

## WILLEM BOSHOFF AND THE BOOK

The relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendor is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as if they were equivalents.

Michel Foucault 1970:9

I write this chapter in response to Willem Boshoff's assertion that everything he makes is a book.<sup>1</sup> In 1984, as an undergraduate, I asked Boshoff to comment on what I perceived to be a certain 'bookishness' (my rather vague and apologetic term indicating that I was not sure of what I was looking at) inherent in his *370 Day Project* (from 1982). I was surprised to hear him respond not in terms of the work's 'bookishness' but in terms of how the work operated as a book. A decade later I find myself still responding to Boshoff's assertion, but here, I am writing in response to what I perceive as his pantextuality.

In this chapter I examine selected pages from *Kykaprikaans* (1980) in order to conclude the analysis begun in previous chapters. In doing this I hope to show that the influence of both *Wurm* and Brink's *Orgie* (1965) helped form a body of work which has resulted in unique sculptural books. I then look at Boshoff's *370 Day Project* as an example of one of these books. I argue that its qualities as an Artist's Book reside in its pantextuality (the term I have used to define a synthesis, unity and breaking down of semiotic difference between image and text).

Reading these works highlights, for me, his acknowledgement of the tensions between the prevailing formalism of the 1970s and the insurgence of the conceptual and elements of process which emerged in that decade. His work willingly reveals the formal and material processes through which it moves – the hammering keys of the typewriter or the reductive marks of the chisel. At the same time, however, Boshoff purposefully attempts to cut the viewer off from his meanings. His typewriter and chisel become instruments of both revelation (through the formal constructs) and obfuscation (by allowing the viewer no key to the myriad of graphic symbols).

These works ultimately require the viewer to read his texts as images (a convention of Concrete and Visual Poetry)<sup>2</sup> as, in converting the sign (of lettering) into an image, Boshoff allows one to make little or no headway into deciphering textual meaning.

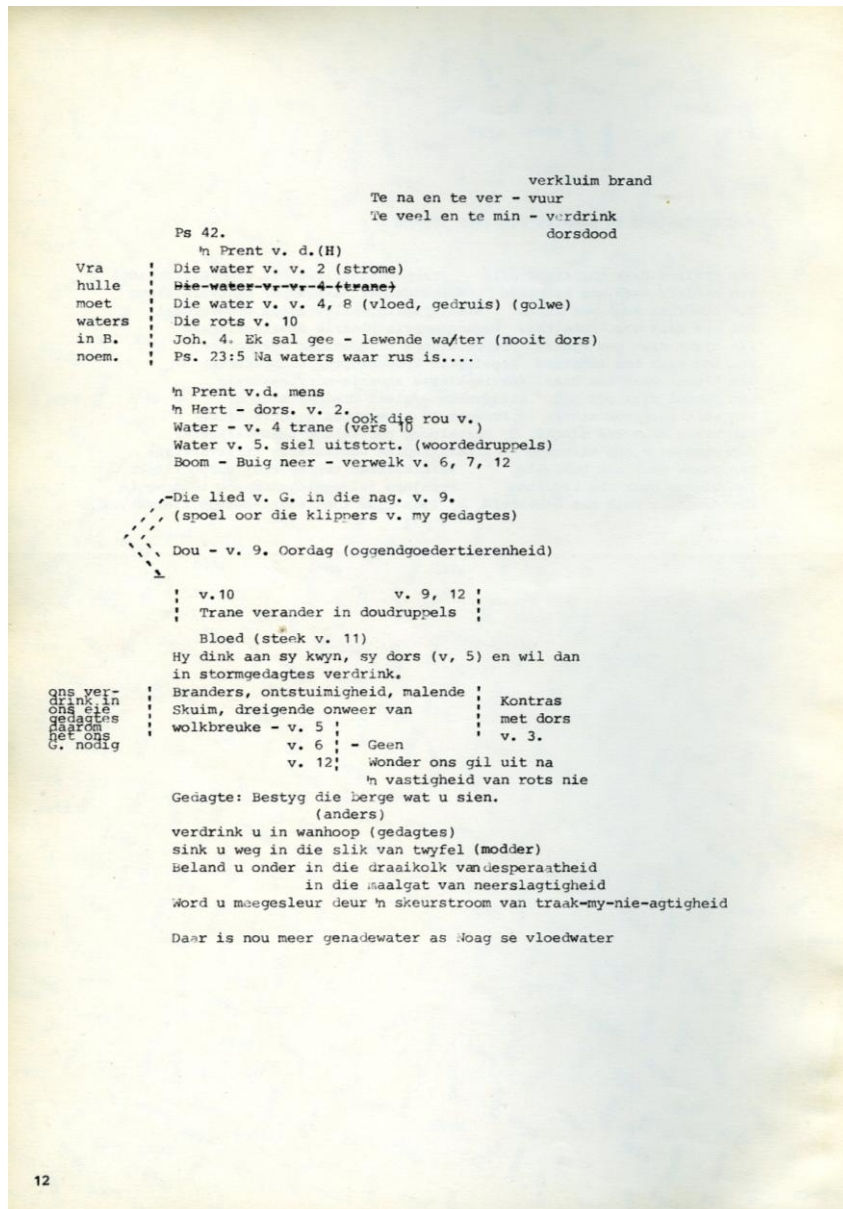
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<sup>1</sup> Boshoff has made this point to me in many private conversations stretching back to my first formal interview with him in 1984. In a lecture given to the Art Educators Association at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1996 he repeated this belief in reference to his *Blind Alphabet* series.

<sup>2</sup> Boshoff was considered a maverick and his work 'difficult' largely shunned by local galleries (with the exception of the Johannesburg Art Gallery where he was Guest Artist in September 1981) and collectors, leading to his self-conscious refusal to exhibit work (From an interview with the artist. July 1997). Only in the mid 1990s with international cultural isolation and boycotts lifting did Boshoff begin to receive local and international attention. The *Sachner Foundation for Concrete and Visual Poetry*, for example, only became aware of and purchased the original works for *Kykaprikaans* in 1996.

An example of this is Boshoff's forging of *Kykafrikaans* into a work of visual poetry of extreme importance. This work, I argue, not only influenced his future work, but also began to resolve the tensions between the physicality of his works and the supremacy of the idea. Boshoff's intention seems to have been the construction of a text-based visuality, operating as a continual interplay between looking and reading.

The origins of *Kykafrikaans* are, according to Boshoff,<sup>3</sup> varied. Boshoff remembers a tradition which he calls 'school boy crib notes' in which vast quantities of information were written in minute letters and secreted under desks and the soles of his shoes during examinations. Further points of departure included the practice of writing notes in tiny spaces in his Bible which would influence *PS 42*. (p.12)

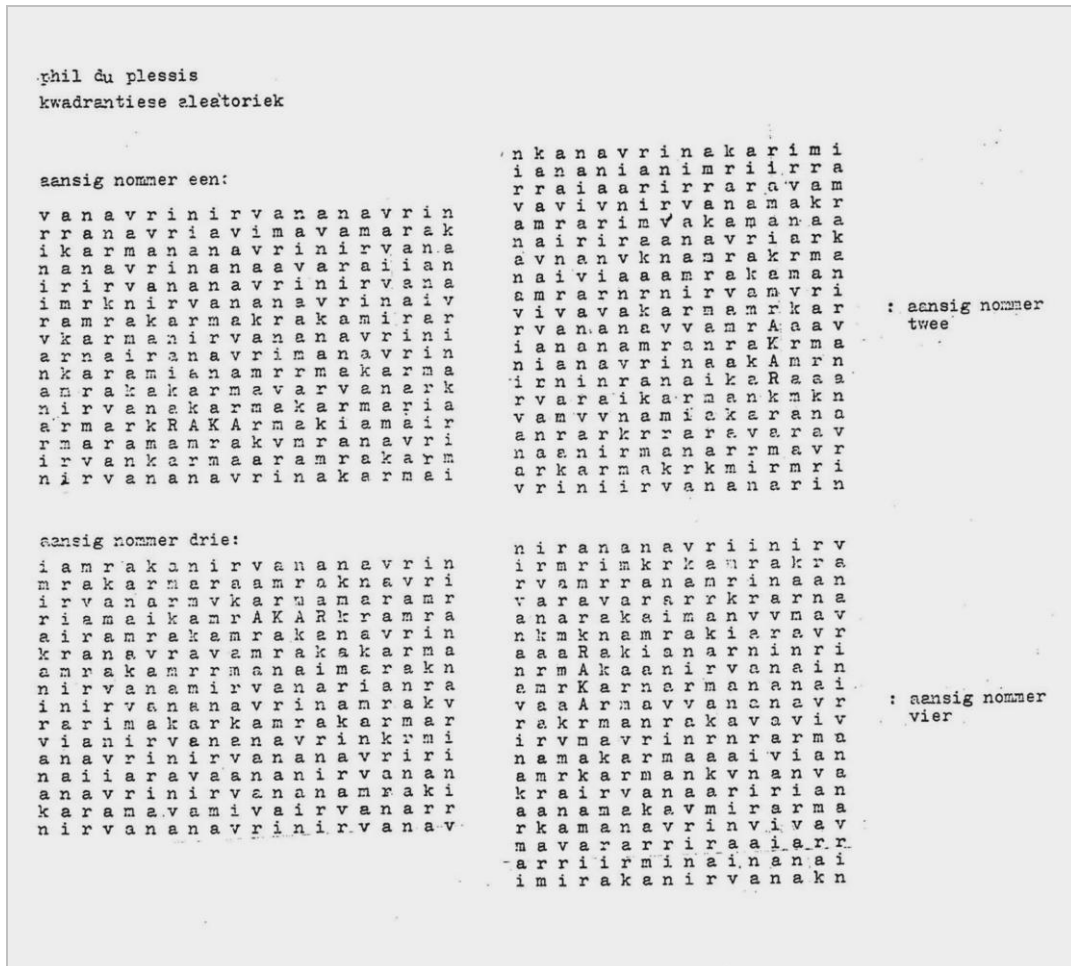


and, more profoundly, his massive typed justification for not attending Church Parade in the South African Defense Force, titled *Genesis* (c.1977).

<sup>3</sup> From an interview with the artist. (Boshoff, W., Johannesburg: July 1997.)

Yet there are also immediate formal and optical links between du Plessis' *Kwadrantiese Aleatoriek* (in: *Wurm* 9, July 1968 and discussed in the previous chapter) and many of Willem Boshoff's visual poems published in *Kykafrikaans*.<sup>4</sup>

The formal structure of the elements of language (letters, sentences etc.) as units for the creation of meaning forge similarities between *Kwadrantiese Aleatoriek* and *Kykafrikaans*.



I will now attempt to unpack some of Boshoff's sources and will isolate three which I consider important.

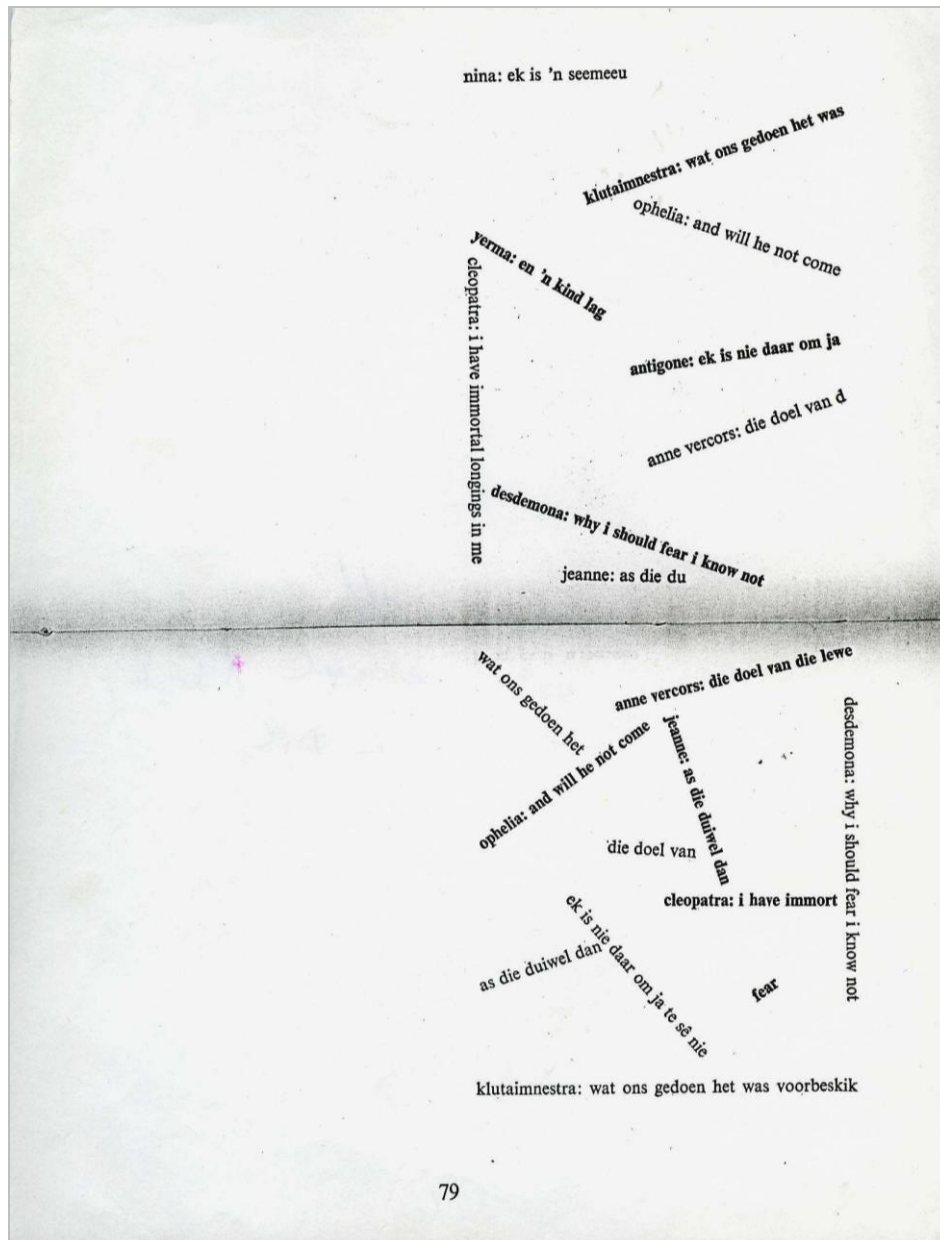
Firstly, André Brink's *Orgie* (1965).

In this book Brink exploits the page both spatially and temporally. Reading the pages becomes a haphazard and confusing activity with linear processing of text interrupted by blank and black pages and other intrusions into the literary structural conventions of the page.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For example: *Pro Patria* (p.1), *Vlegskrif* (p.2), *Persbeheer* (p.24), *Vol Vierkante* (p.26), *Teken van Gesag* (p.43), *Rorschach Klattoets* (p.60), *Strepe* (p.84) and *'n Huis in die Hemel* (p.86).

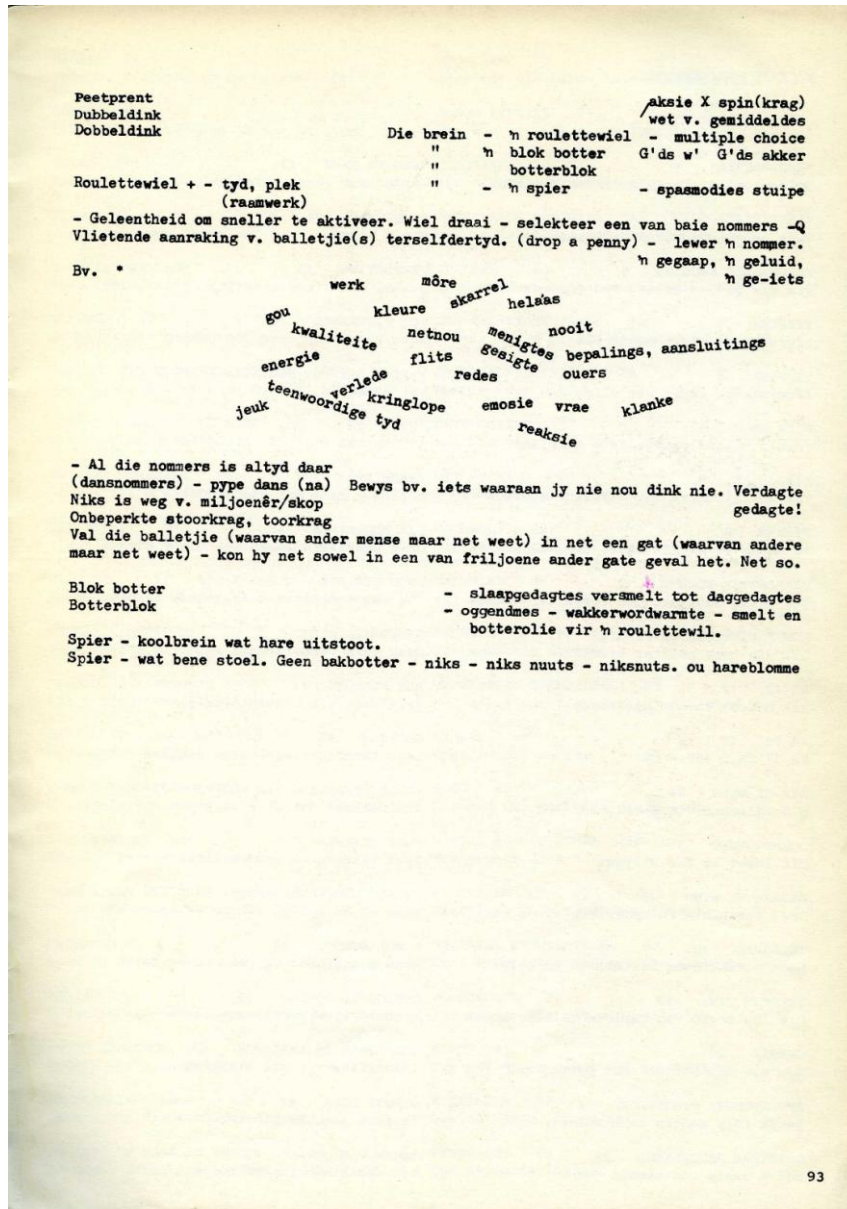
<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the literary structural conventions of the page, see the next chapter.

Brink's manipulation of the page as a spatial site encouraged Boshoff to explore similar spatial concerns i.e., when the structure of syntax is broken, the page begins to operate as a visual rather than purely textual field to be read.<sup>6</sup>



Brink's falling lines on page 79 of *Orgie* make a fruitful comparison with Boshoff's scattered words in *Peetprent* (p.93).

<sup>6</sup> This can be seen when examining works such as *Geagte Heer* (p.42) and *'n Oorgeskryfte Verhaal van Elegante Mistiek* (p.50-53). These works resemble a simultaneous and superimposed script for three or more actors with the narrative elements blending to such an extent that it becomes impossible to separate the lines logically. They thus operate as multi-layered speech, happening and heard at the same time, a sign for sound. See, for comparison, references to the sound quality of text in Blake and Mallarmé and the spatial elements of the page in Walter Saunder's *Guavajuce Ballad of Pretoria* and Phil du Plessis' *Apocalypsis 'n Teks vir Verhoog*.

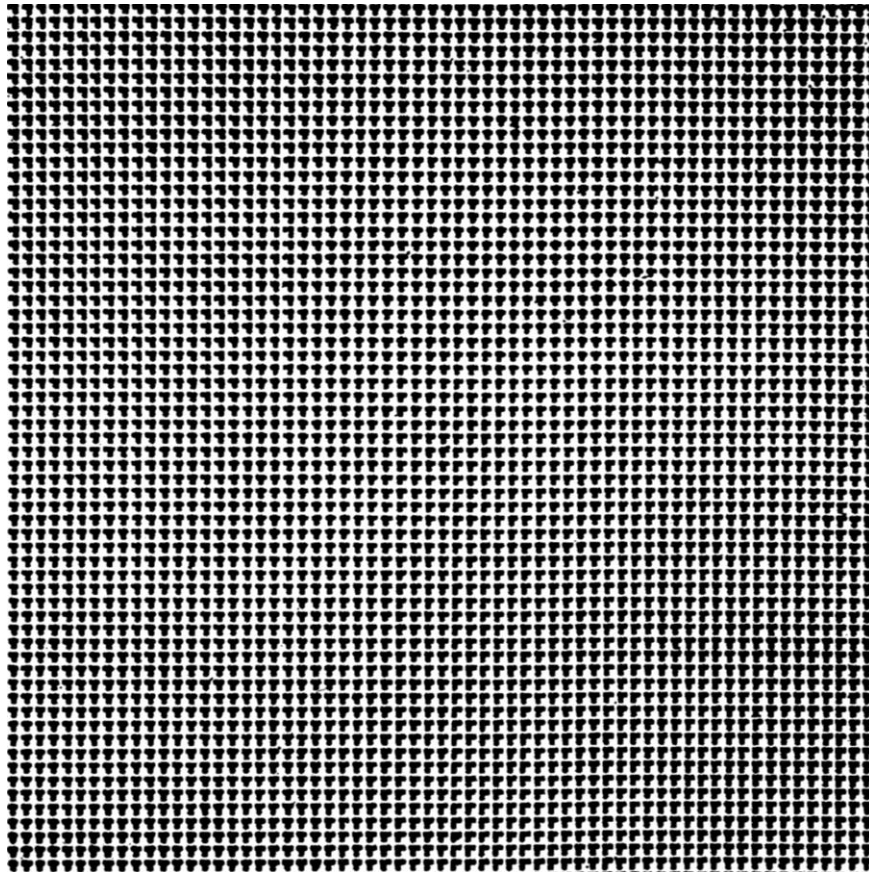


In both, the convention of linear syntax and grammar are replaced with graphic representations of textual disruption. Brink's page is viewed as a disturbance in the structural and temporal whole of the book. Reading the words and attempting to fit them into the narrative on either side of this disruption becomes a perplexing exercise. The reader observes the literal collapse of the narrative structure as a graphic representation rather than reading it as the words unfold. Reflexive and graphic elements such as these make *Orgie* extremely important to the way in which we are able to approach (if not process) Boshoff's work.

Boshoff employs such optical qualities throughout *Kyafrikaans*. In *Peetprent* Boshoff's falling text constructs a visual link between two sets of ideas, two conceptual units as implied by the 'sub title' *Dubbeldink* (thinking double).

The second source, the typographic manipulation of a block of text in order to heighten the text's opticality,<sup>7</sup> seems the very basis of *Kykafrikaans*. This opticality is constructed via the carefully manipulated relationship between black type and the white space of a page. Boshoff sought out examples of Op(tical) Art as suggestions for the opticality of his work.<sup>8</sup> In *Kykafrikaans*, optical relationships between typed and untyped elements construct the content of the work regardless of the fact that the optical units (letters and words) are, in places, unreadable.

An example of this pantextuality is provided by Curil Barrett (1970) in his seminal study of Op Art. He describes Gotthard Müller's serigraph *SD 65* (1962)



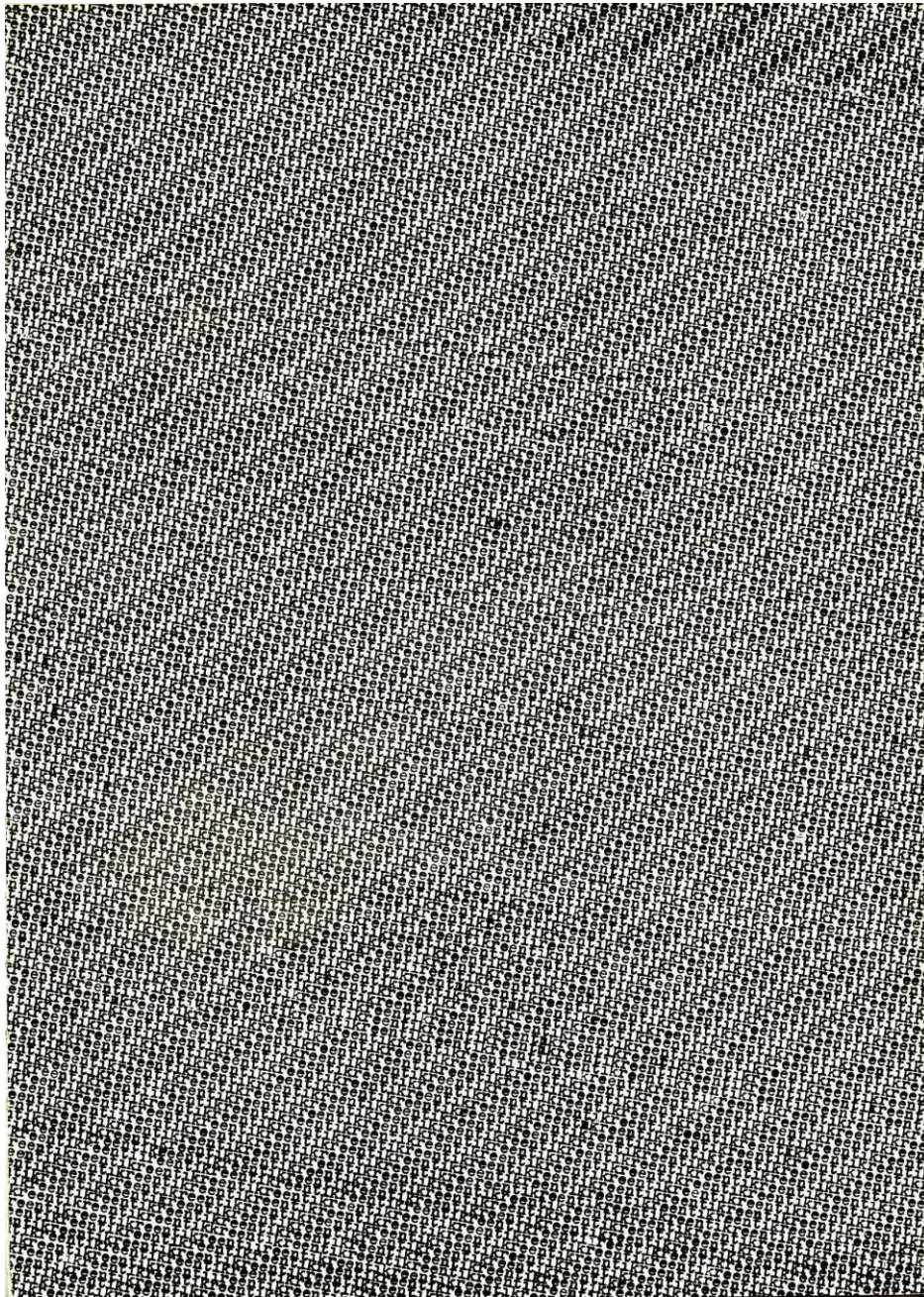
as giving the “*impression of downward movement like that of gently falling rain*” (1970:47).

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<sup>7</sup> The term opticality is in no way neutral. Leora Farber (1992:2) equates the term opticality with modernist qualities of unity, autonomy, closure, singularity and completeness. There seems an inherent contradiction here. Although Boshoff's work was produced under conditions which, in Farber's terms, were modernist and male dominated, Boshoff's work in no way valorises the qualities listed above as optical. In fact Boshoff moves to the other extreme expressing qualities of open-endedness, indecision, incongruence, incompleteness and obfuscation. For the purposes of my project I will use the term opticality to express these qualities in Boshoff's work.

<sup>8</sup> Boshoff was aware of Morellet's work which predates some of the more overtly optical work in *Kykafrikaans*. Examples in *Kykafrikaans* include *Verskrif* (p.2), *Gekrap* (p.20), *Skakerings* (p.46), *Tekstiel* (p.80) and *Verskanste Openbaring* (p.82-83).

It is important that Boshoff acknowledges<sup>9</sup> the flickering opticality of Op Art in *Tikreën* (p.49).

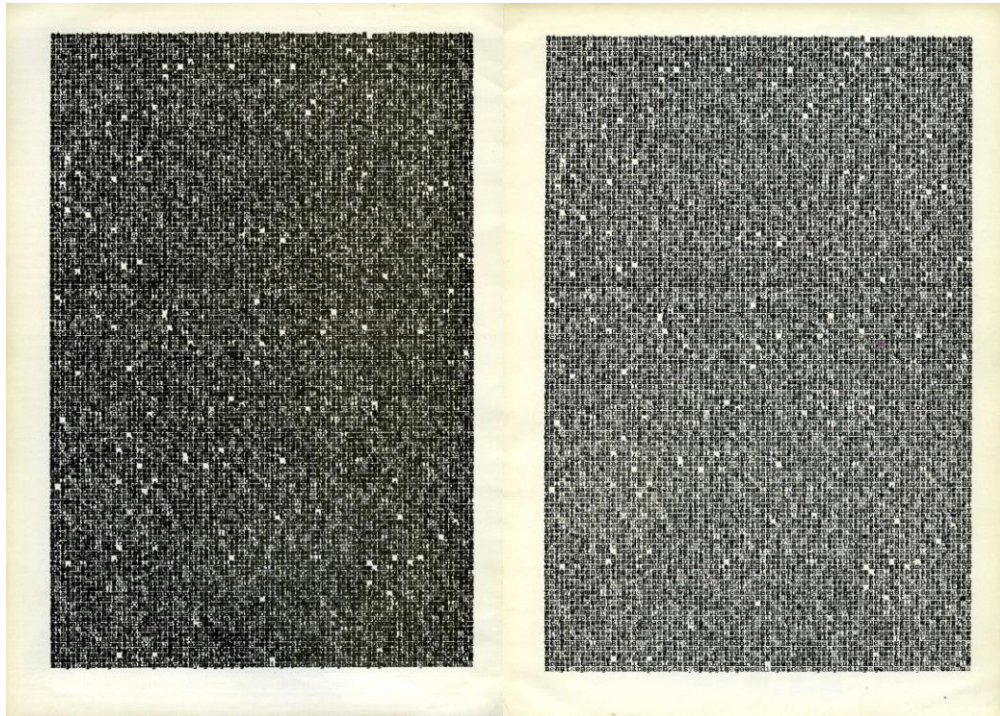


In this work, 'drops' of text are typed ceaselessly from beyond the edges of the page and 'rain' downward no matter how one views or turns the page.

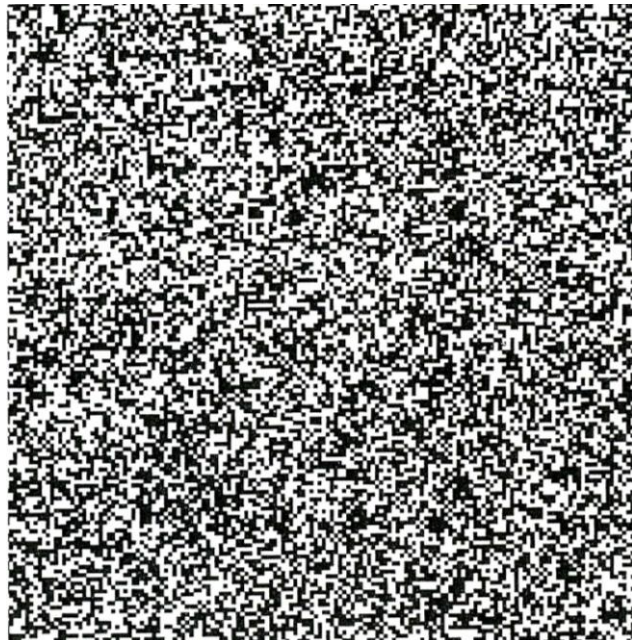
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<sup>9</sup> In an interview (Boshoff, W., Johannesburg: July 1997.)

Boshoff pursues these qualities throughout *Kykafrikaans*, especially in works such as *Verskanste Openbaring* (82-83).



In terms of the indirect influences *Wurm* had on Boshoff, it is important that du Plessis speaks of the optical qualities of *Concrete* and *Visual Poetry* and the importance of *Op(tical) Art* at the time of *Wurm's* inception.<sup>10</sup> Works such as François Morellet's serigraph *Aleatoric Distribution* (1961)



<sup>10</sup> Du Plessis states in an interview (du Plessis, P., Kalk Bay: July 1997) that, for him, the movement or optical flicker in works of Op Art functions on the level of essential gesture (or movement) associated with the oral tradition of storytelling which is at the root of all language. What du Plessis refers to as 'essential gesture' is the basic relationship between visual and verbal tonalities, colour, tempo and intonation between elements of a spoken narrative and those of an image.



The works in the catalogue are seminal examples of Concrete and Visual Poetry created during the 1960s some of which were reproduced in *Wurm*. They suggested a framework with which Boshoff's idiosyncratic writings could, at least in visual form, identify.

Notwithstanding Boshoff's indebtedness to Op Art and Concrete Poetry similar to that created for and included in *Wurm* by du Plessis and others, there seems to be something else happening in *Kykafrikaans*, a subtly configured level of difference. I will need to explain this as I believe it is important for a reading of Boshoff's work as a whole. Michel Foucault's view of the inherent qualities of post-modern surfaces may prove helpful in explaining what seems to be happening on the pages of *Kykafrikaans*.

Douglas Crimp (in Foster 1993:44-45) cites Foucault's view that post-modern surfaces

can receive a vast and heterogeneous array of cultural images and artifacts that had not been capable with pictorial fields of either pre modernist or modernist painting [by the] replacement of unities of humanist historical thought such as tradition, inference, development, evolution, source and origin with concepts like *discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit* and *transformation* (my italics).

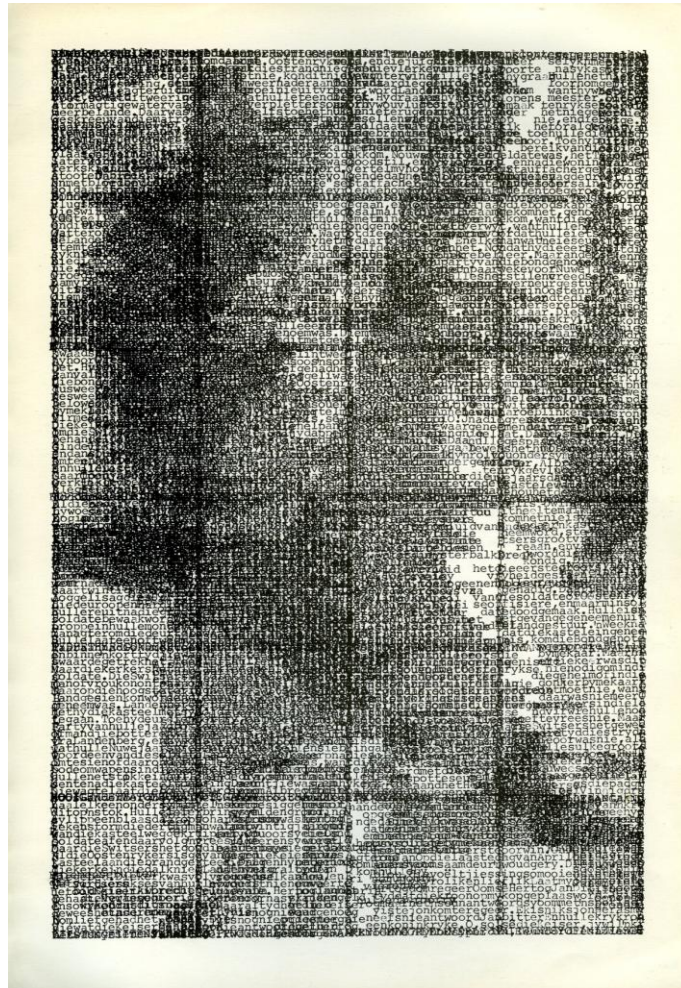
These concepts inherent in post-modern surfaces seem congruent with Boshoff's desire for the obfuscation of both immediate recognisability of, and the construction of meaning from, formal visual elements. Concrete Poetry attempts to dismantle the semiotic differences between images and texts by constructing a unity or congruence between textual meaning and typographic shape, i.e. iconicity. Boshoff acknowledges this iconicity but, at the same time, subtly begins to unravel its concrete specificity. Boshoff's is a deconstructing activity of obfuscation and deliberate hiding. As a result the viewer cannot be certain what s/he is reading, what I call *an iconicity of doubt*.

Boshoff attempts this deconstruction in many ways. In *Kykafrikaans*, for example, the use of Afrikaans itself limits the readability of the works nationally and particularly internationally. By establishing Afrikaans as the '*lingua franca*' of this entire body of work, linguistic barriers are set up. These barriers map the difficulty one has deciphering, in most of the works, word from words, beginnings from endings and the untying of close bonds set up by the opticality of the elements of the work. As I will discuss later, the difficulty (and in some places the impossibility) of separating the whole into discreet bits of text demands that a decoding of the work be done on the basis of image perception and not textual reading.



In the de Vree, the pun on the mythological labyrinth created by the adjacent letters **O** and **S** are 'metamorphosed' rapidly by the eye as they work outward from the center of the maze. The reading of the text as an image of a labyrinth is constructed and confirmed by the contextualising words **KNOSSOS**, **MINOS**, **TAUROS**, **DAIDAIOS**, and **ICAROS**, which are found at the entrance/exit points of the labyrinth. This contextualisation of the mythology of the work and its characters and thus, obliquely, the Ovidian concept of metamorphosis locates the specificity of the work on the page. In Boshoff's *Pesbeheer* however, this form of contextualisation, metamorphosis and specificity becomes discontinuous and ruptured. Here a binary pair of visual surfaces operates - the frame (without spacing) and the framed (with uniform single-letter spacing). The rapidity of the metamorphosis in the de Vree is replaced by a tyrannical detainment in the Boshoff. It is easy to lose one's way in the reading. Concentrating upon the specific words in the string of letters undermines the reader's attempt to construct any form of meaningful narrative.<sup>12</sup> We have to read well and with great patience and difficulty if we are to make headway.

In works such as *Pesbeheer* Boshoff signals his intention to derail any concrete certainty. Likewise, in *Verdwaalkaart* (p.87)



<sup>12</sup> It is ironic (given de Vree's reference to a labyrinth) that Boshoff's act of detaining locks the reader into a labyrinthine word-shape (created by the frame and framed elements). The task of sifting words away from each other contrasts with de Vree whose work requires a *joining* or *gathering* of visual elements. The very concreteness of the works in *Wurm* requires the viewer/reader to appreciate a metamorphosis of shapes and/or words, thus discovering a meaning which is not always possible in *Kyafrikaans*.

Boshoff exploits the surface as one of discontinuity and rupture of the concrete, transforming it into a 'map to get lost by'.<sup>13</sup> Boshoff's intention is to seemingly provide the reader/viewer with all the pantextual material needed to decode the work. This provision is of course highly provocative as Boshoff provides us (in the form of a note which accompanies the title) "with everything that cannot be understood". Text in *Verdwaalkaart*, like *Verskanste Openbaring*, (p.82-83) is so densely overlaid that it is impossible to see the work as anything other than a page of textures made by a typewriter.<sup>14</sup>

Boshoff's acts of inversion, obfuscation and opacity were, in part, developed in an earlier seminal work *Bangboek* (begun 1976). While Boshoff was compiling work for *Kykaprikaans*, he developed a unique book which pushed both the literary structural and the visual spatial conventions of the page into a new conceptual dialogue. In *Bangboek* this dialogue was achieved in the form of an open book whose entirety is visible and accessible at once. This breaks the structural and unfolding temporality that a conventional codex offers its readers. The irony in this is that the book is written in a code to which the viewer has no access. Any attempt to read the book or even take in its graphic visual totality for the purposes of reading are subverted due to its illegibility.<sup>15</sup>

It seems appropriate for me to flag my investigations at this point. I consider Boshoff's work to be hugely important to artists' books in South Africa. I state this because his *Kykaprikaans* can be seen to have taken the pantextual developments, which *Wurm* and to a lesser extent *Izwi* had earlier constructed, into a new decade and to have moved them from a predominantly literary context into the visual arts. Boshoff's work is also important in that, as I further argue, the (concrete) specificity evident in the types of Concrete Poetry published in both *Wurm* and *Izwi* is subtly manipulated. The purpose of this is to construct surfaces which promote themselves, as Foucault would describe, as discontinuous, ruptured, and transformed (Foster 1993:44-45). Thus I find the obfuscated pantextual surfaces of *Kykaprikaans* rich sites for the iconicity of doubt.

I also argue that in the conceptual and structural reality of both *Bangboek* and *Kykaprikaans* the roots of pantextuality in book form are matured and established. I believe that Boshoff also contributes highly original, conceptually complex and materially unusual books to South African visual arts at a time when local artists were barely starting to see the possibilities of the book as an artwork.<sup>16</sup>

My argument for originality, conceptual complexity and materiality in Boshoff will now be developed in terms of the second work which forms the main focus of this chapter.

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<sup>13</sup> The translation of the Afrikaans word *verdwaal* as *lost* gives only a partial meaning. The phrase 'To be in a dwaal' implies a state of confusion by not having access to a solution or fixed concept. The idea that a viewer has little access into the work is most important in the iconographical reading of this and other works from both *Kykaprikaans* and most other mature works since 1979. (See also Ginsberg & Paton 1996:11).

<sup>14</sup> Boshoff seems, however, to make concessions towards the concrete in the example *Tikreën* (p.49). As stated above, the 'literal' drops of type are typed ceaselessly from beyond the edges of the page and rain downward no matter how one views or turns the page. An interesting comparison can be made between Boshoff's *Tikreën* and the concrete poem *Rain* (1967) by the Japanese poet Seiichi Niikuni (in: Williams 1967:n.p). Note also Gotthard Müller's *SD 65* described by Barrett (1970:47) as 'like falling rain' discussed above.

<sup>15</sup> The context in which this uniquely conceptual South African Artist's Book was born is discussed elsewhere. (See, Ginsberg & Paton 1996:11).

<sup>16</sup> In terms of the period of time in which I attempt to locate a more widespread activity in the artist's book in South Africa seems to correspond with the return of Philippa Hobbs from the USA in 1980.

Boshoff's passion for the obfuscation of the meanings of pantextual imagery and the hiding of meaning within words are exploited in *370 Day Project* (begun 1982), his major sculptural Book Object of the 1980s. Boshoff's explorations which resulted in the publishing of *Kyafrikaans* in 1980, his subsequent work developed for his National Diploma in Technology by 1984, all had important influences upon *370 Day Project*. I will now analyse this work within the context of *Kyafrikaans*.

First, some details regarding the work. *370 Day Project* began on 12 September 1982. Boshoff searched for three hundred and forty species of trees in all official South African tree-growing regions. Samples of these were added to thirty samples of better-known woods collected earlier in the eighteen months of the planning stage.

Boshoff chose the number 370 as it was the nearest number to the 365 days of the year which can be divided into a rectangle. The final work is exhibited as ten rows of thirty-seven blocks which are numerically related in that three plus seven equals ten. 370 individual blocks of wood were prepared each measuring 240mm (length), 48mm (width) and 10mm (deep). Seventy-four blocks fit onto a box/coffin whose dimensions are taken from a six-foot man. Five coffins exhibit all 370 blocks. Boshoff (1984:73) states that at the end of the process the implication is that "the man gets buried under all the work".<sup>17</sup>



Each individual block is considered a page. It is divided into two vertical columns of graphic symbols. This division is repeated in the division into two rows of blocks on each coffin. This structural configuration, states Boshoff (1984:76), "becomes a book within a book".

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<sup>17</sup> Boshoff began the work on his birthday and ended it a year and 5 days later. There are five days between his and his sister's birthdays. During these five days, the work may be exhibited open. In this time the entire contents are displayed, each page open, the entire narrative revealed. For a full and detailed discussion regarding the work's concept, see Boshoff 1984:73-85. It also contains a complete inventory of each type of wood and an explanation of the code-signs.

Boshoff's intention was to create a book as an equivalent "mind space" (1984:78), each block reflecting what he terms six *resolutions* and six *evaluations* per day. Each block was completed within a twenty-four hour period without breaking the routine for 370 days. According to Boshoff (1984:78), the work "is an autographical record of an introspective, meditative lifestyle. It is further an aid in the realisation of strongly premeditated intentions" making "high demands on spiritual and physical endurance" (1984:77). Three groups of intentions (the resolutions) are represented by 'code-signs' down the left-hand side of the block thus

- Duties (to be performed in the normal course of the day)
- Recreation (anything giving pleasure)
- Sacrifices (things of value to be given up or of no value to be tolerated).

These code-signs consist of straight lines, for Boshoff (1984:84), the equivalent of "mans' way of building, writing and use of tools...all predominantly linear".

On the right-hand side are the circular *evaluation* code-signs. The circles, suggested by the rising and setting sun of the day as work targets, indicate the relative success of the resolutions appearing on the left-hand side of the block. "Straight lines link to most circle signs like an arrow links to a target; straight lines implying direction, circles implying destinations" (1984:84).



Boshoff (1984:83), states that it is not contradictory with the secrecy of his intentions that the signs are made known, since no insight regarding specific duties, recreation and sacrifices can be derived from a mere key list. A diary of every detail was kept but this remains private.

Boshoff's intention is to construct a book, not only as a structure – where the wooden blocks become the pages – but as a metaphor for the biblical creation myth. Of this, Boshoff (1984:81) states:

These verbal expressions relate to the idea of a book as a report or key to the intellectual world of creation. The symbols which were worked out in this project are not letters, words or sentences in the ordinary sense of the word, but are singular ideas which, taken together, oppose intention.<sup>18</sup>

With this information what are we to make of Boshoff's attempts at obfuscation? In order to make some headway, it may be useful to examine a critical analysis of a similar attempt at concealment in the work of another artist.

In his exhaustive analysis of Jasper John's illustrations contributed to the livre d'artiste *Foirades/Fizzles* (1976) Colin Richards (1994:159) grapples with the "formidably complex" issues of "valencies of intention and contingency" in the production of meaning. This complexity, argues Richards (1994:159), is due to "signs...of arcane or obscure reference", and processes of "concealment and hiddenness". John's intention seems to be to engage his viewer in an "act of hunting" for meaningful clues (1994:160). Richards (1994:157) refers to the intaglio *Face* (towards the start of *Foirades/Fizzles*) and more particularly the 'x' which marks the surface. Richards calls us to ponder, as important, the issue of reading the surface of John's text literally and consider "commonplace oppositions" such as literal:metaphorical, surface:depth, space:time, looking:reading, icon:symbol (1994:158). On one hand he feels compelled to "acknowledge the potential for textual meaninglessness" (1994:157). On the other, he firmly states that "we should take neither surface nor literalism at face value" due to the importance of "mechanical processes"<sup>19</sup> and signs (often quite abstract) of arcane or obscure reference, concealment and hiddenness" (1994:159).

Richards (1994:160) refers to John's visual complexities as a 'leitmotif' in a number of earlier works in both picture making and prose texts. Similarly, I argue, the pantextual complexities in *370 Day Project* and its predecessors *Bangboek* and *Kykafrikaans* cause us to take neither surface nor literalism at face value due to arcane or obscure references, concealment and hiddenness. Perhaps another way through Boshoff's obfuscation is constructed at the intersection of his intention to hide meaning from his viewers and the 'mechanical processes and signs' used as vehicles for this hiding. Richards (1994:161) argues in John's work that such 'processes and signs' invoke the notion of allegory<sup>20</sup> and conceptualises 'otherness' as hidden beneath the textual surface.

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<sup>18</sup> There are many possible reasons for or suppositions regarding why a viewer's appreciation of Boshoff's intention is thwarted and meaning always withheld. Perhaps in the acknowledgement that language equals power, Boshoff, who is in possession of bodies of obscure, dense and complex knowledge makes doubly sure that this knowledge – in the form of a meta-language, a set of code-signs or, in the case of *Kykafrikaans*, hidden and layered pantextualism - remains recondite, inaccessible and therefore in the 'possession' of the artist. Boshoff plays games with his viewers, a game where the odds are stacked against them.

<sup>19</sup> Acknowledgement of the intentionality of such marks as premeditated, slowly wrought and thus doubly meaningful within the iconography of the resultant image is important. Intaglio, by virtue of its process-driven nature, is different from other processes such as painting, i.e. plate to print reversal (See, for comparison, Richards 1994:129, note 262).

<sup>20</sup> Foucault (1983:21) states in relation to the image-text juxtaposition in Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*:

The essence of rhetoric is in allegory. The calligram uses that capacity of letters to signify both as linear elements that can be arranged in space and as signs that must unroll according to a unique chain of sound. As a sign, the letter permits us to fix words; as line, it lets us give shape to things. Thus the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read.

He (1994:161) continues:

In this conception allegorical revelation may be held to require expertise in some secret, hidden, supersophisticated 'language' or code which provides a key to deciphering the otherwise unforthcoming, innocuous, or 'innocent' text.

Richards (1994:161) draws attention to John's literal hiding of "we know not what" under indexical marks and patches of ink. Similarly Boshoff hides textual meaning under a regime of cuts and code-signs by working into the surface of the block of wood. By incising his 'code-signs' he attempts to elaborate on their permanence, their tactile corporeality but at the same time hides any sign of his own meanings within a surface.

Boshoff first confronted this conceptual 'act of hunting' in *Bangboek* (begun 1976), where the pages are 'bound open' in order to reveal the contents in their entirety. Although with much patience a reading could be undertaken, as each symbol represents a letter of the alphabet, viewing quickly replaces the exhausting act of reading and we are confronted with the task of constructing meaning in pictorial terms. Like hieroglyphics and cryptograms perception takes place in terms of an appreciation of aesthetic marks, extensive labour in craftsmanship, formal relationships and an acceptance of this strategy as meaningful within a broader, hidden, and arcane paradigm. *Bangboek* can only be perceived in these terms; pictorial rather than textual. A denoted linear reading of the encoded surfaces as a narrative is supplanted with a scanning of the entirety of the work as connoted image.

Boshoff matures and deepens the 'act of hunting', in *370 Day Project* by removing the link between the graphic symbol and its corresponding letter of the alphabet. No amount of processing will reveal the exact narrative, no amount of decoding will reveal Boshoff's experiential meaning. As Richards (1994:161) states, "[t]his patent cover-up is about concealing, a sign of concealment, a visual representation of absence". The hidden text reveals its possibilities only as an image.

If we must accept that we will never have access to the specific meanings of Boshoff's actions,<sup>21</sup> the work nonetheless signifies action and exists as an index of that action. Perhaps this is a significant place to begin, in the decoding of the results of that action: obsessive physical labour, making 'high demands on spiritual and physical endurance'. If Boshoff's work exposes the separation of image from text in order to construct meaning,<sup>22</sup> some reference to a critical discourse to substantiate this separation is necessary. W.J.T. Mitchell (1987b) observes there is no shortage of theorists who have devoted themselves to the differences between images and texts. Mitchell, like Nelson Goodman (1976), however, begins to question this difference and what bases have been used for the acceptance, as axiomatic, of, for example, the naturalness of visual signs.

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps it is necessary to acknowledge that the artist's intention and the full content of any artwork are very seldom fully appreciated nor understood in any context. The process of perception inevitably includes the viewer's point of view and cultural influences and thus adds elements unforeseen by the artist. Cf. Goodman (1976).

<sup>22</sup> Meaning derived from the notion of labour as a contingency for that concealment, not meaning to be read in conventional textual terms.

Mitchell (1987b:2) states

there is no *essential* difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind [and that] there are always a number of differences *in place* in a culture which allow it to sort out the distinctive qualities of its ensemble of signs and symbols.

Ernest Gillman (in Mitchell 1980:5) states that the “relationship of linguistic and pictorial representation...like its constituents has a history of shifting balances of power”. This ‘shifting’ is evident as a tension to ‘read’ as well as view. In both Kykafrikaans and 370 Day Project Boshoff’s body of ‘code-signs’ operate not unlike a series of hieroglyphs and become, as Richards (1994:158) describes, “something to be looked at *and* read, seen *and* conventionally understood. At once a hybrid iconic symbol, it seems to contain its own semiotic undoing”.

Boshoff’s ‘code-signs’ refer to conventional writing; they can be read independently of one another on any single block. If we differentiate them as *individual*, we tend to begin to read then as texts. Yet the converse is true; *as a block*, we begin to scan them as part of a pictorial whole. This tension becomes very interesting and I find Goodman (1976), Mitchell (1987b) and Wendy Steiner’s (1982) opinions very fruitful. I will briefly refer to their opinions with regard to the differences between images and texts in order to move into an understanding of how Boshoff is working.

In attempting to differentiate between images and texts, Goodman (1976:226) states:

Non-linguistic systems differ from languages, depiction from description, the representational from the verbal, painting from poems, primarily through lack of differentiation - indeed through density (and consequent total absence of articulation) - of the symbol system.

A differentiated - *digital* - symbol system is not dense but works by stops, starts and gaps (Mitchell 1987b:67). Goodman cites the alphabet as an example as each character is read as distinct and syntactically differentiated from the next (or previous) character. To this, Mitchell (1987b:68) adds: “The picture is, in Goodman’s words, syntactically and semantically ‘continuous,’ while the text employs a set of symbols that are ‘disjunct,’ constituted by gaps that are without significance”.

Goodman thus distinguishes between images and texts in terms of history and habit, as “practical differences in the use of different sorts of symbolic marks, not by a metaphysical divide” (Mitchell 1987b:69).

Wendy Steiner (1982:36), however, explores this relationship from a different angle which may help in coming to terms with Boshoff’s pantextual tension. She writes:

The much-vaunted simultaneity of the painting exists in the material artifact but not in its perception. ...Modern science supports this criticism; the eye can in fact focus on only a relatively small portion of visible objects and must scan them in order to build a unified image. Pictorial perception is thus a matter of temporal processing.

What we can begin to accept in the dichotomous reading of Boshoff's pantextuality is that, as it is the graphic symbols which construct both text and image, both viewing and reading become acts of temporal processing because they spring from the same source. Steiner (1982:37-38) continues:

The usual temporal flow of verbal art is not perceived as such...because of violent disruptions in narrative and logical sequence...and the reader is asked to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity. The text does not make sense as a sequence, but as a finished whole, and thus its perception is analogous to that of painting.

I believe that we can now make some sense of the (seeming) *temporality of the image* and the *atemporality of a text* in the context of *370 Day Project*.

Boshoff's typographic symbols such as '^' can rely on a generalised conventional reading of 'upness' or, more vaguely, 'directional movement' which is perhaps all we are given/able to read. Similarly, if we start with a conventional understand of the circle as pictorial rather than as textual, we must 'read' that an open circle is something different from one that is closed. We must observe that there are variations also within this difference. A 'O' is thus importantly different from a '⊙' or '⊖'. This would then be true for every salient difference Boshoff makes.<sup>23</sup> When Boshoff makes use of the 'O' he could be referring to a target (each day's work being seen as one) but, conventionally, it is also the fifteenth letter of the alphabet and it is also numerical.

Semiotics as a discipline has encountered particular problems when describing the nature of images and the differences between images and texts (Mitchell 1987b:53-54). The difficulty in assimilating the *icon* into semiotics seems to lie with capricious relationships of similarity as "[e]verything in the world is similar to everything else in some respects" (1987b:56).<sup>24</sup> But Mitchell's analysis of Goodman's theory of symbols will help me make some tentative conclusions. Mitchell (1987b:70) states

[t]here is nothing in Goodman's terms to prescribe what artists can and cannot do. Hybrid works are not only possible but are eminently describable in his system. A text, whether a concrete poem, an illuminated manuscript, or a page from a novel, may be constructed or scanned as a dense, analogical system, and thus the results may be noted without worries over whether this violates a law of nature. ...A picture in one system may be a description in another. A paragraph may be turned on its side and 'read' as a city skyline; a picture may be riddled with alphabetic characters, and may be constructed to be read from left to right in a descending series of sequences.

Mitchell (1987b:70) restates as important Goodman's insistence that particular marks

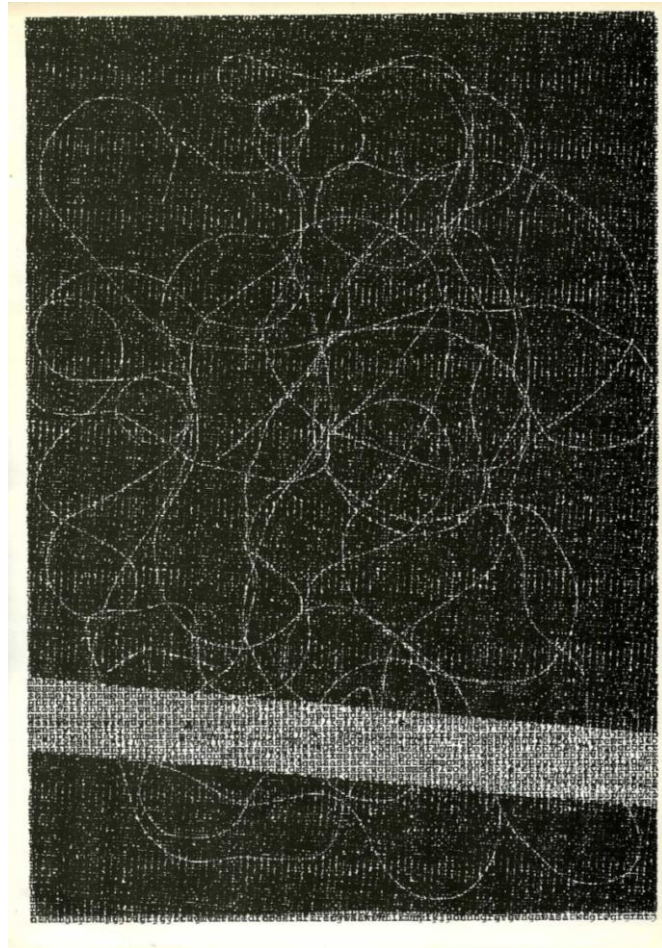
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<sup>23</sup> Boshoff is not unique in his ability to represent the word pictorially. Roland Barthes (1977:161) writes of Cy Twombly's loitering on paper as succeeding in deconstructing writing. In his graphics, Barthes recognises the presentation of writing yet they no longer participate in any code. On certain surfaces there is nothing written and yet, for Barthes, they "seem to be the repository of all writing".

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed analysis of problems inherent in similarity, see Goodman's *Seven Strictures on Similarity* in Harrison & Orton 1984, Chapter 9. For problems concerning the relationship between iconic signs and semiotics, see Eco 1977.

or inscriptions are not read by virtue of their “internal structure or natural essence”. Rather, they are read as a symbol system which is often affected as a matter of convention, habit, choice, need and interest. This freeing of the artist from the ‘laws of nature’ also allows the viewer to approach any work, including *370 Day Project*, as either text or image or both.<sup>25</sup>

I believe it is informative to end by looking at semiotic tensions which exist in a work from *Kyafrikaans*.<sup>26</sup> *Aan 'n Lyntjie* is impossible to read as it operates as an image made up of typed letters.



The layers form a dense textured support for two elements: the first is a thin line, threading its way around the format; the second is a diagonal bar of lighter, less dense type. In this work lies an ‘act of hunting’ which lies at the heart of *370 Day Project*. The work is typed, with both letters and numbers, and is essentially a piece of writing, comprising all the elements typical of a page of type. The optical qualities of white page between undulating columns and rows of type suggested to Boshoff

<sup>25</sup> This dilemma can be resolvable only by ‘taking sides’. Certainly for some, the pictorial element of Boshoff’s pantextuality may illuminate his intention more fully than if the work were approached in terms of its textuality.

<sup>26</sup> *370 Day Project* had its roots in *Bangboek* and many of the contemporaneous works published in *Kyafrikaans*. It is therefore important to acknowledge the role that some of these works played in forging *370 Day Project*. Works such as, *Diagonale* (p.8) and *Min of Meer* (p.14) display a visual similarity with the layout of the blocks on the coffins in *370 Day Project*. Works such as *Vlegskrif* (p.2), *Aan 'n Lyntjie* (p.71) *Tekstiel* (p.80), *Verskanste Openbaring* (p.82-3) and *Verdwaalkaard* (p.87) all use layered typography in such a way that the text is no longer readable. This illegibility defines an optical or pictorial perception of the work, something exploited in the examples of Op(tical) Art discussed previously and seen as important in the development of *Kyafrikaans*.

that these arbitrary tonal relationships could become encoded as content in a work.

Thus Boshoff exploits the iconic relationship between this work and its resemblance to the abstract tonal qualities of any typed page. At the same time, he exploits the indexical relationship between illegible pictoriality and our acceptance of this as a typed page of words. Lastly Boshoff exploits a symbolic relationship, as the denoted objects – a thread and a bar – have an utterly arbitrary relationship with the words of text that form them as images. This work becomes, in Richards' (1994:162) terms, determinate, indeterminate and overdetermined, "at once iconic, indexical and symbolic", fatefully implicated in the same conflict of signs that are to be found in *370 Day Project*.

In conclusion, in the context of my project as a whole, I have firstly felt it necessary to acknowledge *370 Day Project* as a book and secondly to analyse how, as such, it operates. More specifically though, the work suggests a maturation if not a termination of the thread of Concrete and Visual Poetry (and their conceptual underpinnings) that began in *Wurm*. As books, *Kykafrikaans* and *370 Day Project* challenge aspects of structure and temporality within the field of reading and viewing.

In this way, I believe, Boshoff presents us with the challenge of decoding the elements which make up our conventional experiences of the book. By framing that experience within the context of pantextuality, Boshoff interrogates the nature of the field as widely and vigorously as is possible and thus adds to our knowledge of artists' books.