

Artists' books
in the age of digital reproduction:
An enquiry into the problematic nature and
(in)accessibility of book production as contemporary art.

by
Heléne van Aswegen

*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree Master in Philosophy in Visual Arts (Illustration) at
Stellenbosch University*



Supervisor: Prof. Keith Dietrich
Department of Visual Arts

March 2012

Declaration

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

March 2012

Copyright © 2012 Stellenbosch University

All rights reserved

Abstract

This thesis problematises the accessibility of artists' books. Being a relatively young genre in contemporary art, the artist's book faces several dilemmas regarding its reputation for being a book that needs to be regarded and treated as a work of art.

I am concerned that the artist's book does not gain much attention within contemporary art and related discourse. This thesis explores possible reasons for this lack of attention by asserting that the manner in which artists present books and the strain in which secondary sources discuss artists' books contribute to the inaccessibility of the art form.

Issues on presentation are discussed in several contexts. I look at how artists' books are presented physically within art institutions as well as how they are dealt with in library systems. This is followed by an inquiry into how artists' books are commonly *re-*presented within secondary sources specifically theoretical texts and websites that discuss art.

Considering that new media is yet another aid to facilitate access to information, I reflect on the implications it has on the production and conceptualisation of artist's books. This interplay between the digital- (new media such as computer mediated software application) and the material form (the printed word and book structure) are explored through examples of my practice as well as other contemporary book artists' work.

In conclusion the case is made that artists' books can only be completed works of art once the viewer/reader has direct access to the object. It is thus the experience and unfolding of the contents of an artist's book that completes its meaning.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis vind die toeganklikheid van kunstenaars-boeke problematies. In kontemporêre kuns is dié genre redelik jonk. Gevolglik ervaar kunstenaars-boeke 'n paar hindernisse aangesien dit soos 'n boek funksioneer maar beskou en hanteer moet word as 'n kunsvoorwerp.

Ek vind dit kommerwekkend dat in kontemporêre kuns en verwante diskoerse daar nie baie aandag gevestig word op kunstenaars-boeke nie. Hierdie tesis bestudeer moontlike redes vir dié gebrek aan erkenning. Daar word aangevoer dat die manier hoe kunstenaars-boeke fisies vertoon word, asook hoe dit bespreek word in sekondêre bronne, bydra tot die ontoeganklikheid van die kunsvorm.

Vertonings-kwessies word bespreek in verskeie kontekste. Ek bestudeer hoe kunstenaars-boeke fisies in kunsinstansies vertoon word asook hoe dit in biblioteek-sisteme gehandhaaf word. Dit word gevolg deur 'n ondersoek oor die *uitbeelding* van kunstenaars-boeke in sekondêre bronne soos boeke en webtuistes wat handel oor kuns.

Aangesien nuwe media nog 'n hulpmiddel is wat toegang tot informasie vergemaklik, word die implikasies wat dit op die produksie en konseptualisering van die kunstenaars-boek het uitgelig. Die speling tussen die digitale- (nuwe media soos rekenaar aangedrewe sagteware) en die materiële vorm (die gedrukte woord en die struktuur van 'n boek) word bespreek deur middel van voorbeelde van my eie praktyk sowel as die werk van ander kontemporêre boek-kunstenaars.

In gevolgtrekking word daar aangedui dat kunstenaars-boeke slegs volledige kunswerke is wanneer die toeskouer/leser direkte toegang tot die voorwerp het. Dit is dus die ervaring en die blootlegging van die inhoud van 'n kunstenaars-boek wat die betekenis voltooi.

Table of contents

List of illustrations	5
Artists' books in the age of digital reproduction:	8
An enquiry into the problematic nature and [in]accessibility of book production as contemporary art.	8
The scope and nature of the field of study	10
Literature survey	12
Exposition of contents:.....	15
Chapter 1: An Introduction to Artists' Books: Their background and various definitions ...	15
Chapter 2: Presenting the artist's book: Queries on accessibility within the framework of existing institutions	16
Chapter 3: Representing artists' books: Artists' books within secondary sources	16
Chapter 4: Conceptualising the artist's book.....	17
Chapter 1:	19
An Introduction to Artists' Books: Their background and varied definitions	19
A concise overview of the predecessors to examples of contemporary artists' books.	20
The artist's book in relation to book arts; fine printing and <i>livres d'artistes</i>	32
The Great Dispute: Defining the Artist's Book.....	34
Chapter 2:	42
Queries on accessibility within the framework of existing institutions.....	42
Introducing institutional theory and relational aesthetics	43
Galleries and Libraries: Their intentions and their limitations.....	46
The conflicts of presentation in relation to conservation.....	58
'A Museum without Walls': The artist's book as a self contained exhibition space	60
Chapter 3:	63
Presenting the artist's book intellectually: Artists' books within secondary sources	63
Books on artists' books	65
Connecting to the Internet: Using new media to do the work of the old.....	66
The problematic nature of photographic representation.....	67
The limitations of descriptive texts on artists' books.....	69
The lack of the relational factor	70
Chapter 4: Conceptualising the artist's book.....	75
The accessible media: The materiality of the book and the intangibility of digital media.....	75
Conclusion.....	88
Sources consulted.....	92

List of illustrations

Fig. 1. *The Book of Hours*(1460). Illuminated manuscript. 15 x 10. Collection: Royal Library, The Hague (Woman's Studio Workshop 2010).

Fig. 2. William Blake, *Jerusalem* (1804). Hand printed manuscript. 34.5 x 26.4. Collection: Paul Mellon, Yale University (Yale Center for British Art 2010).

Fig. 3. William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1892). Published book. 20 x 14. Klemm Press, London (Bartram 2001: 110-111).

Fig. 4. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de Des* (1914). Typographic book. 33 x 42.5. Collection: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Library, New York (Bartram 2004: 4).

Fig. 5. Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914). New York Public Library, Spenser collection, (NYPL 2010).

Fig. 6. Marcel Duchamp, *Unhappy Readymade* (1919). Dimensions variable. Non-collectable, (Agnelli 1993: 69).

Fig 7. Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte Verte* (1934). 33 x 28. Box containing, notes sketches, and photographs. Collection: Gabrielle Keiller, Eidenburg (Agnelli 1993: 90).

Fig. 8. Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise* (1936-1941). 38.7 x 41.3 (closed). Leather valise containing miniature replicas. Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Agnelli 1993: 108).

Fig. 9. Mel Bochner. *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Art* (1966). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: School of Visual Arts, New York (Kleber 2009).

Fig. 10. Marcel Broodthaers. *Un Coup de Des* (1969). Artist's book. 33 x 42.5, Collection: NYPL, New York (Rare Book Collection, NYPL 2010).

Fig. 11. Ed Ruscha. *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1962). Artist's book. 18 x 14, Collection: MoMA Library (MoMA Library 2010).

Fig. 12. Dieter Roth, *Daily Mirror* (1961). Artist's book. 2 x 2. Collection: MoMA Library (MoMA Library 2010).

Fig. 13. Dieter Roth, *Literaturwurst* (1961-1974). 52.5 x 42.5 x 12. Collection: MoMA (Walter, Jenny & Vischer 2003:74).

Fig. 14. Anselm Kiefer. *Zweistromland/ The High Priestess* (1985-89). Installation of 200 lead artist's books. Dimensions Variable. Collection: Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (Lopez-Pedraza 1996: 74 - 75).

Fig. 15. Buzz Spector, *A Passage* (1994). 21.3 x 15.7. Collection: Spenser Collection, NYPL, New York (Spenser Collection, NYPL 2010).

Fig. 16. Joachim Schönfeld, *Gif 2* (1994). Artist's book. 25.5 x 25.5 (slipcase) 22.5 x 24 (book). Collection: Jack Ginsberg, Johannesburg (Paton, 2009).

Fig 17. Willem Boshoff. *370 Day Project* (1982). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Jack Ginsberg, Johannesburg (Paton 2009).

Fig. 18& 23. Willem Boshoff. *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1994). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: MTN Art collection, Johannesburg (Paton, 2009).

Fig. 19. Pippa Skotness. *Sound From the Thinking Strings*(1991). Artist's book. 39 x 31. Collection: JS Gericke Library, Stellenbosch (Paton 2009).

Fig. 20. Pippa Skotness. *Lamb of God: Book of the Divine Consolation* (2004). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town (Skotness 2004:5).

Fig. 21. Pippa Skotness. *Lamb of God: Book of Blood and Milk* (2004). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town (Skotness 2004:5).

Fig. 22. Pippa Skotness. *Lamb of God: Book of the Speaking in Tongues* (2004). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town (Skotness 2004:5).

Fig 24, 32 & 33. Heléne van Aswegen. *The Nature of Technology.doc* (2011) Artist's book. 23.5 x 22.5. Artist's collection, Stellenbosch.

Fig. 25. Sol LeWitt. *Brick Wall* (1977) Artist's book. 26 x 22. Collection: MoMA Library, New York (MoMA Library 2010).

Fig. 26. Heléne van Aswegen. *www.bookoffriends.com*(2011) Artists's book. Dimensions variable. Artist's collection, Stellenbosch (Van Aswegen, 2011).

Fig. 27 & 28. Nora Schattauer (2007) *Prima Vista: Artist's books*. Cornerhouse Publications, Manchester (Schattauer 2007: 46-47, 43-44).

Fig. 29. David Paton, *Speaking in Tongues: Speaking Digitally/Digitally Speaking* (2009). Artist's book & video projection. Dimensions variable. Collection: Jack Ginsberg, Johannesburg (Paton 2009).

Fig. 30. Heléne van Aswegen, *Ctrl + P* (2011) Artist's book. 39 x 28.5. Artist's collection (Van Aswegen, 2011).

Fig. 31. Maria Fischer *Traumgedaken* (2010). Artist's book. 28 x 20. Collection unknown (Fischer, 2010).

Artists' books in the age of digital reproduction: An enquiry into the problematic nature and [in]accessibility of book production as contemporary art.

This thesis forms part of the research for my Masters in Philosophy (MPhil) in Visual Arts (Illustration). My specific practice revolves around the production of artists' books. Before I delve headfirst into the field of artists' books, I need to clarify my area of study in relation to the study of Illustration. I have been presented with the challenge of determining what exactly 'illustration' entails and if it would necessarily incorporate the contemporary art genre of *artists' books*.

To answer this question I need to briefly untangle what is meant by the term 'artists' books'. An artist's book (also referred to as a *bookwork*, *book object* or *book art*), is regarded as a work of art. It is a complete conceptual and material consideration of both the content and the final form of the book (Drucker 2004:2; Bury 1995:3). An artist's book is self-reflective (Drucker 2004:4, 161-226). It questions the book form while using the book form as medium, by creating another newly interpreted book or an object that retains aspects of the book (Drucker 2004: 10; Bury 1995:4). The content and the structure of the book are fully integrated or, in a sense, 'conscious' of each other¹(Drucker 2004:4). Since illustration is a standard medium that is, more often than not, incorporated into a book form, I feel I can safely deduce that I am able to consider both the image and its supporting structure in a symbiotically meaningful way. In other words, I choose not to take the form of the book for granted and, rather, conceptually incorporate the form and content into one coherent, self-conscious art work.

During my undergraduate studies in Visual Arts (Fine Arts) at Stellenbosch University, I had the privilege of being taught by a master bookbinder, Mr. Arthur Wadman. When I enrolled in my Master's degree I was asked to assist Mr. Wadman in a bookbinding workshop with my peers. Over the past two years I have had to step into the shoes of my mentor to continue his unforgettable legacy.

¹Conventional books tend to take the book form for granted and thus assume a position where the actual book form is only a means of containing information, and seldom a creative device in itself.

I now teach bookbinding to anyone who wishes to be taught the craft. In the process of teaching I find it challenging, yet stimulating, to convey the technical details of making a book, step by step, as clearly as possible. Many of my students have commented that they would never again look at a book in the same way having come to realise how complex the structure of a book can be. Since the book is designed to carry and convey information while remaining an accessible, user-friendly, portable medium, I have found the *comprehension* and *accessibility* of artist's books to be a central theoretical theme that I explore throughout this thesis.

As a practitioner of book arts I need to see examples by other artists who have interrogated the book form as an artistic medium, in order to gain an insight into the production of contemporary artists' books. However, I have come across numerous difficulties in finding both sources and actual examples of artists' books. This frustration has led me to the contradictory task of writing a thesis on artists' books without having had adequate access to the art form.² More importantly, if I cannot access such books in South Africa, how could the general South African public ever be able to appreciate artists' books?

Keeping this conundrum in mind, I have considered the availability and portability of conventional books and have realised that when it comes to artists' books, this function seems to be nullified or, at least, obscured (Bright 2005:7). I hold that these aspects require theorising in order to identify possible reasons for why and how artists' books become inaccessible especially in South Africa. By identifying the reasons one can create a point of departure from which to address the problem.

My research question is, how and why are artists' books frequently inaccessible and consequently, an incomprehensible art form?

²Here I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Prof Keith Dietrich, who went on a research trip to New York to document as many as possible artists' books from the various collections from of the Museum of Modern Art Library (MoMA) as well as the New York Public Library (NYPL). Without his input and passion for artist's books this thesis would never have been completed.

This thesis is a practical enquiry designed to help cultivate an appreciation and an understanding of artists' books. It is my intention to show that there are practical, presentational elements that need reconsideration regarding this relatively new field of study. It also follows that enquiry into accessibility is a central theme within my own practice. I interpret this theme in light of our contemporary technological milieu and by questioning how technologies have influenced our ability to gain a better understanding of, and access to, creative productions or more specifically, artists' books.

This thesis explores and problematises two major aspects. The first is the creative practice of conceptualising and producing artists' books in the contemporary context. The other aspect is how artists' books are firstly physically *presented* to the viewer (especially in public exhibition spaces), and secondly, *represented* in secondary sources (predominantly in book form or digitally/electronically mediated).

The scope and nature of the field of study

The artist's book, as we know it today, is a fairly new art form (Klima 1998:12-13).³ The field of study consists of a limited selection of discussions. In his *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature*, Stephan Klima (1998:7) condenses the field of theoretical activity when he states that:

Three issues dominated the debate: [1]definition; [2]the book considered an object and its challenge to a new kind of reading—the debate's implicit political act; and, [3] the desire to challenge an art establishment—the debate's explicit political act. Of the three, the work to establish an acceptable definition consumed the greater effort. If it is deemed necessary, it has yet to be established.

Many of these debates attempting to define artists' books include a brief overview of significant books and artworks that have played an influential role in how artists conceptually reflect on the book form as an artistic medium (Bright 2005; Paton 2000;

³The artist's book was used as a democratic multiple during the 1960s. The term was coined in 1973 as the title of an exhibition of books organised by Perry Vanderlip at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia (Klima 1998: 12-13)

Bury 1995; Hubert & Hubert 1999; Perrée 2002). 'Predecessors' of the artist's book include artists such as William Morris, printers and poets such as William Blake and the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, as well as artists such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, El Lizzitsky and Marcel Duchamp, to name just a few.

As mentioned above, during the 1960s, with the rise of Conceptual art, many artists found the book to be a logical medium as a neutral vessel to house their 'art-as-idea' (rather than 'art as form') in their art practices (Perrée 2002:19). Many discussions on the book as 'alternative space', or 'democratic medium', refer to Conceptual art (specifically the artists who tried to circumvent the conventional gallery space) as a point of departure in this line of research (Lippard 1977; Moore & Hendricks 1987; Phillpot 1987; Drucker 1995; Lyons 1987). Ed Ruscha, Dieter Roth and Sol LeWitt are commonly mentioned in such discussions. With regard to my personal field of inquiry, the book as an alternative space is another critical concept in the sense that the artist's book has the capacity to be exhibited outside the gallery walls.

I will show that the environment or space for presentation plays a pertinent role in both preserving and housing artists' books. As its history is intertwined with anti-establishment tendencies, I will also discuss how the artist's book that is housed within an art institution sits ambiguously within an exhibition space. Some writers (Drucker 2004; Perrée 2002; Hubert & Hubert 1999), have contributed briefly to such a suggestion. Critical enquiries regarding the presentation of artists' books to the public (Rob Perrée's *Doomed to the Showcase*, 2002:66; see also Bright 2005:7) and notions revolving around the 'intentionally ephemeral' (Drucker 2004:47) (also see *The Myth of the Democratic Multiple* in Drucker 1998:175) form a large part of my area of study as I feel that this requires further development.

Literature survey

In relation to the history of the artist's book, Betty Bright's *No longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960-1980* (2005) and Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artists' Books* (2004) offer the most information reflecting on the pioneers of this genre. These sources will also serve to provide a perspective on contemporary discourse on the nuanced differences between artists' books and other related genres, and are sometimes even confused with artists' books. Drucker's text contributes a comprehensive genealogy of artists' books. She dedicates chapters to specific kinds of artists' books (for example the democratic multiple, book objects, unique one-offs, etcetera) and thus offers a comprehensive summary of this genre's 'zone of activity'. It will prove productive to use her writings as a foundational point of departure to problematise the definition of artists' books in the first chapter.⁴

With regard to the definition and the boundaries of the artist's book, Drucker has written extensively on artists' books in an attempt to break free from the circular argument in which many other theoretical discussions become entangled. Here, her insights on the book's material significance in the face of electronic media prove to be very helpful. These insights stretch over several sources. However, I find her book, *Figuring the Word* (1998) (a collection of several essays Drucker produced for different publications and seminars), a good representation of her concerns regarding artists' books and other forms of visual poetics.

In his book, *Cover to Cover: The Artist's Book in Perspective* (2002), Rob Perrée offers insightful contributions not only concerning the defining parameters of the artist's book, but also—and more importantly, with reference to my central concern—the awkward position the artist's book takes regarding its display. A critical part of this

⁴In an attempt to achieve a balanced view, I will also refer to other prominent writers regarding the history and definition of artists' books. Renee and Judd Hubert's text, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* (1999) and Stephen Bury's *Artists' Books: The Book as a Work of Art, 1963-1995* (1995) are used in support of Drucker's definition of artists' books. However, many other writers differ with these authors and their input is referenced in order to obtain a balanced view.

thesis, particularly the second chapter, adopts Perrée's line of reasoning in his chapter *Doomed to the Showcase*.

Insights from Tom Sowden and Sarah Bodman's *The Manifesto of the Artist's Book* (2010) are added to the debate as an up-to-date view of artists' books in the contemporary digital era. They throw the definition open by making the case that a book may be interpreted in many forms (for example, a computer screen, a mobile phone or even an entire room) as a book may be argued to be merely a container of information (Bodman & Sowden 2010:1).

Art academic David Paton has contributed to the field of artists' books, particularly within South Africa. Paton has four main zones of interests to which I make extensive reference. In 1995, Paton acted as the co-curator of Jack Ginsberg's artist's book collection. A few years later he also organised the show *Navigating the Bookscape: Artists' Books and the Digital Interface* (2006), with an accompanying essay entitled, *The Sound of a Book: Sound as generator of narrative in the reception of selected new media objects as books*(2006). As an artist he produced the bookwork, *Speaking in Tongues: Speaking Digitally/ Digitally Speaking* (2009). Paton also produced a thesis and subsequent articles⁵ on the renowned conceptual artist Willem Boshoff, who has extensively interrogated the book form in his art practice. Each of these endeavours is relevant to this discussion as they have contributed to several points that I make.

The theoretical foundation of this thesis is an interdisciplinary anthology of several fields that interlink with my concerns regarding the accessibility of the artist's book. To date there has been no prominent theory to support the practice of book arts, although there have been several attempts and suggestions.⁶ Theories I have examined may be grouped into two clusters. One group of theories relates to Art theory, the other to media studies.

⁵*South African Artist's Books and Book-Objects since 1960* (2000) and *The Artist Book – South Africa: Some Thoughts on Artists' Books in General and the Exhibition in Particular* (Sa).

⁶Also see Mary Tasillo stating the need for and importance of critical discourse in *Shaping a New Critical Discourse for the Field* in the *Journal of Artists' Books* and Matthew Brown's article in the same journal entitled *Book Arts and the Desire for Theory*.

George Dickie's *Institutional Theory of Art* (2004) and Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) are two of the main theoretical contributors to this thesis. George Dickie's 'institutional theory of art' plays an important contributing role with regard to the gallery space as a representative of art as an (informal) institution. Dickie argues that, to a large degree, the context (the art institution) determines the status of the art object (Dickie 2004:53). This theory developed after Conceptual art, as most previous definitions of art were more inclined to define art according to its form and/or aesthetic sensibility (Dickie 2004:47).

Like Dickie, contemporary theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud also noticed that art criticism's approach to art is falling behind the rapid evolution of art practice after Conceptual art.⁷ Relational art⁸ encourages the public to become participants rather than mere viewers.⁹ The environment of (re)presentation is thus of equal importance to the artist and his/her practice, as the space in which the art is presented determines whether or not, and how, the viewer might participate. This 'interactive stance' is directly applicable to the artist's book, as it is not an object to be viewed from a distance, but beckons the viewer to interact with it, in order to fully comprehend and appreciate its content.

Another field of study that relates to institutions that house art objects (and artists' books) from which I have drawn information, is Museology (the study of museums), which by proxy relates to the field of Art theory. I draw specifically on French writer André Malraux and his influential book, *The Voices of Silence* (1978), with specific emphasis on his notion of an art-book¹⁰ being a 'museum without walls'. I have also relied on a second group of theories which I extract from the field of media studies. This discussion therefore makes reference to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of*

⁷Nicolas Bourriaud refers specifically to artists from the 1990s.

⁸Relational art is a 'set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent private space' (Bourriaud 2002:113).

⁹This is also similar to what the Dadaists and later on Fluxus incorporated to their art practices.

¹⁰Malraux refers to a typical book which contains reproductions of art and *not* artists' books. That said, many book artists have taken his notions into the realm of artists' books, as I intend to do in my critical enquiry.

Mechanical Reproduction (2001), Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium is the Message* (2001), Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* (2001) and some applied examples from art practices covered by David Paton.

This thesis attempts to encompass different perspectives of the artist's book. The first perspective deals with the institutions' difficulties to preserve and present bookworks. The second perspective deals with the theorist's viewpoint, which critiques, reflects or describes the artist's book. Finally the last perspective is perceived from the artist who engages with the book as a medium and who questions and manipulates the communicative power of a book. I adopt all three perspectives, as a critical assessment of each is necessitated by the practical and theoretical requirements of my degree.

Exposition of contents:

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Artists' Books: Their background and various definitions

An introduction alone is not a sufficient foundation for the reader who is uninformed about artist's books to delve straight into the nuanced critical concerns that inform this thesis. To contextualise my views on the current predicament that artists' books face, it will prove productive to focus first on the history of artists' books. Here I introduce the afore mentioned 'predecessors' of the art form before moving on to 'avant-garde' artists who used the book medium to challenge the status quo of the art establishment. Arriving at the contemporary artist's book, I examine examples made by Dieter Roth and Ed Ruscha (deemed by many to be the founding fathers of the contemporary artist's book), Marcel Broodthaers and, finally, Buzz Spector.

This thesis would not be complete if I did not mention the most prominent discourses within the field of artists' books. Concerning the various disputes over how artists' books may be defined, this section sketches the varied opinions of the better known writers on the subject. These discussions include categorical groupings under the

umbrella term 'book arts', which encapsulates many more sub-categories than just artists' books. The final section of Chapter One focuses on the disputes and suggestions as to the defining parameters of artists' books.

Chapter 2: Presenting the artist's book: Queries on accessibility within the framework of existing institutions

Chapter Two problematises the space in which artists' books are presented. This includes institutions like the art gallery, the library, and the book as an exhibition space in itself. The three theories referred to in this chapter are concerned with the presentation of art. These theories all place emphasis on the environment or the setting in which the art is presented. With regard to George Dickie's 'contextual' approach, I question what happens to the book when it is presented within an (non-art world) institution, such as a library.

I use Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relation Aesthetics* (2002) to problematise many institutions' tendencies to keep viewers from touching precious bookworks. I argue that this, in effect, is detrimental to the artist's book since it absolutely requires an interaction between the viewer/reader and the bookwork to ensure a better understanding and thus, an appreciation of the artist's book. André Malraux (1978) offers a unique view of the book, noting that it may become a portable self-contained exhibition space. Though Malraux only enquired into books on art, the potential for an artist's book to be a 'museum without walls' is another contributing viewpoint to be considered.

Chapter 3: Representing artists' books: Artists' books within secondary sources

The artist's book tends to be conceptually misrepresented within secondary sources. Although this is inevitable, since the relational kinetic experience of paging through an original artist's book is reduced to a two-dimensional representation of images and text, it is essential to be aware of it. Here I elaborate on Walter Benjamin's postulation on the loss of the 'aura' of an original work of art when it is reproduced photographically. I apply the theory to the photographic representations of artists' books within theoretical

texts. Furthermore I argue that one loses even more than just the aura of any bookwork, since only part of the book is represented in the photograph.

Lastly, I reflect on possibilities for easier accessibility to the artist's book. I look at the Internet as a platform for both the artist and the theorist to reflect on in order to produce artists' books. Although this is not necessarily the solution to the problem of presenting the artist's book, it at least enables one to incorporate more images and even film or video, since the limitation of print is transcended by the fluidity of a digital system that can instantly convey an abundance of information.

Chapter 4: Conceptualising the artist's book.

This chapter will problematise key concepts concerning the art-making practice of the artist's book within the milieu of contemporary art and in the age of 'digital reproduction'. Here I will unpack my own art practice, elaborating on the conceptual frameworks supplied throughout this thesis that inform the practical component of my Masters'. I will also refer to the conceptually related bookworks of other South African artists, namely Willem Boshoff and David Paton. The common thread between my practice and that of these artists is the conceptual play with notions of (intellectual) inaccessibility and the complex interplay of various media forms within society's persistent need to integrate new information technologies with outdated, yet existing forms.

To conclude, I wish to cast light on where I think this particular thesis is leading. My foremost concern is to question whether artists' books are accessible. This problematises different aspects that relate to accessibility: physical and cognitive. The former relates to the interaction, between art object and viewer. The latter relates to cognitive perception in the absence of the actual bookwork, it is assumed that a reader/viewer will comprehend the content of a bookwork from just a photographic representation and descriptive texts.

Throughout this thesis it becomes increasingly evident that the artist's book is in fact not as accessible as it has the potential to be. It has been stated several times that, in general, artists' books are under acknowledged (Lyons 1987:8; Drucker 2004:xvii; Bright 2005:12, 13). I would agree with such an assessment and hope to show that this genre requires new consideration in both the mindset and infrastructure of art institutions where artists' books are expected to be understood through redundant models of art discourse.

Chapter 1:

An Introduction to Artists' Books: Their background and varied definitions

It has become evident that there is a need to sketch the broader field of artists' books in order to provide a comprehensive background to the artist's book and thus to contextualise the thesis. This chapter summarises a variety of examples of artist's books. It includes discussions of the precursors of artists' books, the artists who dabbled in the book as an artistic medium, contemporary book artists as well as the dilemmas regarding the definition of artists' books'.¹¹

In the first part of the chapter I will examine William Blake and William Morris who used their talents as craftsmen to express their own insights and the aesthetic appeal derived from illuminated manuscripts. I will then move on to the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who broke the limiting tradition of typography that was once controlled by letter setters and printers. Mallarmé's influence may be seen in the many works that follow within art and literary movements such as the Dadaists, Futurists and Russian Constructivists. I examine work of artists who started working with books and who made a contribution to the artist's book.

In the second part I examine the broader field of activity within book arts, to which artists' books, along with *livres d'artistes*, *livres de peintres* and other special publications belong. Finally, the artist's book has been ravaged by disputes regarding its definition and classification. Though I disagree with making use of a classificatory methodology, it must be referred to as arguments on artists books are consumed by this dispute.

¹¹For further information on books and artworks which contributed to the contemporary artist's book refer to Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artist's Books* (2004), Alan Bartram's *Bauhaus, Modernism and the Illustrated Book* (2004) and Betty Bright's *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960-1980* (2005).

A concise overview of examples of the predecessors to examples of contemporary artists' books

Both William Morris and William Blake revisited the tradition of illuminated manuscripts as a source of inspiration. I find Blake and Morris's books as pertinent examples not only of the development of artists' books but also in respect of my own practice. I find that the support of, and admiration for the ancient traditions and crafts of illuminating and binding manuscripts to be a source of inspiration and motivation in my own practice as a technician and as an artist within the book format.

Illuminating manuscripts (a common practice before and during the fifteenth century) (fig. 1) has produced artefacts revered to this day. By definition, an illuminated manuscript is a book produced by hand from the preparation of the parchment¹² to the writing or copying of an existing book (such as a section of the Bible), and then illuminating the text with miniature paintings, border decorations, enlarged initials and gold-leafed embellishments. Depending on the value of these books the covers are of leather, decorated with inlays of gold, silver and semi-precious stones (Delaissé 1965:10).¹³

William Blake (1757-1827) (see fig. 2) was an apprenticed to a commercial engraver. In 1788 he wrote and illuminated his first essay, entitled *There is No Natural Religion*. Inspired by illuminated manuscripts, he appropriated their format as his point of departure (Drucker 2004:22). However, contrary to the tradition of illuminating and writing everything by hand, Blake etched his spreads onto copper plates. This method of 'illuminated printing' enabled him to reproduce his books but still to vary his use of colour for each reproduction (Drucker 2004:22,23). Many books were to follow this first work: *Songs of Innocence* (1789), *The Book of Thel* (1789), *The Gates of Paradise* (1793), *Urizen* (1794), *Jerusalem* (1804-1820) and *The Book of Job* (1821), to mention

¹²Parchment or Vellum was the preferred writing surface before paper was used. It is made from the hides of animals (calf skin in the case of vellum). The hides are prepared by a lengthy process that rids the hide of its hair. The hide is then stretched and scraped until it reaches the desired thickness.

¹³In terms of examples of illuminated manuscripts, refer to *Medieval Miniatures* (1965) by L.M.J. Delaissé.



Fig. 1. *The Book of Hours* (1460). Illuminated manuscript. 15 x 10. Collection: Royal Library, The Hague (Woman's Studio Workshop 2010).



Fig. 2. William Blake, *Jerusalem* (1804). Hand printed manuscript. 34.5 x 26.4. Collection: Paul Mellon, Yale University (Yale Center for British Art 2010).

just a few. Considering his decision to work within a book form that is largely associated with monasteries and religion, it must be noted that his content (that in many cases contends with traditional religious views) were a well considered aspect of his work. Among the suggested principles of a successful artist's book are: conceptually, the form and the content of the book need to be fully integrated with one another (Drucker 2004:3,4).

English artist, writer and designer William Morris (1834-1896), played a pivotal role in book production and was a central figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement.¹⁴ In 1891 he founded the Kelmscott Press at Hammersmith in London (see *News from Nowhere*, 1892, fig. 3). In response to the effects of industrialisation upon labour, his objective was to produce books using as far as possible the traditional methods of printing and typography of the fifteenth century. I find Morris' intentions to go back to manual skills in the late 1800's just as (if not more than ever) relevant in our current times. In my practice I try to rekindle these intentions within my contemporary framework, as I question the excessive reliance on new media as a primary vehicle of creative expression in contemporary art.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) was an influential nineteenth-century French symbolist poet and philosopher. His work and his insights on the meaning conveyed by typography and layout are seen to be among the prime principles governing artists' books (especially in relation to typography). He stressed that one needs to see the pages of a book as a space in which the text can express itself (Bright 2005:34-35). For the first time the white space of the pages was seen to be part of the poem; Mallarmé noted that he interpreted the blank space on the page as silence (Bartram 2004:37). He therefore saw the potential of books to be something more than a mere repetitive

¹⁴The Arts and Crafts Movement was sparked by the Industrial Revolution. After the development of the steam engine in 1765, the mechanisation of industry was developed at a rapid pace. William Morris was among the founding fathers of the arts and crafts movement, whose sole purpose was to revive the hand-craft skills that had been overshadowed by the new, manufactured goods. They believed that the decline in the skills and the quality of objects had a direct influence on the European and American social and moral decline in their time.



Fig. 3. William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1892). Published book. 20 x 14. Klemcscott Press, London (Bartram 2001: 110-111).

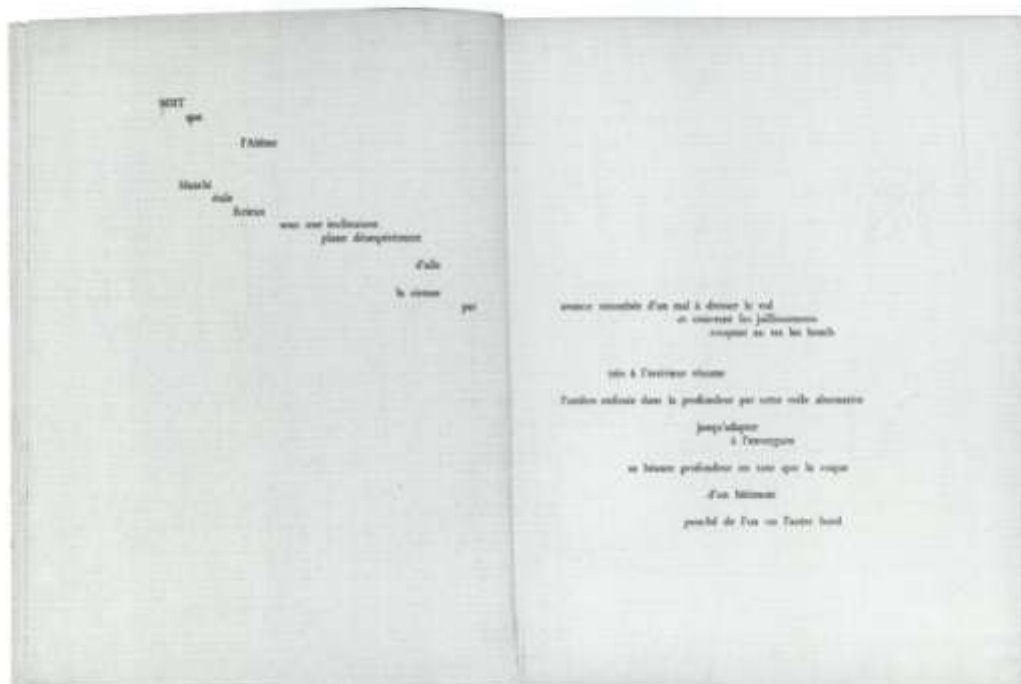


Fig. 4. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de Des* (1914). Typographic book. 33 x 42.5
Collection: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Library, New York (Bartram 2004: 4).

surface for text to be squarely aligned and read methodically from left to right. This freeing up of the pre-determined textual alignment allowed text to embody emotions rather than only to convey literal signifiers. This notion was clearly realised in his book *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'abolira Le Hasard* ('A throw of the dice will never abolish chance', 1914)¹⁵ (fig. 4) and would today be closely associated with concrete poetry.

Mallarmé's influence on the freeing up of structured text could be found in many subsequent works. Books, flyers and the poems of the Futurists (Russian and Italian), Russian Constructivists, the Dadaists and later the Fluxus¹⁶ movement all manifested the idea that text carries emotion, depending on the font, its size, its placement in the white space of the page and even the direction of reading.

The leader of the Italian Futurists, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, built further on Mallarmé's vision in his publication, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914). Here (fig. 5) Marinetti conveyed images of violence and chaos through the use of typographic layout, font style and visual onomatopoeia (Bartram 2004:38).

The celebrated French Dadaist, Marcel Duchamp, also contributed to the contemporary artist's book. His *Readymade Malheureux* (Unhappy Readymade 1919)(fig. 6) is argued to have influenced the phenomenon of the 'altered book' within the genre of artists' books.¹⁷ Betty Bright (2005:42) notes Duchamp's insights on the weathered *Unhappy Readymade*: 'Duchamp dismissed the inviolability associated with books,' and subsequently 'revealed them as vehicles whose cultural and religious associations only raised their value to artists as objects ripe for appropriation.' Some years later Duchamp revised the book from another perspective. He postulated that if a book is a container of information, the box and the suitcase could also then function as books. Both *Boîte Verte* (*Green Box*, 1934) (fig. 7) and *Boîte-en-Valise* (*Box in a Suitcase*, 1936-41) (fig. 8) are

¹⁵It was published posthumously in accordance with Mallarmé's instructions.

¹⁶The Fluxus centre their practice on events and happenings and assemble their documents and manifestos in the form of bookworks.

¹⁷An altered book: a type of artist's book which the artist defaces (as in Buzz Spector's *Kafka* (1980), changes (Tom Phillips *A Humument* (1980)), or deconstructs (Dieter Roth's *Daily Mirror book* (1966)) an existing book, either by retaining the integrity of the book's shape or by altering it into a sculptural form.

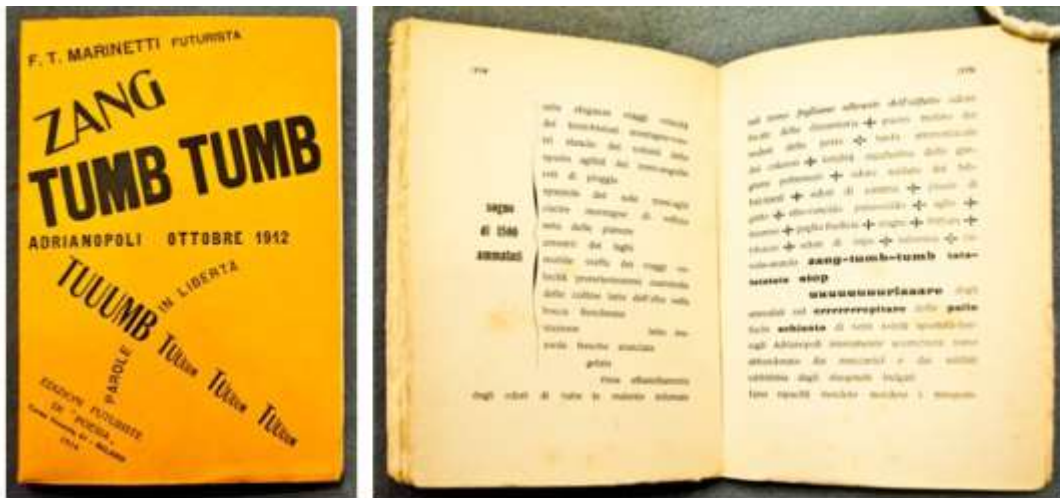


Fig. 5. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914). New York Public Library, Spenser collection, (NYPL 2010).



Fig. 6. Marcel Duchamp, *Unhappy Readymade* (1919). Dimensions variable. Non-collectable, (Agnelli 1993: 69).

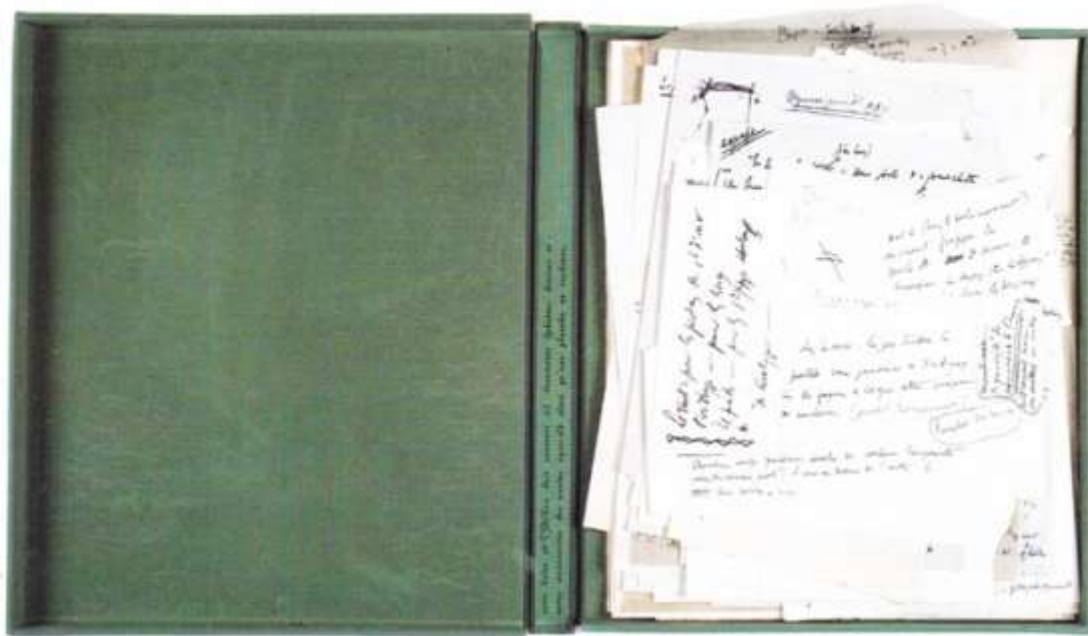


Fig 7. Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte Verte* (1934). 33 x 28. 33 x 28. Box containing, notes sketches, and photographs. Collection: Gabrielle Keiller (Agnelli 1993: 90).



Fig. 8. Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise* (1936-1941). 38.7 x 41.3 (closed). Leather valise containing miniature replicas. Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Agnelli 1993: 108).

collections in the form of sketches, notes, reproductions and miniatures of Duchamp's earlier works (Bright 2005:42). Not only did his works open up common conceptions regarding the structure of the book, but they also introduced the idea that the book and other related 'containers' can become portable exhibitions. Both of these notions are central to this thesis and will be elaborated on in the next chapter. Duchamp's reproductions of his artworks bring to mind Walter Benjamin's (1968) idea that a reproduction diminishes the 'aura' that an original work of art possesses. We see the form of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* and *Boîte verte* in many approaches to realising the form of artists' books. One such example is Willem Boshoff's *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1994) (fig. 18) which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Mel Bochner's exhibition, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Art* (1966) (fig. 9), was to be the first exhibition of specifically Conceptual art (Godfrey 1998:116). It consisted of a collection of drawings and notes by friends. Initially he wanted to frame these works or alternatively, photograph them, but both these proposals were refused by the unimpressed gallery director who did not intend to spend funding on 'non-art sketches'. Though it was not his intention to create an 'artist's book' *per se*, this exhibition, in its final form, did consist of four ring-bound books presented on four sculpture pedestals (Godfrey 1998:115). One can now also understand why the artist's book is so closely related to Conceptual art, for this exhibition and many other conceptual pieces manifested their concepts in the form of the book. I find this a pertinent example in relation to the (awkward) practice of exhibiting artists' books and will come back to this piece in the next chapter.

Steering towards artists who intentionally work within the field of artists' books, Marcel Broodthaers also contributed to the artist's book, working conceptually with the book as art form. One of his most celebrated books is based on Mallarmé's publication, *Un Coup de Dés* (1914). Titled with the same name (1969), Broodthaers (fig. 10) intended to highlight Mallarmé's typographic intention by reducing the publication to its structure. Drucker notes that Broodthaers 'elevates the structure of the work to a



Fig. 9. Mel Bochner, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Art* (1966). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: School of Visual arts, New York (Kleber 2009).



Fig. 10. Marcel Broodthaers, *Un Coup de Des* (1969). Artist's book. 33 x 42.5, Collection: NYPL, New York (Rare Book Collection, NYPL 2010).

concept worthy of study in its own right' (Drucker 2004:115). Broodthaers used translucent paper for his version of Mallarmé's poem to allow 'the phrases on the page to be read against each other in a dimensional relation' (Drucker 2004:116).

A certain kind of artist's book which was prominent particularly in the 1960s would be the 'democratic multiple'. As the term might suggest, these bookworks are made in multiple forms, in either a limited edition of under a hundred, to an unlimited reprint of thousands of copies. The ideal was to push the book's already well known capability to reach a larger audience with each copy that is made. Johanna Drucker credits two main factors for the rise of the democratic multiple. Books were not always a democratic medium as they were associated with a laborious and thus an expensive production process, therefore reserved for the wealthy and powerful. After the industrial revolution, book production gathered momentum. In the period following World War II, inexpensive modes of reproduction as well as photography became more readily available. This greater availability, combined with major changes in the art world during the 1950s and early 1960s set the stage for the creation of artists' books as democratic multiples (Drucker 2004:69).¹⁸

During the rise of Conceptual art in the 1960s many artists found the democratic multiple to be a suitable form for their conceptual enquiry into the making of art. Ed Ruscha was recognised by many as the poster child of the democratic multiple. Ruscha produced a series of nondescript booklets, of which the first (and arguably the best known) was *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1962) (fig. 11). Each edition was created to be just like any other commercial publication. By producing a body of work, in a sense a typical publication, but by deeming it to be art, Ruscha not only managed to confuse the reader but also succeeded in being widely discussed in terms of art theory¹⁹ (Hatch, 2005:207).

¹⁸For further reading on the Democratic Multiple book, refer to Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (2004) pp. 68 – 92, and Lucy Lippard 'The Artist's Book Goes Public' in Joan Lyons (ed.) *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (1987).

¹⁹For further reading on this subject refer to Some Contemporary Artists and Their Books, in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (1987) edited by Joan Lyons.

Dieter Roth (aka Dieter Rot) set out to explore the book as an art form. The approach of Ruscha and Roth differs from other art movements, namely the collective CoBrA²⁰, the Fluxus and the Lettrists. Each of these movements used the book form to document or to refer to other practices. For them, 'books were an aspect of their overall aesthetic campaign' and 'not the sole or even main focus' of their art practice (Drucker 2004:71). Roth's vision of the book form was to experiment with the book's graphic design combined with concrete poetry. Roth would consider not only the textual or pictographic content of the book but also interrogate the sculptural form of the conventional codex²¹ (Drucker 2004:74). In his bookworks the *Daily Mirror*(1961) (fig. 12) and *AC* (1964), Roth uses found print materials that consist of print run test prints, magazines and newspapers, to deconstruct and then reassemble in various forms. These reassembled forms would not necessarily take on the traditional form of the codex but morph into sculptural, illegible forms. Roth's series *Literaturwurst* (*Literature Sausage*, 1961-1974) (fig. 13) is one such example. He treated found publications like sausage meat, reworked the pulped publications with authentic sausage recipes and stuffed them into sausage skins. Each was then numbered, to form part of an edition.

German conceptual artist, Anselm Kiefer produced a prolific body of work in both book and canvas form. His most celebrated work to date consists of a library of lead books entitled *Zweistromland/The High Priestess* (1985-89) (see fig. 14). Throughout his artistic career he interrogated the physiological burden and guilt the German nation carries due to their horrific past (López-Pedraza 1996:13). Many believe that this work, *Zweistromland*, is a culmination and clarification of all the conceptual concerns he previously explored.²² The lead books (each weighing up to 300 kilograms) can be

²⁰CoBrA is an international movement of artists from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam.

²¹The term 'codex' is another word for book, although the term book is more inclusive. 'Book' according to the Oxford Dictionary is much more inclusive and would include forms such as scrolls, clay tablets or a collection of loose-leaf pages. The term 'codex' refers specifically to the modern binding technique of a traditional book: It is a collection of papers that are folded in half and sewn together along the fold. It is then protected by two hard covers as well as a cover for the sewn back, known as the spine.

²²Also see other bookworks Kiefer produced such as *Brunhilde and her fate* (1977), *Erotik im Feren Osten* (1975) *Iconoclastic Controversy* (1980) and *Shulamith* (1990).

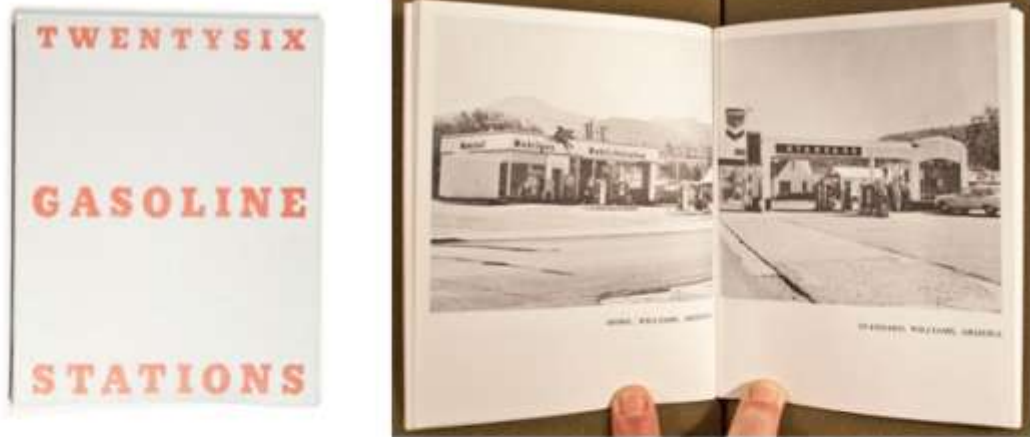


Fig. 11. Ed Ruscha. *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1962). Artist's book. 18 x 14, Collection: MoMA Library (MoMA Library 2010).

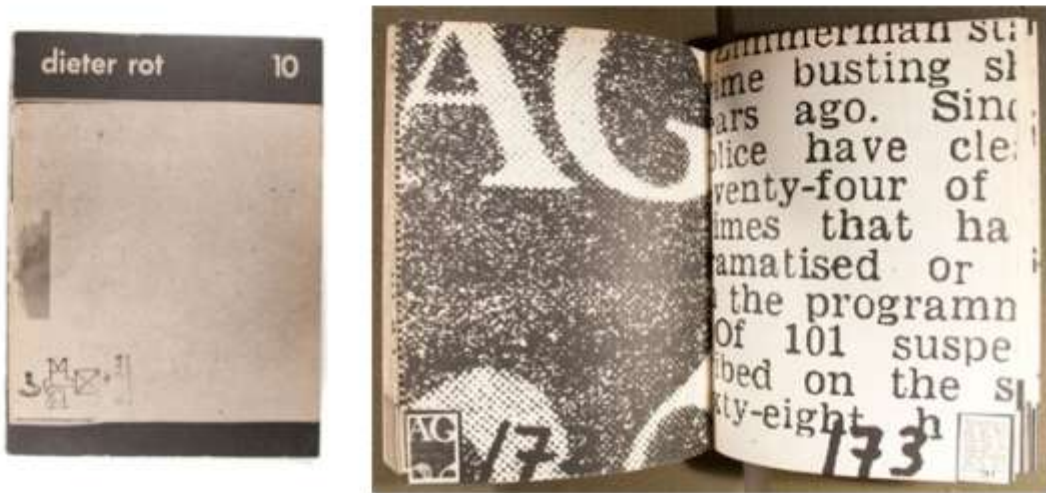


Fig. 12. Dieter Roth, *Daily Mirror* (1961). Artist's book. 2 x 2. Collection: MoMA Library (MoMA Library 2010).



Fig. 13. Dieter Roth, *Literaturwurst* (1961-1974). Artist's book. 52.5 x 42.5 x 12. Collection: MoMA (Walter, Jenny & Vischer 2003:74).



Fig. 14. Anselm Kiefer, *Zweistromland/ The High Priestess* (1985-89). Installation of 200 lead artist's books. Dimensions Variable. Collection: Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (Lopez-Pedraza 1996: 74 - 75).

interpreted as society's heavy burden of using knowledge to either build or destroy a civilisation. The monumental collection of lead books references concepts of legendary libraries that have been lost or destroyed over time, along with the civilisations that were recorded in the books (Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art 2011).

The artist's book in relation to book arts; fine printing and *livres d'artistes*

Artists' books fall under the umbrella term 'book arts'. This relates to the art of making books by hand, paper making, fine printing, limited editions, *livres d'artistes*, *livres de peintres* and artists' books. According to Drucker, one of the major differences between these genres and the artist's book is that the artist usually plays a smaller part in realising the final product. On the other hand, the artist who produces a bookwork regards every step of the production as equally important, since the form and the content need to be completely integrated (Drucker 2004:3-4).

It is important to note here that the genre artist's books must not be confused with fine printing or *livre d'artiste*, which existed long before the conceptualisation of the artist's book. Fine printing is usually associated with the letter press, handset type, or any other carefully produced print medium. These printing processes were previously commercial mass printing processes, but were eventually replaced by electronic and digital printing presses. Books made in the tradition of fine printing are generally known to be time consuming and labour intensive, which inherently means that one would need to hire a master printer, so that the printing costs might become quite expensive.²³ Drucker (2004:6) reflects on this fine printing process by stating that,

[t]he tactile dimensional physicality of letterpress tends to be associated with fine printing, and fine printing with the conservative tradition. But an artist's book can certainly be well printed without losing its identity, just as bad printing is often acceptable and successful in the context of artists' books'.

Livre d'artiste means 'artist's book' in French, but these are fundamentally different from artists' books.²⁴ Such books are productions in which an artist and a poet would collaborate in order to create interplay between the text and the image. They are usually printed in limited editions, by hand, on carefully selected paper. David Blundell and Amélie Blanckaert note in their essay *The Making of the livre d'artiste*, that '[i]n 'conventional' book illustration, artists' previous works may be reproduced to adorn texts, or, more importantly, to picture its content [...]' They go on to say that these books are a collaboration between artist and writer, the final form and dialogue between text and image are a central focus of these books and not a mere representation of the text (in Khalfa 2001:153,154).

Drucker (2004:5) compares the characteristics of the artist's book to *livres d'artistes* when she states: 'While many *livre d'artiste* are interesting in their own terms, they are

²³Commercial printing is designed in such a way that the smaller the quantity of books on order, the more expensive it will become, as most of the production cost goes into, for example, the preparation of lithographic plates before a single paper is printed.

²⁴For other defining debates see Eric Haskell's book review in which he compares the two different views held by Drucker and Castleman about *Livre d'artiste* and artist's books in a book review titled: *Castleman and Drucker: Re-Viewing the Artist's Book* (1997).

productions, rather than creations, products, rather than visions, examples of a form, not integrations of its conceptual or formal or metaphysical potential.'

The Great Dispute: Defining the Artist's Book

The artist's book sits uncomfortably between two major fields, the world of books and the art world. Having properties of both, the artist's book will remain a disputed territory. Intertwined in the history of activities and art movements encompassing the artist's book are the theoretical debates on what exactly an artist's book is. In the library system, it is common practice that literary books are labelled, numbered and categorised. It would seem, unfortunately, that the artist's book has forcibly inherited this system of cataloguing in debates on the definition of artists' books. The result is that many theoretical texts are concerned with categorising artists' books.²⁵ Consequently these debates become circular arguments that do not allow for broader discussion that might be more engaging to a reader on the subject of artists' books. By trying to define and discuss the genre within the premise of artists' books they consequently exclude any other potential influences from the rest of the artworld (Klima 1998:21).

Most theoretical essays and discussions on artists' books fail to escape the trap of defining artists' books.²⁶ These categorical attempts to pigeonhole examples into different groupings are remnants of a modernist approach to understanding art which is obsessed with placing all art into divisions namely 'medium', 'period' and 'style'. For the purposes of this thesis, it will prove productive to limit these discussions to this chapter. It is provided as an informative base for the information to follow, since a debate about definitions is beyond the scope of this thesis.

²⁵It must also be noted here that many contributors to the discussion such as Stephan Klima and Clive Phillpot are, ironically, librarians.

²⁶See Stephan Klima's book *Artists' Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature* (1998), which offers an overview of the literature on artists' books and inherently maps out the differences between some authors.

The general consensus seems to be, in artist's book discourse that an artist's book is made by an artist (Drucker 2004:2; Lippard in Lyons 1987:45; Hubert & Hubert 1999:7, 11; Perrée 2002:12). However, this statement is qualified by many authors who note that not every book made by an artist is an artist's book (Bury 1995:1; Drucker 2004:9; Perrée 2002:12). With the long tradition of the art of bookbinding there has been a growing interest in the fine arts in learning the methods of book binding, from the traditional codex to the more elaborate designs such as the concertina fold, Japanese stab stitch and open spine books. Although these skills could be valuable points of departure for the creation of artists' books, the style of binding and the use of seductive materials are not, in themselves, sufficient qualities for a book to fall into the category of the artist's book. It therefore falls back to the craft of book arts (Drucker 2004:10).

Theorists Drucker and Bury argue that sketch books, books about artists or the documented process work for an intended artwork could not be classified as artists' books, as these books lean towards portfolios and *livres d'artistes* (Drucker 2004:10). Bury then adds that an artist's book should be an independent artwork; it should be able to stand, conceptually, on its own (Bury 1995:1).

Furthermore, the artist has a high degree of control over the whole process of creating an artist's book. According to Renée and Judd Hubert in, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* (Hubert & Hubert 1999:8), this control enables the artist to have the final say over each aspect in the creation of the book. This is necessary as each aspect of the book contributes to the conceptual nature of the piece.²⁷

Finally, it can be argued that the central point in the definition of artists' books would be that these bookworks push the format of the book in unexpected directions. Bury holds that they challenge the conventions of reading books in the traditional method; as they tend to question or explore the 'unquestioned weight books carry' in society (Bury

²⁷This is not to say that artists do not use the aid of printing and publishing houses- for example in the case of the democratic multiple- but the artist would probably choose a publishing house that is familiar with and supportive of the artist's creative vision.

1995:1). In other words, the creators of these objects are always aware and critical of the physical and conceptual aspects of the book and it is therefore a self-conscious production of the book form. The question that arises here is how far the book form can be pushed until it exceeds the parameters of what is understood to be an artist's book? Many writers who attempt to draw categorical borders differ greatly from one another. Some (like Stephen Bury, and Rob Perrée) decided to keep the borders vague or to suggest only a guideline for the readers to decide for themselves. Others (Like Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden) have embraced an all-inclusive approach to forms that venture beyond the conventional book-form. To sketch a clearer picture, I will elaborate on this specific dispute as a common concern of many critics, which cannot all be covered in this thesis.

In his book *Cover to Cover* (2002:12), Rob Perrée writes that 'an artist's book is the resolution of a creative idea, one which does justice to the *bookness*²⁸ of the book as a medium and has been realised under the responsibility of the artist.' Perrée states that he did not wish to fall into the dispute of defining artists' books and thus set out to use the term 'bookness'. This term was an attempt to find a definition of artists' books that includes art pieces which push the boundaries of the notion of the book to the very point where it potentially collapses. 'Bookness' refers to all the different aspects that make up the book. This could be approached on several levels such, as the physical attributes of the book (the covers, paper, string, glue), textual references (the title, the ISBN code, the body text, the chapter headings), or even a conceptual notion of the book (the sentiment, the kinetic movement, the process of documentation) (Drucker 2004:9; Perrée 2002:12). Artists thus have the freedom to adjust the idea of a book in any manner they please, which would include pushing the structural form of a book into other dimensions and mediums.²⁹

²⁸This term, first coined by Philip Smith in the 1970s, refers here to his essay, *The Whatness of Bookness or What is a Book?* (1996) in which he revisits his comments on the notion of 'bookness'. Available at <http://www.philobiblon.com./bookness.shtml>.

²⁹This opens more possibilities as to what may be regarded as artists' books. It brings the proposed term 'artists' publication' to the fore. The logic in this is that the word publication refers to anything, from

A new generation of book artists contributed to *A Manifesto for the Book* (2010), which was edited by Tom Sowden and Sarah Bodman. The first paragraph gives us a valuable insight to their view on the boundaries of the artist's book. Bodman (2010:1) elaborates on Ulises Carrión's postulation that 'a book is a sequence of spaces':

If it is to be argued that a book has to be a sequence of *pages* inside a container, and if a container is considered as a physical entity – then as well as covers, a container must also be able to be a computer monitor, a mobile phone screen, a room, a box, the Internet. A series of pages can exist on paper or on a screen. On screens we scroll through the pages reflecting an original, historical book format. The big mainstream publishing houses have no problem terming screen-based works as books. Just look at the recent push for e-books from publishers and hardware manufacturers alike.

This stands in stark contrast to the view of Johanna Drucker who is wary of being all inclusive as new screen-based forms might be too far reaching for working with the notion of the book (2004:14).

Bodman and Sowden publication (which is based on several interviews and the Artist's Book Tree or ABTREE project), is that throughout the project they included all the participants' mind maps of how they understand how all the different 'categories' that relate to book arts fit together. What is interesting to note in this project is that even though they initiated a suggestion of what the ABTREE could look like, they approached it as only a suggestion or a point of departure. By inviting the opinions of participants to alter the ABTREE as they wished, the authors democratised the dispute on the categorisation of the artist's book and all the other forms of books and digital media. This allows for a multi-faceted approach to the same subject matter. It seems to me as if the new generation of artists' books embraces the new needs and contemporary views of the book arts.

books, records, multiples, music and the new venture of digital publications via the Internet. This enables the field to be more inclusive. The question then arises, whether the newly proposed term *artist's publication* is too broad and if it loses its character as an artist's publication can become, basically, anything. (Bodman & Sowden 2010:5).

Reflecting on these defining parameters, I find that Richard Price, one of the contributors to the *Artist's Book Yearbook*, effectively summarised the artist's book as a whole. 'At the heart of the artist's book is a three way relationship between the language of its text (if it has one), the book's visual manifestation and its physical elements' (cited in Bodman 2007:11).

A fine example of an artist's book that demonstrates this 'three way relationship' is the work of the prolific American book artist, Buzz Spector, entitled *A Passage* (1994) (fig.15). Spector's piece investigates the book as an image, as a cultural icon and the metaphoric roles that the book plays in the different aspects of cultural identity. Johanna Drucker notes that when the book is closed and displayed on a shelf it seems to look just like any other book. The book is always depicted in its open form, as the book's interior has only one viewing plane. Exactly the same text is printed on each page, but each page is torn out with each tear leaving a slightly larger remnant of the preceding page. The visual result is somewhat akin to the three-dimensional representation of contour lines on the slant of a hill. The text tells of an anecdote about an encounter between Spector and an old friend who was viewing some of his of altered books. His friend told him of a learned scholar who knew the Talmud so well that when shown a single line in the book he would be able to tell you 'what letter occupied that site on every following page.' Spector commented on this piece by saying, '[this edition] only shows what I have forgotten' (Drucker 2004:118-119). Drucker reflects on the conceptual implications of the work by stating:

Spector's book is about the absence, rather than the presence, of record. Here, life is what is missing from the book, experience is always elsewhere, and the text, form, and material of the work are a thing in themselves rather than a symbol or substitute for the world. The metaphor is one of loss, continual escape and slippage of life from its containment within representation. Spector's work suggests a fundamental impossibility for the book to contain anything except the sign of absence, it is the empty field showing all that it cannot enclose (2004:119).



Fig. 15. Buzz Spector, *A Passage* (1994). Artist's book. 21.3 x 15.7. Spenser Collection NYPL, New York (Spenser Collection, NYPL 2010).

I find Spector's book a model of the genre of artist's books. It is a graceful solution which Richard Price calls the 'heart' of the artist's book where the form, text and visual effect hang coherently with one another (in Bodman 2007:11). In a sense this piece has that 'magic' Drucker seems to refer to. The book's structure itself fools one into expecting a typical, traditional literary text but once it is opened, one is caught off guard seeing the torn pages; associating them with the unthinkable act of mutilation, tearing pages from a book that parents warn their children about. Then one encounters a flicker of text, which is surprisingly readable, despite the fact that the pages are torn. After reading and reflecting on this passage, one realises that the theme of the content has been carefully selected to fit its frame, as the passage is a metaphorical example of what has been physically realised in the form of this artist's book.

In this chapter it is demonstrated that the small world of artists' books is alive and well, in spite of the debates that revolve around their defining characteristics. It is inevitable that opinions on any genre that stretch over several continents are bound to differ. In Poland an artist's book is considered only to be a one-off piece and nothing other than that (Bodman & Sowden 2009). Compare this to the attitude of the British who use the term to describe a large field of different approaches to the book form (Bodman & Sowden 2010:5). To find a common description of the field of artists' books proves to be so problematic that must seek examples of what is regarded by the artists, curators and critics to be an artist's book, for any critical discussion on artists' books to ensue.

With this brief review of the activities revolving around the artist's book, it is time to move on. To explain the direction I take from here on, I wish to introduce the rest of this thesis by means of a metaphorical comparison. I perceive Buzz Spector's bookwork *A Passage* (fig. 15) to be an appropriate introduction to my thesis. If *A Passage* refers to what is, and what is not seen in books, this thesis explores what is seen and is not seen in artists' books. Throughout the rest of this thesis I will examine how sight and insight are determined by accessibility to either a physical or a conceptual interaction. As an

artist and bookbinder, I have often felt that the artist's book has been overlooked by my contemporaries. This thesis explores possible reasons as to why this might be the case.

Chapter 2:

Presenting the artist's book:

Queries on accessibility within the framework of existing institutions

The artist's book invites a unique interaction between the viewer and the artwork. The viewer (or reader) is often required to page through the multi-plane object to comprehend its sequential message (Bury 1995:3; Drucker 2004:257). However, the question arises whether this ideally intimate relationship between the viewer and the bookwork is ever fully realised (Bartram 2001:19; Bright 2005:7). In this part of the thesis I set out to problematise the current infrastructures (galleries and libraries) that present artists' books. Here I make the point that these institutions are not geared towards presenting this hybrid art form in the ideal manner. In his chapter, *Doomed to the showcase*, Rob Perrée (2002:66) succinctly summarises the dilemma artists' books face when presented within existing frameworks:

[An artist's book] is a work of art, but it is also a book. A work of art 'belongs' in a gallery or a museum. A book belongs in a bookshop or a library. The book lover does not go to a museum to indulge his love for books, nor does the art lover happily rummage through library card files to quell his particular appetite. You are supposed to keep your hands off the work of art; a book is something made to hold in your hands. An artist's book removes itself from standard conditioning, consequently putting itself in an impossible predicament.

What this chapter hopefully brings to light is that the traditional framings of existing institutions are problematic for the artist's book. With the aid of George Dickie's Institutional theory, Nicolas Bourriaud's theory on relational aesthetics and André Malraux's notion of the 'museum without walls', I will problematise the accessibility of the artist's book when it is physically presented within institutional frameworks such as the gallery (as the representative of *art*), the library (as the representative of *books*) and the book itself (as a self-contained exhibition space). Here I will stress both the importance of the *context* in which the artist's book is presented and the *bookwork's form* that requires physical interaction between the viewer and art object. In relation to this 'ideal situation' between reader/viewer and bookwork, I also reflect on the notion

that the book itself can become its own self-contained and portable exhibition. Due to its structure as a book, the artist's book can be seen as an independent entity, 'a museum without walls', or in other words, an exhibition between two covers.

Introducing institutional theory and relational aesthetics

Institutional theory of art, as presented (and later on revised) by art philosopher George Dickie,³⁰ is a classificatory theory that defines what may be regarded as art. It is not my aim here to argue whether an artist's book is art or not. I do however find Dickie's point that most art is determined by its context or its 'institutional framing', pertinent to this discussion.

To summarise his views, Dickie offers this very concise definition of what art is: 'A work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public'(Dickie 2004:53). Though each key term in this sentence needs unpacking (as Dickie inherently offers in many versions of his theory), I choose to focus on the latter concept, namely the 'artworld public'. In this concise definition, Dickie steers away from using the word 'institution' as it has been strongly critiqued³¹ after his first publication on the subject. Dickie postulates that the artworld (in other words the artists and people³² who appreciate art to varying degrees) can be seen as an (informal) institution, despite the fact that these groupings of the artworld are not rule-governed (as many would argue in their critique of this theory) (Dickie 2004:51).

³⁰George Dickie has written and revised several texts on Institutional theory. One of his earlier versions on this theory may be seen in, among others, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (1974). A revised version of this theory can be found in his *The Art Circle* (1984).

³¹See M. Beardsley, 'Is Art Essentially Institutional?', in *Culture and Art* (1976).

³²To answer the question 'what is an artworld public' Dickie (2004:51) replies:

Such as public is not just a collection of people. The members of an artworld public are such because they know how to fulfil a role which requires knowledge and understanding similar in many respects to that required of an artist. There are as many different publics as there are different arts, and the knowledge required for one public is different from that acquired by another public.

Nevertheless, I would agree that the artworld forms a kind of institution, bearing in mind that I am enrolled within an art institution and that art is formally presented within the institution of an art gallery or a museum.³³ It is in this light that I wish to present my point. An art gallery is a place that represents art. Furthermore, the gallery attracts people that appreciate art and have (or who wish to gain) knowledge on art.³⁴ The art gallery thus creates the appropriate context for art, or in this case, artist's books, to be appreciated as artefacts with some conceptual and/or technical concern for them to be given their art status.³⁵

In the case of the artist's book we find that this genre stands out as a hybrid between books and art. Artists' books are thus not only displayed within art institutions but also within literary institutions such as libraries. Keeping in mind that Dickie postulates that the context, to a large extent, determines the status of an artefact as 'art', one might then question what happens to the status of a bookwork the moment it is presented within another institutional framework such as the library?

It is my opinion that a library succeeds to some extent where the gallery tends to fall short in relation to the viewing public's interaction and the basic desire and freedom to interact with books. It is after all the library's most basic function to provide books for the public to borrow and to read. This physical interaction is unusual within the setting of a gallery. However there are instances in which a gallery gives the viewer permission to interact with bookworks- but I will shortly return to this point. For now I wish to draw the reader's attention to yet another theory that addresses the problem of approaching contemporary art within the traditionalist understanding of art.

³³The main difference between an art gallery and a museum is that a gallery's main purpose is to display and sell art. Galleries are privately owned and financially independent as they generate their own income. Museums, on the other hand, are driven to collect and protect cultural artefacts. They are granted funding (and are owned by) by patrons of the arts, other institutions and/or government to enable them to collect, preserve and conserve art.

³⁴Dickie would postulate that this grouping of people is part of the art institution.

³⁵On the point as to whether art is a status, Dickie insists: 'Being a work of art is a status all right, that is, it is the occupying of a position within the human activity of the artworld. Being a work of art is not, however, a status which is conferred but is rather a status which is achieved as a result of creating an artefact within or against the background of the artworld' (Dickie 2004:50).

French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud has challenged the status quo of art institutions and art criticism. He (2002:11) argues that these artistic conducts should 'catch up' with the contemporary artists, who have reassessed the function of art and its practice. Bourriaud insists that 'the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist' (2002:13). Such art practices he groups within the term 'relational art' which he defines concisely as 'an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space' (2002:14). He continues: '[a]rt is a state of encounter' (2002:18). This statement is central to my thesis in relation to artists' books, as the structure of a book requires a direct participatory encounter. It is in its basic design (a book being a container of information) that it requires the viewer to stop, to touch, to interact and to consider the artwork at hand.

But the 'encounter' that Bourriaud refers to cannot be fully realised outside an environment which allows physical interaction. Instead of subjecting the artwork to an existing structure that posits a universal framework of 'this is art - *and do not touch*' he suggests that the environment should become central to the art-practice.

As part of a 'relationist' theory of art, inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its 'environment', its 'field' [...], but also becomes the quintessence of artistic-practice (Bourriaud 2002:22).

Bourriaud's assertion that the environment of the artwork is part of the artwork ties in with his previous statement that an artwork should not become an 'independent' or 'private symbolic space' (2002:14). In other words, the environment should cultivate an atmosphere of encouraging the participant to interact with the work. Art then should not 'be placed on a pedestal' to use the metaphor. This space or 'atmosphere of interaction' subsequently becomes a part of the artwork. In the case of the artist's book I believe the artwork cannot be fully appreciated unless it is activated by a participant who feels free to interact with the bookwork (Bright 2005:3).

Galleries and Libraries: Their intentions and their limitations

Each institution has its own preconceived ideas. It might prove productive to compare the library and the gallery with one another in relation to housing and presenting artist's books. It becomes quite clear that both have their advantages and their disadvantages. Considering the structure of a conventional book as a point of departure, one can imagine that in the hands of a gallery the artist's book becomes an awkward object to deal with. On the other hand, a unique artist's book that pushes the boundaries as to how the book should look or function is, yet again, a difficult object to place within the conventions of the library.

Conventional books (especially story books and novels) have for centuries been a familiar form. The book is commonly viewed as an accessible, portable and durable vessel of knowledge that changes hands frequently and easily. Ironically, when it comes to artists' books, such accessibility is limited.

As an institution the library is a space where books and information are stored and where knowledge is gathered and made available for the public to access. To push Dickie's view that context is as important as the object (and its content) itself, one can understand that the library also imposes a certain expectation or understanding of the books it houses. Generally the library is seen as a place where copies of books and other containers of information (such as journals, virtual books, compact storage media, newspapers, videos and access to the Internet) are stored, used and/or loaned to members of the public. In other words the library, as it is understood by the general public, does not house original works of art as a gallery or museum would. Artists' books preserved in libraries thus sometimes become neglected as art objects, due to the institutional framework that the library imposes upon the book.

It is also interesting to note that artists' books housed in libraries are bookworks that mostly still conform to the traditional notion of the codex. In Stellenbosch University's library, the JS Gericke Library, the few bookworks housed in the Africana section still resemble and function very much like traditional books with the exception of *Gif 2* (edited by Schönfeld, Atwood and Weinek, 1994) (see fig. 16) if we consider its unique slipcase. Willem Boshoff's *370 day project* (1982-1983) (see fig. 17) or *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1994) (see fig. 18 & 23) for example, would most probably not be acquired by a library. Boshoff's intention to make bookworks that still conceptually function as books and his text-based interrogations of the book as a container of knowledge and information are sufficient for it to be accepted as an artist's book (Paton 2000:1).

This misconception of artist's books by the library's classificatory system seemed to be confirmed by South African artist Pippa Skotnes who found herself to be in an interesting predicament when producing a conventional codex that was deemed a work of art. The National Library of South Africa sued Skotnes after she refused to donate a copy of her published artist's book, *Sound From the Thinking Strings* (1991) (see fig. 19). By law the National Library in South Africa is entitled to receive a copy of each South African published book intended to be sold in the Republic (Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa 1997:3). When the library enquired about Skotnes' artist's book (which consists of 65 copies of a series of original etchings and screen prints) she argued that it is *not a book* but a *work of art*. After losing the appeal Skotnes re-evaluated the artist's book and reconsidered its final form. The result was realised in her impressive body of work entitled *Lamb of God* (2004) (fig. 20-22). Realising that the library could not see beyond the structural form of the book, what would happen to something that transcends the form but still functions (and is deemed by the artist) as a book?

Skotnes' *Lamb of God* comprises of three 'volumes', *Book of the Divine Consolation* (fig. 20), *Book of Blood and Milk* (fig. 21) and *Book of the Speaking in Tongues* (fig. 22). Each volume consists of a skeleton of a horse (that replaces the codex form) with inscribed

texts written on the bones. To date it would seem that the library has no interest in obtaining these versions of artists' books for their collection.

Though it is not my aim to establish what should and should not be housed in a library by initiating a question as to what should or should not be defined as a book, I need to mention this as it would mean that the viewer who engages with artist's books in a library is presented with a 'specific type' of artist's book. The viewer is subsequently deprived of a broader and more comprehensive understanding of this genre, as it is in the nature of the artist's book to push the very boundaries of the book. This point is similar to one I make in the next chapter that books discussed in theoretical texts also tend to be selected on the basis of easy textual description over other bookworks that are too complex to describe. This contributes to my argument that the institutional framing assists in what I see as a general lack of awareness of artists' books within the public domain.

When libraries house original artists' books they are conventionally kept away from the public section of the library. In other words, one can only view artists' books by special request. The question that arises here is when books are stored away from public traffic in the library, how would one ever know that they exist, unless one has acquired knowledge of artists' books elsewhere? Even if one were to request permission to view artists' books the very term tends to be misleading, as some librarians might interpret the request as relating to conventional books on artists. To add to the limitations of this already inaccessible structure and confusing terminology, the New York Museum of Art Library only allows people to access artists' books on a specific day of the week and they are also limited to thirty books per viewing. To put this into perspective, the library prides itself on housing one of the largest collections of artists' books, comprising 9000



Fig. 16. Joachim Schönfeld, *Gif 2* (1994). Artist's book. 25.5 x 25.5 (slipcase) 22.5 x 24 (book). Collection: Jack Ginsberg, Johannesburg (Paton, 2009).



Fig. 17. Willem Boshoff, *370 Day Project* (1982). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Jack Ginsberg, Johannesburg (Paton 2009).



Fig. 18. Willem Boshoff, *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1994). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: MTN Art collection, Johannesburg (Paton, 2009).



Fig. 19. Pippa Skotness. *Sound From the Thinking Strings* (1991). Artist's book. 39 x 31. Collection: JS Gericke Library, Stellenbosch (Paton 2009).



Fig. 20. Pippa Skotness. *Lamb of God: Book of the Divine Consolation* (detail) (2004). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town (Skotness 2004:5).

Fig. 21. Pippa Skotness. *Lamb of God: Book of Blood and Milk* (detail) (2004). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town (Skotness 2004:5).

Fig. 22. Pippa Skotness. *Lamb of God: Book of the Speaking in Tongues* (detail) (2004). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Collection: Michaelis Gallery, University of Cape Town (Skotness 2004:5).

titles (Ek Dahl 1999:2).³⁶ Hypothetically speaking, an avid researcher of artist's books would not be able to examine all the books in a year, given the weekly intervals and the limitation on the quantity of bookwork requests.³⁷

In the case of the MoMA library, one advantage is that the library is closely related to the art world as it specialises in housing only art related resources (Ek Dahl 1999:2). The reason for this is that the artist's book still retains its status as art within this milieu. To consider Dickie's postulation that the institution as context helps with the status of the object there are some institutions that, like the bookwork, are hybridised spaces. The MoMA for example, library is closely affiliated with modern art and supports the museum as a resource station *specifically* for art (Ek Dahl 1999:1, 2).

To retain the 'status' of an art object, Dickie argues that it needs to be created within or against the background of the artworld. A library that is not directly affiliated to an art institution tends to taint the status of an artist's book, as noted by a local librarian, to that of 'just another book' (Seyffret, personal interview, Stellenbosch JS Gericke Library, 15 April 2009).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that other contexts, such as that of an art gallery 'undo' the quandary artists' books face in terms of presentation and accessibility. In a gallery or a museum context, curators often have a problem with viewers handling art objects as they are concerned by the fragility, preciousness and the irreplaceable nature of such objects. In some cases curators even resort to using glass display cabinets for protection, in order to avoid any possible damage to the artist's book. Galleries that are 'brave' enough to allow physical interaction often require viewers to use white cotton gloves when handling the books. These gloves prove a hindrance when one is paging

³⁶On the Franklin Furnace's website regarding the MoMA artist's book collection it reads, '[The] Franklin Furnace's collection of artists' books published internationally after 1960, [is] the largest in [America], [and] was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art Library's collection in 1993, forming the world's premier repository [of artists' books]' (http://www.franklinfurnace.org/research/moma-FF-artist_book_collection.php).

³⁷This is based on the first hand experience of Prof Keith Dietrich in the course of his research to view artists' books in New York. For more information on the MOMA library and its special collection, refer to http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/library/faq_library#ff.

though the book as one's sense of touch is inhibited by the fabric. Furthermore, I personally have encountered people who would rather not engage with a bookwork as the mere presence of gloves is indicative of the risk the viewer must take in paging through such a fragile art object.

In 1996, artist and lecturer David Paton and art collector Jack Ginsberg curated an exhibition of Ginsberg's vast collection of artists' books in Johannesburg, not knowing at the time that this would be the second largest exhibition of artists' books in the world.³⁸ The exhibition: *Artists' Books in the Ginsberg Collection, with some South African Books from Other Collections*, was curated within the format of a book itself. Here the viewer 'reads' the 'book' while moving between various display cabinets placed to resemble the form of an accordion fold book. The curators chose different artists' books to introduce the reader/viewer to the genre, discussing these in several 'chapters' (most of which were inspired by the chapters in Johanna Drucker's book *The Century of Artists' Books* (1995)). They ended the show with an 'endnote',³⁹ which raised questions about the nature of the artist's book in terms of future thematic and material possibilities within this field.

Due to the value ascribed to the bookworks, they were displayed behind glass. Paton stated that they were aware that the glass barrier between viewer and bookwork inhibits the viewer from fully comprehending and appreciating each work. To overcome the limitation on accessibility in relation to reading these bookworks they resorted to leafing over a page of each book, every day throughout the show. This enabled the viewer to perceive the sequential contents of the bookworks over several days. In theory this might seem a practical solution but in practice I doubt that it is effective. Supposing a book has hundreds of pages and the exhibition only runs for a month? Although it is understandable that these objects are perceived to be revered commodities and that they form part of a massive art collection, it seems to me that the

³⁸Both Ginsberg (personal interview, Johannesburg, 18 May 2010) and Paton (personal interview, Johannesburg, 13 May 2010) have noted this in my conversations with them.

³⁹The 'endnote' of the exhibition was interestingly Willem Boshoff's *370 Day Project*.

works are only truly accessible to the owner of the collection. To reiterate the thoughts of Rob Perrée, in the hands of the gallery the artist's book seems 'doomed to the showcase' (2002:66).

Viewing bookworks that are displayed behind glass creates a different experience to a bookwork that encourages physical interaction with the viewer or reader. It is not necessarily wrong, especially if one has many artists' books to display and only wishes to give a sense of 'what is out there' to the audience. Seeing that the book is a sequential intimate experience between reader and bookwork, I have noted that comprehensively viewing a series of artists' books in an exhibition space necessitates a considerable amount of time and can prove tiring. Tony Godfrey takes note of this notion in his book *Conceptual Art* (1998), specifically in reference to Mel Bochner's time consuming art viewing/reading exhibition, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art* (see fig. 10). He states that '[t]he viewer became the reader, an active participant: as there was no immediately obvious art on show, the readers had to make or deduce the art experience for themselves.' He then (Godfrey 1998: 116) continues:

[t]he exhibition was uncomfortable for the visitor, both physically and mentally: the drawings took a long time to decipher, leaving them with an aching back and an uncertainty as to whether they had been given an 'art' thing to contemplate. Perhaps only in retrospect would they realize that it had been not the pictures or objects, but the exhibition itself, or the experience of it, that constituted the 'art'.

In Bochner's case he did not initially intend to make an artist's book. The book was only the vehicle for the concept, and not necessarily the artwork itself. Many other artists would deem the books they create to be art works. Either way, what Bochner did bring to light was the 'interactive' and 'experience' factor of the exhibition that needs to be considered when presenting artists' books within an exhibition space. When presenting 'a book' within an exhibition space the artist is confronted with a set of challenges: minimising the space to a few copies of thick books or presenting a magnitude of

bookworks behind glass implies that the experience - and ultimately the meaning of the bookwork - will be adapted according to its environment.

As an example of an artist who considers the art gallery space in accordance to how it is received by the viewer I will refer to conceptual artist Willem Boshoff. Boshoff took the notion of barriers regarding interaction between the viewer and the art work to an extreme. In examining the conditioned habits of an audience 'not to touch art' Boshoff decided to use this conceptually to his advantage (Boshoff, 2009). His piece, *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1994) (see fig. 18 & 23), is an installation consisting of a large number of pedestals with a metal container on each one. Each box contains wooden sculptures, while the lids of the boxes have passages written in Braille describing the object within. Here it is important to note that although this piece is not in the physical form of a conventional book, it uses the conventions of the book regarding the relationship between text and image and conceptually explores the content of the book as a three dimensional form. This would be an appropriate example of an artist who looks conceptually at how a book functions as an aspect of what Philip Smith and later Rob Perrée set forth as the 'bookness' of a book. On his website, Boshoff (2009) explains the implications of this piece:

I decided to make an art installation that would enable blind people to function as gifted experts instructing disenfranchised sighted people [...] To put sighted people at a disadvantage I needed to impose upon them a sense of the disappointment blind people suffer when they are restricted. The way I 'blind' sighted visitors to the artwork is to hide the sculptures in small boxes, under wire mesh. The art gallery's signs reading 'Don't Touch' prevent them from opening boxes, so that they are overcome with frustration. [...] The sighted visitor feels denied, lost in a labyrinth that might lead nowhere [...] Because the blind person is unable to see the art gallery sign forbidding touching, his or her uninhibited touch reveals first a familiar Braille text, then it explains the sculptural object inside the box, and then the feel of that object.

Being unaware of the 'Don't Touch' sign, the blind viewer is therefore able to open these containers and touch the contents. This installation speaks volumes about the unquestioned weight traditional literary books have in society, since the general practice of reading is visually inclined to automatically restrain non-sighted people from accessing the 'mainstream of the reading world'. This limitation becomes Boshoff's

inquiry into the traditional book format and he realises his conception in the form of an installation.

The sighted viewer has the ability to perceive what is made but is not able to comprehend what he/she sees. The Braille is perceived as a texture and can only convey the message to the viewer that it possibly contains legible information. This is similar to a child browsing through a thick book with some illustrations. The text becomes the background – a texture – and the image becomes the main source for the narrative. As I will discuss in further detail in the last chapter, we see that this is reiterated in my bookwork *The Nature of Technology.doc* (2011) (fig. 24), in which the body text is incomprehensible and only functions as a symbolic gesture indicating that the text may contain information.

Boshoff's humorous insight into art as an institution and the traditional 'etiquette' expected from the viewer coincided with his conceptual intentions. This is a pertinent example of an artist who is acutely aware of the institution's framing. By perpetuating the inaccessibility (by restricting physical interaction) of artworks within the gallery system, Boshoff's work shows the shortcomings of a gallery space. This again ties in with the notion of relational aesthetics where the environment needs to form part of the art practice, in the case of this piece the environment was thoroughly considered and incorporated. That said, this will not be the case for other artists' books which need to break the traditional habits of the viewer to ensure interaction between that viewer and the bookwork.



Fig. 23. Willem Boshoff. *Blind Alphabet ABC* (detail)(1994). Artist's book. Dimensions variable. MTN Art collection, Johannesburg (Paton, 2009).

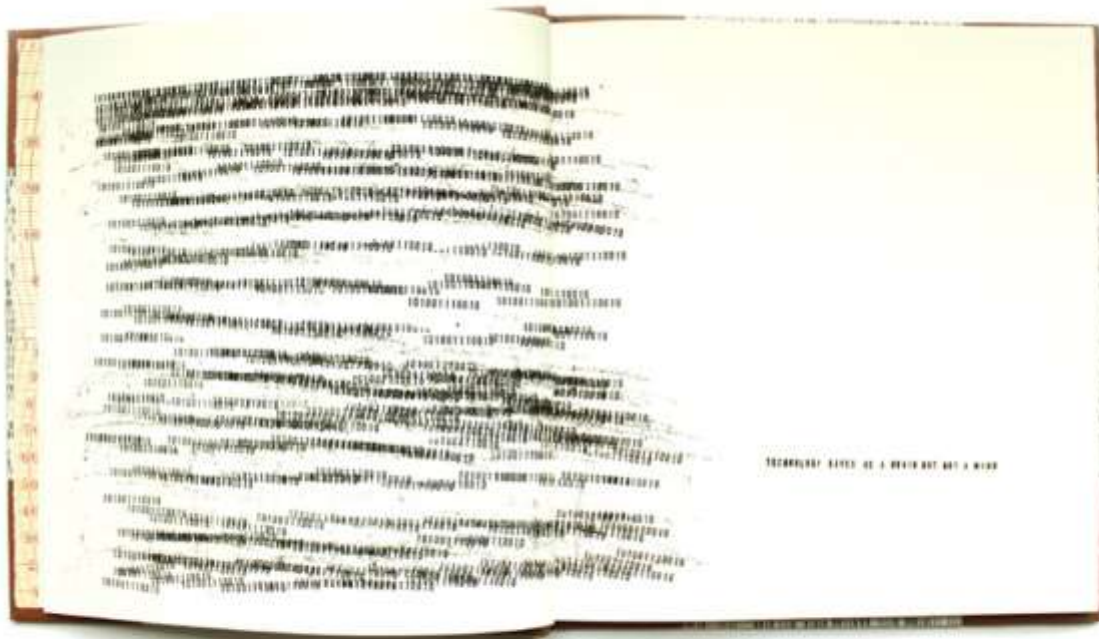


Fig. 24. Helene van Aswegen. *The Nature of Technology.doc* (2011) Artist's book. 23.5 x 22.5. Artist's collection, Stellenbosch (Van Aswegen, 2011).

Both galleries and libraries approach artists' books from their respective frames of reference. Art galleries have their own institutional framing that they impose upon the art objects. Galleries have a vested interest in these objects as they are valuable commodities that generate the gallery's income. A damaged bookwork will not be suitable for business. Libraries, by contrast, have the responsibility to collect, house and protect books. When a book is deemed 'special' due to its age, its value or its rarity it is usually contained within a special section where public interaction is limited and monitored. In many cases the artist's book is destined to be locked away in these rare book sections as they are revered as valuable art objects. Consequently, these books are rarely exposed to the interested viewer. To put it simply, the libraries that are not affiliated to art institutions (such as MoMA), or those that are not familiar with the art form, see the artist's book as a book, while the gallery or museum presents it as an artwork (Perrée 2002:60).

The conflicts of presentation in relation to conservation

Many artefact related institutions grapple with presentation with regard to conservation. Conservation ought to be any institution's responsibility if it intends to house cultural artefacts that need to stand the test of time. However it is the basic implementation of conservation regulations that may cause the artist's work to be yet more hidden from the eyes and hands of the public. Ironically, it is sometimes the artists themselves who create this predicament with their choice of materials that might be cheap alternatives to traditional material but are not durable. Drucker (2004:47), for example, reflects on the works of the Constructivists and the Russian Futurists when she states that:

The unfortunate effect of this eclectic attitude toward materials was the impermanence of the work. Many of these are now too fragile to handle and crumble or tear if touched. The work was intentionally ephemeral – made for the moment, in order to be circulated among friends and read without regard for preciousness or longevity.

The 'eclectic attitude' Drucker referred to was a reaction against the elaborate use of fine press printing that was especially prominent in the Russian artworld. They started using unconventional materials for example burlap covers, wallpaper covers and different kinds of cloth and paper (Drucker 2004:47).

This instance is not a unique case. Conservationist Glenn Wharton (in Altshuler 2005:163) opens his chapter *The Challenges of Conserving Contemporary Art* by stating:

Contemporary art challenges the underlying values of conservation. Committed to prolonging the physical life of objects in the face of inevitable change, conservators are particularly vexed by Conceptual and other art that questions notions of permanence and deliberately employs ephemeral media.

Throughout this chapter he refers to works of art that use materials such as deteriorating rubber gloves and pest-infested rice (Donald Lipski *Building Steam-190*, 1983), melting wax and a rotting sausage (Josef Beuys' *Untitled (Vitrine with Four Objects/Plateau Central)* 1962-83). Though these are 'worst case scenarios', even acidic

paper bound in a book could also pose a threat to the book's lifespan. That said, artists' books evolved with the era (and the 'rebellious mindset') Wharton refers to here. They too consist of ephemeral materials such as Dieter Roth's *Literaturwurst (Literature Sausage)* (1961), Anselm Kiefer's *Erotik im Fernen Osten* (1975) or even Duchamp's withered book *Unhappy Readymade* (1919).

With the intention of preserving cultural objects, or more specifically, books and works of art for future generations, it is the work of the institution and the conservationists to implement regulations that will help with the preservation of the artworks. In the case of books and artist's books it has proven to be difficult. Paperbased artefacts are sensitive to too much handling, light, dust, acid, fire, water/moisture and insects. To protect for example a paperbased artefact, the ideal environment would be containment in an acid free container that blocks out light, that allows the object to breathe within a clean space that is free of insects, with a consistent level of humidity and a consistent climate. This limiting environment, as one can imagine, places artist's books in quite a predicament. Artist and writer Buzz Spector duly noted,

The dilemma in staging exhibitions of books as art objects is the denial of access to the work that conservation necessarily demands. Any book that, by virtue of its uniqueness or frailty of materials, would be damaged by handling must be protected, even at the cost of intelligibility (in Ginsberg 1996).

It is vital to keep in mind that the artist's book brings a new experience to the gallery compared to most other forms of art. For example, a painting or a sculpture may be viewed 'publicly', that is more than one person at a time can experience one work of art (from a distance). However, an artist's book necessitates a more personal interaction and thus as Bourriaud would argue, requires a re-evaluation of the space in which it is to be presented (2002:11). Towards a re-evaluation of the institutional structure one might pose a question to the collectors and curators who wish to present artists' books. Should one favour the preservation of the original bookwork by making it inaccessible to the public, or should one take the risk of favouring the public with accessibility to the

bookwork to generate a greater appreciation for the artist's book as part of contemporary art?⁴⁰

There are alternative solutions to this problem. MoMA has digital screens of bookworks that are too frail to handle. By swiping over the touch screen one is able to view the contents of each page digitally. This overcomes the problem of handling the fragile bookworks but, once again, deprives the viewer of the materiality of the book. The materiality of the bookwork contributes to the experience and ultimately the meaning of the bookwork. The digital screen presents the bookwork within a new form. It carries its own set of associations instead of the original bookwork. To illustrate this point I will refer to the book in relation to its material form that has the capacity to become its own portable exhibition space.

'A Museum without Walls': The artist's book as a self contained exhibition space

For a moment, let us step away from the housing institutions and consider the book as an independent entity. Drucker states that books or artists' books have their own lives as objects and stresses that books can exchange hands frequently, they may be snuggled up to, become lost, or be found again in a perfect working condition (Drucker 1998:192). To help to develop this idea it would be interesting to consider the artist's book as a portable exhibition space.

French writer and Minister of Culture, André Malraux, presents in his book *The Psychology of Art* (1950) the notion of *musée imaginaire* (directly translated: imaginary museum) that was translated for the English version of the book to 'a museum without walls' (Malraux 1978). As art critic and theorist Rosalind Kraus explains, Malraux explores 'the conceptual space of the human faculties such as imagination, cognition and judgement' (Kraus 2005:341). Kraus complains that the translated title of Malraux's

⁴⁰Though the question reaches beyond the scope of this thesis it is indeed something to consider and to address in future essays regarding the longevity of the artist's book within contemporary art and the role of the general public.

term is misleading in relation to Malraux's conceptual underpinnings. A *museum without walls* 'speaks instead to a place rendered physical, a space we might walk through, even though a museum without walls, being something of a paradox, will be traversed with difficulty' (Kraus 2005:341). Although I understand Kraus' reading of the title to be somewhat narrow, it was enlightening to have insight into the original term. What I propose in this part of the thesis relates to both translated versions of the term, *musée imaginaire*.

It has been mentioned that the artist's book was used as a device to question social and political differences (in both the art world and the agendas of governments). One such period was during the sixties and seventies when Conceptual art was at its peak, so that 'a number of artists [...] began to develop to provide a forum and venue for many artists denied access to the traditional gallery and museum structure' (Drucker 2004:72). The artist's book became one of the many experimental formats that could circumvent traditional art institutions and circulate freely between members of the public (Drucker 2004:72).

Drucker (2004:321) reflects that Malraux 'suggested that changes in the capacity for reproduction of images would soon make museums an outmoded form.' She continues, that,

Malraux felt that the publication of artworks or their availability in the form of printed postcards, slides, transparencies or other techniques would have a democratising effect. The 'museum without walls' was a Utopian vision of cultural property loosened from the grip of institutions, curators, elite collectors, or private patrons. While it may be that the age of electronic media will finally realise Malraux's vision, in the interim, many artists have found ways to realize the concept of the museum or gallery within the book form.

Malraux's sentiment that the museum might become an outmoded form is to a large extent yet to be seen. But in relation to the artist's book his insights present a new angle. A book can be an exhibition space in itself. Ulises Carrión adds to this notion that the book 'is a *sequence* of spaces' (cited in Lyons 1987:31). The artist's book has the potential to become an independent exhibition space that travels with its owner or representative, which can be borrowed, shared, given away or sold. In the words of

Johanna Drucker, '[t]his is not nostalgic romanticism, but hard physical fact: books have their own lives as objects' (Drucker 1998:192).

In conclusion, the institutions provide a platform for artists' books to be collected, displayed and protected. However, we have seen that each institution has its own set of problems regarding display and access as they see the artist's book as a commodity too precious to be handled by the public. Nevertheless, I have argued the artist's book can be seen as a form of relational art. They therefore need to be 'activated' by the hand of a viewer in order to cultivate an understanding and consequently an appreciation for these unique art objects (Bright 2005:3). This limitation of accessibility is justified from several angles. Bookworks within the framework of art institutions are seen as precious commodities and are thus controlled by inhibiting the interaction between the viewer and the bookwork. Bookworks within the framework of libraries also limit the viewer by only granting interaction on request, however, this may only be granted if the viewer already knows what he/she seeks. To add to the dilemma, both libraries and art institutions are acutely aware that to conserve paperbased artefacts such as artists' books there needs to be added control over the artefacts and thus furthering limitation of interaction (or even viewing) of fragile bookworks.

Considering this predicament will it ever be possible for artists' books to circulate freely as a 'museum without walls' in the public, without the restraints of institutions? And if artists' books circulate freely, would that necessarily mean that they would be appreciated more as artworks or would they become lost and forgotten on the bookshelves of the original collector?

Chapter 3:

Presenting the artist's book intellectually: Artists' books within secondary sources

In order to invent more effective tools and more valid viewpoints, it behoves us to understand the changes nowadays occurring in the social arena, and grasp what has already changed and what is still changing. How we are to understand the types of artistic behaviour [...] and the lines of thinking behind [contemporary art] if we do not start out from the same *situation* as the artists? (Bourriaud 2002: 11)

As a researcher on the topic of artist's books it is my duty to study as many possible sources on the subject matter. I am frustrated by the lack of in-depth discussions on examples of artists' books. This part of the thesis problematises how the artist's book is presented within academic literature, as most people will only be able to access most bookworks via secondary sources presented either in printed form or via the Internet.

In her book, *Artists' books: A Critical Anthology* (1987:12), Joan Lyons comments that we need to find the right language to discuss artists' books. Lyons states that art theory's manner in reflecting and theorising art is not an appropriate methodology for theorising artists' books:

Perhaps the hardest thing to do in connection with the artist's book is to find the right language for discussing it. Most of our criticism in art is based on the concept of a work with separable meaning, content and style. "this is what it says" and "here is how it says what it says." But the language of normative criticism is not geared towards the discussion of an experience, which is the main focus of most artists' books. Perhaps this is why there is so little good criticism of the genre (Lyons 1985:12).

Looking at secondary sources, specifically theoretical books and websites on artists' books, I will refer here to theorists and writers on art namely André Malraux, Walter Benjamin, Nicolas Bourriaud and Maria Linsmann. Each writer (with the exception of Bourriaud) relate either to the book format or photographic reproductions. I use them as a point of reference to problematise representations and textual discussions on artists' books.

André Malraux shares his insights in his book *The Voices of Silence* (1987), that the book form is an ideal vehicle to break free from the museum's restraining walls (Malraux 1987:14-24). Malraux (1987:14, 15, 16) believed that an art-book (a book that consists of photographic reproductions of art) can be seen as a 'museum without walls' and can become a better reference source as museums in reference to the limitations museums faces (for example not being able to house unmovable art such as a fresco, a stained glass window pane or a cathedral). However, Malraux (1987:18, 20, 21) also soberly considers the downfall of photographic reproduction within books, especially regarding the loss of texture and scale. He also reflects that photographic devices could add to or alter the meaning of an existing artwork, with the use of dramatic lighting and positioning. Furthermore Malraux (1987:24) also mentions the power of association when two very different artworks are placed together in a spread within the book form. All these intentional and unintentional graphic effects contributes to falsifying the original meaning of a work of art that he terms 'fictitious arts'(Malraux 1987:24).

To support my viewpoint on this matter of inaccessibility, I will refer to Walter Benjamin's essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* that was originally published in 1969. He critiques the use of mechanical reproductions and the effects these have on the reproduction and the representation of original art. This may now also be applied to digital reproduction. These methodologies of criticism need to be addressed in order for us 'to invent more effective tools and valid viewpoints' as stated by relational theorist Nicolas Bourriaud (2002:11). Bourriaud offers a valid insight as a reason for this problem of theoretical inaccessibility. He believes that an artwork should be integrated within the everyday, and not something idealised or as an independent, private entity (2002:14). Art should therefore be interactive and experiential between the viewer and the artwork. Furthermore, art criticism, in return, should evolve with the artist's practices in order for the critic and the reader to comprehend where the artists are coming from and conceptually heading to. This proposed approach to art practices as well as art criticism should also apply to the artist's book. The artists' book requires a direct engagement between the viewer and bookwork. Where a direct engagement with

the bookwork is not possible, new ways of presentation should be considered, as opposed to static photographs of a single spread and accompanying texts.

In the previous chapter I made the point that the artist's book is an art form that requires a physical interaction between the viewer and the bookwork. Especially if one considers that the artist's book could be seen as a portable exhibition within two covers (Lyons 1987:87; Drucker 2004:320-332), or to borrow Andre Malraux's words, a 'museum without walls'. Again one can also reflect here on Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002:18) supposition that '[a]rt is a state of encounter'. Keeping these notions in mind it becomes clear that the artist's book requires that direct encounter to be fully or properly appreciated as a relational aesthetic experience.

Books on artists' books

Not everyone is privileged to see original artists' books. It is here where many use catalogues and other secondary sources to infiltrate a larger audience. Malraux (1987:16) professed the advantages of books that contains photographs of artworks (he refers to it as 'the modern art-book'), stating that the collection of reproductions within an art-book 'have far more great works available to refresh our memories than those which even the greatest of museums could bring together.' Malraux (1987:16) then continues to say that:

For a 'Museum without Walls' is coming into being, and (now that the plastic arts have invented their own printing press) it will carry infinitely farther that revelation of the world of art, limited perforce, which the 'real' museums offer us within its walls.

Although there are major advantages of using these strategies to stimulate awareness and appreciation for artists' books (as it does for any other art forms—considering Malraux's viewpoint), it does not come without its flaws.

Established American book artist Keith Smith, published his 200th artist's book, *200 Books: A Bibliography*, in 2002. It is a catalogue of the entire collection of bookworks he

made in his career. In his introduction he expresses that this catalogue/artist's book is an attempt to document his artist's books for the very reason that few people have had the privilege of viewing his books first hand (2002:2).

While paging through Smith's and similar books it became clear to me that the photographs of the various books do not do justice to the art objects. These representations convey only a fraction of the actual artist's book as do arguably all secondary representations of art objects (this will become evident below regarding Benjamin and *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*). Artists' books are made with the intention that one should experience the art form as a whole. Ulysses Carrión states that '[b]ookworks are books that are conceived as an expressive unity, that is to say, where the message is the sum of all materials and formal elements.' (cited in Hubert and Hubert 1999:7). A two dimensional photograph will barely be able to capture how it feels in the hands of the viewer, paging through the book and noting all the details, such as embossing and the paper's texture.

Connecting to the Internet: Using new media to do the work of the old

When talking about books that contain information, it seems naive not to turn our heads slightly toward the digital world in our contemporary setting. Presently texts are not only represented in the physical form of printed books and journals but have also found their place within the electronic realm, especially on the Internet. I now shift my attention towards the Internet as a source of sharing information on artists' books and reflecting on what the implications of this shift are from the material book towards the digital screen.

The internet's most important contribution is to propagate the art form worldwide. Furthermore, the Internet facilitates much more immediate and active discussions on

artists' books on web-based forums.⁴¹ It also allows other new media formats with text and images to incorporate sound⁴² and video.⁴³ However, this increased accessibility comes with some prerequisites; one cannot access this information if one does not have access to a computer, a modem and the knowledge how to navigate through the Internet. Being immersed in the never-ending web of information, websites on artists' books could become part of mass information and not enjoy much, if any, attention. It is a kind of compromise as the material form of the artist's book is dematerialised within the digitised system of the computer and the Internet.

The problematic nature of photographic representation

The artist's book faces a dilemma as soon as it is reproduced photographically for (re)presentation or critical analysis. Benjamin (1935:ii) criticises the photographic representation of an original work of art as it lacks 'its presence in time and space' and 'its unique existence at the place where it happens to be':

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. [...] In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its authenticity—is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.

Benjamin admits that many original artworks will never reach a large audience without the aid of photographic copies. This is also true with regard to the artist's book. However, the copy will always depreciate the original artwork (Benjamin 1935:ii). This

⁴¹For example the webpage, *Artists' books 3.0* (<http://artistbooks.ning.com>), is a forum for anyone who wishes to discuss, query, advertise or partake (in exhibitions or seminars) regarding artists' books.

⁴²The *Book Arts* website (www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk) founded by Sarah Bodman, offers recordings of their seminars on several subjects revolving around artists' books.

⁴³The website YouTube offers an array of footage on artists' books, ranging from discussions on artists' books to actual bookworks presented in a video format.

proves to be even more applicable in the case of the artist's book. In art theory it is conventionally very important to include an example of a discussed artwork to visually substantiate what is theoretically discussed. However, in many cases theoretical texts that discuss artists' books only provide a single image per bookwork. This is problematic due to the fact that the artist's book is a multi-plane object and relies on sequential paging to convey the message (or to use Carrión's words 'a book is a space-time sequence' (in Lyons 1987:35; Hubert & Hubert 1999:7). By only providing an image of a single spread of a bookwork it effectively deprives the viewer of the whole story or the whole concept. Maria Linsmann (cited in Schattauer 2007:47) comments that '[t]his structural entity obtains a specific spatiality in the act of leafing through the pages' she then goes on to say that 'the motion of turning the pages sets a rhythm which then becomes an integral constituent of that entity.' What one can deduce from this is that when only a single photograph is taken of the bookwork that needs to be appreciated in time-sequence experience, the meaning of the bookwork becomes disjointed and misrepresented. This can then also lead to a misinterpretation of the bookwork as the viewer is forced to draw his/her own conclusions of the work of art based on a mere abstracted fraction of the work.

Even so, it needs to be noted that the pragmatics of the photographic representation of complete bookworks, spread by spread, from cover to cover, often prove to be excessive and expensive. It is thus understandable that visual representation is limited to one or two images per bookwork in many cases.⁴⁴ This thesis is no different, finding itself in this same predicament, which ironically lends credence to this point of misrepresentation.

Developing the notion of misrepresentation one can refer to Malraux's elaborations on the downfall of reproducing art in art-books (which is his suggestion of a museum without walls). Malraux warns that although the art book can contain many

⁴⁴Particularly when one needs to discuss several bookworks in one book such as Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artist's Books* (2004) or even *The Cutting Edge of Reading Artist's Book* (1999) by Renee Rise Hubert and Judd David Hubert.

photographic reproductions⁴⁵ and therefore have a democratising effect regarding what is and what is not seen in museums. The nature of illustrations within a book has varying affects that might differ from the original art work. Malraux warned against reproductions that systematically falsify the scale of art objects (1987:24). Illustrations within a fixed format of a book are of a similar size. A photograph thus not only affects the scale of a single artwork but becomes affected by its neighbouring reproductions. A photograph of a miniature artist's book for example becomes a full sized bookwork the moment it is placed with an image of a larger format artist's book. This could also lead to the misguided assumption that the two bookworks are part of the same style of artist's books or to what Malraux refer to as the same 'family' of artworks (Malraux 1987:21).

The limitations of descriptive texts on artists' books

In light of the above predicament, the lack of appropriate representations in both catalogues and theoretical texts influence the quality of critical enquiry of individual bookworks. It also means that works that are discussed in theoretical texts are bookworks that are more inclined to textual description. In other words, writers might select certain kinds of bookworks over others that can be easily described and can 'get away' with only one photographic example of the book, such as conceptual artist Sol LeWitt's *Brick Wall* (1977)⁴⁶(fig. 25) or even 'sculptural' book objects such as my bookwork *www.bookoffriends.com* (fig. 26). This bookwork consist of coffee filters bound together to function like a codex.⁴⁷ Due to the fact that these pages do not contain any

⁴⁵Before photography was used to make reproductions of art, only a selected few that were deemed 'masterpieces' were reproduced. With the advent of photography more, less popular works could be photographed for public appreciation.

⁴⁶Each page contains a photograph of a close-up view of a brick wall, the only difference between the images being the changes of shading on the wall that indicates it has been photographed several times during the day. Though the actual experience of holding and paging through the book would be ideal, the message is still easily conveyed textually and with the aid of one image.

⁴⁷*www.bookoffriends.com*, is a direct comment on computer social networks (such as Facebook) that in a sense dematerialises our relations with one another. Drinking coffee with friends is a simple attempt to regain a physical interaction with people.

images (accept for the stains created from the coffee residue) or any text a photograph of the whole book would be more comprehensible to the reader than a book filled with different images and texts.

On the other hand, how should one describe Nora Schattauer's bookworks (see fig. 27 & 28) that consist of different brush strokes and stains? The interplay of water, pigment and oil conveys nuanced and layered messages when one pages through the book and sees the sequential changes. These abstract 'stains' elucidate her creative thinking and mark-making process. Without the aid of several photographic images one cannot grasp what is being described in this case. Language fails to convey the visual complexities of an image (more so when it is a non-figurative image). For a writer this kind of work would be problematic in the sense that one would need to *see* all the contents of the pages to fully comprehend what is said.

The lack of the relational factor

In the beginning of this chapter I included an introductory quote from Nicolas Bourriaud's book *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). Bourriaud insists that art criticism needs to find an improved methodology to reflect, theorise and understand contemporary art practices. He states that, '[a]rtistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence. It is the critic's task to study this activity in the present' (2002:11). As we have seen in the first chapter, the artist's book has evolved. It is a hybrid form that uses one of the most everyday cultural icons, the book, as its primary medium. A painting asks the viewer to stand back and view the whole pictorial frame, while a conventional book asks the reader to read and comprehend its contents. The artist's book, on the other hand, asks the viewer/reader to read and/or view creatively (Perrée 2002:14). It is now a practice where viewing, interacting and reading are collected into the one experience of the artist's book at hand.

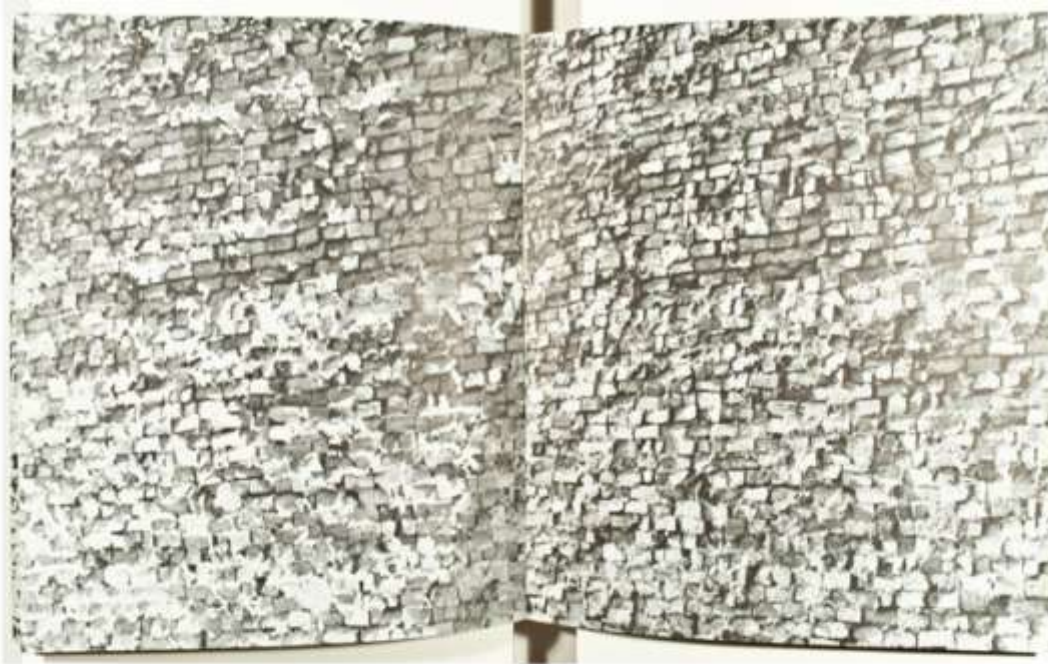


Fig. 25. Sol LeWitt. *Brick Wall* (1977) Artist's book. 26 x 22. Collection: MoMA Library, New York (MoMA Library 2010).



Fig. 26. Helène van Aswegen. *www.bookoffriends.com* (2011) Artist's book. Dimensions variable. Artist's collection, Stellenbosch. (Van Aswegen, 2011).

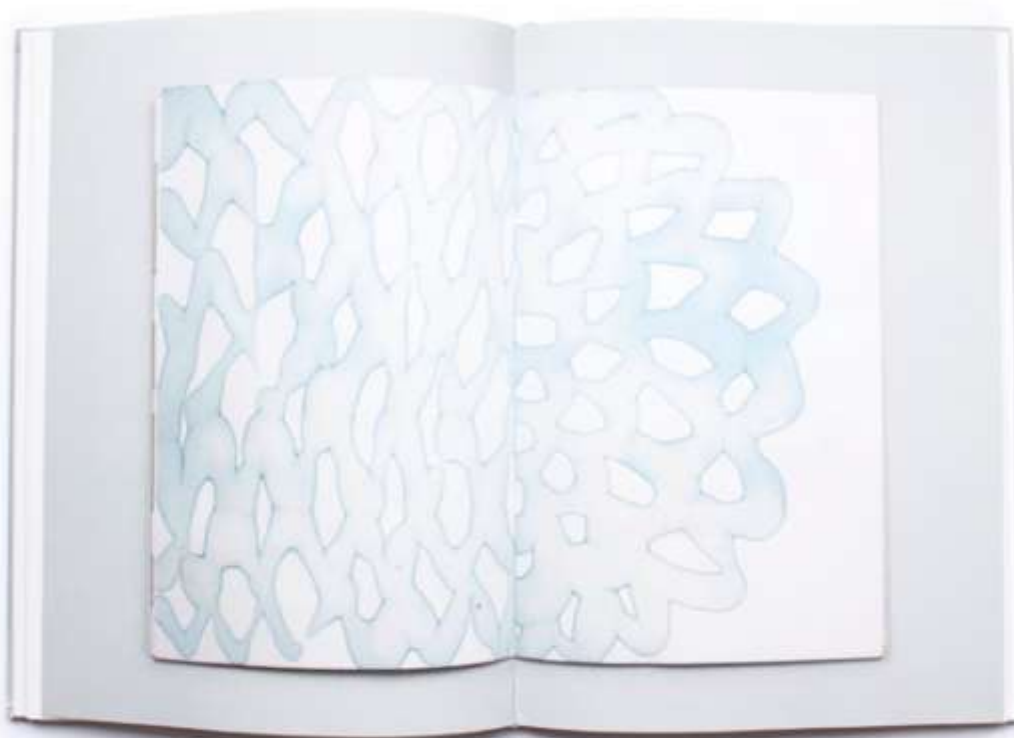
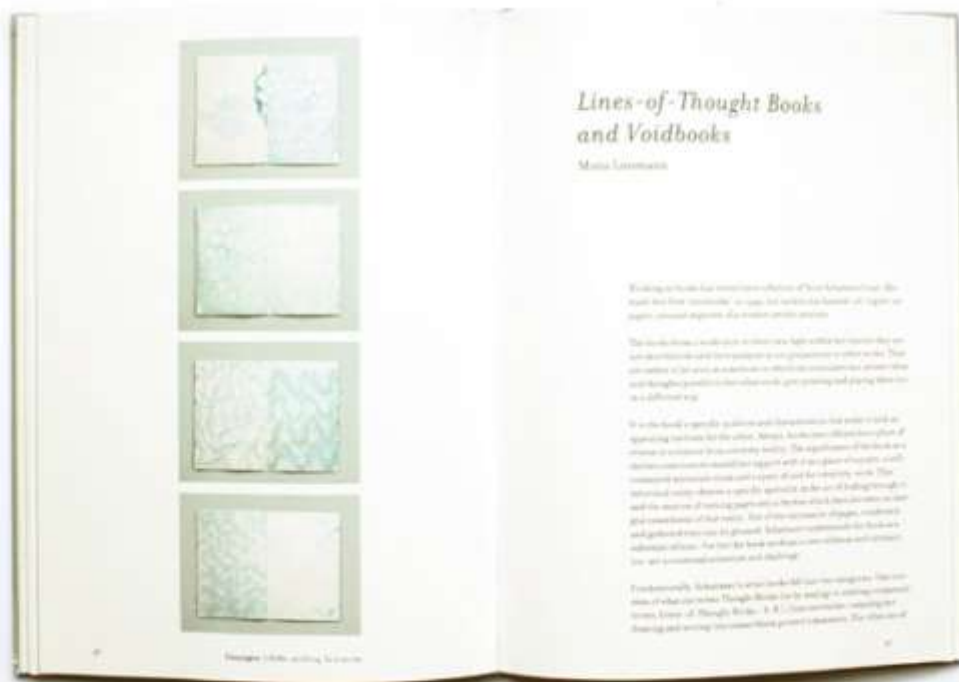


Fig. 27 & 28. Nora Schatauer (2007) *Prima Vista: Artist's books*. Cornerhouse Publications, Manchester (Scattauer 2007: 46-47, 43-44).

In Nora Schattauer's catalogue, *Prima Vista* (2007) (fig. 27 & 28) (which is a collection on her artist's books) Maria Linsmann writes about Schattauer's work stressing the importance of 'turning the page'. Linsmann (cited in Schattauer 2007:47) notes that Schattauer uses pre-bound blank books which she then paints in keeping the sequential nature of the book in mind. 'Out of the succession of pages condensed and gathered time can be gleaned. Schattauer understands the book as a substrate of time.' Linsmann goes on to say that,

[Schattauer] stresses the tactile quality that plays such a great part in turning of the individual pages. Simultaneously, working on a bound blank, she discovers the possibility of connecting past and future. Thus the composed and concluded pages represent the past, while the void pages the artist has yet to come to stand for just that, what is to come and the future. In the creative process, the processing of a page in the present, there is a confluence of both: past, present and future form an entity. It is in sense Schattauer's work on the book may also be seen as an attempt to arrest time, or rather, to artistically manifest and render visible its passing (cited in Schattauer 2007: 47, 48).

Linsmann stresses the fact that the book is a time and space representation within the sequential pagination. The kinetic pace the reader induces while paging through the book 'becomes an integral constituent of that entity' (Schattauer 2007:47). In other words, the action and pace of paging through the bookwork becomes part of the artwork.

A thorough analysis of a bookwork needs to stem from a direct encounter. The experience begins at a distance the moment one sees the closed book, picking it up, feeling its weight and textures, opening the bookwork to view its endpapers, title page and then contents of each following spread. Drucker notes in her essay *Intimate Authority: Women, books and the Public-Private Paradox* (2007), that 'a book is a virtual space in which the symbols and structures of expression perform for us and through us, in our reading and engagement of the work' (in Wasserman et al 2007:16). What is thus lacking in photographic representations is the sequential experience of the book that allows the viewer to see all the 'symbols' on the various pages as well as the 'structure' regarding the binding style and the specific materials used.

To conclude this chapter there are four reasons for this dilemma of inaccessibility. Firstly, the multi-dimensional structure of the artist's book is a hindrance to adequate representation. Secondly, artists' books require a direct interaction, but due to geographical (and also sometimes institutional) limitations, direct experience of the bookwork is not always possible. Thirdly, when artist's books are presented photographically, the image only conveys a fraction of the content of the bookwork. Finally and most importantly, a bookwork is a form of relational art. The viewer/reader needs to interact with the bookwork in order to activate its sequential nature. In the process, the viewer will then observe all the formal and material elements that contribute to the meaning of the bookwork's message (Hubert & Hubert 1999:7).

To reiterate the words of Ulises Carrión, the artist's book's meaning is the sum of all its materials and formal elements. Keeping this in mind it is evident to experience and interpret the bookworks' significance one needs to take each aspect of the book into consideration. Due to its structure, this entails a direct relational/interactive experience.

The internet as well as printed matter describing and theorising artists' books, can be helpful to overcome the limitations that artists' books currently experiencing, but this is not the solution.

Chapter 4:

Conceptualising the artist's book.

The accessible media: The materiality of the book and the intangibility of digital media.

In the previous two chapters I set out to problematise the accessibility of artists' books. These two chapters show that consideration must be given to how artists' books may be discussed and presented to cultivate a greater appreciation for this fairly young genre. In the third chapter I briefly reflected on the contribution digital media has had on mediating information about artists' books. In this chapter I will explore the influences digital media have had on the conceptualisation and production of the artist's book. Thus far I have focused primarily on the function of the conventional book (as a supposedly accessible, portable medium of information) in relation to the artist's book. Now it is important to consider the artist's book within the contemporary technological milieu, since the artist's book does not always reflect on the book form in isolation, but also in relation to other forms, namely new media.

In his *Relational aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud insists that the artist no longer creates utopian or imagined realities but creates 'models of action within the existing real' (2002:13). Our reality, or 'existing real', currently relies on both old and new technologies within our social and cultural practices. Bearing this in mind, I pose the question as to how does the inter-changeability between old and new technologies alter our relations to one another, to our technologies, and ultimately to our art practices? If one considers that the book is a form of technology, as a container of information, and that artists use the book form as a device to create 'relational art', I see the need to consider and reflect on the use of new technologies within the field of artists' books.

Since the book, as an 'old' technology, lives simultaneously with 'new' technologies, such as digital and electronic media, I find this to be an interesting terrain of contradictions and conflicts of interest as well as newly developed inter-dependence and co-existence

between old and new technologies. To limit the scope of this thesis, I decided to look at those artists' books that still work within the 'conventional form' of the codex rather than to explore the new terrain in which artists' books are realised in the form of e-books, websites, cell phone applications and any other kind of computer- or electronically-mediated forms.⁴⁸I prefer to focus on the content and on the production processes that artists undertake in realising a final bookwork as a point of critical reflection.

I will refer to both new media theorist Lev Manovich's theory of *The Language of New Media* (2001), alongside technology theorist Trevor Pinch's *Social Construction of Technology* theory (2009). Manovich takes a critical look at new media technology and assesses its history and place in contemporary culture. Pinch reflects on how media and new technologies alter our relations with ourselves and with one another. Here I will look at examples of my own practice as well as David Paton's artist's book, *Speaking in Tongues: Speaking Digitally/Digitally Speaking* (2009). My practice, as well as that of Boshoff (as discussed in chapter 2) and Paton have internalised the fact that some audiences would not be able to either fully comprehend⁴⁹ or to physically interact with bookworks. In this context artists use devices that are supposed to facilitate understanding and knowledge (such as the book structure, digital media, illustration and descriptive text) and subvert it with devices such as illegibility (for example Boshoff's use of Braille), (mis)understanding, coding and decoding (in both my and Paton's work), and obscuring or hiding text.

Before Johanna Drucker produced her comprehensive theoretical body of work on artists' books (as well as other typographic expressions such as concrete poetry and alternative publications), she had firsthand experience as a typographic book artist. Drucker situates herself between old media and new media. My practice is aligned with

⁴⁸For a comprehensive study on artists' books in the form of new media refer here to Bodman and Sowden's publication *A Manifesto for the Book* (2010) and (for a local example) David Paton's *Negotiating the Bookscape: Artists' Books and the Digital Interface* (2006).

⁴⁹The artist's book estranges the well-known form of the book by critically engaging with the conventions of the book as a communications form.

Drucker's preference to engage with the 'current tension of the book' that 'reflects the present tense of electronic media coming into being' (Drucker 1998:11). Drucker adds to this notion by quoting Marshall McLuhan's insightful statement, 'In the name of 'progress' our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old'(in Drucker 1998:167).

In order to have some clarity on the phrase 'new media', I refer to Lev Manovich's definition in his book *The Language of New Media* (2000:19). The term 'new media' is not as clear cut as one might imagine. Manovich states that, 'the Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs and DVD virtual reality' are the most well known ones. However, he continues, this list is incomplete, 'the popular understanding,' Manovich goes on to say, 'of new media identifies it with the use of a computer for distribution and exhibition, rather than production'(2000:19). Computers are used to manipulate video footage, photographs and music. Text and images, for example, are designed on the computer, printed out and bound into a book. Manovich (2000:19) concludes his defining parameters by stating:

There is no reason to privilege the computer as a machine for the exhibition and distribution of media over the computer as a tool for media production or as a media storage device. All have the same potential to change existing cultural languages. All have the same potential to leave culture as it is. This last scenario is unlikely, however.

Carine Zaayman writes in her essay, *Riding a Different Wave: Digital Media and Subcultural Expression* (2005:157), that 'we should not be fooled into thinking that new technologies present a total departure from older cultural objects.'⁵⁰ She continues to say that:

In fact, many new media technologies are popular precisely because they augment and extend realities we are already familiar with. It is therefore important to take a double view of new media: on the one hand, there is the sudden expansion of the computational possibility of computers which allows unprecedented distribution sophistication and manipulation of original content. On the other hand, these

⁵⁰For example, one can consider the systematic evolution text has undergone from the printing revolution to the digital revolution. For further reading see P.L. Shillingsburg *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (2006).

technologies and their possibilities enhance existing cultural objects, such as magazines, fine art images and music (2005:157).

In the previous chapter I briefly reflected on the effects the Internet has had on the proliferation of information on book arts. In his chapter *The Social Construction of Technology, The Old, the New and the Non-human* (2009), Trevor Pinch remarks that people use 'new technology [for instance the Internet] to support old technologies'. He notes that this 'points exactly to the sorts of odd bedfellows and hybrid support systems one finds in the world of coexistence' of old and new media (Pinch in Vannini 2009:49).

A contemporary South African example that reflects on the integration of old and new technology can be found in the work of David Paton. He has been a pioneer on this front of incorporating both old and new media in relation to the artist's book in South Africa.⁵¹ Paton uses the digital form combined with the book form as a point of departure to comment on forms of coded and decoded language. His artist's book titled *Speaking in Tongues: Speaking Digitally/Digitally Speaking* (2009) (fig. 29), plays on various levels of sign, language, code and the digital. The work consists of a book and a video. The accordion fold book narrates two sets of hands actively communicating by means of incomprehensible gestures. One set of hands belongs to an old woman. These hands are in constant motion conveying some secret story within her movements. The other set of hands belong to a young boy, who is also involved with some undecipherable coded language with his hand movements. These depictions represent how our hands are agents of communication.

Our fingers – also referred to as digits – parody the computer that uses digital systems to convey information. The title of Paton's book acknowledges both sets of hands in the method of communication they use; *Speaking digitally* refers to the hands of the boy who represents the younger generation who are inclined to communicate via the digital interface. *Digitally speaking* references the notion that our fingers are digits and implies with a play on words that the old lady uses her 'digits' to communicate expressively.

⁵¹In 2006 Paton curated an exhibition entitled, *Navigating the Bookscape: Artists' Books and the Digital Interface*. He wrote a comprehensive article on the subject titled, *The sound of a book: Sound as generator of narrative in the reception of selected new media objects as books*(2006).

The depictions of the gesturing hands are reminiscent of sign language which is another form of text that is incomprehensible to most people, but recognisable to some as language that conveys messages. This is similar to the digital texts I use in my work, *The Nature of Technology. doc* (2011) (see fig. 24, 32 & 33), and *Ctrl + P* (2011) (fig. 30), where computer languages such as binary code and JavaScript are easily recognised as language but are comprehended by very few people.

Without digital and mechanised technology the artist's book as we know it today would arguably not exist. One such example would be the widespread availability of (digital and analogue) photocopy machines that have enabled people to make many copies at a very low cost. This has enabled artists to produce books such as the 'democratic multiple' as an artistic medium. Furthermore, the structure of digital media is fundamentally different if one compares the World Wide Web as a network system to the linearity of the conventional book (Drucker 2004:156). In this sense, digital structures also revived or opened up new ways of approaching the structure of information. Artists can now consider making books that emulate a network system or that function as a hypertext.



Fig. 29. David Paton. *Speaking in Tongues: Speaking Digitally/Digitally Speaking* (2009). Artist's book & video projection. Dimensions variable. Collection: Jack Ginsberg, Johannesburg (Paton, 2009).



Fig. 30. Helène van Aswegen, *Ctrl + P* (2011) Artist's book. 39 x 28.5. Artist's collection, Stellenbosch (Van Aswegen, 2011).

Maria Fischer, for example, made the bookwork, *Traumgedaken* (Thoughts on dreams, 2010) (fig. 31), which incorporates the system of hyperlinking key terms. This bookwork is a collection of works of literature on the topic of dreaming. Key terms in the book are connected throughout with different colours of thread. On her website (Fisher 2010), Fisher explains how her bookwork functions:

To ease the access to the elusive topic, the book is designed as a model of a dream about dreaming. Analogue to a dream, where pieces of reality are assembled to build a story, it brings different text excerpts together. They are connected by threads which tie in with certain key words. The threads visualise the confusion and fragileness of dreams.

Johanna Drucker reflects on the influence that electronic media have had on printing and producing bookworks compared to labour intensive mechanical processes, such as the letter press. She suggests that '[t]he development of electronic media, oddly enough, has become the fulcrum point for critical reflection upon the value and character of mechanical work'. She reasons that 'the very act of dematerialising information has made the act of rendering it back into form that much more a self conscious process' (Drucker 1998:193).

This is true of my bookwork, *Ctrl + P* (2011) (fig. 30). It is derived from my awareness of becoming completely reliant on a specific digital printing process that is available within our art department.⁵² This process has become an unquestioned convenience. In reaction to this I have abandoned the idea of producing drawings to be scanned and printed digitally. On a technical and stylistic level, the bookwork borrows from the fifteenth century (and earlier) practice of illuminating manuscripts. The content of this piece is an open source computer program copy written in JavaScript (one of the many coding languages that construct the computer applications we use on a daily basis). This specific program is written to enable a user to print a JPEG image from Photoshop.

⁵²When I started my Master's program we had to produce story books which had to be drawn, digitalized and then printed on a digital inkjet printer. For the duration of my Master's course it has been my responsibility (along with another Master's student) to print lecturers', undergraduate and postgraduate students' work for them.



Fig. 31. Maria Fischer. *Traumgedanken* (2010). Artist's book. 28 × 20. Artist's book. 28 × 20. Collection unknown (Fischer 2010).

The script was meticulously copied by hand in the same calligraphic style as a typical gothic illuminated manuscript.

Although the abovementioned process is labour intensive, I find it immensely stimulating and satisfying. As a symptom of automated digital culture I feel that there is a decline in manual skill. For this reason I have set out to learn new skills and to apply them in my own practice.

Considering these sentiments, I would like to elaborate on a key bookwork that I mentioned earlier. *The Nature of Technology.doc* (fig. 32 & 33) consists mainly of watercolour illustrations of discarded electronic and mechanical objects. These illustrations are painted in the convention of botanical illustrations. Botanists employ illustrators to illustrate the specimens and are subsequently incorporated into the bodies of texts on the findings of the botanists. It is held that these illustrations offer information to the botanist and the reader to help them to understand the specimen in relation to its classification, structure and function. In the case of *The Nature of Technology.doc*, technological objects become the 'specimens' of the study. Each specimen was manually reproduced in the form of watercolour paintings in a visual attempt to understand how each specimen is structured and how it functions. However, this process proves to be futile as most of the workings of these objects, be they electronic or magnetic, are invisible to the eye.⁵³ A naturalistic painting of, for example, a tape recorder will never convey the necessary information about the magnetic systems that the tape strip uses to create sound.

A key component of the bookwork is the notion of intellectual inaccessibility. As mentioned above, the basic function of these illustrated 'specimens' are dependent on invisible processes that cannot be captured in a purely visual representation of the object. The viewer can thus not obtain the knowledge necessary to comprehend the

⁵³For example the invisible processes of a motherboard's software or a tape recorder's system of magnetising a recording strip.



Fig. 32 & 33. Heléne van Aswegen. *The Nature of Technology*. doc (2011) Artist's book. 23.5 x 22.5. Artist's collection, Stellenbosch (Van Aswegen, 2011).

actual workings of the specimen. This is similar to the impossible task of illustrating oxygen or air without the aid of signifiers to indicate that air is present. An aircraft, for example, will show that a heavy object can be suspended in space but it still does not explain that it is air that carries the craft.

This is echoed by the text that accompanies these paintings. Drucker (1998:52) reflects on the versatility of texts as a tool to convey meaning in several ways:

All writing has the capacity to be both looked at and read, to be present as material and so function as the sign of an absent meaning. It can be structured and shaped – or merely accumulate according to standard conventions. It can be found, appropriated, manipulated and effaced. As a form of individual expression writing is a somatically inflected sign, a production of the bodily self which seeks identity in an image of its own making. As a social and cultural system, writing partakes of the semiotic conditions of meaning production within the constraints of the rule bound system of language. The richness of written language resides in these multifaceted qualities, and for them, as a consequence, many curious contradictions and parallels open in the field of writing.

In the tradition of any legitimate scientific research, text is required to discuss and analyse a specimen. However, to continue with the notion of not being able to comprehend the functions of technological objects, the texts that accompany the painted illustrations are written in binary code. The use of 1s and 0s typeset in the format of text in paragraphs seems suitable, as this is the system that a computer uses to process its data. This 'text' is, in effect, incomprehensible to the (human⁵⁴) reader. Access is thus denied in two ways; the reader cannot understand the content of what is written, nor the function of what is illustrated.

To tie this in with an earlier mentioned work, I will return to Willem Boshoff's bookwork *Blind Alphabet ABC* (fig. 18 & 23). This is an interactive piece that subtly forces the sighted person to look at the artwork – which on face value looks like a sea of containers with embossed dots on the lids– while enabling the blind viewer to interact, to read the Braille, to open the lids and to discover a three dimensional object in each that relates to the description on the lid. With this installation Boshoff queries the

⁵⁴I imply here, that computers motherboards' processing software, too, are readers of coded information/data.

previously unquestioned weight of traditional literary texts which favour the visually able person. In my practice, I would add that one could broaden this basis of enquiry not only in relation to the book form but also in relation to the digital interface. The digital interface is less tangible - and legible in the case of the blind - than the literary texts in books.

My practice questions our contemporary society's 'blind' reliance on digital technology. *The Nature of Technology.doc* and *Ctrl + P* represents a 'visual study of technology' by utilising a style that parodies scientific illustration, and by copying a computer language. It is a means of being self-critical of our times and of people who are more and more dependent on digital and automated equipment. It indicates that as consumers of technology, we depend on things that we do not fully understand. The user of technology thus becomes a *consumer* and nothing more. The user is not able to create, maintain, fix or preserve technology that is lost or outdated without the aid of technological specialists. Our relations to our own possessions and knowledge become removed, or in the words of Marshall McLuhan 'alienated', in the process of digitisation and mechanisation (2001: 129). In my opinion it is not only the blind, as in Boshoff's installation *Blind Alphabet ABC*, who are disadvantaged when it comes to media technology, but also the sighted person. Most people are blind to the invisible mechanics of their appliances.

With the development of digital technology I would suggest that both the book and the computer are complementary facilitators of one another, as opposed to being competitors for society's most valuable contributor to information structures. In some cases the book might be succeeded by the use of the computer, but it is my belief that the book will always play a central role in our daily practice. Therefore, how we perceive, treat and even produce books has been altered with the aid of digital technology.

The artist's book plays the role of reflecting and acknowledging the colliding forces of old and new. There is no clear answer as to where we will find ourselves within the

technological advances that continue to evolve. There is also no consensus as to what shape the field of the artist's book will take. This consensus, to my mind, is not essential. It is in the present moment of flux and contradiction that I find an intriguing space that recognises the niches that new technologies have opened up. By appropriating an ambivalent technology that is seemingly on the cusp of digital dematerialisation, the artist's book occupies, indeed, a productive artistic niche.

Conclusion

Artists' books' accessibility are hindered by several factors. I have found it difficult to source and to have direct access to artists' books in South Africa. Consequently, this thesis' primary inquiry is not about the contents of artists' books but rather about the execution and presentation of the art form. I have therefore placed myself in the shoes of the viewer/reader, the researcher and the artist regarding the presentation of the artist's book.

The artist's book has been beset by differences of opinion and discussion with regard to its defining parameters and its sister genres. To provide each theorist's, artist's and librarian's version would have been an impossibility in this thesis. However, I have provided the most widely contested insights regarding the definitions and other related activities that pertain to the artist's book, *livres d'artistes* or fine printing that often become confused with each other. That said, one should regard the suggested categories as having no clear boundaries as many examples blur the lines between what should be seen as (for example) a *livre d'artiste* and an artist's book.⁵⁵

To problematise the current tendencies in relation to the (re)presentation of artists' books to the general public and to researchers, three different (re)presentational (re)sources needed discussion. The first was the physical space in which artists' books are housed and exhibited (the key concern here relates to physical interaction; it thus questions institutional conventions). The second is the books and blogs that describe artists' books (here the key concern is whether the reader/viewer is able to understand what is represented; it thus questions literary conventions). And lastly on a conceptual level, the artist's book itself (artists reflect and manipulate the physical interaction⁵⁶

⁵⁵See Drucker or Castleman for further enquiry regarding the boundaries/categories of artists' books.

⁵⁶For example, Willem Boshoff cunningly inhibits certain people to interact with *Blind Alphabet ABC*.

and the intellectual understanding⁵⁷ of the artist's book; it thus reflects both institutional and literary conventions).

This thesis suggests a theoretical basis for a new approach to analysing artists' books that require interaction, and I believe that artists' books should be considered from such a perspective. Betty Bright states that 'the artist's book needs a reader to open the book in order to activate it, and so complete it' (2005:11). This supposition is the very foundation of my theoretical argument. A bookwork cannot be entirely appreciated without a direct encounter with the viewer/reader. This is similar to the notions Nicolas Bourriaud sets forth in his theory of *Relational Aesthetics* or creating 'relational art'. Art should be, according to Bourriaud, a 'form of encounter'. However, this process of 'completing the artwork' stands in contrast to the conventions of art institutions. The bookwork in a sense has many institutional obstacles to overcome as they hinder the interaction between the bookwork and the viewer. Thus, relational art (which, I argue, includes bookworks), contrasts with institutions' ideal presentational environments (for example, fragile objects need to be protected by inhibiting the viewer from touching via notification or glass cabinets).

Representing specific examples of artists' books in secondary sources is no easy task. Although the publications by writers such as Betty Bright and Johanna Drucker are a highly significant contribution to the field, there is still a breach between the actual bookwork and the literary discussions on specific examples. Considering that the convention of discussing art uses the format of image (in other words a photograph of the artwork) and text, these conventions seem missing from the experiential and sequential nature of the bookwork. Bright notes this when she states that a bookwork cannot be judged by seeing only one opening of the bookwork. '[An artist's book] is much more than pictures and text, much more than any one page. Reading [an artist's

⁵⁷For example David Paton removes the context of his communicating subjects in *Speaking in Tongues: Speaking Digitally/Digitally Speaking* and thus deprives the viewer from what is being said and only to know that something is being said.

book] involves the tactile, even emotional, experience of paging through it' (Bright 2005:7).

As an accompanying theme for this thesis, the technological era we live in also has massive implications for our art practices. Since the artist's book is a highly self-reflexive medium, it would be suitable to reflect on the influences new media have on older media like books. The last chapter takes on this theme of creating contemporary artists' books. The reason for this inclusion is twofold. First, with the advent of highly developed computational resources, new media undeniably forms part of our current art practices. Secondly, new media are also fully integrated into the practices of making conventional consumer books. In both cases digital images are manipulated, texts are typeset and designs laid out with the aid of computers. During the printing process many employ digital printing equipment and even the binding process can be computerised.⁵⁸ Processes like these might seem to be contradictory to my practice as a bookbinder and illustrator, where I commonly employ skills and techniques that are often outdated by advances in technology. The irony is that, instead of turning a blind eye to new technology (as many purists might do), I have found it highly productive to incorporate new technology as a self reflexive device with regard to book and art production.

In summary this thesis asks for new ways in which to present the artist's book in order for it to find its rightful place in contemporary art. This question comes in the form of problematising what we currently have and examining the possible avenues that represent both existing institutions and new media. However, many of the possible solutions are either beyond the scope of this thesis or are yet to be discovered. The future of the artist's book is not certain. We need to find the right system to allow bookworks to claim a life of their own, to become exhibitions without the institution's conventional framework. Perhaps Andre Malraux's vision will be achieved via the

⁵⁸For example the Espresso Book Machine (EBM) (see <http://www.ondemandbooks.com/>) is a computerised 'vending' machine that contains digital versions of books. On request the EBM then prints and binds a book within minutes.

Internet as the ultimate museum without walls, at the (potentially detrimental) cost to the materiality of the book object.

Sources consulted

- Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. (ed.). 2000. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. London: The MIT Press.
- Agnelli, G. (ed.). 1993. *Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Altshuler, B. 2005. *Collecting the New, Museums and Contemporary Art* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Bartram, A. 2004. *Bauhaus, Modernism and the Illuminated Book*. Yale University Press: New Haven.
- Bartram, A. 2001. *Five hundred years of book design*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Beardsley, M. "Is Art Essentially Institutional?", in 1976 *Culture and Art* edited by L Aagaard-Mogensen. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: 194-209.
- Benjamin, W. 2001. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* edited by M G Durham & D M Kellner London: Blackwell publishing: 18 - 40.
- Biggs, A. & Barke, P. 2002. *A Social History of the Media: From the Gutenberg to the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blundell, D. & Blanckaert, A. 2001. The Making of the 'Livre d'Artiste' in *The Dialogue between Painting and Poetry: livres d'artistes 1874-1999*, edited by J Khalifa. Cambridge: Black Apollo: 153 - 56.
- Bourriaud, N. 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*. France: Les presses du réel.
- Bodman, S. & Sowden, T. (eds.). 2007. *The Artist's Yearbook 2008-2009*. Bristol: Impact Press.
- Bodman, S. 2009. *Research Resources on Artists' Books for Students* [Online] Available: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/resources.htm [2009, December 10]
- Bodman, S & Sowden, T. 2010. *A Manifesto for the Book*. Bristol: Impact Press.
- Bodenstein-Ferreira, E.M. 1998. Deconstructing the Postmodern Artist's Book: The Journey is the Destination. Masters dissertation Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Boshoff, W. 2009. *Willem Boshoff Artist* [Online] Available: www.wilemboshoff.com [2010, April 01]
- Bright, B. 2005. *No longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960-1980*. New York: Granary Books.
- Brown, M. 2007. Book Arts and the Desire for Theory in *The Journal of Artists' Books* edited by Freeman, B., Long, E., Meador, C. & White, T. Chicago: Columbia College: 6-9

Buchloh, B.H.D. 1990. *Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions*. London: The MIT Press.

Bury, S. 1995. *Artists' Books: The Book as a Work of Art, 1963-1995*. Hants: Scholar Press.

Carrión, U. 1987. The New Art of Making Books in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* edited by J Lyons. New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press: 31-44.

Carrol, N. 1999. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Castleman, R. 1995. *The Century of Artists Books*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Delaisié, L.M.J. 1965. *Medieval Miniatures*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Dickie, G. 1974. *Art and the Aesthetic: an Institutional Analysis*. Michigan: Cornell University Press.

Dickie, G. 1984. *The Art Circle: a Theory of Art*. Michigan: Haven.

Dickie, G. 2004. The New Institutional Theory of Art in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition, an Anthology*, edited by P Lamarque and S H Olsen. New Jersey:Wiley-Blackwell: 47-54.

Dietrich, K. 2011. Intersections, Boundaries and Passages: Transgressing the Codex. Inaugural lecture. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Durham, M.G. & Kellner, D. 2001. *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*. London: Blackwell publishing.

Drucker, J. 2004. *The Century of Artists' Books*. New York: Granary Books.

Drucker, J. 1998. *Figuring the Word*. New York: Granary Books.

Drucker, J., Gass, W.H. & Homburg, C.1997. *The Dual Muse: The Writer as Artist and the Artist as Writer*. Exhibition Catalogue. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Ekdahl, J. 1999. Artists' Books and Beyond: The Library of the Museum of Modern Art as a Cultural and Research Resource in *Inspel* 33(4):241-248.

Emsley, A. 2007. *Art and Book: A Commentary on Artist's Books*. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Fischer, M. 2010. [Online]
www.maria-fischer.com/en/traumgedanken_en.html [2011, July 15]

The Franklin Furnace collection 2011 [Online]
Available: www.franklinfurnace.org/research/moma-FF-artist_book_collection.php
[2011, October 10]

Freeman, J. 1995. The Visual Word in *Art Journal: Conservation and Art History* 54(2) College Art Association.

Freeman, B., Long, E., Meador, C. & White, T. (eds.) 2007. *The Journal of Artists' Books*. Chicago: Colombia College.

Geck, E. 1968. *Johannes Gutenberg: From lead letters to the Computer*. Berlin: Brüder Hartmann.

Ginsberg, J. Artist's book private collection, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Ginsberg, J. 1996. *An Exhibition of Books by People who don't write. It Should Make for some very Interesting Reading*. [online]
Available: www.theartistsbook.org.za/view.asp?pg=exhibitions&ex=ex1_001 [2011, September 15]

Godfrey, T. 1998. *Conceptual Art*. London: Phaidon Press.

Google books Library Project, An enhanced card catalogue of the world's books [online]
Available: www.books.google.com/googlebooks/library.html [2010, January 14]

Greenberg, R.; Ferguson, B.W. & Nairne, S. (eds.). 2005. *Thinking about Exhibitions*. London: Routledge.

Haskell, E. T. 1997. Castleman and Drucker: Re-viewing the Artists' Book in *Substance: Metamorphosis of the Book* 26(82). Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Hatch, K. 2005. *"Something Else": Ed Ruscha's Photographic Book*. London: MIT press.

Hubert, R.R. & Hubert, J.D. 1999. *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' books*. New York: Granary Books.

Hyde, J. [Sa]. Journal of Contemporary art: *Buzz Spector*. [online]
Available: www.jac-online.com/spector.html, [2010, April 03]

Kearney, R. & Rasmussen, D.M. 2001. *Continental Aesthetics: Romanticism to Postmodernism, An Anthology*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell publishing.

Keynes, G. 1964. *A Study of the Illuminated Books of William Blake: Poet, Printer, Prophet*. Paris: Trojan Press.

Khafila, J. 2001. *The Dialogue between Painting and Poetry: livres d'artistes 1874–1999*. Cambridge: Black Apollo.

Kleber, B. 2009. Department of the newly uncovered [Online]
Available: containerlist.glaserarchives.org/index.php?id=60 [2011, October 15]

Klima, S. 1998. *Artists Books, a Critical Survey of the Literature*. New York: Granary Books.

- Kraus, R.E. 2005. Postmodernism's Museum Without Walls in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, edited by R Greenberg, B W Ferguson and Nairne, S. London: Routledge: 341-348.
- Lauf, C. & Phillpot, C. 1998. *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artist's Books*. New York: D.A.P.
- Lamarque, P. & Olsen, S. H. 2004. *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition, an Anthology*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lippard, L. 1973. *Six years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. California: University of California Press.
- Lippard, L. R. 1987. The Artists' Book Goes Public, in *Artist's Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, edited by J Lyons. New York: Visual Studies Press: 45 – 48.
- Lopéz-Pedraza, R. 1996. *Anselm Kiefer: 'After the Catastrophe'*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Lyons, J. 2009. *Artist's books: Visual Studies Workshop Press 1971-2008*. New York: Visual Studies Press.
- Lyons, J.(ed.). 1987. *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*. New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press.
- Malraux, A. 1978. *The Voices of Silence*. New York: Princeton University Press.
- Manovich, L. 2001. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- McLuhan, M. 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- McLuhan, M. 2001. The Medium is the Message in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, edited by MG Durham and D Kellner. London: Blackwell publishing. 129-138.
- Moore, B. & Hendricks, J. 1987. The Page as Alternative Space: 1950 to 1969 in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* edited by J Lyons. New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press: 87- 96.
- Museum of Modern Art Library (MoMA), Artists' Book Collection, Queens, New York, NY.
New York Public Library (NYPL), Schwarzman Building, New York, NY.
- Paton, D.M. 2009. *South African Artists' Books* [Online]
Available: www.theartistsbook.org.za/view.asp?pg=research [2010, January 10]
- Paton, D.M. 2000, South African Artist's books and Book-Objects since 1960. (MA) Thesis. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Paton, D. M. [Sa]. *Some Thoughts on Artists' Books in General and the Exhibition in Particular*. [Online]

Available: http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/exhibition_1/dp_essay.htm [2010, January 05]

Paton, D. M. 2006. *Navigating the Bookscape: Artists' Books and the Digital Interface*. Johannesburg: [Sn].

Peixoto, T. Bently, J., Brown, S. & Szelkun, S. 2001-2. *Artist's Yearbook*. Boston: Magpie Press.

Perrée, R. 2002. *Cover to Cover; The Artist's Book in Perspective*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers.

Phillpot, C. 1987. Some Contemporary Artists and their Books in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* edited by J Lyons. New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press: 97-132.

Pinch, T. 2009. The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT): The Old, the New, and the Nonhuman in *Material Culture and Technology in Everyday Life: Ethnographic Approaches*, edited by Vannini, P. New York: Peter Lang: 45 – 58.

Schattauer, N. 2007. *Prima Vista: Artist's books*. Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications.

Seyffret, M, personal interview, Stellenbosch JS Gericke Library, 15 April 2009

Shillingsburg, P. L. 2006. *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, K. 2002. *Two Hundred Books; An Anecdotal Bibliography*. New York: Keith Smith Books.

Smith, P. 1996. *The Whatness of Bookness or What is a Book*. [Online]
Available: <http://www.philobiblon.com./bookness.shtml>[2011, September13]

Stein, B. 2009. *The Book is a Public Place* [Online]
Available: www.theage.com.au/articles/2009/07/23/1247942011314.html[2010, January 10]

Supreme Court of Appeal. 1997, March 27. *Skotness v South African Library*. (ZASCA 28) SAFLII: South Africa.

Tasillo, M. 2007. Shaping a New Critical Discourse for the Field in *The Journal of Artists' Books* edited by Freeman, B., Long, E., Meador, C. & White, T. Chicago: Colombia College: 12-13.

Van Eden, J. & Du Preez, A. 2005. *South African Visual Culture*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Vannini, P.2009. *Material Culture and Technology in Everyday Life: Ethnographic Approaches*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Walkup, K. 2009. *The Book is a Public Place; Traditional and Emerging Formats of Artists' Books: Where do we go from here?* [2009, July 25] [Online]
Available: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/contrad09/conpdfs/walkupimages.pdf [2010, January 10]

Wasserman, K., Drucker, J. & Niffenegger, A. 2007. *The Book as Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Woman in the Arts*. New York, N.Y.: Princeton Architectural Press.

Warburton, N. 2003. *The Art Question*. London: Routledge.

Wharton, G. 2005, The Challenges of Conserving Contemporary Art in *Collecting the New, Museums and Contemporary*, edited by B Altshuler. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 163-77.

Woman's Studio Workshop. 2010. *Colophon Page: Modern Illustrated Books and Fine Press Books* [Online]
Available: colophon.com/gallery/minsky/illum.htm [2011, October 15]

Yale Centre for British Art. 2010. [Online]
Available: www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/mellon/education-guide/developing-art-markets,495,AR.html [2011, October 15]

Zaayman, C. 2005. Riding A Different Wave: Digital Media and Subcultural Expression, in *South African Visual Culture*, edited by J van Eeden & A du Preez. Pretoria: Van Schaik:152-171.