

The post-modernNIST's **progrESS**

or

bluFf your WaY In pOST-modERNism¹

Andries Gouws

(contd.)

there isn't.

Bok Visagie – 1945-2001² – a biographical sketch

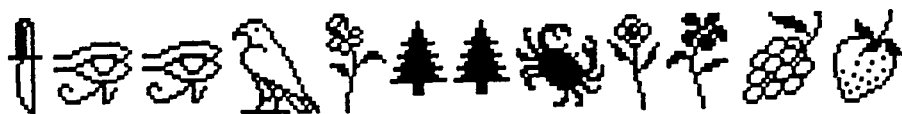
Bok Visagie, the Protean All-South African hero of post-modernism, grew up in the streets of Johannesburg. At sixteen he already had some degree of renown as a graffiti artist. In his first year at university he dabbled in painting and writing, as well as in philosophy, without any success. His art lecturers told him he should find one consistent style, and distance himself from the pictorial language of comics and kitsch. Everything except abstraction was out. He submitted his manuscripts to various publishers, who told him he should avoid the atmosphere of the Grade-B Hollywood film and the language of the pulp novel. Quoting from a medley of current or outdated styles, as he did, was totally unacceptable. He should seek his own, personal voice. His mentors in philosophy chided him for his shameless eclecticism, his dabbling in various disciplines instead of limiting himself to a purely philosophical problematic. Their injunctions that Man himself formed the real centre of all philosophical questioning seemed to fall on deaf ears.

In January 1967, we find him convalescing after a schizophrenic bout. His therapist explains to him that his is a case of loss of identity, and that his ego needs strengthening so that he can have a healthy and integrated personality.

Six years later, Bok Visagie is a junior lecturer in philosophy, and working

¹Permission to use the anti-conceptions *versgil*®, *BREAST*®, and *archi-printing*® kindly granted by *P-M Philosophical Enterprises, Inc.*, a division of Warner Disseminations, permit no 468-23-2418.

²Visagie of course had no origins. He does not seem ever to have been born; in any case no birth prior to his many rebirths (e.g., as reborn Christian in 1969, and as reborn post-modernist in 1988) can be traced. Fortunately, it has been possible to deconstruct his genealogy from the archives. His end, if he had any, is shrouded in obscurity. Nevertheless, his life is conventionally dated as coinciding with the post-modernist era, i.e. 1945-2001.



on his M.A. thesis: *Angst, alienation and authenticity. A comparison of the theories of Fromm, Buber and Marcuse.*

In an overly adventurous mood, he suddenly gives up his job, and spends the next eight years teaching philosophy at the University of Bothatswana, severing all ties with the rest of South Africa and the world at large. One morning he wakes up to an existential crisis: "To stay or not to stay?" He resigns and hitchhikes to Johannesburg. During his absence, an undefinable change has taken place. His applications for all advertised posts in university departments fail. He cannot quite pinpoint the source of those knowing smiles when he talks about the existential Angst of modern man, the need for authenticity and the alienation of man under capitalism. Why do the members of the selection committee seem to lose interest when he outlines the courses he plans giving on *Sartre and Marcel on human consciousness and The problem of man. Existentialism from Nietzsche to Heidegger*? Even the obscurest journals imaginable send back the articles he submits, such as *The fragmentation of consciousness and loss of meaning in our modern age.*

In low spirits, he visits his therapist, whose views have meanwhile changed. So-called mental disorders are the effect of clutching at the straw of personal identity. Seeing the ego as the centre from which life and one's environment can be controlled is futile. Desire should be liberated and the fear of madness abandoned. The stifling norm of the healthy, integrated personality should give way to the cultivation of the schizophrenic ideal. Bok is dumbfounded by this change. He goes to the Municipal Library, where he still knows a woman called Li from the days of their discussion group on Existential Phenomenology (or was it Marxist Existentialism). In a nostalgic fifties-style drugstore, the waitress pours them coffee, while Visagie pours out his heart to Li, mentioning the therapist's strange remarks in passing.

Sy ontferm haar oor hom. Bit by bit, she teaches him the elementaries of present-day life in academia, the ABC of post-modernist etiquette, so to speak. Li's first step in educating Visagie is to show him an article in a year old copy of the *Landbouweekblad*: "Convert your Gawie Fagan home into a post-modernist farmstead". He gasps. "That" he says confidently "is kitsch. How agterlik can one get? Pseudo-Cape Dutch gables spoiling the beautiful functional severity of a Fagan design – the ideal entourage for modern living." Li realizes that the time to be firm has arrived. "Bok" she says gently "take another look at that title. What do you think the words 'post-modernist' mean?" Visagie is at a loss for an answer. "Bok Visagie, you will have to realize that *you* are the one who is agterlik. If even the *Landbouweekblad* has caught wind of the fact that modernism is *out* and post-modernism is *in*, don't you think *you* must be a bit behind the times not to know this? And please: if you *must* use the word '*kitsch*', then only as a term of commendation."

Slowly, Visagie feels life returning to his mental muscles. The next day he



sees an ad for a lecturer in philosophy at an art academy. Li realizes that there is no time to lose. If Bok Visagie cannot pass muster as a post-modernist, all hope is lost. So she drills Visagie in the following principles:

HOW TO PASS MUSTER AS A POST-MODERNIST

1. **Call yourself a post-modernist.** (Post-modernists don't have any identity, apart from the fact that they know that they are post-modernists.)
2. **Refer to "our post-modernist age" frequently and as a matter of course.** (There are no more certainties left in our post-modern age, except that we *are* indeed living in a post-modern age, and that being a post-modernist is vastly preferable to being old hat.)
3. **Be disparaging about modernism.** (But don't get caught looking like a pre-modernist.)
4. **DON'T refer – even disparagingly – to Sartre, Camus, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty or Bergson.** Post-moderniste swyg hierdie subjekte dood.
5. **Nietzsche is the only thinker who is kosher for orthodox post-modernists of all persuasions.** (For our purposes, his work can be summed up as follows: Everything is metaphor. Everything is will to power. Nothing is true.) After you have carefully sounded the company, references to Freud and Heidegger are also reasonably safe. If in doubt, keep these references ambiguous – but don't let the doubt show – any ambiguity must radiate post-modern self-confidence.
6. **Speak a latinate language.** D.w.s.: gebruik franglisismes. If you see to it that signifiers from the following list are overrepresented in your texts, you need not worry whether your *ideas* are post-modernist. Using post-modernist terminology is *eo ipso* thinking post-modern thoughts.
a double . . . (gesture, movement)
alterity, radical alterity
archeology, genealogy
"bodies" or "desiring machines" (instead of "persons", "individuals") "the death of the subject" (or: the ~~subject~~) (the subject as produced by/an effect of . . .)
desire
discourse
economy (of the trace, of the body, of the sign)
écriture
gesture (as a way to describe a theoretical move)
hymen, pharmakon, clôture
insert
intervene
moment
phallus



lacuna, non-dit, impensé
 play (of anything whatsoever)
 produce (the subject is produced by . . .), stage
 re (-inscribe, -write, -insert, -valorize)
 recuperate (which does not mean “recuperate”, but “récupérer”)
 signifier(s), signified(s) (and not: *meaning*)
 société de consommation (*anybody* can use the expression “consumer society”, so don’t)
 space (for *anything* non-spatial: . . . of the sign, of difference, etc.)
 strategy (instead of *method*)
 text (and not “book” or “work”), pretext, subtext, intertextuality
 the Modernist project (something unitary you are against; the identity that shapes your identity through the fact of your nonidentity with it)
 trope (not: figure of speech); topos (not: theme)
 valorize

7. Describe even the most innocuous everyday occurrences and practices in terms of violence, rape and warfare. (We don’t want anybody to suspect us of secretly harbouring a non-conflictual model of reality, do we now?)

8. Forbidden terms:

person, man, perception, experience,³ consciousness, soul, spontaneity, life world, immediacy.

9. Bad:

Lukács and Hegelian Marxism; humanism; (philosophy of) identity; ego psychology; creativity; the phallus and phallocentrism; existentialism. (For the benefit of those who completed their studies before 1965: “existentialism” does *not* include Heidegger and Nietzsche!)

10. Speak lightly of science. Don’t let yourself be at all inhibited by the massive presence of natural science, either as theory or as basis of practice. Treat it as just one more language game/discourse among others. Without tackling it in any detail, exude the certainty that your own critical tools and strategies are more than a match for any science/scientist.

11. Exploit any knowledge of post-modernism you already have, to the full. Find out which of the works you are familiar with can with any plausibility be labelled/relabelled “postmodernist”, and make sure you get maximum mileage from this fact. If in doubt, don’t let this show – rather show that you realize how outrageously original your relabelling is. Or translate/modify your existing interpretations to agree with the jargon treated above, and refer to your “post-modern reading” of the work – oops, text – in question.

12. Anything goes, but, unfortunately,

³Though Culler does manage to use it in a convincingly post-modernist phrase like: “the possibility of this experience induces an attempt to produce it”.



13. "Derrida" is not the name of a novel by George Eliot.

14. Don't be didactic. Structuralism went out of fashion way back in the sixties.

Visagie passes muster as a post-modernist

Visagie gets the job. His students churn out essays like *Reiterating petits récits above the abyss*, *The allegory and mechanics of desire in Sade*, *Revalorizing the oneiric*, and *Tropes, topoi and tropisms in the Modernist project*.

His old friends welcome him in their midst with a special party. One of those present is a dominee, who tells him he'd recently come out of the closet after having been a closet post-modernist for years, and what a relief it had been. And how post-modernism would soon be the new orthodoxy in the NGK, with Johan Heyns titling his address to the annual synod: "Écriture and pharmakon – a post-modernist interpretation of the Dordt Synod".⁴

Gradually Visagie recognizes that ~~in his heart of hearts, his real Self~~, he had always been a post-modernist. Stripped of all foreign accretion, reduced to unmediated selfidentity, he is now free to realize his ~~true essence~~ as postmodernist and to evolve his own, personal, highly unique style⁵ perfectly crafted as a vehicle of his post-modernist Weltanschauung.

As Visagie comes to realize that he is indeed passing muster as a post-modernist, he gradually becomes more ambitious. Why not reach for the stars, and aim to be a cultural hero, a *great* post-modernist? He and Li study post-modernism and post-modern philosophy in depth. After six months they come up with the following recipe for success:

HOW TO BE A GREAT POST-MODERNIST

1. General principle: distinguish yourself from other post-modernists. (Pooh-pooh other post-modernists, without looking like a modernist or a pre-modernist.)
2. See to it that you are regularly interviewed.
3. Self-confidence is not enough. Display *sublime* self-confidence while de-

⁴Few people today still recall that post-modernism had once been anathema to the NGK. Just eight years previously, Heyns had still labelled Visagie's post-modernism – and post-modernism in general – as volksvreemd, oncalvinisties and gesagsondermynend. ("Die nuutste masker van die Totale Aanslag op die volk se sedelikheid" (Review of *Schizosemia*), Die Kerkbode, Vol. XC, no 16, p. 23.)

⁵Cf. Jameson's masterly description of the style of Visagie's *Most Podernism*. "a book in which, as in few others, the sentence is reinvented with all the force of origins, as sculptural gesture and fiat in the void." Visagie's style remains the crucial index separating him from the Yale Visagieans (De Beer, Gouws and Hambidge).



playing your own ideas and reacting to criticism. (But dissociate yourself from the Western need for intellectual mastery, or pretensions to truth.)

4. Ignore disciplinary boundaries.

5. Deny that you are a post-modernist.

6. Show that post-modernism is totally different from what others have been saying it is. (Both regarding characteristics and regarding exemplars.) Make of your opponents' central modernist your own central post-modernist.

7. Deny that any of the traditional categories of criticism apply to your thought. (In any case: the critical categories used by your interlocutor.)

8. Devise your own jargon. Your own personal alternative to "différence" will be a good first step. Important too: you will have to show that you have an alternative to the ways in which other great post-modernists conceive of the relation of signifier to signified, and criticize the concepts of "sign" and "meaning".

9. Devise your own explanation for what is fundamentally wrong with Western Metaphysics.⁶ (Be sure to flaunt the paradox contained in combining this with a rejection of all ultimate explanations.) Flog your own thought as the only state-of-the-art attempt to come to terms with this tradition.

10. See to it that the blurbs of your books are complete gibberish to the uninitiated. (It helps to publish with Éditions de Minuit, Éditions du Seuil or the Presses Universitaires de France.) Where possible, avoid verbs:

"J'aime ce livre": proposition insignifiante.

L'artiste? Un prétexte. On en parle, bien sûr. Etc.

11. You will have failed if anybody can tell an analytical philosopher what your book is about.

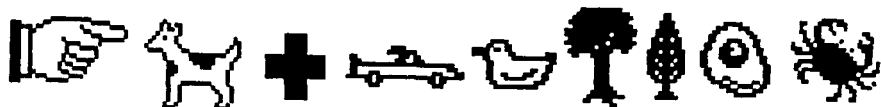
12. The real test of success: when fashion dictates that anything goes, as long as it agrees with an orthodox reading of your texts.

Visagie decided that, while remaining within this general framework, he would set his sights on the greatest existing post-modernist, Jacques Derrida, on the one hand, and simultaneously introduce all the characteristics of post-modernist art, music and literature into philosophy, on the other. (Its use of aleatoric elements and the language of pop culture, its frank and fearless commercialism, etc.)

Visagie becomes a great post-modernist.

His first local breakthrough came when his book *Schizosemia* appeared and received favourable reviews. Johan Degenaar wrote: "With this very rich book, Mr. Visagie puts a new spin on some very old words and situates signs differently. His nimble footwork and his innovative moves make this book

⁶If you are a feminist post-modernist, you will also want to explain the pin-up.



extremely interesting. I salute you and thank you for the unfamiliar noises you have made, Mr. Visagie.”⁷ André Brink found *Schizosemia* important enough to review for the general public in *Rapport*: “At last there is another South African who understands how one can differently defer the hymen, relate the “here” to the “there”, and all this in a language deliciously full of latinisms”. André Letoit hailed him as a fellow post toasties modernist in his song: “!@* die Bok, die grens en my kitaar”. This paved the way for their collaboration with Phil Glass on the deliberate bad taste of the multi-media opera “Springtime for Eugene and the AWB” and the unabashedly heroic “Hendrickse on the Beach”.

His next great leap forward was his pulp novel *Her secret dream come true*.⁸ It was published by Daan Retief, who immediately put Visagie in touch with Mills and Boon. The novel tells of a rich mother marrying her plain daughter to a spendthrift, and thereby destitute, playboy tennis star. After the wedding he is constantly abroad, always finding an excuse not to see his disgustingly boring wife. Of course she doesn’t take this lying down. After a course at a charm school she is thoroughly transformed. She meets him in a bar in Monte Carlo. He is immediately fascinated by this seductive woman – not recognizing her as the partner of his unconsummated marriage. After many travails he is able to possess her, and only then does she reveal her true identity.⁹

Her secret dream come true became the greatest success in the history of pulp publishing. Thanks to the royalties from this book Visagie could make a clean break with academia.

At first the astounding richness of the post-modernist thematic Visagie works into this unprepossessing tale went unnoticed. It was only after Bok Visagie had established his fame as a theorist in other ways (and partly also thanks to his student Jehan Hassan’s full length study *The Dismemberment of Visagie*) that philosophers and critics became aware of its seminal importance for what was later to be called “The Second Wave” in Post-Modernism. The membrane protecting academic philosophy from the assault of mass culture had finally and irrevocably been ruptured. Henceforth the commercial and the philosophical stopped being separate realms. It is not widely known that

⁷*Die Suid-Afrikaan*, Vol. XII, no, 2, p. 18.

⁸Bok Visagie: *Her secret dream come true*. Critical edition, with parallel German translation; edited, translated and introduced by H.G. Stoker. New York and Munich: Springer Scientific Publishers, 2003. (Though its price tag of \$225 may seem exorbitant, this is the *definitive* edition, superseding the previous editions edited by Rorty, Schlechta and others.)

⁹Recent research by the brilliant young Visagie scholar H.G. Stoker (no relation) reveals that *Her secret dream* departs only very slightly from the first draft, which Visagie wrote while still in high school.



Bok Visagie was the first philosopher to take patents on the basic concepts of his discourse, that is: *versgil*®, *BREAST*®, *archi-printing*®. (As regards the latter he successfully appealed to the newly-formulated laws protecting the makers of software from illicit copying.) The royalties from the use of these terms by his critics, disciples, epigones and other exegetes further increased his independence from academia. The initial outrage at this step subsided when nobody could convincingly counter his argument that his ideas were creating jobs for academics all around. (The recent bibliography of secondary literature on Bok Visagie comprises 232 articles and 117 Doctoral dissertations on *Her secret dream come true*.)

Visagie's fame or notoriety¹⁰ internationally dates from the outcry provoked by his transtranstrans . . . translation project. The point of departure was a scholarly exegesis, written in Afrikaans, by Visagie of pp. 231–258 of *Of Grammatology*. This was then translated into French, from there into German, from there into Latin, etc. through Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, Swahili, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese and finally English. Overnight *Transtranstrans*, this “celebration of dissemination”¹¹ inscribed Bok Visagie's name on the intellectual map. Within 2 years, authorized translations of it had appeared in six languages, including French and Modern Greek.

At about the same time, Visagie made the headlines by refusing to *sign* his cheques by hand. He always carried a typewriter with him so he could *type* his name on his cheques, thereby (in his own words) *performing* the death of the sign, the subject and of writing, simultaneously. The banks took him to court. In a sensational case lasting six months Bok Visagie successfully conducted his own defence, convincing the judge that the sign, and writing in general, was the last refuge of Western metaphysics, which had been responsible for Gulag, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Bles Bridges. (Fortunately for him, the judge was as eager as he to free us from the bane of metaphysics, having read *Language, Truth and Logic* as an undergraduate.)

But, if we want to seize the historical moment and the redoubling move-

¹⁰For the critical Marxist view, see Perry Anderson: “In the Spoor of South African Immaterialism”, *Radical Philosophy*, XXXII, 6, pp. 23–44. On the other hand, Andrew Nash, Dan O'Meara, Joe Wolpe and (posthumously, through deferral) Marx himself have expressed admiration – albeit grudgingly – for Visagie's analysis of apartheid as “the nostalgia for the presence of undifferentiated différance”. See Andrew Nash and Dan O'Meara: “On a purported falsification of Marxian theory: Visagie as a non-bourgeois non-Marxist”, *Radical Philosophy*, XXXII, 7, pp. 45–79. For the critical Russian dissident view, see Emmanuel Levinas: “Le Visagie inhumain – propos sur un nouvel attentat totalisant contre l'Infini”, *Les Contretemps Post-modernes* VIII, no. 4, pp. 13–18.

¹¹Vincent Descombes: *French Thought after the Visagian Breakthrough*. Seventh Edition. Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1998.



ment which led from *Transtranstrans*, in which Visagie still owed allegiance to Derrida, to the economy of the court case inscribed above, in which Visagie “e-rupted from the parameters of the still pre-post-modern Derridean problematic”¹² – rupture toujours déjà en train de se produire, as Bouchard would put it – his subsequent *Unquote Quote* is as good a pretext as any to begin with. This book, a web woven entirely out of quotes¹³ without any punctuation by quotation marks, despite Derrida’s spirited reply¹⁴ deservedly consigned that writer’s *Glas* to oblivion. (Derrida himself later quipped ruefully that it “sounded the death-knell of *Glas*”.)

Why did Derrida’s Word fail to become the Name of the ~~Father~~ for Visagie? By remaining faithful to Derrida’s text, he had to transgress it; simply wishing to pet the redoubling-undoubling folds of this glorious membrane, he ended up by rupturing it, demonstrating the impotence of Derrida’s graphallogocentrism and leading, in Lyotard’s felicitous phrase, to a “disovulation of the dissemination”.¹⁵ The centre (or noncentre) of this rupture can strategically be located by inscribing the economy of the *versgil*® into the economy of the Derridean (or crypto-Derridean) différance, impressing the economy of Visagian **archi-printing**® onto Derridean *archi-écriture*, and by the anti-concept of **BREAST**®, which puts that ~~phallus~~, the hymen, itself under erasure. Let us pause at each of these signifiers for a moment.

Archi-printing®

In the field of forces constituted by today’s *société de consommation*, the best point at which to insert ourselves into this problematic is doubtless Visagie’s deconstruction (or as he would put it: deconsecration) of Derrida’s concept of *archi-écriture*. What could be more nostalgic than making the concept of writing bear the burden of our thought at the very moment when the pen is being thoroughly displaced by the typewriter, the PC printer, xeroxing, faxing, and printing in general? Why does Derrida – who *never* writes, but always *types* – formerly on his typewriter, and since 1973, on his PC – type “writing” on his PC, instead of “printing”, or at the very least: “typing”?

To topple writing, this hier-archaic king, Visagie introduces **archi-print-**

¹²Andries Gouws: “Bluff your way in post-modernism”, p. 322. (Paper read at the 5th Biennial Main Congress of Saval, Durban, 7–9 April 1988).

¹³If we are to trust Visagie’s own words. Despite numerous dissertations and other studies of this “printing”, the origins of more than 20% of the text are still unaccounted for. In an ambitious project, the HSRC has earmarked R20,000 a year till the year 2020 for research aiming to reduce this to 10% by that date.

¹⁴Jacques Derrida: “Un bock en face de votre Visagie”, *Les Contretemps Post-modernes* VII, no. 1, pp. 87–134.

¹⁵Private dissemination, 4 April 1996.



ing[®]. This is not a word, not a concept, not a trace. It is an anti-conception, "ein Preservativ gegen die Dissemination"¹⁶ as one prominent critic calls it. (In a provocative article, Barbara Johnson and Luce Irigaray have shown why the displacement of writing by **archi-printing**[®] must be considered to be the feminist gesture *par excellence* of the twentieth century.)¹⁷ This anti-conception at long last allows philosophical thought to sever the umbilical cord linking it to the subject, presence and nostalgia. As such, it is the scene of a radicalisation of Derridean thought. Visagie shows that, if writing goes, erasure, palimpsests and mystic writing pads are also passé.

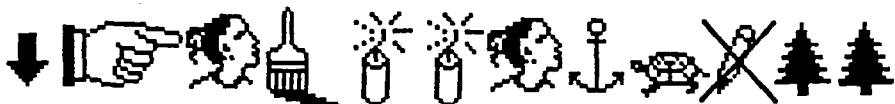
With the appearance of *Of Typology*, many of those who had previously refused to take Bok Visagie seriously were converted by his textual demonstration that the concept of printing had been repressed ("ef-type-faced") throughout the whole of Western metaphysics, and that Western civilization is none other than the movement and the general economy of this effacement. His desecration of Derrida's texts – the demonstration that his thought was the last and purest flowering of metaphysics – is today generally considered to have been one of the epoch-making achievements of our time. Henceforth it was commonly conceded that Derrida's writings – or rather: printings¹⁸ – are less an intervention into, than acceptance of, the institutional mode of presentation. The result of Visagie's desecration/defloration of this last flowering is not didactic. It does not add to the understanding of Derrida's concepts. It displaces them from the context in which they are operative and inserts them in a narrative space where they can be properly *misused*.

Boldly continuing the displacement of epitaphs begun by Freud, Derrida and Rorty, he showed the importance for philosophy of the so-called unintentional, insignificant printing errors to be found in the "impression" of philosophy – that is: the texts of philosophy as they are actually printed and distributed. Exhibit: Visagie's dismantlement of Adorno, starting from an apparently trivial printing error in a *Raubdruck* of his *Minima Moralia*, in which "Negativität" becomes "Negativitätigkeit", thereby undermining the façade of synchronicity in a project which was actually diachronic.

¹⁶Andreas Huyssen: "Die visagische Revolution in den Post-Modernismus", *Kant-Studien*, LXXVIII, no 4, pp. 673–696.

¹⁷Barbara Johnson and Luce Irigaray: "Forgetting your umbrella is not enough, Mr. Derrida", *Gynocriticism*, Vol. 1, no 1, pp. 3–92.

¹⁸In his later work Visagie developed a systematic alternative to all references to "the thought of X", "the writings of X", "X says . . .", etc. These became "the (re)printings of X", "X is (re)printed as . . .". "Reading" became just another form of (re-)printing. Derrida had demonstrated that the sayings of the philosophers were not sayings, but something else. Amazingly, this "something else" became "writing" – as if his knowledge of Plato, Hegel, etc. derived from handwritten letters these philosophers had addressed to him personally.



BREAST®. (And the chain of substitutions to which it paradigmatically and syntagmatically belongs: (m)udder, (m)udderation, (M)utter, mamma.)

Visagie's substitution of a mammalian myth for the *clôture* of Derrida's hymeneal fable is obviously a moment in his larger androgynic strategy. As such it should be juxtaposed with his *cri de coeur* in *Face-to-face à Visagie*, his famous TV-interview with Kristeva: "I love women's brrreasts so much, I wish I had a pair myself". (Thereby demonstrating that his anti-conception of breast-envy was not intended to apply only to others.) According to Visagie himself, of all his creations the signifier **BREAST®** takes pride of place. This tallies well with the great number of his "impressions" (as he calls his texts) in which he fondles this signifier.¹⁹ The **BREAST®** is the granite cornerstone of the superstructure Visagie erects on the base of Derrida's sexualisation of philosophical discourse. It is a strategic moment in his dehierarchisation of sexuality and the body in general. Derrida's hymen is still caught up in the primate of the genital, and as such cannot fully escape the economy of the phallus.²⁰ The rehabilitation/reconstruction of the **BREAST®**, puts the so-called "secondary" sexual characteristics, and the erogenous zones in general, on an equal footing with the genitals, thereby trading the horizontal for the vertical. With this gesture, the fully sexual status of the infant's mouth-breast contact with his mother is simultaneously vindicated, thereby consummating the emancipation of infantile sexuality begun by Freud in his *Drei Abhandlungen*. This unheard of celebration of oral/mammalian sex, this (m)udderation which intertwines iteration, adoration and moderation, is simultaneously Visagie's strategy for the valorization of the Hindu contribution to world thought. Lest anybody think this way of thinking a dangerous regression to a pre-Derridean position in which deferral has been referred to a non-existent *hors-texte*: Visagie emphasizes that the **BREAST®** is always shielded from an immediate touch or gaze by a bra: the **Playtext®**. The **Playtext®** has always-already intervened – it is the intervention *itself*, in its fully play-ful, fully text-ual

¹⁹The seminal, or as Visagie would put it, *lactational* text on this point of course being "A Playtext between the Playboy and the Bunny's **BREAST®**" – the 1996 Hugh Heffner Lectures in Literary Theory at the Robert Venturi University in Las Vegas. Cf. also his "Phallacy of the Hymen", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, pp. 324-345. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 2002.

²⁰Nevertheless, Johnson and Irigaray, loc cit., feel that Visagie, through his exploration of the "erectile potency" of the nipple, and his (non-identical) equation of lactation and ejaculation, has restored the phallus to woman, its true proprietor. "Acknowledging the femininity of this gland also implies acknowledging the ultimate femininity of the glans." (loc. cit.)*

*They insist that nothing can be more ill conceived than grouping Visagie's sexual vocabulary with Richard Greene's feeble sexual/textual concatenations, the concepts *sext*, *presext*, *subsext*, *intersexuality*, *oversext*, *undersext*.



form".²¹ When Barthes' mother's garment gapes, revealing the lavish **BREAST**®, and readerly *plaisir* makes way for writerly *jouissance*, this therefore does not mean that an unmediated nudity has been re-established. The erotics of printerly *extase* are constituted exactly when we joyfully affirm the play of the **Playtext**® instead of demanding an essence behind the façade of "appearance". The **Playtext**® is also a *code*: the code through which any nourishment has already been filtered. But neither is this **Playtext**® an extraneous addition to the **BREAST**®: "the illusion of an intrinsic fullness is nothing but an *effect* of this (n)ever-signifying, (n)ever-signified textual *constraint* on a transcendental content."²²

versgil®

"Call no post-modernist philosopher great till he has devised his own alternative for *difference*". If we apply the fossilized signifiers of this ancient saying to Visagie, they suddenly recapture their originary oneiric *glissement*. "With **versgil**®, Visagie has succeeded where French *différence*, including Derrida's *différance* and Lyotard's *différend*, has failed: he has found the ~~pharmakon~~, the Post Modern prancendental medication with which philosophy will finally be taught to dance".²³ **versgil**® is the central term in the chain of substitutions with which Visagie inaugurated his ethno-post-modernism of the early "nineties".²⁴ The anti-conception **versgil**® can be read as a misspelling²⁵ of either the Afrikaans word "verskil" (difference/to differ/to differ by/to disagree/to deviate) or the Dutch word "verschil" from which it is derived.²⁶ (Visagie, always generous in admitting his debt to tradition, further specifies that the "r" must be pronounced as in French, thereby repeating/displacing the signifying chain genealogically linking/dividing it to French thought, and beyond

²¹Jonathan Culler: *On Defloration. Theory and Criticism after Deconstruction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1997, p.211.

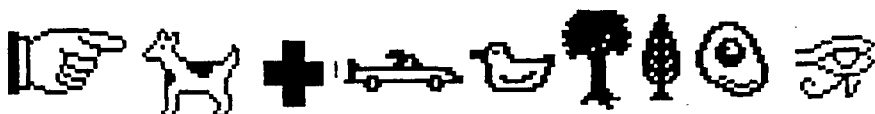
²²Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: "Oedipe Sud-Africain" *Ornicar*, XXI, 5, p. 176. (My translation).

²³Ihab Hassan, *Introduction to Visagie's "Towards a critical regionalism in philosophical thought"*, *Diacritics*, XXV, 5, pp. 1-22.

²⁴"Towards a critical regionalism in philosophical thought". *Diacritics*, XXV, 5, pp. 23-34. Translation of "'n Volkseie filosofie w i t h a v e n g e a n c e" *Woord en Daad*, Tydskrif van die Herstigte FAK, Februarie 1993, p. 1-8.

²⁵Andries Gouws: "Bluff your way in post-modernism", p. 325, n. 25. (Paper read at the 5th Biennial Main Congress of Saval, Durban, 7-9 April 1988.)

²⁶Furthermore, **versgil**® - vers-gil (vers = verse, gil = shriek) constitutes both a hyperbolization of the slip of the tongue (ver(s)gil refers us to ver-spreek = to commit a slip of the tongue) and a wonderfully condensed statement of Visagie's theory of poetry: vers = gil, verse = shriek.



that to the whole Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition). In using this and other Afrikaans words in his English and French writings, Visagie underlines the untranslatability of the signifier due to the absence of a neutral meta-language. Besides *versgil*® itself, the strategic signifiers in this respect are: *spoor* (which displaces “trace”), *boerewors* (which deflates the phallus), *kappie* (which does a Claes Oldenburg job on the parergon), *jukskei* (which valorizes the ethnicity of “Geworfenheit”) and *boereraat* (relegating “pharmakon” to its rightful place among the other plato-tudes of the Derridean pharmacy). This insured that Afrikaans will henceforth be ~~represented~~ in the international lingua franca with words other than “apartheid” and “veld”. Both the State President and Boshoff’s Afrikaner Freedom Foundation wanted to give him a medal for this – but they turned chicken on hearing of each other’s intentions. Again Visagie’s Foucauldean laughter could be heard at the centre of the controversy he so loved.

If there had been an ending, that would have been a very good place to end. But there isn’t. Just as: if there had been a beginning, that would have been a very good place to start. But

