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Meta-Bibliography

Thinking in the Book Format

A finished book is a complex object with many temporal and spatial dimensions. A bound book has pacing and timing. Some sections move quickly. Others slow us down. The potential for orchestration of its components across the openings, turnings, and signatures is nearly inexhaustible. Scrolls offer a more constrained experience. Unlike the random access afforded by a codex, a scroll is linear and has to be unrolled in a fixed sequence. Book-like objects, with physical transformations turning them into pop-up theatres, table-top sculptures, drilled and carved creations, have their own particular affordances for viewing and/or reading, as do other combinatorics or alternative structures. Along with the components of intertextual play (paper, binding, typographic design, and the layout of images and other elements), these varied structures all participate in producing the potential meaning available to a reader.

Most readers rarely stop to contemplate the structural details of the object they encounter. Typically, descriptions of books fall to bibliographers and library cataloguers, those professional experts who follow prescribed protocols to provide everything from author, title, and publication information to highly detailed collation formulas. These latter are a mystery into which the novice must be initiated through the meticulous apprenticeship of »desc-bib« (descriptive bibliography). Learning to read the signature marks and collation details allows the critical scholar to reconstruct the imposition of the pages, the printing sequence and binding instructions that result in the final printed object. The technique also provides authentification, a way to assess whether a book is what it purports to be or whether it has become corrupted, with missing parts or out-of-sequenced pages. For generations, these esoteric practices were considered essential to library work as well as critical editing and the techniques were taught regularly. Now, they have become less com-

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mon, and the reading of a book as an object has suffered its own fate in literary and library studies.

But whatever form a book takes, it cannot tell the back-story of its conception and production. This story is all but vanished, stripped away from the object. A few rare and unusual books might merit the kind of investigation Adrian Wilson gave to the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, or that a handful of current printer-publishers document in their video recordings and evidence-based accounts. But neither standard cataloguing protocols nor basic bibliographical techniques are equipped to present the elusive interplay between conception and production that results in the final object. What you don't see—can't see–is *how* the work was *thought into being*. That is what meta-bibliography aims to recover.

Most books are not written or composed in the book format. They use their form as a container, incidental and unacknowledged. Texts and images are placed on the pages, more or less in dialogue with each other. If the designer is at all self-aware, the images don't cross the gutter except at a spread, the binding is not so tight it eats the interior margins, and the layout has some rationale and consistency. Few and far between are works that originate with the book as their form clearly in mind, written to the page, so to speak, with a clear sense of what that means. But the handful of works that do this, some of them artists' books, some of them designer objects, illuminate the capacity of the form to participate in the production of meaning, not simply to ›convey‹ content. The gestation of such objects follows many different trajectories. No single formula for their production exists, but as is often the case, the many decisions that go into the formation of a complex aesthetic artifact cannot be recovered from even the most in-depth engagement with its final form. Other materials and approaches are required.

To the standard practices of descriptive, enumerative, and analytic bibliography, I therefore propose an addition: meta-bibliography. The function of this is to provide a framework for precisely this kind of description by establishing a few basic fields and categories in which such a discussion could be framed and in which standards for this work would flourish. I will work with three books as case studies, each quite different in the way it was produced, each a work that would be classified as an artist's book, and each produced by a very different practitioner. After detailing the case studies, and their evidence, I will provide a very schematic outline of what might constitute a meta-bibliographical structure: fields, terms, and protocols to support this practice—not as a set of rigid standards, but as a heuristic to follow.

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My inspiration for this project came from the many years I spent studying the books of Ilia Zdanevich, known professionally as Iliazd.[1] This involved finding the back-stories of the books, uncovering the networks of social relations and personal activities within which they had their origin and development. While the detailed physical history of production, embodied in proofs, notes, studies, tests, and other materials, was important, social production was my main concern. What motivated his books? What exchanges with ideas and individuals were involved in their development? Other formal and bibliographical work has been done on Iliazd's books.[2] This did not need repeating.[3] But I had access to individuals who had known him, and to documents about the process of motivation that tracked some of the inspirations and impulses that had led to the productions. These documented the checks and obstacles that had arisen, points of passion that had supplied the inspiration for elaborate type-setting, layout design, or editorial work. None of this can be found in the details of edition size, paper stock, or binding techniques, let alone collation formulas.

What cannot be captured in bibliographical description or analysis is the creative intellectual work of a book. Many processes are part of bringing thought into form and format to arrive at the final object. The creative exploration of craft and hands-on aspects, combined with the engagement with texts, images, type, ink, paper, and other features of production, feeds back into the conception of the work. The conception gradually brings an idea into being as a manifestation with the artist exploring material expressions along the way. This is particularly true with highly aesthetic objects whose production is not merely an execution that conforms to standard formats, cost considerations, timelines, or market forces. Paradoxically, the creative process by which an idea becomes a book vanishes as the work is resolved and completed.

I chose the work of three artists for this project: Brad Freeman, Emily McVarish, and Felicia Rice. Each is an experienced and practiced maker of books.

1 Johanna Drucker: *Iliazd: Meta-biography of a Modernist.* Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.

2 David Sume: *The architectural nature of the illustrated books of Iliazd: (Ilia Zdanevich, 1894-1975).* Université de Montréal, 2018. For Sume's full dissertation online, see: https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/21735/Sume_David_2018_these.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=2.

3 François Chapon: »Bibliographie des livres imprimés édités part Iliazd«. In: *Iliazd*, ed. Annick Lionel-Marine and Germain Viatte, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1978, pp. 107–117.

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All are highly self-conscious and reflective with regard to their own process. I did interviews with each and focused on one book per artist. I chose *MuzeLink* (1997) from Freeman's corpus because of its richness and because it is very much a book about its own making. McVarish chose *A Thousand Several* (2011). I invited Rice to talk about the *Codex Espangliensis* (1998) because it differs radically from the works by McVarish and Freeman who produced all of the contents of their books, while Rice crafted the *Codex* from the visual work of Enrique Chagoya and texts by Guillermo Gómez Peña. The three projects are sufficiently distinct to provide a range of considerations for a meta-bibliographical schema.

1 Brad Freeman, MuzeLink, The Tours (1997)

The artist's book *MuzeLink* is a symphonic work, elaborate and complex, created using Brad Freeman's signature offset ›painting‹ approach to produce richly overprinted pages that combine process color, spot color, and silver ink. Freeman's printing process is controlled but unpredictable, its outcomes are a combination of decisions made in advance and effects that occur on the press. The conceptual work is similar: he enumerated themes and topics at the outset, but then pulled them into focus through a process of association and montage. While the print production can be analyzed, reverse-engineered to recover the sequence of events on the press, the conceptual process would be hard to track from the final result. At the outset, themes he calls »the tours« were not fully determined. And nowhere are they explained or narrated outside of the sequence of visual events and occasional captions that appear on the final pages, residues of the decision-making process preserved by Freeman as he photographed his working mock-ups as an integral part of production. More than most books, *MuzeLink* contains many of these explicit records of its making, notes about his process.

The title *MuzeLink* came from a graffiti tag observed in the dense urban landscape of New York City. How is one to know that? The tag appears in the photograph on colophon page of the book, echoing the other graffiti images that appear on walls, overpasses, and bridges throughout. The suggestivity of the compound term, with its allusion to musings, muses, and linkages provided a useful rubric for the book's associative organization. Freeman thinks in the book format. His organization of the work (which can be discerned from

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careful study, without meta-bibliographical material), follows the structure of the signatures, their gathered sheets each working as a modular unit within the whole. But what cannot be discerned are the motivations. The finished book is filled with commentary in various forms, notes about moving an image from one page to another, for instance. But no overall explanations are present, just bits of direction.

Freeman's thinking is worked out in graphic as well as typographic form. The materials on which he draws are contained in a large inventory of photographic images taken over decades and other source materials. For instance, the sketch for the ›title page‹ shows a scribbled drawing of his face as a baby, notes about the sheet (1, b side) and the page number. Printing sequences are always in his mind, and the note about the PMS color (409) is another indicator of this constant attention to production. »Overprint« and »overrun lots« are other notes under »Use @ End.« Freeman is always structuring, thinking into, across and around the book. His composition process combines a collage approach with layered images and tightly structured sequences. He works spatially within the book as a whole, anticipating later appearances with hints and partial images. Freeman's approach is panoramic in scope with notes and refrains that echo throughout. By the time the title page was printed, the notes and sketch were replaced by effects of overprinted type and photographic imagery. [Figure 1]

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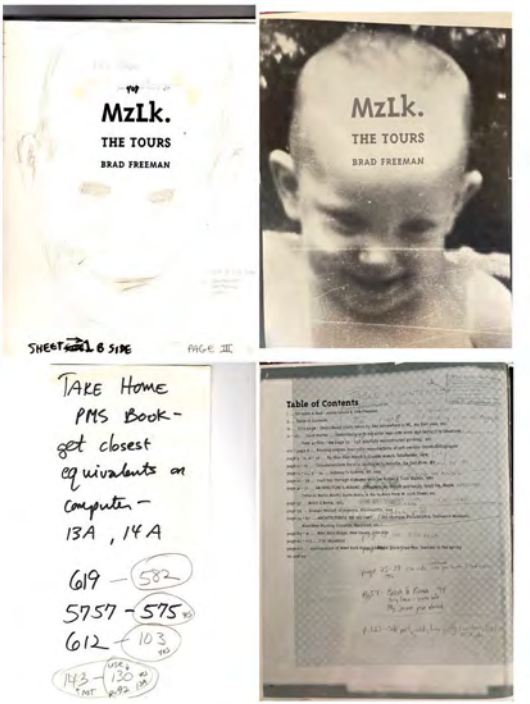

Figure 1: Brad Feeman, MuzeLink, Production and conception notes: Upper left, MuzeLink title page sketch; upper right, final title page; lower left, notes on production; lower right, Table of Contents showing photographed mock-up and revisions throughout the production phase.

Freeman uses the press as a painting platform, a means of producing unexpected results and outcomes. He cannot predict every effect in advance, though offset printing requires elaborate planning. The materials for each plate have to be output as film, mounted in opaque masks, plated and printed. The press has to be cleaned in between each color, and the PMS formula for mixing needs to be observed carefully. Freeman's experience gives him the ability to predict the way, for instance, Pantone #103 or #206 will look combined with the other specified colors on a sheet. This comes from a lifetime of knowing colors by their PMS numbers and being able to anticipate their appearance on the page at different percentage values. Freeman lists the plates, and the runs to be done for each sheet in advance. This is not mechanical work, it is the imaginative visualization of an outcome in which the back-and-forth bet-

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ween his vision of the pages, their production on the press, and the digital environment for pre-press all coordinate. To think effectively through process requires familiarity, long-standing experience on knowing how one color will sit on another, but also, it means holding the book in mind as a spatially sequenced whole.

Freeman keeps elaborate notes for himself, instructions on what to do next and in what order, finding his way as he goes. The book emerges from this process, it is not merely executed by the stages of production to become something already envisioned. Some of the notes are work assignments to himself for the next printing session. Others reflect on the surprises that emerge in the process and offer ways to incorporate the outcome into the ongoing composition of the work. Considering the size, scope, and complexity of *MuzeLink*, considerable confidence is required to be able to work in this improvisational manner. Production becomes a way of making meaning through effects, incorporating sometimes unexpected elements. The conception of the work has to be capacious enough to accommodate these emerging features. Freeman approaches the production process as a creative making, not a march towards a pre-existing and finished design. Freeman would not be able to outsource the printing of his work any more than McVarish or Rice. This keeps the work interesting as well, and each print run has a »what will happen« suspense to it.

The composition of *MuzeLink* began with a thematic game plan, an outline and list of topics. These appear clearly in the finished book, and a critical reading would be able to discern their presence: ›Industry‹, ›leisure time‹, ›transportation‹. His notes on topics are then linked to his existing photographs. Some are thick with personal associations, such as the figure of Joe Ruther, a mentor-become-friend who taught the twenty-something Freeman offset printing, helped him obtain his first press, and inspired the painterly approach that is part of his signature. In an extended sequence of images of Ruther, showing a long scar down his chest after heart surgery, each iteration of the image is printed in a different combination of colors. No framework for understanding the relationship is provided. Nor is it immediately evident that he is the man driving the car in another sequence, or that Freeman is the seated figure on the passenger's side. Evidence of the relationship is present, but no information about it.

All of the plans, outlines, sketches, thumbnails as well as the outline of the imposition of pages on sheets used to organize the printing contain information that vanishes once the book is complete. The temporal framework within which the project was conceived and executed also disappears. A note

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from November 1994 provides information about the time span of the work, attending to the more than a year that had lapsed between early design sessions and the moment of taking up the work again. In the seventeen months, a change of venue, new house, new job, and other shifts had occurred. The initial incident in the book, the theft of Freeman's car in New York City, had become remote. The book's final sequence shows the road up West Rock in New Haven, Freeman's morning bicycle route in his new location. Nothing explains this or gives the reader a story on which to hang the shift of venue from the opening discussion of ›Manhatta‹ and Melville's remarks on circumambulation of that island to the leaf-strewn unidentified empty road in Connecticut. The travels in-between and from earlier, the deep past of a Civil rights march, Klan members, protestors, and of travels to Duluth, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, and recollections of Tallahassee—all specific incidents in Freeman's life, appear in barely-identified form, sometimes labelled with place and time, but uncommented upon within a larger narrative. The reader is left with the pastiche texture of the whole, its graphical arrangement having been arrived at along the way towards completion. A note that says »Document of travels without clear purpose« gives an idea of the errant manner in which the book came together.

Freeman's final Table of Contents in the printed version of the book provides another account of the history of the book's production and conception over time. [Figure 1] The fiction of a ›Table of Contents‹, that it announces the interior of the book at the outset, is exposed in Freeman's palimpsestic drawing, with its many crossings out and rewritings. The artist's shifting focus, rethinking and reworking, are all marked. But the reasons that motivated the changes and decisions are not present. We are able to see *that* the history unfolded, but must guess at the rationale. Because the book itself is so rich, readings of its interlocking themes, phases, shifts of time, place, and topic are manifold. The complexity of the pages offers plenty with which to engage, formally as well as semantically. Within a standard analytic or descriptive bibliography the structure, the print runs, the binding and paper choices could all be described. But conceptual frameworks and personal motivations could not.

The many notes, production instructions, and conceptual reflections comprise the larger meta-bibliographical framework essential for a critical reading of the work. Other details available only through conversation and personal knowledge, are fully bibliographical. They describe the book as it emerges in a complex creative process and they constitute the larger field of its path from initial impulse to completion.

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2 Emily McVarish, A Thousand Several (2011)

Many of Emily McVarish's works have been concerned with how private communications and personal technologies have created incursions into public space. *A Thousand Several* was triggered by a personal memory that arose in response to seeing a bench in a park in London. The associations the object provoked were not available in any sense to view at that moment or any other. But the notion that a kernel of private experience could cut out a section from public space struck McVarish with emotional force. The term she used to describe the effect was that the trigger ›parcelized‹ the space. The sense of a cut-out fragment galvanized her to consider what happens to such fragments, to the compartmentalized pieces of public-private space. A sentence in the final version of the book expresses this realization by stating »No index stores the cuttings.«

From this initial experience, *A Thousand Several* began to take shape in a dialogue of conception and production. The graphic features of the work are, as in Freeman's case, very much signature elements of McVarish's process. Silhouetted and outlined figures, halftone printed images of the same figures, and patterns of text and rule organize the pacing and development of the work as a whole. These formal elements are familiar in other works by McVarish—*Was Here* (2001) and *The Square* (2009) come immediately to mind—even if they are used differently in each project. The point is that a critical reading of *A Thousand Several* lends itself readily to an understanding of the interplay of technology, personal and public space, and the specific quality of contemporary interpenetration of the interior and exterior life that is at once on view and hidden. The very ›sever-ing‹ that occurs in the *Sever-al* of the title calls constant attention to the cuts that connect and disconnect these compartmentalized realms. But the trigger incident would not be apparent, or recoverable, from the book, nor is it essential for a reading of the work. McVarish usually keeps personal information private, and the figures in her pages are not individuals with whom she has a personal connection, even when they stand in for intimates or friends.

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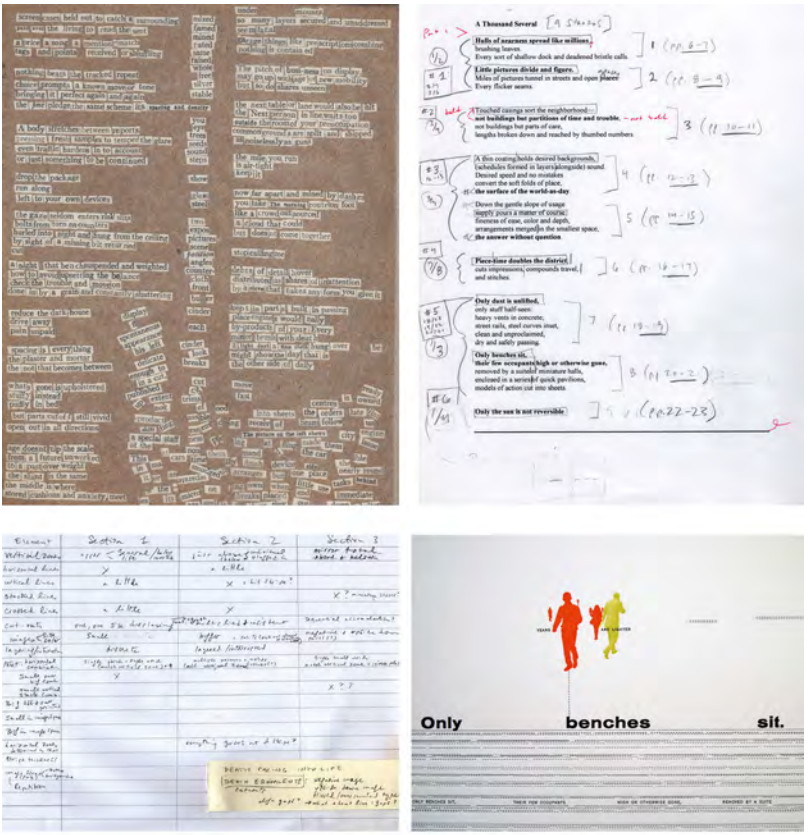

Figure 2: Emily McVarish, A Thousand Several, Production/conception materials: Upper left, early note for the project; upper right, the text composed; lower left, tabulation of positions for texts in the layout; lower right proofs with rule and figures.

In a note written before she began the project, McVarish paired the terms ›memory‹ and ›perception‹ followed by the phrases »current perception / crushing / exploding capsules of the past / pain.« The gestation process began with an elaborate act of textual composition. In this first step, she wrote and typeset textual strings, then cut them up, almost word by word, to make a textual composition. [Figure 2] This tedious process slows down the composition to a point of intense focus, segmenting and isolating each word, before chunking it into spreads. The book becomes a way to re-shuffle the text, a site of iterative refrains and amplification through repetition. When the text

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achieves its final, or near-final, form, she reformats, and begins to organize a layout, allocating phrases to pages. The careful process of excision through which the text gets edited is only apparent in the worksheets. By the time the full text is set, various elements are eliminated. This is the creative process, and no explanation is given or required within the final book. The work takes its shape through a process of craft. But the attention to editing shown in the intermediate stages disappears as the text becomes finalized. No description of its final physical features would be sufficient to recover the thought process by which certain words fall away and others remain. We have to see these pasted pages of texts to observe the way the text emerged.

After chunking the text (using a digital font for the mockup) McVarish works on the layout, organizes the distribution of the text across the openings and sequences. [Figure 2] The thumbnails do not show any images at this stage, just the structured pattern of rule that organizes the horizon of the page. A note to herself contains an instruction, »Choose phrase for each spread / design into word image etc.« And another note tells her to »Recombine aligned phrases.« The design is slowly emerging in these reflections and instructions. Not fully formed from the outset, the layout came bit by bit as she worked the materials. She tabulated selected recombinations, each marked to indicate its place in a sequence. The order of the text emerged from the process. Phrases recur. For instance, »only benches sit« comes back multiple times with its haunting suggestivity, as a headline, an inline statement, and as a text set vertically below a field of rule. At this point, she is working with metal type in the shop and pulling proofs. Certain phrases are set free from their original context, previewed, and then let loose as fragments. This structure, fugue-like in some regards, allows the pages to function as fields rather than strictly sequential openings even if they play off each other in order, with their echoes and repetitions, absences and placeholders.

The images are similarly decontextualized, lifted from scenes to become icons. The unawareness that is characteristic of people talking on the cellphones, the leitmotif of the figures, is reinforced by having them isolated. Using photographs taken on her own phone, McVarish manipulates the images through a sequence of steps to create color separations, silhouettes, and outlined versions of the figures. They occupy a space between the personal and the public, individuated but part of an anonymous or at least unidentified flow of random encounters.

One of the production aspects of this book that resonates with Freeman's *MuzeLink* was that McVarish began printing before the book was fully de-

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signed. Giving herself space for improvisation and innovation as she went along was a way to create what she termed a »drama graph.« The point was to ›think compositionally‹ in the process of making, expressing the topic of text graphically. She ran print tests with the metal rule, playing with the way the central ›stripe‹ in the pages looked. She made notes on the ways the cut-out images became »the thing attached to the ghost of the surrounding« and how blown-up details might be printed. Type and rule tests to assess different tonal values of ink were done directly on the press, at the shop, as material execution and exploration. Some fonts were dismissed, some approaches discarded. One pattern of ›plaid‹ produced through overprinting was also set aside even as all of these trials helped set the print sequence for final production.

As the various trials and experiments continued, a more formal structure was tracked in a table. [Figure 2] This conceptual game plan gave coherence to the whole, so that the rate of transformation and the forces of continuity were in balance. Having worked out various design and production issues in the shop, McVarish then took these designs into a digital platform for production of the halftone images as polymer plates, working with elements laid out on a long table as part of the vision of the whole. Multiple color tests playing with CMYK substitution led back to the press and ink experiments. The back and forth between physical and digital production methods allowed a certain fluidity between conception and production rooted in actual attention to the way the final work would be created.

In her final statement about the book, written after the printing was completed, McVarish emphasizes the way the work »lends the tangible forms of relief printing and die cutting to experiences of social and subjective discontinuity that mark everyday life in networked public space.« The sentence is clear. The ideas are distilled. The commentary frames and also indexes the work, points to it and provides a comprehensive approach to reading and engagement. ›Reminders of loss‹ continue to surface in the severed fragments and outlined forms that populated the book. But the statement cannot recollect the pages of collaged text fragments that were essential to the original composition, nor does it show us the color tests, the path by which the decisions about ink, about rule, about placement on the page came to structure the work throughout. These features belong to the distributed bibliographical material, the evidence that offers material witness to the creative process. These are the meta-bibliographical elements, the conceptual, intellectual, and personal backstory of the composition.

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3 Felicia Rice, Enrique Chagoya and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol. (1998)

Both McVarish and Freeman work with highly personal material, presented with various degrees of remove and abstraction. Both draw on their individual experience as a crucial aspect of the impetus towards a project. Neither thinks of themselves as a publisher in relation to their artist's books, and the creative practice is a site of authorship and original thought, not a process of bringing someone else's work into being. For the final case study, the notion of publication plays a central role, as that is the way Felicia Rice thought about her work as artist, designer, printer, publisher at Moving Parts Press at the time of the making of this book. Though the same tasks need attention in the work of all three artists—bringing the book into being materially, conceptually, and intellectually through elaborate processes that connect production and conception—Rice's process began with her explicit commitment to her role as a printer and publisher.

When she began her work as a printer, learning from the nearly legendary William Everson in Santa Cruz in the 1970s, she had an unusual initiation into the craft and techniques of the shop. Her appreciation of material—the literal stuff of type, rule, reglets, and fonts—all begin with that initial experience, now deepened by more than four decades of hands-on experience. Like McVarish and Freeman, Rice is very much a printer, and thinks about design from a production standpoint. She understands the implications of decisions about mixing words and images on a page, the choice to use color and multiple runs, and to print on a particular Mexican bark paper in this project. As in the case of the other two books already discussed, the choices made along the way disappear in the final outcome. The meta-aspect of bibliography at work here is meant to suggest that the description of a work benefits from having other information than that which can be obtained from physical observation or description.

The *Codex Espangliensis* is richly layered, thick with images from popular culture, traditional Mexican sources, and historical ones as well. [Figure 3] Many are modified and reworked into contemporary commentary form—traditional Mayan figures are driving an army tank, Superman stands with crossed arms next to a scene of ceremonial violence, and so on. The hybrid pastiche of the images is graphically striking. Bold forms, heavy contrast of

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dark and light space, the forceful collage and compositional strength of the images with their mordant postcolonial commentary is everywhere. Nothing is subtle, nothing is understated. The statements about the politics of displacement of indigenous peoples in the ›New World‹ are unmitigated by any softening of tone or impact.

Figure 3: Page from the Codex

Rice began the project in about 1993. She had been teaching at University of California, Santa Cruz and publishing broadsides of writers working on the campus. Her contacts allowed her to provide students the opportunity to work with visiting writers and artists on broadsides. This was publishing, not self-expression. Her work helped bring this community into focus through these publications, giving it visibility and coherent identity.

She developed a connection to the Chicano community, and subsequently published various editions in the Chicanx/Latinx Series of Moving Parts Press. On the suggestion of Francisco Alarcón, whose homoerotic poems *De Amor Oscuro* (1991) she had published along with her own prints, she went to an event at the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco to talk with artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Enrique Chagoya about doing a book. In the

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midst of a busy reception, they accepted her proposal to do a book and began working immediately. That was 1993.

The collaboration was limited in some ways and also very open in others. Chagoya supplied highly detailed finished boards, camera ready, and his work took three years. Relations were cordial and Rice visited his studio a few times in the interim period. Once the boards were finished, he sent the original artwork in the mail to her as a stack of fifteen mechanicals (artwork ready for photographic reproduction) without any fixed or set order. This was in 1996. The texts came from Gómez Peña, also as a sheaf of unordered performance materials he had previous published. The only condition that Chagoya put on the project was that it be printed on *amate* paper, the Mexican bark paper that is a traditional material for codex books. The paper turned out to be very brittle, and Rice ended up having to back the sheets for the entire edition with a strong, flexible, Japanese tissue.

Rice had full license from the artists to paste the project up in whatever sequence and form that she liked. Neither Peña nor Chagoya intervened, and making the book was her contribution to the collaboration. She crafted a connection between the images and the texts, and wove a narrative that made them work in a sequence. The writer and the artist knew each other very well, but each simply put material into her hands. Rice created a coherent organization that respected both artist and writer while also being her design and print production.

Unlike Freeman or McVarish, Rice wanted to have the project fully designed before she began printing. In this instance, the work on the press was well-planned execution, not innovation. To sequence the text and images, she scanned the materials and developed a long frieze that orchestrated the flow of the whole. She needed to be able to handle the parts, cut them up, and arrange them physically into a layout. Once she had the final layout, she had photo-engravings made and printed from these plates. The formative phase of the production was in the composition of the pages and spreads, the merging of texts and images produced independently, and the choice of type and setting—all major points of aesthetic decision-making.

The actual printing posed certain challenges. The *amate* paper was soft and registration was difficult, as was getting the kind of fine print, precise, letterpress impression that she had been trained to produce. The basic edition was printed in black and red, and five copies were then hand painted. The two collaborators, whose contributions had made the book possible, had an enthu-

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siastic response to the final outcome. They appreciated the creative feat of design and production that Rice had completed.

Rather than recovering her process through mock-ups, layouts, and press tests, I got information about this meta-bibliographical dimension almost entirely from conversations with Rice. This back story does not appear in the book in any form, and yet, it is invaluable for understanding the work. In a commentary produced by Jennifer González about the *Codex*, the emphasis is on the border politics of the work—in its formal properties as well as its contents.[4] By »unraveling the formal outlines and delimiting vocabularies that separate visual images from spoken-word performance, book arts, and typography« she says that the work enacts various boundary crossings in its production. The ›imaginary and ideological cartography‹ of the fully realized volume is the outcome of Rice's bricolage, the knitting together of the related by disparate parts into what González rightly calls »a structured narrative and layered iconographic system.« The graphical strength of Chagoya's work and the tone of Gómez-Peña's voice are in vivid focus as they take ›liberty with many sacred sign systems‹ but Rice's vision is what moved the project from boards and texts to a book format. Hers was the orchestrating force.

The way this work came into being would not in any sense be available without Rice's recollections and descriptions. Her telling of this tale is a meta-bibliographical contribution, one that frames the work through information that would otherwise be missing, unavailable, not present in the physical object or recoverable from it.

One last important point is that nothing in standard bibliographical approaches allows for the connections between one work and another. The *Codex*, in Rice's view of her work, anticipates the fuller expression that was the outcome of a seven-year collaboration that followed, *Documentado/Undocumented: Ars Shamánica Performática,* published in 2014.[5] This elaborate book object extended some of the processes of collaboration and thematic exchanges among cultural traditions into a performance space for which the book object provides a foundation and documentation. Rice considers it a turning point in her development as an artist, and publisher, and though the *Codex* can be seen, retrospectively, as anticipating this later work nothing in the ini-

4 Jennifer González: »CODEX ESPANGLIENSIS. Critical Commentary«. On: Moving Parts Press, https://movingpartspress.com/publications/critcom.

5 For a detailed portrait of this work and multi-faceted documentation, see: https://docundoc.com/.

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tial publication determined that this would be the case. Connections within the work of an artist, and to the communities of practice in which they are embedded, provide the social and intellectual frameworks for understanding many dimensions of these objects.

4 Conclusion

The choice of these three books, while not arbitrary, was not predicated on a sense that they are uniquely suited to the task of demonstrating principles of a meta-bibliographical method. They were chosen because each resonates with me in particular ways—personally, aesthetically, intellectually—as objects of complex and successful book art. But they also allow for very different principles of a meta-bibliography to be articulated. The raw materials of a project, the phases of testing, proofing, and trying things out to arrive at solutions are put into the final production offer evidence of thought processes. These materials—the pasted-up sheets of word-by-word text from McVarish, the instructions for PMS colors and printing sequence set by Freeman as a task list for work, the memories of Rice about her initial encounter with Gómez-Peña and Chagoya—are all information that is external to the book in its finished form.

For a meta-bibliographical method to work, its fields need to be clearly delineated. This is meant, as stated at the outset, as a heuristic, not a rigid or formally structured approach. Here are the elements of the meta-bibliographical field:

- material studies (including things put aside, excluded, or eliminated, such as alternatives to paper, binding, or ink),
- printing tests and press proofs,
- dummies,
- thumbnail sketches,
- notes by the artist to themselves,
- prints from digital and photographic experiments,
- layouts and production instructions,
- verbal documentation of the process.

Each of these categories can be used to define a descriptive field. They are the thought-work of intellectual creativity. They are the documentation on which a critical study of a book might be based. They are not the materials that are

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elaborated by descriptive bibliography, with its emphasis on physical features and form, nor analytic bibliography, with its attempts to recover the history of production in strict material terms. Meta-bibliography engages with the *conceptual gestation* of a work, that mysterious but very material process through which an idea becomes a manifestation, and attempts to go beyond the understanding of a book as a physical form, and instead, grasp some of its ineffable, essential, features as *an aesthetic object coming into being*. This approach offers the possibility of attending to conceptual work as well as material production as an essential aspect of a book as an aesthetic, cultural, and historical object.

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