perception is in flux  
The perception of others filters our intention

Designers need to know that

#### EVALUATION OF THE ELABORATION PROCESS

Each step in the elaboration process increases the complexity of the problem and builds on the previous experience.

An awareness emerged for me:

a future range of possible connections in the exhibition space and the perception of viewers.









STATISTIC



COMMUNITY

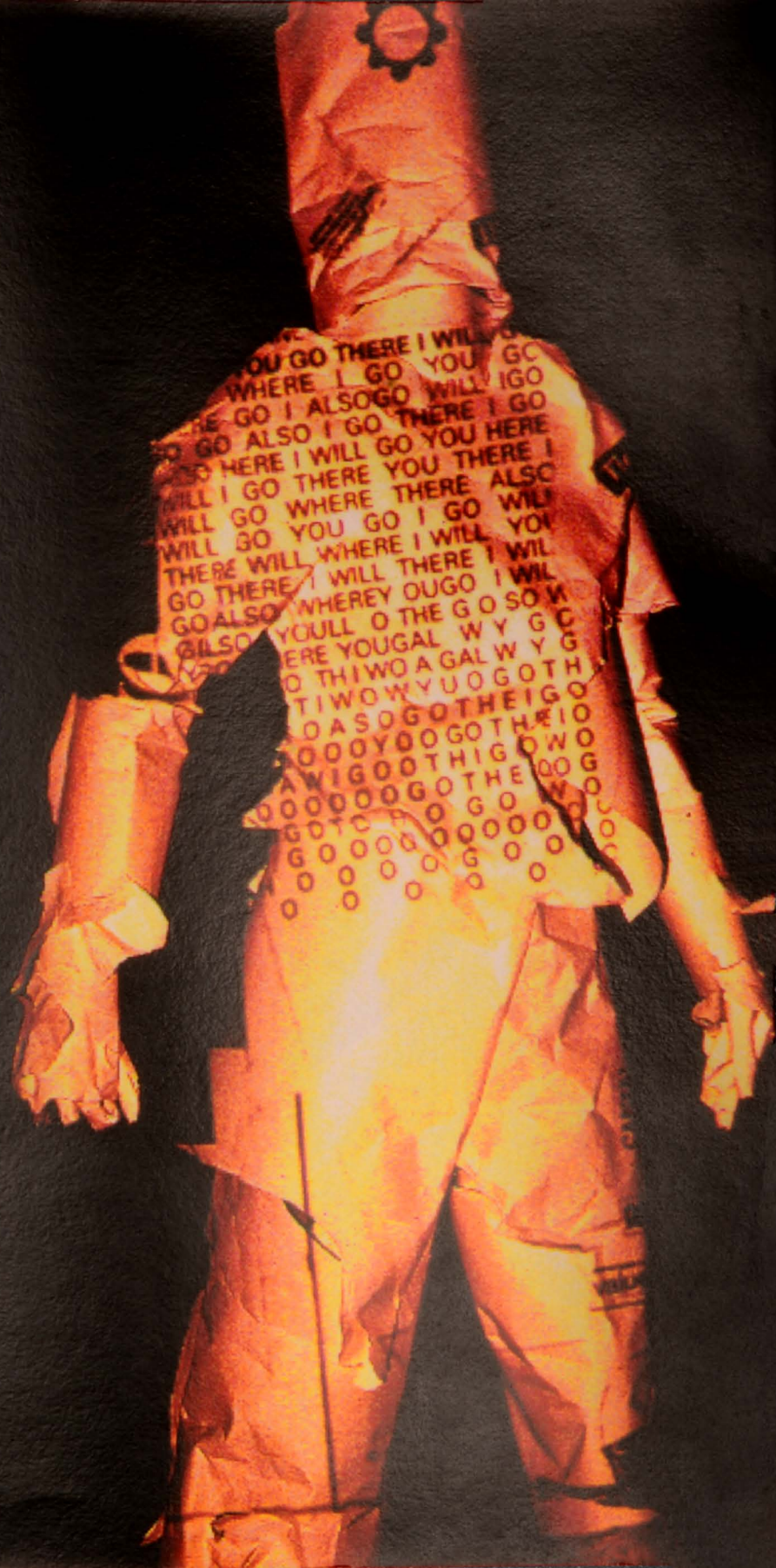


LEADER

BODY



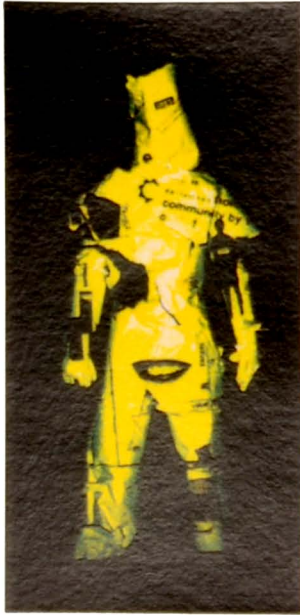
STORIES



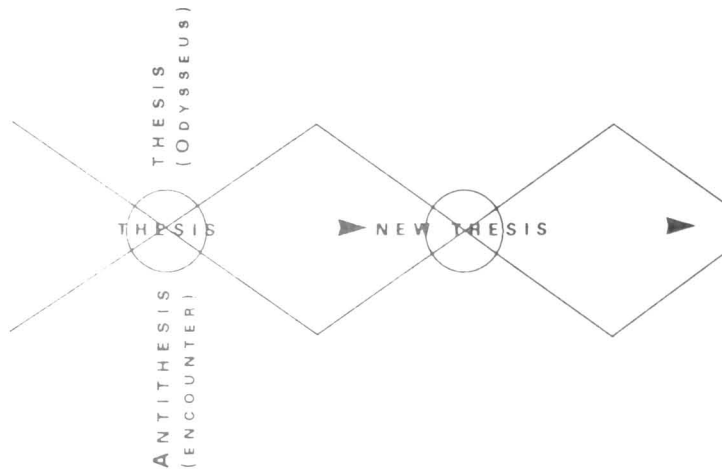
YOU GO THERE I WILL GO  
WHERE I GO YOU GO  
RE GO I ALSO GO WILL I GO  
GO ALSO I GO THERE I GO  
GO HERE I WILL GO YOU HERE  
WILL I GO THERE YOU THERE I  
WILL GO WHERE THERE ALSO  
WILL GO YOU GO I GO WILL  
THERE WILL WHERE I WILL YOU  
GO THERE I WILL THERE I WILL  
GO ALSO WHEREY OUGO I WILL  
GO YOU'LL O THE GO SO V  
D THIWO A GAL WY G  
TIWO WYU O GO TH  
O A SO GO THE IO  
OOOY O GO TH IO  
A WIG O TH IO GO W  
OOO O O GO TH IO G  
G O T C R O G O W O  
G O O O O G O O O O  
O O O O O G O O O O



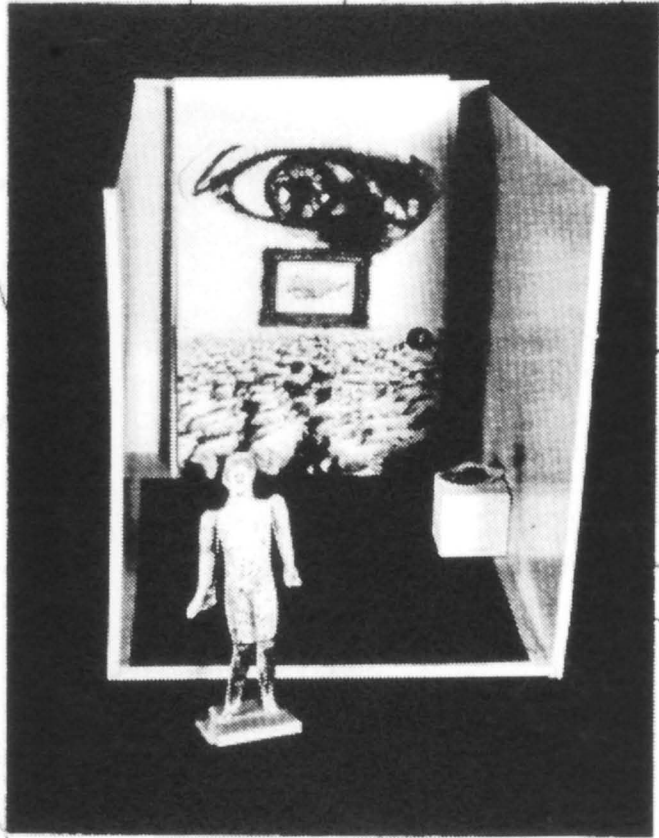




O D Y S S E Y



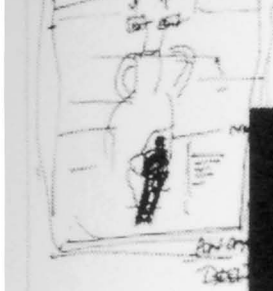
GAZE | SPACE | STRANGER



cyclops / GAZE  
CAVE OF POLYPHONY ~~THE~~ SPACE  
~~ODYSSEUS~~  
ODYSSEUS / STRANGER

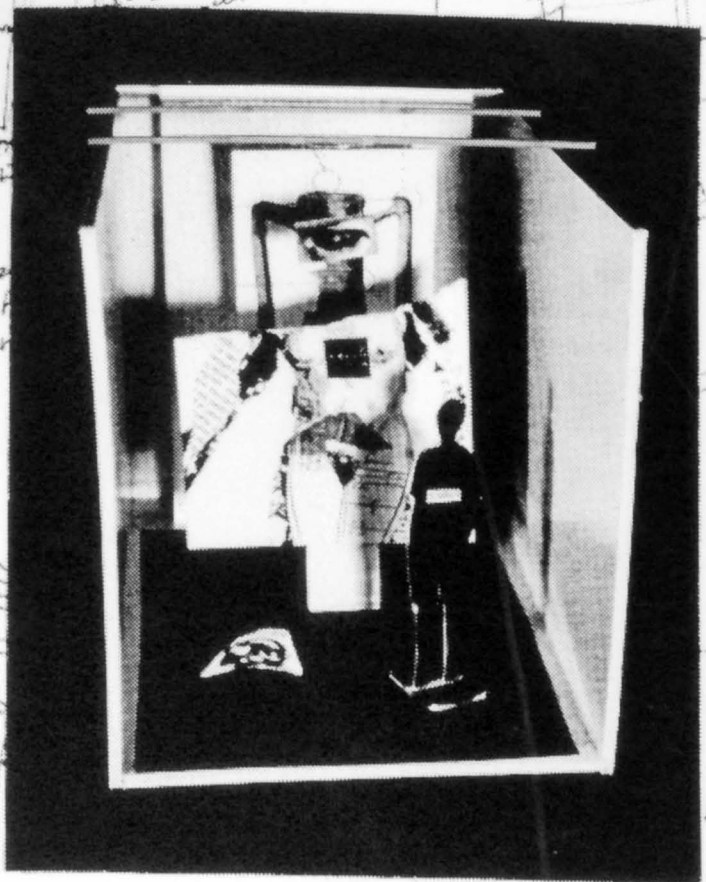


- remember when → measure quality  
 - ask Guy about start size -  
 - dot system?



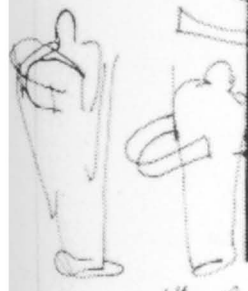
(exhibition and)

monitor  
 Board



type? can  
 mt live? h  
 work with

- pick up slides



more through space  
flag ship?



the strength is detailed  
 from the community  
 by virtue of mobile



interaction  
 eye/lips

from the community  
by virtue of mobility.

detached

Because  
of this freedom  
and detachment

the stranger may view  
the conflicts  
and situations within which  
locals are mired;

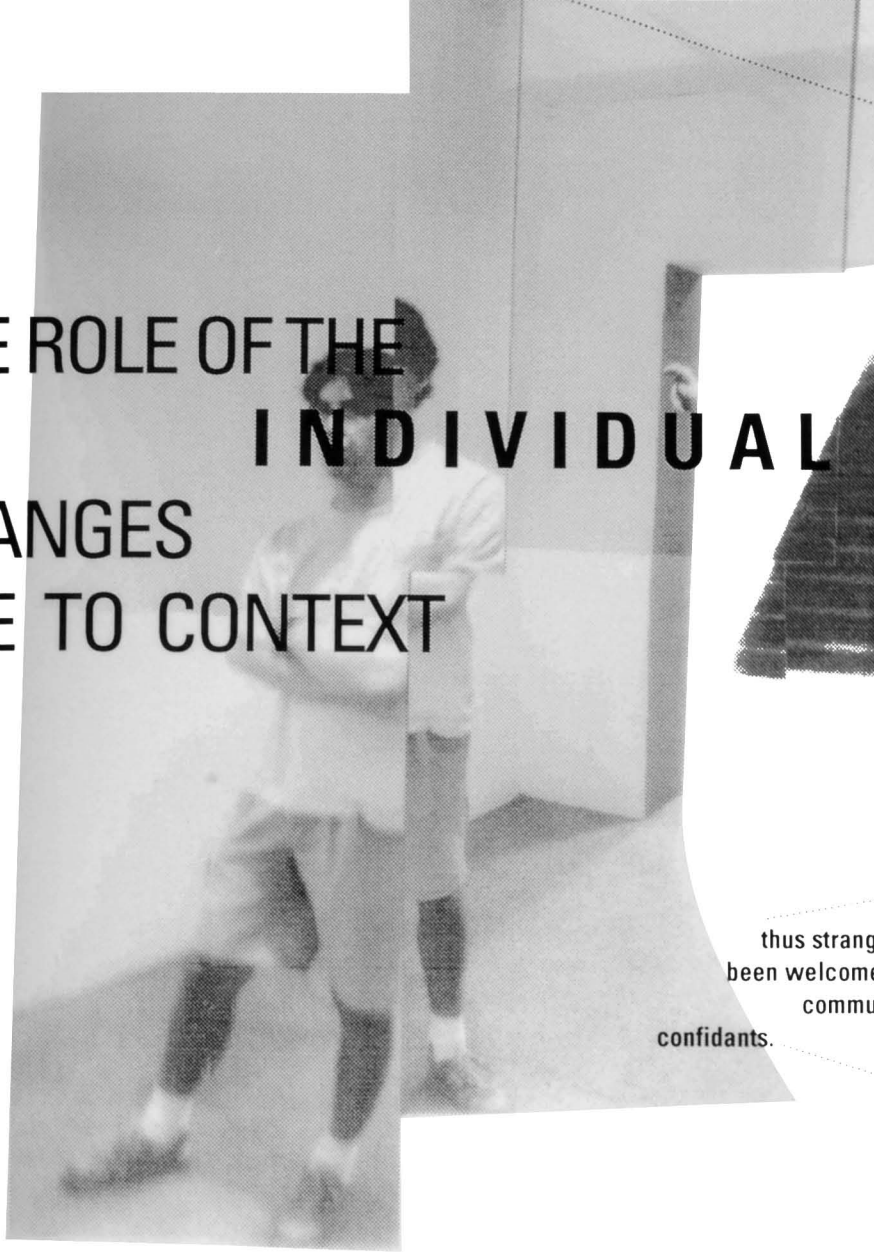


In overcoming this distancing,  
the serious traveler  
must develop techniques of reading from the  
surfaces of things

Motion connects the traveler  
to the world  
but also  
distances one from it.

and people to discover their  
interiors, relationships,  
functions, and meanings.<sup>24</sup>

The stranger is

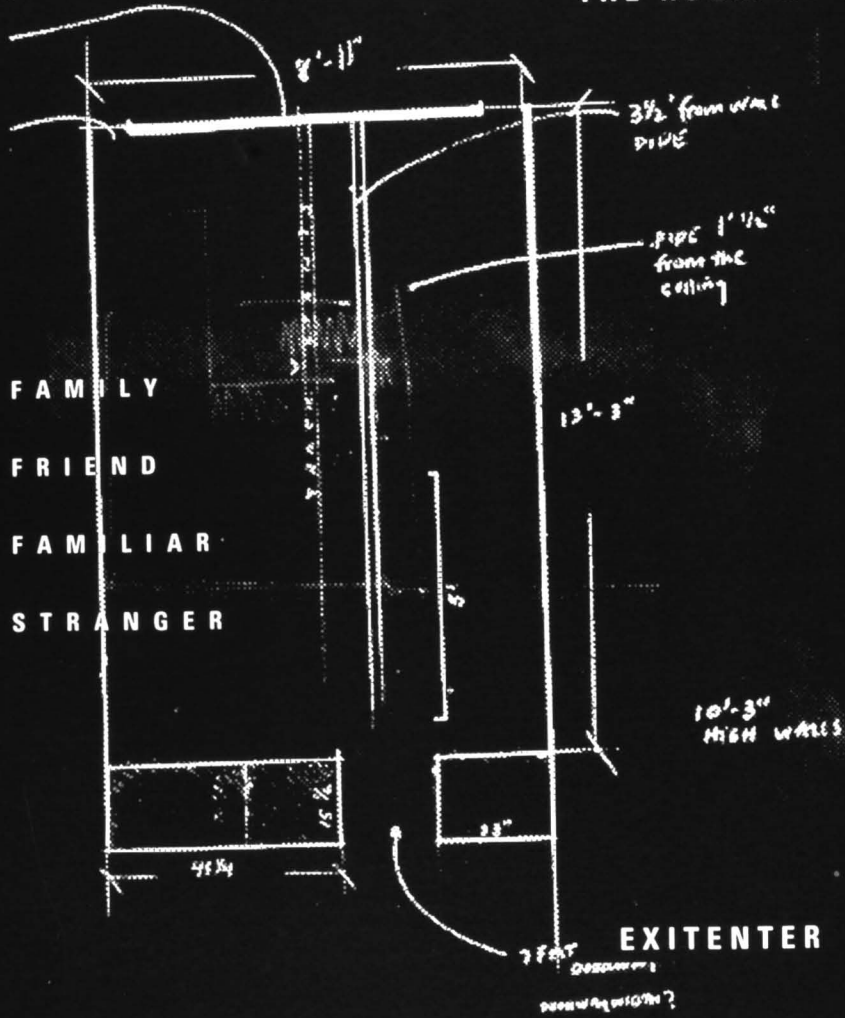


THE ROLE OF THE  
**INDIVIDUAL**  
CHANGES  
DUE TO CONTEXT

thus strangers have often  
been welcomed into  
communities as judges, confessors, and  
confidants.

5766 FROM 7-  
BANK

# THE ROOM AS A VESSEL



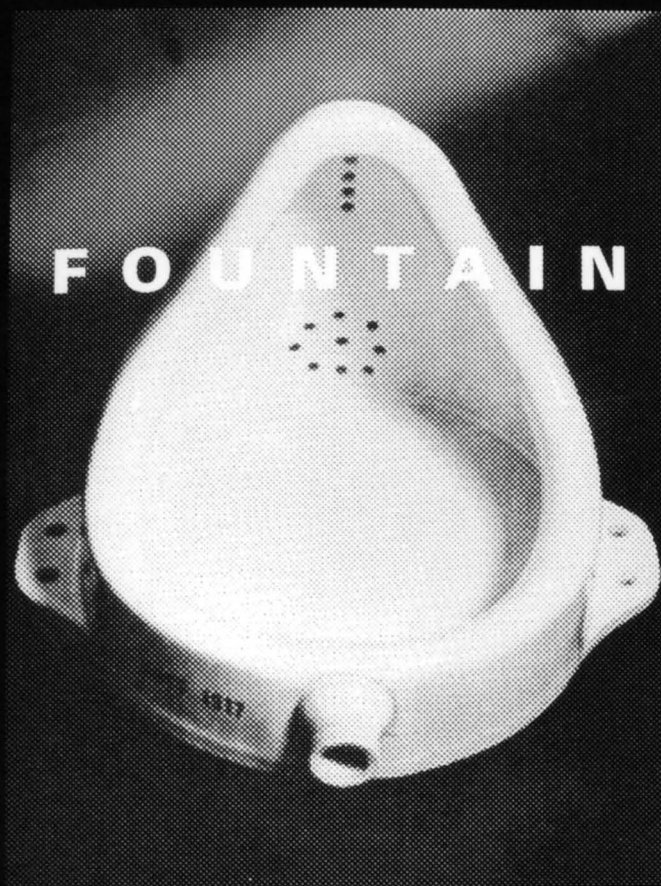


Figure 12

C O N T E X T U A L I Z A T I O N

**When an entity is placed into an environment there is potential for a shift in its meaning. Even though the object does not change, our perception of it does.**

When Marcel Duchamp positioned a urinal signed R. Mutt in the context of an art gallery, the object was taken out of its everyday context and its significance was altered. Duchamp challenged the meaning of art and declared that anything made, even by a machine, was a work of art, and the artist was merely a person who signed things.

Context can also be defined as something intangible, a situation or a place where an experience emerges. Our experiences and perceptions are context dependent. As Odysseus traveled homeward he encountered new contexts which subsequently altered his behavior.

*To make or invent something new is to change not only one's surroundings but to change oneself and the way one perceives: it is to change reality a little."*

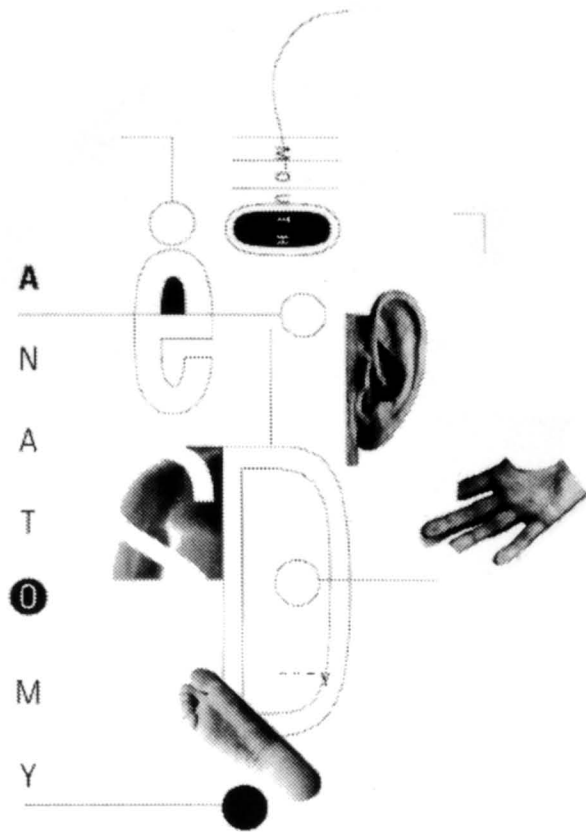
Because context can be considered an environment as well as an experience, a contextual designer can design with the user's experience as the focus of the process rather than the final creation of a product. Tangible forms may become a part of this design process, but they are secondary to it; such as, cars being secondary to motion. In this context the car can be viewed as an object and motion a process. A designer could broaden the range of problem solving if, for instance, the process of transportation were considered as the primary problem rather than the manufacture of another automobile.

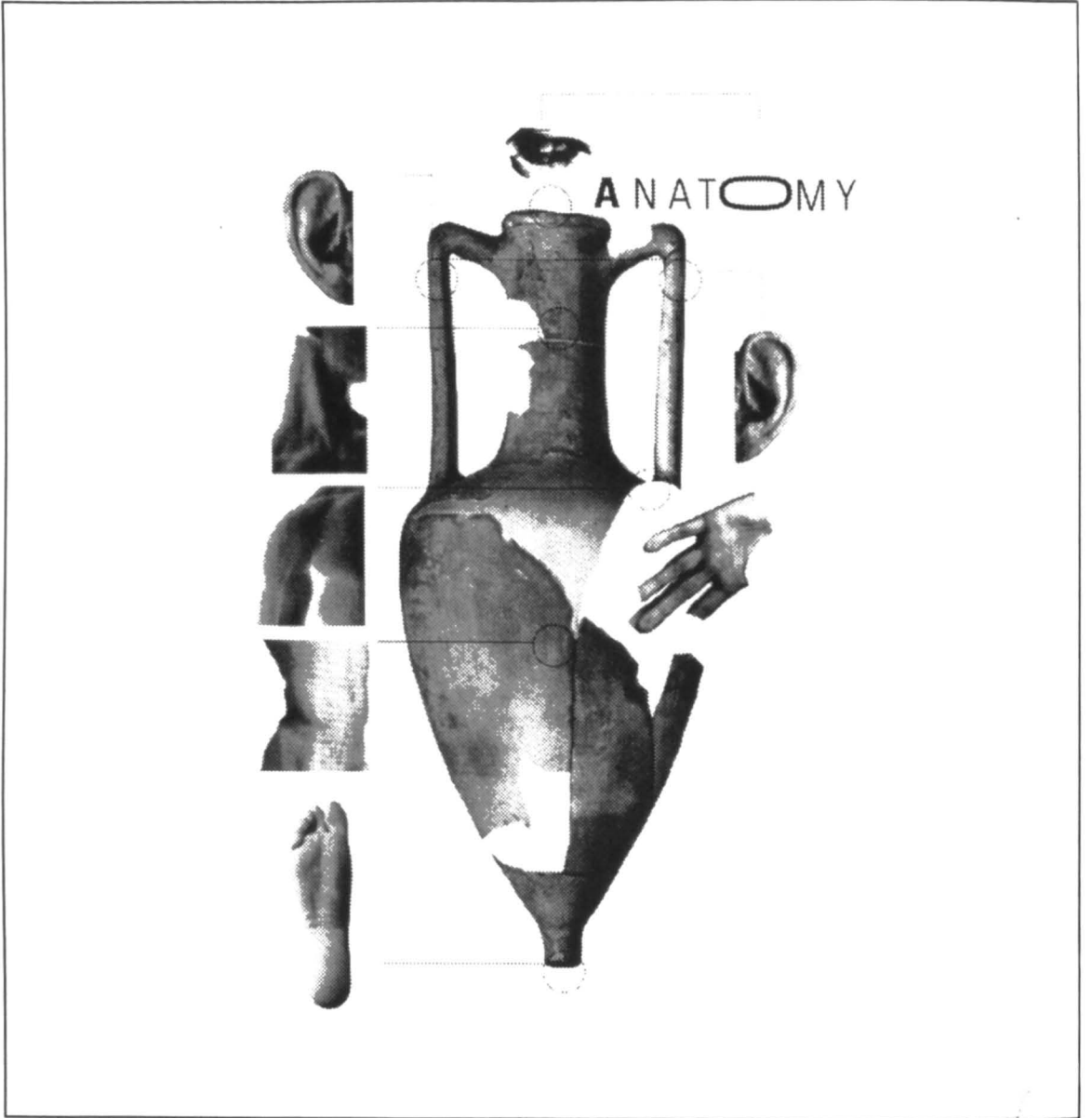




There is nothing more shameless than the belly; whatever pain assails our heart, the hateful stomach claims its right to be remembered. It constrains us always, forcing us to eat and drink.<sup>22</sup>







A N A T O M Y

In the  
hands of  
the potter  
the vessel  
is like a  
body  
being  
formed



## M E T A P H O R

**A metaphor is the substitution of one visual or verbal meaning for another. Metaphors can condense and clarify ideas, or can enhance concepts. In any use of metaphor there is always a concept to be compared and a concept to be compared to. Verbal and visual information can be communicated through the use of metaphors.**



In ancient Greece vessel nomenclature was labeled the same as human anatomy. I generated visual integration exercises by combining traditional vessel fragments and a metaphor for the vessel — the human body. Combining the Greek vessel with the human form reinforced semantic relationships between the two “vessels”. The meaning of the word vessel links the urn and the body. Syntactic relationships occur between the vessel and the human body through their corresponding shapes and functions. For instance, the foot and mouth of the vessel is similar to the foot and mouth of the human body .



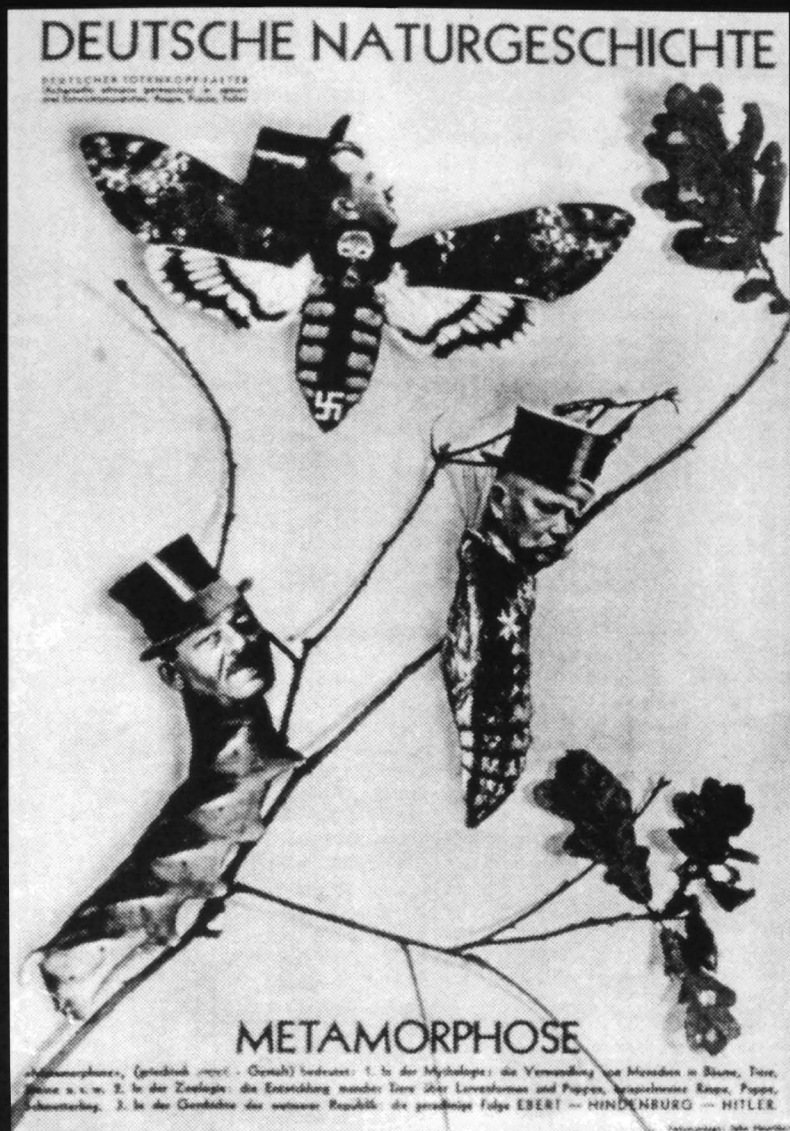


Figure 11

I N T E G R A T I O N

**In integration, entities are combined to create a unified whole. New form and new meaning emerge from the combination of seemingly disparate parts. Because each fragment retains its inherent meaning, the new form can be read simultaneously. The surrealists used this method of combining images in photomontage. The results can create fantastic images due to the unrealistic relationships.**

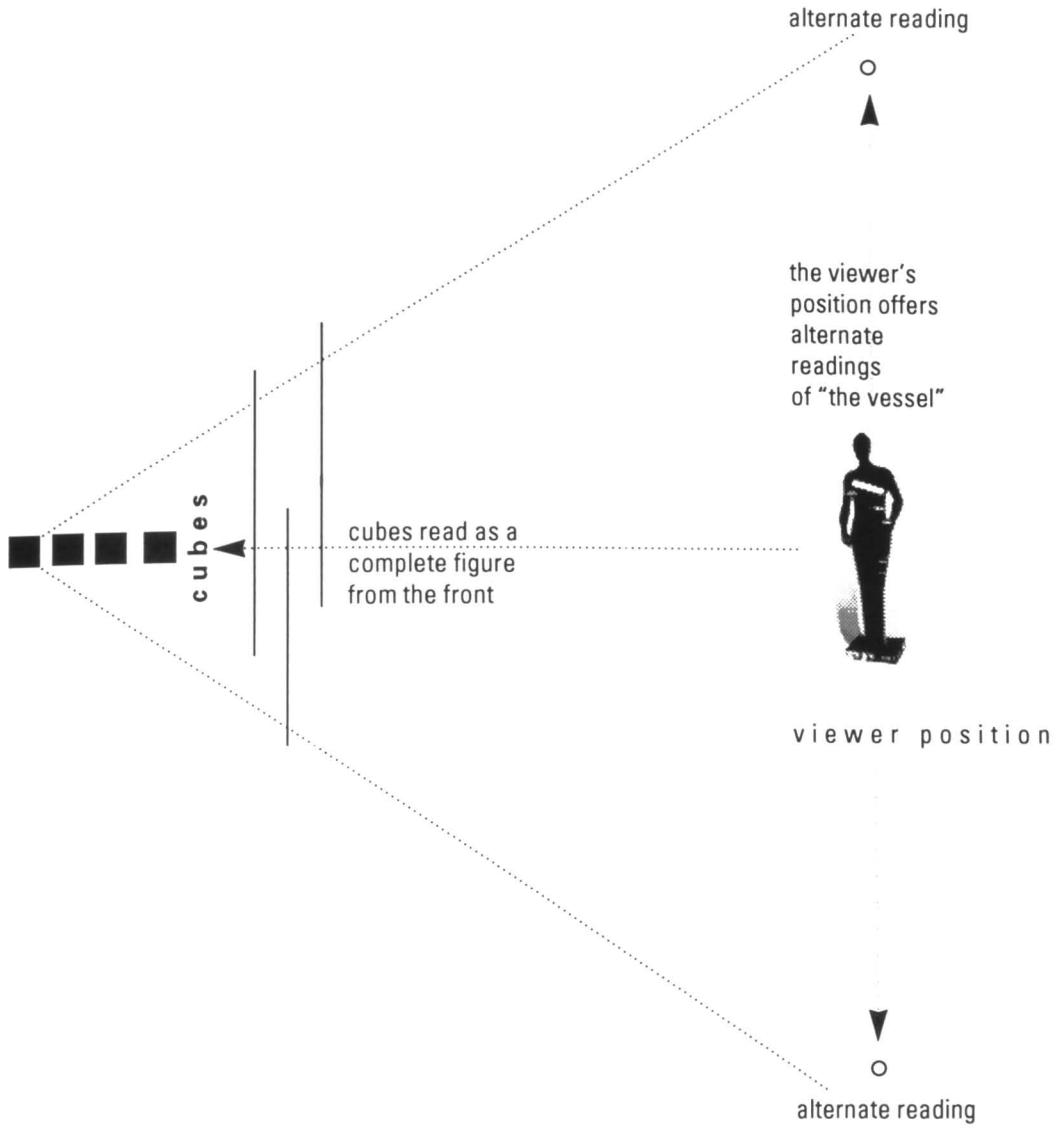
Like Eisenstein's films, Heartfield's photomontages use diametrically opposed images to provoke a conflict in the spectator which gives rise to a third synthetic image that is often stronger in its associations than the sum of its parts.<sup>18</sup>

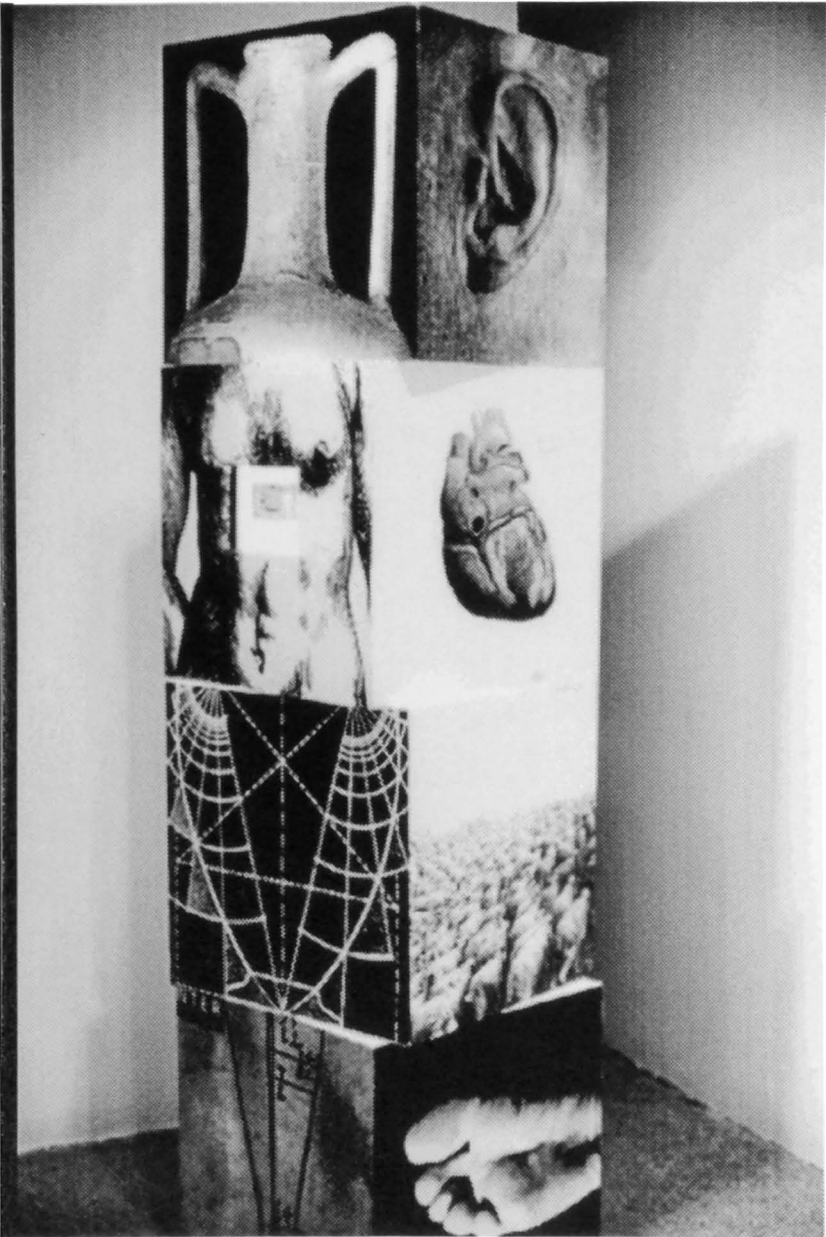
Through verbal and visual integration the image functions as a political and moral critique. *German Natural History* is represented allegorically in the three biological stages of development of the Death's Head Moth.<sup>19</sup>

*Time after time innovative breakthroughs depend on new contexts in which to view a problem. To make the familiar strange is to distort, invert or transpose the traditional ways of looking at, and responding to the secure and familiar world. It results in achieving a new look at the same old world. In the familiar world objects are always right side up . . . This look can transpose both our usual way of perceiving and our usual expectations about how we or the world will behave.*<sup>20</sup>

In *German Natural History*, the controlled integration of elements creates multiple readings: one from nature (insects), one from history ( Ebert; first chancellor of Weimar, Hindenberg; last president who approved Hitler as Chancellor and Hitler), and one from mythology (the metamorphosis of human beings into trees, animals, and stones).

These three ideas become interchangeable. Myth applies to politics and historical progress. The disparate connection between the entities is broad and therefore enables open interpretation. The identity of those represented takes on the form of a critique.



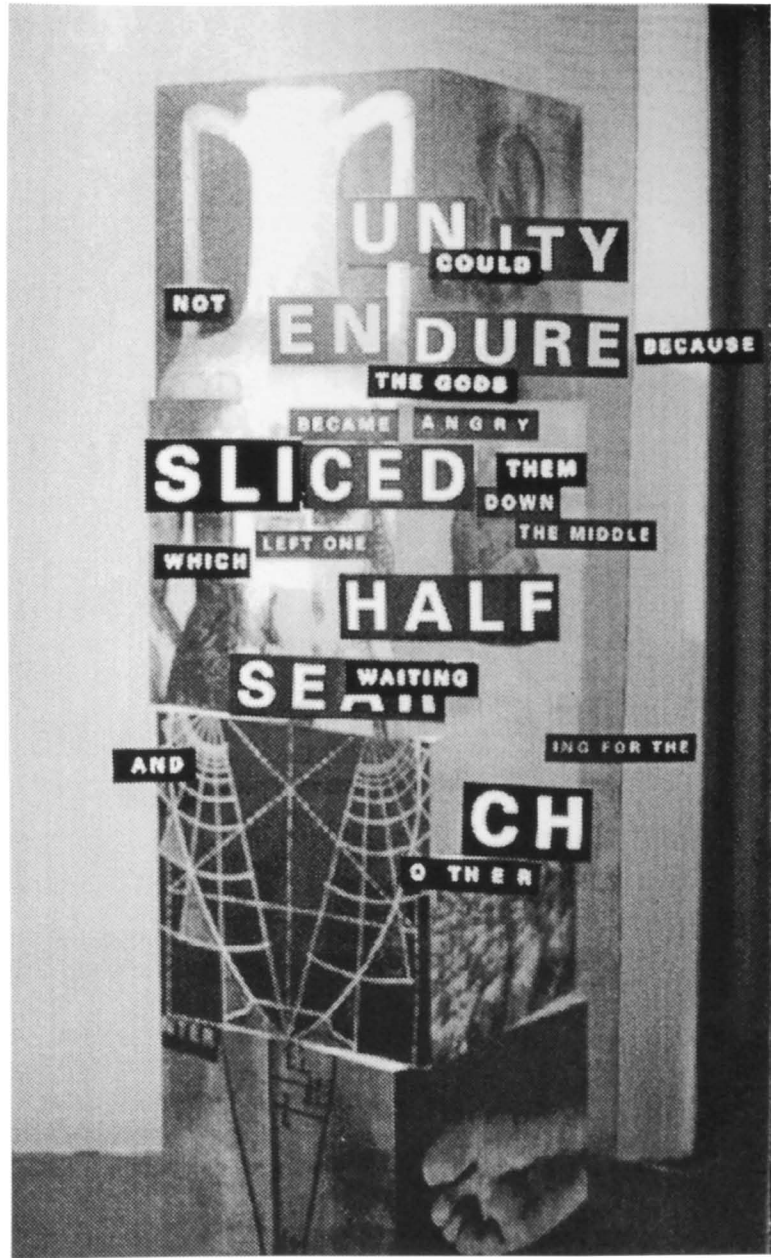


8 feet

6 feet

4 feet

2 feet



message  
is illegible



the viewer's  
position alters  
the message  
from legible  
to illegible.



the message  
is legible  
from the  
front

▲  
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s

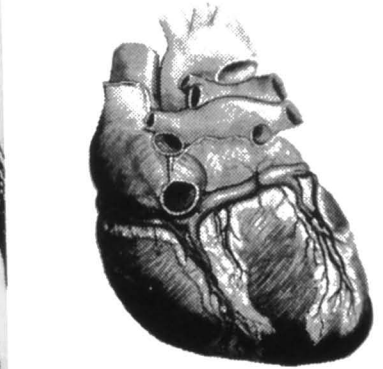
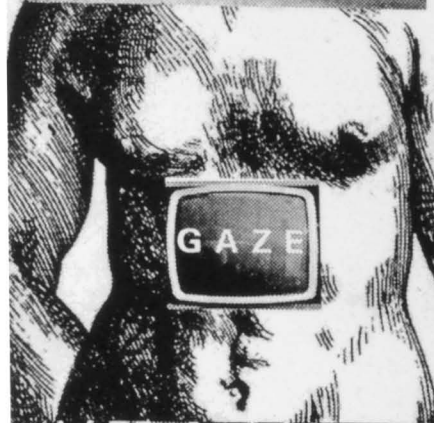
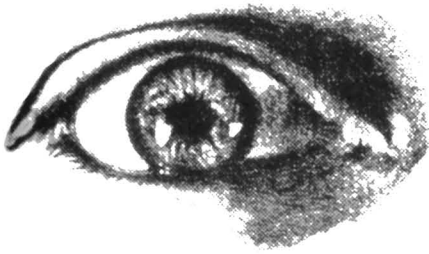
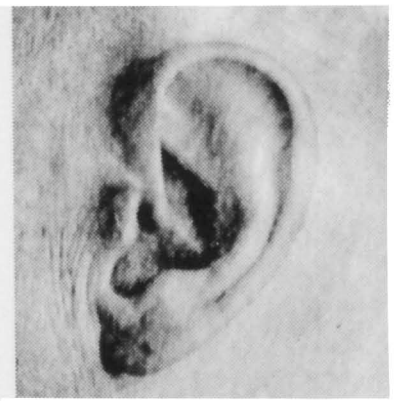
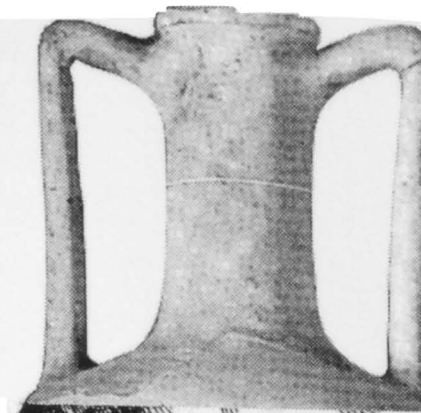
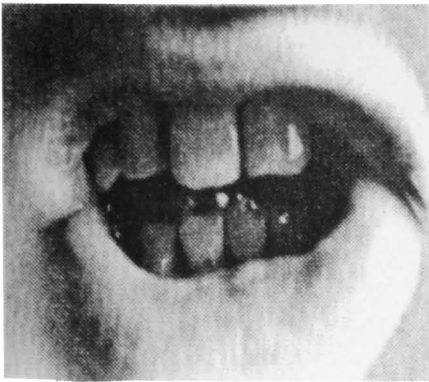
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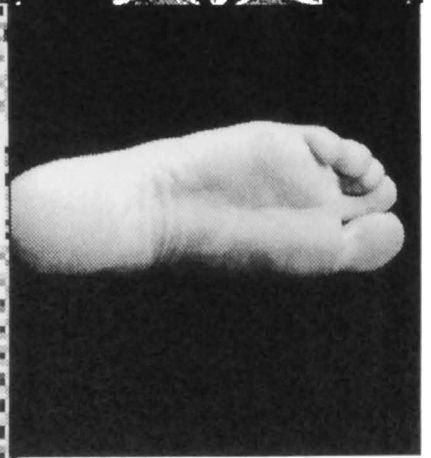
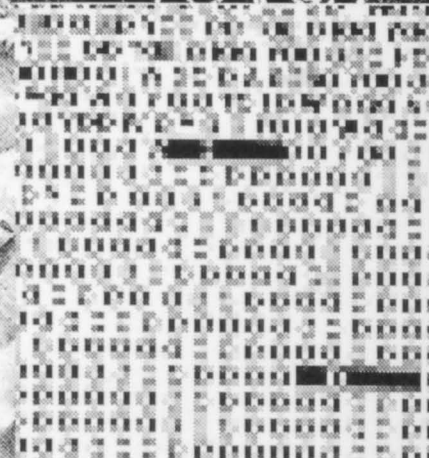
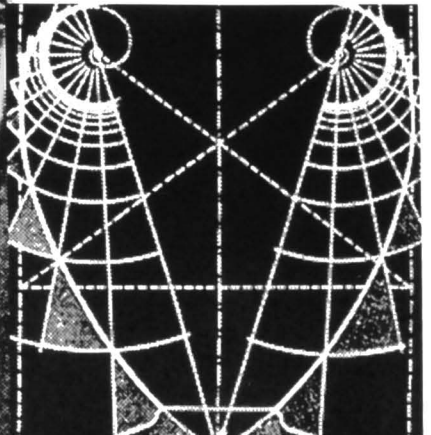
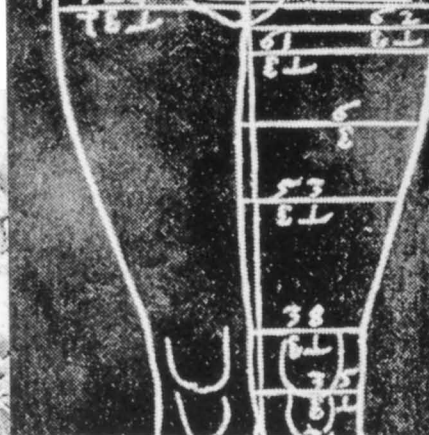


message  
is illegible





F O L L O W



L E A D E R S

# TOUCHED

BITTER

FIRE

BLACK

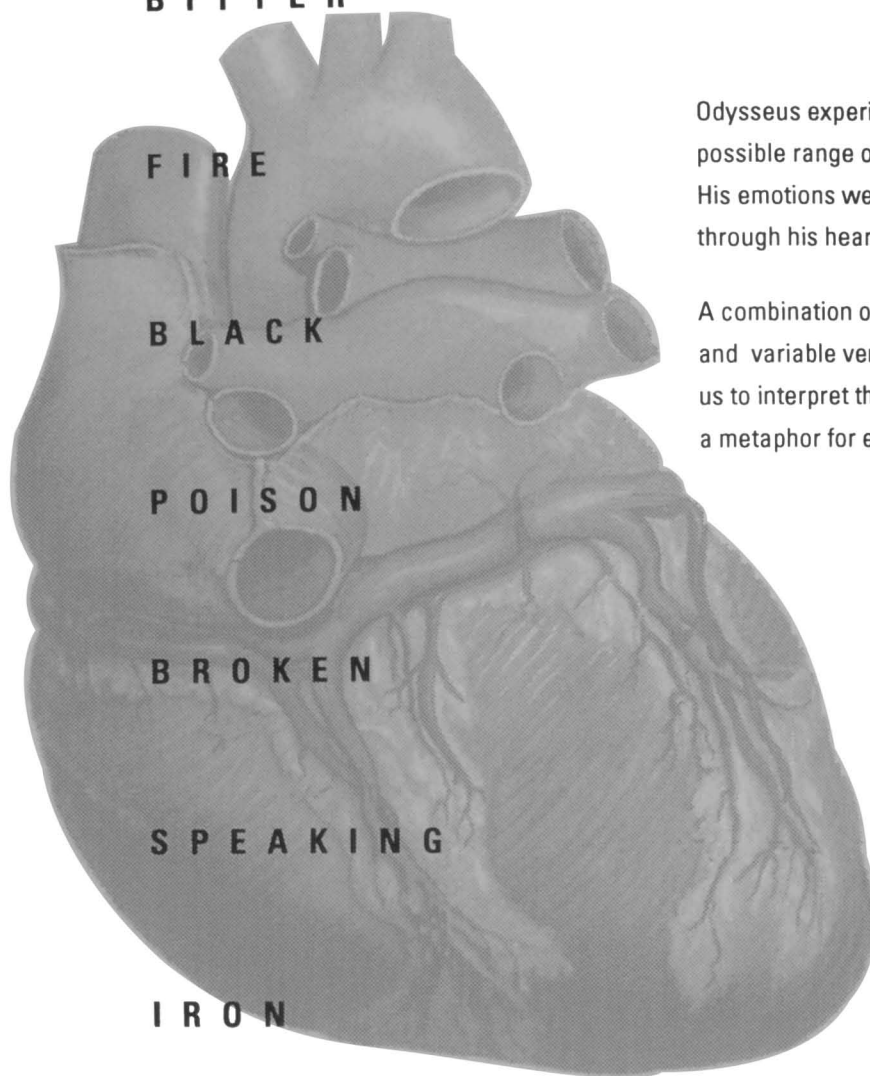
POISON

BROKEN

SPEAKING

IRON

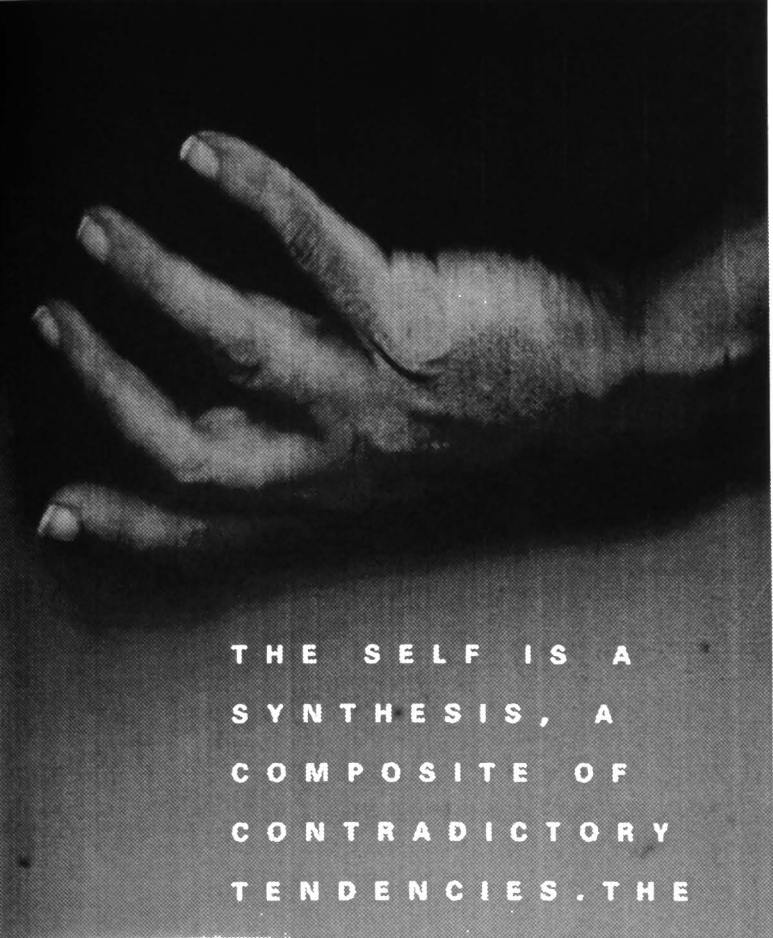
PURE



Odysseus experienced every possible range of emotion. His emotions were expressed through his heart.

A combination of the heart and variable verbal cues lead us to interpret the message as a metaphor for emotion.

V  
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S  
U  
A  
L  
V  
E  
R  
B  
A  
L  
J  
U  
X  
T  
A  
P  
O  
S  
I  
T  
I  
O  
N



THE SELF IS A  
SYNTHESIS, A  
COMPOSITE OF  
CONTRADICTIONARY  
TENDENCIES. THE  
SELF IS NOT A  
HARMONIOUS  
SYNTHESIS, AND  
NEVER CAN BE. <sup>18</sup>

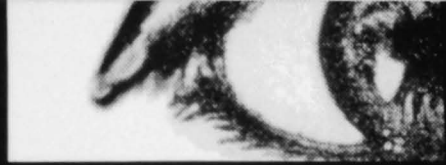
KIERKEGAARD



DUALITY

POLARITY

CONTRADICTION<sup>17</sup>



*dear ram...*



*i'll eat you last*

Polyphemus was a contradiction, the synthesis of a benevolent spirit and a lawless heart. He was affectionate to his animals and tended his sheep with love. When strangers came into the cave he tore them apart, devoured them for dinner, and afterward picked his teeth with their bones.

BRUTUS                      KILLED                      CAESAR

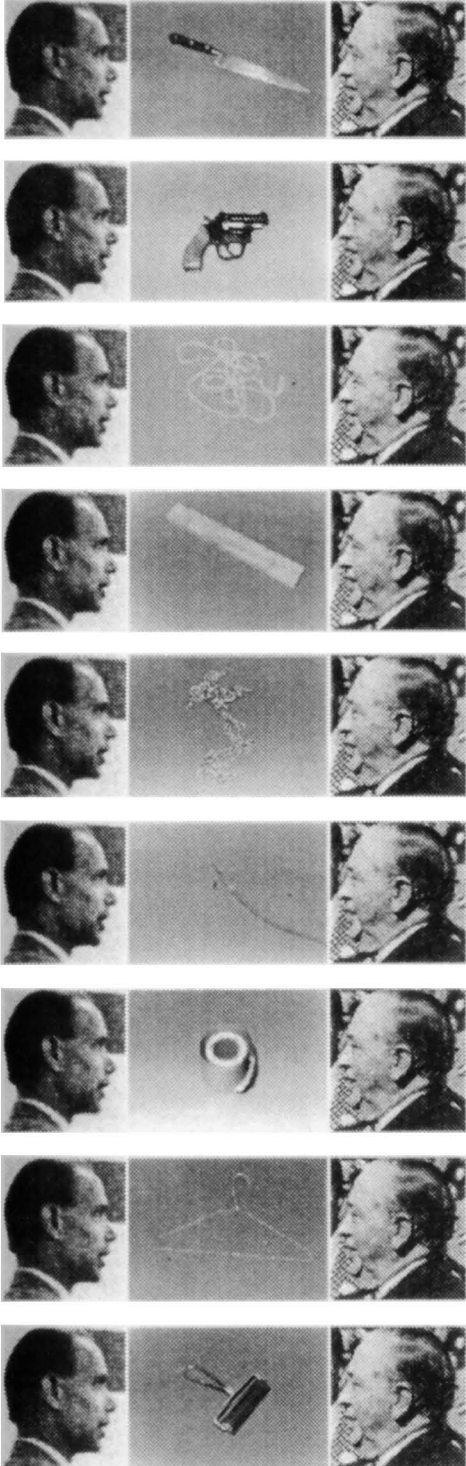


Figure 9

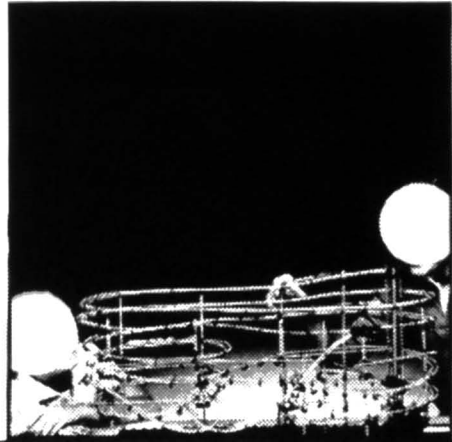


Figure 10



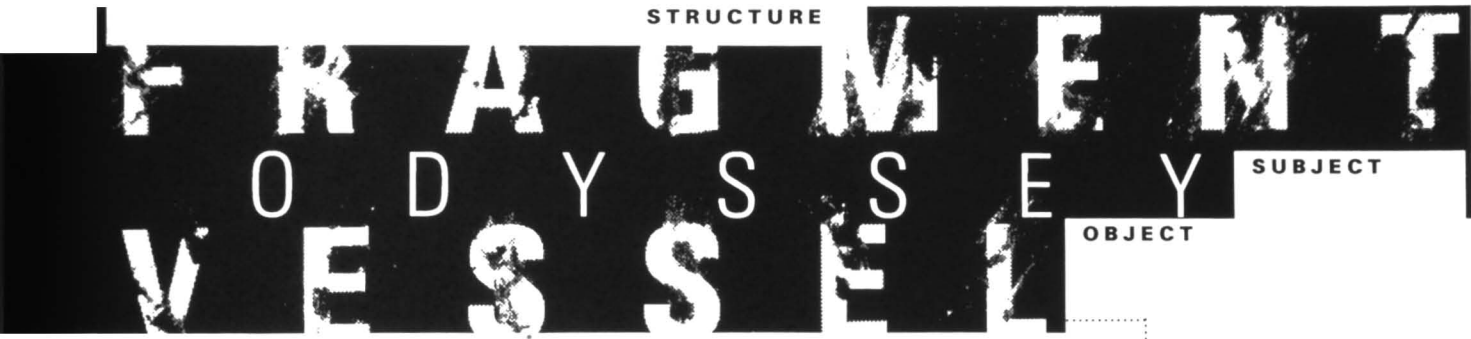
J U X T A P O S I T I O N

**In juxtaposition, each entity retains its own form. When the entities are positioned next to one another the following can occur: new meaning through juxtaposition; semantic and syntactic similarities enhanced; polarities revealed; or loss of order.**

In *figure 9*, John Baldessari uses forced semantic relationships. The images read as a visual sentence: "Brutus Killed Caesar." In the first example we understand the weapon used to kill Caesar was the knife. In each row the object changes. Even though the objects become more absurd, due to the relationship of the object to the whole we are forced to visualize the use of the object as a murder weapon.

In *figure 10*, more complexity in the image leaves room for multiple levels of interpretation. The (object) roller coaster and the barbed wire create a syntactic (formal) relationship by their shared spiraling form. The similarities rather than the differences are revealed between the two images. The excitement (action) created by the game vs. the frenzy of the barbed wire creates a semantic connection or relationship based on meaning.

A polarity is created through juxtaposition of the idea of the freedom of the children and the containment of the prisoners. This polarity creates a dual meaning or paradox.<sup>8</sup>



The next three sections open with precedents: examples that support and define:

J U X T A P O S I T I O N

I N T E G R A T I O N

C O N T E X T U A L I Z A T I O N

The first works are by various artists, followed by visual explorations used in the thesis exhibition or as part of the elaboration process.





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visual  
exploration

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**Synthesis as a Method for Elaboration**

*Exploration of the intersection between entities*

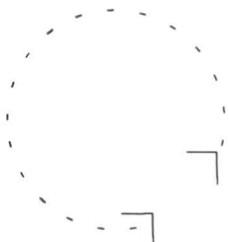
POLLY JOHNSON

MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University 1994

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of the Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Fine Arts Degree

Richmond, Virginia, August 1994



The cyclical nature of the journey of Odysseus is reflected in the structure of this book.  
Open the book from front to back or from back to front.  
Either direction is a valid journey.



