

## PAUL ZELEVANSKY: A BOOKMAKER WITH A CASE

Paul Zelevansky, a New York artist and bookmaker, discovered in his early art career the importance of words. As an object maker or a painter, words always were incorporated in the imagery, including a 30-foot sentence, or a three-dimensional poem. Having reached a point where he had to find another way of expressing himself, he turned to the book.

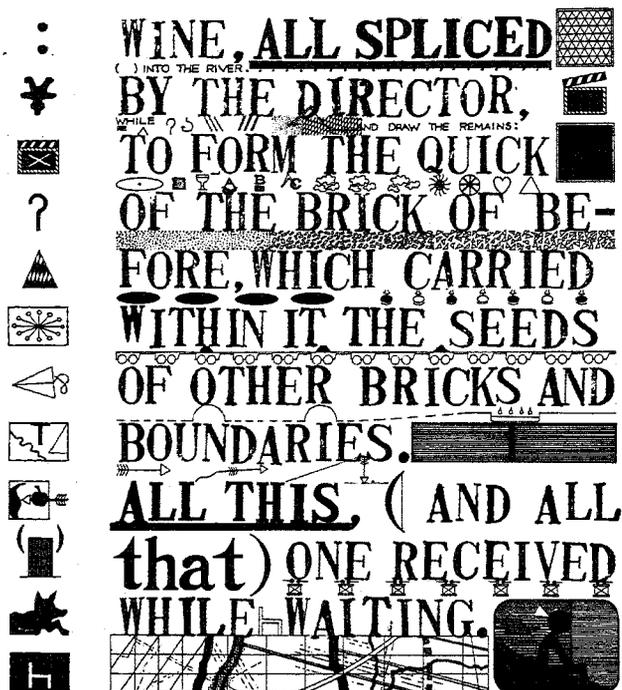
His first book was *Sweep*. The idea was to take a word with 24 definitions of it, and using the definitions the same way he used the lines of a poem, he associated the words magically and literally and did the book. After taking the book around to various publishers, the Something Else Press in 1974 finally published six pages of it in their Anthology, and Zelevansky was absolutely thrilled.

That is when Zelevansky met Richard Kostelanetz, who inspired him to do books. Books solved a great many problems for Zelevansky, condensing imagery and words. In addition, it solved the portability problem. Although you learn to warehouse many books in your studio, in most senses except for the distribution, books circulate; you put them in an envelope, with pleasure, put stamps on that envelope and the returns are continuous through the mail.

In Europe with his wife, Lynn, he took the time to catch up on his reading in 1972, starting with *Ulysses*, and then *Magic Mountain*, then *Moby Dick*, and finally the *Bible*. When he got to Jerusalem, while reading the Bible, he got the idea for his next book, to be called *Jericho*, the exodus of one person.

The theme seemed to be much more than he could handle at that time. He began with birth, where the first 12 pages contained the *Book of Thats*. The title came from the conversation of his first child, indicating that and that and that, which seemed to be a way of taking in information for children. What seemed to be a chapter, however, became a whole book. He had pages published in a few magazines and anthologies. That led to establishing a corporation, Zartscorp, primarily a financial arrangement to publish books and umbrella other activities and expenses. Then they published *The Book of Takes*, in an edition of 1000. Thinking it would sell quickly, because it was made so beautifully and yet was reasonable in price, Zelevansky learned the hard way that the road was difficult. He had worked hand in hand with the printer and the binder. Certainly, some copies sold at exhibits, and its most recent reincarnation was a review in the *American Book Review*. "It was a long process, although it is not a very long book. It is very condensed. The way I worked on it in terms of generating the narrative was to use three columns and three concurrent stories, and I worked in an inventory book, which had six to eight columns. I seem to enjoy a 'found form' with which to work. *Sweep* was the found form of the dictionary; *The Book of Takes* was the inventory. Part of it is the physical layout and part of it is the 'feel of it.' I wanted it to be a recording, and it felt right to work in that situation. There would be three concurrent stories and three columns; one column had to do with stairs as with both the image and the idea, the other column had to do with chairs, and the central column had to do with Jericho which was still on my mind as a place."

Central to all Zelevansky's books is a certain relationship to the page, since the page for him is beyond conventional reference as a holder for type. Instead, it has edges (a frame)



and because we can make marks on it if we allow ourselves to do so with visual and verbal books, it becomes a geographical space.

### CASE FOR THE BURIAL OF ANCESTORS

Having found another section of the Old Testament to work from, the construction of the tabernacle with details, Zelevansky wanted to see if he could write a description of a tabernacle that might in some way be connected to this Jericho book, but still maintaining the language of construction. He then went to the dictionary, the Random House edition, and started making columns of materials, structures, famous buildings, starting with A and B and working through the alphabet. Going at this via a roundabout route is the way the artist works. When he got to the letter H, there were a great many pertinent words, and he decided to stop at that letter, describing the tabernacle as the H Tabernacle.

Starting to write about this H Tabernacle, Zelevansky described its shape, with four pillars, the harpoon, the hook, the hoe, and the four altars, going to this place and uncovering the lost civilization of Hegemon, and thereby uncovering the lost tabernacle H.

The Book is largely a chronicle, the history of a fictional people called the Hegemonians (much like the Hebrews in the Old Testament). The first part of the story is a log (which shows up in the third book) from the standpoint of the explorer. They find this tabernacle, and the next step for Zelevansky was to actually build it. So he went back and stopped working on pages of this book and began building in earnest—four pillars and different hand-held objects. Somewhere it dawned upon him that the Hegemonians were interested in portability, so he built this into the story. They were also interested in taking their religion on the road.

At that time, the artist was with a cooperative gallery West Broadway Gallery, and he had an exhibit called *The History of the H Tabernacle in Exile*. The exhibit was made up of these different artifacts, and there was a mockup of the tabernacle. There was an audiotape ongoing with his reading sections of the history behind the altar. The main connection between the *Case for the Burial* of the first book was that the stamps were from the object called The Forty Cards, and that is how the stamps were included in a small envelope in the back of the book.

During the course of the show, he gave "tours" or orientational talks, a kind of performance, explaining sources and facts of the tabernacle, artifacts, in the language of a "guest speaker" or priest or patriarch.

The *Case for the Burial* is a real suitcase, which was one of the objects in the original show with four tombstones in it. When he started doing the performances, he developed a piece called *The Waters of Separation*, which later became that section in the book, referring to water and cleansing. Each time he added statements in the book, he would take something out or put something in the suitcase, but never making any reference to the case, until the very end, when he would come back to the podium and pronounced the *Case for the Burial of Ancestors*, then holding up the case. He therefore actually walked around with a physical pun, and he was delighted.

In writing the whole story, after the exhibition and after some performances, there is discussion of fathers, sons, generations, and the necessity to make separations—not to get disentangled from the past, or from the present, but passing through the wall, going over the wall. The book was a basic outgrowth of trying to bridge the problems of God the Father (in an orthodox Jewish home) and the actual father, the sense of responsibility to religion and the sense of responsibility to his own father, including the confusion it elicited. In writing the story, Zelevansky built a whole culture with references to the Old Testament and other places, making fun of the material that seemed ridiculous, analyzing the material that seemed more interesting, and applauding the material that seemed really essential.

In beginning the story, Zelevansky started with Genesis (it was supposed to have been 5 books), using water as a wall of separation, metaphor and pun. In order to write the Creation, he had to have a God and that role was played by the Puppeteer. A piece in that original Tabernacle show was called the Puppeteer's Portable Traveling Pack.

The second book is called *Genealogy*, and the author feels this book is the funniest one, which contains a lot of the performance material. It starts with the people in the sections and ends with four priests going out on the road for 40 days in the desert, going through their rites of purification and ending up back where they started, mostly because the people are not that bright. They get the people together, make a giant spear, and throwing it up, it lands on the top of the hill. On that spot they make a benchmark, and that is where the tabernacle is to rise. The language is also semi-biblical in tone.

The third book is called *Tabernacle*. In the whole process, Zelevansky was trying to find out who was the Puppeteer. "I was part of the puppeteer, who was this god, but I never truly found out who he was, except to find out my own

sense of myself as watching and participating. The answer to that is in the book I'm working on now, *Shadow Architecture at the Crossroads*."

The book has been a great project, and this is only the first volume of three. It has been beautifully printed at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. It is a book that will be viewed as a personal statement, but also a spiritual and psychological journey not only for the artist but also for the reader. For only \$15.00 paperback, one can truly have an aesthetic, spiritual voyage. Available at most of your bookshops or from Visual Studies Workshop, 31 Prince St., Rochester, NY 14607.

#### COMING IN JANUARY:

*Europe and the Mail Art Network*, by Ginny Lloyd  
*Technical Pages* by Kevin Osborn  
*List of Outlets for Artists' Books in U.S.*

#### BOOKWORKS: UPDATE

This is to let all our readers know about the International Conference, **Bookworks: 1982**, which is to be held in Philadelphia from 1 - 3 October 1982.

Besides the conference, there will be a Book Fair open to the public, as well as the workshops, lectures, seminars, panels and events to gather in people who have occupied themselves with growing and expanding art arena of artists' books, bookworks, independent publishing, with related extension in the form of performances, audio and video works.

Within the next few weeks, you should be receiving a questionnaire which will help the Project Director, Michael Kostiuk, and his planning group to map out the program for the October meeting. If you do not receive a questionnaire by Christmas, then please write to Michael Kostiuk, Project Director, Foundation for Today's Art, 2017 Chancellor St., Philadelphia, PA 19103. (215)667-8886.

**Umbrella** will serve as a forum for news about the Conference in each issue until next October, so look out for more news. Thus far, the funding for the Conference has been aided by three foundation grants, but there is still a long road to go.

#### LAST CALL! LAST CALL! LAST CALL!

This is the last call for **ARTISTS' PUBLICATIONS IN PRINT 1982**, which will go to press in early 1982, if we receive enough ads. Independent bookmakers and magazine publishers can advertise for a nominal fee and get their visual ads circulated in this catalog that will go to museum shops, universities, art libraries, and be presented at the College Art Association Annual Conference and the Art Libraries Society of North America's annual conference. So hurry! The deadline is 10 December, and you must accompany your camera-ready copy, 7½ x 10 inches for a half-page ad with \$40.00. All ads must be *horizontal*. Please indicate photo size and location, crop marks, reductions or enlargements. No bleeds off page. Please send artwork and check to APIP, P.O. Box 3903, Glendale, CA 91201.