

SOME SIXTIES INFLUENCES ON
SUELLEN GLASHAUSSEY'S ARTISTS' BOOKS

BY MICHAEL JOSEPH

Suellen Glashausser was an artist of many influences, although one who absorbed influence and transformed it into something unique and powerful. Pamela Scheinman has noted the influence of the fiber artist, Ed Rossbach,¹ and Barbara Valenta, the 1960s art movement, minimalism. I would like to extend the discussion by examining the influence of two other major artist movements of the 1960s—pop art and conceptual art—and the contemporary idea of camp. I will argue that pop art and conceptualism helped to provide Glashausser with materials and subject matter, even the opportunity to choose the book as an artistic medium, and the contemporary notion of personal taste served to warrant the value of Glashausser's art.

At the time Suellen Glashausser spoke at the second annual Book Arts Symposium, "Preaching What We Practice," in 1996, its orientation towards books was thoroughly traditional. A year earlier, its panel of presenters comprised a typographer, a wood engraver, two bookbinders, and two papermakers. It included only one book artist, whose works primarily served to showcase her virtuoso prints. The audience for "Preaching What We Practice" undoubtedly expected more of the same, so they were clearly caught off-guard by Glashausser's one-of-a-kind artists' books, and a radical aesthetic she concisely summarized by declaring that the chewing-gum wrapper she found on the street *inspired* her more than a Renaissance painting.

In "The Value of Culture and the Disavowal of Things," the historian Peter Stallybrass notes that Christians adopted the codex book in the second century specifically because it was a vile, castaway thing utterly without prestige. For centuries,

the scroll had supported the sanctioned communications of the state. Now, lately come on the scene, the book made do for the haphazard uses of women and slaves—the figures with whom the book is most often iconographically associated. Believing that “God as flesh and god [sic] as word, then, inhabited the waste parts of the material world, [e.g.] fragments of bread, the ‘mere’ notebooks of the codex,”² the Christians sought to identify their religion with the book.

Glashausser’s proclamation of the magnitude of the castaway object, with overtones of her choice of the book as artistic medium, would appear to resonate with a comparably inversive mode of thought, obliquely echoed in the postmodern decree that value is conferred only in relation to prevailing conditions: that meanings themselves are transient and changeable. No artwork is inherently meaningful, but meaning derives from a series of conversations among artist, viewer, and culture. Art historians trace this idea back to Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, the upside down urinal he exhibited as art in 1917, but it certainly can be glimpsed earlier, in Édouard Manet’s final masterpiece, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, painted in 1882–83, in which the dubious figure reflected in the painted mirror may be the viewer. Glashausser introduced us, with her throwaway comment, to a discourse on the relative nature of value—of “high” and “low”—as it had been codified and objectified within the idiom(s) of modern art—a discourse that by 1996 had already been exerting a gravitational pull on the constructed uses and meanings of the book for over two decades. While many book people professed to be wary of it, most were secretly curious.³

Pop Art

Denunciations of settled critical opinion became routine during the 1960s and 1970s when art movements jostled with one another to contest the hegemony of abstract expressionism⁴ and its tenets, that abstraction had a monopoly on seriousness, and an artwork could be

meaningfully understood on aesthetic grounds alone, as if universally held values resided in the object, itself. It was then that pop and conceptual art burst on the scene (much as the Gauls burst on the Roman scene in 387 BCE).

Pop art was the first significant counter-movement to abstract expressionism, and one whose innovations influenced Suellen Glashausser, as Debra Weier notes in her essay, "Suellen and the *Topaz Man*." Pop used familiar quotidian images from popular (or low) culture, such as pin-up models, body builders, cars, highway advertisements, comic books, household appliances, and, of course, soup cans to satirize the pretensions and inward gazing agendas of high art, and mechanical means of production employed by commercial artists to subvert refined formalist ideas of color, line and shape.

Pop was very much part of the cultural moment when Suellen Glashausser studied art in the 1960s, first at Manhattanville, where she obtained her BA in 1965, then at the Sorbonne, where she got a *degre français superieure* in 1967, and finally at Berkeley, where she graduated with an MA in textile design in 1969. Her artists' books, conceived over a period of two decades (1981–2000) persistently draw on pop imagery and pop irreverence. The titles of her books, *The Santa Claus Book* (1980), *Frutas Selectas* (1982), *Blue Zorro* (1985), *Topaz Man* (1995), *45% Less Fat* (1997), and *Bush's Beans* (1999) boldly assert the artistic legitimacy of representing commercial products; and by appropriating the material substrate of commercial imagery—advertising wrappers, soda cans, cigar boxes, Christmas kitsch—these works unmistakably reflect pop's aggressive posture toward refinement and gestural abstraction.

As we can see from their dates, Glashausser's artists' books continue to be influenced by pop from first to last. However, they cannot be defined wholly by pop. While the use of processed imagery certainly references pop's deprivileging of the human touch, their persistent use of the stitch, perhaps the hallmark of Glashausser's oeuvre,

would appear to reestablish the human touch as essential to artistic production. I would argue that by sewing Glashausser imposes a distinction between high touch and low touch, or, the “good” touch of Art (Renaissance), and the “bad” touch of domesticity (litter). Moreover, her representation of the low is playful and more affectionate, and lacks the archness of her austere pop exemplars; identifying with the lowly, her demotic images humanize and celebrate the material culture they symbolize. *Topaz Man*, for example, duplicates an image of the model, Steve Sandalis, in dishabille on page after page; these beefcake photographs bracket images of sacred personages by the Early Renaissance painter, Piero della Francesca.

Were it a pop collage or book, the juxtaposition of *sacer* and *profanus* in *Topaz Man* [See fig. 2], might serve to emphasize the superficiality or inescapable, honeyed banality of American popular culture, or implicate the pretenses of high art. But, instead, in part by the sheer weight of its reiterations, it celebrates the pleasure we take in the human form, from which the book takes its shape, and associates it with the pleasure we take in all acts of creation. Visual creativity simply plays to all audiences; it complicates, disrupts, and reconciles various discursive formations and analytic modes—a theme (accented here with bright lime-green and pink appliqués) pronounced in most of her artists’ books.

In a late, untitled work ([MMA]), consisting of scanned images, cellophane, colored Mylar, plastic, and thread, Glashausser includes several of The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s familiar round admission buttons. She is not making rhetorical hay by deriding the supposed hypocrisy of The Met, a cathedral of high art but, nonetheless, a purveyor of visual junk (as it would have been in an early pop work), but pointing at the button as an example of creative hybridity—a castaway iconic object that is recognizably kitsch and yet, simultaneously, the very emblem of Art (if not indeed legitimacy, itself): Transcendent art and junk constitute a binary in this work that is subject to creative manipulation

such that each element might construct and subvert the other. The MMA buttons are both intrinsic and extrinsic to the artwork, materials that embody the work and badges that confer identity on it—a hilariously ambiguous identity that may be either art object or trash.

Gaultier Fan/Box (1991) [See fig. 6] is a fan book of six leaves made from tin, copper, paper, tape, and cardboard, in which five joined photographic images of an unidentified fashion model and one image of the controversial French *haute couture* fashion designer, Jean-Paul Gaultier, can be spread out like a fan, then folded and fitted back into a cruciform box covered in glittering foil. The insistent shock of her materials would compel us to read her work as social satire if her sheer power of invention did not disorient and take us elsewhere. Popular culture is transcendent here; the high is the low. Glashausser is not having a moan about the decline of values in our unregenerate times, but, rather, trumpeting her own irrational enthusiasms and pertinacious sense that personal taste rules: it trumps proportion and whatever norms our culture cares to throw at it.

Glaschausser's virtuoso theatricality, and identification with what is ersatz or despicable strikes me as more daring than mainstream pop art is, whose emotional neutrality toward popular culture seems a more rational and more normative response (one that became its own kind of cliché). Lucy Lippard notes that from the start, pop harbored "a growing disdain for sentiment, and even for sensitivity" which it perceived as "a platform for the so-called humanist schools."⁵ Disdain, or detached observation, is an affect we experience in Ed Ruscha's pop book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, a significant work inasmuch as it is the notional origin point for American artists' books.

The tone of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, amplified by Ruscha's remark that "it is almost worth the money [spent on the work] to have the thrill of 400 exactly identical books stacked in front of you,"⁶ is cool, elliptical, self-consciously plonking. It is meant to jangle. Claes Oldenburg insisted

that pop artists were themselves not dispassionate, but they cultivated an impersonal style. "Making impersonality the style characterizes pop art in a pure sense"⁷; in other words, pop works become intentional objects in which viewers encounter impersonality. Perhaps we can call them art history's *Laugh-In*.⁸ By contrast, Glashausser's artists' books assert personal taste. They embrace the ridiculous and avoid the reductive laugh track effect of pop.

As the reminiscences collected in this issue of *The Journal* attest, Glashausser insisted on personal taste, not merely as a gesture of independence, but I would argue, as a way of organizing subjectivity. Regardless of whether viewers share her taste—I would argue, Glashausser makes the question all but irrelevant—it is impossible to ignore. Taste presides over the viewing experience from beginning to end. Even before one realizes s/he is viewing a book form lacking narrative content, the viewer is confronted by the unique choice of materials, whose eclecticism and supercharged exuberance is recalled by the artist, Andrea Valerio.

We became instant friends bound by—hunts at second hand stores, the almost going out of business paper and hardware stores, debates on where to go for chocolate and finally agreeing on a certain chocolate sorbet, frequenting outdoor markets and trying to charm an extra paper bag from each stand because Suellen had to have a perfect one for her current art project: an inconceivable concept for a Parisian fruits and vegetables vendor (they are probably still talking about her!), not to mention the cheese wrappers and the individual exotic fruit papers and crates. If we timed it right we would still be there JUST as the clean up crew (in their apple green overalls and bright green plastic brooms [she NEEDED one]) took care of the rest. Add to that the discovery of the perfect copper staple rivet maker, shower

curtain, embroidery threads, wax paper, parchment paper, acetate, permanent markers, pencils, paperclips (all colors, shapes and sizes), shoelaces, cigarette papers, old post cards, candy-wrappers, postage stamps, rubber stamps, and I will probably kick myself for having forgotten the essentials! The next time we would meet, Suellen would produce 'jewel' she had constructed from, and because of, the previous outing.⁹

Just as Valerio contrasts Glashausser's book as a "jewel" with the disposable matter from which it was fabricated, Glashausser uses the medium of the book to contrast the quirkiness of her materials and her techniques, a contrast intensified by the book's ordinariness and invisibility. For *Sprite* (1999), Glashausser cut pieces of metal, with no small difficulty, out of a soda can. For *Frutas Selectas* (1982), she attached pendant red plastic grapes to pages made from colored photographs of grapes printed on plastic. I would argue, through a radical and elaborate selection of materials and techniques, Glashausser is demonstrating the prerogatives of personal taste (selection sings the aria, and taste composes the music.) She reinforces her statement about the palpability of personal taste as an accessible and *possessable* element on an immediate, purely sensual level by associating it with food and drink.

Conceptual Art

Like pop art, Suellen Glashausser's artists' books are fun, full of jokes and nonsense, but her sense of humor has less in common with pop's own humor (think of Lichtenstein's punch-lines or Oldenburg's monstrous phones and lipsticks), than with conceptual art. A conceptual artwork called *Styrofoam Chain* (1969) by the young William Wegman, in which he floated Styrofoam letters and punctuation marks down the Milwaukee River,¹⁰ has obvious structural and

kinetic similarities to the book sculptures of Buzz Spector and the book-art performances of Susan Share; but it also has a subtle affinity with several of Glashausser's artists' books. *It's Our Pleasure to Serve You* (1997) [See fig. 1], the work briefly discussed in this journal by Lore Lindenfeld, attaches ruffled silk skirts to six hand-colored blue and white coffee cups illustrated with the emblematical female lyrist within a cartouche and the legend that serves as the work's title, and fastens them together in a codex form. *It's Our Pleasure* takes the form of a book to disrupt our reading of diner culture (and perhaps as well of feminist art¹¹) in the same way Wegman's commas disrupt a complacent reading of the Milwaukee River. It reveals a profound dimension unattainable within the prosaic constructions of our consumerist culture. It finds a modality of consciousness where one least expects it.

Conceptual influence surfaces early in Glashausser's artists' books, such as in *Ripped Out Number Book* (1981), *Blue Red Grid Book* (1981), *Carbon Paper Numbers Book* (1981) and *Dotted Stitched Grid Book* (1981) [See fig. 7]. In general, their enigmatic nature reflects the cognitive play of conceptualism, and their flight from conventionality is closer in spirit to conceptualist anti-art attitudes than to the (merely) anti-formalist attitudes of pop. Glashausser's artists' books developed over time according to (and diverging from) conceptualist doctrine. Before returning to personal taste, I would like to expand on this idea by suggesting how Suellen Glashausser's artists' books draw on conceptualism, and how conceptualism enabled a generation of artists to take the book as a medium for fine art.

Pop had rebelled against the formalist but not the economic values of the art industry; but conceptualism, developing leanings implicit in pop art, iconoclastically declared that artworks could no longer be viewed as commodities. Art was a communicable idea that must be made accessible without commercial mediation. Lawrence Weiner famously proclaimed, "Once you know about a

work of mine you own it. There's no way I can climb inside somebody's head and remove it." Obviously, tangible objects were necessary, but peripheral. Where Greenberg had encouraged the perception of an auratic majesty surrounding paintings and sculpture, the conceptualists described artworks with studied irreverence as mere documents of the real (conceptual) art. Books often served this mundane purpose of documentation, so that, while they were documents and signifiers of protest against materialism, conceptualist books were *not* art, at least in theory.

The Conceptual Book

We have this attitude put variously before us. The readers of *Art & Project*, an irregular single-sheet periodical published from 1968 to 1989 by the Dutch art dealers Adriaan van Ravesteijn and Geert van Beijeren, did not regard their journal as a work of art, but as description and documentation. Two artists' books (*Records 1* and 2) produced in 1973 and 1978 by Thomas M. Canaday resemble visual diaries, or art journals, but, drawing on Duchamp's notion of "leaving retinal art behind," they do not foreground the visual field as an aesthetic object. Claiming only to be records, they posit the contravening claim that the "record" of an artist's thoughts and his visual games may bear the same weight of analysis conventionally accorded to a finished work. Since anybody can enjoy the activities these records document, or similar amusing activities, they efface the boundary between artist and non-artist. They objectify one of Canaday's democratic contentions that anybody can do art. *Records 1* and 2¹² confirm that art is attitudinal, that it engages a mode of awareness of being in the world.

Readers of Lawrence Weiner's conceptual book, *Statements* (1968) a small paperback containing sixty-four conceptual projects, were also doing art. They would form mental images of a project, or how it might appear, while trying to imagine the ways in which the process evoked (disturbed or confirmed) ideas about art. In this way, the act of reading

became the act of "doing" art (conflating making and interpreting in a way that recalls *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*).

For conceptualists like Weiner and Canaday, the larger purpose was to suggest how the immensity of the spatialized material world yielded to visualization and to valorization as art—to efface the arbitrary boundary between *sacer* and *profanus*. The book object merely served as a trigger, or an incitement to thought, and it was informal and absolutely disengaged from traditionally privileged questions of craft and technique. One might think of the conceptualist's artists' book as a kind of paradox—artists' book = *not* book + *not* art—recalling Rene Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928–1929), in which a depiction of a pipe floats above the cursive caption, "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*"

Yet, just as one reads Magritte skeptically, one must read the conceptualists' claim skeptically, too, because both are nuanced and, again, draw meaning, not immediately apparent, from their cultural contexts. Although flouting the prevailing norms and conventions for judging art, conceptualist books focused those norms and conventions and therefore demanded that viewers view them with the knowledge and sensitivity one brings to a work of art. The conceptual book *functioned* as work of art, and thus reinscribed artfulness in its claim of artlessness. We can see this by a glance at Weiner's *Statements* which begins with a project that may reflect with some relish on the destructive potential of conceptualism:

A field cratered by structured simul-
taneous TNT explosions¹³

According to Weiner, the reader owns the artwork by possessing the text, memorizing and mentally processing it, in the same way one might possess any very simple text. The art potentially belongs to everyone equally, which is an important part of its ideological underpinning; it trumps any commercial claims by a book-publisher or gallery owner, even the proprietary or intentional claims of the artist. The conceptual artists might have assumed that, whatever other symbolism

it might have accrued, the universal accessibility of the book made it the symbol nonpareil of *communitas*¹⁴ by inhibiting anyone from revering it as an art object, and arrogating special privileges in relationship to it. The book spoke for everybody.

But, however hard one presses on the conceptual, the book is in fact material—it is composed of organized stuff—and, in the event, the materiality of the book infiltrates the conceptual experience. As one can see in Weiner's *Statements*, materiality asserts its own inherent claims; the medium cannot avoid being a part of the message. In his choice of typeface, by centering the text on the page and breaking the word "simultaneous" over two lines, Weiner directs the expressive plasticity of, and elicits our pleasure in, typography—and, indeed, language. The complexity of his ideas is mediated by a series of choices realized and inseparably bound up in the physical form. The materiality of the object impacts the viewer's experience of the book-works of a contemporary of Weiner's, the German conceptualist, Hanne Darboven. Her *100 Books 00-99* (1970), whose concerns with numbers and grids anticipate Glashausser's 1981 artists' books, asks questions about space and mass that play off the viewer's visceral engagement with the objects.

These few examples may suffice to quickly illustrate the point that, even in conceptualism's early days, the immateriality of the book, or the disembodied artwork, was less a project than a parable or myth. I would argue that, like other myths, it gradually became obscured if not lost within the tumult of its various translations—the explosive growth of the artists' book in the 1980s and 1990s. Several possible etymologies suggest themselves: (1) that the artists' book (an alternative or counter-cultural medium of expression) depended from the conceptualist book ("not" art), overwriting its myth of self-erasure with other often contradictory re-materializing, re-retinalizing and re-iconizing narratives (albeit some similarly activist and politically informed); (2) that, quite oppositely, to date, the artists' book remains fundamentally the conceptualist book, that it speaks as

the conceptualist book and while the myth may no longer be rationally comprehensible it nevertheless continues to function effectively, or to have a revelatory function, at an unconscious level, and it is precisely this that gives artists' books their cohesiveness as a field, their primary claim to significance as contemporary art and their esoteric charm.

We must not neglect the dour possibilities: (3) that whatever remains of the original inspiration has been lost or re-aculturated into the history of the book, and artists' books are now only marginally relevant to contemporary art; although (4) as conservative and thoroughly retinalized as they appear, artists' books carry the conceptualist myth forward, a recessive gene that may one day come roaring back to life to proclaim uncomfortable truths.

Although in their emphasis on tactility and flamboyant materiality Glashausser's artists' books diverge from the early conceptual project of dematerialization, their demotic materials inherit a sense of *communitas*. The fragility and ephemerality of their materials recontextualize the propositional superfluousness of physicality as the object's lack of inherent value becomes the pathos of embodiment.

A pivotal moment in the evolution of the conceptualist book (into the artists' book) occurred in the mid-1970s in the founding of bookstores and collectives for promoting conceptual art. In 1976, Lucy Lippard opened Printed Matter¹⁵ on Lispenard Street in downtown Manhattan. Printed Matter was intended to distribute texts by conceptual artists,¹⁶ but soon became a distribution point for books created by all artists, and, indeed, a site of inspiration for nonconformist artists, a symbol of the artists' book movement and a storehouse of evidence for the inexhaustible complexity and creative potential of the book. Following the history of Printed Matter, one could watch conceptualism set at variance to the growth and commercial viability of the artists' book, and, its continued presence in our century serves to remind us that conceptualism opened the door for artists during the late 1970s and 1980s to reinterpret and re-embody the book.

Back to Camp

Earlier, I mentioned that Glashausser asserted personal taste against the reductive weight of pop art. While conceptualism provided her with a medium and pop helped to bring the mutable world of eating, traveling, and living into artistic play, ultimately, the value of her art found its warrant in the authority of personal taste. The question of taste was debated in the sixties when a formerly deprecated personal taste (what I think of as romantic or *low* taste) arose to challenge an analytic, critical kind of personal taste (which I want to call *classical* taste). The artists' books of Suellen Glashausser self-consciously embody *low* taste while resisting and even consolidating themselves against *classical* taste.

What I am calling *classical* taste can be located in a celebration of connoisseurship, discrimination, and entitlement, often in conjunction with technical facility and arcane or metaphysical knowledge. Greenberg references this phenomenon in passing when he refers to "the tastes of the wealthy elite."¹⁷ He, himself, assumes the part his own sense of taste plays, or of his application of fiat, in declaring Michelangelo superior to Maxfield Parrish, or Giotto superior to Rembrandt. "Taste has varied," he concedes, "but not beyond certain limits."¹⁸

Classical taste, referencing Greenberg as an example, narrowly constructed personal involvement. It inhered in leveraging education and judgment (reasserting proportion, "limits") to recognize and validate superlative control over a mechanical craft, process or technique. It surfaced in certain ritualized critical or pseudo-critical phrases, such as "skillful brushwork," and "polished technique," which imply that an artist equates to a visual technician who gains accomplishment or mastery over his or her instrument in order to *perform* a predetermined project—as though the great themes of mythology, the Bible, nature, civilization or the human psyche are somehow already completed compositions needing only professional interpretation—a "masterful accomplishment."

Behind the popularity of formalism, and, perhaps, implicit in Clement Greenberg's formulations, resides the notion that "art is nature improved."¹⁹ Technique, of course, is the improving agency, known to us through its formalist effects. Technique provides a *via media* between the "primitive," or the unconscious—human nature as it imposes itself upon the sensitive artist—and the "civilized"—the institutions that support the civil society. The knowledge of the good, which Greenberg believes mankind has always possessed *a priori*, can stave off the barbarism lurking in the human soul and spewing out as kitsch in the roiling popular culture only if properly reified by technique.

Suellen Glashausser's artists' books demystify *classical* taste, just as they defy the tenets of its concomitant, high art, unsettling its halo of lofty seriousness (and its related juridical and constabulary functions) with a spark of mercurial pleasure, momentary rapture, a paradoxically secular, decentering state of grace. Just as they displace painting and sculpture with the ordinary book, they replace the usual book materials (paper, cloth, type—to say nothing of the regalia of traditional book-making: cured animal skins, deckled papers, Renaissance typefaces) with the ersatz, the ordinary, the dispensable, the domestic: cheesecloth, paper-towels, doilies, lace, thread—whatever *you* have in your pockets. Appearances notwithstanding, however, Glashausser's artists' books do not propose to mock traditional materials or craft, but to upset expectations in order to call attention to their own eccentricity and contiguity, their substantive link to all venues of human existence, and their value outside of the conditioning, elitist restraints of *classical* taste. Celebrating momentariness, individuality and immanence, whilst outing the arbitrary configurations of high and low—structures that have no basis in experience—was central to the *low* taste in the 1960s.

New taste relinquished claims to any absolute knowledge or any point of origin—it did not memorialize or claim the mantle or shroud of a glorious predecessor—and thus relinquished any claims of the authority to "discriminate,"

which one sees in its constant re-inscription of paradox (i.e., “anti-art” = art); and it insisted on a freedom to “like.” New taste further interrogated discrimination by embracing naïve art, relaxing the distinctions between its own highly informed dissent and various permutations of folk and “outsider” art. It deemphasized technical expertise (how to) and emphasized predilection and whim (what to do now). It deemphasized judgment and connoisseurship by reveling in its peccability: its emphatically fallible, imperfect and flawed being reflected and indeed touched by an immanent existential truth. New taste was utterly individualistic, and liberated sensibility, even culpability, rhapsodizing over its guilty pleasures.

We can locate the idea of “new taste as guilty pleasure” in Glashausser’s introductory comment (in which I have found my inspiration) about the inspiration she found in a chewing gum wrapper (unlike a Renaissance painting, one really does know where it’s been), and, more to the point, in her artists’ books that feature food and eating: obviously and directly in works titled *Florida Citrus* (1999), *Mangez les Fruit* (1989), *Amaretto Book* (undated), [See fig. 8] *Bush’s Beans* (199?) *It’s Our Pleasure to Serve You* (1997), *Fast Food*, (1995), *Frutas Selectas* (1982), *Sprite* (1999), and *Wedding Cake Book*, (1981). We also find it manifest in her multicultural, ordinary materials: the paper bags she begged from the Parisian fruit and vegetables vendors, Brazilian coffee bags, the cheese wrappers, Chinese paper, Indian paper, exotic fruit papers, cookie box labels, candy wrappers, plastic grapes, Belgian liquor labels, French collar stiffeners, canned food labels, margarine paper The unswerving insistence on the freedom to make art out of and about things not conventionally constructed as art (classical taste) but things that appealed directly to the senses—that she and others liked to eat, taste, smell, touch, wear—proclaim that art is both a personal language, and an expression of individual freedom available to everybody.

In her famous essay, “Notes on Camp,” which *Partisan Review* also published, in 1964, roughly a quarter-century after the essay by Clement Greenberg, Susan Sontag wrote

that "taste" is but a marker of being human. "To patronize the faculty of taste is to patronize oneself," she warns, "for taste governs every free—as opposed to rote—human response. Nothing is more decisive. There is taste in people, visual taste, taste in emotion—and there is taste in acts, taste in morality. Intelligence, as well, is really a kind of taste: taste in ideas."²⁰

One might read her astounding commentary as encouragement to subsume conceptual art as a subset of camp—a maneuver we might ascribe to Glashausser. Viewers who understand the concept in a work by Lawrence Weiner can really only possess the art (as Weiner claims) if they understand it as an expression of taste—or as a personal response to experience. Taste is a determinative contextualizing element. (A viewer can only be "doing" art if that is what s/he *wishes to do*.) Glashausser *wished* her artists' books to exist, the improbability of their form and material existence providing proof of the power of her wishing.

Sontag discusses (new) taste and sensibility in other ways that resonate with the intentionality of Suellen Glashausser's artists' books.

"Taste has no system and no proofs. But there is something like a logic of taste: the consistent sensibility which underlies and gives rise to a certain taste. A sensibility is almost, but not quite, ineffable."²¹

With this movement toward transcendence, though of a decidedly non-Augustan type, Sontag seems to be drawing closer to a Romantic mindset behind new taste. Existing outside of system or proof, "almost . . . ineffable," the new taste possesses something akin to Rousseauian Innocence, which, quite apart from valorizing the individual, regards the individual, apart from the corrupting influence of society, as an instrument of the revelation of transpersonal truth. In this case, society is located in the cultural institutions—the art industry, for example—rather than the swelling masses decried in the 1930s. The character of the artist does not form the basis of art; it is personal taste functioning in the capacity of the ineffable, in the manner somewhat akin to a

personal epiphany; and it is the nature of all human beings to have personal epiphanies that can be communicated by art. Thus in art, we do not perceive immutable truths; but we recognize one another's humanity. In this light, the new taste succeeded in being both personal and universal, immanent and transcendent, and reconciled the competing claims of conceptualism and formalism, High and Low.

We see an example of this *coincidentia oppositorum* in the well-known painting by Charles Demuth, *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold* (1928). The painting records a profound experience of the poet, William Carlos Williams, who glimpsed the enamelled numeral flashing by on a speeding fire truck; it also records Demuth's no less profound experience reading Williams' poem, "The Great Figure." The multivalent painting communicates an experience that is both historical and universal. It unites Williams, Demuth and anyone else profoundly moved by the painting, as (full disclosure) I am; it also instances and has come to symbolize the human capacity to have personal epiphanies (*sacer*) grounded in ordinary, even banal experience (*profanus*).

What I believe Sontag to be suggesting by "logic of taste . . . that is almost ineffable" is that camp (or "low" art as processed through new taste) constitutes a reaffirmation of one's own interiority as it is transformed by an impersonal faculty: the ineffable—that which is unutterable, unspeakable, inexpressible. I would argue that Suellen Glashausser absorbed this Romantic sense of inspiration in the nineteen sixties. Her preoccupation with transforming materials—making gum-wrappers into art objects—focuses on the transformative power of art to express the self in the act of self-transformation. By sewing fragile, ephemeral hand-towels or paper coffee-cups, to stabilize them and join them together, by stitching with copper thread, sewing through wood and metal (juxtaposing the impersonal and the personal), Glashausser resolutely asserts the ever-present possibility of transmuting the base element of experience, and thus the indwelling human potential for revelation, ecstasy. In later

artists' books, with increasing frequency, she explores highly complicated structures. *Bush's Beans*, for example has sixty panels or pages, assembled so that one can open the book in an innumerable variety of ways, creating many different combinations of images and form. The viewing (reading or art-making) experience changes from reading to reading and making to making, creating, virtually, an artists' hypertext. The book's meta-textuality becomes the self's inexhaustible capacity for renewal (to express it as a bad librarian's pun).

La Lune uses the flexagon structure, in which outside and inside swap places as one folds open the outer parts, so that different faces/phases of the *la lune*/the moon rotate positions. One's reading experience becomes cyclical and ritualistic. One's self becomes a cosmic self, or a Rousseauian child self. In *Florida Citrus Fruit* [See fig. 9], Glashausser uses the flexagon structure to poke fun at her own eating obsessions. While, the "outside" of the book seems to praise healthy nutritious foods, the "inside" reveals large Mallomar cookies and a red, anthropomorphic, absurdly masculine M&M. The chocolate, and its implication of guilty pleasure, is as likely a source of revelation as the golden number five on a fleeting fire truck, and assumes its value within the process of being revealed—the fulfillment of capacity. Perhaps *Florida Citrus* even calls our attention to the act of revelation or "unfolding" (which is the basis of the flexagon structure), so that it constitutes the potential epiphany, an idea suggested by the thin strips of the Mallomar label Glashausser alluringly adheres to the work's "outer" surface. The humble book as self—a self no more dignified by social structure than the Topaz Man, or the M&M character, but a self nonetheless—becomes the datum of experience that revelation ecstatically reconfigures. How this universal process occurs is unfathomable—just as a humble plastic book that keeps constantly opening, recursively reinventing itself is unfathomable—but at least we know that it must be grounded in what Stallybrass elegantly calls "the waste parts of the world."²²

The Low

In conclusion, I'd like to focus on "the waste parts of the world" and suggest a way of situating Glashausser's sociopolitical conscience in a broad historical context. Sontag locates the origin of camp in the nineteenth century, in "Gothic novels, Chinoiserie, caricature, artificial ruins, and so forth."²³ She writes "a pocket history (pocket histories!) of Camp might, of course, begin further back—with the mannerist artists like Pontormo, Rosso, and Caravaggio, or the extraordinarily theatrical painting of Georges de La Tour, or Euphuism (Lyly, etc.) in literature."²⁴ Still, the soundest starting point seems to be the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, because of that period's extraordinary feeling for artifice, for surface, for symmetry; its taste for the picturesque and the thrilling, its elegant conventions for representing instant feeling and the total presence of character."²⁵

I would suggest that the division between high and low founds and even potentiates camp, and that division is already incipient in classical Greece. We see it, I think, in no less canonical a source than Aristotle, most plangently in his justifications for slavery.

We teach our children that Greece, more particularly, Athens, is the birthplace of democracy; the Athenians were a people that loved democracy and personal liberty. Yet, we also know they kept slaves to do the heavy lifting in virtually all areas of their society: on farms, in shops, in the house working alongside the women, from whom they were not always distinguishable. (The same categories of person Stallybrass links to the inception of the book.) So ubiquitous was slavery in the classical era that contemporary scholars have seriously considered that slavery facilitated Athenian democracy.

Who were slaves? Athenians made slaves out of captured warriors and the occupants of conquered territories, as well as, perhaps more remarkably, other Athenians. How could Athenians reconcile the abhorrent practice of keeping slaves, let alone making slaves of their own countrymen, with a

love of individual freedom? Prizing rationality as they did, how could they not see the illogic and inconsistency of their actions, as well as its moral bankruptcy? Predictably enough, it is the very faculty of rationality that becomes the basis of the Greek justification for slavery.

In the fourth century BCE, the last century of Greek hegemony, Aristotle argued that slavery conformed to the natural order of things in which the stronger dominated the weaker. In the *Politics*, he asserts that slavery is natural and that some people are born to be slaves and others to be masters. "For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule."²⁶

The statement raises the question, who is "marked" out for subjugation, and who for rule? Women, for one, are naturally inferior, so Aristotle claims, as are all who are distinguished by the strength of their bodies rather than their minds.

"Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master."²⁷

And those masterful individuals who work with their minds are distinguished by the faculty of apprehending "rational principle": those who cannot apprehend "rational principle" are marked "by nature" to be slaves or fitted "for servile labor." The one who can apprehend is "upright," and "useless for [manual labor]," but rather "useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace." Lastly, those who are fitted for servile labor, i.e. women and those in "the inferior class," lack "the beauty of the soul" imputed to those who are "upright" and fitted for mental exertions.

So, the theory goes, it is natural for slaves to have powerful bodies but not self-rule. Their minds (or souls) are weak, but their backs are strong; or they possess wombs. Accordingly, since this was a foundational assumption, inasmuch as it

defined Athenian identity, it compelled free Athenian men to prove that they truly belonged to the upright group, and predisposed by nature to dominate. Therefore, an Athenian male was expected to undertake tasks and responsibilities to demonstrate mental superiority, rationality (from which the concept of *scholē*, or freedom from the necessity to work, arises):²⁸ Athenians who escaped the domestic tasks, shop-keeping, farm work, could—and indeed were obliged to—participate in public life: to make themselves citizens. “Citizen identity is, then, a product of making and doing, where doing is a kind of self-making . . . and making, as the guided shaping by laws, education, and other institutions, entails citizenly doing.”²⁹ By making—engaging in philosophical debate, performing other activities (“the “art of war and peace”) that displayed a “natural” superiority to women and slaves, Athenian men proved not only their own fitness to rule, but the fitness of their class, as well.

In the convoluted attempts of the Athenians to reconcile their love of freedom with the perceived necessity of keeping slaves—to rationalize, in multiple senses of the word—we have our first distinction between high art and low art. Public life became associated with art forms and other activities that signified the rational principle: a sense of order, apprehension of normativity and the social expectations of the state. Public life therefore conferred legitimacy on wealthy Athenian males who, reflexively, conferred legitimacy on the state. Practices associated with the muses—music, poetry, drama and dance, as well as architecture, sculpture, and painting—became the high or inspired practices, as Leonardo, a conceptualist of the Renaissance, would observe: “*Pittura est cosa mentale*” (painting is a thing of the mind), while activities such as quilting, sewing, stitching, which were associated with women, became a part of the low—craft, or work.

These latter, homely pursuits, unrelated to public glory and citizenly responsibility, are pursuits valorized in many artists’ books, and with particular emphasis in the artists’ books of Suellen Glashausser, where they are associated with

personal and domestic pleasure. In Glashausser's artists' books we notice, as many of the writers in this volume have observed, a relentless obsession with sewing or with the stitch. Sewing reminds us over and over of the mundane physical acts by which culture and social history and domestic felicity are produced. It has a particularly intimate and emblematic connection to women's work, and, as Karen Guancione's art reminds us, to the work of unseen and unheralded laborers, and, it eloquently attests to the fundamental significance of clothes-making, fitting, tailoring—not only to each of us on a very personal level—but to human survival, as well.³⁰ Its persistence throughout her work—its strong affirmation that her art involves physical labor—ascribes a symbolic importance to sewing that is reinforced by her predilection for commercial and demotic materials; it conscientiously resists the category of the high and the equation of art with ideas of entitlement, exclusion, conventional mastery, ease, or *schöle*.

The artist, Susan Wick noted, in conjunction with a comment about Suellen's sewing, "Suellen often did obsessive repetitive work, more, more and still more. The artist questioning when is enough."³¹

Questioning "when is enough" speaks directly to the classic Greek notion of The Golden Mean. Aristotle wrote of The Golden Mean as the desirable middle between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency in both the *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*. Flouting the conventional wisdom of a "desirable middle," or of a natural warrant for social control, Glashausser's pertinacity destabilizes the Athenian premise that social inequality is natural, or beautiful, and therefore there can exist a natural and harmonious balance between rich and poor, man and barbarian, strong and weak, ruler and ruled.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Suellen Glashausser's artists' books reveal the influence of anteceding art movements of the 1960s,

particularly pop art, and conceptual art, which prefigure their Carnavalesque sense of a world turned-upside-down—a sense that continually and passionately disrupts a normativizing privileging of technique, materials and subject matter formalistically associated with institutional control, and thereby disrupt a cultural meta-narrative that warrants male dominance, abstraction, and academicism. In alternative, they emphasize sensuality, immediacy and subjectivity, attitudes that, while implicit in pop and conceptualism, from which she derives inspiration to make the book form her artistic medium, are most explicitly articulated by Susan Sontag in her “Notes on Camp.” It is personal taste and inspiration that ultimately warrant the value of her art. By design, the works emphasize intuition over rationality: they wear their ideology lightly. They intend first and foremost to be just as they appear to be, light-hearted applications of the things at hand, or lost things found, to personal inspiration and a wish to make art. Made to speak directly to the hand, the eye, the viewer’s sense of humor and love of freedom, they dance the enduring sweetness of the ordinary, evanescent life—eating, playing, loving, making, worthwhile work—the civilizing pastimes of women and men since time immemorial. Weaving their influences lightly together as well, they attest to the imperative of sharing one’s existence, of being influenced and influencing others.

Notes

1. Pamela Scheinman, [Statement] *Suellen Glashausser and Her Circles* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Libraries, 2007): 46.
2. Peter Stallybrass, “The Value of Culture and the Disavowal of Things,” *Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar* (2000) <http://emc.eserver.org/1-1/stallybrass.html> (accessed January 13, 2010).

3. At the New Jersey Book Arts Symposium (1996), Glashausser's inversion of high and low was blatant and manifestly self-conscious. Conventionally, Renaissance paintings are assigned a high value—particularly the Renaissance paintings of the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, which in fact are referenced as the *High Renaissance* (the *sacer*)—while detritus is the veritable definition of lowliness (the *profanus*)—lying, as it often does, at our feet. By opposing Renaissance painting to a detrital wrapper and pairing the latter with the lofty concept *inspiration*, Glashausser was making the point that the cultural binary “high and low”—like the binary “art and not art”—are arbitrary and tend to be oppressive. Lacking any permanent or transcendental sanction, they merely reflect social discursive practices that privilege the habit of thought of an elite—one relatively small group of individuals, whose privileges and entitlements are flaunted and legitimized by their association with the high.
4. Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (Fall, 1939): 34–49.

Histories of twentieth-century art ascribe responsibility for the avant-garde's ascent in critical and social esteem to the *Partisan Review* article by then Uber-critic to be, Clement Greenberg. Greenberg argues that abstract art, as exemplified in the paintings and sculpture of the avant-garde, equates to intellectual honesty and moral virtue. With a conservatism that now seems to border on monoculturalism, Greenberg writes, “[a]ll values are human values, relative values, in art as well as elsewhere. Yet, there does seem to have been more or less of a general agreement among the cultivated of mankind over the ages as to what is good art and what bad” (42). “Good art” is the antithesis of bad, which went hand in hand with the frenzied, totalitarian beliefs that were on the move in Europe and threatening the values of the free world. Supporting the avant-garde was both virtuous and patriotic.

The differences between abstraction and other styles were exemplary. Abstraction arose to significant form—line, color, shape, and texture. Representative art, by contrast, had degenerated into crude sentiment or starchy academic imitation: “kitsch”—a term that we see revived and rehabilitated several decades later, most notably in the criticism of Susan Sontag. Although sentimental or academic art assumes multiple forms, the concept of form, itself, comes to consciousness in avant-garde painting and sculpture. Hence, there an awareness of awareness reflected in abstract art that approaches transcendence. As late as 1991, *The Times* still referred to Greenberg as “The high priest of criticism,” an epithet that was not simply tongue-in-cheek. Deborah Solomon, “The High Priest of Criticism,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1991: 229.

Contemporaries were not all convinced by Greenberg’s universalist claims for art. George Boas argued that a claim for the universality of taste based on the ongoing public admiration for certain works of art, e.g. the *Mona Lisa*, must contend with the fact that different ages have found these works admirable for entirely different reasons. George Boas, “The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste,” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 1 (January, 1940): 207.

Nevertheless, Greenberg’s status, unprecedented for an American art critic, created art heroes (or art hierophants) of abstract painters, most notably Jackson Pollock, who, embodying the best of Western culture, thus served to defend the Western Rationalist Tradition from the incursions of fascism (49). As it happened, however, in the early sixties, with fascism no longer a focal point, but, rather, the notion of heroism itself under threat, America’s passion for abstract expression began to cool—a moment that ironically coincided with MoMA’s massive memorial exhibition for Pollock in 1967.

5. Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*. 3rd ed. (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, 1970): 73.
6. Ed Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal, Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*; edited by Alexandra Schwartz (New York: October Books, 2002): 24–25.
7. Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, 86.
8. *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* was an American sketch comedy television program that ran for 140 episodes from January 22, 1968 to May 14, 1973.
9. Andrea Valerio, [Statement], *Suellen Glashausser*, 52.
10. Joan Simon, *William Wegman: Funney/Strange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 31.
11. Michael Joseph, *Enduring Delight* (Newark, NJ; Rutgers University Libraries, 2002): 4.

Glashausser's relationship to feminist art is complicated and worth deeper investigation. I tried to suggest its ambivalence in a memorial exhibition Barbara Valenta, Karen Guancione, and I curated at the Dana Library in 2002. *It's Our Pleasure to Serve You* puts the raw energy of the artist's 1990s work on brilliant display as it sets the cultural discourse about the contested female shape against the seductive power of art. By attaching a cloth skirt to the familiar paper coffee cup, Glashausser shows us the camouflaged (& corseted?) female shape, nimbly turning the achingly banal phrase (of the title) into a parody of female subservience. However, *It's Our Pleasure to Serve You* also savors of Dionysian ecstasy and surrender, carried forward as the "leaves" of the book unfold into a musical procession of draped Greek lyristes, who, siren-like, sing the reader away from worldly woe: drink, and forget. Inventiveness, cultural viscosity, and artistry transcend the problematic social context. Nevertheless, the pendulum swings back toward contemplation, and the book's performative subversion of its own cool, distanced cultural critique is in turn subverted. As the discourses of the book reflexively and dynamically interact, the reader is left disoriented (intoxicated?), poised between seduction and censure."

12. *Record 1* is dedicated to Walter C. Arensberg, the patron of Marcel Duchamp, and *Record 2* to Wilson Jones, inventor of the three-ring binder, and the man/company who manufactured the blank record books Canaday filled.
13. Lawrence Weiner, *Statements* (New York: Louis Kellner Foundation, 1968): [1].
14. I mean to suggest that the book's conspicuous lack of prestige enabled conceptualists to present themselves as a community stripped of any affiliation with structure and hence liberated from its repressive (or otherwise) constructions.
15. Note the almost aggressively concrete, self-effacing title of *Printed Matter*, which echoes *Art and Project* and Canaday's *Records*.
16. Julie Ault, *Interview with Lucy R. Lippard on Printed Matter* (December 2006) <http://printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/ault.cfm?CFID=6530394&CFTOKEN=92538870> (accessed January 19, 2010). In response to a question about the founding of *Printed Matter*, Lippard names six artists whose work she founded *Printed Matter* to support (Seth Siegelaub, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry, Doug Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Jan Dibbets). Although she identifies them as artists making books, all of them were closely associated with the conceptual art movement.
17. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 48.
18. *Ibid.*, 42. This proclamation is precisely what George Boas sets out to disprove. See note 1 above.
19. Leo Marx. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). I am borrowing this phrase from Leo Marx who, echoing Alexander Pope, who in turn is echoing the first century Roman rhetorician, Quintilian, uses it to comment on American culture in his discussions of "the technological sublime."
20. Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall, 1964): 516.

21. Ibid.
22. I was considering the idea of the book as valueless and the act of revelation being itself the object of revelation while walking through the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and happened on Robert Campin's *Mérode Altarpiece*, an example of fifteenth-century art in which the Angel of the Annunciation appears to Mary and his supernatural presence flutters the pages of the book, the New Testament, lying on the table. While the Angel's presence physically stirs the pages, it seems to me that one could interpret the imagery to say that the physical book, itself, takes on life within the act of revelation: that the book is transfigured by ecstasy.
23. Sontag, "Camp," 519.
24. Euphuism is a mannered style of English prose that appeared in the sixteenth century.
25. Sontag, "Camp," 520.
26. Aristotle *Politics*, book 1, part v, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885) <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html> (accessed January 20, 2010).
27. Ibid.
28. Thomas Goodale and Geoffrey Godbey, *The Evolution of Leisure*. (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 1988): 2.
29. Jill Frank, "The Nature of Identity: Citizenship and Slavery in Aristotle," *Political Science Research Workshop* (Columbia, South Carolina: Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina, 2003) <http://www.cas.sc.edu/poli/psrw/Frank032803.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2010).
30. Ian Gilligan, "Neanderthal Extinction and Modern Human Behavior: The Role of Climate Change and Clothing, *World Archaeology* 39, no. 4 (December 2007): 499–514.

Paleoarchaeologists argue that a significant contributing factor in the demise of the Neanderthal about 30,000 years ago, was Neanderthal's inability to fashion layered clothing, which would have provided

better protection against the cold in Ice Age Europe, as well as a defense against the larger, horned, animals they hunted: the Neanderthal toolkit—the Mousterian—lacked a needle, which is found in the Aurignacian toolkit of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. For want of a needle . . .

31. Susan Wick, [Statement], *Suellen Glashausser*, 53.