

BILDERBUCH FÜR
ERNST WILL

ERNST WILL'S
Picture Book

A EURO REBUS
 BY
PETER CALLAS
 1990-1993

11:00 mins, D2 NTSC master. Music by Felix Davies and Robert Moss.

This videotape is an electronic rendering of a form of proto-televisual iconomania: the creation of haphazardly sourced private pictorial scrap books or *bilderbücher*. Often intended for the surprise, delight and edification of grandchildren by grandparents (the most famous example being Christine Stampe's picture book which was compiled by her grandfather Adolph Drewsen and the remarkable storyteller Hans Christian Andersen), these books had the anagogical potential to become flamboyant transmutations of the detritus and sequestered oddments of the great age of print in the latter half of the 19th century.

The activity of making picture books was so phenomenally widespread at that time that gaudily printed, glazed and embossed picture sheets of flowers, animals and quaint people, known as *bilderbogen*, were manufactured specifically for the purpose of feeding the desire for images to fill the blank pages of these books. So-called "Ephemera societies" were formed across Europe to buy and swap these printed fragments.

Whilst *bilderbücher* were not intended to make a public statement, the deliberately irrational and surprising bricolage constructed to delight the young recipient as s/he turned from page to page was often amplified surrealistically by the logic of placement determined, for example, by the size of an image in filling out a partially completed page. Often the composition of a book might be re-entered (such books were rarely "completed") at a later date by another hand (usually that of the child owner grown into adolescence) with the inclusion of parachronic imagery. This type of pre-literate/ post-verbal, and often intrapersonal, animus could lead to the creation of visual tropes of astonishing clarity. Such tropes beg the question of intention in the creation of "meaning" and suggest the unravelling of a kind of rebus or enigmatic code which reveals the extremely private within the use of the plethora of mass-produced public images of distant scenes, events and people.

The fortuitous collocation of views of towns, voyages of exploration, catastrophes, battle scenes and royal portraits become mantic in the deft hands of an expert snipper such as Andersen or the unknown creator of Ernst Will's picture book in war-time Vienna.

Peter Callas
 Tokyo, April, 1993