

BOOK REVIEWS

Cathleen A Baker. *From the Hand to the Machine: Nineteenth-Century American Paper and Mediums: Technologies, Material, and Conservation*. Ann Arbor, MI: The Legacy Press, 2010. xiv, 389p. ill. ISBN 9780979797422. US \$65.

From the Hand to the Machine represents a *tour de force* in the connoisseurship of paper as a physical object during its least understood period of production: the transition from handcraft to the modern machine age. The work's groundbreaking complexity helps illustrate why machine-made paper, despite its ubiquitous presence in museums, archives and research libraries, has traditionally been underappreciated when compared with hand-made paper. Through an exhaustive analysis of American production methods, Dr. Cathleen Baker reveals the simple truth that paper produced during the industrialization is abundantly rich in handwork, experimentation, and variety, and deserves closer scrutiny.

Baker's text sheds light on numerous machine-milled mysteries such as the reason some sections of a printed and bound nineteenth century book appear reasonably bright and robust while others immediately following are much softer and darker brown. The solution to this riddle lies in nineteenth century paper mill practices necessitated by the use of gelatin sizing, which putrefies rapidly at room temperature, especially in the summer. Gelatin produced for vat sizing on a Monday or a Tuesday included a little alum and worked well as evidenced by the book's bright paper following 100–200 years of natural aging. However, as increasing amounts of alum and white vitriol (zinc sulfate) were added to preserve the gelatin as the work week progressed, the sizing became far less effective and considerably more acidic. Paper sized on a Friday or a Saturday produced sheets that could discolor disastrously over time, yet when printed in the day proved indistinguishable from Monday's paper.

The author brings an extraordinary depth of knowledge to this demanding topic. Currently the senior paper conservator at the University of Michigan Library, Baker has previously taught paper conservation at the Art Conservation Department of Buffalo State College and earned her doctorate practicing papermaking, letterpress printing, punch cutting, and bookbinding. Her definitive

biography on paper historian Dard Hunter, *By His Own Labor* (2000), was completed while living for several years in Hunter's Chillicothe, Ohio home and having unprecedented access to his archive of 10,000 letters, books, and photographs provided by his grandson, Dard Hunter III. Baker brings to the present study a ratified expertise gleaned through critical examination of tens of thousands of paper artifacts over the past forty years combined with extensive hands-on experience. The result is a discerning blend of numerous threads of paper history and conservation practice melded into a cohesive work that is a modern American classic.

While this edition could use more refined editing in places, the text is carefully linked with over 500 illustrations that visually underscore nuances of the technical points discussed. Baker moves beyond the subtleties of nineteenth-century paper manufacture to address paper as a printing, printmaking, writing, drawing, and painting medium. She concludes that greater restraint is called for in the conservation of machine-made paper artifacts, a thesis of grave importance to current practitioners and future generations of aficionados. This work should facilitate the reevaluation of this nation's paper legacy and establish Baker as our leading light on the topic.

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Nathalie Collé-Bak et al., eds. *Les Vies du Livre, passées, présentes et à venir / The Lives of the Book, past, present and to come*. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2010. 316p. ill. ISBN 9782814300217. €20.

As the bilingual title suggests, this anthology – with contributions by academics, publishing and book trade professionals, and a French writer-cum-film director – ranges widely around the practices of the book as a source of economic, sociological, historical, or cultural movement. The anthology is divided into three thematic sections, with a mix of French and English articles in each. Most of the articles in French are concentrated on developments in the French-speaking world and lean heavily towards France. However, Célia Vilà's essay on children's literature in France does make references to the underde-

velopment of the children book's industry in other parts of the world, especially in relation to the distribution and translation of French children's books that deviate from 'norms' of the other countries. On the other hand, a majority of the English-language articles takes on a broader, macro perspective of the materiality of the book and the world it occupies, ranging from book art to the hermeneutics of textuality within the world of electronic media.

Two articles on the history and politics of literary awards in France point to specificities of the politics of French publishing. Novelist Philippe Claudel discusses the life of the writer, and examines the book trade, reading circuits, availability in translations of foreign-language works, and literary awards that dominate French publishing; the specific political conditions of literary prizes in France and their influence on independent publishers are addressed in greater detail by Sylvie Ducas. Repeated mentions are made of France's famous publishing houses, notably in Benoît Berthou's analysis of the quality presses' engagement with the reproduction of the 'classics' and the decisions that go into designating any specific work as a 'classic.' He argues that the paradox of such literary 'monuments' is the 'enshrinement' of works that do not necessarily cater to public demand, such as the juvenilia or less-known writings of an otherwise famous author.

The sole reference to a francophone world outside of France is the article on the early developments of the novel in French Canada by Stéphanie Danaux, in which she traces the correlation between social values and cultural memory in the direction taken by French-Canadian novels and themes (war, marriage, women's place, nationalism, religion, and morality) contextualized by their relationship to the rest of Anglo-Canada. Danaux also differentiates the French Canadian reading public from their counterparts in France by acknowledging the diverging route and preoccupation of the former. In a different register, Bérénice Waty discusses public readership by focusing on French bibliophile bloggers and the way such online communities are shaped, as well as how publishers have begun to pay attention to these communities in the marketing of their books. Jeremy Tranmer's article about radical bookshops, their complicity in the pedagogy of Marxist ideology, and the socio-economic evolution of the British Left complements the multi-authored French narration of the little Book Village of Fon-

tenoy-la-Joûte near Nancy that is presented as a model of how well-thought out branding and quality wares can attract book-lovers and book-trade professionals, and thus rejuvenate a 'dying' village of 300-odd residents. These two articles address the political economy of the book trade by putting onto center-stage the realpolitik involved in each case.

The final section of the anthology tackles the problem of defining the relationship between the text, reading, and the book, as well as the practices of scholarship and digital editions. Barbara Gordalejo, in particular, raises important issues on copyright and technical skill sets, as well as the politics of collaboration, involved in the production of expansive literary corpora.

What is interesting about this anthology is that it attempts to tackle a very wide spectrum of interdisciplinary fields within which book history has been ineluctably situated. The editors have arranged the articles in such a way as to encourage a dialectical approach to reading even when the articles do not directly speak to one another. Nevertheless, debates on the definition of the book (and the possible extinction of the traditional codex) is the thread that runs throughout, helping us to link the various specific micro-aspects of book history to the larger macro world within our own area of research and experience.

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Marija Dalbello and Mary Shaw, eds.
Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011. x, 356p. ill. ISBN 9780813548838. US \$34.95.

When commencing defining or describing, delineating or depicting, one usually begins with two things that are fundamental to presentation and representation: a surface that has the properties of dimension and materiality, and a tool or mechanism. In going on to perform such acts one takes up the tool, sets down a point in space and starts to trace a line. So begins the seemingly simple process of making the invisible and the imagined, the idealised and the commonplace, the conceptual and the concrete manifest and visible in time and space. So begins this lavish, full-colour compilation of illustrated

essays published in response to the 2006 interdisciplinary conference on the theme of visible writing. As the title broadly implies, *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings* deals with historical and contemporary modes of imagistic and textual expression. The collected writings consequently encompass a broad array of perspectives and cover complementary fields of study such as art/design thinking and practice, visual and literary studies, histories of art and writing, and social knowledge, in addition to the epistemology of vision. These perspectives are cogently applied by sole and group authors to unpacking topics such as the sophisticated worldviews and spiritual concepts embedded in ancient Mesoamerican pictographic systems, modernist modes of literary expression, and collective and ephemeral responses to high-modern disasters. Punctuating this discursive content are beautifully reproduced images of the contemporary artist, Buzz Spector, whose praxis engages in contesting the domain exclusiveness of the graphic and typographic. As the editors state in their introduction, their intention was not to create a chronological *exposé* of canonical systems regarding image, text, and visibility, but to juxtapose modern western perspectives with modes from other times. Consequently, pictorial examples of densely coded and embellished representations for depicting governance, politics, and religion sit alongside modern visions of power and race. This considered juxtaposition and interweaving of image and text has resulted in a book that is absorbing and informative as it is visually seductive.

In reviewing this book I marvelled at how the visible word has been adapted over the centuries and over continents, islands, and seas to meet the needs of both the private and public self. The contained essays explore this notion in depth beginning with Brotherston's investigation of the concrete word of the codex in the New World of Central America, and Pappas's interdisciplinary discussion regarding the use of the alphabet in archaic and classical Greece, and the third to the first century B.C.E. Hahn's essay follows and takes a lively look at how medieval calligraphy and the exquisite book art of the Hiberno-Saxon world playfully tailored the formal expression of the Logos to suit audience perception. Stallybrass similarly focuses on audience perception, reading, and seeing. In comparatively examining the iconographic and typographic symbolism inherent in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Low Country woodcuts of the expulsion of

Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, he questions our textual and visual literacy. In discussing the Enlightenment text entitled *Paul et Virginie* (1806) Piroux further extends the conversation into the privileging of text and image by examining the paradoxical notion of the intimate and fetishised object, the book, as symbolic monument. This consideration gives way to Neefs's reflection on the orchestration of space resulting from Proust, Hugo, and Flaubert's extraordinary word sculpting of the ineffable. Buzz Spector's work intercepts at this point to remind us that this publication is not merely concerned with the textual and the visual, but the tactile and material. From here on the essays of Shaw, Dalbello, and Dennis Cate interrogate the performative role of image and text in communicating the poetics of space, in the allegorical representation of statistical and quantitative information, and in signalling the attitudes and values of subversive counter-cultures. Dennis Cate's unpacking of the French *fin-de-siècle* poster highlights popular culture and modern art as emergent paradigms for artists and graphic artists' hands-on experimentation with the aural and the oral, the visible and the legible, the graphic and typographic in creating works in which neither form has overt precedence. These themes are fully examined in the sole-authored essay of Cornilliat, and in the collective discussion of Symmes, Giviskos, and Tulovsky. The latter's analysis of the subtle hues employed by Ruscha in his work entitled *New, New, News, Brans, Stems & Dues* (1970) points to colour as an intrinsic factor in visibility, and is expanded on by Samoyault in her rhythmic reading of Roche and Roubaud's polychromatic texts. This and the final essays by Jinja, Mouchard, Serrano, Fraenkel, and Jubert argue the case for the dialogic: for visible writing to be considered a synthesis of form and function, function and beauty, legibility and aesthetics, the overt and the secret. In returning to the abstract and the monumental these essays remind us of the communicative importance of the graphic and the textual for all levels of society, and for all periods, ancient and contemporary. *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings* is a wonderful read. I thoroughly recommend it.

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