

The Artists Book in General, the Altered Book in Particular

Cheryl Penn

Paper based on the dissertation *THE USE OF THE ARTIST'S BOOK AS A VERSATILE FORM OF EXPRESSION IN THE WORK OF SELECTED ARTISTS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ALTERED BOOK* (2009).

Abstract

This study broadly investigates the artist's book as a form of visual expression, placing particular emphasis on the altered book. The project gives a short history of the artist's book, accedes to the complexities of attempting to define this art form, as well as providing a postmodern context for altered books.

The artist's book as a form of expression by an artist offers an interdisciplinary approach to art making, calling on such disciplines as printmaking, painting, drawing, textual narrative, calligraphy, papermaking and bookbinding - to name a few. Artists making these books draw their inspiration from the smallest events of daily life to the grand narratives of history and mythology, echoing the words of Mallarmé (Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:17), "everything in the world exists in order to end up as a book".

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Chapter One: Contextualizing Artists' Books

Section One: *The Book versus the Artist's Book*

In 1895, Mallarmé the French poet wrote that "everything in the world exists in order to end up as a book" (Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:17). We take the book, and the book format for granted. Books are man-made artifacts designed to carry information. Fictional information, non-fictional information, pictorial information - any sort of 'portable' information. Books are part of our cultural heritage. The aim of this paper is to investigate the artist's book as a versatile form of expression, well articulated by Bright (2005:35) when she wrote about the artist's book as "the book itself (becoming) an organic entity whose very form participates in its expressive power, and where turning a page is an act akin to the waving of a magicians wand". Interaction with the artist's book is about the artist and reader removing the cultural assumptions of the traditional book and transforming it into an expression of artistic integrity and compulsion.

In order for a book to become more than a simple information container, the artist seeks to actively involve the reader in the viewing process. This is achieved when the content and form of the book are considered together and given equal meaning and import. Books as cultural artifacts carry loaded historic meaning. "From its inception, the book has been associated with power" (Miller, 2000), with only the wealthy being able to afford books, or even the education necessary to read them. An artist may expressively use this association of power in the message, materials, form and content of an artists' book to make the viewer aware of this association.

For most people the word 'book' conjures up the idea of an object filled with pages, bound by a cover, consisting of printed words and/or images. It has become difficult to think of books without the context of a beginning, middle and an end, purporting some narrative or progression of thought. Books can be experienced on many levels: the experience of the words and/or images; the experience of size and luxury of the volume; the experience derived from the feel and quality of the paper and the uniqueness of the cover, either by font, texture or imagery. We are drawn to particular books because of titles and promised content, perceived uniqueness, collectability, or the age of particular volumes.

Individuals seek to become immersed within the content, form or structure of a book for many reasons; artists' books seek to enhance, challenge or renew the viewers' familiarity with the traditional book.

Book artists wish to make the reader aware of the incarnation of the *book as more than*; more than narrative or image, more than information and reading experience, more than private space for reflection and contemplation. Through the artist's book, the artist seeks to complicate and enrich the reader's encounter by interrupting or subverting the traditional book. It is the artist's intent to "embody ideas about the book as an object and as a concept in its form and materials" (Bright, 2005:5).

In the introduction to the book dealing with the art of Rosamond Purcell, Sven Birkerts (Purcell, 2006:11) wrote, as "shadings of the world ambushed by the artist's eye - they [artists' books] also induce, in echo-life of delayed recognition, the most provocative mediation on the defining paradoxes of the book".

It is the provocation of the traditional book to which a successful book artist aspires. This dual nature of the artist's book, as book and as art, has raised several issues as to the uniqueness of the artists' book as an art work. Bright (2005:6) comments on this issue by asking whether or not "the artist's book has helped to enlarge our concept of what constitutes art and art-making". Textual readings on this question have answered in the affirmative. For example, Renato Barilli (1994) wrote of the artist's book as an "extraordinary instrument" used from the moment "art decided to step beyond its traditional areas and practice alternative means". Keith Smith (2004:viii) wrote of artists' books as being 'a bridge' between the writer [artist] and viewer. Drucker (2004:9) has written that artists' books "have served to express aspects of mainstream art which were not able to find expression in the form of wall pieces, performances or sculpture [with artists] engaging with the more subtle and complicated fact of the book's capacity to be a highly malleable, versatile form of expression".

Another question currently being addressed is the formalizing of further approaches that will assist in the evaluation of artistic works in book format. Gary Frost (2005:3) wrote, "this topic is the aesthetic consequence of a work of book art in the hands of the reader where tactile qualities and features of mobility are appreciated. This is a haptic (pertaining to the technology of touch) domain where the study of touch as a mode of communication is at work". It is one of the peculiar features of artists' books that they are hand-held art, unique and quite different from most other forms of visual expression. It is this tactile quality which contributes greatly to the meaning of a successful artist's book. It does of course create another logistical problem: how does one exhibit a hand-held artifact? How many people can hold it before it falls apart and loses its material value?

Artists and the visual arts use the book format as communication to try and escape the "oppressive structural limits that have always condemned art to be a manifestation of space" (Barilli, 1994). Barilli states that art objects, for example paintings, have to present themselves in a space, revealing every resource simultaneously. Thus everything is immediately evident in terms of form, structure and artistic expression. The artist's book on the other hand, makes use of sequences and series, narratives and/or a systematic collection of information (visual or textual), the grouping of similar, or seemingly unrelated elements into a relatively small, portable format which is interacted with in a private, tactile space - the intimate space of the reader. Drucker (2004:8) wrote of books as being "low maintenance, relatively long-lived, free floating objects with the capacity to convey a great deal of information, and serve as a vehicle to communicate far beyond the limits of an individual life or contacts".

It is this capacity which drives many artists to create books as a versatile form of expression: the capacity to sometimes load large amounts of information in a conceptual manner in a portable space; the capacity to express the unexpected in a capricious format; the capacity to articulate the most intimate information, in an intimate artwork, for an intimate encounter. The book format can also provide the freedom to have fun, a way to articulate humour and absurdity, or it may be a cherished recollection of memory in a personal space.

Mallarmé wrote that "the foldings of a book form in miniature a tomb for our souls" (Rothenberg and Guss,1996:15). Mallarmé has also referred to the book as "a spiritual instrument" (ibid:14). These phrases encapsulate the intrinsic need of humankind to articulate and record the daily round of life, the need to visually express spiritual concepts outside the realms of this dimension and to deal with matters of death. Such a record is the ancient Egyptian **Book of the Dead** (1350-1300 BC) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1.

Late 18th dynasty (1350-1300 BC). Folio from **The Book of the Dead**. Papyrus scroll. 39.2 cm x 71.3cm. Collection: British Museum.

Prior to the codex format with which we are universally familiar, 'book' formats such as clay tablets, wax tablets and scrolls were the earliest objects onto which text was inscribed. Some researchers consider the Sumerian clay tablets (Fig. 2), dated around 3500 BC, to be the earliest book form. "Sumerians (used the) cuneiform alphabet, pressed into clay with a triangular stylus. Clay tablets were dried and/or fired for longevity. Some even had 'clay envelopes' which were also inscribed" (Knops, 1998).

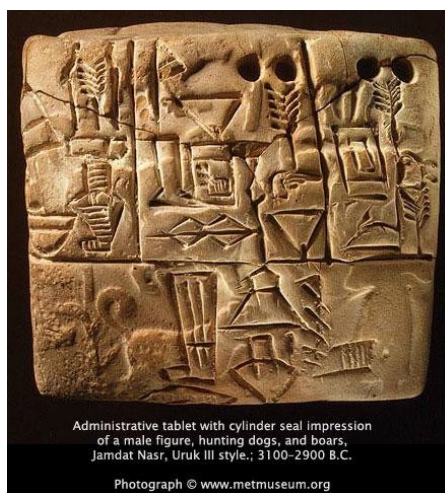


Figure 2.
Sumerian Administrative clay tablet with cylinder seal impression. 3100-2900 BC. Clay; (5.5cm x 6cm x 4.2cm)
Collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

These clay tablets were called 'tokens' and were also used for counting agricultural and manufactured goods. As time went by, tokens were protected from loss and theft by storage in sealed hollow containers which have come to be called envelopes (Lawrence, 1996).

The book 'as a tomb for the soul' is best seen in the papyrus scrolls containing the texts of **The Book of the Dead** (Fig.1). This is the name given by Egyptologists to "a group of mortuary spells written on sheets of papyrus covered with magical texts and accompanying illustrations called vignettes" (Parsons, 1996). The texts, nearly two hundred in total, are divided into individual spells or chapters, with no one papyrus containing them all. Specific chapters could be selected out of the collection depending on the status of the person making the choice. For example, if a person was prosperous and his death not untimely, he would hire a scribe to write an 'original' portion of the text for him, based on his individual choice of spells.

The less affluent had to make do with a ready-written text. The spells were intended to grant the spirit forms of the deceased the freedom to move freely in the afterlife. 6

This consisted of a template in which gaps had been left for the insertion of the titles and names of the individual (Parsons, 1996). One of the best preserved copies is **The Papyrus of Ani** written in about 1240 BC. "This version of the book is filled with beautiful pictures of Ani and his wife as they travel through the land of the dead and to The Halls of Ma'ati and beyond" (Seawright, 1995). The spells were originally selected by the Egyptians as *The Book of the Coming Forth by Day*, and these spells, together with the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts "primarily served to provision and protect the deceased: [they] were concerned with descriptions and practical help and magical assistance for the hereafter" (Parsons, 1996). The **Book of the Dead** is thus a collection of spells used to be able to survive the afterlife, as well as hymns of praises to the deities. It also includes speeches and spells to enable the bearer to pass the tests and judgments of the underworld. It would be the epitome of what Mallermé described as a "spiritual instrument" (Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:17).

The transmission of ideas, both textual and visual, has also not always been in linear format. "The nonlinear visual book has been part of communication history since the beginning of human life, before codified systems of writing, objects were decorated or modified in such a way as to communicate a message" (Davidson, 1997). Such an artifact is the **Phaistos Disc**, (Fig.3), dated around 1500 BC. This small disc (16cm across) was found on the island of Crete in 1908. It was produced "by pressing relief-carved symbols into the soft clay, then baking it. Although it contains the germ of the idea of printing, it appears to be unique" (Knops, 1998). The inscriptions on its two sides appear to be the only ones of their kind and they have never been deciphered. "The symbols bear no resemblance to any of the ancient script of that time, period and area. The signs are recognizable as humans, plants and houses and other objects, but their meaning in relation to each other is unknown" (Davidson, 1997).



Figure 3.

Phaistos Disc. 1500 BC. Clay. 16cm diameter. Collection: Iraklion Museum, Crete.

Other non-linear 'book' objects include knotted cords used to store information. The most well-known of the knotted cords used for information storage is the 'quipu' (Fig.4) developed and used by the Inca in ancient Peru (Davidson, 1997), although many ancient cultures such as the Chinese, Japanese and Siberians have been known to use this format. Quipu means knot in Quechua, the native language of the Andes, with the Incas using this as "a system of accounting and data recording, a device in which cords of various colors were attached to a main cord with knots" (Sze, 2005).



Figure 4.

Illustration from *The Indian Chronicle*. de Ayala, Felipe Guaman Poma. 1615. 1200 pages, notes, pen and ink drawings. Dimensions not given. Collection: Biblioteca Real de Dinamarca, Copenhagen.

The way the knots were connected together, the colors of the cords, their placement, the types of knots, the size of the knots and the spaces between the knots all contributed to their meaning. "Archeologists have recently suggested that authors used the quipu to compose and preserve poems and legends. Because there are relatively few words in Quechua, the cords of a quipu could be used as pronunciation keys" (Sze, 2005).

Walls of caves, rocks, clothing, sticks, trees, in fact most surfaces have been used since ancient times to record the lives, stories, catastrophic incidents, celebrations and surroundings of humans. This transmission of ideas, although not always linear in format, represents the beginnings of visual communication we enjoy today. As illustrated, "most European languages are written left-to-right and top-to-bottom, but other variations exist" (Davidson, 1997).

Before the first century BC, both Greeks and Romans used wax tablets (Fig. 5) framed and backed with wood for correspondence, note taking, orders and the recording of temporary information. "At times, two or more tablets were joined together with thongs or cords, similar to a 3-ring binder. The Latin name for this was *_codex_*, from the word for wood" (Knops, 1998). This wax tablet (Fig.5) "is the only Roman deed of sale of a slave ever to have been discovered in Britain. Written for a rich Roman bureaucrat over 2,000 years ago, it also reveals startling evidence that some slaves in London could afford to pay high prices for slaves of their own .

Dated to around AD 80-120, the legal document relates to a Gallic slave-girl called Fortunata who was sold for 600 denarii - a price far higher than the annual salary of a legionary soldier" (Holmes, 2003).

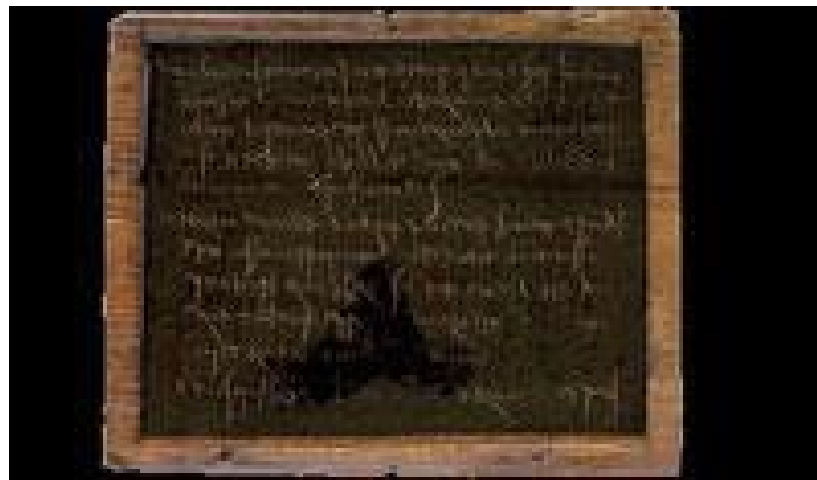


Figure 5.
RomanWaxTablet.AD80-AD120.
Silver fir tablet containing eleven lines of text inscribed into black wax with a sharp metal stylus. Dimensions not given.
Collection: Museum of London.

Professor Hurtado (2002) notes that one of the most puzzling questions in the history of the book is "why the early Christians so emphatically embraced the codex over the scroll as the preferred format for their books". He writes that about "98% of all non-Christian sources dating from before 300 AD are recorded on scrolls and about 2% on codices", this being entirely reversed in the matter of Christian manuscripts. Here the percentages are reversed showing a clear preference for the codex format over the scroll format. He continued by arguing that this preference appears to be one of the "features that distinguished early Christianity from its cultural environment in general, and from Judaism in particular" (Hurtado, 2002).

By the fifth century, the general use of the codex format was evident. Hurtado (2002) believes that the adoption of the codex was a consequence of a wider culture realizing the practical advantages "of a form already developed by their Christian predecessor, the coming of the codex one of several examples of the impact that Christianity was to have on the wider culture of late Roman antiquity".

The **Codex Amiatinus** (Fig. 6) dated to about AD 716, was made at the scriptorium of the twin monasteries Wearmouth and Jarrow near Newcastle, Northumbria. It was the first "codex to bring together the entire old and new testament in 1030 folios in a single binding" (Knopps, 1998). This particular codex was compiled by a number of scribes and consists of over 2060 vellum pages, made from 515 animal skins. It was originally one of three extensive Bibles, made up of the hides of more than 1500 animals. This reveals the huge material wealth and capacity of Wearmouth-Jarrow in Bede's day (Sole, 2007).

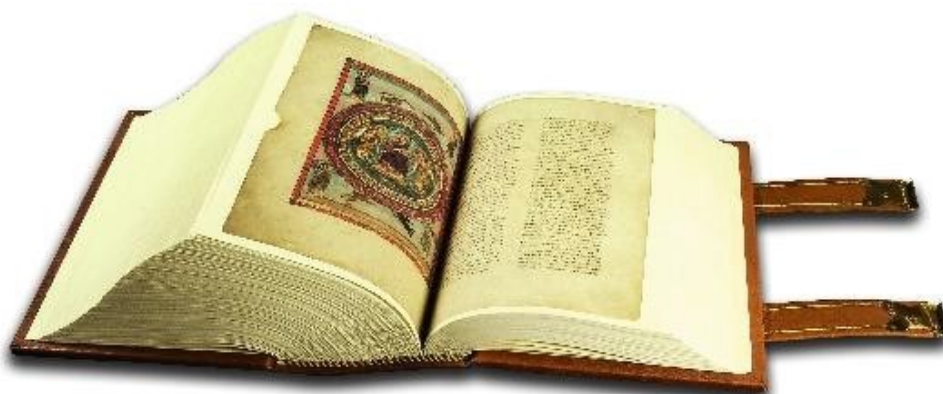


Figure 6.
The Codex Amiatinus. AD 716. Vellum. 2060 page

An interesting aside to the history of books and paper making is the important invention of watermarks on paper. This technique originated in 1276 and was first used by one of the Fabriano Mills in Tuscany. The watermark technique involved "a brass wire motif being stitched onto the sieve plate of the cylinder press. This meant that the fibers are less dense at this point so that more light can pass through the paper" (Cartier Fabriano Website, 2007). "One can assume that the reason for the watermark was to give the product a branded trade mark of superior quality" (Knopps, 1998). The Fabriano website (Cartier Fabriano Website, 2007), states that the watermarks were initially used to reproduce the trademark of different papermakers. There is a significant collection of archival Fabriano watermarks going back to the first one in 1276, showing a mark for each year until modern times.

Another important innovation was the use of animal gelatin for the surface sizing of the paper. This technique resulted in the paper being easier to write on, and solved the problems of aging caused by starch sizing. Prior to this innovation, due to the aforementioned problems, the use of paper was forbidden to chancelleries and notaries for public deeds (History of Fabriano, 2007).

Mallarme, in his essay on the book as a 'spiritual instrument' wrote of the book as "the hymn, harmony and joy, grouped as a pure unit in some lightning circumstance, the [relationship] between everything" (Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:14). It is the book as mobile space, the container of reflection and absorption, the apparatus of fabrication and the space of intimacy that the book artist wishes to explore; often drawing on the history of the codex and the various other formats the 'book' has undergone. The interrogation of form is vital to the success of an artist's book, and an understanding of its method of expression is imperative to the creation of a work of art which accomplishes its purpose as an artist's book.

Book artists should also be concerned about the nature and operation of the book itself. "This involvement requires a certain setting aside of the belief that we all know how to operate a book. For instance, what *really* happens when we open the cover of a book? How is the reader likely to proceed through the book? What prompts different approaches? In what way might access to the content inside be controlled?" (Walkup, 2003).

Here Kathleen Walkup is outlining some of the challenges for the book artist: challenges, which can in some measure, be successfully met by an insightful awareness of the actual operation of the book as a form of expression. The artist may bring about delayed access to narrative, interruption of narrative flow, ways of hiding information and interaction by the reader; elements that are essential to an understanding of the work and the pace at which the reader might access the work.

Section Two: *Defining Artists' Books.*

Jack Ginsberg (2008) wrote that "most experts in the field have decided not to try and define artists' books apart from 'a book made by an artist' - anything else excludes something. For example you can't exclude any material (specifying paper, say) or any structure (specifying codex, say) or any method of production (specifying letterpress or etching, say)". There has been extended debate around the subject of artists' books in the last twenty plus years, with theorists in this genre agreeing that "we still lack a generally accepted and workable definition of artists' books in spite of many perceptive commentaries" (Bright xiii:2005). Drucker (2004:1), rather than attempting a rigid or definitive explanation about artists' books wrote about "a zone of activity. This zone is made up at the intersection of a number of different disciplines, fields and ideas - rather than at their limits".

Drucker (2005) wrote further that "rather than a rigid, reductive scheme, we need an appreciation of the many traditions on which artists' books draw. [These include] Calligraphy and illumination in manuscripts

- literary publishing
- fine press
- livre d' artiste
- photographic albums
- documentary works
- journals and diaries
- exhibition catalogues
- performance records
- conceptual work minimalist work
- pop art and multiples
- graphic novels
- etc."

When viewing the book-making influences and fields within which the book arts lie, one is made aware of the "number of different concepts, design decisions and production methods that can make a book 'work' as a book" (Drucker, 2005).

Different book artists will of course place different emphasis, or make use of different methodologies, in order to arrive at a particular book form.

However there are a number of distinctions and conceptual issues which need to be taken cognizance of, in order to set parameters for a workable version of a definition in providing a context for a critical discourse on artist's books. Not every book made by an artist is an artist's book. In defining whether or not a book functions as an 'artist's book', intent is everything. Acclaimed book artist Angela Lorenz (2002) wrote that she would "hesitate to establish rules, only tendencies" in attempting to formulate a workable definition.

Drucker (2005) wrote that critical discourse is a "meta-language for talking about works of art". She wrote further that "criticism attempts to articulate principles from cases, [asking] what is the project of this work, what are its premises and principles [and] does the work succeed on those terms, but also, were the terms worthwhile and interesting to start with" (ibid). Definitions and counter definitions about artists' books abound on the internet, in books, in informal discussions, in journals, in critical writing - in fact wherever there is discussion on the making of these art works. There appears to be a preoccupation with trying to define artists' books. This could be due, in part, to the immense diversity of form and content within the realm of artists' books. (In 2014 as I rewrite this article, I think this preoccupation may have lessened).

Artists' books encompass fine press books, unbound folios, letter-press printed works, sculptural book works, altered books, Chapbooks, multiple Xeroxed books, unique one-off books, handmade books, professionally printed and bound limited edition artists' books, burnt books, books which are unable to be opened or even read, books with pages made of Perspex in metal frames; in fact the list is endless.

Having examined all the types of books one can encounter, one is then faced with the question of reproduction; is the reproduction of an existing work of art an original artwork? Does the artist have to be involved in all stages of the book for it to be an original work? What if the production, printing and binding are all done by others and it is then further done in an edition, for example of one thousand? Is it then an original, unique work of art?

Bright (2005: 4, 5) has divided the range of artists' books into four categories, namely:

1. the letterpress-printed fine press book, where the craft and text is the most remarkable feature of the book.
2. the deluxe book - "often dominated by imagery, printed through a printmaking medium, and bound with costly materials"
3. the multiple bookwork - altered images and text usually occurring to create a new sort of interaction in content. Bright comments that this type of bookwork is often printed in large editions, at a relatively cheap price with the ability to reach a large audience. Its content is also relatively populist.
4. the sculptural bookwork - this is a work which may be perceived as sculpture, and one which comments on, or responds to, or questions the cultural nuances associated with the term 'book'.

The content and/or form of the book works in the last two categories can interact with or comment on, the book as a cultural artifact, or object of association.

This categorization of artists' books by Bright is expanded on by the on-line information given by the Special Collections Library at the University of Central Florida (2006). To paraphrase the information given on the website, the following description of categories is provided:

- 1 **Fine press books** are similar to deluxe books as a great deal of attention is given to the material prior to book construction, but the distinction comes with how the material is processed. Fine press books tend to focus more on the literary content of the text and these books are created in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts Movement. They are noted for their intricate letter press and often labor intensive, fine binding techniques. Books such as the **Chaucer Day Book** (1958) (Fig.7), make use of illustrated pages and decorative capitals with the book having the feeling of overall grandeur.

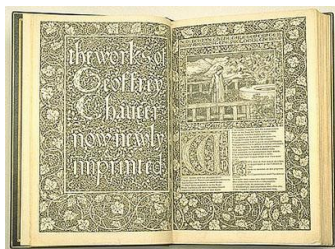


Figure 7.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. 1958. **The Chaucer Day Book**. A Facsimile of the William Morris Kelmscott Chaucer, with the original 87 illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones. Cleveland: World Publishing Company. Fine Press Book. Collection: University of Central Florida.

2. **Deluxe books** are created in the style of 'the star artist'. These luxury books are generally rare and very expensive. Modern printing techniques, such as lithography can allow for longer editions. Deluxe books pay closer attention to their imagery and this is what separates them from fine press books. The imagery plays an equally important, if not sometimes a more important role, than the text in the deluxe editions. "Deluxe refers to the high quality materials used in the production process to stimulate the pleasures of sight and touch and sometimes smell" (Special Collections Library at the University of Central Florida, 2006). **Lonely Tylenol**, (2003) (Fig. 8) illustrates such a book.

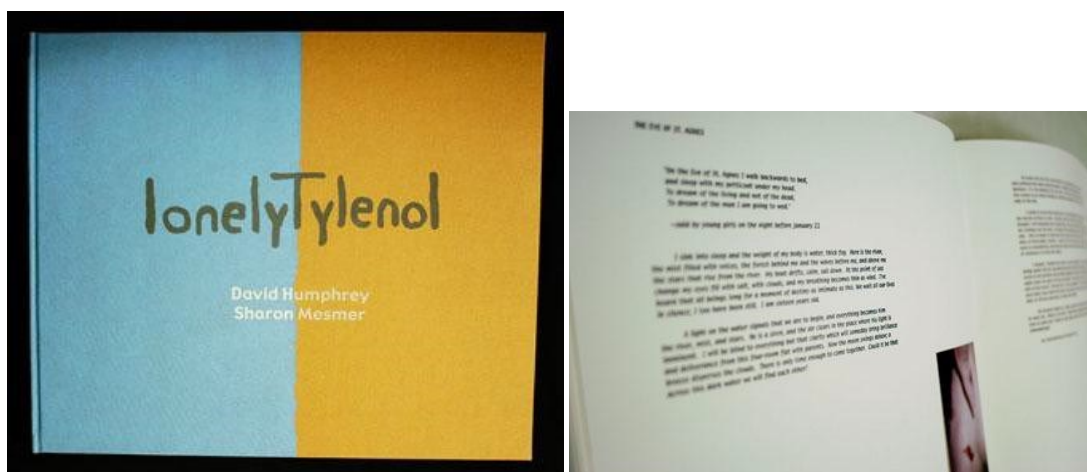


Figure 8.
Humphrey, David and Sharon Mesmer. 2003. **Lonely Tylenol**.
Orlando: Flying Horse Press. Deluxe Book. Dimensions not given. Special Collection: University of Central Florida.

3. **Multiple bookworks** which rely on commercial printing techniques – such as offset printing and even household copiers are a fairly recent artform, starting in the early 1960's. They are printed in large editions, several hundred or more, and are fairly inexpensive. "These traits mean that they are more geared towards the public and often contain avant-garde or radical ideas. They are excellent mediums for the spread of information or ideas" (Special Collections Library at the University of Central Florida, 2006). An example is the 400 copies published in 1963 of Edward Ruscha's **Twenty- Six Gasoline Stations**, (1962) (Fig. 9). These multiple bookworks were about \$3 each, they were portable and pocket sized. "The idea behind this was that theoretically 400 different people could experience his art at the same exact time, in completely different ways" (Special Collections Library at the University of Central Florida, 2006).

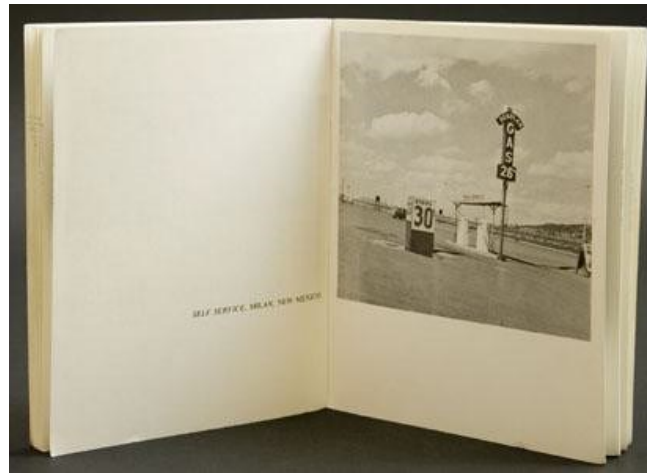


Figure 9.
 Ruscha, Edward. 1962 edition. **Twentysix Gasoline Stations**.
 Alhambra: Cunningham Press. Multiple bookwork. 7 1/16 x 5 1/2 x 3/16 inches.
 Collection: University of Central Florida.

4. Sculptural bookworks are described as "almost the antithesis of multiple bookworks" (Special Collections Library at the University of Central Florida, 2006). They are rarely, if ever, done in editions, are almost never handled, often expensive and concentrate on the book as an object rather than as a medium. They may be impossible to read (in a book sense) by, for example, being glued together or wrapped in barbed wire. **Bon Bon Mots** (1998) (Fig. 10) is considered a sculptural book where the book cover is shaped like a candy box which holds five other books.



Figure 10.
 Chen, Julie. 1998. **Bon Bon Mots: a Fine Assortment of Books**.
 Sculptural book work. Berkeley: Flying Fish Press. Letterpress on Paper, Fimo, polymer
 clay, Plexiglas. 10 x 7 x 2 in. Collection: University of Central Florida.

Muriel Prince (2008) succinctly describes artists' books as concept-driven when she wrote that "book artists use, and combine, whatever means necessary to give form to their idea, crossing all literary and artistic boundaries. to give physicality to the concept". She went on to state that this notion of a successful 'whole' work "utilizes the whole design and production process to reinforce the message of the subject matter. Shapes, folds, text patterns and materials can be used to nudge the viewer in the direction of the artist's message, producing a unified coherent statement the outset" (ibid). Peter Verheyen (in Miller, 2000), one of the leading figures in the world of book art, wrote "not everything can be a book. That doesn't make it non-art, just not an (artist's) book". In the confines of their own disciplines, creative individuals bring expertise and purpose to the mediums of book making.

This is reinforced by Kopystynska (in Miller, 2000) when she said:

the book as an art, and an artist's book are two completely different things. An artist's book can be made by somebody who does not know the book structure. For him/her a form or image is used to convey a certain message that is not connected with the book as a medium. Book as an art must combine two equally important elements: an intellectual and artistic message. In other words, the expression and form must melt together. In an artist's book, the symbol or an image of a book serves only as an excuse for expressing some other idea. In an artist's book the EXPRESSION is a primary concern. In [a] book that is an art both EXPRESSION and STRUCTURE are equally important. Artist's book? A piece where bookish shapes, objects or book symbols serve as a form of artistic expression.

Artists' books are laborious to produce, frequently misunderstood, difficult to exhibit and their creation commonly stems from a love of reading and/or books. Such books are multi/interdisciplinary works of art, not constrained by tradition or convention. Artists' books make use of a range of mediums, in any sort of vaguely codex format (bound or unbound), including stitching, collage, drawings, paintings, etchings, linocuts, printing, dying, photography, digital printing, photocopying, reproduction, uniqueness, text, carving, embossing, pressed organic matter, watermarks, fabric, folding, architectural elements, paper, glass and mirrors; there is a freedom to give voice to the idea which may be quite unparalleled in any other form of artistic expression.

Drucker (in Wasserman, 2007:14) wrote, "women create authority in the world by structuring a relation between enclosure and exposure. The women who make books out of the materials of their lives and imaginations establish a balance that gives voice to their own issues on their own terms". Women also use the book format as a form of autobiographical writing, not shying away from difficult or disturbing self revelations.

These may include dealing with cancer, loss, abuse, intimate relationships and personal revelations. Prince (2008) wrote that "women in general do not shy away from difficult subjects, and women book artists in particular, seem to embrace the controversial, disturbing, horrific and ugly". Interestingly, the book format provides a very 'attractive' way of dealing with negative subject matter in a personal, intimate form; the seemingly holding the unseemly. The book is an outward manifestation of inner thoughts and thought processes, sometimes unformulated, sometimes complete. Books, are the ideal format for narrative and memory, expressed in word and image; they are a superior vessel for ideas in this regard. By their very nature they are layers and layers (pages) of life 'stuff', intimate archeological digs of the mind where meaning is never instant.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the "the creative space in which books and art intersect, where imagination takes surprising turns in new ideas, media and techniques, are artists' books" (Wasserman, 2007:18). The Jewish poet Jabés wrote that "the book is as old as fire and water" (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:14). As a cultural artifact the book has traditionally presented its reader with information, fictional or non-fictional, in a particular format. However "nowadays, the book - its death forewarned - has found new energies with new generations, and has become a receptacle for real experience and multiplied its expressiveness with new techniques and different productive capacities" (Maffei and Picciau, 2008:17). Heusser, (in Clay 2001:147) wrote of the artist's book as "drawing attention to a new hierarchy, one in which the book is no longer merely read but experienced as an aesthetic phenomenon". Waldrop (2002), quoted Jabés as saying that "the world exists because the book does". Will someone one day say that art exists because the artist's book does?

Section Three: A Brief History of the Artist's Book

"The unopened virginal book, moreover, ready for sacrifice from which the red edges of ancient books bleed" (Mallarmé in Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:19).

This section will provide information on the growth of the artist's book through a discussion of Emblem Books, the contribution of William Blake to the genre of artists' books, *livre d'artiste* (artist's book), the period from the early 1900s to the 1960s, and finally the 1960s to the present day where the artists book exists as an art form in its own right. This is a brief overview as numerous books such as *No longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960 - 1980* (Bright, 2005) and *A Century of Artists' Books* (Drucker, 2004) provide a very comprehensive history of artists' books for the interested reader.

It is important to remember "the history of the artist's book has unfolded in the art world, where it belongs. The history of book art complicates an art world context because it highlights art world issues set into play with the transformation of the book from information vehicle into artifact" (Bright, 2005:261). It would be difficult to identify a modernist art movement that does not contain a reference to the artist's book, including such artifacts as artist's journals and independent publications (Drucker, (2005:8). Giorgio Maffei (Maffei and Picciau, 2008: 14) wrote that:

nobody invented art, so nobody can be said to have invented the artist's book
- however, there are at least two dystonias in this evolution: overcoming the idea of a figurative representation of thoughts (which characterized the intrusion of artists into the world of publishing until the late 19th century, and which belong to the genre of illustrated books) and the transformation of art - and therefore the art of books - from something golden into a communications medium, so characteristic of the 1960's.

Using the "two dystonias" of Maffei is a useful tool with which to divide the history of the book as art, but there was, as noted by Drucker (2005:8,9) the use of the book as a form of expression in Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Dadaism which pre-dates the 1960's. Many of the avant-garde artists produced books as part of their artistic endeavors, which included periodicals, pamphlets and manifestos.

I make mention of Emblem Books as more and more libraries are collecting and digitalizing these books as "research in emblems is highly interdisciplinary, attracting scholars of Latin, history, art history [as they are an] unusually rich form of combined artistic and literary expression" (Wade, 2001).

Works such as **The heroicall devises of M. Claudius Paradin, Whereunto are added the Lord Gabriel Symeons and others** (Fig. 11) created by Paradin in 1591 are books whereby "an emblem combines a picture and text for the striking presentation of a message" (Stelts, 2006). It has also been written that "the influence of contemporary media culture and modern advertising techniques have also heightened our appreciation of these books that rely on popular iconography of the Renaissance to produce the print version of a 'sound bite' or slogans to convey a message" (Gordon Collection, 2006). These volumes, which consist of small print editions, wood block printing and engravings make extensive use of allegory and the relationship of word to image to convey their visual message.

Mara Wade (2001) wrote that "each emblem is composed of three constituent elements – a motto, an illustration or 'picture' in the form of a woodcut or engraving, and an explanatory poem or 'subscription': an emblem is more than the sum of its parts, because the interplay between text and image produces a greater meaning than any of the individual components can provide". Drawing on totally diverse sources, ranging from fables, mythology, the Bible, medicine, science and classical antiquity, emblem books borrowed from whatever knowledge and source the author chose. In order to interpret and understand an emblem book the reader had to use humour and knowledge in matching references in the text and image to reveal meaning (Wade, 2001). Stephen Rawles (2008) wrote:

the symbolical means of expression characteristic of the genre invites a multiplicity of approaches, from the traditional literary or art-historical, to the semiotic; moreover its didactic intention involves the consideration of varied historical and philosophical contexts, ranging from contemporary political events through the complex religious conflicts of the period to the hermetic and the alchemical.

This description of emblem books mirrors the postmodern art genre, where inspiration is drawn from anything, anywhere, anytime, from the small personal narratives of daily life, to the great mega narratives of the past. This is the way in which artists' books function. They are created with the expectation that the viewer will interact with the text and images, in order to arrive at his/her own interpretation and extended meaning.

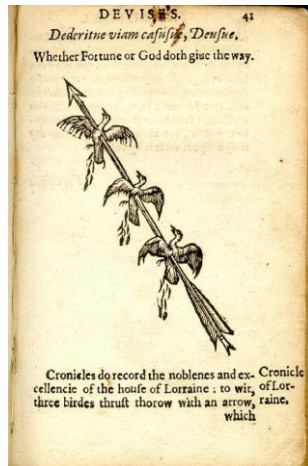


Figure 11.

Paradin, C. 1591. **The heroicall devises of M. Claudius Paradin, Whereunto are added the Lord Gabriel Symeons and others.**

Emblem Book. Dimensions not given. Collection: University of Penn State Libraries.

William Blake (1757-1827), who worked in the late 1700's and early 1800's, has been suggested as the forerunner of the contemporary artist's book as "his work was unique in that it created a painterly union between image and text and he was self published with full control over the entire process" (Miller, 2000). Ian Chilvers (2003:63) wrote that "he was equally gifted in poetry and the visual arts, and in both fields he worked in a highly original, deeply personal idiom that expressed his unconventional views and fiercely independent personality". In books such as **Songs of Innocence and Experience**, (1789) (Fig. 12) he used a technique called 'Illuminated Printing'.

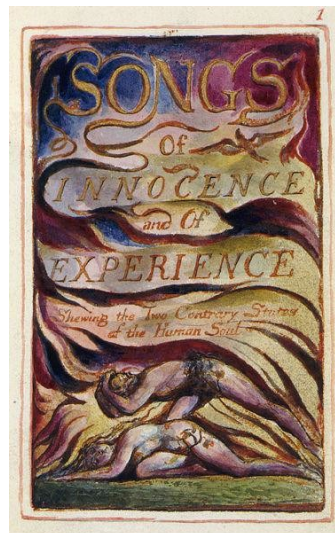


Figure 12.

Blake, W. 1789. **Songs of Innocence and Experience.**
Paper, Illuminated Printing, water colour washes. Dimensions not given.
Collection: University of Rochester.

"What made the books 'illuminated' was not colored inks (as distinct from the usual black) on each plate or even the addition of water colors to the impressions.[it] was created simply by printing from relief-etched plates - that is, from plates produced by the method of printing both letter-press and engraving that Blake 'invented', [combining] the Painter and the Poet" (Essick and Voscomi, 2003). Blake developed a printing method

which allowed for the integration of his written and visual work. John Lynch (2008) stated that: [what] is especially notable about Blake was his role as a predecessor of the sentiments expressed by book artists in the 1960's. Blake was seeking a means of bringing the production of illustrated texts under his own control so that he could become his own publisher, independent of commercial publishers and letterpress printers. The independence is key to the creation of an artist's book.

Miller (2000) wrote that for a decade Blake failed to source a publisher that would

give him free rein to make his own images and engrave his own plates. This resulted in Blake devising a cheap method to print and publish himself. Although this was unfortunate for Blake, his legacy has influenced book makers to this day. [What] is especially notable about Blake was his role as a predecessor of the sentiments expressed by book artists in the 1960's. Blake was seeking a means of bringing the production of illustrated texts under his own control so that he could become his own publisher, independent of commercial publishers and letterpress printers. This independence is key to the creation of an artist's book.

The production of *livre d'artiste*, meaning 'artist's book' "took advantage of the expanded market for visual art which had grown in the 19th century...Artists whose work was featured are among the foremost in 20th century art... Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, Joan Miro, Max Ernst and Pablo Picasso" (Drucker, 2005:3). There are copious quantities of information written on the genre of *livre d'artiste*, also called illustrated books. These are books which were created from the mid-1890's "as a publishing enterprise initiated by such figures as the Parisian art dealers Vollard and Kahnweiler who saw a business opportunity in marketing deluxe editions" (Verheyen,1998). These luxurious book editions boasted "large sized format, elaborate production values such as hand coloring, virtuoso printing, fine binding [and] use of rare materials" (Drucker, 2005:3). Although called 'artist's book' in French, theorists do not consider these works to be true artists' books as they do not "interrogate the conceptual or material form of the book as part of [their] intention, thematic interests or production activities (Drucker 2005:3).

Rather, these books were invariably the idea of the publisher with almost no interaction between artist and author" (Verheyen, 1998). These works which were beautiful, hand crafted and filled with original artwork were radical at the time in their first attempts to unify text and image but, as noted by Lynch (2008), "a book of this nature made today is merely following a codified model – an expected presentation and format. As these livres were market driven, they were not a means to promote a voice or opinion, nor were they accessible to a wide market because of their cost".

Following hard on their heels, the book arts, like most mediums were influenced by modernism between 1910 and 1950 (Miller, 2000). The term 'book arts' is defined by Bright (2005:4) as being an "umbrella term, implying a broader meaning [than artists' books] that encompasses related arts such as papermaking and bookbinding, although [it can] convey radically different meanings to those in the field". Avant-garde ideas were being expressed by artists and writers in the form of posters, magazines and pamphlets with the role of artists and writers often overlapping or working in conjunction with each other. "The artist/writer/activist used one set of skills to further the ambitions of a collaborator with another set of skills. While these items were not books, per se, they set the stage for a new way of thinking about and using a craft that had existed for centuries" (Lynch, 2008).

It is important at this juncture to make mention of a writer who has frequently been quoted as having a major influence and inspiration in the production of artists' books, the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). Mallarmé perceived the book to be a conceptual space where the idea of the book "is not rooted in a psychological function for the artist, nor a cultural function for the author [rather it functions as] a metaphysical investigation which focuses on the possibility that form (in the most abstract and philosophical sense) might be realized through 'The Book' " (Drucker 2005:34). Bright (2005:29) quoted Mallarme as writing that the book is a place "where one gradually conjures up an object so as to demonstrate a state of mind". To Mallarmé the page is portrayed "as a living space where meaning could be affected by type size, style and placement" (Bright, 2005:35).

In 1895 Mallarmé wrote of the book in his seminal essay *The Book , Spiritual Instrument* (Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:17) that it was "a spiritual instrument.[a] total expansion of the letter.[an] intervention of the folding.[a] rhythm where dwells the silence, precious, in pursuit of evocative signs, quite literally abolished for the spirit".

Miller (2000) wrote that in his work, Mallarmé was searching "for a book in which typography and even the folding of the pages achieve an ideational, analytical and expressive significance".

Blanchot (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:141) wrote of the book as perceived by Mallarme as an "inevitable structure". His concept of this work as architectural and deliberate, not as a collection of chance through marvelous impressions [by this he means that the book is] a purposeful computation, and the deployment of exceptional powers of concentration capable of organizing all the elements of the work infallibly". The expressiveness of his experimental typography, and his concept of *the book*, influenced many subsequent artists.

For example, in 1909 Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), the Italian poet and one of the founders of the Futurist movement, who was the publisher of an independent, controversial literary magazine, "caught the imagination of writers and artists throughout world by [insisting] that the artist turn his back on past art and conventional procedures, to concern himself with the vital, noisy life of the burgeoning industrial city" (Chipp 1968: 281). The ideas of Futurism meant that writers, artists and poets continually cross-pollinated ideas. Quoting Chipp (1968:282):

in 1912, Marinetti published his theory of "free word" poetry, in which evocative words printed in varying type faces and sizes, linked by mathematical signs rather than grammatical connectives, were scattered dramatically over the page. The painters drew upon this idea and began to use words in their paintings, not as in Cubism, for their forms, but as evocations of sounds and extra-pictorial associations.

Maurizio Scudiero (2003) wrote that "Futurism, as opposed to Cubism an essentially visual movement found its roots in poetry and in the whole renovation of language. **Zang Tumb Tumb** (1914) with its explosive layout, is undoubtedly a masterpiece in this field...the poetic and literary impressions of the explosions of grenades and shots of weapons are here shown graphically with the use of the so called 'words-in-freedom' " (Fig 13).

Just prior to, and running in conjunction with the Italian Futurists, were the Russian avant-garde Futurists. Their development was completely independent to that of the Italians. Drucker (2005:46) wrote that this movement "served as an arena in which the 20th century art of the book emerged".



Figure 13.
Marinetti, F. 1914. **Zang Tumb Tumb**.
Paper, different type-faces, rubberstamp poems. 20 x 14cm.
Collection: Sandro Dorna, Torino.

Janecek (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:186) wrote that the paper these books were printed on was "usually the cheapest and thus the most perishable variety. The writers not having the funds for better paper (there was a great scarcity of paper in Russia during those years), [although it was also chosen as] as anti-establishment gesture". He continued by noting that the "format of the booklets was quite small, typography by letterpress was a relief process, the lithographs which appear with typeset are always *hand-mounted* on the covers or *hand-inserted* within [and] the degree of participation by the artist who originated the image or handwriting would vary" (Janecek in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:187).

The artists who produced books during this time were influenced by "pre-Petrine Russian folk art, medieval manuscripts and 'primitive art'. They also reveal much experimentation in format. In addition to handwriting, which produced the unity of text and illustration found in medieval manuscripts, there is use of rubber stamping and innovative typography" (Hellyer, 2006). One example using these elements is a booklet made by Aleksey Kruchenykh (1886-1968) in 1913 titled **Vzorval'** (Fig. 14).

Krusanov (National Library of Russia, n.d.) wrote:

it is commonly agreed that Russia's literary avant-garde introduced a totally different vocabulary and many new devices, but also introduced a new attitude towards the physical appearance of books and other printed materials. During the first three decades of the 20th century, artists did not regard books simply for the conveyance of intellectual content, but also as objects of art in their own right.

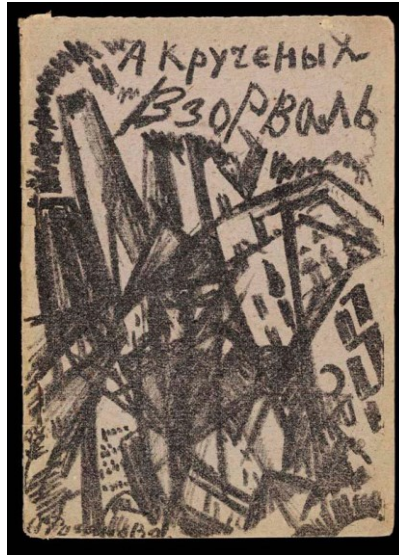


Figure 14.

Kruchenykh, A. 1913. **Vzorval'**.
29 page book. 17.6 x 11.8cm. Collection: The Getty Library.

Lynch (2008) confirmed this when he wrote:

the Russian avant-garde seems to be the first hotbed of activity for radical new uses of the book format. The Russian Futurists began making books as art, in much the same spirit of the 1960s in America, using readily available (and cheap) materials and methods of creation, new approaches to the combination of text and images, a somewhat irreverent attitude towards the establishment, and confirmation of the validity of experimentation and innovation without boundaries or definitions.

The photograph also contributed to the development of contemporary artists' books. In Germany in the 1920s and 1930s Berlin acted as a magnet for nomad artists and writers, and photography contributed material to the development of photo-books (Langford 1997: 139). Lynch (2008) wrote of these photo-books; "while these works were commercially printed, they were based on the purposeful use of sequence with which to create meaning in the book format".

Paton (2000) traces the beginnings of artists' books in South Africa around this time to Irma Stern's **Paradise (Worte der Weisheit)** (Fig. 15), begun in 1919 and finished in 1925. Paton wrote of this work; "the book has the ability to contain, and amplify Stern's artistic aspirations and reflect a spiritual purpose in the role of the artist [which is] congruent with the utopian ideal present in the work of Blake, Morris, Mallarmé and others" (Paton, 2000:34).

Page two of Stern's book reads "this book has been given to me with the intention of keeping reviews of my work - I don't really need a book for that purpose any longer, this book should free me from everyday life - a free and happy playing about in the realm of colorful imagination" (Stern, 1919). Paton (2000:33) wrote that this book "is a considered and sustained conceptual and narrative mediation for the self".



Figure 15.

Stern, I. 1925. **Paradise (Worte der Weisheit)**.
Unique artist's book. Dimensions not given. Collection: Irma Stern Museum, Cape Town.

Following Futurism, the Dada movement also had a large impact on the book arts. "European Dada was founded in Zurich in 1915 by a group of artists and writers including Jean Arp, Hans Richter (1888-1976) and the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), with Duchamp [being] the most influential of all the exponents of Dada (Chilvers, 2003:156). Lynch (2008) noted that the Dada Movement in Europe "used books as a means of expression, and their ethical and political concern for the function of art in society is a precursor to the American idea using books as art during the 1960s".

One of Duchamp's works, which became "a model for the so-called book object and a valuable prototype for the artist's book as it became an accepted art form in the 1960's and 1970's" (Miller, 2000) was **The Green Box** (1934) (Fig. 16). This work was a compilation of "his previous works in a miniaturized facsimile, assembled in a box, a folding exhibition space which, blurred the boundaries between the unique art object and the multiple" (Judovitz, 1998:3). Paul Thirkell (2005) wrote that Duchamp announced to his American patron Walter Arensburg that his intention was to "reproduce the notes made during the gestation and creation of the **Large Glass**. **The Green Box** was printed by the collotype printing plant of Vigier et Brunissen, Paris in an edition of 300 with twenty deluxe versions, some of which were pre-sold to various friends and collectors to help finance the project".

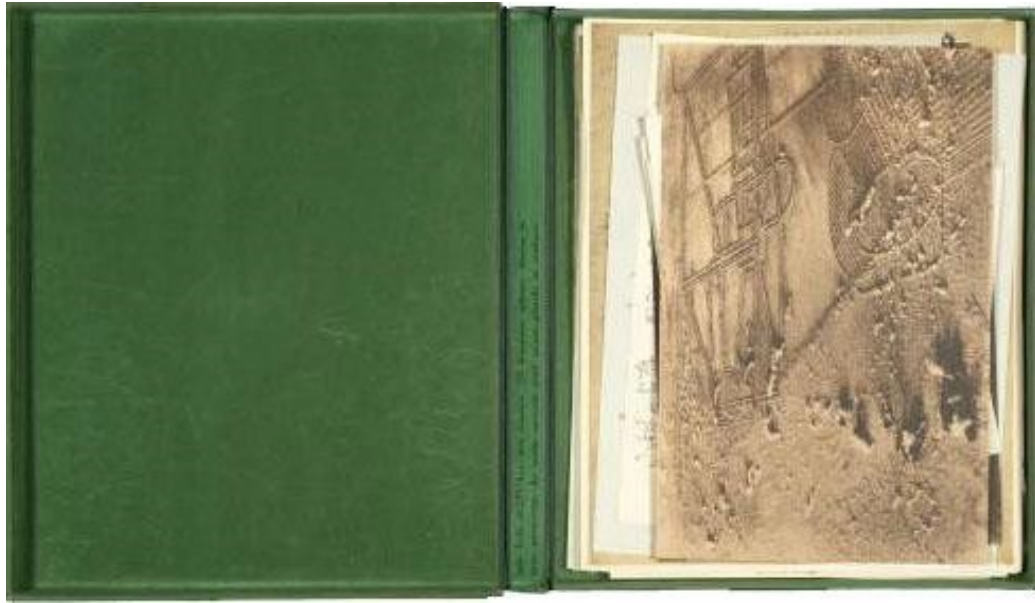


Figure 16.

Duchamp, M. 1934. **The Green Box**. (Interior).
Felt covered cardboard containing one color plate and ninety-three paper elements.
8 in x10 in. Collection: Tate, London.

Collotype and hand colouring printing medium using stencils was chosen by Duchamp to best support the work's concept Judovitz (1998:56). Thirkell (2005) added that "the work bears many of the common hallmarks of a twentieth-century artist's print publication". Judovitz (1998:56) quoted Duchamp as calling this work "a book", which was to accompany **The Large Glass**, also known as **The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors**:

I thought I could collect, in an album, like the Saint-Etienne catalogue, some calculations, some reflections, without relating them. I wanted that album to go with the "Glass" because, as I see it, it must not be looked at in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book and see the two together (Duchamp in Judovitz, 1998:56).

A seminal work, also appearing in 1934, was Max Ernst's (1891-1976) **Une semaine de Bonté (A Week of Kindness)** (Fig. 17). This book, called "a Surrealist novel in collage" (Publishers note 1976:v), is an example of the fact that "the years that followed the invention of collage witnessed one of the most astonishing revolutions in the history of art" (Poggi, 1992:257). **Une semaine de Bonté** is a book that is a "clear instance of the integration of experimental concept and content, [the] quite perfectly realized Surrealist expressions in book form" (Drucker 2004:61).

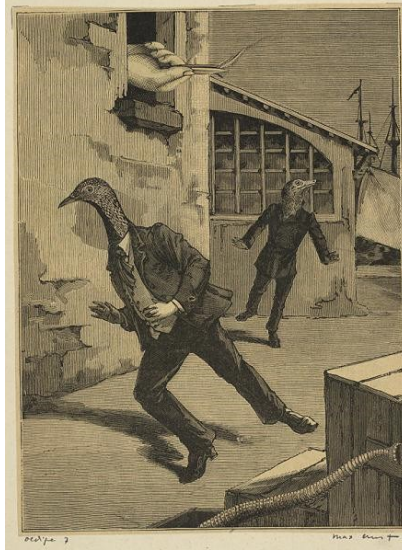


Figure 17.

Ernst, M. 1934. Image from **Une semaine de Bonté (A Week of Kindness)**.
Collage Novel, 5 booklets. Dimensions not given. Collection: Daniel Filipachi and Isidore Ducasse Foundation.

Elger (2004:24) quoted Max Ernst as saying that the "collage technique is the systematic exploitation of the chance, or artificially provoked confrontation of two or more of two mutually alien realities on an obviously inappropriate level – and the poetic spark which jumps across when these realities approach each other". **Une semaine de Bonté** comprised five booklets, "each named after a day of the week, combining selected motifs to create allusive and seductive visual worlds." (Roettig, 2008). Drucker (2004:59) wrote that these works are "almost impossible to see with fresh eyes at this point because they have served as the model for so many imitations [but these are] book-length projects in which this collage method reaches a pinnacle of narrative and visual form".

From the above it is apparent that the Futurists were attempting to create "a recurring tension in their production, between the desire for an absolute origin in immediately perceived sensations, conveyed through spontaneous gestures, and an equally strong desire to formulate laws and to base their work on a language of established signs" (Poggi, 1992:257). Their expression of modern life in book format proved to be an important part of the evolution of the artist's book in its current format. The Dadaists, influenced by the Futurists, used manifestos, magazines, and periodicals which were ideal formats for spreading and sharing stylistic innovations (Drucker 2004:53). The Surrealists used the book format to express their "fascination with the bizarre, the incongruous, and the irrational" (Chilvers, 2003:576).

Whilst the book works of the Futurists, the Dadaists and the Surrealists influenced writers and artists working in the book medium, "there are two artists from the 1960's and 1970's who stand out as pioneers to the current activity in artists' books" (Miller 2000). These two artists are Dieter Roth, also known as Diter Rot (1930-1998), and Ed Ruscha (b. 1937). Miller (2000) wrote:

their works stand as a model to the artists book as a form because they produced book works in a sustained, long term body of artists books [growing] out of the non-traditional, conceptual art forms being developed in the late 1950s and the early '60s and set a foundation for the medium of artists books and particularly for the artists book as a democratic multiple or inexpensive edition.

The multiple bookwork "emerged on several fronts in the 1960s propelled by the expanding phenomenon of independent publishing and by art movements committed to populist principles" (Bright, 2005:108). Drucker (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:386) wrote that the book as a medium for artists took off in the 1960s as "they fitted the sensibility of the 1960s alternative scene, whether produced independently by artists or by galleries as an extension of an exhibition, also giving rise to the hybrid genre of the catalogue as an artist's book".

Roth was an artist who, amongst other mediums, used type to manipulate his aesthetic. Hamilton (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000: 396), in commenting on Dieter Roth's work, said that "the context of type was as a medium of high art". These experiments in typographical design and his consequent "book production was the outgrowth of experimental work in graphic design combined with concrete poetry" (Drucker 2004:73). In works such as **Bok 1956-59** (Fig. 18) reprinted in 1979, the book for Roth "isn't simply as form which provides the means to a continuous sequencing of text. The book is a plastic entity which can be entered into from the back or front - it can accept the limitation of attachment of sheets along a common edge or not. Fundamentally Rot's interest in words is plastic rather than semantic, easily cross[ing] the barriers of language" (ibid, 398).

The improvements in technology, for example the photocopy machine and offset printing, opened up access to cheap methods of book production and democratized art making in allowing control over production and distribution (Lynch, 2008). **Twenty Six Gasoline Stations**, (1962) (Fig. 9) by Ed Ruscha, "is generally cited as the founding instance of artist's bookmaking" (Drucker, 2004:76).

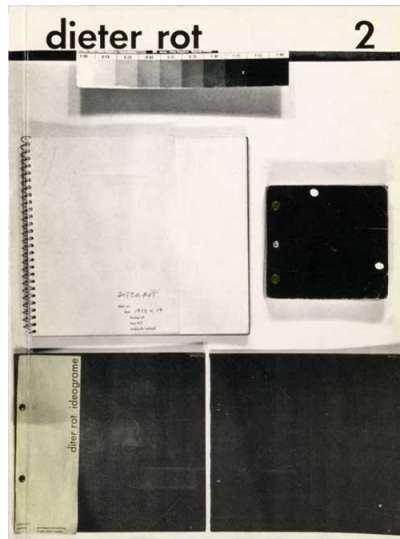


Figure 18.
Roth, D. 1971. Reproduction of **Bok 1956-59**.
Artists Book. Dimensions not given.

Importantly, "Ruscha made books visible within the art world in a way which would not have been possible for literary based endeavors or even cross-over trade published photo books" (Drucker, 2004:76). One of the reasons for this was that artists in the 1950s and 1960s, at the first stirrings of what is now termed conceptual art were "at the point at which the conception of the artwork as an object of visual, or, more broadly, special experience and pleasure was most directly and radically changed. With the unassisted readymade, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said" (Osborne, 2002: 13). Osborne (2002:90) wrote that Ruscha said of this book that "my pictures...are simply a collection of 'facts': my book is like a collection of 'readymades'".

The altered book and its history will be discussed extensively in Chapter 2, but at this time the altered book was inadvertently gathering its own practitioners. Joe Orton (1933-1967), the playwright, was during this era, also appropriating his own brand of readymade. In the late 1960s, "incensed at the poor choice of books at Essex Road, their local library, they (Orton and Halliwell) began stealing books. These were smuggled out, dust jackets altered, new blurbs written on inside flaps and then surreptitiously returned" (Forsythe, n.d.). This entire collection of altered books is now held in the Islington Library Collection, although at the time they were caught and arrested. An example (Fig. 19) is the defaced book jacket of a book titled *The Great Tudors*. "While never openly admitting the reasons for the prank, these acts of guerrilla artwork were an early indication of Orton's desire to shock and provoke.

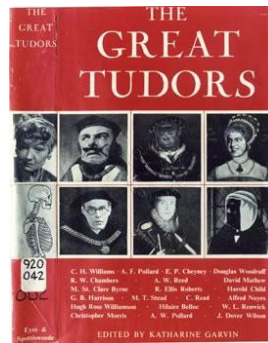


Figure 19.
Orton, J. Defaced book jacket of 'Great Tudors' edited by Katharine Garvin.
Dimensions not given. Collection: Islington Library Collection.

His targets were the genteel middle classes, authority and defenders of 'morality', against whom much of Orton's later written work would rail against" (Forsythe, n.d.).

It is interesting to note that this act by Orton inspired the **Long Overdue: Book Renewal Altered Book Project** in Maine, which is also discussed in Chapter 2. Sutherland (2006) quoted the librarian Whittaker as saying that "the idea for the project came to him after reading a biography of the British playwright Joe Orton. Orton would borrow books from a London library, insert sexual innuendos and collages in the pages, and then return them to circulation. It was an act of vandalism. But I liked it as an act of art."

In the 1960s books "at that time constituting non-art materials" (Bright, 2005:127) were appropriated as sculptural bookworks. Sculptural bookworks are defined by Bright (2005:127) as "the appropriation of the book object itself as content, freeing the book from specifics of title and author". An artist who appropriated books in his work was John Latham (1921-2006). In works like **Philosophy and the Practice of** (1960) (Fig. 20), "Latham combined art, science, and philosophy, thus challenging the views of professionals in each field. 'Event structure' was the main sustaining principle of his art and suggests that the most basic component of reality is not the particle, as understood through physics, but a 'least event' or the shortest departure from a state of nothing" (Thorpe, 2006). Latham transformed books in many ways. For example, Vogler (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:455) wrote of Latham's well-known transformation of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* which he broke up and gave to friends who chewed the pages and spat the pulp into a bottle of acid. This act was intended as a challenge to Greenberg's belief in the supremacy of painting. The result is *not* considered an artist's book!



Figure 20.

Latham, J. 1960. **Philosophy and the Practice of**. Altered book work. Dimensions not given.
Collection: Nicholas Logsdail. Courtesy John Latham Estate and Lisson Gallery, London.

As the 20th century progressed, the appropriation, intervention into, onto and with books developed. Artists like Huang Yong Ping (b. 1954) subjected books to washing machines. Ping said this "act of 'bookwashing' is similar to Wittgenstein's idea when he said that certain expressions should be extracted from a language and sent to be cleansed" (Eimert, 1994:188). Tim Ulrich (b. 1940) subjected books to the paper mangler and shredder, commenting on the disrespect shown generally to books and a two thousand year history of paper. He said "the forests are getting smaller and smaller, the supply of wood is decreasing when the time comes and the forests cease, we can burn books instead for so long as it takes for new ones to grow" (Ulrich in Eimert, 1994:234).

As has been noted, from the 1960s onwards, interference with the mores of the traditional book by artists made the book form a vehicle for artistic, visual expression. In South Africa, during the mid 1960's and early 1970's, Paton (2000) traces the history of the South African artist's book through the periodicals *Wurm* (from August 1966 to February 1970) and *Izwe* (from October 1971 to August 1974), [as] *Wurm* was self-consciously unconventional in spirit and placed itself outside the conservative literary circles of its day...[and that although a magazine] in its final edition, it published the first example of an artist's book in South Africa.

The history of the artist's book is of course much more complex and convoluted than these pages allow. The history of the artist's book is attached to writing, printing, the fine press book, independent publishing, painting, sculpture, commercial and fine art, assemblage, culture, advertising, poetry, art and craft, politics and book binding.

Drucker (Rothenberg and Clay, 2000: 376) wrote, "artists' books appear in every major movement in art and literature and have provided a unique means of realizing works within the many avant-garde, experimental, and independent groups whose contributions have defined the shape of twentieth-century artistic activity". She wrote further, "the increased popularity of artist's books can probably be attributed to the flexibility and variation of the book form, rather than to any single aesthetic or material factor" (ibid). It is this "flexibility and variation of the book form" which will be explored in the following section.

Section Four: *The Artist's Book as a Versatile Form of Expression*

This section will explore different types of artists' books as structures for storing visual information. Aside from images for general discussion, I have limited the illustrated and discussed examples of South African artists' books to artists and/or books that I interviewed/reviewed during the course of my research.

Marshall McLuhan (1971:15) wrote, "the medium is the message". In this case, books as a form of visual expression carry a message that is varied, complex and not easily defined. The artist's book is nonetheless a medium with a powerful message. Books historically have "offered the individual the opportunity to freely access information [having] evolved over centuries from the autocratic function of the scroll to the democratic disseminator of seed" (Smith, 2004:x). When one listens to speech, communication is accessed immediately, whilst the written word and/or visual image in a book "exists in suspended animation. Words, scattered on the pages in furrows, await the reader, [they may] lie idle, be re-read a month later, or germinate in another century" (Smith, 2004:xvii). The structure that the words and images inhabit is the book, the format, the vessel or house, which gives an idea physicality.

Artists' books are structures for storing visual information. It is the book format which allows the artist to create an interactive, tangible, physical structure in which to accumulate a tactile encounter with an art work. Drucker (2004:9) stated, "to an unprecedented degree, books have served to express aspects of mainstream art which were not able to find expression in the form of wall pieces, performances or sculpture." Rather, the book is able to combine one, or all three, of these forms of expression in an alternate format. The forms and structures of artists' books are almost as varied as the subject matters they engage in. When one looks at the variety of forms the artist's book can take, there are as many variations of material, structure, formats and bindings which inform the books' function and production as an art artifact.

Take, for example, binding structures. These include the scroll, the codex, loose leafed, unbound books, accordion bound books, pamphlet stitch binding, tunnel books, flag books, Japanese binding, fold out books, spiral bindings, horizontal and vertical fold books, dos-à-dos bindings, venetian blind binding, split board binding and fan bindings to mention a few.

The list is as long as the types of books created. Then, think of the materials these books are made from. Take paper for example. Again, to name but a few variations; handmade paper (anything from dung to rag), tracing paper, rice paper, papyrus, grease proof paper, card, cardboard, photographic paper, paper pulp, recycled paper and paper from altered books. Other materials artists' books are made from include plastic, copper, lead, glass, x-rays, tin, fabric, wax, wood, ivory and bone.

If the 'medium is the message', all the material elements of a good artist's book should be considered. For example, the binding structures should be intrinsic to the meaning and content of the book. The binding of a book is relevant to how content is stored in the book. The way this content is stored will then determine how the book is read and how the order of the information to be disseminated is revealed. Smith (2007:32) wrote that "binding becomes a broad horizon of potential... an integral [part] of the total experience and element of the content, part of the statement [and] should be more than appropriate". He goes on to write, "the best bindings are more than craft which facilitates turning and providing protective cover. Bindings should never be an afterthought; they are not independent of content" (Smith, 2007:32).

Material choice should work in a similar manner. Book artists use materials to express conceptual issues. For example, Daniel Essig in the work **Book of Nails** (2003) (Fig. 21) uses nails to "suggest a defense, like the quills of a porcupine. In Medieval Europe, books were so rare and precious that they were chained to library shelves, and in some of my work I chain books to niches, to suggest their preciousness" (Essig in LaFerla, 2004:15). Geraldine Pomeroy, an Australian book artist captures the essence of Australia's natural world by using "reclaimed, recycled and hand gathered materials to create handmade paper, each sheet an evocative piece of the land that it comes from" (Prince, 2008).



Figure 21.

Essig, D. 2003. **Book of Nails.**

Carved and painted mahogany, handmade flax paper, tin, velvet, linen thread, mica, nails, trilobite fossils, Ethiopian Binding, unique artist's book. 7x11x17 inches, (opened). Collection: Daniel Essig.

During the interviews with artists done as part of the research for this project, I encountered in the main two types of artists' books; unique books made by individual artists and secondly, collaborative books made by artists in cooperation with Malcolm Christian at the Caversham Press in the Natal Midlands.

Unique may be defined as "being the only one of its kind, unlike anything else, something that is absolute and which by definition cannot be more or less than it is" (Readers Digest Dictionary, 2002:1072). Good unique books have been described by Drucker (2004:93) as "books which have an aura about them [which] generate a mystique, a sense of charged presence. They seem to bear meaning just in their being, their appearance, and their form through iconography and material". Drucker broadened this terminology to encompass some limited edition books, but I am of the opinion that if a book is replicated though mechanical means, its originality is lost. It has moved away from the artist to the next stage of production.

Verheyen (2009), in denoting a unique book, wrote, "I will not attempt a definition beyond saying it is a book work created in an edition of one. Whether or not someone else has already used that structure does not matter as I think all art is derivative, nothing is created in a vacuum". Smith (2004:239) described the unique book as a "one-of-a-kind book, a book in a single copy as opposed to a production book". So, for the purposes of this discussion, I am defining unique books as books that have not been replicated and have been conceived and made by the artist.

Peter Clarke (b. 1929) began working fifteen years ago on collage books which fold into boxes of various shapes and sizes that he handcrafts from leather. He said that he draws much of his inspiration for these books from music; "a lot of them are inspired by jazz, although I'm more of a classics person. I enjoy music very much because my father always had a collection of records so music was heard quite a lot. I enjoy listening to music and expressing it in a different way" (Clarke, 2009). **'With a hey-nonny and a shoobee-doo-bee-doo'** (1997) (Fig.22) is typical of the accordion bound books Clark creates. In creating unique books, Clarke is also commenting on the fact that these works break through the usual 'look-but-don't-touch' gallery environment. Clarke does not begin his collage books with a concept in mind.



Figure 22.
Clarke, P. 1997. **'With a hey-nonny and a shoobee-doo-bee-doo'**.
Unique artist's book. Accordion bound. Mixed papers, collage, leather box.
Dimensions not recorded. Collection: Peter Clarke.

Rather, he starts the narrative "with a strip of paper, letting the work unfold according to the format" (Clarke, 2009). Clarke said of his books that he started making and using the traditional format, but later in about 1994 started working with the concertina style. Clarke (2009) expanded on this when he said:

I wanted to get away from the political statement/story. At the same time I also became interested in the recycling of materials. I wanted to work with whatever was left over; anything from gravy packets to labels. You can't fold up a painting or a print or any precious work of art. But with one like this, you can fold it up and carry it in a little box. You can sit next to somebody in a waiting room and say: 'I've got something to show you' and lift it out its box.

Collage as a medium is discussed extensively in the section dealing with altered books but, interestingly, a lack of sequence or narrative has been described by Harry Polkinhorn (n.d.) as "decay of plot". Polkinhorn (n.d.) pointed out that "the contemporary artist's book or anti-book as categorically rejecting the hierarchic and linear elements upon which traditional culture has been established". By the term anti- book he is describing a "lack of sequence, absence of plot. A radical exploration of physical properties of book and non-book materials (within the general format of the book) [as constituting] one more piece of evidence of the breakdown of absolute standards in art" (Polkinhorn, n.d.).

Clarke (2009) also said that the experience offered by the artist's book should be "that the viewer must become involved in the object. It is a dialogue between the artist and the viewer. People want a connection and people want to touch [art] work. Touching has a lot to do with experiencing artists' books". In this regard, Smith (2005:66) wrote, "the book is a physical object. The hand-held-book demands touching. Effort must be taken to view it. A print on the wall under glass has no volume, no shadows, and little or no texture. It is not tangible. It is almost non-physical. The book, as object, is intimate, it insists on a one-on-one confrontation: the bookmaker and the viewer".

For book artist Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen (b.1953), the uniqueness of the artist's book lies in the fact that the book is tactile. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen (2009a) said:

how the book is bound, how it opens, what materials it is made of, and its content make up the book and form one package. The binding is integral to the content of the book, it is part of the book's 'message'. The idea making up an artist's book can therefore only find expression in book format. It is an idea that develops in time, sequentially, yet it is not sculpture, although it has sculptural and architectural qualities. It is visual but is not a painting, drawing or print, although it can have these as part of the book. An artist's book is not merely a collection of paintings/drawings/prints put together in book form, it is an idea, visual or conceptual.

In works such as **Stroebe's Strudel OR Treasures and Feasts: a discourse about stars** (2009) (Fig. 23), Liebenberg-Barkhuizen has used complex binding and paper mechanisms; "star binding/Leporello in three layers with tunnel effect and pop-up, cased into split board casing, with piano hinge spine and 3-hole binding of sections into the Leporello" (Liebenberg-Barkhuizen, 2009). This informs the viewer that this book is also about secrets. Secrets which can only be revealed when the book is opened and handled.



Figure 23.

Barkhuizen-Liebenberg, E. 2009. **Stroebel's Strudel OR Treasures and Feasts: a discourse about stars.** Unique artist's book. Fabriano, black card, handmade paper, embossed paper, sugar paper, fabric with sequins, cotton thread, coins, variety of beads, pearl and hand crafted cross. Star binding/Leporello in three layers with tunnel effect and pop-up, cased into split board casing covered with hand-made and sugar paper, with piano hinge spine and 3-hole binding of sections into the Leporello. 33.5cm x 18.5cm x 4cm text block: approx 15.5cm x 15.5cm. Collection: Tatham Gallery.

This book, together with **Polophony** (2009) (Fig. 26) (to be discussed) by Jeanette Gilks, formed part of an exhibition titled Contemporary Reflections at the Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg in May 2009. A number of local artists were invited to respond to one or more of seven artworks from the Tatham's permanent collection. This show was intended to provide an insight into creative processes, and the opportunity to reflect on and engage with old and new. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen chose Hendrik Stroebel's ceramic piece called **Pleasures and Treasures** to respond to. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen (2009b) wrote of this piece that;

the vase is a bit 'over the top' as it includes rich decoration and imagery. I noticed the handles on this vase, which reminded me of the cover of a book and immediately made the connection between the vase - which one can only conceive of in the round i.e. it takes time to walk around the object in order to see it as a whole - and a book, which can also only be understood/memorized in time once you have read the whole book. The title 'Stroebel Strudel' was for me a humorous play on the rich decoration - like an over-iced cake - both in the vase and the book, and the subtitle "a discourse about stars" refers to the conceptual underpinnings of the imagery of the star.

Liebenberg-Barkhuizen used the image of a star, which appears on the vase, as a starting point for the binding technique for the book, whilst at the same time using the star motif as subject matter for the work. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen (2009) wrote that "the star on the vase led me to a 'star' book, and I decided to make a star book, and play with the idea of the star - Jewish star, Christian star (in the east), star book, and my name [Estelle], which means star".

Liebenberg-Barkhuizen (2009b) wrote of **A Woman's Heart** (2008/9) (Fig.24) as looking at "the dual nature of a woman's heart - the physical heart and the 'metaphoric' heart. Each of the two books begins with a definition of the heart - heart as organ, and heart as soul. They both reside in the chest - encompassed by the rib cage - but the chest is also something like a treasure chest, where we keep secrets and things dear to us". Liebenberg-Barkhuizen refers to 'two' books as, inside the cover and separated by the 'spine', is a type of pop-up piano hinge binding which separates the two parts. This is a good example of structure informing content. This is part of what Verheyen (1998) refers to as the "operational ability" of an artist's book. In writing about structure and content, Verheyen (1998) wrote that:

The structure determines how the "book" is read, and influences how the "reader" interacts with it. Pages can open up from both sides and panels can be hinged along different sides making the viewer unfold the structure as they "read" it. Pop-ups can reveal hidden aspects. By slightly changing a series of illustrations animation can be created as the "reader" flips through the pages quickly. Through the use of transparency, an image can evolve and de-evolve as the "pages" are turned. The possibilities are almost endless, and one innovation leads to another. In the process the "reader" becomes increasingly drawn into the object as they interact with it.

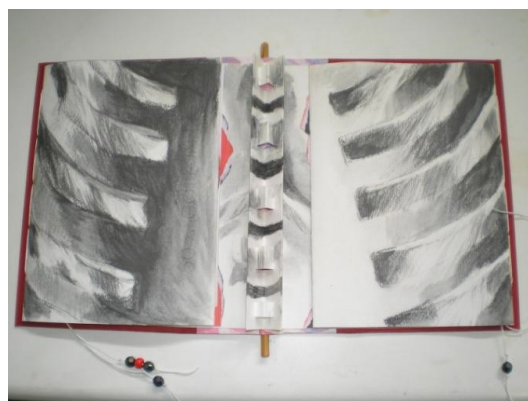


Figure 24.

Barkhuizen-Liebenberg, E. 2008/9. **A Woman's Heart**.

Cartridge paper, acrylic paints, rubber stamps, ink, fabric, lace, hand-made paper, mulberry paper, marble paper. Split board casing with concertina spine and piano hinges, covered with marble paper and book cloth. 21cm x 19cm x 1.5cm, texblock 14.5cm x 18.5cm. Collection: Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen.

Another book format used by Jeanette Gilks (b. 1953) is the scroll. This non-codex form is used by Gilks as a teaching tool, as well as a personal format of visual expression. Scrolls as a book form are difficult because of their limitations. Richard Bear (1998) wrote that "scrolls were replaced by codex books, beginning about AD 400, at least in part because scrolls were accessible only sequentially. Codex books permit random access, so that a reader may readily consult a particular passage". Bear is articulating the fact that the scroll format is "difficult" Drucker (2004:121). She wrote further that the form is so rigid as a means of access and sequencing that it has rarely appealed to artists" (2004:153). Although this may be the case, for Gilks the use of this format has the value of historicity as "it chronicles a history of essentially drawing events as well as existing separately as an ongoing artwork in the present" (Gilks, 2009). This form of sequential accessibility is a history of her personal drawings and teaching methods.

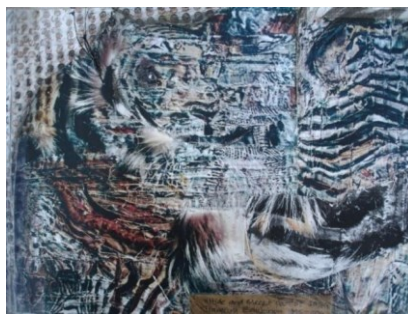


Figure 25.

Gilks, J. 1970's-2009. **Animal Scroll**.

Unique artist's book. Scroll format. Paper. Collage, ink, pencil, charcoal, graphite, fabric, sewing, bating, text, wax crayons, pencil crayons, pastels, photocopies. Currently 16m x 21.5cm. Collection: Jeanette Gilks.

Although the scroll format is one of the oldest book formats, we can see that "what we are dealing with is never replacements that put an end to what they replace but rather, if I might use the word today, restructurations in which the oldest form survives, and even survives endlessly, coexisting with new form and even coming to terms with a new economy" (Derrida in Frost, 2006). This shows that the scroll format survives despite new book structures.

Gilks (2009a) said that "this scroll is a selective documentation of my interest in animals and animal issues over the past 30 odd years. The first part of the scroll records animals drawn from life and dates back to the mid 1970's, and is becoming a synthesis on a number of levels, developing into a visual analysis of my current thinking". Gilks (2009) also said "all the images are processed in some way and therefore transformed by technology, the work [revealing] the close links between textile and fine art images and demonstrates how they exist, in a sense quite literally, on the continuum". This work, some of which is thirty years old, makes conceptual reference to history and continuum by existing in one plane, the scroll format, which the codex format would be unable to demonstrate. Unrolled, the scroll is a work which exists in one piece, unraveling its history and working methods at the same time. Gilks (2009) wrote further, "this work is not complete. Indeed this kind of journey is never complete. It symbolizes a state of becoming by plotting a personal passage of time"

As noted above, **Polophony** (2009) (Fig.26) by Gilks, also formed part of the exhibition Contemporary Reflections at the Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg. Gilks responded to the painting by Roger Fry (1866-1934) **Still Life with Omega Flowers painted** in 1919. In response to this painting, Gilks wrote (2009) that she made a sculptural fold book "that explored the idea of different kinds of paper flowers, indeed all the different 'melodies' of paper flowers. Painted flowers and paper [origami] flowers end up as paper flowers [photographs] if they are reproduced in a book. Books turn images *and the medium in which they have been made* into paper [with] other melodies or voices about flowers and Still Life as a painting genre beginning to germinate." The shape of the book recalls the Omega workshops of the Bloomsbury group, of which Roger Fry was a member. These included workshops on interior design. Gilks (2009) said "I therefore made it possible for the book to zigzag and assume the Omega shape in the manner of a series of room dividers. The melody between books, high 'fine' art, craft and interior design is thus also explored".



Figure 26.

Gilks, J. 2009. **Polophony.**

Accordion, Fold Binding, origami, paper, sewing, pop-ups, violeen cotton, dowel rods, drawing, collage (including ready mades for examples stamps), ticking, sewing, pen and ink, machine embroidery, ready made objects, stamps, photocopies. Dimensions not given. Collection: Jeanette Gilks.

For artists like Liz Vels (b. 1937) (2009b) the making of unique books is about

an 'exhibition' which consolidates the entire content of a theme. The seminal activity of 'reading' is just as present in 6 inches as it is in 6 meters; a page can equal a canvas. [The artist's book is about] intimacy, a hands-on experience of both the artifact and a closer understanding of the artists themselves. Sometimes the book is a hand-held exhibition. [they also] capture 'volumes' of energy in a small format. They are a way of getting out work, a way of consolidating ideas.

To this end, Vels makes books where she is in full control of the production process relating to the works. Vels binds the books, makes the paper, designs, creates and makes the covers, writes and illustrates the books. Drucker (2004:102) wrote of journals and diaries as "a cliché of artists' books - [offering] a glimpse into the ongoing thought processes, jottings, projects in the progress of an individual". She wrote further (Drucker, 2004:358) that such journals are:

the expression of another person's experience, suddenly revealed, communicated, across the space of time and with no other thread of connection than the existence of the book itself... It is the independent life of these books - their persistence - and their ability to circulate on their own [that] suggests an animate quality to these inert objects, moving them from one set of circumstance to another.

Books with their content and meaning are portable like no other art form. They can be carried as personal possessions in bags and on holiday. Vels (2009) said that her artists' books "are about private mediations. The making of books is not only about public consumption, they are filled with intuitive decisions requiring an empathetic or confrontational reaction from the reader".

Books like **Metaphorical Gardening** (2008) (Fig. 27) and **Metaphysical Gardening** (2008) (Fig. 28) "deal with gardening as a metaphor for life. They represent all growing things - life is ripe with expectation and answers" (Vels, 2009).

In dealing with the subject of life and death, birth and the daily journaling of her personal life in her books, Vels conceptually creates unique artist's books. She is dealing with the knowledge that in each incident the individual experiences is unique. These particular books, with their star binding are particularly sculptural when open, denoting the physical, sculptural aspects of a garden; the plant images acting as "prototypes for imaginary desert plants" (Vels, 2009). Further, "it is about finding joy in the unexpected and survival, the functions of beauty; a beauty that creeps up unexpectedly" (Vels, 2009).



Figure 27.

Vels, E. 2008. **Metaphorical Gardening** . Unique artist's book. Carousel/Star binding, handmade paper, collage, paper mache. 20cm x 35cm diameter. Collection: Unknown, London.



Figure 28.

Vels E. 2008. **Metaphysical Gardening**.
Unique artist's book. Carousel/Star binding, handmade paper, collage, paper mache.
20cm x 35 cm diameter. Collection: Unknown, London.

Vels also makes extensive use of scriptural references and quotes in her work. Vels created "two garden diaries in opposition to each other after the death of her husband; the one of death, the other of life". Such an example is **Beauty for Ashes I** (1998) (Fig 29).



Figure 29.

Vels, E. 1998. **Beauty for Ashes I**.

Unique artist's book. Handmade paper, embroidery, paintings, text, etchings. Accordion Binding. 30cm x 23cm x 8cm (closed). Collection: Elizabeth Vels.

Vels covered "handmade paper with grey dune plants on the one side, symbolizing ashes" (Vels, 2009). She said "'beauty for ashes' is a quote from the book of Isaiah, the passage speaking of restoration, the oil of joy for nourishing, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, beauty from ashes". The ashes are also associated with cremation.

For Vels (2009), the making of unique artists' books is "a personal sequence, and they retain the qualities of narrative [but, are also] pertinent to whatever time of life I am at, to what I am experiencing – death and birth" (Vels, 2009). The books made by Vels embody what is described by Drucker (2004:93) as "investigations of the book as a form through examination of its material, thematic and formal properties."

Writing about limited edition artists' books, Mason (n.d.) wrote;

artists' books are limited edition art works that are produced by an artist or a collective and that have aspects of handmade work in them. Artists books have an edition number and are signed by the artist/s who have worked on the book as well as by the writer of the text if this is relevant. The book may be in the form of hand printed lithographs, lino cuts, letterpress or even hand written. They are often made using an unconventional format and unusual binding. Any artists book produced in South Africa has to have a copy, or a number of copies donated to the State Library Collection. This ensures that South Africa as a country has an archive of these artworks produced in the country. It also acts as a resource for people who are interested in them but who cannot afford them.

Malcolm Christian (2009) of the Caversham Press in the Natal Midlands, speaks of editioned artists' books as;

just another level of collaboration from single sheet prints, and is the sharing of responsibility rather than playing the role of technician, or artist, or one role being more subservient to the other, its just saying - how do we pool our ideas together and draw from different areas of expertise or insight to actually create something which speaks about that dialogue or that conversation.

In this spirit of collaboration, Caversham Press has been able, through the efforts of Harriet Sanford to initiate a very successful "exchange of artists from South American and South African artists. These international collaborative residencies [are] known collectively as the Hourglass Project" (Lieberman, 2009). The first project by the collective was an artist's book entitled **A Women's Vision** (Fig. 30), done in 1999. The first page of the book reads as follows:

The Project; The first Hourglass Residency Program brought together 15 artists from South Africa, USA, Mexico, Ireland and Zimbabwe to create a collection of 30 unique icons. These explore the multi-faceted experience of woman at the cusp of the millennium. Their collective memories, histories, shared dreams and story-telling were a search for common ground and a focus of this dialogue. This project was about the values the women would like to carry through to the new millennium.

This limited edition artist's book was done in an edition of fifty copies and consists of portraits as " the artists created black and white images of each other and these formed the basis of the book" (Christian, 1:1999).

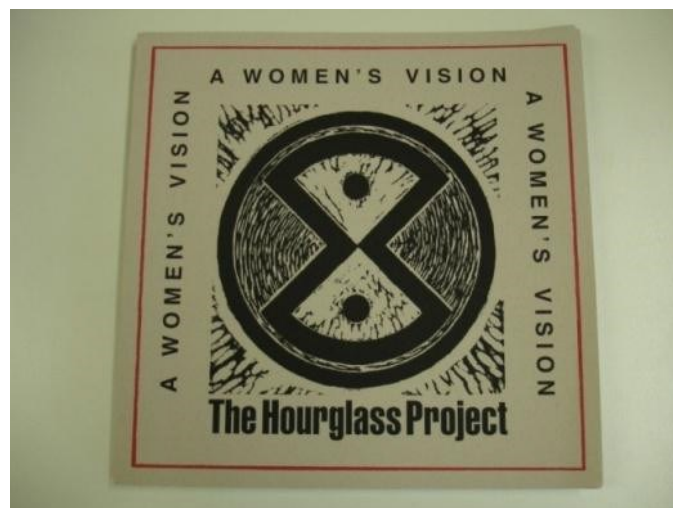


Figure 30.

Christian, M. (ed). 1999. **A Women's Vision**.
Accordion Bound, screen print artist's book. Edition of 50. 22cm x 22cm (closed).
Collection: Caversham Press.

I find Myself Wandering (2000) (Fig. 31) by Chris Cozier is a type of Exquisite Corpse artist's book in which the images can be rearranged and seen in various combinations as the pages are cut in half. Christian (2009) spoke of Cozier as:

a writer and a visual artist who worked with us whilst he was on a residency with the Bag Factory. [This book] formed part of the Baggage exhibition, baggage being the things we carry with us. We produced this book and a suite of booklets for the Havana Biennale. What he is looking at is the stereotypical racial segregation he grew up with. The construct of the book works with the idea of self, the cover being a print we created in its own right and then constructed it into a cover. These were all Photostats he brought out with him. [it is a] book that you can rearrange, and discover various combinations.



Figure 31.

Cozier, C. 2000. **I find Myself Wandering**.

Limited edition artist's book. Single print acting as wrap around cover, pamphlet stitched, screen printed, Fabriano Paper. 33cm x 19cm. Collection, Caversham Press.

André Breton (in Butler, 2008) wrote, "Exquisite Corpse [was a] game of folded paper played by several people, who compose a sentence or drawing without anyone seeing the preceding collaboration or collaborations. The now classic example, which gave the game its name, was drawn from the first sentence obtained this way: The-exquisite- corpse-will-drink-new-wine." Mirek (2000) wrote, "developed in 1925, the Exquisite Corpse was designed for group participation and relied on chance encounter as a disruption of rationality and a product of the shared, oceanic unconscious in which the Surrealists believed". The ability to change permutations is also a support to the title of the book **I find Myself Wandering**, in that the figure on the pages is continually subject to change through the reader's intervention.

Ihambo Iyazilawaula (2002) (Fig. 32) by M Xolile is a limited edition artist's book, which deals with the passport as subject matter. Xolile "wanted to make his own passport, so we constructed a 'passport' by scanning images from his passport, and other peoples' passports.

It's a combination of a whole lot of information coming from a variety of passports with images created over the top" (Christian, 2009). The idea of the passport was to do with travel and boundaries. Xolile worked with American and Zimbabwean artists. Christian (2009) said that the cover is an image representative of:

sign sticks used in the landscape to actually indicate which is the way you should go. They were used extensively on the slave routes moving from the south up to the north and here [in South Africa]. It is a way of disguising and informing people who knew the signs, where to go. Anybody who didn't know, just looking at the landscape would just see a stick, something bent over, without knowing it was a sign, so it's about travel, looking at routes.



Figure 32.

Xolile, M. 2002. **Ihambo Iyazilawula.**
Limited edition, screen printed, Accordion bound artist's book. 20cm x 14.5cm.
Collection: Caversham Press

In conclusion, my interviews (to be made accessible on the Durban University of Technology Research website) reveal that the subject of artists' books is complex. The interviewed artists are passionate about the book as art, the unique book in particular having "an unconscious fetish element attached to paging through and touching what amounts to someone else's 'skin'" (Gilks, 2009b). Artists' books are about process and the establishment of a sequential reading, even though the sequence may be illogical to the reader. Collaborative books are "about sharing responsibility rather than the definition of one craft or area of contribution over another" (Christian, 2009).

The next chapter will explore the altered book as a particular form of expression in the development of the artist's book. My interviews revealed that artists engaged in this form of expression were unaware that this art form exists in its own right; rather, they were unconscious experiments done by various artists, unaware that this is a form of expression, with its own international following, existing in its own right.

Chapter Two: Altered Books

This chapter will investigate altered/transformed books and selected artists for whom this work is the central focus of their practice.

Section One: *Defining the Altered Book*

In recent years, the term 'altered books' has gained wide currency. Hubert and Hubert (2001) write that the concept of the altered book "consists in taking an existing book and treating it in such a way that it becomes something quite different and fulfills a function having very little in common with the original". Sutherland (2006) described the altered book as "an alternate system for delivering art".

The transforming, alteration and appropriation of an existing book, through physical intervention with the artifact, constitutes an altered book. This intervention may be quiet and relatively non-invasive, where the original pages are still visible, or the intrusion may be what amounts to an aggressive assault and violation onto, and into, the book (Drucker 2004:109). Works such as **Little Boy** (2007) (Fig. 33) is an altered book by Jeanette Minnix, which formed part of a series of journals and mixed media works created from existing books. All the pages within the books have been completely obliterated in order to impose her own life onto its folios. Everything within the original artifact has been interfered and intervened with.



Figure 33.

Minnix, J. 2007. **Little Boy**.

Altered Book. Materials include paint, cloth, wood and rope. Dimensions not given. Collection: Jeanette Minnix.

Acts of intervention include tearing, erasure (by painting over or collaging onto pages), insertion of new pages, writing over existing text, aging techniques, stamping, burning, piercing and many other methods by which the artist may transform an existing artifact. Drucker (2004:109) wrote of these interferences as practices which are interventions "into the social order, and the text of the world as it is already written". She wrote further "the book as a form is a received idea, loaded with cultural and historical values and resonances" (Drucker, 2004:108). By interfering with that existing form, a skilled book artist can further enhance the reader's encounter with a book, deepening and enhancing their experience.

Slight changes include alterations called marginalia. These may be doodles, small sketches or a reader's notations made in the margins of the pages. William Blake was an avid user of the margin, annotating "many works of philosophy in his library with thoughts and comments about Berkeley and Locke. [These] give us valuable insight into the poetry he wrote later in life, an often inscrutable body of work called *The Prophecies*" (Stark, 2003). One is reminded of *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, where the character Catherine Earnshaw wrote in the margins of all her books, using her precious volumes as diaries and journals.

Bantock (2004:5) wrote about the process of altering of ephemera as "a little wit and guile [which] can move us backward and forward within an artifact's history, giving us an enhanced sensitivity toward the archaic and the ever malleable. In so doing, we allow ourselves to develop a creativity rooted in something stronger than the transience of fashion". In an interview, Kentridge (2008) said that by altering an existing book, each page gives "the appearance of the accumulation of knowledge, the fact that it is not just a blank sheet of paper, that the whole history that is built into that text, becomes part of the work when you do it". In making an altered book, the artist takes cognizance of the particular volume selected for revision and reworking.

The criteria for the selection of a book to alter is different for each individual artist. For Bantock, the writer and artist of the **Griffin & Sabine** saga, the selection of artifacts must cost less than ten dollars. For Phillips, the creator of **The Humument** (1966 - 1980), the book he would choose to alter had to be the first book he could find for three pence. John Eric Broadus chooses books which call attention to the visual elements of the page structures rather than the text blocks. Drucker (2004:112) wrote that Broadus "has an uncanny capacity to zero in on the precise bit of visual form which carries the maximum amount of resonant associations".

For William Kentridge, it is firstly about the quality of the paper which the text has been printed on and then an acknowledgement of the sensibilities of the printed page; the juxta-positioning of image and word (Kentridge, 2008). The books I choose to alter are based on a response to the title.

As an aside, it is also important to highlight the almost extreme interest in altered books by hobbyists and crafters. All over the world (and that without hyperbole), people are using this technique to create journals, scrapbooks and diaries. Altered book websites, chat rooms and communal blog sites abound on the internet. The site www.alteredbooks.com boasts a membership of over 58000 members world wide, with an addition of two to ten new members every day. Similar sites boast even larger numbers of adherents. This type of altered hobby book is not the focus of this discussion, as generally there is no conceptual underpinning to the production of these bookworks. Rather, they are a form of scrapbooking. Like all art forms, the creation of altered books has a large hobby contingent.

Due to intent, one project which falling outside this hobby parameter, was a project entitled **Long Overdue: Book Renewal Altered Book Project**. This was a project in which the Portland Library in Maine and the Maine College of Art joined forces to create altered books from the books to be culled at the library. Nearly two hundred artists were requested to choose and alter the discarded volumes from the library. They were given ninety days to return the transformed books back to the library. These altered books were then returned to the library and re-entered the library system to be borrowed by the public. "Despite some unconventional sizes and unusual fragility, all but nine of the books can be borrowed. The altered books that aren't circulating are exceptionally tricky or are difficult to handle, like "Inaccessibility" by Joanna House which is covered in dress making pins - the sharp ends sticking out for liability reasons [the Library] would rather have people look at it there" (Sutherland, 2006).

Inspired by this event in America, the Bower Ashton Library of the University of the West of England in Bristol took books boxed up for disposal from their art section of the library and created an artists' exchange project. Eighty-two artists were involved. Each selected a book from the list and returned it after they had created a new piece of work with it. The books were sent out to artists in the United Kingdom, Eire, Australia, Germany, USA, Denmark, Norway and South Africa to work with a return date of March 2007. An exhibition was held to showcase these works at a gallery in Bristol in May 2007 (Fig. 34). Once the exhibition was over, the books were swapped among the various artists who had created the altered books.

Each of the books has been permanently archived on the website www.bookarts.uwe.uk/regen/html with the working notes from the artists, and images of the books.



Figure 34.

Images from **Regenerator**: altered books project exhibition. 2007. No dimensions available.

Many artists are attracted to the process of altering existing books and individualizing them. Smith (2005:361) wrote of the finding of a book to work with as "found structure as motif". He wrote further that "the book artist finds a structure in an existing book and is inspired to make a book using this property. *Property* in this instance means characteristic, not ownership, since the book artist borrows the idea, but, hopefully, transforms it into something new" (ibid). The altering of existing cultural artifacts which are printed in their hundreds of thousands and the use of their '*properties*' can move their status from the morass of mass production to a unique artwork. The original intent of the artifact is embellished with new meaning.

Section 2: A History of the Altered Book

The alteration of an existing book is by no means a new phenomenon. For example, it was a practice during the Victorian era to illustrate, alter, or enhance certain books by adding removed engravings collected from other books. This was known as 'grangerism'. *Webster's Dictionary* (1913) described this practice as "the mutilation of books to acquire extra illustrative materials... the augmentation of the illustrative material by prints, sketches and engravings not found in the original edition". James Granger (1723-1776) was an English biographer and clergyman. He published his *Biographical History of England* in 1760, but "by 1824 various editors had increased it to six volumes by adding illustrations and biographies from other books. Because many books were robbed of steel engravings to put into Granger's history, each mutilation became known as grangerising" (Columbia Encyclopedia on-line, 2004). The history of altering books is in fact far older.

The palimpsest can be regarded as the forerunner of the altered book. The word 'palimpsest' comes from a Greek term meaning "rub away again" (Henry, 1994) and denotes a manuscript which has later writing superimposed onto the original writing after the vellum has been gently rubbed or washed off. A double palimpsest is one that has two overlaid writings and therefore two 'old' writing removals. The extent to which the earlier writing could be removed depended on the type of ink used. "Early carbon inks, which merely lay on the surface of the parchment could be removed more or less by sponging, but the later iron gall inks were much more difficult to remove because of the interaction with the fibers of the tannin present in the ink" (Henry, 1994). Further, the manuscripts had to be scraped and they were then treated with a weak acid, for example the citric acid of an orange. Even when this process occurred, traces of the original writing remained. These original traces of writing and their subject matter interlace themselves with the new text, creating works, which aside from their historical value, represent the layering of thought, time and cultural values. Lowe (1972) wrote that "palimpsesting was first and foremost a matter of economy, with the number of palimpsests increasing in periods of intense intellectual activity." Cultural considerations were also extant in deciding the selection of texts for re-writing. Paraphrasing Lowe (1972), there are three such cultural considerations:

Firstly:

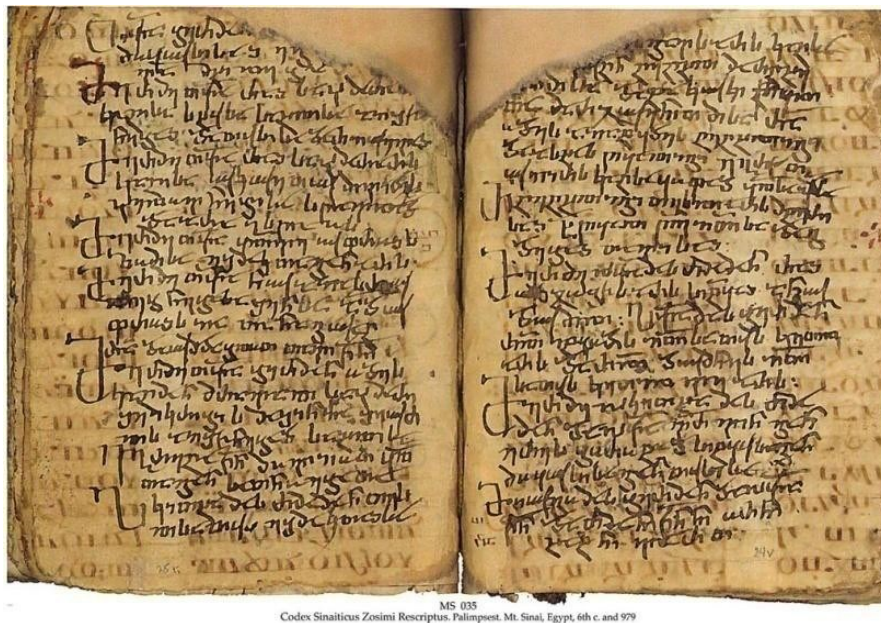
"Obsolence": these being legal and liturgical texts which were no longer in use; pre-Jerome translations of the Bible superseded by the Vulgate; texts written in foreign languages or those no longer understood;

texts in unfamiliar scripts or if they were difficult to read or texts which were already damaged and no longer useful.

Secondly: "Duplication": the need for the 'new' translation of the Bible created a large number of Vulgate Biblical palimpsests patristic.

Thirdly: "Literary Taste": Beneath Christian texts many "pagan classics" are buried. This could represent a systematic attempt by the church to destroy pagan literature or a "general lack of interest in the classics during the seventh and early eighth centuries" (ibid). Interestingly, during the time of the Renaissance pagan classical authors appear more frequently in upper texts.

An example of a palimpsest is the **Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus** (6th cent and 979), (Fig. 35) held in the Schøyen Collection in Norway, one of the largest private collections of manuscripts in the world. This palimpsest is printed on vellum with the underlying biblical texts being the "earliest extant in Christian Palestinian-Aramaic... [including] addresses delivered by St. Cyril in 348 AD to candidates for baptism" (Schøyen, 2007).



MS 035
Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus. Palimpsest. Mt. Sinai, Egypt, 6th c. and 979

Figure 35.
Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus. 6th Century and 979.
Vellum Palimpsest. 14x19cm-31x20cm.
Collection: The Schøyen Collection.

The overlying texts include "letters containing ascetical instructions for monks, and a colophon dated twice, Mt Sinai 979" (Schøyen, 2007). The binding information is "Mt Sinai, Egypt, 979, black leather and linen from mummy wrappings over stout palm wood board" (Schøyen, 2007) with alterations to the binding done in the 6th century.

In October 1998, an anonymous purchaser bought, for \$2 000 000, a 13th century prayer book from Christie's in New York. The prayer book was a palimpsest, and had been "written over 10th century manuscript copies of treatises by the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes (287-212BC)" (Noel, 2004 a). **The Archimedes Palimpsest** (10th Century) (Fig. 36) is a manuscript of great importance in the history of science. The title is a little misleading as in its current format this medieval manuscript is a "Byzantine prayer book, written in Greek, and technically called a euchologion" (Noel, 2004 a). It is believed that this manuscript, in its present arrangement was completed by April 1229, probably in Jerusalem (Noel, 2004). The existing book is made up of five other parchment books which were taken apart, the text scraped off the individual leaves and then reused. In this instance, "the full leaves of the books were split down the middle, rotated ninety degrees, and then refolded to make further double sheets that were half size" (Noel, 2004). The result is that the prayer book text lies at ninety degrees to the now almost indecipherable, erased writings and drawings.

The manuscript consists of one hundred and seventy four parchment folios, the most important of which are at least seven treatises by Archimedes namely; "Equilibrium of Planes, Spiral Lines, The Measurement of the Circle, Sphere and Cylinder, On Floating Bodies, the Method of Mechanical Theorems and the Stomachion" (Noel, 2004 a). Except for *On Floating Bodies*, all other treatises are found on other manuscripts, but there is no other surviving copy of *On Floating Bodies*, written in Greek. The Archimedes manuscript has been dated to the second half of the tenth century, to Constantinople (Noel, 2004 b).

This obscured work, which has been erased, written and painted over, is part of Archimedes' legacy, which has been lost and found numerous times throughout history. Scientists now employ modern technology such as x-ray light to illuminate the buried work. From this manuscript it has been found that Archimedes "did not just take steps toward calculus, as formerly believed, he actually created and used calculus methods, the basis for modern engineering and science" (Woods, 2005). Archimedes is also known to have designed and drawn weapons of war including claws that pulled attacking ships out of the water. Last to be added to the palimpsest were four paintings of Byzantine religious images, "which turned out to be 20th century forgeries intended to increase the value of the book" (Woods, 2005).



Figure 36.

Various Authors. Various Dates.
The Archimedes Palimpsest. Medieval parchment manuscript, 174 folios, vellum.
 Collection: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

The **Novgorod Codex**, (11th AD) (Fig. 37) is the name given to a set of three wooden tablets containing four pages filled with wax found on 13th July 2000 in Novgorod. The tablets were held together in the form of a codex by means of holes on one edge through which wooden pegs were inserted. The codex can be dated back to the 11th century "and is the only medieval object of its type from the entire Slavonic world, and one of the very few from Europe as a whole" (Zalizniak, 2002).

Once the wax had been removed for conservation, on the wood under the wax, faint traces of earlier writing created by the scratching of the stylus onto the wax and consequently through onto the wood had been preserved (Zalizniak, 2002). Because of its multiple layers of superimposed text, the *Novgorod Codex* is termed a 'hyperpalimpsest'. The Russian linguist Zalizniak (2002) wrote, "trying to disentangle all the layers and decipher the texts on the Novgorod Codex is like trying to disentangle and decipher the layers of text of an old and much used piece of carbon paper". The task is also made difficult by the fact that there is one author with one particular style of writing superimposed to create the palimpsest.



Figure 37.
Author unknown. 11th Century. **Novgorod Codex.**
Wooden tablet with wax and multiple layers of writing. Dimensions not given.
Whereabouts unknown.

Phrases from the **Novgorod Codex** are very interesting as the writer echoes the pessimism of postmodernism. A few lines from the Codex read:

The world is a town in which heretics are excluded from the church...
The world is a town in which innocent people are excluded from the church. The world is a town in which people not deserving of this exclusion are excluded from the church.

This 11th century view of the global village concept, the layering of thoughts and the resultant illegibility of the writing has created an encoded series of glyphs (pictographs) which render the original narrative redundant echoing the rejection of the grand narrative. This textural attack on the discourses of power appears to be in defiance of notions of authority and reliability; the maintenance of a skeptical attitude on which a great deal of postmodernist theory depends (Butler 2002:13).

Although most palimpsest manuscripts are not artists' books, the same considerations and working methods apply to the process of producing altered books. Palimpsests are altered books by default. They were not intended as altered books, but the resultant linkages between the texts result in the creation of many textual arrangements within the confines of one artifact. This removes it from its original reading. The altering of these manuscripts creates a change in the organization and presentation of knowledge, imposing different cultural nuances with each re-writing. These textual alterings, interventions and layerings have strong reference to postmodernist processes, such as collage and appropriation.

Section Three: *Positioning the Altered Book in a Postmodern Construct*

The altered book in particular echoes the processes of postmodernism in terms of the appropriation of an existing artifact, its alteration and fragmentation. Drucker (2004:109) wrote, "all of these practices of working onto or into an existing work are interventions into the social order, and the text of the world as it is already written". In the context of book works, postmodernism is concerned with the structure of language and "literary rhetoric [where] the text is left open to all sorts of interpretations" (Butler 2002:11). Altered books fall directly into the path of text intervention and the garnering of alternate, paradoxical literature and visual readings. Defying simplistic classification, Hubert and Hubert (2001) speak of "bookworks (as) feeling quite at home among postmodern art works. Like other postmodern genres, such as installations, artists' books allow, and even require versatility in the use of materials, and, by virtue of their built-in complexity, encourage intertextuality as well as multimedia experimentation".

In relation to this discussion, postmodernism can broadly be defined as "celebrating incoherence, discontinuity, parody, popular culture and the principle of metafiction" (Quinn 1999:265). To this definition can be added the terms appropriation, fragmentation and disruption; the essence of the altered book. In contrast to the modernist who hoped to unearth the fundamentals of art, the postmodernist aims to unseat such fundamentals by embracing diversity and contradiction, seeking to eradicate the boundaries between low and high forms of art, to interrupt genre and its conventions with collision, collage and fragmentation (Quinn 1999:265).

Appropriation is what altered books are. There is no defining moment which breaks the modernist period with the postmodern. However, by the mid-1960's, critics like Ihab Hassan in *The Postmodern Turn* (1987) and Susan Sontag in her book *Against Interpretation* (1978) had begun to highlight some of the social and artistic characteristics operating in America and Europe which we now know as 'postmodern'. It is interesting to note that this period marks the generally accepted beginnings of the artist's book, as we know it.

Butler (2004:5) wrote:

They (Hassan and Sontag) argued that the work of postmodernists was deliberately less unified, less obviously 'masterful', more playful or anarchic, more concerned with the processes of our understanding than with the pleasures of artistic finish or unity, less inclined to hold a narrative together, and certainly more resistant to a certain interpretation, than much of the art that had preceded it.

From the 1970s the art world embraced "a series of wildly diverse tendencies. It was an attitude of rebellion not against previous art movements, but against the categorical authority of art history. Artists demanded freedom of expression, and they found radical ways to test the limits of all definitions of art" (Heartney, 2008:8). Appignanesi and Garratt (1995:55) wrote, "reality becomes redundant and we have reached hyper-reality in which images breed incestuously with each other without reference to reality or meaning".

A postmodern construct therefore provides for multiple readings of artworks, encouraging intercultural, inter-disciplinarian and subversive interpretations. Like Duchamp's famous urinal, Quinn speaks of postmodernism as combining formal experimentation with powerful social and cultural criticism (1999: 265). This is the work of the altered book.

In his book on postmodernism, Butler (2002:2) refers to postmodernists as "all members of a loosely constituted and quarrelsome political party [something like the various voices in an altered book] by and large internationalist and 'progressive' not particularly unified in doctrine, and certain of its uncertainties.". He also wrote that the postmodernist way of seeing the world is to see it as a whole, influenced by the huge growth in media communication by electronic means (Butler 2002:15). We are bombarded with visual information and communication on a very intense, continual level. The overlaying of visual images on the mind just by the sheer image immensity and force of advertising is a subconsciously physical hyper-palimpsest on the mind. In discussing the postmodern version of narrative, Heartney (2008:123) quoted the art critic Craig Owen as stating that this allegorical narrative incorporates

the notion of the palimpsest, which allows for infinite layering of meaning and recognizes that symbolic relationships are not simply 'one-to-one': in allegorical structure, then, one text is *read through* another, however fragmentary, intermittent or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest.

Hubert and Hubert (2001) also refer to altered books as "quite a different kind of postmodern artifact, and sometimes far less legible (derived) from imitating palimpsests", terming this transformation by erasure and erosion an expression of "loss or denial of memory erasure asserting, by dint of denial, intertextuality" (ibid). Intertextuality, a term associated with post structuralism, "rejects the idea of a text as a single, autonomous entity created by a single author" (Quinn 1999:173). The transformed book is a physical manifestation of this phrase.

There has been extensive debate on the positioning of collage as the forerunner of postmodernism. Writers like Christine Poggi (1992) and Thomas Brockelman (2001) have theorized that collage was actually the beginnings of postmodernism, not the outworking of modernism. Once 'invented', the collage method, as a system of representation, undermined the accepted notions of representation in art, signaling the beginnings of postmodernism rather than acting as a support to the modernist debate. Brockelman (2001:11) wrote that collage practices are " the gathering of materials from *different* worlds into a single composition demanding a geometrically multiplying double reading of each element [thus creating] a new kind of relationship between two shards of the traditional concept of worldhood". By its very nature, collage borrows from the world around it in order to create a new reality. This is the postmodernist reality of the altered book.

In altered book art practice, existing books become a canvas on which to add, subtract, appropriate and collage with various previously un-intentioned fragments. By definition, collage is a cutting up and fragmenting of pre-existing images, texts, forms and visual components in order to recontextualise them and thus create new meaning (Joris, 1997). In essence, the rationale of the altered book is collage. The altered book practitioner may physically cut up or tear out pages, or pieces of text, from a book chosen for alteration. These 'bits' are discarded and new fragments take their place. The page, already a conceived quantity, is inexorably changed by intervention, losing its original meaning and purpose. Drucker (2004:109) wrote of the page as a 'surface which is already articulated or spoken for". This 'spoken for' space becomes the support for a new idea, a new fragment, and a new piece of visual language.

As a visual language, collage involves the situating of signs in new contexts – it is both medium and idea. As stated earlier, Marshall McLuhan (1971:15) wrote, "the medium is the message".

Collage as a language of representation is full of conflicts, parody and diverse cultural borrowings. It involves the shaping and arranging, then rearranging and shifting of subject matter; collage is in fact the art of fragmentation, a key component and intricate measure of the postmodern condition.

In writing of the collage method, Poggi (1992:257) stated:

the co-existence of images, words and objects is now a familiar feature of twentieth century art - one can sometimes take it for granted. But the freedom to mix materials and media to emphasize abrupt juxtapositions and discontinuities, to give works of art an ephemeral life, to explore the possibilities of kineticism and viewer interaction and to invent new media stems from the initial innovations of the Cubists and Futurists.

It is this idea of 'inventing new media', with intent as well as an acknowledgement of form, which causes the artist to rethink the ordinary book. The ordinary book, unaltered is a readymade, founded in the industrially produced, appropriated articles of Duchamp (1887-1968).

Duchamp's work **Unhappy Readymade** (1919) (Fig. 38) was a geometry textbook hung up in the corners of a porch, left suspended in this way for an extended length of time, subjected to the weather. The intention was the destruction (alteration) of this book by the weather. Seekamp (2004), quoted Duchamp as saying "that's all that's left (a painting by his sister), since the wind tore it up. It amused me to bring the idea of happy and unhappy into readymades, and then the rain, the wind, the pages flying."



Figure 38.

Duchamp, M. 1919. **Unhappy Readymade (Readymade Malheureux)**.
No Dimensions recorded. Work no longer exists.

Although Duchamp calls this work a readymade, Bright (2005:41) noted that "its alteration by the elements and the fact that it is a book, complicate its identity more than Duchamp's earlier readymades. **Unhappy Readymade** can be described as one of the first altered books. In this artwork a commercially produced book was lifted from its traditional intent. This altered thinking about the conventional book whose cultural identity was relatively unquestioned at the time. Duchamp liberated the artist from the obligation of producing the actual art object. Art in itself becomes "a form of production, involves reassembling and redeploying already given elements and rules, to discover the world in the modality of the ready-made is to confront the condition of postmodernism" (Judovitz 1998:140).

There are numerous ways in which the artist intervenes with the commonplace book in order to produce an altered book. Each of these interventions can represent more than just a material action. Quoting Janis, Seekamp (2004) wrote of **Unhappy Readymade** as "epitomizing the conflict between human knowledge and the eternal verities. Duchamp accepts as inevitable the action of the forces of nature, the change which time effects, its proclivity for corroding, destroying, reducing to rubbish all that man builds".

Rosamund Purcell (2006:33) wrote of weather-beaten books, faded and slumped as "pulp bricks almost impossible to read...a book that is still a book but cannot be read (imparting) peace and promise".

Hall (2003:85) spoke of the closed book as representing chastity. The artist, who willingly interferes in this quietness, tearing pages, erasing and adding, obstructs the initial purpose and communication technique of the book, violating its intended function. Bright (2005:10) in commenting on the reflective relationship attached to the book and the reader wrote that "a book's openable codex format suggests oppositions of containment and release, interior and exterior, surface and depth, covering and exposure, invitation and rejection, an unfolding physical, intellectual and emotional simultaneity".

By violating the ready made book, the artist challenges traditional reading patterns and inherent meaning, being at once destructive and constructive.

One of the alteration methods is the removal of pages within the book. Physically, the reason for removing the page is generally to add space for the new, or to lessen strain on the spine of the new book which will come about by the additions to the format.

The spine represents that which binds the whole together. It is the rigidity of frame and format. The spine is that which gives the codex its structure. By physically altering the book and thus straining the spine, new philosophical implications are brought to bear.

Verheyen (1998) wrote, "the structure determines how the book is 'read', and influences how the 'reader' reacts with it on an allegorical level". When an altered book is filled with information alien to its original purpose it becomes a 'stuffed' object, sometimes too small to hold the added information it contains. The spine becomes strained and at times breaks altogether, spilling the information. It can no longer be restrained by contained boundaries. Its rigid backbone (spine) might be broken. Containment is ended and the 'frame' is broken, the original function invalidated. Brockelman (2001:25), in discussing the 'broken frame' speaks of "the ability of art to make us 'see again' a world that tends to get lost through habit...invites us to take a second look, bids us take leave from our usual interests and concerns and to attend to what is thus re-presented". The altered book is a re-presentation of an old book. It calls on the viewer to separate *this* book from the world of popular commodity and re-position it.

Vogler (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:457):

the converted book can be seen as removed from the fall of mass production, redeemed by its aura of uniqueness and conferring a comparable aura of individuality on its creator. By being unique, it privatizes the experience of its possessor and distinguishes [it] from mass forms of commodity consumption. The artist who seems to be violating one code, that says don't mistreat valuable property, is obeying another, that says the right to ownership derives from the mixture of one's own labor with something that is common to all.

For Hubert and Hubert (2001), the transformed book "reveal[s] the derivative nature of art and literature in so far as the modified book, by relying on a specific origin, denies originality, thus reducing all art and literature to reframing and rewriting".

Section Four: *The Altered Book as a Versatile Form of Expression*

A Humument (1966 - 1980) (Fig.39) is one of the best known examples of an altered book. The artist Tom Phillips altered an existing book called *The Human Document*, an obscure novel written in 1892 by W H Mallock. Phillips wrote (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:423) that "I made a rule: that the first (coherent) book I could find for three pence would serve". Phillips has radically altered every page of this wordy novel to create a transformed piece, which speaks of a new visual and textural work. The Victorian novel has mostly been obscured by erasing, painting and collaging from other parts of the book to create a new book - an altered book. In the beginning, Phillips just "scoured out unwanted words with pen and ink" (Traister, 2006). Traister (2006) quoted Phillips as saying that "it was not long before the possibility became apparent of making a synthesis of word and image, the two intertwined as in a mediaeval miniature". Phillips wrote further (in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:423) that "much of the pictorial matter in the book follows the text in mood and reference: much of it is also entirely non-referential, merely providing a framework for the verbal statement and responding to the disposition of the text on the page".

The Human Document has as its two main characters Robert Grenville and Irma Shilizzi. These two characters have maintained a role in the new book, but another character has been added, that of Bill Toge. Toge "could only appear when Mallock used the words 'together' or 'altogether' on a page, these (being) the only two words from which this characters surname can be constructed" (Traister, 2006). Toge "has his own recurrent iconography; his insignia include a carpet and a window looking out onto a forest, and his amoeba-like, ever-changing shape, always constructed from the rivers in the type" (Phillips in Rothenberg and Clay, 2000:423). **A Humument** is intended to be a self-conscious anthology of the entire history of the book, including the illustrated book, the medieval manuscripts, through to the early printed book and the experimental and avant-garde book format (Traister, 2006).

It is also interesting to note that the making of the pages did not follow their original chronological order. Ekdahl (1999) writes that **A Humument** may have the distinction of being "the most commercially successful artist's book ever". The first version of **A Humument** was published in 1980 by Thames and Hudson and is currently in its thirteenth edition.

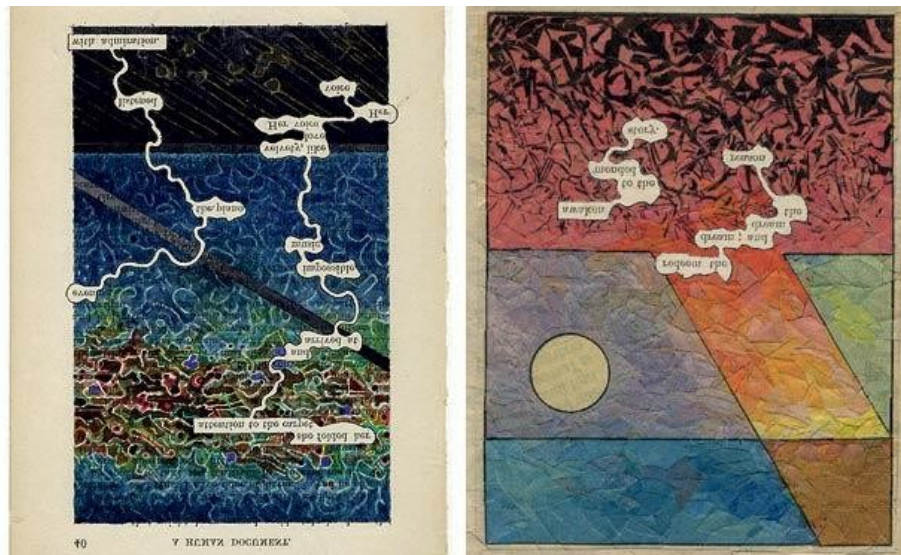


Figure 39.

Phillips, T. Begun in 1966. **A Humument**.
 Altered Book. 367 pages. 7.3 in x 3.0 in x 1.2 in. Various Collections.

Rosamund Purcell is an artist who subjects books to the forces of nature and decay such as **Book for Fishes** done in the mid 1990's (Fig. 40). Although much of her work is confined to the resultant photographs and images of bookworks, rather than the books themselves, her methods in altering the book are intriguing. Accepting that books are man-made artifacts designed to communicate information, Purcell causes a convergence of disparate phenomenon by removing the natural to an unnatural habitat. In 1989, with the help of the biologist Dr James Traniello, she subjected carefully selected texts to a termite colony. She wrote that she "offered up to [the] colony selected architectural texts, pages of perspectival drawing, a Dutch version of the Book of Genesis and a catalogue of handguns" (Purcell, 24:2006). When invaded by these forces, the texts became suggestive of "an alternative literary universe" (ibid). Within termite society, a different set of popular consumptive rules applied. The termites did not care for certain inks, "rejecting, for example, a picture of a tomato dyed a luscious orange in an otherwise black and white gardening pamphlet, though they did consume the descriptive text in its entirety" (Purcell, 23:2006). The result of this foraging? The termites created their own universe out of human artifacts, eating the pages and leaving "traced contours of moistened paper, and their foraging patterns left Cartographic islands, hollows of text not unlike Pacific atolls" (Purcell, 24:2006).

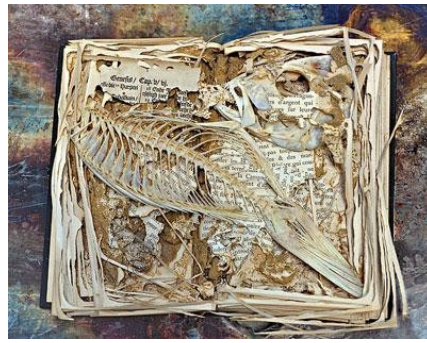


Figure 40.

Purcell, R. Mid 1990's. **Book for fishes.**
 Altered Book including fish bones. Dimensions not given.
 Collection: Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University.

She wrote that her "process of working with words and pictures is like assembling a masticated language; a rebus-language made of letters and images" (Purcell, 26:2006). One of her intentions is to render literal meaning irrelevant. She also refers to dissolution and decomposition in her work; the breakdown of the object. These discarded books are a bad history never read, a boring book on economics never learned, a "vivid illumination of damage" (ibid). Her altered books are in museums and academies in America and England, a paradoxical end to the used and discarded.

Yohei Nishimura is an artist who subjects numerous objects, including books, to the pottery kiln. **The Open and Closed Book** (1993) (Fig. 41) is a fired copy of an exhibition catalogue of a 1979 exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum titled *The Open and Closed Book*. Nishimura coats existing books with clay before firing them. He also noted that pages or covers that are not covered with clay, also retain their form. In this instance, the original catalogue shrunk; the wrappers are stark white and the pages fused together. Various artists have practiced the subjecting of books to heat as an intervention method. This alteration of the cultural artifact by heat and fire can be read as inspired by the book burnings of the middle ages, where any assumption of knowledge outside the 'frame' was deemed heretical.

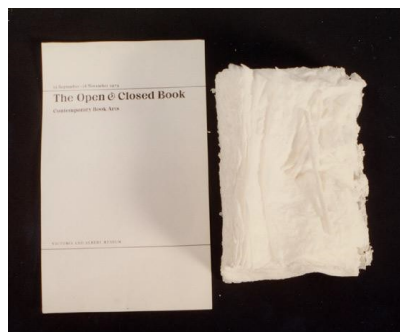


Figure 41.

Nishimura, Y. 1993. **The Open and Closed Book.**
 Altered Book. Exhibition catalogue coated in clay and fired. 17cm x 11cm x 5cm.
 Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum.

Unfurled (2008) (Fig. 42) was part of a series of books by Jacqueline Lee. The artist used water and dye to transform the structure of the book. Once dried, these books were stretched and built into geometric forms. "Using the discarded books of anonymous book owners, the work emerged from an experimental casting process in which book covers, edges and raw book spines were removed and embedded in gypsum cement" (Bodman, 2009). These works are small in nature "fitting into the palm of the hand, Lee terming them "Imprescoes; a joining together of the words 'imprint' and 'fresco' " (Bodman, 2009).



Figure 42.

Lee, J.R. 2008. **Unfurled.**

Altered Book. Dye, gypsum cement. Dimensions not given.

Center for Book Arts, New York.

David Ferry, head of Printmaking at the Winchester School of Art, has, over the years produced a series of laboriously manipulated, altered books, "satirizing the perception of UK tourism from his childhood memories" (Bodman 2005:58). **A Picture History of England, mainly in black and white** (2002) (Fig. 43) was a book created from *A Picture History of England*, published the year of his birth.



Figure 43.

Ferry, D. 2002. **A Picture History of England. Mainly in black and white.**

Altered Book. Dimensions not given. Collection: David Ferry.

He said of this particular book that it did not include "anything about Punk Rock, Charles and Camilla, wars in the Falklands, or the beautiful game of football, indeed nothing about the Twentieth Century at all" (Ferry, 2005). Bodman (2005:59) speaks of these 'defiled' books "as the act of defilement as an artistic act". Ferry (2005) said that the original book "captures and places the most rigorous and intense historical attention to detail all the important character and places from the past [it is] understanding this past can we begin to move forward in the 21st century and more importantly, into a greater understanding of a genuine hand knitted quality of life".

Cyclopedia of Drawing (2004) (Fig. 44) saw William Kentridge using page restructuring as an intervention method. Kentridge used pages from an American Technical Society reference book called *Cyclopedia of Drawing* published in 1924, to create the cells of an animation in flip book format.

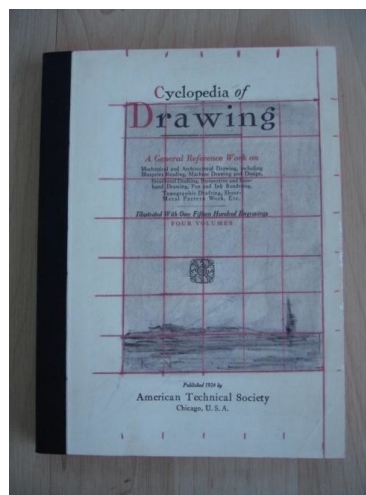


Figure 44.

Kentridge, W. 2004. **Cyclopedia of Drawing**.
Editioned, soft cover artist's book, printed from an original altered book. Flipbook.
71 pages. 21cm x 15cm. Collection: Cheryl Penn.

He drew over existing, selected machine, mechanical and architectural drawings used to illustrate the manufacture of sheet metal and tinsmith projects. With no introduction at the beginning of the flip book, Kentridge's alter ego Felix laboriously springs into the air, whilst at the same time subtly morphing into a bird taking flight. "After a brief stint as Icarus, he somersaults back to the ground and ends in a relaxing, almost comic pose" (Whiskets, 2008). On each page, the engravings and drawings, along with their commensurate instructions appear to give credence to the possibility of this feat.

This is accentuated by the red grid superimposed over each of the drawings, lending them a scientific air. It is interesting to note that the reassembly of the pages into a 'new' **Cyclopedia of Drawing** has rendered the old page structure invalid. The original structure of instructions is overlaid with another form of sequence; drawings of Felix jumping into the air and transforming. This new sequence supersedes the original sequential page structure as if only the reshuffling of the original information on sheet metal can render the Icarus idea possible. This imposing of a new progressive order onto the existing order speaks of an alternate reality, formed by integration of old and new knowledge. This is the purpose of the altered book; the alteration of an existing volume to create an art work which is conceptual, contextual and transformative. This intervention with an existing artifact alters both the content and the physical space of a traditional book, moving it into the realm of the artist's book. Kentridge (2008) views the already written page as "the appearance of an accumulation of knowledge - the fact that it is not a blank sheet of paper, that the whole history that is built into that text becomes part of the work when you do it".

As stated previously, Drucker (2004:109) wrote of these impositions on the already written word as "interventions into the social order, and the text of the world as it is already written". This recreation of **Cyclopedia of Drawing** has lifted an ordinary, outdated reference work from obscurity into a limited edition artwork, changing its fundamental purpose. Kentridge has used the language and conventions of this text as something to play with in his deliberate alteration of the written page.

There is a postmodernist sensibility of being not committed to the delimited argument, or narrative, of the existing word: rather, he has become a disseminator of meaning. In his addition of visual elements and divergence from the intentions of the author of the original work, Kentridge has contributed to the postmodernist concept of 'the death of the author'. As Butler (2002:24) wrote "the text, as really constructed by the reader [artist], was thereby liberated and democratized for free play of the imagination. Meaning has become the property of the interpreter, who was free to play, deconstructively with them". The artistic intrusion in this work is gentle, creating a work that could be regarded as a palimpsest in which the original writing and drawings bleed through.

The artist's book **Everyone Their Own Projector** (2008) (Fig.45) by Kentridge formed the focus of an exhibition of the same name held in 2008 in Paris. This artist's book was inspired by a satirical story by Nikolai Gogol called *The Nose*. In brief, this tale revolves around a petty Russian official named Major Kovaliov who wakes up one morning discover his nose is missing. His nose has donned the uniform of a counselor of higher rank than its owner and, despite numerous entreaties, is not prepared to return to his face. Whilst attempting to leave the town with its own passport the nose is caught and returned to Kovaliov. Twelve days later he wakes to find his nose back on his face in its proper place. Using **Everyone their Own Projector**, Kentridge walks the nose through his own rendition of various women painted by artists such as Manet, Rembrandt, Giotto and Masaccio as well as characters from his previous work. (2008) wrote that "the Nose intimately explores the female body: contemporary female bodies from South Africa alongside Degas' *femmes après le bain*. The Nose travels with Kentridge examining the artists' selected artistic lineage, and the classic subject of the European artist until the mid twentieth century, that of the female nude".



Figure 45.

Kentridge W. 2008. **Everyone Their Own Projector**.
 Editioned, printed altered book. 26cm x 19cm.
 Collection: Cheryl Penn.

This book is about perceiving, rather than just seeing. Clues are provided throughout the volume as cryptic messages from the personal journey of the Nose, two important ones being the realization that "all I could remember, there were things I had forgotten" (Kentridge, 2008:38) and "you will find no new lands you will find no new seas" (Kentridge, 2008:98).

The appropriation of images, text and Gogol's' Nose and their resultant fragmentation and deconstruction, speak of a skeptical postmodernist attitude toward any sort of overall, hegemonic narrative. It is interesting in this regard that Kentridge assembled the pages of this book post-event. The pages were drawn over the period of a year and then assembled according to their own narrative, the story they told, rather than that imposed by the artist (Kentridge, 2008). This reversal of sequential power from artist to the actual image is almost 'Lyotardian' in nature. Lyotard saw the role of the artist as the one who "questions the rules of painting or of narrative as they have learned them from their predecessors." (Lyotard in Butler, 2002:62), rather than "worrying about its [arts] own language" (ibid).

Art Angels (2003), (Fig. 46) is an altered book by Liz Vels which uses *An Apostolic Optimism* as a base. This work formed part of an exhibition entitled Art Angels, which was held in a church. Elizabeth Vels (b. 1937) is a South African artist whose primary form of expression is book making. The original book was a heavy, Victorian treatise on apostolic optimism, which Vels perceived as being resplendent with Christian clichés. The binding led Vels to believe it was a book dealing with weighty matters, "a heavy Christian read" (Vels, 2009a), so heavy she almost wanted to avoid it. It seemed to her like "an ancient leather bound Dickens which remains unread in my library" (ibid).



Figure 46.

Vels, E. 2003. **Art Angels**. Altered book. Dismantled and reconstructed book which includes rising parchment, collage, watercolors, etchings, hand written text, canvas strips. 21cm x 14cm x 4cm. Collection: Elizabeth Vels.

Vels (2009b) said she;

bought into the whole notion of hopefulness, layering the book with a personal and art historical view of painting angels. The resultant pages were overwritten with perhaps unexpected images of Christian iconography resulting in a rather messy un-Victorian book. The lofty, spiritual Victorian view of angels is brought into the realm of the everyday, updating a universal Victorian belief system into a personal vision.

Fruit (1996) (Fig. 47) is a transformed book, chosen because of its title. 'Fruit' is perceived by Vels "as answers to prayers" (2009b). The resultant work is without textual alteration, making reference to the private playground of personal meditation. The book is embossed with real fruit and stained with the juices of fruit. Although dealing with the uniqueness involved in private mediation, the book was chosen by Vels because of its mass production status and the fact it was about to be recycled.



Figure 47.

Vels, E. 1996. **Fruit**. Altered book. Plum and peach skins, fruit juice, rising parchment, embossing, paint, collage, hand written text. 25cm x 16cm x 2cm.
Collection: Elizabeth Vels.

Lesley Magwood-Fraser (b. 1957) is an artist for whom the making of the artist's book is not the central focus of her practice, but it is an integral part of the formulation and accumulation of ideas. She makes extensive use of the altered book, viewing an existing book as a work already begun. **The South African Landscape** (2005) (Fig.48) is an old text book also titled *The South African Landscape*. The book contained South African landscape contour drawings and typographical photographs onto which Magwood-Fraser has superimposed drawings of the body, clothing, fabrics, knot drawings and any sort of mixed media drawings she feels are inspired by contour drawings of the landscape. "At times the photographs speak of facial contours and these nuances are accentuated with paint, pastel and collage (Magwood-Fraser, 2008). This book deals with the explorations and feelings expressed by existing shapes and forms within the context of contour drawings.



Figure 48.

Magwood Fraser, L. 2005. **South African Landscape**.
Altered book including text, drawing, painting, collage. 30cm x 24cm x 4cm. Collection: Lesley Magwood-Fraser.

The use of redundant text books is, for her, the creation of a new superimposed visual narrative which moves an existing, outdated artifact into the realm of art.

Helmut Löhr is an artist who tears and shreds books and has been creating sculptural objects since the 1970's. **The Exquisite Book** was an exhibition held at the Minnesota Art Museum as part of his ongoing project called **The International Library**. For this exhibition (on-going), Löhr created a series of altered books with the book covers on the inside and the torn pages on the outside. These books were then sent to artist- collaborators around the world to alter them even further.

"**The Exquisite Book** considers these objects in the contexts of both book art and collaborative art practices" (Hancher, 2008). An example of one of these collaborative works is (Fig. 49) **Untitled** by Anja Deerberg, made in 1994. Hancher wrote further that in the 1960s mail art, characterized by the transferring of art by post, and collaborative art, were closely related experimental practices; "The International Library is an example of the intersection of these creative and social impulses" (Hancher: 2008). This book has a leather strap around it and attached to the strap are two wings, giving one the idea of a flying book.



Figure 49.
Deerberg, A. 1994. **Untitled**.
Altered book, Leather, Polymer. Dimension not given. Part of the **Exquisite Book Exhibition**.

The use of the medium of altered books is extensive, and growing. There are altered book forums, chat rooms and web sites that boast members in the hundreds of thousands. The altered book is becoming a tool in art therapy (Chilton, 2007), art making, education, and social studies. Strauch-Nelson, an assistant art professor at the University of Wisconsin, has used the techniques of the altered book as a tool to integrate social studies and art. She wrote that there are "several inherent characteristics of books that promote complex thinking, not by the reader in this case, but by the maker, requiring students to process, analyze, order and transform meaning [making] combined aesthetic, content judgments. [Thus generating] ways to represent new knowledge and interpretations so their viewer could understand as well" (Strauch-Nelson, 2008). Hobbyists, professional artists, curators and students of linguistics, collaborative writers and poets, journalists and digital artists, collectors and educators are all investigating the altered book form as a medium for communication.

This intervention into an existing artifact expands the reader's understanding of cultural codes and expectations, re-forming anything from romances, cookbooks, botanical reference books, dictionaries and children's books. These are renegotiations of what is already given, what has already been. Paton, (2000) commented that altered books have "proven controversial and contentious, particularly when seen to operate as Artists' Books. Their contention lies in their lack of originality and the fact that the artist was not engaged in the making of the original work, [that] many works cease to be read and therefore cease to function as books". Although this is the case, he goes on further to point out there are many artists' books that cannot be read. For example they are bound closed, or they are without some sort of key to understand content. He concludes by stating that a "way through t h e debate is to highlight the common acceptance of *appropriation* as fundamentally post-modern" (ibid).

Suzan Johanknecht (in Bodman, 2005:37) in her essay entitled 'Some Reformations' writes that the strength of altered books "lies in simultaneously existing in their own right as well as promoting a reassessment, or new reading of their sources". She quotes Walter Benjamin, in speaking of this relationship to the original as an 'afterlife' "which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living - the original undergoes a change" (ibid). Writing of postmodern consciousness, Grenz (1996:13) writes that "in addition to its dark pessimism, the postmodern consciousness operates with a view of truth different from what previous generations have espoused, [looking] beyond reason to nonrational ways of knowing". He wrote further that pluralism is the hallmark of postmodern cultural expression and that "postmodern artists deliberately juxtapose seemingly contradictory styles from immensely different sources [thus] postmodern cultural works are often 'double-coded', carrying meaning on two levels" (Grenz 1996:20).

In essence, the altered book is a form of expression which brings together seemingly incompatible source material and actions. Think of a book, and the destruction of the book, in order to render double meaning about the book. Think of re-writing the already written word by erasing what is said in order to clarify, or nullify, what has been previously stated. Rather, the altered book speaks of a plurality of voices, undermining the concept of a powerful, originating author.

Altered books question given stories and structures, embrace stylistic diversity, freely enlist diversity and parody, fragmentation and paradox, inviting the viewer to find new meaning and readings from an existing cultural artifact.

In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to provide a general discussion on the artist's book as a versatile form of expression in the work of selected artists, with particular reference to the altered book. The importance of books as cultural artifacts is undisputed. Their function is utilitarian. They serve to inform, engage, educate, inspire, and entertain their readers. History has taught that certain books are more revered than others. The Bible and the Koran have set nations at war by their human handlers.

Certain authors, like Stephane Mallarmé (1843 - 1898) and Edmond Jabés (1912 - 1991) are revered for their philosophical insights on the nature of the book. They removed the book from the status of the ordinary, to "a spiritual instrument" (Mallarmé in Rothenberg and Guss, 1996:17). Jabés (in Waldrop, 2000) wrote, "my books are for me a place of passage and the only place where I might live. It is language, the book, that enables us to perceive - and to live. It is our universe to the point where we ourselves metamorphose into the word". Waldrop quotes Jabés further as saying "the book never actually surrenders" (ibid). I have found that this 'place of passage' is, for many artists, the artist's book.

Clive Phillpot (in Lauf, and Phillpot, 1998:32) wrote;

Artists' books are distinguished by the fact that they sit provocatively at the juncture where art, documentation, and literature [and history] all come together. Indeed, one of the characteristics of the field is its mongrel nature. ... What really characterizes artists' books is that they reflect and emerge from the preoccupations and sensibilities of artists, as makers and as citizens.

By changing, or continually modifying the definition of these books, their history becomes more inclusive. Even its theorists broaden their theoretical views of artists books.

Take Clive Phillpot for example. Phillpot is an artist's book collector, theorist, and lecturer. He has proposed various definitions as to what constitutes an artist's book during the many years he has been involved with this art form. (Bright 2005:189) wrote, "in 1977 the arrival of Clive Phillpot as librarian at the MOMA marked the pivotal move of the multiple bookwork into the establishment art world".

These definitions include one in 1976, as quoted by Miller (2000) that artists' books are "books or booklets produced by the artist using mass-production methods, and in (theoretically) unlimited numbers in which the artist documents or realizes art ideas or art works." In terms of this definition, altered books, collaborative books, unique books, in fact any books, other than 'democratic multiples' were not artists' books.

By 1980, Phillpot (ibid) wrote that artists' books "were not inextricably dependent on the book form". By 1998 his definition was broader still, using the terms 'artists' books' rather than bookworks, which, "reflect and emerge from the preoccupations and sensibilities of artists" (Phillpot in Lauf and Phillpot, 1998:32). This example of the difficulty a leading theorist on book art has in trying to define just what an artist's book is, testifies to the complexity of their history, their definition and their situation in current art practice.

This paper set out to gain an understanding of the history of artists' books, and found that they were embedded in a rich cultural heritage. They draw on the historical disciplines of book binding, paper making and sewing, as well as on the contemporary practices of printing, drawing, sculpture and painting. The complexity of placing their development in art history is discussed by theorists such as Bright (2005) and Drucker (2004). Drucker (2004:1) wrote, "what is unique about artists' books is that with very few exceptions they did not really exist in their current form before the 20th century". But what of the exceptions? Are the books of William Blake not artists' books? Drucker (2004:21) wrote of 'precedents' to the artist's book; "genuine precedents for the conceptual practice of artists' books can, however, be found in the work of several individuals. William Blake in the late 18th century and William Morris in the late 19th century. the writings of the Symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé, the Realist novelist Gustave Flaubert, and the poet Edmund Jabe". But, it can be argued that these are artists' books and that the precedents to artists' books are actually the emblem books, which are only recently receiving intense academic scrutiny.

As the "quintessential 20th century art form" (Drucker 2004:1), the artist's book functions as contemporary art and, "as the book as artifact comes under closer scrutiny by historians, students and scholars of literary criticism, an understanding of just how its component parts come together should provide greater insight into its overall material functionality" (Walkup: 2003). 79

Further study in this area may reveal that, as the definition of artists' books is under scrutiny, so will their history be.

A final note

Since writing this paper in 2009, I have been intimately involved in the construction and production of artists' books on a daily basis. I have subjected existing books to alteration by fire, storms, knife, tearing, painting, drawing and collage. I have created books from clay, photographs, metal, glass, wood, stone and fabric. I have completed multiples books through digital printing, Xerox, traditional printing methods and every creative art media available to me. And it seems a circuitous route, an Ourovoros Ophis - "in my beginning is my end".

April 2014.

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- Figure 23. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen, E. 2009. **Stroebel's Strudel OR Treasures and Feasts: a discourse about stars**. Unique artist's book. Fabriano, black card, handmade paper, embossed paper, sugar paper, fabric with sequins, cotton thread, coins, variety of beads, pearl and hand crafted cross. Star binding/Leporello in three layers with tunnel effect and pop-up, cased into split board casing covered with hand-made and sugar paper, with piano hinge spine and 3-hole binding of sections into the Leporello. 33.5cm x 18.5cm x 4cm text block: approx 15.5cm x 15.5cm. Collection: Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg. Photograph, courtesy of Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen.
- Figure 24. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen, E. 2008/9. **A Woman's Heart**. Unique artist's book. Cartridge paper, acrylic paints, rubber stamps, ink, fabric, lace, hand-made paper, mulberry paper, marble paper. Split board casing with concertina spine and piano hinges, covered with marble paper and book cloth. 21cm x 19cm x 1.5cm, texblock 14.5cm x 18.5cm. Collection: Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen. Photograph, courtesy of Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen.
- Figure 25. Gilks, J. 1970's - 2009. **Animal Scroll**. Unique artist's book. Scroll format. Paper. Collage, ink, pencil, charcoal, graphite, fabric, sewing, bating, text, wax crayons, pencil crayons, pastels, photocopies. Currently 16m x 21.5cm. Collection: Jeanette Gilks. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Jeanette Gilks.
- Figure 26. Gilks, J. 2009. **Polophony**, Unique artist's book. Accordion, Fold Binding, origami, paper, sewing, pop-ups, violeen cotton, dowel rods, drawing, collage (including ready made stamps), ticking, sewing, pen and ink, machine embroidery, ready made objects, stamps, photocopies. Dimensions not given. Collection: Jeanette Gilks. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Jeanette Gilks.
- Figure 27. Vels, E. 2008. **Metaphorical Gardening**. Unique artist's book. Carousel/Star binding, handmade paper, collage, paper mache. 20cm x 35cm diameter. Collection: Unknown, London. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Elizabeth Vels.
- Figure 28. Vels E. 2008. **Metaphysical Gardening**. Unique artist's book. Carousel/Star binding, handmade paper, collage, paper mache.. 20cm x 35 cm diameter. Collection: Unknown, London. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Elizabeth Vels.

- Figure 29. Vels, E. 1998. **Beauty for Ashes I**. Unique artist's book. Handmade paper, embroidery, paintings, text, etchings. Accordion Binding. 30cm x 23cm x 8cm (closed). Collection: Elizabeth Vels. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Elizabeth Vels.
- Figure 30. Christian, M. (ed). 1999. **A Women's Vision**. Limited edition artist's book. Accordion bound, screen print artist's book. Edition of 50. 22cm x 22cm. Collection: Caversham Press. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Caversham Press.
- Figure 31. Cozier, C. 2000. **I find Myself Wandering**. Limited edition artist's book. Single print acting as wrap around cover, pamphlet stitched, screen printed, Fabriano Paper. 33cm x 19cm. Edition of 50. Collection: Caversham Press. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Caversham Press.
- Figure 32. Xolile, M. 2002. **Ihambo Iyazilawaula**. Limited edition artist's book. Screen printed, accordion bound. 20cm x 14.5cm. Collection: Caversham Press. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Caversham Press.
- Figure 33. Minnix, J. 2007. **Little Boy**. (2007). Altered book. Materials include paint, cloth, wood and rope. Dimensions not given. [online]. Available at: www.alteredbookartists.com/gallery/index.html [Accessed February 2009].
- Figure 34. Image from *Regenerator altered books project exhibition*. [online.] Available at: www.bookarts.uwe.uk/regen/html [Accessed 17 February 2009].
- Figure 35. 6th Century and 979. **Codex Sinaticus Zosimi Rescriptus**. Vellum Palimpsest. 14x19cm - 31x20cm. Collection: The Schøyen Collection. [online]. Available at: <http://www.choyencollection.com/HebrewAramaic.htm#035> [Accessed March 2008].
- Figure 36. Various Authors. Various Dates. **The Archimedes Palimpsest**. Medieval parchment manuscript, 174 folios, vellum. Collector anonymous, but the manuscript is housed at The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. [online]. Available at: [Accessed June 2008].
- Figure 37. Author unknown. 11th Century. **Novgorod Codex**. Wooded tablets with wax and multiple layer of writing. Dimensions not given. Whereabouts unknown. [online]. Available at: www.csad.ox.uk/csad/Newsletter10/Newsletter10d.html [Accessed June 2008]
- Figure 38. Duchamp, M. 1919. **Unhappy Readymade (Readymade Malheureux)**. No Dimensions recorded. Work on longer exists. [online]. Available at: <http://artist.bingham.edu/duchamp/Unhappy%20Readmade.html> [Accessed February 2009].
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- Figure 40. Purcell, R. Mid 1990's. **Book for fishes**. Altered book including fish bones. Dimensions not given. Collection: Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University. (Purcell 2006:90).
- Figure 41. Nishimura, Y. 1993. **The Open and Closed Book**. Exhibition catalogue coated in clay and fired. 17cm x 11cm x 5cm. Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum. [online]. Available at: www.vam.ac.uk/collections/prints_books/features/artists_books/ [Accessed February 2009].
- Figure 42. Lee, J.R. 2008. **Unfurled**. Altered book, dye, gypsum cement. Dimensions not given. Exhibition Collection: Center for Book Arts, New York. [online]. Available at: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk [Accessed February 2009].
- Figure 43. Ferry, D. 2002. **A Picture History of England, mainly in black and white**. Altered book. Dimensions not given. Collection: David Ferry. [online]. Available at: web.utk.edu/~imprint/Ferry.html [Accessed February 2009].
- Figure 44. Kentridge, W. 2004. **Cyclopedia of Drawing**. Limited edition, soft cover artist's book, printed from an original altered book. Flip book. 71 pages 21cm x 15cm. Collection: Cheryl Penn. Photograph by Cheryl Penn.
- Figure 45. Kentridge W. 2008. **Everyone Their Own Projector**. Limited edition, soft cover artist's book. 26cm x 19cm. Collection: Cheryl Penn. Photograph by Cheryl Penn.
- Figure 46. Vels, E. 2003. **Art Angels**. Altered book. Dismantled and reconstructed book which includes rising parchment, collage, watercolours, etchings, hand written text, canvas strips. 21cm x 14cm x 4cm. Collection: Elizabeth Vels. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Elizabeth Vels.
- Figure 47. Vels, E. 1996. **Fruit**. Altered book. Plum and peach skins, fruit juice, rising parchment, embossing, paint, collage, hand written text. 25cm x 16cm x 2cm. Collection: Elizabeth Vels. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Elizabeth Vels.
- Figure 48. Magwood-Fraser, L. 2005. **South African Landscape**. Altered book. Text, drawing, painting, collage. 30cm x 24cm x 4cm. Collection: Lesley Magwood-Fraser. Photograph by Cheryl Penn, courtesy of Lesley Magwood-Fraser.
- Figure 49. Deerberg, A. 1994. **Untitled**. Altered book. Leather, Polymer. Dimensions not given. Part of the [Exquisite Book Exhibition](http://www.weisman.umn.edu/exhibits/ExquisiteBook/home.html). [online]. Available at: <http://www.weisman.umn.edu/exhibits/ExquisiteBook/home.html> [Accessed February 2009].

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