

ARTFORUM

MARCH 2007

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

JACQUES RANCIÈRE
ALLEN RUPPERSBERG



for Carl Solomon

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Tim Griffin on Allen Ruppertsberg

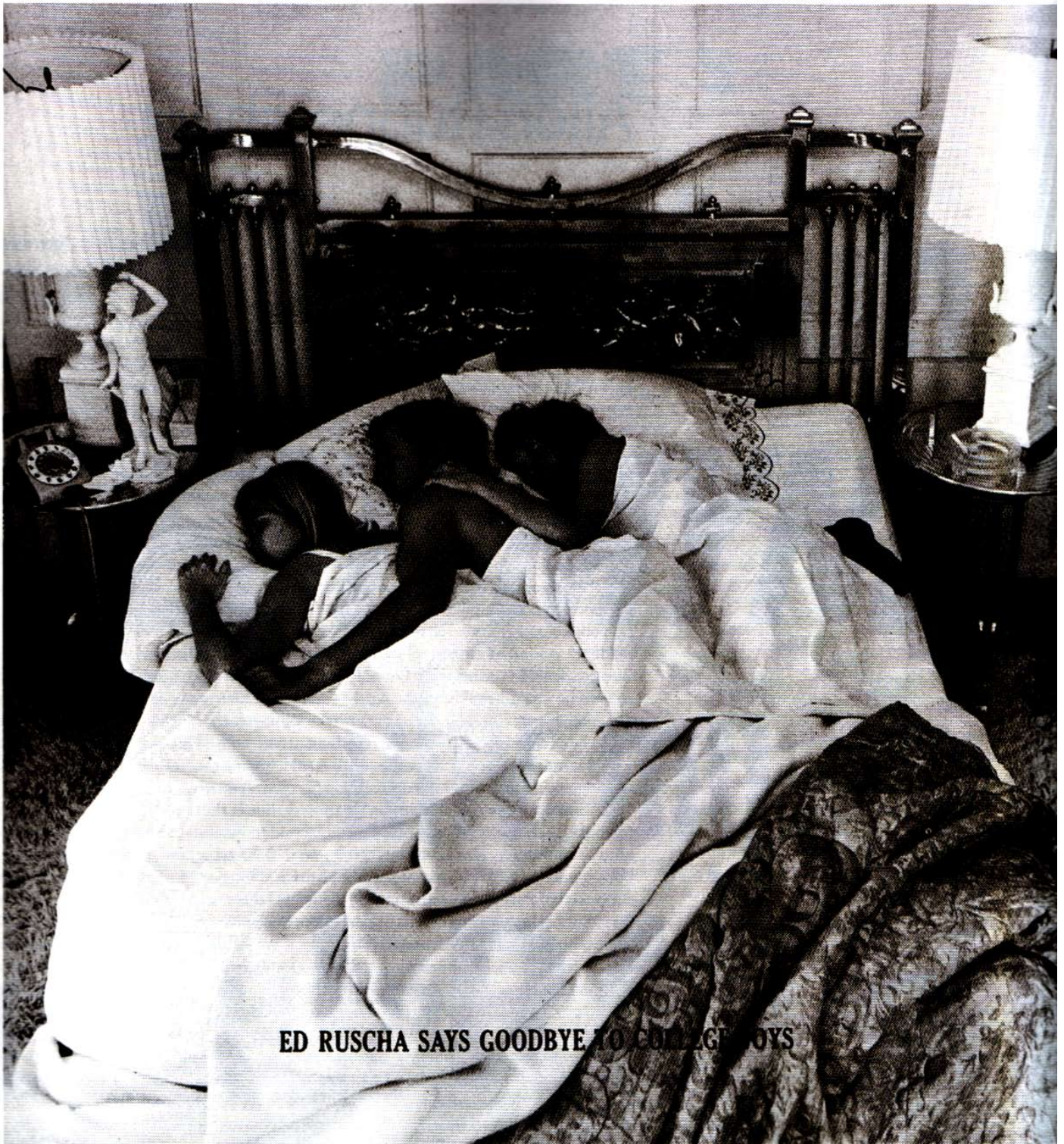
If ever there were an artist whose practice seemed premised on Jacques Rancière's idea of the spectator who "makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him," it is Allen Ruppertsberg. So much of his work takes the act of transposition as its substance, as when, for example, cinema provides a model for sculpture or literature the subject for drawing. In this way, the artist himself can seem a distanced viewer who creates parallel narratives for the works before him, ruminating openly on educational movies of the past or on the writings of Raymond Roussel—putting on display the kind of subsequent personal fiction that flourishes in the only place where art might actually meet life, in a viewing or reading subject's mind. But Rancière's notion is manifested most literally for audiences in *The Singing Posters, Parts I, II & III (Poetry Sound Collage Sculpture Book)*—Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* by Allen Ruppertsberg, 2003/2005, where the poet's bohemian psalm is rendered almost entirely in phonetic form. Here, Ruppertsberg's own recasting of language is foregrounded at the same time as the act of reading is activated—the poem placed in the viewer's body, in effect, as one inevitably must mouth the words in order to recompose and decipher them for oneself. Nearly as literal in its reenactment of firsthand experience is his landmark *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1974, for which the artist wrote the entirety of the eponymous novella in felt-tip pen across twenty large canvases (thereby making a space for looking into a space for reading). A kind of anxious elegy to the task of painting, the work reflected its day's deep skepticism about the medium, but only with a sublime irony, re-presenting Wilde's testament to art's power to transform the world—a literary case made all the more compelling, or affecting, by the embodiment of the prose in Ruppertsberg's own hand. Setting aside the artist's related text-based works, one recalls an urban myth of literature: Hunter S. Thompson would write out entire Faulkner novels, it is said, hoping that the master's lyric consciousness would make an indelible impression upon his own creativity.

"A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety," Harold Bloom once famously asserted. Such an anxiety could be said to inhabit all of Ruppertsberg's work, as a kind of continuous play of misinterpretation that his art wears on its sleeve (like copy on a book's dust jacket). His recent traveling survey, "One of Many—Origins and Variants," conceived in part by the artist, clearly evidenced this principle of repetitions, returns, and rereadings in both its title and its organization, bookended as it was by Ruppertsberg's *Dorian Gray* and *Howl* pieces. Yet as variations on a theme and instances of ideas dispersed across myriad forms, these and other pieces (showing Ruppertsberg remaking the work of both others and himself since coming of age in '60s Los Angeles) underline their own suspended quality—their own "failure" to resolve into a finished, fixed language, if you will. Paradoxically, this provides audiences with interpretive possibilities, in turn. The encounter is a bit like looking at Marcel Broodthaers's final volume of poems, which Ruppertsberg mentions in the story he tells in the following pages, or like the isolated copy of Roussel's *Locus Solus* that Ruppertsberg renders in *Raymond Roussel Falls to the Floor (Discovering Art): A Biography (with Additional Notes)*, 1979. What is closed in one way opens in another—the very sense of distance created by Ruppertsberg's work allowing one to recast for oneself the experience of, and then the relationship between, art and life. □

TIM GRIFFIN IS EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

Allen Ruppertsberg, *The Singing Posters, Part I (detail)*, 2003, 133 screenprints on cardboard, each 22 x 14".

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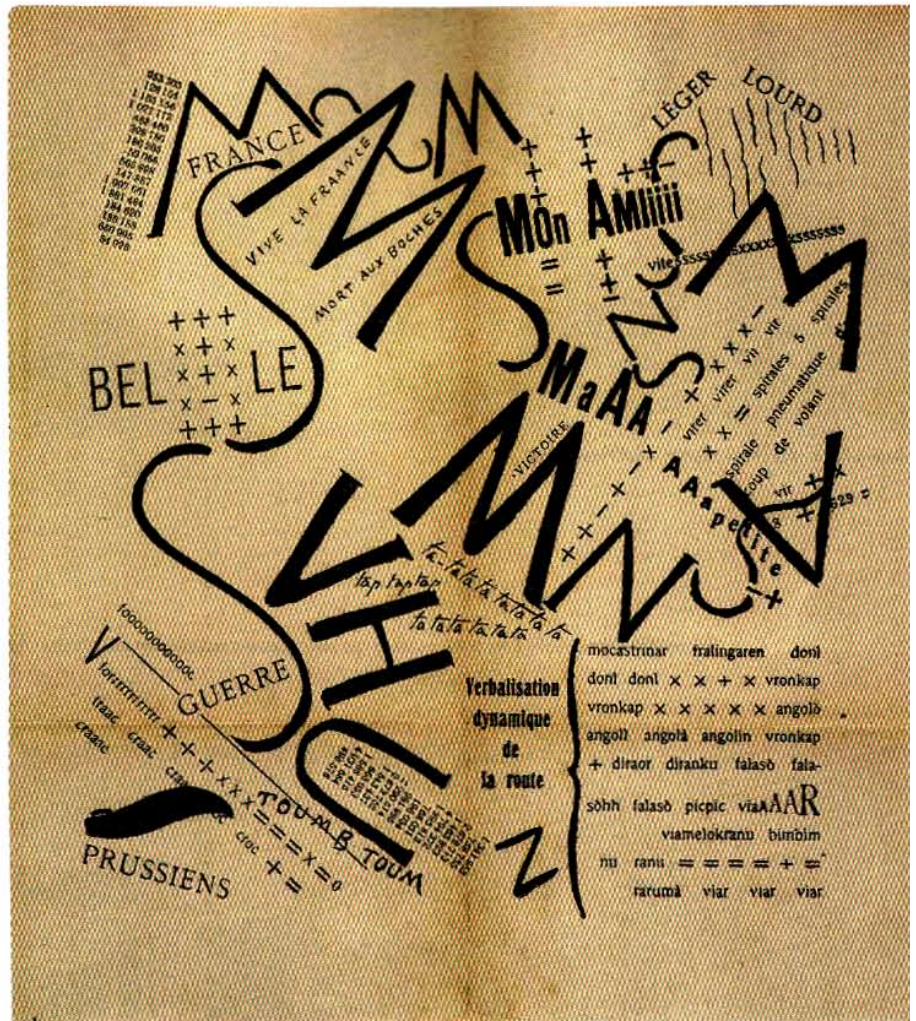


Advertisement from *Artforum* (January 1967).

First Thought Best Thought

—Allen Ginsberg

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG CURATES



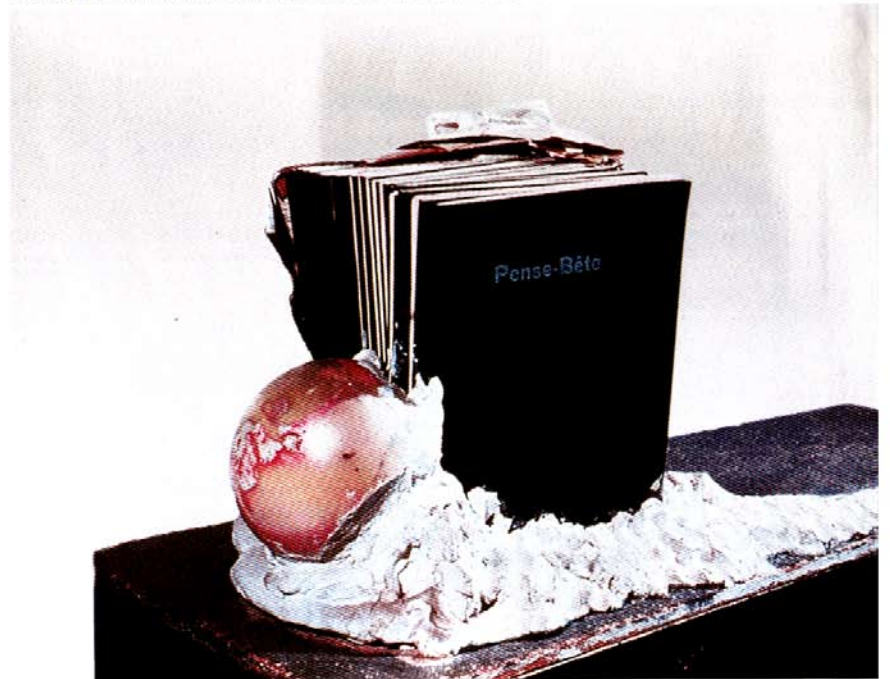
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto* (After the Marne, Joffre Visited the Front by Car), 1919, ink on paper, 10 3/4 x 9 1/2". © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

Not so long ago during a class discussion where I was apparently using the word *poetic* quite liberally, a student raised his hand. "I don't know what this word *poetic* means," he said. I paused as I was caught up short by the question. I had always taken for granted that most everyone, particularly in a class of university art students, would know the meaning of this commonly used word.



William Copley, S.M.S. (The Letter Edged in Black Press, 1966).

Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête*, 1963, books, paper, plaster, plastic spheres, and wood, 38 1/2 x 33 1/2 x 16 1/2".



KEMPENS

Informatieblad

Herausgeber
JEF GEYS
Langvennen 61
2490 Balen
Belgien
Oktober 2001

Sonderausgabe Kunstverein München



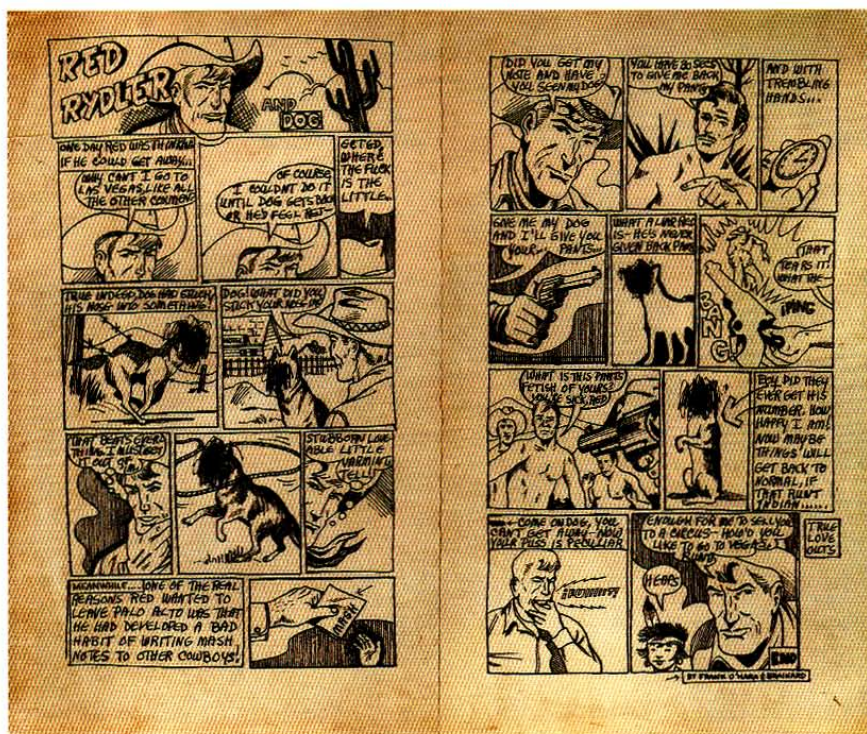
“You all know the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, right?” Knowing not to linger I marched right on. “When he decided to give up the job of poet and become an artist, so that, as he famously stated in the announcement for the show, he could sell something and succeed in life—by inventing something ‘insincere,’ as he also famously put it—the first work he made involved partially covering some volumes of his last book of poetry in plaster and placing them on a sculpture stand. He discovered that no one was curious to read the books when viewing the sculpture.”

Jef Geys, *Kempens Informatieblad* (Kunstverein Munich, 2001).



Guy de Cointet, *Tell Me*, 1979. Performance view, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1979.

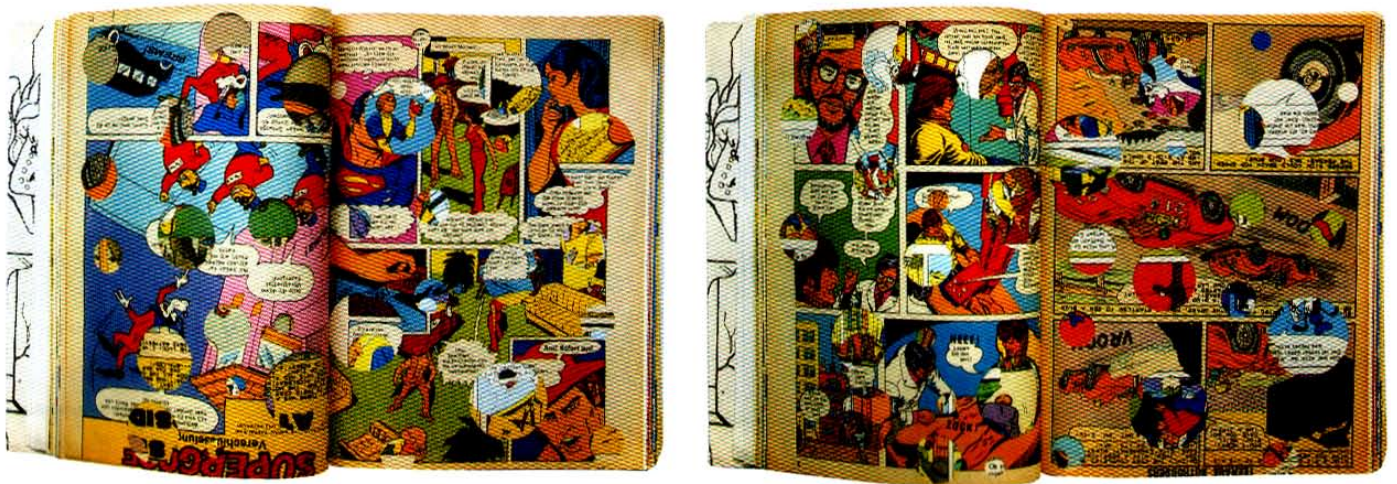
I continued on. "Maybe the artist has the sensibility of a poet. It's the feeling you have when you look at a work of art that maybe it pertains as much to poetry, small *p*, as it does to the world of visual art." More silence. I was getting in deeper. "You have all heard of so-called poetic license, right? Well, can't the artist also be a poet? Change horses in mid-stream? He can change the rules, rearrange the form or logic or context within the elements of the piece in order to have a completely different effect on the viewer. Maybe he is trying to lead you astray, to a different world of sense and meaning."



Joe Brainard in collaboration with Frank O'Hara, *Red Ryder and Dog*, ca. 1964. Ink on paper. From *C Comics 1* (Lorenz Gude, 1964).



Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Inscribed Stone*, 1987, Furka Pass, Switzerland. Photo: Werner Hannappel.

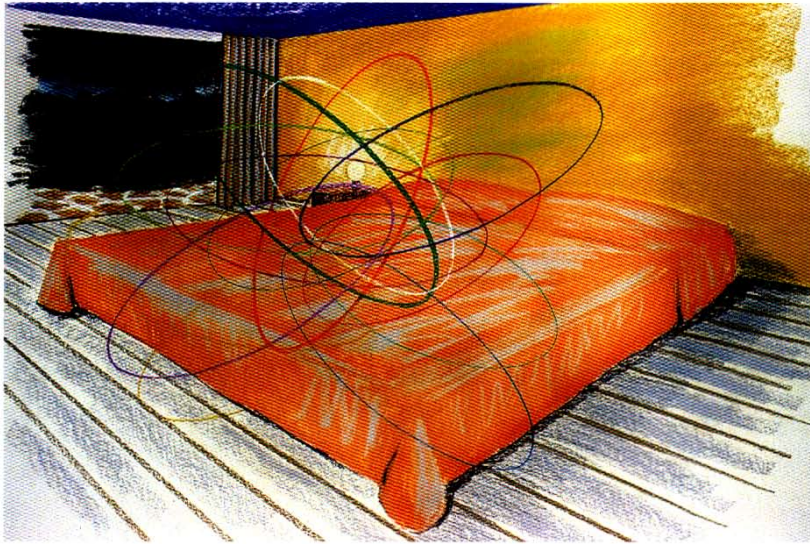


Dieter Roth, *Bok 3b*, 1974, ink on paper, 9 x 6 1/4 x 1".

“How?” was the response. “Well,” I said again, “if I were to think like an art critic, I would approach the work through the language of art, and if I were to try and express a similar idea speaking about language as art—or literary criticism—I would be talking about the laws of poetry.” Oh, no, I sighed to myself. The laws of poetry? What is wrong with you?

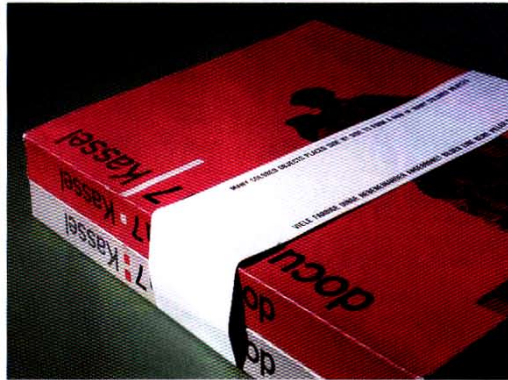


Wallace Berman, *Untitled*, 1967, offset poster, 26 x 23".



William Leavitt, *Elliptical Bed*, 1982, pastel on paper, 30 x 44".

After a moment I started again. "You know, if you poetize something, it becomes poetic." Back to square one. Then . . . "One of the elements of traditional poetry that we initially respond to is the verse forms of the words, the rhyming of the syllables or the various sounds we hear— versification, in other words. In visual arts maybe we respond to the correspondences or connections found within the work itself. Reflexivity. Where one thing mirrors another." Now I was getting somewhere.



Left: Lawrence Weiner, *Many colored objects placed side by side to form a row of many colored objects*, 1982, enamel on brick. Installation view, Ghent, Belgium. Right: Lawrence Weiner, *Many colored objects placed side by side to form a row of many colored objects*, 1982, book cover.



From top: Allan Kaprow, *Days Off: A Calendar of Happenings*, 1968, photo offset on newsprint, staples, and shrink-wrap, 10½ x 15½". Cover art (recto and verso) for Allan Kaprow's *Courtesey* (Slowscan, 1977).

"Can photography be poetic?" was the last thing I heard.