

*Erota/Afini* (1973) Notes

Mike Leggett

The Beau Geste Press was established by Martha Hellion and Felipe Ehrenberg, who together with several others in 1972 rented a large farmhouse at Clyst Hydon near Cullompton in central Devon. Not long afterward, I bumped into Martha in Exeter, the nearest city, with her young children. I had met them all in London on several occasions but had not realised that they had relocated to the southwest of England. I had a part-time position lecturing in film and video at the college of art in Exeter and soon became a regular visitor to the BGP. There were many visitors at the house, most of whom were invited to come and work with the collective to make a publication—a book, a pamphlet, a construction—or to contribute to the ongoing Fluxus West project of exhibitions and performances.

Felipe suggested over a meal that I should make a book, and so I set to thinking about how an experimental time-based artist would approach this proposal. From my archive, I recovered a collection of small photographs and two poems hand-written in a form of Greek dialect used in Alexandria, Egypt. These I had found after a great aunt had passed away a few years before; most of the images were taken on the Continent during the 1920s and '30s.

The real narrative linking the pictures was unknown, but I created a narrative using a method of selection based on chance to link the poem and the pictures. Initially, the two poems were translated into English by Peter Foster-Marr, even though he had no knowledge of the language the writer had employed. The English nouns and verbs he

used were cut from the manuscript of his translation, all chosen at random, and then each word would be placed next to one of the photos, also chosen at random from the pile. The juxtaposition of the word and the image prompted me to write several paragraphs before I moved on to the second randomly selected set; links between each set were sometimes evident but most were not, the 'narrative' thereby being dispersed in time and space.

The two sequences of words and images were then prepared for the BGP's offset litho printer: the words were typeset using a golfball Olivetti and photographed, then transferred onto anodised aluminium printing plates. A dummy version of the book indicated which page needed to be printed verso to another; this was important, as the material deriving from each of the two sequences was to be printed from opposite ends of the book; the book could be started from either cover, which bore the image of each poem.

When the time came to print the pages containing the words, we discovered that the plates had partly oxidised, the images of the words becoming faint and broken. Master printer Felipe took on the challenge and suggested we apply various household chemicals to the plates to see if we could improve the visibility of the page; otherwise, we would re-make the plates.

After we worked on the plates, inked them up and saw how the images looked, the results were intriguing, moving the 'weight' of words into a relationship with the photographs that was more equal, less authoritative, a joining of images linked by the procedure of printing, of reading.

We printed enough pages for 200 copies, the book's collation involving a communal process where all the residents of Langford Court South walked around a table on which each of the pages were laid out. Shortly after that, I made a film version of the book, likewise read (and heard) by being projected from either end of the 16mm film, the soundtracks and pictures being superimposed on one another, one going forward, the other in reverse.