afterward, and then dizzy and confused as he questioned whether the experience had been real. "Whatever the Artist wishes the Historian to experience—the lessons of failure, the necessity of war, the infiniteness of the universe—" M. Cgn. Lux explained, "will be brought to mind in the Box through one's own thoughts and memories. The Artist reveals the joys and successes of life, things the lesser enlightened can never fully appreciate, by using the metaphors within the observer's own experience. The effect is marvelous."

The Box itself represented a return to the clandestine spaces where art began: the darkest reaches of caves where the secrets of the universe were the exclusive domain of a select group. But University professors insisted, the intimate connection Artists created in the Box was far too personal to be of use for the rest of society. Individuals' emotions were even considered dangerous by some of the Artworld's harshest critics—the few scientists and Ministers who occasionally delved into Aesthetic affairs—and so the State mandated the Assessment.

The Assessment was a solution to the annoying inconsistencies of individual Art interpretation. Alexis had spent thousands of hours listening to the droning, recorded voice of an anonymous Cognoscente in the dark dormitory as other students slept. It was a voice he heard
occasionally in his deepest subconscious, barely audible over the pulsing sound of blood through his brain:

The Assessment is a crucial element to the shared experience of the Artist. To encounter a Box solely for one’s own pleasure is a selfish act, a treacherous crime against the benevolent State. The Artist’s voice is a communal message to a select group of humanity. The Sublime, the reflection and extolling of perfection and accordingly, of State supremacy, can only be determined by many brilliant minds, not one. Every Box must be followed by an Assessment. It is the critical dissertation by the Historian upon metaphors the Box presents. Within the purity of the mind’s eye, the Historian will observe the appropriate images, experience the universal forms they recognize, critically analyze the transcendence of the Artistic mind, and then conclude how these forms praise and reaffirm the righteousness of the State. Assessments must be succinct, yet thorough. Only a keen, discerning mind can recognize the genius of an Artist.

One night Alexis couldn’t sleep. He stayed awake long enough to hear the recording shut itself off and drifted in and out of a doze,
dreaming of Dominique. She talked to him for the first and only time since the last Saturday he had seen her. She spoke of screaming flowers.

The Warden stops at the end of the corridor in front of what appears to be a blank wall. He holds up a tightly-gloved hand, and the wall vanishes to reveal an anteroom inside of which Alexis can see a small black cube about 30 cm square upon a white table. Beyond that is the darkened doorway of a Box. The Warden turns to him and speaks as if to an audience.

"Prisoner Alexis Marcolean," he begins, with a voice like the buzzing lights, "has chosen on this Seventeenth of the Fifth month of this year to view the Cipher Box." He crosses his hands behind his back, thinking perhaps that the expansion of his chest gives Alexis a better view of the blue Ministry stripes over his heart. Seemingly abashed by the prisoner's indifferent attitude to his authority, the Warden looks him in the eye and lowers his voice. "I trust you understand the implications and consequences of your decision?"

"I haven't made any decision," Alexis answers curtly.

"You decided to disrupt the sanctity of the State. You decided to break the law. And now you have decided to accept punishment." Alexis remained silent. The Warden continued.

"There will be no Assessment of the Cipher Box; no one living..."
has seen it, and your death ensures its continued secrecy. Your acceptance to view the Box was of your own volition, and upon exiting the piece you may, of your own accord, open the lid of that receptacle and place your hand inside." He motions briefly at the peculiar cube on the table.

"I may? What will it do?"

"It will end your life quickly, painlessly, and without any aggression by the State," the Warden replies, tightening his gray lips.

A hot tension erupts over Alexis' skin. It is so forceful it energizes the stale molecules of air around him into motion for the first time in a century and millions of infinitesimal universes collide at once.

The only persistent fear Alexis endured during his academic career was that his one observable deviance from strict University rules would someday be discovered. Nearly every other night, as the hypnotic voice carried on about Assessments and the Sublime, Alexis held a small, lighted computer under his bedcovers and poured over the latest galactic discoveries posted on scientific journals and global information databases. Naturally, such activity was illegal at the University, not only because it was after hours and involved contraband technology, but because it encouraged useless knowledge; namely, the physical sciences. Alexis knew his genes had never lied; he truly had the mind of a
scientist. His respect for the laws of gravity, the power of light and its infinite travels through the universe, and even for the microcosm of plants and insects of his father's greenhouse all reflected his obsession over the search for universal patterns in Art. But it was more than this. Alexis sensed something lacking in the objective rhetoric of the University and in the similarly cool analysis of scientific theorems. There was a thought—in fact, something even more elusive and indeterminate—that thought—that sparked occasionally in the depths of his subconscious like a flash of electrons. It was a kind of magic—a passionate need not only to know, but to feel, recognize, and define himself within the forms of the universe. But although this idea was too quick and obscure to grasp, it fueled his feverish diligence. He therefore continued to hoard scientific knowledge in the back of his mind, allowing the nighttime studies to become a minor addiction—a small vice like the fiercely guarded conversations with Dominique.

Alexis enjoyed his last concealed study the night before his Final Assessment. He had read an article on black holes frantically, absorbing every detail. Their existence intrigued him; their strength and gravitational pull sending waves through the curve of the universe like ripples in a pond. After downloading a vivid hologram of a new black hole just discovered a few light years away, Alexis held his
breath as he watched it swirl slowly in space, a brown spiral rotating in a disk of luminous dust. It was dazzling, beautiful, and empty. Even after shutting off the computer, he could watch swirls of bright, black holes play in the space of darkness before his eyes. They throbbed slowly: blue, yellow, then red, gradually fading away.

The museum in which Alexis had his Final Assessment held the finest Art collection on Earth, exhibiting only the most highly esteemed and challenging of all Boxes. Senior M. Cgn., at the University decided that such a location was the only fitting conclusion to Alexis' stunning career as a student.

He met his mentor Aesthetician, Cgn. Kirana, in the west wing of the museum. She reminded him to relax—that today's examination was like hundreds before. Alexis tried to calm himself by thinking of Dominique and the dream from the night before in which she stood in the greenhouse, stretching out her small hands to capture blue swirls of light.

The examiners stood up from their seats in the center of the room as Kirana and Alexis entered. Cognoscentes Moley, Lochet, and Alician, with whom Alexis had studied at the University were there, as well as Magna Cognoscentes Schnabe and Omm, perhaps the only Historians more well known than Soren Marcolean. Alexis was
suddenly very glad she wasn’t present.

"Salutations, Alexis," Cgn. Lochet said, "We are all excited to hear your Assessment this afternoon. Naturally we’re familiar with your work at the University—brilliant, like your mother’s." Several of the others nodded in agreement.

"The praise is to the State," Alexis replied, trying to hold back the tremor in his voice, "I hope today proves to be my most enlightened evaluation."

"Indeed we shall see," the Cognoscente answered, "Let us commence with the Final Assessment."

They seated themselves again in the plush, white chairs of the examination room. Kirana indicated to Alexis where to sit so he could listen to the introductory address which Cgn. Moley stood up to give.

"Gathered colleagues," she began in a pinched, nasal voice, "We are here today to witness a most spectacular revelation. I’m assured you are all as excited as I about the potential for interpretive genius to take place this afternoon. While contemplating this very event a few days ago, I was reminded how fortunate the State is indeed to have such brilliant minds as Alexis’ that will lead us boldly into the next generation of Historians. I have no doubt that he is destined for such greatness as his esteemed mother..."

Alexis’ attention drifted. The comparison to Soren was inevitable; there hadn’t been a day at the University when he didn’t hear it. He
looked at the ground, suddenly reminded of his father's empty speech fifteen years ago explaining why Dominique wouldn't arrive Saturday morning.

"...represent an advancement in our own evolution. For as we know, Art in its purest form—the concept within the Artist's mind—is both the simplest and most profound of human faculties. It reveals the laws and patterns of the universe, and it is our duty to preserve them for our species, for all humanity."

Brief applause. The Historians paused for a moment to ponder their significance to the course of human evolution. Moley glanced at Alexis. "Well, enough of formalities, I know we're anxious to begin the Assessment." Her eyes rarely blinked. "Now without further delay, our most distinguished guest, M. Cgn. Omm, will discuss the examination piece." The thin woman nodded at the Magna Cognoscente, indicating his turn, and took her seat.

Omm stood up slowly, the weight of humanity on his shoulders. He took his place before the group and began speaking in a deep baritone:

"Distinguished Historians, we are an exclusive lot aren't we? You know I was just speaking to one of my scientist friends this morning, telling her of this very Assessment. I said, 'Can you imagine the excitement the Aesthetic world is feeling today?' and you know what she said, the poor dear? 'Excitement? Feeling? Of what
The Aestheticians shared a pleasant chuckle. "But in earnest my friends, today is a milestone in the annals of Historian craft. We have among us without question the finest young mind produced for Aesthetic study: Alexis, son of our own illustrious M. Ggn. Soren Marcolean. But we are also honored today to have with us a most unique work of Art for Alexis to experience. The Artist our student has yet to discover has never before exhibited, never yet been discussed, and certainly never fallen under the scrutiny of an Assessment outside the Commune. I myself have not even seen the work, yet had the highest assurance by Commune directors that it is the most outstanding work they've ever seen." Omm stopped, allowing the last echoes of his great speech to hang in the air, echo, and fade. "Alexis Marcolean, you may now enter the Box to make an Assessment of it. I trust we shall not be disappointed." M. Ggn. Omm took his seat as Kirana indicated to Alexis that it was time to enter the Box. He stood up deliberately and walked slowly to its entrance, the black doorway within the wall the seated Historians faced.

It's a Box, he reminded himself, like the multitudes encountered before. Swallowing silently, he continued into the dark room. With his feet as guide, he knew the measured steps required to the exact center of the isolated chamber. He concentrated on the cold brightness behind his eyelids and stopped pacing. Allowing the room a moment
to recognize his presence and illuminate, Alexis opened his eyes.

The room was blue. Entirely blue. Alexis had never seen a Box interior any color other than white, and the change caused him to hesitate for a moment. Then the room began to melt; its corners convolved together, the ceiling arched around to connect to the wall, and the floor stretched out from under his feet to encapsulate him entirely in a glowing blue light and suspend him in clear sky. Having neither the floor nor the enclosure of walls, he simply hovered in blue space, a spring morning stretching on forever. He rolled forward, swimming in the air, unsure if he was still stationed in the center of the Box. The sensation was unusual but not unpleasant.

He then stood in his father’s greenhouse. Dominique was there just as she existed in his mind, forever six years old. Sitting cross-legged amid the hybrid grasses and flowers, she looked up at Alexis with dark, melancholy eyes and plucked a flower for him.

“Dominique,” he said, not certain if he spoke aloud or inside his mind. “What are you doing?”

The young girl looked at him blankly, remaining mute. As she held up the flower, her image paused strangely, and for a fleeting second Alexis thought she was real. He nearly convinced himself, vainly and hopefully, that the fifteen years between them were made up a confused dream. Then he realized she was real. This was
her Box. He knew it as surely as if her child image had told him.
He blinked and both Dominique and the greenhouse were gone.
The air around him condensed. He was in the blue void again,
and a force like gravity gently tugged him, pulling him forward as
he closed his eyes, thinking of Dominique and trying to imagine
himself within her mind. But she was outside of him, directing him
through the Box as if to some destination. Alexis opened his eyes,
looking for a horizon, wanting to see her again.
"Dominique!" he called into the space, but caught his words at once.
Still floating, he looked about him, intuitively aware of some change.
Dominique's presence had disappeared completely now, leaving a
deep, resonating absence. Alexis felt a sensation—frightening
sense that he had somehow been cheated. And suddenly, just beyond the
edge of his consciousness, he sensed it: a latent, insidious blankness.
"No," he whispered, but the Box had finished. With his feet
planted firmly on the wooden floor once again, he stood in the
center of the now darkening Box and gathered his senses. His legs
were unstable, yet he managed to turn and exit the room. His
throat burned and his head was nearly too heavy to lift. The bright
lights of the examination room were a shock like daylight, as
unbelievably dazzling as the sun.
For the first time before the assembled Historians, Alexis wasn't
certain what to say. The Aestheticians blinked in unison, waiting. Alexis gasped and swallowed. After several agonizing moments—each one diminishing his performance—he forced a beginning: "In the course of my studies I have never—"

He stopped, fumbled. An ebbing sound throbbed about him in a steady vibration, the nearly imperceptible hum of the room's atmosphere controls. "It would appear that the Artist in this piece..."

Kirana saw his struggle and tried to help. "What was the revelation, Alexis?"

"I found—" he looked to his feet. Inhaling a long, deliberate breath, he closed his eyes and remembered the feeling of Dominique around him, outside of him. The confusing sense of her vanishing. He couldn't convey this—not to them. He had no idea what it meant. Suddenly, his head shot up, and before he could stop himself he blurted out:

"Nothing."

Silence. Then: "What?" Eyes bored into him in surprise and fear. "What did you say?"

Alexis knew this was his last chance to save himself. Answers whipped about his mind like white flags: that the Artist was taking a new approach in the use of color; that the expanse of blue reflected the clarity and keen perception by which the State determined the lives of its constituents; that the allusion to nature was an affirmation
of the natural laws dictating the need for harmony and order; that
the nostalgia he felt was not a longing for childhood, but for the
communal love of duty and tradition provided by the State. He knew
he could have said any one of those things, but he didn't. He couldn't
betray himself any longer.

"I saw nothing."

Kirana stumbled to save him. "I'm sure what Alexis means—what he
means to say is that he has made a tremendous error, that he is for
the moment completely taken by the piece and requires a moment
to articulate his thoughts. Am I right, Alexis?"

"No," he replied, "I simply—I saw nothing at all." The words fell
slowly from his lips as he held each one in turn, causing its validity.

"This is treason," M. Cgn. Schnabe said, reminding Alexis of his
authority through the pressure of his voice. "It is a crime of profound
proportions and I hope you realize it, Alexis Marolean. You will
promptly rescind this lunacy before I have you stripped entirely of
your University status and reduced to the level of a Drone. Save
your career and your dignity and speak some sense. Now!"

"I will not rescind my Assessment. I saw nothing," A fever seized
Alexis as he watched M. Cgn. Schnabe stand and summon the words,
yet he stood motionless. Omm and the others accused with offended glares. There was something about Kirana's
face—her uncertainty—that signaled an understanding, but Alexis hadn't the time to focus on it. The sharp binding of a security hold broke his paralysis. The guards wrestled him down. Their putty-colored suits blocked his vision and a tranquilizer gun provided him with the relief of darkness.

The Warden's gray gaze judges Alexis' face and probes his fear. "No one will be in this room when you emerge from the Cipher Box," he continues. "The State will not be responsible for your death. You, as a threat to the Public Good, will have been eliminated. This is your sentence. Are you prepared to enter?"

Alexis swallows deliberately, hesitating. "What if I refuse to kill myself?"

"No one has ever refused," the Warden answers bluntly.

"Then let's continue." Alexis' face is cold and as he blinks, the negative space of the room pulses behind his eyelids.

The Warden leads him to the darkened doorway and watches as he enters. The dim fluorescents light up the moment Alexis steps inside. They blend into an intense, constant drone.

The two weeks in prison seemed to Alexis the longest expanse of time he could remember. He hoped the delay might have been a result of his mother's intervention—perhaps an effort to save him with her influences. But he soon understood that would never
happen. Soren understood the justice of his punishment as much as any of the Aestheticians who had witnessed the crime. Alexis had questioned the value of Art, challenged the authority of the State, and angered University officials. And in the cool solitude of his prison cell, he still wasn't sure why he had done it. It was, for now, enough to have seen Dominique once again.

Alexis had never known anyone in prison, nor did he have any reason to be familiar with sentencing for various crimes, so when news of his punishment came in a message through the Warden, a man who never met his eyes, Alexis didn't understand.

"Prisoner Alexis Marciolean has decided to view the Cipher Box. Execution will take place on day Seventeen of month Five, current year. This is the final verdict."

With heels clicking, he turned and left. Alexis jumped from the bed on which he had been resting and ran to edge of his cell. "What... execution?" he yelled after him, but the Warden was gone.

Alexis scavenged his mind, trying to recall some shred of memory, some understanding of what he would face. He hadn't been asked to view any Boxes since his Final Assessment, and nothing in University training had ever mentioned a Cipher Box. Finally at a complete loss, he lay on his bed for hours contemplating the events of the past few weeks, then quietly escaped into the comfort of dreamless sleep.
The lights are loud. They have been in existence too long with little or no maintenance. Alexis smells the room. It is dry. His eyes open and he sees an installation mounted to the wall directly before him across the three-meter floor. It looks like a square box lacking sides—the one against the wall and the one across producing a deep frame of dark wood about one-half-meter square. It is unlike any Box Alexis has ever seen or heard about. He has no idea what to do.

Before he can decide, images appear. They aren’t his. They feel old, like this room a year flashes—century ago. Alexis understands he is reading someone else’s mind. A flood of information answers him, toppling his balance.

He sees the Artist Communes. They are peaceful and contained. An Artist escapes to build this Box. Forms and patterns suddenly surround Alexis, stretching out before him like luminous stars. He stands watching the rotations, geometry, symmetry, law, cause and effect—physical things that construct the universe—circle around him like fireflies or the cotton of dandelion seeds. And then the chaos—the brief pits of disorder, the black holes. Instantly everything is gone. The vision disappears and Alexis stands in space.

He senses the presence of someone else. He thinks it is Dominique. He calls her name.

Another series of images. Someone is in this beautiful museum.
He locks himself in, threatened to take his own life if anyone interrupts the work or forces him away. The Aestheticians are intrigued and allow him to finish the masterpiece. He works for three weeks alone, then stumbles out through the front entrance on the last day, down the many beautiful steps, bleeding from every limb. He tells about the creation to save humanity. Historians come in this room—the few brave enough to try—but none of them speak of the Box or what it contains or what they experienced. They walk away and vanish from society and are simply found dead within the following days. Hundreds of Historians gather to discuss what to do, and finally a scientist is sent in to investigate. He reports strange occurrences and nothing more. The Aestheticians are perplexed yet refuse to admit their inability to explain. They deny the existence of the Box and the Artist. The Ministry guards it, eventually coming to realize its effective use as a solution to renegade Aestheticians who, invariably, choose to die after viewing it. It is truly a creation to save humanity. No one is held responsible for the deaths. The outcasts conveniently dispose of themselves, permanently silenced.

The solidity of the room returns along with the buzz of lights. Alexis is alone again, facing the dark object on the wall. He approaches it. Only when he is a few steps away does he notice...
something moving inside. It's hard to see with the dim, green lights, but—
it's his face. He is in the frame. Or rather, some crude, two-dimensional
representation. He waves his hand before him. The replicated
image waves back, exactly in the same fashion. Alexis knows what
this is; he has seen it before.

When he was younger, before his University studies, Alexis had
traveled a few times with his mother to the Drone colonies. Once
there had been a very cold colony, a place where they stayed for
several days in a beautiful, sterile apartment. Soren had an eye for
antiques and loved to impress her friends with unique artifacts
found only in the colonial markets. Alexis was rarely taken outdoors
at that time and thus cherished every moment of his travels. He tried
to remember them all as vividly as possible.

Black flies had droned about and plagued him all day. Butting them
away he glimpsed, in the corner of his vision, chubby legs moving
alongside him. They weren't his legs, though; they walked within a
frame, flattened to the ground, as if they didn't exist. "What is it,
Mother? Can I touch it?" he had asked Soren, tugging her arm,
but she was caught up in an intense barter with a merchant and
shooed him away. He walked up to the object and squatted down
to stare at himself. He touched the smooth, silver surface—
does now. This close, he can behold himself fully in all of the
beautiful flatness. The silver is recessed within the deep frame, the square box lacking a side. It has a delicacy to its strange warp and how it is preserved here in the dustless Box forever. Alexis looks at himself.

The time in isolation has drawn his face down, and he appears much older. Or it may be the lighting which casts faint shadows down his cheeks, describing all the minuscule imperfections on his granite skin. He has never been handsome, but this flat reflection washes out his eyes and hair of color, the straight brow he inherited from his mother, especially sharp. Lightly, he touches the appendage to his mouth, where it is added weight. Even the curved line of his father's jaw and the thickness of his nose do little to soften his expression. His pupils are black and round.

He wants to speak to Dominique again—wants to see her now, his same age, not the six-year-old girl in his mind. But the room remains vacant, and the slippery silver offers no comfort. He hopes to find Dominique in its flat reflection, but he is alone. A panic seizes him:

"Dominique!" He grasps the sides of the wooden frame and, feeling its solidity, watches the grief spread over his face cautiously, unbelieving. The ephemeral blank moment he had experienced in the blue Box returns, but it is stronger now, choking him with
design & construct: sketches, notes, thoughts
void loss empty nothingness absurd
swirl - infiniteness, universal

THE CIPHER BOX

the cipher box

eye seeing

motifs:
the box
black hole
flowers
buzz
white
blue

gestalt

window
the cipher box
blue-tranquility
passivity
those who are blind to the
void

[the cipher box]

[THE CIPHER BOX]

Secrecy: add '1 info

(thecipherbox)
floating disconnectedness

letter relationship

the cipher box

The Cipher Box

the cipher box

the cipher box

the cipher box

the cipher box

the cipher box

the cipher box
Piet Zwart

**Tough-Hewn**

- linen paper
  - clean, perfect

- the cipher box

Lines drawn together

Forces of gravity

(the cipher box)
2/14/98
Cephus Box

in the blue room A. Knows it is Dom's work

- Dom is descendent of a shaman, a fact obvious in the angle, pronoucement of her cheekbones & uplift of corner of eyes, olive skin

Dom has escaped the confined of state-defined art (art of universal forms) and holds w/i herself an art that defies definition-

- would be called chaos

"that which they would call chaos is all around the art w/i you. It is the beauty of a flower and your willingness to call a flower beauty & ability to recognize that beauty. But it is not just form that is art, Alexis—it is the joining of minds, the connection the gravity which moves you to speak & act about the things that move your soul."

The Box + the Assessment

- artists would present an idea—love, melancholy, anger, sadness, peace

- used the Historian's own

We are the tools by which individual genius is interpreted for the greater whole + the supremacy
Von Mauer Mtg.
what image to sell?
Stories of customers - easy return
family owned

code - mystical
(+ 2 9 a)
masons
spells
texts/ancient writings

the cipher box

the cipher box

the void
doorway
black box
woodcut/linoleum cut
bottom left
is going on because deep down I know that I do. I know I'm lucky to be working with such a fun & understanding & patient group of people & I really need to make the best of it.

Money arrives Friday!

Messerschmitt box

side flip (secret openings)

Pages flip different ways not flat?

May 27/91

slide panel off

Inside final panel has mirror, framed in like "truth"—has engraved plate.

Wooden box?
Metal panels

Map out course of story thru sequence of page turning, mode of page turning

Typography

flaps—zooed
bound pages square

1st few pages
- have black square box by itself
+ on final page back

sliding top

mirror bottom

as you lift book out, can see your reflection in bottom + the 'receding square'

bigger size 2 sides

false bottom
empty
Box of Books

- lid
- opens
- book opens

Diecuts

- open-accordion w/folded in pages
- star book

Each panel opens...
only one encloses full book

Cipher box
- 'Nothing'
- number
- figuring...

Flowers
- lid
- front of lid carries logo
- interior all blue?
- flowers...

Book does not leave box...
must always read in context of the flowers

Black box
- front cover logo in dark gray logo
- in lid
- one lid black die cut logo
- next blue (will show blue)
- then white
- varnish (book cover)
Numera

inner cover

End paper cover (left)

Glue dam

back

2 6.5" srw
3 6.6" srw

back cover (center w/hyphen paper)

butt joint (x)

bumpers

For 3/4" 5/6"
Cipher Box - Logo/Identity

The boxes are made of aspen, so they are very white and clean. I thought I could carve the logo into the top + bottom + stain the relief part w/ebony stain. The whole thing will then get a clear satin coat.

The logo will be somewhat rougher -

Perhaps a looser swirl

I tried it in all the other corners... I can't decide.

More into the infinite

Swirl is a natural form

Square is unnatural (is perfect; doesn't exist)

Swirl represents the universe, black hole, positive/negative

Is the sterility, enforced order + definition

Nature, Science, art - basic forms

Perhaps direction of swirl should be positive - [Diagram]

7" otherwill hold book

One side has mirror

Divider (inside)
Text block:
Sew pages w/ rayon

71/8

6 3/4" x 6"

Cover - 2 boards + spine covered w/ white only

Covered w/ white only

25" x 16"

Put cover on:
Fold paper

Weight down logo endpaper

SEQUENCE:
11-15

* Square *
16 - square -
17 -

25

Page 1-3
* black square *

Page 9-10
* Square *

5 blind
coloophon
end