

Keith Dietrich

INTERSECTIONS, BOUNDARIES AND PASSAGES: TRANSGRESSING THE CODEX

October 2011





INTRODUCTION

Keith Dietrich was born in Johannesburg in 1950 and studied graphic design at Stellenbosch University, where he graduated with a BA degree in Visual Arts in 1974. Between 1975 and 1977 he studied painting at the National Higher Institute for Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium. He obtained his MA in Fine Arts (*cum laude*) in 1983 and his D Litt et Phil in Art History in 1993, both at the University of South Africa (Unisa). He has lectured at the University of Pretoria and Unisa, and is currently Chair of the Department of Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University. He has participated in over thirty community interaction projects in southern Africa and has received a number of awards, in South Africa and abroad, for both his creative and his academic work. He has participated in group exhibitions and biennials in Belgium, Botswana, Chile, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Namibia, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA, and has held 20 solo exhibitions in South Africa. His work is represented in 34 corporate and public collections in South Africa and abroad.



*Intersections, Boundaries and Passages:
Transgressing the Codex*

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Intersections, Boundaries and Passages: Transgressing the Codex

Given that the convention of an inaugural lecture excludes art practice, I decided to present an inaugural exhibition. The `work' that is exhibited on this occasion is an artist's book with the title, *Many Rivers to Cross: Conflict Zones, Boundaries and Shared Waters*. This lecture is therefore a supplement to the above-mentioned exhibition of the book.

Six years ago I began experimenting with making artists' books, and the work on this exhibition is my fifth attempt at making a bookwork. In her article, *Artist's Books - For Lack of a Better Name* (2002), Angela Lorenz appends the following passage to her title:

Artist's books should come with a warning label. Once you know what they are, be warned, you have the burden of trying to explain them to others.

Since artists' books are neglected and relatively unknown in South Africa, explaining bookworks is partly what my burden is with this lecture. I therefore will begin by introducing something of the discourse around attempts to define and categorise artists' books, and then move on to providing some background to the broader family of contemporary artists' books.

Artists have been active in book production and printing for centuries, but the artist's book is a relatively new field of art production and study, dating back to the late 1960s. The synonymous terms "book art", "book object", "bookwork", and "artist's book"¹ refer to art objects that are informed by the concept of the book and are realised in the form of a book. As with many disciplines in the early stages of discovering their identities, a considerable amount of energy and thought has been devoted to defining the boundaries of book art. Book art straddles two dominant domains, namely the world of books and the world of art, and as such it occupies a liminal space betwixt and between these worlds.

Artists' books are generally associated with conventional paper codices that are conceptualised as works of art. They are commercially printed in high volumes or published in limited editions, or produced as one-of-a-kind objects referred to as `uniques'. Besides the conventional codex form, artists' books are also produced in a wide range of other forms, such as scrolls, accordion folds, fan folds, gatefolds, venetian blind folds, pop-up books or loose-leaf pages contained in a box.

Artists' books lie at the intersection of disciplines in both the visual arts and literature, and include poetry, prose, playwriting, illustration, picture books, the graphic novel, graphic design, typography, photography, printmaking, drawing, painting, papermaking and bookbinding. Many, however, transgress the boundaries of the conventional book form by entering the arenas of sculpture, installation and performance, as well as the now escalating field of digital and screen-based media, such as iPads and e-books. Although many examples might not even be identifiable as books, they play with the meanings associated with books and book making.

The most striking characteristic of artists' books as a field of art practice then is the lack of a clearly delineated identity as to what an artist's book is. Because of the absence of definition, this field of art production abounds with examples of book objects that challenge and subvert every facet of the function and purpose of the orthodox book. Some of the most thought-provoking artists' books are to be found on the margins of definitions where boundaries are stretched to their limits (Bicknell 1996: 24-25). It is because of this lack of a fixed identity and definition that artists' books find themselves in the liminal space they occupy.

The aim of this paper is not to establish whether there is a fixed identity for book art within a conceptual framework that struggles to define or establish the field of study and practice. I explore, rather, ways in which book artists interrogate and interpret the physical structure and conventions of the book in order to create objects that we can identify as artists' books. In this undertaking I am less interested in definitions than in the advantageous position that book art occupies in that ambiguous space between the book and conventional fine art. With reference to Homi Bhabha's `Third Space of enunciation' (1994: 86), I will examine why and how artists' books defy or create challenges for definition and categorisation. This will also help me conclude my discussion with my own bookwork, *Many Rivers to Cross*, which constitutes this exhibition.

In 1998, art librarian Stefan Klima (1998:12) credited Diane Perry Vanderlip with first using the term *Artist's Books*. Vanderlip chose the term for the title of an exhibition of book arts at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia in 1973. In his *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature*, Klima devotes a whole chapter to defining the artist's book. He writes (1998:7) that such works are difficult to define,



Fig. 1. William Blake 1821. *Jerusalem* (Johnson & Grant 2008:pl 14).

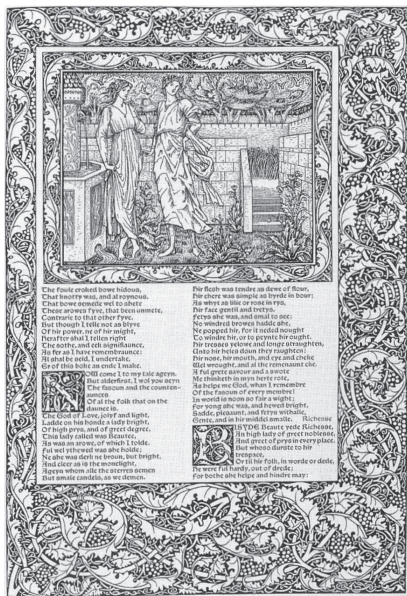


Fig. 2. William Morris 1896. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Haslam 2006: 22).

and that the debate on the correct definition and use of the term had persisted without any success for almost two decades prior to the publication of his book in 1998.

The debate was still in full force in 2010. Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden from the Centre for Fine Print Research at the University of the West of England in Bristol completed a two-year project that investigated issues concerning the context and future of the artist's book. Their attempt was to extend and sustain critical debate as to what constitutes a bookwork in the twenty-first century.

So why is it necessary to establish definitions? There are certainly some practical reasons for definitions and categories, such as the collection, categorisation, management, storage and retrieval of artist's books by museums and libraries. Moreover, collection policies have an impact on what artists make. Delineating definitions and categories also helps to chart the broader field of artist's books, contextualising them within a larger framework related to both art and books.

Yale librarian Jae Jennifer Rossman (2003:1) writes that artists' books must be distinguished from other associated books that give the impression of being artists' books. The latter include art books and the *Livre d'artiste*. Richard Kostelanetz (1985:28) makes the point that there is a vast disparity between an artist's work appearing in an honorific art book form (such as a compendium of reproductions) and an artist making a book as an artwork. In the case of the latter, the book artist determines both the content and form of the book, as well as controlling its design, production, publication and distribution (Kostelanetz 1985:28).

The *Livre d'artiste*, by contrast, came into being in France during the late nineteenth century when art dealers, collectors and publishers such as Ambroise Vollard and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler commissioned artists to illustrate texts of writers and poets and then had these works finely printed and bound for an exclusive audience of collectors and bibliophiles. Johanna Drucker (1995:3) points out that these types of books do not fall into the broader definition of artists' books in that they are not conceived and produced solely by the artist. Although these are in most cases finely created rare books, Drucker argues that they 'stop just at the threshold, or even a bit before the threshold, of the conceptual space in which artists' books operate'. It is most unusual to find a *Livre d'artiste* that probes the conceptual framework and material form of the artist's book as a self-

conscious part of its purpose, structure and significance (Drucker 1995:3).

When it comes to delineating boundaries for the artist's book, I would follow Louise Kulp's framework outlined in her article, *Artists' Books in Libraries: A Review of the Literature*. Kulp (2005) assigns book arts to one of two categories. She calls the first category 'production pieces', which she describes as being 'inexpensively produced, widely distributed, accessible and disposable'. Known as the democratic multiple, this is the type of book on which the artists' book movement was founded in the 1960s, when artists attempted to circumvent established galleries and museums and exhibit their work in an alternative space, namely that of the book. Kulp describes the second category as a unique art object that comes in a limited edition or as a one-of-a-kind work. These bookworks are frequently characterised by unorthodox materials, such as wood, perspex, latex, metal, fabric, and so on, and are often contained in finely crafted custom-made holders (Kulp 2005).

Rather than attempting to define or categorise artists' books, I will endeavour to highlight some of their many traits. Pushing the boundaries beyond the expectations of ordinary books and defying existing limitations and definitions regarding orthodox books are some of their primary qualities. Other important characteristics are their intermedial, intertextual and transdisciplinary attributes, the self-production and accessibility of the book, and the desire to transgress the established aesthetic norms and expectations of art and books. Technological advancements, primarily photocopying and digital printing, have made it financially easy for artists to manufacture books by themselves.

Authors writing on the topic of artists' books credit the English artist and poet William Blake (1757–1827) with being the earliest forerunner of book artists. He was followed by William Morris (1834–1896) a century later. The work of Blake and Morris demonstrates particular characteristics that are found in contemporary artists' books (Drucker 1995:21). Books such as Blake's *Jerusalem* (1804–1820) (Fig. 1) and Morris's *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1896–1898) (Fig. 2) served as models for future artists' books in that the integration of text, image and form, as well as self-publishing and distribution, remain significant features in artists' books today.

Where Blake and Morris created precedents for the conceptual practice of the modern artist's book, the writings

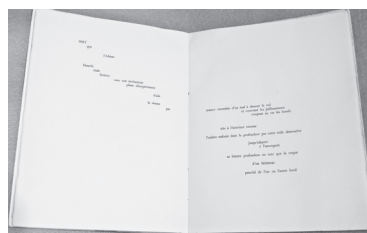
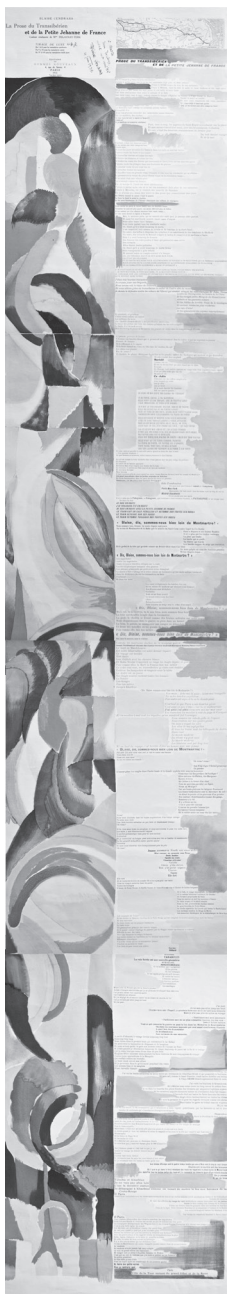


Fig. 3 Stéphane Mallarmé 1914. *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* (Rare Book Collection, NYPL).



Fig. 5 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti 1914. *Zang Tumb Tuuum: Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912: Parole in Libertà* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

Fig. 4 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay 1913. *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

of the nineteenth-century French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) raised a number of philosophical, poetic and cultural issues relevant to recognising the book as an artistic concept (Drucker 1995:21). Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* (A roll of the dice will never abolish chance) (Fig. 3) transgressed the conventional literary book by working extensively with word sounds and allowing onomatopoeia to substitute the implications of content (Perrée 2002:14). The poem was written in 1897 and published posthumously in 1914 in accordance with Mallarmé's instructions (Drucker 1993:37). Rob Perrée (2002:14) writes that, by placing words on the page in an unorthodox manner, Mallarmé transforms them into visual arrangements where texts become images and where white space 'suddenly has a face'.

Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* allows for multiple non-linear readings of the text and focuses on the significance of the form of typography and the structure of the pages. These notions filtered through to the Expressionist, Futurist, Dada and Surrealist artists, and in particular to their habit of subverting the conventional use of typography, space and composition in books, pamphlets and posters. In contrast to the deluxe *Livre d'artiste* editions, different groups of avant-garde artists across Europe, such as the Italian and Russian Futurists, produced their own books, posters, pamphlets and manifestos in response to the political events that preceded and followed World War I. This was partly a way to win publicity within a rising print-dominated world, but it was also a tactic to circumvent customary gallery systems, to circulate ideas and to generate inexpensive work that could be seen and bought by people who would not normally frequent art galleries.

I will now focus on some early twentieth-century avant-garde books from Italian and Russian Futurism, and Dada and Surrealism, which were precursors to the contemporary artist's book. As an art form, the artist's book is closely associated with the early twentieth-century avant-garde, and it was here that the form of the book became one of the main vehicles for experimental artistic vision (Drucker 1995:45).

One of the earliest twentieth-century artist's book collaborations was the poem-painting by Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay. *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France) (1913) (Fig. 4) features a poem by

Cendrars about a journey he undertook through Russia on the Trans-Siberian Express in 1905 during the first Russian Revolution. Sonia Delaunay interwove Cendrars's poem with non-figurative stencil prints in gouache and aquarelle. A print run of 150 was originally envisaged so that, end to end, all the copies would equal the height of the Eiffel Tower, the symbol of modernity. In the event, only 60 copies were printed (Michaelides 2008).

When published, the artwork caused a sensation in the avant-garde circles in Paris, and it is astonishing that Cendrars and Delaunay could imagine and create such a work in 1913. The work challenges the conventional codex form in that it can only function as a legible book when it is completely unfolded (Drucker 1995:51).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, only a limited number of examples of typographic experimentation were executed in the form of book works, the greater part of revolutionary typographic innovation having taken the form of posters and pamphlets (Drucker 1995:51-52). One of the first major avant-garde attempts to transgress typographic conventions occurred in *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (Figs. 5 & 6), a lengthy concrete sound poem published by the Italian Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1914. The poem was particularly influential among the Italian Futurists, and evokes the sensations Marinetti experienced in the Balkan War of 1912. It uses different types of onomatopoeia, words-in-freedom and creative typography, and transgresses the conventional relationships between text and image. The poem includes other poetic impressions of the events of the battle, such as the sounds of gunfire and explosions (Perrée 2002:15).

The influence of Futurism spread from Western Europe to Russia, with the Russian avant-garde poets and artists borrowing from the German Expressionists, Fauves and Cubists, and from the Italian Futurists. As with the Italian Futurists, these developments included pushing the boundaries of typographic design and layout, and were influenced by Stéphane Mallarmé and the *Calligrammes* of the French Dada poet, playwright and critic Guillaume Apollinaire. Lazar El Lissitzky's book, entitled *Pro dva kvadrata - suprematicheskii skaz - v 6-ti postroikakh* (About Two Squares: In 6 Constructions: A Suprematist Tale) (Fig. 7) and published in 1922, for example, clearly demonstrates a strong Futurist influence. As in the case of his illustrations for Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Dliá`golosa* (For the Voice) (Fig. 8), published



Fig. 6 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti 1914. *Zang Tumb Tuuum : Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912: Parole in Libertà* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

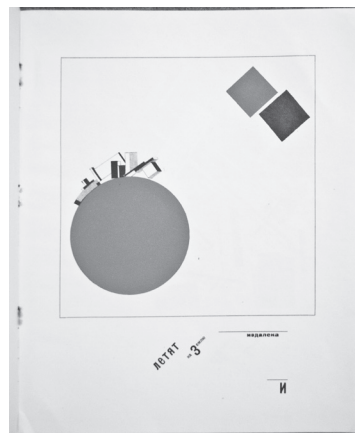


Fig. 7. El Lissitzky 1922. *Pro dva kvadrata – suprematicheskii skaz - v 6-ti postroikakh* (Rare Book Collection, NYPL)

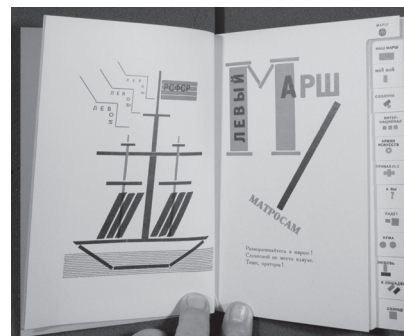


Fig. 8 Mayakovsky, Vladimir 1923. *Dliã golosa*. Illustrated by El Lissitzky (MoMA).



Fig. 9. Max Ernst 1934. *Une Semaine de Bonté: A Surrealistic Novel in Collage* (Print Collection, NYPL).

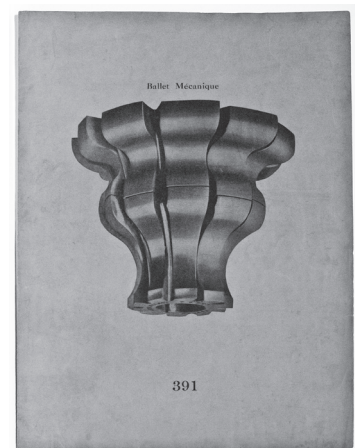


Fig. 10. Francis Picabia 1917. *391* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

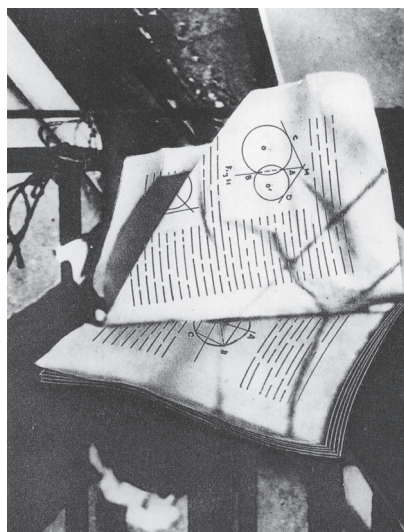


Fig. 11. Marcel Duchamp 1919. *Ready-made Malheureux* (Agnelli 1993: 69).

in 1923, this influence is manifested through his use and placement of text and geometric shapes, his organisation of space on the page, and his use and scale of typefaces (Drucker 1995:56). By the early 1920s, avant-garde typographic experimentation and the transgression of the conventions of design and layout, introduced by the Italian and Russian Futurists, became institutionalised in the curriculum of the German Bauhaus School in Weimar (Drucker 1995:58).

The Surrealists were also involved in the production of book art, and Max Ernst, one of the leading figures of the movement, broke with earlier book conventions in his *Une Semaine de Bonté* (A Week of Kindness) (Fig. 9), published in 1934. By combining elements of collage from Victorian encyclopaedias, catalogues and pulp novel illustrations, Ernst produced this series of 182 wood engraving reproductions, presenting a surreal world of uncanny images depicting dreamlike erotic fantasies couched in dark humour (Drucker 1995:60).

In contrast to Futurist, Constructivist and Suprematist principles, the cynical, nihilist and anarchic ideas of Dada were circulated in publications like *Cabaret Voltaire* (1916), the periodical *Dada*, founded in 1916, and Tristan Tzara's famous *Dada Manifesto* of 1918, along with *391* (Fig. 10), a Dadaist periodical edited and published by Francis Picabia that first appeared in 1917. These periodicals form the most important documents for grasping the transformation that took place in literature, art and ideas in the twentieth century. Their anti-art sentiment included compositional disruption, typographical disorder, illogical language, the absence of narrative and descriptive elements, outrageous associations between textual elements, and chance and chaos as means to social revolution. The periodical *391* remains the sole manifestation of the imaginative and enthusiastic Picabia, who argued that

[e]very page must explode, whether through seriousness, profundity, turbulence, nausea, the new, the eternal, annihilating nonsense, enthusiasm for principles, or the way it is printed. Art must be unaesthetic in the extreme, useless and impossible to justify (cited in Gay 2008:143).

Marcel Duchamp's *Ready-made Malheureux* (Unhappy Ready-made, 1919) (Fig. 11) is an example of a book transformed by chance. Duchamp asked his sister Suzanne to hang a geometry textbook outside their Paris balcony

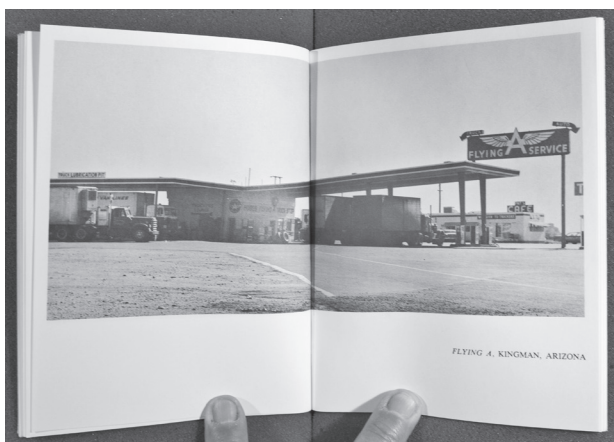
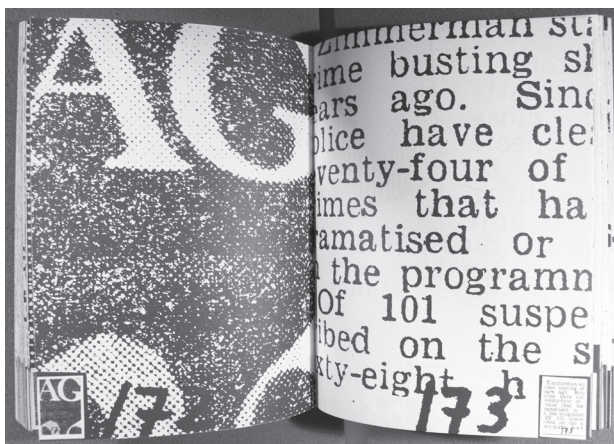


Fig. 12. Ed Ruscha 1962. *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (MoMA).



7 Fig. 13. Dieter Roth 1961. *Daily Mirror* (MoMA).

until it was destroyed by the weather (Bright 2005:41). The work sits in an ambiguous position between a destroyed book and an artwork. It also speaks of Duchamp's interest in authorship, as the exact claim to authorship of this work remains ambiguous.

Because of its flexibility and versatility, the book format attracted artists from virtually all the major movements in the visual arts during the twentieth century. The development with regard to using the form and structure of the book as an artistic expression increased after World War II, when it began emerging as a separate field of mainstream art. From 1945 it gained considerable momentum, developing into a distinct and independent area of art production and study from the 1960s (Drucker 1995: 1).

A number of leading European and American artists, such as Edward Ruscha, Dieter Roth, Sol LeWitt, Yoko Ono, George Brecht and Lawrence Weiner, began to systematically deconstruct the book and explore the functions and forms of the bookwork as a way of experimenting with an alternative space for publishing their ideas.

With the advent of Pop Art in the 1950s and 1960s, artists readily became involved in political and social action arising from investigations into the form, structure and content of the book as an art object (Lyons 1985:7). Clive Phillpott (1985:97) argues that Ed Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (Fig. 12) from 1962 was a key work that had a powerful influence on the future of book arts and endorsed the idea that artists could use the form of the book to make artworks. Janice Ekdahl (1999:244) writes that Ruscha's book epitomises many of the features that typify late twentieth-century artists' books. It presents a sequence of twenty-six ordinary black and white photographs of gasoline stations taken on Route 66 between Los Angeles and Oklahoma. Each station is portrayed in a direct documentary manner, accompanied by a simple caption. The books are not rare or precious, but were kept affordable, conforming to the notion of the democratic multiple (Ekdahl 1999:244).

Like Ruscha, the German Fluxus artist Dieter Roth was also productive during the 1950s and 1960s, creating works that transgressed the conventional form of books. In his *Daily Mirror* (1961) (Fig. 13), for example, Roth used found newspaper material that he cut into 2 cm squares and then bound into a 150-page book. Betty Bright (2005:108) remarks that Roth 'is arguably the most inventive and influential book artist in the twentieth century'. His attraction to

the conceptual and structural form of the book arose from his interest in concrete poetry, with the graphic composition of characters and words on the page (Drucker 1995:73).

Books also formed a core component of the Fluxus movement, where the notion of what Phillip Smith (1996) calls 'bookness' was challenged and the parameters of the book became increasingly open-ended and blurred. George Brecht's *Water Yam* (1963) (Fig. 14), for example, is regarded as one of the most significant works to have arisen from the movement. This work comprises a series of some 70 scores or imprinted cards, containing instructions known as *event-scores*, or *fluxscores*, based on performances that took place over a period of four years. The book was published in a package called a *Fluxbox* or *Fluxkit* that has an open structure, with no rules regarding its reading sequence (Drucker 1995:310-311).

Yoko Ono and George Maciunas, who attended John Cage's experimental music composition classes at the New School for Social Research in New York in the 1960s, developed similar event scores. These scores were collected and bound in Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* book (1964) (Fig. 15), which has become known as an early example of conceptual art. The 1960s and 1970s saw a strong gravitation towards conceptual book art, where the idea was given primacy over the formal qualities of the book, and had a direct influence on the way book artists approached the medium. Clive Phillpott (1985:99) points out that the book was the most suitable vehicle for most conceptual artists to document and circulate their ideas, theories and values, which easily lent themselves to the form of the book.

Conceptual artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt, Marcel Broodthaers, Peter Downsbrough and Joseph Kosuth all used the book in their art practice (Ekdahl 1999:244). Weiner created his first book, entitled *Statements* (Fig. 16), in 1968. The work is considered one of the seminal conceptual artists' books of the era, and comprises 24 phrases that refer to specific sculptural and performative processes, such as: 'One piece of plywood secured to the floor or wall' and 'An amount of paint poured directly upon the floor and allowed to dry' (Ekdahl 1999:244).

Marcel Broodthaers's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* (1969) (Fig. 17) is directly informed by and parodies Mallarmé's book of the same title. Broodthaers replaced Mallarmé's words with black strips that correspond directly to the typographic layout of Mallarmé's book. The



Fig. 14. George Brecht 1963. *Water Yam* (MoMA).



Fig. 15. Yoko Ono 1964. *Grapefruit* (MoMA).

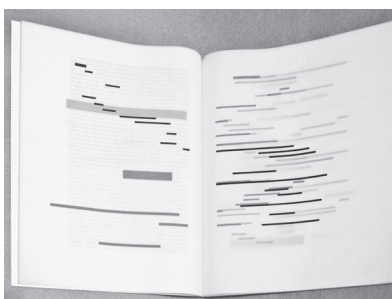


Fig. 17. Marcel Broodthaers 1969. *Un Coup de Dés* (Print Collection, NYPL).

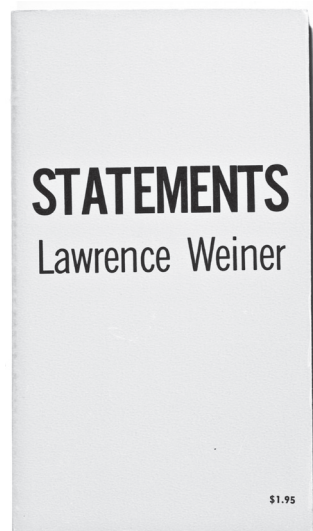


Fig. 16. Lawrence Weiner 1968. *Statements* (MoMA).

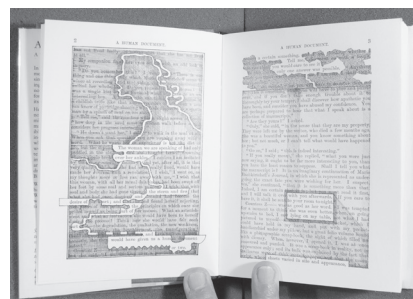


Fig. 19. Tom Phillips 1987. *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel* (MoMA).

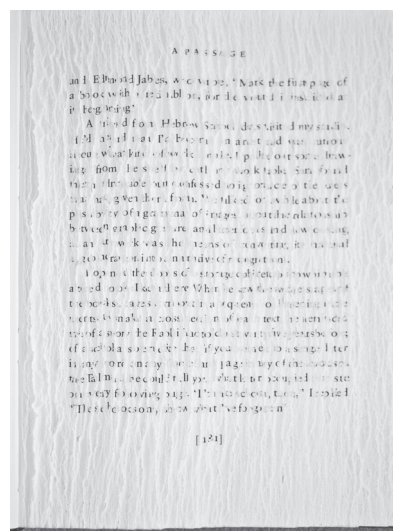


Fig. 18. Buzz Spector 1994. *A Passage* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

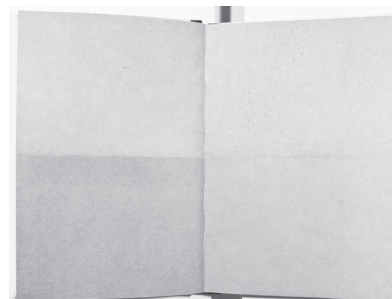


Fig. 20. Sol LeWitt 1987. *Four Colours and their Combinations* (MoMA).

book is printed on translucent paper, and the phrases on the different pages relate to each other in a spatial dimension through the pages of the book (Drucker 1995:116). Broodthaers reduced Mallarmé's book to its structure and layout, and subverted the convention of the book as a device for encrypting and recording.

As with Broodthaers, Buzz Spector and Tom Phillips are among the many artists who produced interventions and parodies of existing books. Spector has a particular interest in text as art and in altering existing books. His *A passage* (1994) (Fig. 18) comprises a wedge-shaped text block of 360 identical pages, hand-torn in a sequence of increasing increments revealing a cross-section of his text. The open book exposes a ragged field of typographic characters, lines and paragraphs whose legibility gives further meaning to the personal narrative written by Spector. In his altered book, *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel* (1987) (Fig. 19), Tom Phillips laboriously transformed the pages of the 1892 Victorian novel, *The Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock. By concealing, deleting and adorning the original text of each page, Phillips produced a radically new book.

Sol LeWitt, by contrast, used the format of the book to investigate his own aesthetics as visual abstraction (Ekdhahl 1999:244). As the title suggests, in his *Four Colours and their Combinations* (1987) (Fig. 20) he begins by identifying four colours that he combines to explore a number of combinations over consecutive pages. The book is an interrogation of the potentials of graphic combinations and the effects of sequence, as well as a study of colour and geometric form.

Unlike the largely conceptual text-based books hitherto discussed, some artists choose to rather explore the specific relationship between texts and images. With reference to the narrative structure of many artists' books, Shelley Rice (1985:59) writes that the exploration of the relationships between words and images on pages is one of the most extensive innovations of artists' books. The direct association between words and images, where the one element illustrates the other in the service of a linear narrative, has been subverted or transgressed in numerous narrative books by a new form of visual literature (Rice 1985:59). Narrative books take the form of either photo narratives or drawn or graphic images, or a hybrid combination of these.

Nancy Holt's *Ransacked* (1980) (Fig. 21), for example, adopts an uncomplicated and direct narrative relation-

ship between text and image. By contrast, Richard Nonas relies on a more complex conceptual approach regarding the integration of words and images. In his *Boiling Coffee* (1980) (Fig. 22), Nonas forges a narrative between seemingly unrelated and fragmented photographic images, handwritten texts and ink drawings. As Rice points out, in the beginning there appears to be no direct relationship between the photographic images and the scrawled texts. Gradually, however, the images become more demanding until the boundaries between the words and images begin to evaporate (1985:66).

In contrast to Nonas's apparently displaced narrative, Paul Zelevansky constructs an extremely complex and multi-layered three-volume allegorical narrative in his *The Case for the Burial of Ancestors* (1981) (Fig. 23). The narrative, which is a rewriting of the *Book of Genesis*, writes Shelley Rice (1985:66), 'develops episodically through a sequence of graphically designed pages that function as geographic grounds for shifting relationships'.

I would now like to move from the democratic multiple on which much of the post-1960s artist's book movement was founded, to what Johanna Drucker refers to as unique, rare, auratic or self-reflexive artists' books that frequently interrogate the 'codex and its variations' (1995:93, 121, 161). In many cases, these are limited-edition or one-of-a-kind interactive books associated with fine printmaking. Contrary to the predominantly text-based artists' books, many unique books contain limited words, as the artists choose rather to explore the form and materials of the book as such. The visual and tactile elements of the book's covers, spine, endpapers, and pages; and its papers and binding materials; its margins and gutters, are particular properties that render the book expressive as a medium (Drucker 1995:162).

The experimental forms of hermetic autonomous artists' books, such as Julie Chen's *True to Life* (2004) (Fig. 24), and Keith Smith's *Swimmer* (1986) (Fig. 25), make use of hybrid structures informed by the conventions and techniques of bookmaking and bookbinding. It must be noted that these artists mostly make and bind their own books. Like Smith and Chen's books, Scott McCarney's *In case of Emergency* (1984) (Fig. 26), Margot Lovejoy's *Labyrinth: A Montage Book* (1991) (Fig. 27), and Angela Lorenz's *The Nomad's Chair* (1998) (Fig. 28), are all interactive works, inviting the reader to touch and hold the books; to open

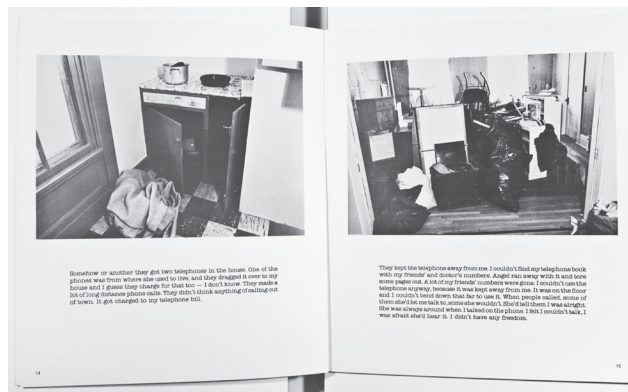


Fig. 21. Nancy Holt 1980. *Ransacked* (MoMA).

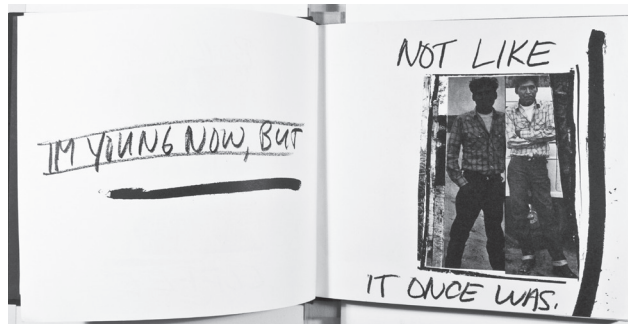


Fig. 22. Richard Nonas 1980. *Boiling Coffee* (MoMA).

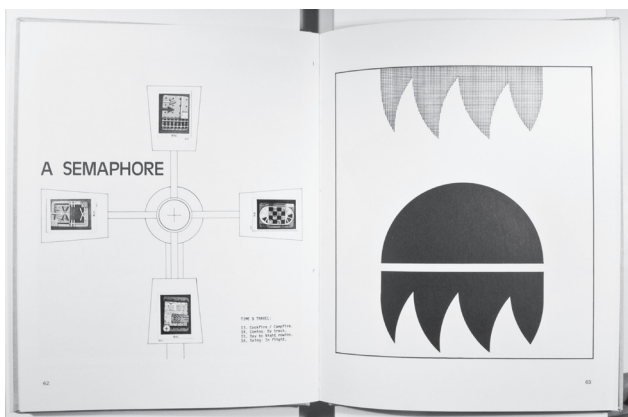


Fig. 23. Paul Zelevansky 1981. *The Case for the Burial of Ancestors* (MoMA).

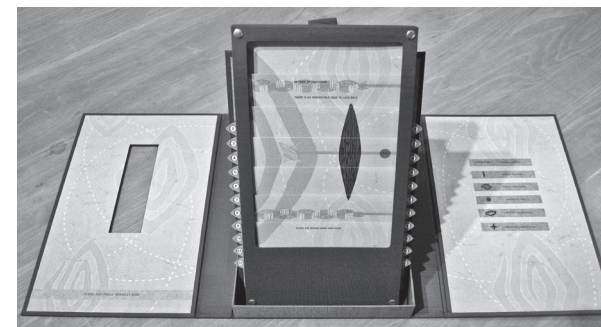


Fig. 24. Julie Chen 2004. *True to Life* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

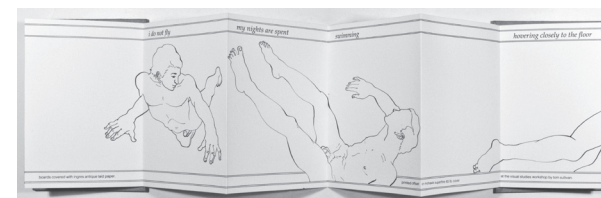


Fig. 25. Keith Smith 1986. *Swimmer* (MoMA).

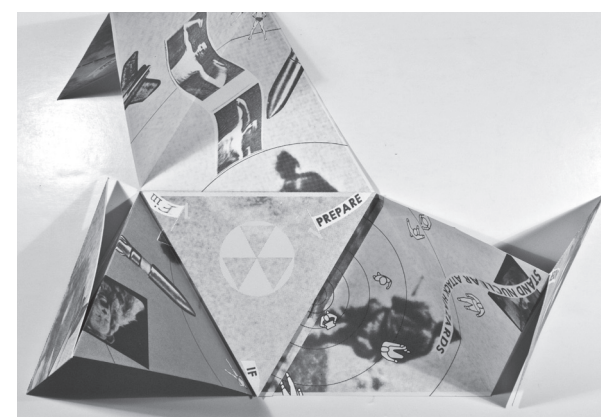


Fig. 26. Scott McCarney 1984. *In Case of Emergency* (MoMA).



Fig. 27. Margot Lovejoy 1991. *Labyrinth: A Montage Book* (MoMA).

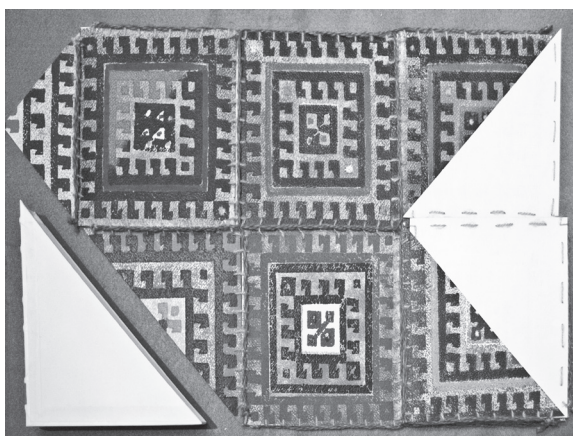


Fig. 28. Angela Lorenz 1998. *The Nomad's Chair* (Spencer Collection NYPL).

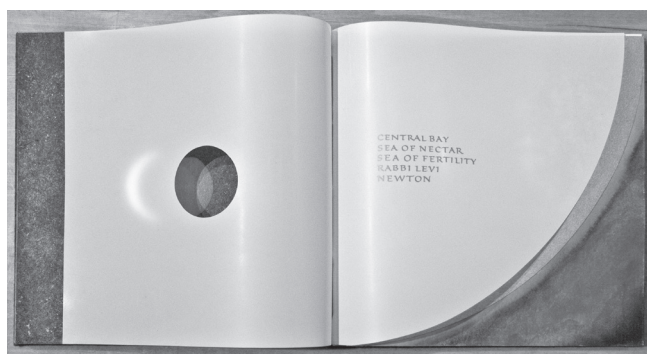


Fig. 29. Susan Weil 1994. *Meta Mor for the Moon* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).



Fig. 30. Stephan Köhler and Clemens-Tobias Lange 2000. *Mexico* (Spencer Collection, NYPL).

them and contemplate their pages; to unfold and refold the pages. The materials used in Susan Weil's *Meta Mor for the Moon* (1994) (Fig. 29) and Stephan Köhler and Clemens-Tobias Lange's *Mexico* (2000) (Fig. 30) evoke touching and, like our skins, may be viewed as metaphors of covering and exposure, surface and depth, and interior and exterior.²

Sculptural bookworks, or what Renée Riese Hubert (1985:521) calls deviant books, are the antithesis of multiple bookworks and are seldom made in editions. Sculptural books emphasise the book as an object rather than a medium. Although they may not have pages that open and close or work in the way we understand books to function, they question and challenge our ideas of what a book is and communicate their messages visually.

A seminal hybrid bookwork is Dieter Roth's *Literaturwurst* (Literature Sausage) (Fig. 31) series, first made in 1961. Roth was active in developing both multiple and sculptural bookworks, and it was with *Literaturwurst* that his processing of 'found texts' reached its logical conclusion. This sculptural book was made from shredded and pulped pages of the *Daily Mirror* and *Der Spiegel*, blended with spices and products from authentic sausage recipes, and stuffed into a sausage skin. Fragments from the cover of the publication were then collaged as a label onto the skin of the sausage. Although, technically, this is a book, it is wholly unreadable. Writing on Roth's contribution to book arts, Drucker (1995:75) points out that, although early avant-garde artists had experimented with books, no one had taken the formal and structural conventions of book-making as far as Roth did. Roth always made it clear that these works were conceived of as books and not as multiple sculptural pieces.

While some three-dimensional book objects, such as David Stairs's *Boundless* (1983) (Fig. 32) and Steven J. Bernstein's *Strip Poker* (1991) (Fig. 33) are somewhat impractical to read and interact with, others are looser interpretations of the conventional idea of a bookwork. In *71125: Fifty Years of Silence, Eva Kellner's Story* (1992) (Fig. 34), Tatana Kellner narrates her mother's experiences in a World War II concentration camp over a series of handwritten die-cut pages that fold over a cast of her mother's forearm. By contrast, Buzz Spector's cryptic messages inscribed on the set of 12 pencils in his *Memories* (1976) (Fig. 35) can appear in any order in the pencil box, creating uncertainty about the purpose of the messages.

Two artists who work within the concept of the book on a large sculptural scale are the German artist Anselm Kiefer and the South African artist Willem Boshoff. The work of both artists addresses the possibility of the redemptive power of art, and in particular the book as a metaphor for the communication of collective knowledge. The scale of their works is incredible in terms of their size and sheer ambition. Kiefer's controversial books, and specifically his monumental installation of 200 lead books with the title *Zweistromland* (The Land of the Two Rivers) (1986-1989) (Fig. 36), are informed by the horror and guilt of Germany's traumatic and troubled past. Kiefer's works blur the boundaries between the symbolic and the real, the past and the present, and loss and renewal. Boshoff's *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1994) (Fig. 37) is a sculptural dictionary comprising an installation of 338 pieces, each addressing a word that can only be comprehended through touch. The work inverts the relationship between sighted and blind people, by placing sighted people in a disadvantaged position as the 'other' by inflicting on them the handicaps and constraints experienced by blind people.

In a review on the deviant book form, Hubert (1985:521) writes of such works as establishing a confrontation between the book as object and its intellectual, aesthetic and cultural features. He argues that these book objects set art against the function of books, and reading against looking. They clash with our expectations of what books are as receptacles of knowledge and truth.

From the 1970s onwards, the artist's book increasingly became accepted as a distinct genre and, as has been mentioned, with this came the beginnings of debate on and critical appreciation of the subject. Libraries and museums began to collect artists' books and to define categories for their classification and cataloguing. New collections were established, such as the Franklin Furnace Collection that was acquired by the New York Museum of Modern Art Library in 1993, forming the world's premier repository for artist's books. Numerous group exhibitions of artist's books were organised in Europe and America, and bookshops specialising in artist's books were established. In the 1980s and 1990s, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Book Arts were founded at American and European universities and colleges.

Notwithstanding the upsurge in book arts as a genre, there exists a relatively small body of scholarship in the



Fig. 31. Dieter Roth 1961. *Literaturwurst 'Der Spiegel'* (Walter et al. 2003:74).



Fig. 35. Buzz Spector 1976. *Memories* (MoMA).

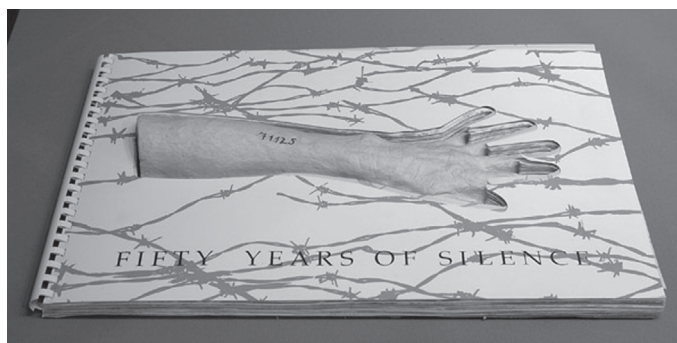


Fig. 34. Tatana Kellner 1992. 71125: *Fifty Years of Silence, Eva Kellner's Story* (Print Collection, NYPL).

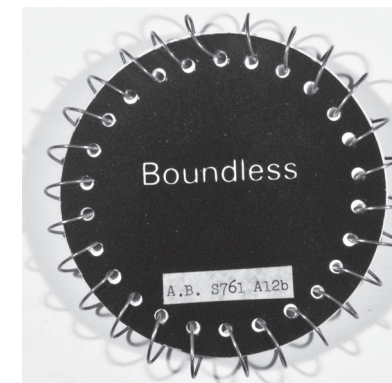


Fig. 32. David Stairs 1983. *Boundless* (MoMA).



Fig. 33. Steven J. Bernstein 1991. *Strip Poker* (Print Collection, NYPL).



Fig. 36. Anselm Kiefer 1986-1989. *Zweistromland* (López-Pedraza 1996: 74).



Fig. 37. Willem Boshoff 1994. *Blind Alphabet ABC* (Vladislavic 2005: 55).

field. Most of the material that has been written attempts to define boundaries for and categories of book arts, instead of challenging or displacing these. Despite the difficulty, or even impossibility, of arriving at an appropriate definition for artists' books, numerous barriers and boundaries have been dissolved between fields within the book arts, as well as between the broader worlds of art and books.

Conventional obstructions and conflicts between text-based and image-based publications, and between handcrafted and industrially manufactured books, have evaporated. The artist's book takes on several functions, be they aesthetic, cultural, social or political. It often offers a form of protest against both institutionalism and elitism. The action of reading can become very complex where the reader is compelled to participate on one or other level in the creation or completion of the book. Images and texts combine, enhance or stand in for one another, or engage and collide with one another, giving rise to a variety of questions and possibilities.

It is precisely this ambiguous space between artwork and book that draws me to work with this medium. In this undefined space where boundaries dissolve, the bookwork transcends the threshold from one space to another. The concept of liminality and the 'liminal space', first pioneered by the French folklorist Arnold van Gennep, and as examined by anthropologist Victor Turner, suggests the notion of ambiguity and ambivalence. Writing on the liminal period in rites of passage and ritual transformation, Turner characterises liminality as a state "betwixt and between" all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification' (1967:97).

Like Turner, I view this space as a domain that abounds with creative opportunities where new and unexpected ideas and possibilities can take root. Turner makes it clear that when examining liminality one is in effect dealing with the unstructured, a condition allied to the 'the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless' (Turner 1967:98).

This liminal space can therefore be read as an intersection where ideas and concepts, be they artistic, cultural, political or social, are in constant states of confrontation and intercession. For Homi Bhabha, liminality is significant as a space related to the notion of cultural hybridity. 'This interstitial passage between fixed identifications', argues Bhabha, 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed

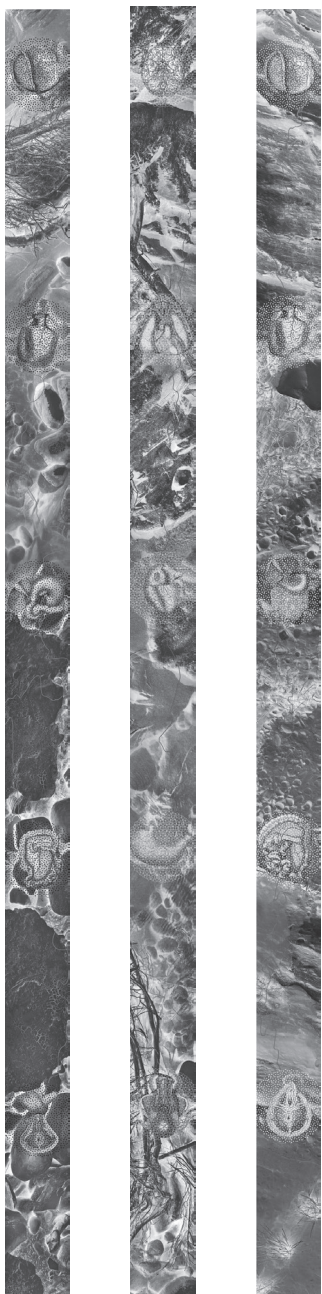


Fig. 38. Keith Dietrich 2011.
Many Rivers to Cross: Conflict Zones, Boundaries and Shared Waters.

hierarchy' (1994:5). The notion of liminality is important in describing some of the phenomena regarding artists' books, as well as my own books: namely their transdisciplinary, transcultural and hybrid nature.

This liminal state unlocks a hybrid space, or what Bhabha refers to as a 'Third Space of enunciation' (1994: 86). Positioned betwixt and between the world of books and the conventional world of art, the artist's book does not quite belong to either of these worlds and, despite this lack of stability, this liminal space allows for a freedom of movement and the dynamic exchanges of ideas, concepts and methods of working.

The significance of the hybrid nature of book art is not to call into question the two fields from which this space emerges. Rather, it is to stress that this space allows for and enables other views and forms to arise from the different branches of the visual arts and literature, and to engender new possibilities. As I have attempted to demonstrate in my overview of artists' books, this hybrid identity emerges from the intertwining of poetry, prose, photography, design, typography, illustration, drawing, printmaking, printing, painting, sculpture, papermaking, bookbinding and handcrafts. Despite the contradictions and ambiguities that characterise this space, it provides a spatial identity of inclusion rather than exclusion that, as Bhabha (1994:1) explains, 'initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation'.

I would now like to conclude by introducing my bookwork entitled *Many Rivers to Cross: Conflict Zones, Boundaries and Shared Waters* (Fig. 38). As with my previous work, this book has grown from my interests in South African colonial histories and the complex and diverse geographical features of our country. The book focuses on three major river courses in South Africa, namely the Gariep, Great Fish and Vaal rivers. These three rivers played significant roles as key frontiers, contact zones and boundaries around sites of major socio-political conflict during the period of colonial expansion and conquest in South Africa. In addition, they have served as post-colonial boundaries between different societies, provinces and neighbouring countries. This book is thus informed by the rich historical and archaeological arena in which successive power struggles played themselves out - by the entangled conflicts of diverse human populations that inhabited our land around

and across these rivers, and by the complex relationships between colonial contact and terrain.

In a country with extremely limited and fragile water resources, the three rivers also constitute important water courses that are linked in a web of shared waters or inter-basin transfer systems, where water is transmitted from one river to another. These systems play a significant role in sustaining water for industrial and agricultural use, and serve as the lifelines for most of the country's population through their supply of water for domestic use. With the rapidly increasing demands placed on their waters, and the toxic effluents being drained into them, these rivers are at risk. The Gariep, Vaal and Great Fish have the potential to be sites of either hydro-political conflict or cooperation between communities, groups, regions or states.

Considering the conflict that has taken place along and across these rivers, I have used them as metaphors for the pain and suffering that our country has undergone. At the same time, they also represent the importance of shared water for the future hope and survival of our country. The images in the book map the body over the land. Suffering and hope are depicted as patterns and centres of energy superimposed over riverbeds, while bodily organs and circulatory systems mirror these river catchments as webs and folds of life.

Besides their diverse functions as frontiers, boundaries and borders, and as sources of water and energy, these rivers also serve as metaphors and symbols for many other aspects of being human in our country. Immersion in or crossing rivers have been used as transformational metaphors and symbols in cultural practices such as initiation and baptism. As such, rivers and water function as liminal passages, intersections and boundaries where people enter into altered states of being. Their rich liminality can be used to explain why, historically and culturally, our limited watercourses have played a significant role in rites of passage in South African cultural life.

1. The forms 'artist's book' and 'artists' books' are both used, depending on whether the context is singular or plural.
2. Despite our desire to touch these books, issues of conservation and security often sway museums, libraries and galleries to provide cotton gloves that must be worn to page through the works, or to place the books behind glass, thus removing the opportunity for the public to interact physically with them.

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