

Visual Propositions on a Page
The Treasury of Information Graphics

LOOK

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Pamphlet Number One

The Simple Tasks Issue

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A picture, they say, is worth a thousand words. To show us how it works. To make visible what we can't see. To help us find out where we are. To tell us how many there are. To give us codes, signals, signs and clues and to tell us how to think.

All through the power of the way images work in our heads. Of course, sometimes pictures don't work and we get

Confused

Amused

Enraged

And Lost

Hopelessly lost.

Here is a celebration of the high and low points, the successes and failures, the conflicts and resolutions. Here are Cutaways and Star Charts, DIY Manuals and Maps for Children on Rail Journeys.

There is information disguised as cartoons, propaganda as statistics, statistics as decoration. Messages arrive in flags, gestures, dots, dashes and Braille.

Information Graphics is a powerful motor in our lives.

Here are a thousand pictures, and more.

Dr. Chris Mullen has taught Art and Design for thirty years all around the world and has written studies of cigarette packaging, British Romantic watercolours, political photography and filmmaking.

He may regularly lose his way on Maps, but has collected Information Graphics since he was three.

How do I do that? Simple tasks

Here are visual instructions for the simplest of jobs to be done, that stress the everyday – the mundane. Once achieved, these tasks will never be made more difficult, nor can they be improved. No aesthetic considerations are present. We are shown how to sort vegetables and inflate a football. No complex dimensions of understanding are required. They are tasks you do not boast about, or pass down in secret through the generations.

The simple gesture or turn of the hand can also take on a vast significance in the imagination because nothing else is present to distract us. It can't be that simple, we suspect.

Because of the popularity of this visual genre, the depiction of simple tasks has caught the imagination of artists looking for the marvellous and the revelatory in the everyday. Paul Nougé's photographs with Rene Magritte explore the Mystery and Melancholy at the Heart of a Simple Task. Jackie Batey's satiric Anxious Homes tests the complexities at the heart of the Housework.

The Very Minimum

Pointing

Etiquette at Home

Laying the Table

First Aid

Cleaning the Eye

Simple Tasks Enhanced

The Gilbreths, Time and Motion

Influences

Paul Nougé Photographs

Max Ernst collages, Marvels of the Ordinary



The very minimum...



Left:
Paul Nougé (1895-1967)

The Revealing Wall

Photograph, 8 x 8 cms, 1929/30, Belgium (private collection)

Paul Nougé was a writer and philosopher who took these photographs that record the Surrealist painter René Magritte and his friends. Like Magritte's paintings, they explore the simplicities of everyday life, in which there lurks a mysterious and even malevolent presence.

Staton Abbey (dates unknown)

Your Motor Car Simply Explained

Book cover, 12 x 19 cms, 1942 (first printed 1939) UK (private collection)

As in so many similar basic books, the artist is not credited. Perhaps it is just as well. "Whether you are a novice who has still to face the driving test, a practically minded owner with a bent for 'tinkering' or are simple blessed with a desire to find out what makes the wheels go round, I hope this book will help you to a better understanding of your car." The author's introduction.

Texaco Sky Chief Gasoline

Simple as 1 2 3

Advertisement (detail), 28 x 35 cms, 1956, USA (private collection)

The attendant on the garage forecourt points it out to you:

1. Petrox,
2. Top Octane and
3. 100% climate controlled.

Any the wiser?

"Only Texaco Sky Chief gives you 1-2-3 Power!"

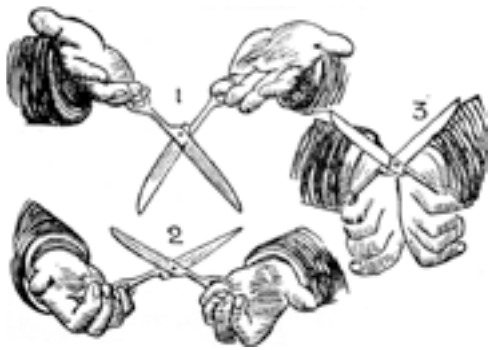
The artwork is unsigned.

Max Ernst

Third Visual Poem

Collage, 21 x 28 cms, 1934. Germany (private collection)

Max Ernst was drawn in his early career to mass produced engravings and particularly the instructional illustrations from nineteenth century trade catalogues and the French periodical *La Nature*. This image, from Ernst's *Third Visual Poem* of the collage novel, *La Semaine de Bonté*, arranges pairs of engraved hands in a featureless landscape, while a hard-boiled egg lurks in the distance. The hands may well have been originally an emblem of friendship or even an illustration in an etiquette book.

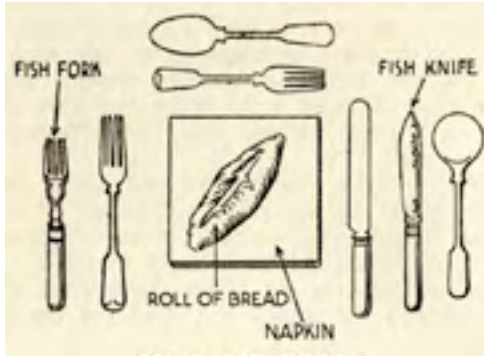


Paul Nougé (1895-1967)

Woman Terrified by Twine

Photograph, 8 x 8 cms 1929/30 Belgium (private collection)

Nougé takes the illustration style of simple scientific proposition, a figure and an object on a dining room table, and instills an anxiety into the whole proposition. Many nineteenth century illustrations in popular books are so badly engraved (*Tom Tit, Popular Science*) that all manner of unwanted meanings become possible. See Nougé caption on preceding page.



Bernard Venables (1907- 2001)

Mr.Crabtree goes Fishing

Book illustration, 20 x 25 cms?, 1959 (1949 first issued) UK (private collection)

Written and illustrated by the Angling Correspondent of the *Daily Mirror*, the book sold two million copies in this paperback form in the 1940's and 1950's. Venables had originally illustrated gardening tips and in the quiet winter months was encouraged to apply his clear prose and line drawings to angling. He lovingly shows the exact hand holds for the rod and also the way that a pipe is to be filled at moments of relaxation on the river bank.



The Bumper Book for Boys

Tricks with Scissors

Book illustration, 21 x 28 cms. Undated, c1952 UK (private collection)

The apparent simplicity of the illustration and the proposition mask the dangers inherent in the exercise. It is never explained why you should experiment with the basic way of cutting paper. As is common in picture puzzles the demonstrator's identity is concealed.

It is as simple as 1 - 2 - 3.

Mary Woodman

Table and Domestic Etiquette

Book illustration, 12.5 x 19 cms, Foulsham undated (c1935) UK (private collection)

Mary Woodman (author of *Wedding Etiquette* and *How to Entertain your Friends*) in 77 pages shows "What a Mistress and all Maids and Menservants should Know", thus easing the anxieties and confusions that any wife might experience in running a household.

Are you sitting comfortably?

Are your hands ready to respond to the COVER FOR DINNER? "Napkin with bread on top. To the left a fish-fork and dinner fork. To the right, dinner knife, fish knife and soup spoon. Beyond the napkin a dessert fork and spoon. The general arrangement of the table is as for luncheon." You wonder why she bothered with the picture. Nerves, I expect.

anon

The Book of Knowledge. The Principles of Leverage, First Order

Book illustration in a children's encyclopedia (detail) 21 x 28 cms, undated c1937 UK (private collection)

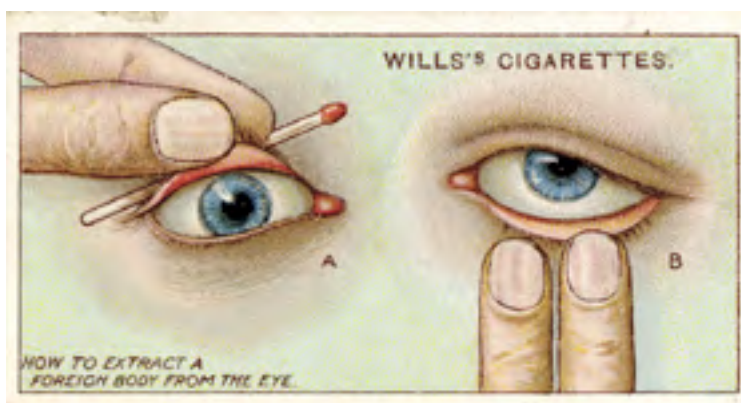
In a mass-produced encyclopedia for children, there were rich pages of illustration of the aspects of science that they were to encounter at school. This page is crowded with jostling diagrams and directional arrows. The illustrations are unconscious revelations of assumptions about the readers and their parents' values. Many were part-publications appealing to the collecting instinct and issued in stout and garish binders at the end of the series.

anon.

First Aid, series of 50, How to Extract a Foreign Body from the Eye

Cigarette card, 4 x 7 cms, UK, (private collection)

For extreme cases, grit or an insect, the rolling of the eyelid around a matchstick is recommended, note the non-safety match is in use here.



Household Hints

Ridding a Carpet of Moths

Cigarette card, 4 x 7 cms, 1938, UK (private collection)

“Dissolve a quarter pound of rock ammonia in a pail containing about half-gallon of boiling water. Immerse the centre of a large house-cloth in the liquid, keeping the edges dry by hanging them over the sides of the pail, as shown on the left. Wring the cloth by the dry ends, lay flat on the carpet and press with a very hot iron until dry. Go over the entire carpet in this manner.”

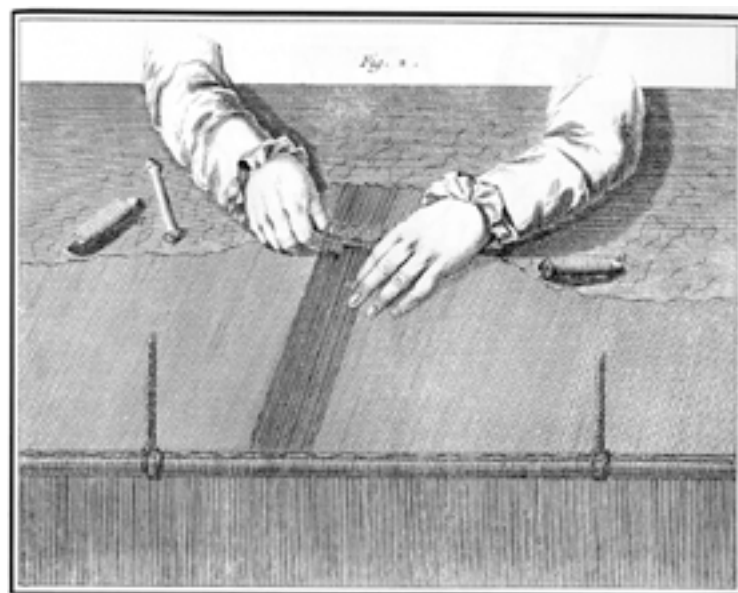
Zoltan Wegner

(dates unknown)

What Makes What?

Book illustration, 18 x 23 cms, undated c1950, UK, (private collection)

Adprint produced this spiral bound book for children divided into two sections which had to be married up by the child. The first section had the raw materials for the exercise. The lower section showed the completion of the exercise. This is a detail of the raw materials for the paper cutting exercise that will culminate in a row of cut-out dolls.



anon

Weaving on the basse lisse Loom

Engraving, from Denis Diderot (1713 – 1784) and Jean D'Alembert (1717 – 1783), *L'Encyclopédie*, 1751 - 1766, France, (private collection)

Diderot and D'Alembert's Encyclopedia, *Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, les Arts et des Metiers* was designed to reflect the workplace back to Society through the depiction of the artisans themselves.” Let us teach them to have a better opinion of themselves; that is the only way to obtain more perfect results from them.”

Minnesota Department of Public Safety

Hand and Arm Signals

Book illustration, 13 x 21 cms, undated (c1970)

“Driving a Motor Vehicle in Minnesota is a privilege, and with that privilege comes an important responsibility to drive safely... During daylight hours hand and arm signals may be used in addition to or in place of approved turn signal lights. The reflection of bright sunlight may make it difficult for other motorists to see your flashing signal light. You are not allowed to use hand signals at night...”



Anne G. Shaw

Chronocyclegraph of a woman collating sheets of paper

Photograph, 7 x 11 cms, McGraw Hill New York 1955 (first published 1950), US, (private collection)

This photograph was published in Marvin Mundel's *Motion and Time Study, Principles and Practice*, second edition. The English pioneer of work study, Anne G Shaw, shows an improved way in which papers may be collated. Lights attached to the fingers demonstrate trajectories generated by the task. Anne Shaw studied with Lillian Gilbreth from 1930 before returning to the UK (see next page) for the main part of her working life. Her book, *The Purpose & Practice of Motion Study* was published in 1960.

William Heath Robinson (1872 - 1944)

Begin the New Year by Joining the Long Chain of Users of Nugget Boot Polish.

Advertisement, 21 x 28cms, undated c1930, UK, (private collection)

Heath Robinson was cherished for his ingenuity in devising small and indeed pointless tasks with huge, elaborate and comic machines. The joke is further extended here by a shoe cleaning assembly line operated by just one man with a delicate turn of the wrist.

George Hardie (1945 -)

Hand

Design motif, University of Brighton, 1994, UK. (private collection)

The illustrator/designer George Hardie has a long fascination for the shape of the human hand, seeing in it a repository of numbers and letters while also resembling objects in a landscape. Here the hand declares itself as an ideal visual container for tools.



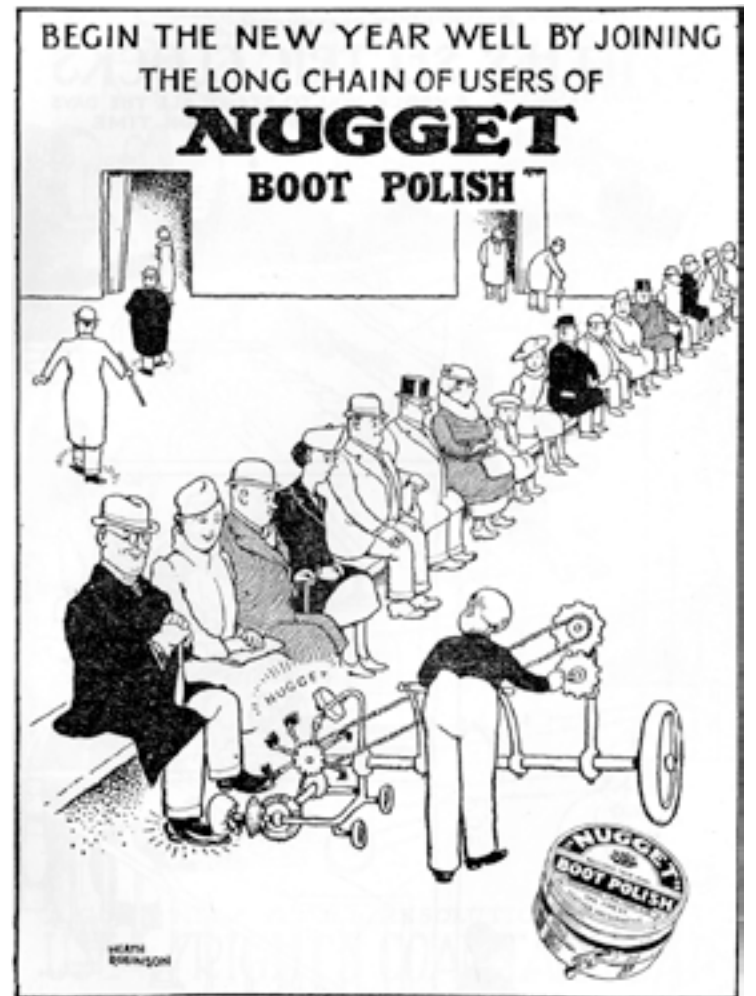
Anne Anson (pseud)

How to Ice a cake

Book illustration, 14 x 22 cm, Tala Books 1949, UK, (private collection)

“Let Anne Anson Show You... Dear Reader and Friend-to-be,” writes this invented Goddess of the Kitchen. “Have you ever iced and decorated a cake? No! Well, you try it! It is an even more fascinating craft than the making of cakes, and once you have started you will want to go on with it. Your nimble fingers, a TALA Icing Set and a little practice will soon enable you to ice cakes for any festive occasion.”

The TALA cake icer has an uncomfortable resemblance to a hypodermic, or instrument used in Colonic Irrigation. Yet with Anne in charge, we need not worry.



Paul Nougé (1895-1967)

Cut Lashes

Photograph, 8 x 8 cms, 1929/30. Belgium (private collection)

Nougé explores a perverse visual exercise in Beauty Practice, but hints at Self Harm. See previous caption.



anon

Four Handed Seat

(First Aid, series of 50 cigarette cards) 4 x 7 cms, 1929/30, UK. (private collection)

The card, one of fifty to collect, was contained in a packet of cigarettes. When completed the set offered portable and exact instructions on how to cope with minor medical crises.

“The bearers face each other. Each bearer grasps his own left wrist with his right hand.. The hands are then brought together, the left bearer seizing the right wrist of the right bearer with his free hand, and the right bearer does the same to the left bearer. The patient when seated passes an arm round each of the bearers.” The written instruction on the back of the card make a strong case for the maxim that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’.

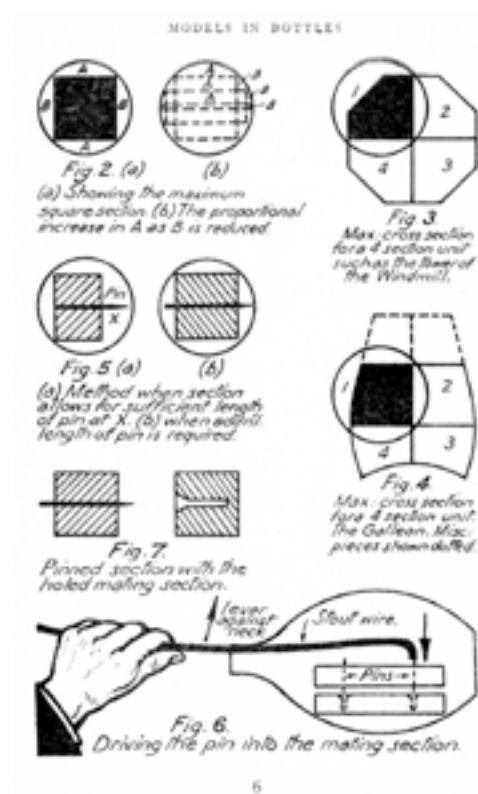
Ian Noble (1958 -)

Enquire Within, a Multi-valent Cypher

Book illustration, 15.5 x 21 cms undated (1994), UK (private collection)

The designer Ian Noble, intends this book to be in the long line of illustrated books that contain the world's knowledge, purporting to reproduce sections from a manuscript abandoned in the early years of the twentieth century by a solicitor Jacques V.

Here are complete instructions for a simple string figure to be made by the fingers. In more complex forms, and passed down through generations through an oral tradition, such string figures can aspire to diagrams of the entire Universe. But not this one. Noble chose the title to evoke the world of picture books for children by the pioneer of children's information books, Arthur Mee (1875-1943), the author of *The World's Greatest Books*, *1000 Heroes*, and *The Children's Bible*.



R.F.C Bartley (dates unknown)

Models in Bottles

Book illustration, 12 x 18.5 cms. Percival Marshall London, 1951. UK (private collection)

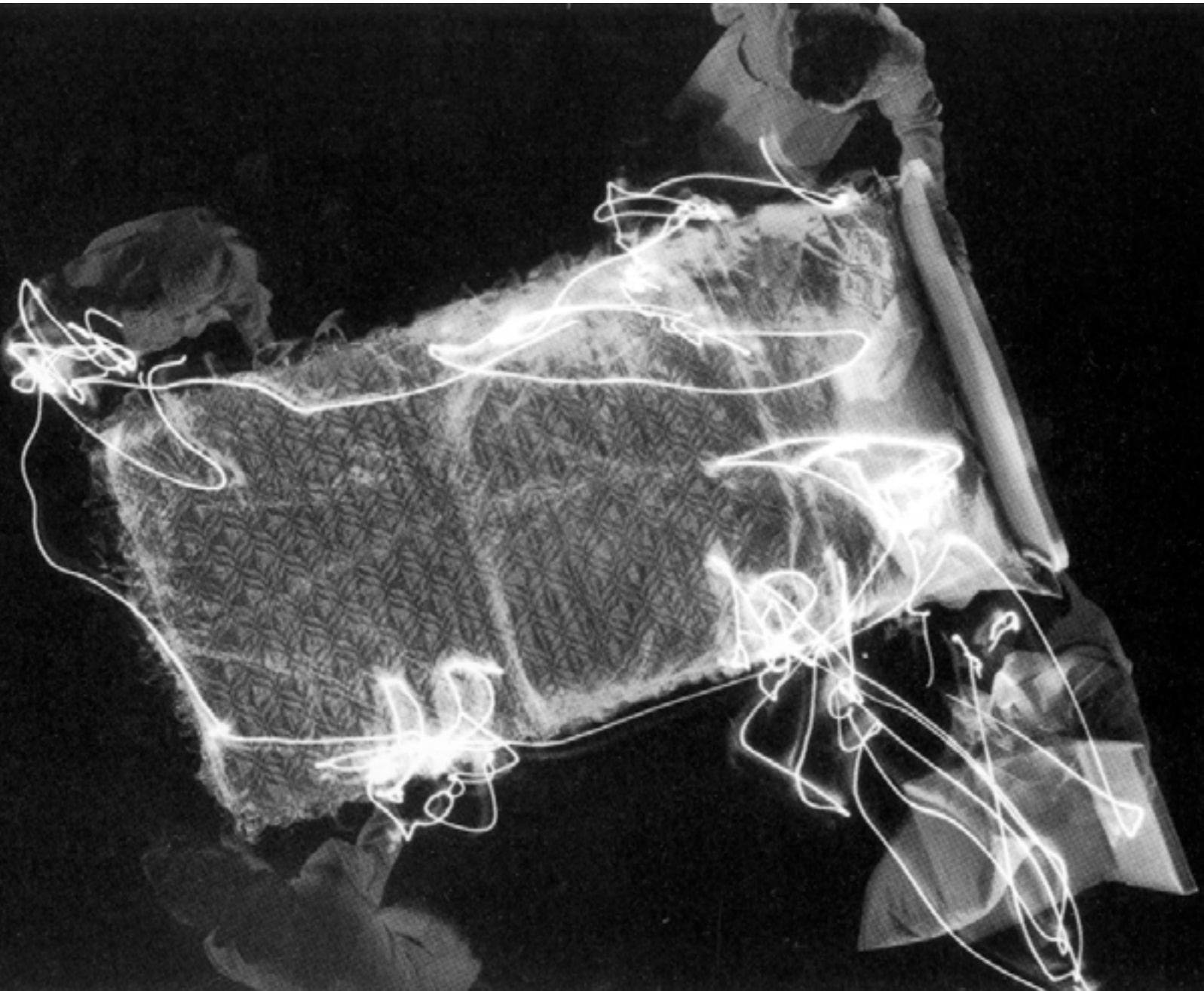
Something of the book can be gained from Bartley's Introduction, "the author has, after two years, evolved a geometrical system which is so advanced that practically any subject may be designed and bottled. In compiling the information and drawings every effort has been made to give a wide and detailed explanation regarding the design and making of various models." Here the hand executes a spare and restricted movement "driving the fixing pin into the mating section", in a model that will culminate in the assembling of a galleon in the Bottle.

Gjon Mili (1904 -1984)

Making a Bed the Efficient Way

Photograph, 21 x 28cms, 1946, USA, Time Inc.

In 1946, LIFE ran a feature on the ergonomic study of housework. Lillian Gilbreth (1878 - 1972) was a pioneer in scrutinizing domestic tasks a woman undertook during her average day. Her researches were of immense help to those who designed working spaces in the home, in particular people with physical disabilities. Her utilitarian images and diagrams resulted also in haunting and beautiful imagery. Her work was popularized by researchers at Purdue University, and Professor Marvin Mundel (see above). Gjon Mili was a prolific photographer who specialized in images of movement.





**Fig. 1.—The Right Way
to Run.**