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DENNIS ASHBAUGH

AGRIPPA

(A Book of the Dead)

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Publisher

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Agrippa - the transmission

When did you last hear Hopalong Cassidy on his NBC radio program? When did you last read to your children around a campfire? Have you been sorry that your busy schedule prevented a visit to the elders mud hut in New Guinea, where legends of times past are recounted? Have you ever looked closely at your telephone cable to determine exactly how voices and images can come out of the tiny fibers?

On Wednesday, December 9th, 1992 Agrippa - a book of the dead will be broadcast to dozens of sites around the world, all at the same moment.

This global fireside story hour will, of necessity, be a digital mutation of the original Dennis Ashbaugh / William Gibson project, a fragment presented in a form radically different from the usual ways we experience literature and art. Text and images excerpted from the book will be fed to museums, apartments, streetcorners, and various digital outposts, all via fibre optic and modem lines. This event will be an evolution of the most basic oral tradition of storytelling, via the computer/cyberspace world. Some electronic aspects will be captured by computer hackers, bootlegged, mutated further, or perhaps forgotten in a desk drawer to become an anonymous puzzle, of interest only to future anthropologists and linguists.

Agrippa - the transmission aims to go far beyond previous global conceptual events, and hasten a new form of tribal storytelling. Words and images, location, language, and weather will become equal parts of the experience. And high technology, built on precision and control, will be used in a manner that is certain to go out of control.

Agrippa - the transmission should in no way be confused with the published version of Agrippa. The book is an art object with weight, smell, texture, and the charm and weakness of paper, ink, cloth, and composite plastics. The transmission will be counterpoint, telling something else, another aspect of the story...

The transmission is available to a limited number of sites. Current locations include the ornate townhouse of the Americas Society in New York City, a streetcorner storefront on the lower east side, The Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta, the Kitchen in NYC, a sheep farm on the Australian outback, and others. For more information, and a technical sheet detailing hardware requirements for the event, please contact:

Read It Once

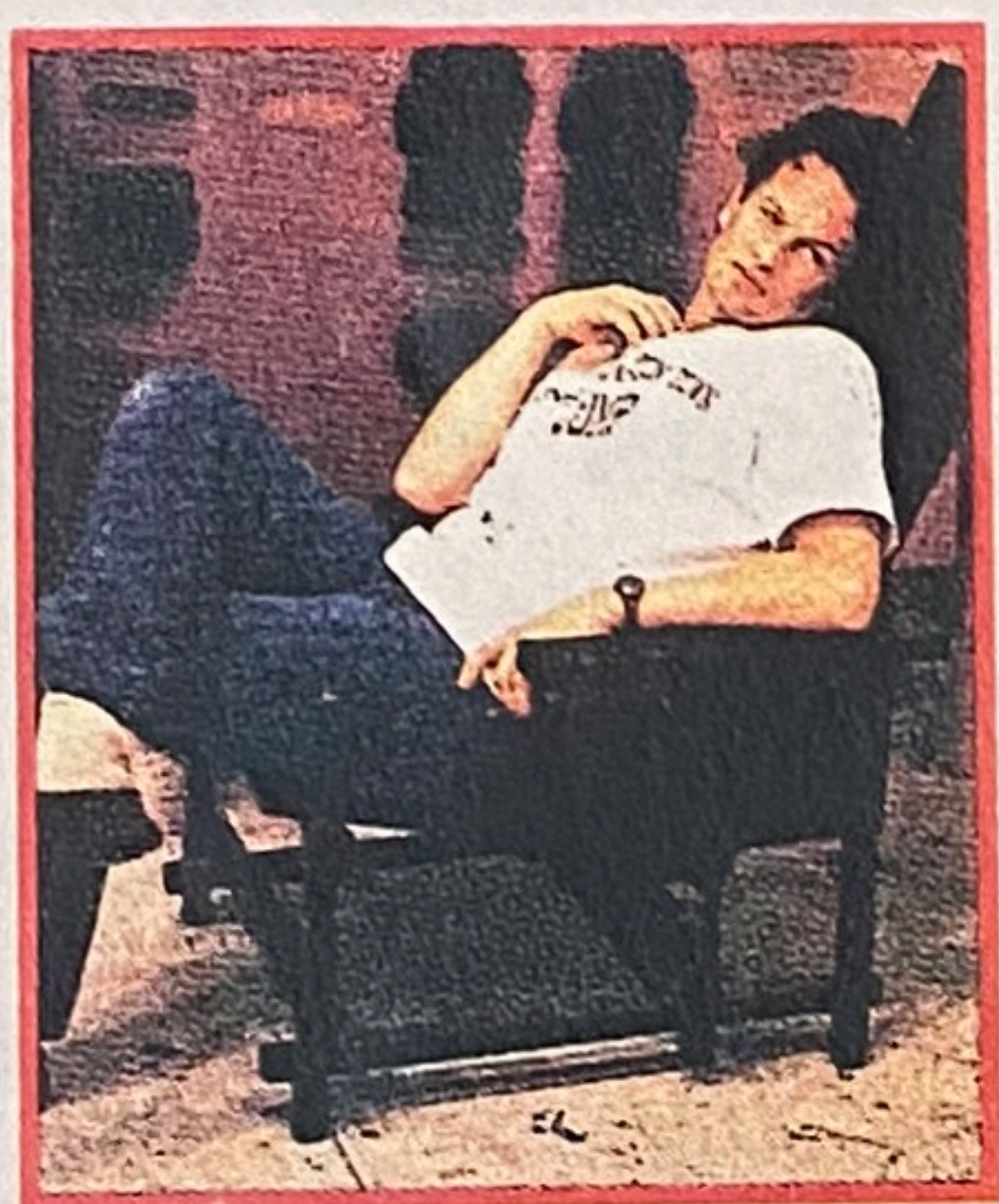
THREE VERY millennial rogues, Kevin Begos Jr., Dennis Ashbaugh, and William Gibson, will publish a book together sometime next

month. Begos, a publisher of museum-quality manuscripts and books, knew Ashbaugh, a New York artist whose canvases employ models of computer viruses. Begos then met William Gibson. Gibson is the author of *Neuromancer* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and the virtual godhead to millions of computer warriors.

Begos asked Gibson and Ashbaugh: "Why don't you guys do a book together, you know, on disk or something, so that after you read it once, it disappears?"

Got that? You read it once and it disappears. It is to be called *Agrippa* (*A Book of the Dead*). The physical object will be a large, somewhat tortured, bronze or graphite portfolio containing Ashbaugh's original copper-plate engravings of DNA codes. Under the engravings will be a floppy, swaddled in its own niche. Gibson's story will be on the disk, along with a very slick little computer virus.

THE PHYSICAL OBJECT: A little light reading, or the end of publishing as we know it?



THE ARTIST: Dennis Ashbaugh, in code

If the reader boots up and commits to reading this work, the disk will scroll at a preordained speed, once, and then the virus will cause it to mutate and then disappear. Appropriately,

Ashbaugh's engravings will be done in two kinds of ink, one that disappears after being exposed to an hour of light and one that appears on exposure to light. The five hundred or so editions of *Agrippa* (*A Book of the Dead*) will cost

between \$450 and \$7,500, depending on how much of an "object" the collector wants to buy.

The Gibson curriculum vitae

goes like this:

A Virginia draft dodger leaves the country during the Vietnam War for Canada, marries, has a kid, and while he's at home taking care of

the baby, decides to write a novel (*Neuromancer*, 1984) about hackers set sometime in the not-so-distant future. Quite accidentally, his acid-washed vision caused a social revolution. Now there are magazines devoted to cyberpunk and whole communities of crazed digital humans busily hacking their way through cyberspace, all over the world.

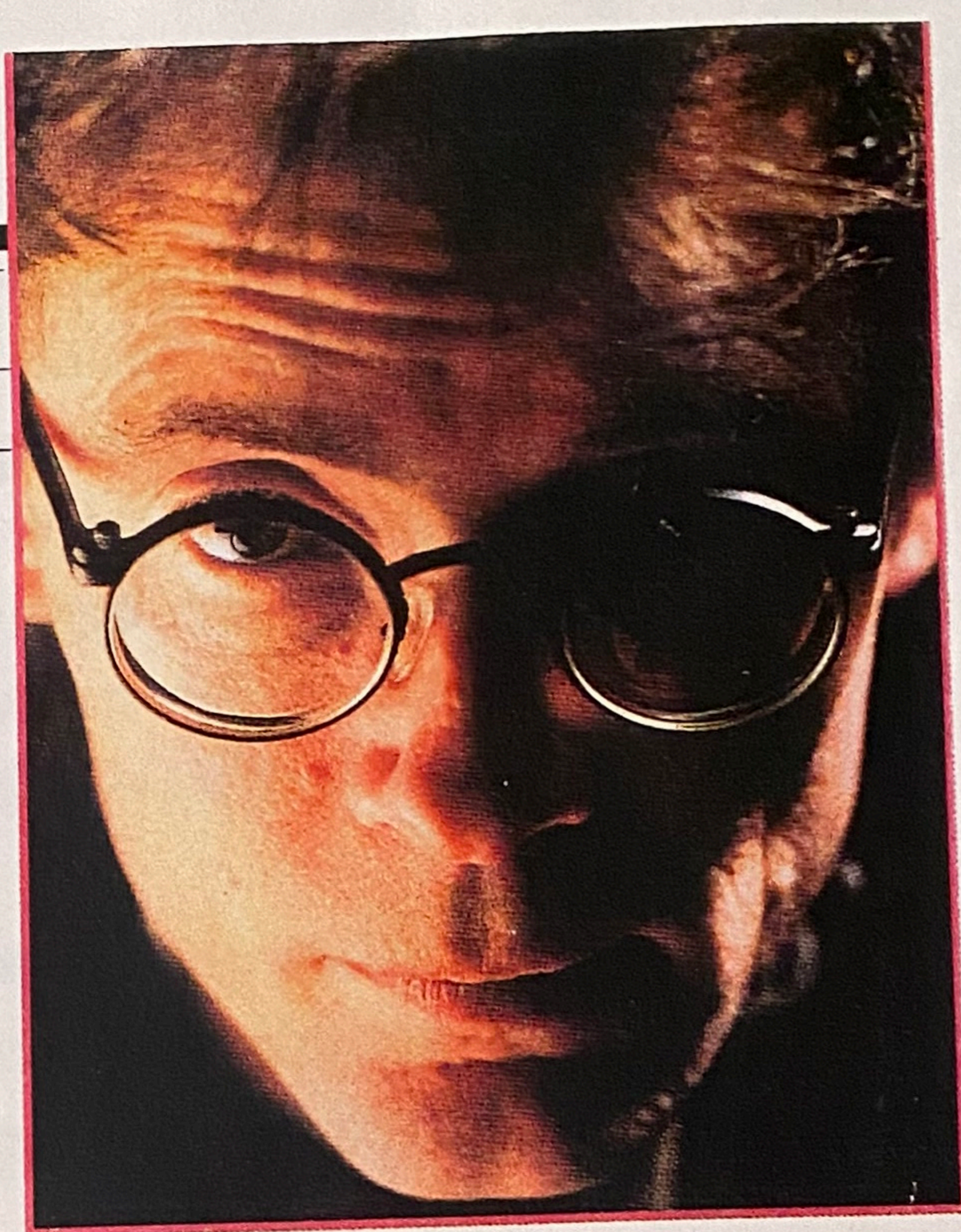
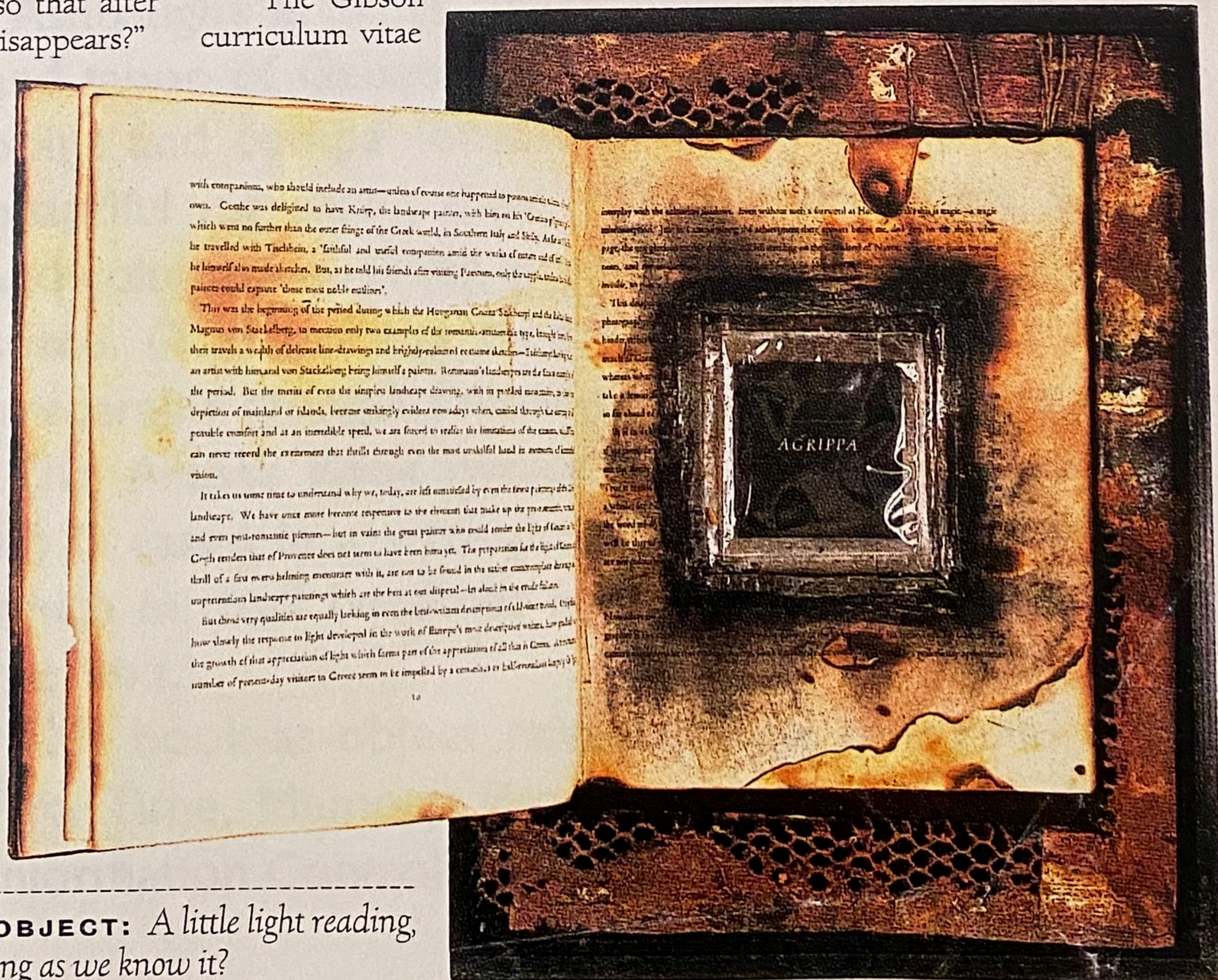
THE WRITER: William Gibson, the inventor of cyberspace and now of self-destructive fiction

The book's publication party is not likely to be attended by its publisher or either of the book's authors. Instead, they've found a barn in Wyoming that is wired for fiber optics. Some techies are going to this barn with a floppy of the story, where they will modem it, once, to computer bulletin boards (i.e., to cyberpunks) all over the world.

The virus will of course be included. The challenge for Gibson devotees will be to see if they can retain all or part of *Agrippa* (*A Book of the Dead*).

The story Gibson has written is about "accessing" his father, who died when Gibson was six. The process of this book is, with the process of Gibson's filial experience, part of the book. It is meant to be evanescent, but not impermanent, and that finally is the point. Those of us lucky enough to read this story and absorb the genetic information encoded in Ashbaugh's art will have had *virtually* the same experience of Gibson's father that Gibson had. It will be encoded, and then etched, by memory.

—GUY MARTIN



Kevin Begos Jr., publisher of museum-quality, limited edition books, has brought together artist Dennis Ashbaugh (known for his large paintings of computer viruses and his DNA "portraits") and writer William Gibson (who coined the term *cyberspace*, then explored the concept in his award-winning books *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*) to produce a collaborative Artist's Book.

In an age of artificial intelligence, recombinant genetics, and radical, technologically-driven cultural change, this "Book" will be as much a challenge as a possession, as much an enigma as a "story".

The Text, encrypted on a computer disc along with a Virus Program written especially for the project, will mutate and destroy itself in the course of a single "reading". The Collector/Reader may either choose to access the Text, thus setting in motion a process in which the Text becomes merely a Memory, or preserve the Text unread, in its "pure" state—an artifact existing exclusively in cyberspace.

Ashbaugh's etchings, which allude to the potent allure and taboo of Genetic Manipulation, are both counterpoint and companion-piece to the Text. Printed on beautiful rag paper, their texture, odor, form, weight, and color are qualities unavailable to the Text in cyberspace. (The etchings themselves will undergo certain irreparable changes following their initial viewing.)

This Artist's Book (which is not exactly a "book" at all) is cased in a wrought metal box, the Mechanism, which in itself becomes a crucial, integral element of the Text.

This book-as-object raises unique questions about Art, Time, Memory, Possession—and the Politics of Information Control. It will be the first Digital Myth.