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The Bookness of a Book: Cataloging Affect in South African Artists' Books

DAVID PATON

ABSTRACT

In 2005, the internationally renowned private collector of artists' books Jack Ginsberg, his assistant Rosalind Cleaver, software developer Peter Dennis, and I began creating a database of every artist's book produced in South Africa. By linking the artists' books in the Ginsberg Collection with others that I had located during my research, we began constructing a bibliographic project: a comprehensive, freely accessible online database of the output of a nation. This national output of artists' books, however, constitutes a sliver of artistic production and is little known as a genre and confusing as a form to the majority of South Africans. It comes as no surprise that one of the most well-documented problems facing the cataloging of artists' books is grappling with their hybrid nature, as each claims territory within the contested space of the book arts. It is within this challenging space that important work can be done. With the collection having been donated to a university in 2019, I unpack some of our work that aims to not only bring these local objects to greater public attention but also ensure that the cataloging of these objects accounts for their affective nature as works of art. Taking Anne Thurmann-Jajes's *Manual for Artists' Publications* (2010) as a point of departure, I examine the South African artist's book database as a case study. Key texts are unpacked, shedding light on particular problems associated with describing artists' books, including acknowledging their self-conscious, reflexive, and artistic character, not merely their subject matter and material elements. While working within broad bibliographic standards, we have modified these by developing our own bespoke software that liberates us from the strictures and limitations of the standard MARC record. This helps

us write a set of descriptors that catalog South African artists' books' affective elements more meaningfully and richly. This work is contextualized in three examples. The first shows the refinements that were needed within the data fields in order to create an amplified record on our online database. The second shows how these refinements help to open up a space for the recording of affective content in the bibliographic record. This is done by acknowledging the work's self-conscious and reflexive elements. The third shows how such affect-rich descriptions are able to provide a reciprocal view of the idiosyncrasies of South African life.

INTRODUCTION AND SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Elizabeth Lilker's (2009, 47) view that "for all their undeniable visual appeal, artists' books can be a trial to the cataloger" suggests that artists' books occupy a liminal zone between libraries and art galleries that defies the limits of the terminology normally used by library catalogers. As early as 1991, Timothy Shipe entered this contested space by asking a simple yet, as we shall encounter later, fundamental question: "Should the description of a work in a library catalog be as complete as a museum description?" (24). The literature I consult unpacks the uncertainty that characterizes the cataloging and description of artists' books. In addition, it succeeds in opening up even more subtle and complex spaces for the affective that sit at the heart of our project, the objective of which is to create a comprehensive, accessible online database of all South African artist's book production; the "output of a nation."

A huge dichotomy exists in the book-arts community in South Africa. On one hand, this community is small, with approximately twenty-five artists having seriously engaged with the book as an important medium within their larger output. Many work in isolation without technical or academic training in the field, or the support of book arts dealers or commercial outlets for their work. Exhibition opportunities are extremely limited, and a pervasive national ignorance prevails concerning what an artist's book is. And so, in relating the bibliographic project of cataloging "the output of a nation," I am deeply aware of what my fellow countryman Verne Harris (2002) has aptly termed "the archival sliver." Harris (84) states: "The archival record is best understood as a sliver of a sliver of a sliver of a window into process. It is a fragile thing, an enchanted thing, defined not by its connection to 'reality,' but by its open-ended layerings of construction and reconstruction." Fragility and affect undergird every aspect of the project of cataloging South African artists' books. The project seems implicated in a high-stakes game of rescuing the artist's book from invisibility and obscurity. This, in a country where the visual and performing arts struggle for funding opportunities and where cries of relevance are often drowned out



Figure 1. View of Jack Ginsberg demonstrating books in the JGCBA, Wits Art Museum, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. 2019. Photograph: WAM, used with permission.

by more forceful and competing economic and political voices. Thus, our “sliver of a sliver” seems increasingly difficult to motivate for. Despite this, South African book artists are resilient and self-reliant, focusing on issues of national, cultural, and personal identity politics. This differentiates the local field from a highly resourced international field in which technical and formal excellence and literary themes seem to take precedence.

On the other hand, the Jack Ginsberg Collection of Artists’ Books, located in Johannesburg, South Africa, is considered one of the finest private collections of its kind globally.¹ Almost single-handedly, Ginsberg has supported local artists’ book production, bringing this fledgling, niche activity to a place of visibility within the local South African art world. In March 2019, the Jack Ginsberg Centre for Book Art (JGCBA) was inaugurated at the Wits Art Museum (WAM), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (see fig. 1). The Centre, unique on the African continent, was made possible by the generous donation of Ginsberg’s entire collection of artists’ books as well as books *on* artists’ books and monographs on book artists, together totalling more than eight thousand items. Ginsberg also helped support the construction of the physical plant to house, grow, and curate the collection. Ginsberg’s donation ensures that the books are now safely stored for posterity and accessible to a wider public. No other South African academic library, museum, or institution contains an extensive artist’s book collection.

BESPOKE BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOFTWARE, CONJOINING DATASETS, AND NEGOTIATING SHIFTS FROM PRIVATE RECORD TO PUBLIC ARCHIVE

From 1997, software developer Peter Dennis began developing a suite of on- and off-line database applications. By 2003, his off-line resource-management database, ResourceMD™, was offering Ginsberg a digital program for keeping track of the diverse parts of his multifaceted collection.² It also helped Ginsberg document the items in his various categories, for example, artists' books as distinct from books *on* artists' books. The software helped digitize and update Ginsberg's original handwritten card-catalog system into new and consistent fields of bibliographic data. These fields also included information on when and from whom an item was purchased, its price, personal communications, and ruminations regarding the item. In the early part of our collaboration, the ResourceMD™ also offered me the means to extend, update, and annotate my own rudimentary database of books lying outside the Ginsberg Collection that I had developed as part of my postgraduate studies into the artist's book in South Africa. In 2005, Ginsberg, Dennis, research associate Rosalind Cleaver, and I began the bibliographic project of conjoining Ginsberg's private collection (with all its descriptive idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, and quirks) with the different sets of data and modalities of description arising from the other South African sources I had documented. Dennis's software became the connective tissue between these two sets of data, while the program Collection OD™ facilitated free online access to this unified database for the first time in 2006.

Before its donation to the Wits Art Museum in 2019, Ginsberg's collection had been private. When a private collection is made public, however, the information Ginsberg had captured, over many decades, reflected idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, and quirks that indexed both the personality of the collector and the scope of the collection; the affective load of a life's project. It was one thing for Ginsberg to document his private collection in the manner that best suited him, quite another to make this information public. Cleaver (2017, 105) describes the reception and cataloging of a new book into the collection thus: "Cataloguing his books into his extensive database requires him to follow the trail in cuttings, art catalogues, or correspondence—like a detective. The way I see it, for him to capture the essence of the book is an act of love and deep appreciation." Cleaver's words seem to echo Walter Benjamin's (1978, 60) when he states that "the period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object."

Without losing the idiosyncratic indices of the personality of the collector, the online data must still satisfy the scrutiny of multiple role-players. These include the general public that wants logical, easy access to infor-

mation of interest, and researchers who require credible, accurate, and meaningful returns on their search terms, including the personal and idiosyncratic. Bibliophiles and librarians will require data to adhere to at least the basic rules and requirements of current cataloging codes such as *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2)*,³ the Library of Congress' *MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data*,⁴ and *LCSH Approved Lists*.⁵ Dennis's bespoke software, as I will discuss, modified existing bibliographic conventions in order for us to achieve the aims of our project. Not only did we believe that our project was achievable, we believed it had, imbedded within it, a unique national importance and public good. When Richard Cox (2002, 290) asks archivists to forcefully "reflect on why, how and for whom appraisal is done" so as to unpack notions of the archive's "authority and power," he is asking the archivist to question its presumption of scientific objectivity, dismissal of inherent power relations, and ideals of neutrality (Cifor 2016, 11–12). Such questioning, states Marika Cifor (2016, 12), seeks a shift of affect from the tacit to the explicit. Our work, then, should not merely attempt to document what the artist's book "is about" in affective terms, but more importantly, seek to conduct the very task of archiving, cataloging, and preparing the metadata of the accessible database as an affective act in and of itself. This project, after all, represents a valid attempt to document the "output of a nation" and, more importantly, reintroduce it to a public that has little idea of its importance to its own identity formation. This work must be achieved by imbuing the act with love for the objects and materials described, respect for their makers, and hope for the way in which a broad public might access the data. Our database should become what Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 7) has termed "repositories of feelings."

THE SLIPPERY, HYBRID SLIVERS THAT ARE ARTISTS' BOOKS

One of the best-documented problems facing appropriate mechanisms for the bibliographic archiving and cataloging of artists' books is grappling with the hybrid nature of the items to be recorded: objects that include bottles, boxes, files, "older" new-media forms, and sculptures that often bear little resemblance to a conventional book or codex. Zines, poster-zines, foldout single pages, and broadsides rub shoulders with ephemera, badges, and bookmarks, only some of which contain text. Added to these is a growing range of interactive online publications that exploit ephemeral and nonphysical elements, take up no shelf space, and exist in the cloud. Each of these claims some territory within the contested space of the book arts, a territory explored most succinctly in Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden's project *What Will Be the Canon for the Artist's Book in the 21st Century?* and impressively documented in their publication *A Manifesto for the Book* (2010). Their project investigated the context and future of the artist's book in an attempt to sustain and extend critical debate on

what constitutes an artist's book in the twenty-first century. Bodman and Sowden (2010, 5) state:

One of the key points of this project was to try and include all the book related activity that artists engage with. To include work that was being produced on, and exclusively for, digital technologies within the book arts field, and not leave it floundering uncomfortably on the edge, or subjected to a different terminology altogether, if the artist considered what they were producing to be a book, then we felt it should be included. We also looked at the continued practice of traditional production processes for artists' books such as letterpress, etching, lithography, screenprint and woodcut, and have interviewed a range of artists and publishers who work with these, as well as those producing livres d'artistes, fine press books, design bindings, multiples, installation and audio books.

Bodman and Sowdon's (2010) project explored the possible redundancy of the term "artists' books" and proposed the more encompassing term "artists' publications." They elicited far-reaching responses to an initial classification diagram for artists' books that they termed ABTREES (Artist's Book Trees). These ABTREES, some hand-drawn and copiously annotated, often noted affective associations. This afforded greater visibility of the field's complexity in order to classify it more richly. These responses came from within the haptic experiences of makers such as binders, crafters, printers, and artists. Their question regarding the possible applicability of the term "artists' publications" over the term "artists' books" responds, in some ways, to Ulises Carrión's (1979) and Clive Phillpot's (1982) arguments against the term "artist's book." Amanda Catherine Roth Clark (2013, 63–64) contextualizes the argument thus:

Clive Phillpot encourages the use of the term bookwork instead of artists' [*sic*] book, as does Ulises Carrión, who also favors the term bookworks. This term, however, while appealing in that it is reminiscent of "artwork," only distances our understanding away from art and closer to book; while the artists' [*sic*] book is book, it is likewise art, and it would be prudent not to lose the duel [*sic*] association.

It is noteworthy that, by the end of Bodman and Sowdon's project in 2010, they too could not discard the term "artists' books," merely incorporating it under the umbrella term "book arts." Tony White (2014, 228) however, states that at about the time Bodman and Sowdon's project came to an end, "Printed Matter began using artists' publishing in place of artists' books on its website. . . . For the past decade, this shift to using the term artists' publishing recognizes that there needs to be a broader, more inclusive term or phrase that describes the variety and types of publications available today." White (email message to author, July 19, 2019) points to Thurmann-Jajes's publication as being a seminal text in this shift. This shift, however, is by no means universally accepted or yet in general use.

CATALOGING ARTISTS' BOOKS' CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS: A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Contemporary debates in the field of the book arts regarding what does and what does not constitute an artist's book, as well as the complexities and stresses associated with their appropriate cataloging in public collections, have elicited many and varied responses. I spend some time here with this literature as it illuminates both the problems associated with the adequate cataloging of the field and our strategies to overcome these problems. Louise Kulp's (2005, 5–10) "Artists' Books in Libraries: A Review of the Literature" provides some important early texts that reflect on these debates. Along with these, I have engaged with texts that are more recent in order to help contextualize the contemporary field and our South African project's concerns and gaps within this field. As far back as 1991, Timothy Shipe's "The Monographic Cataloger and the Artist's Book: The Ideal Reader" (23–25) stated that

the thing to remember in considering artists' books is that AACR2 is a standard for bibliographic description. When a library catalogs an artist's book, the work is being described in its aspect as a bibliographic entity, not as an art object. Although the code does provide rules for describing realia and original works of art, it is not intended for describing museum collections. . . . The question is, Should the description of a work in a library catalog be as complete as a museum description?

In "Artists' Books and Beyond: The Library of the Museum of Modern Art as a Curatorial and Research Resource," Janis Ekdahl (1999, 247) describes the need for expanded referencing of artists' books:

At MoMA the basic bibliographic record is amplified, when appropriate, with descriptions of physical characteristics and subject matter. In addition, the term "artists' books" is part of the cataloging record for all books which share this form. Other terms that we frequently include . . . can be used as keywords or phrase searches. . . . Also some records include a citation or reference notation, indicating where a particular book was reviewed or discussed. Also awareness of the collection is enhanced through exhibitions. . . . The Library also has a small display area where artists' books are regularly featured.

Ekdahl's reference to an amplified record that is enhanced by exhibitions and displays both inside and outside the library forges a potent argument for a tripartite relationship between library, affect-rich data, and gallery (whether real or virtual) in order to cope with artists' books' often challenging nature, a point to which I will return in the examples discussed below. Andrea Chemero, Caroline Seigel, and Terrie Wilson's (2000, 23) survey on collecting, cataloging and preserving artists' books in libraries also emphasizes promotion, book exhibitions, and displays as well as the importance of "expanded descriptions" in the cataloging process. They (23) state, however, that "much of the literature on cataloguing art ma-

terials points to the limitations of trying to manipulate the description of visually-oriented materials into a mold more appropriate for standard books and related documents." They continue by noting that, in their survey, twenty-four out of twenty-seven libraries interviewed cataloged their artists' books according to AACR2/LCSH standards. Although this limited any real expansion of descriptions in the catalogue, Chemero, Seigel, and Wilson (23) note that "most catalogers place a significant emphasis on the use of prose notes within a cataloging record to describe the unique qualities of artists' books." These notes, however, often consist of descriptions of the formal qualities and materials associated with artists' books and not their affective, self-consciousness, and reflexive elements.

Whereas Anne Thurmann-Jajes lists fourteen "Forms" of artists' publications, with artists' books appearing as her first form (2010), in "Typologising the Artist's Book," Duncan Chappell (2003, 12–20) lists twenty-nine "Sub-genres" of the artist's book. Chappell (12) reviews "how different bibliographic forms have been related to the artist's book throughout the critical literature." Of note is his inclusion of the term "artist's publication" as one of the twenty-nine "Sub-genres." Chappell (13) cites David Platzker (1998), who states, "It has been hard to think of artists' books without considering a larger parallel, sometimes overlapping body of work loosely known as artists' publications." Chappell (13) concludes by stating, "In this work, dissemination of ideas becomes the art form rather than the physicality of the form being at issue."

In her revealingly titled article "Artists' Books: Managing the Unmanageable," Nola Farman (2008, 324) acknowledges the difficulties experienced in the management of cataloging artists' books, stating that

the librarian must show some skills that could be associated with forensic science! Within the library's organizational scheme, that is usually constructed for the written word, it is difficult to identify and systematically organise visual play and especially that which skips between word, image and material.

These problems of identification, definition, and adequate description notwithstanding, there is another set of concerns that weigh heavily on the affective experience of encountering and handling these hybrid objects. Farman (324) laments that

the exposure of the artists' [*sic*] book to a readership is often decreased by it being housed (more often than not) in special collections. In large collections, there is not the opportunity to randomly browse. Often, special arrangements have to be made in order to view particular books by particular people.

Thus, Farman acknowledges the importance of displays. The invisibility of artists' books in special collections has motivated a number of more recent

research papers: Maureen O'Neill's "The Ministry of Books" (2009, 33) project attempts an online visual database for "locked away" artists' books at the University of Portsmouth, UK. Eva Athanasiu's "Belonging: Artists' Books and Readers in the Library" (2015, 330) criticizes special collections' models that encourage preservation while disrupting access. So too, Michelle Strizever (2015, 89) promotes artists' books' access—books that are "often hidden," with concomitant frustrations due to "cataloguing inconsistencies." More recently, Maria White (2017, 25) addresses cataloguing challenges of artists' books "in special collections closed to general access." Access is also central to Allison Jai O'Dell's visual vocabulary in the "The Visual Vocabulary: Skos:example and the Illustrated *Artists' Books Thesaurus*" (2015), as well as Sarah Carter and Alex O'Keefe's study of access to visual and textual surrogates on the ARLIS/NA *Artists' Books Thesaurus* platform, pointedly titled "Revealing Invisible Collections" (2018).

What these texts and many others in the field of artists' books recently published in journals such as *Art Documentation* make evident is that artists' books, especially those in major libraries or collections, often become especially distanced from the very qualities that give artists' books their *raison d'être* or aura—their affective and tactile relationship with their reader/viewer. It is one thing to read a book, quite another to have that experience heightened through self-conscious attention to the book's materiality or having the processes of navigation intriguingly problematized through the reflexive objecthood of the thing in hand. These concerns are reflected in a growing body of academic research, not only in departments of visual art, but also within graduate courses in library sciences. This is exemplified by Amanda Roth Clarke's PhD dissertation, "The Handmade Artists' Book: Space Materiality, and the Dynamics of Communication in Book Arts" (2013). Clarke (153) states, "Foundational to the cataloging of artists' books however, may be simply an empathy for the genre," an argument that has implications for the three examples I discuss below. Clarke cites Kulp's (2005, 7) description of Stanford cataloger Kay Teel's "Challenges to Cataloging Artists' Books" (2002) as

a refreshing antidote to the anxious, technical, and procedurally heavy approach that many authors take to the topic. While she agrees that "description of the item must . . . occur primarily through the use of field notes," she says that "even in the absence of a perfect solution, it is nevertheless possible to draw a great deal of *pleasure* from dealing with such items. . . . Use the cataloging tools you have and use them freely, exploiting the fullest flexibility of the MARC record. . . . In short, "stop agonizing!" [my italics].

Kulp (2005, 7) also interviewed Carnegie Mellon book collection custodian Maureen Dawley, who noted "*binding* (e.g., codex, concertina, spiral, stab, etc.) as the most searched-for artists' [*sic*] book descriptor." Kulp (7)

concludes, “Thus, the factor that poses the biggest challenge to catalogers, description, is also the most crucial for access.” Annie Herlocker’s 2012 survey of academic libraries with artist’s book collections indicates that students are most likely to request artists’ books by searching for specific binding types, subjects, and materials. This implies that the structure of the book and the materials from which it is made—the haptic, navigable, and affective characteristics of the book—are at least as important as the subject matter and intellectual content and must be accessible in any search.

Michelle Stover’s masters thesis, “Categorizing the Unique: Analyzing Artists’ Books for a Framework of Description” (2005), in many ways predicted the complexities of our project by identifying what she (20) considers to be three essential areas for cataloging artists’ books: bibliographic information, content, and structure. Yet even by physically handling each book in the collection of the Sloane Art Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Stover (19) found that their “wide ranging differences in form, method, and subject made it almost impossible to unify categories of description.” She adds, “It is not the catalogers [*sic*] place to ascribe meaning or intent” (25). Even “enhanced cataloging” (42) proved unhelpful, a realization echoed in Ann and William Myers’s article “Opening Artists’ Books to the User” (2014), where their cataloging project, completed in line with MARC and AACR2 criteria, seemed to require an even fuller record in which “intellectual content” (62–63) and “artist’s intention” (65) were recorded in extensive prose notes. Myers and Myers (65) state, however, that “even the more complete record stumbles on the fact that the work covers so many topics, often in a cursory or even free associational way, that it is difficult to represent what the book is ‘about.’” Most importantly for our project, Stover’s (2005, 45) solution to these complex questions was the creation of a separate database facilitating complex searching from multiple access points; furthermore, if possible, “records should include images as they clarify the physical embodiment of the work.” Despite Teel’s recommendation to “stop agonizing,” the need for separate databases seems accentuated by problems of description that do not necessarily “convey the complex and nuanced meaning and associations triggered by interaction with objects, or even give much of a sense of what the artists’ [*sic*] book looks like” (Mathews and Smart 2016, 1).

Stover (2005, 46–47) concludes her study with an important observation that, in order to understand, accommodate, describe, and catalog a group of objects as unique and idiosyncratic as an artist’s book collection, “one must spend countless hours with the books, turning their pages, learning their tricks, feeling their materials, examining their story lines.” This describes, most powerfully, the affective sensibilities required of any cataloger in acquiring, what Clarke (2013, 153) terms, “an empathy for the genre.”

THE MANUAL FOR ARTISTS' PUBLICATIONS: A STRATEGY FOR OUR PROJECT

In developing a strategy for what would become our bibliographic project's expanded fields, we consulted Anne Thurmann-Jajes's *Manual for Artists' Publications (MAP): Cataloguing Rules, Definitions, and Descriptions* (2010). It provides cataloging criteria for fourteen forms of artist-published outputs, including records, audio cassettes and CDs, films and videos, photographic editions, graphic work, multiples, and ephemera. Her cataloging rules with definitions (49–200) for each of these fourteen forms, however, are predicated on large, deep, and complex collections. These include multiple forms of artists' publications consisting of objects, notes, and ephemera in support of multifaceted bodies of collected artworks by a range of international artists. Thurmann-Jajes acknowledges such depth in her 2013 article "Collecting Collections," in which she describes the Weserburg Museum of Modern Art's Research Centre for Artists' Publications in Bremen, Germany, as "one of the most significant institutions worldwide in the field of artists' publications, with holdings of more than 200,000 items." She continues: "The Research Centre also embodies the role of a special library, media centre, and documentation centre, including an up-to-date reference library housing secondary literature for the entire field of artists' publications and their historical forerunners" (30).

Given her experience with such comprehensivity, complexity, and depth, in *Manual for Artists' Publications*, Thurmann-Jajes separates "artists' books" from distinct other categories such as "artists' magazines," "artists' newspapers," "edition objects," and "multiples." Of interest to our South African project (demonstrated in Example One, below) are her discrete "Primary Subforms" for artists' books (which she defines as "characteristic as original artists' books" [52]), "Subforms" (which she defines as "facultatively associated with artists' books based upon their content-related references" [52]) and "Genres" (defined as "the thematic areas in which the artist's book as a medium is conceptually involved" [52], and which, inevitably, is an almost limitless list). Despite the terms "codex" and "scroll" being conspicuously missing from her rubric, Thurmann-Jajes's manual remains a valuable guide for recognizing, separating, and nuancing critical differences in diverse artists' publications. It has been of particular importance to the way in which we have conceptualized and operationalized new data fields on our website, opening a space for the acknowledgement of object types, content, self-consciousness, reflexivity, and other affective signifiers. For the purposes of our basic cataloging needs, the Collection OD™ organizes and manages data in item-centric and producer-centric modes that interact with and cross-reference each other. In item-centric mode, the fields Item (display) Title; Description; Medium; Measurements; Inscription; Edition; Dates and Keywords, among others, appear. This mode also provides fields for publication details such as Place of

publication; Publisher; ISBN, ISSN, Volume, Series, Issue and/or Edition numbers; Number of pages; Exhibition notes; and Additional notes that do not appear on the website. In producer-centric mode, fields for the Artist and other Producers' names; Biographic data; Nationality; Gender; Exhibitions; Education; Awards; as well as Keywords appear. These fields are accompanied by metadata, including assigned and reference numbers, filters, and website links. The exclusive existence of purely denotative information on early iterations of our website highlighted palpable gaps in the description of a book's type and content, qualities that were inconsistently included in "Reference notes." Of particular importance to any rich and nuanced documentation of the genre is unpacking "what a book is about" (Myers and Myers 2104, 65). This unpacking is less concerned with subject matter and more concerned with questions of self-consciousness, reflexivity, and materiality. As these are often defining characteristics of the genre, they provoke questions of *how* these characteristics reveal themselves, *how* they are implicated in the book's affective content, and, more challengingly, *how* one adequately describes this in the record.

It is clear that any online cataloging project needs to be logical, navigable, and useful in terms of its responsiveness to search terms returned in the general search field and MARC subject-access field 655⁶ that contains terms indicating the genre, form, and/or physical characteristics of the materials described. Sarah Hamerman, who worked as an artist's book project cataloger under Danny Fermon at the MoMA Library, was able to extrapolate descriptions for their collection from Printed Matter's⁷ extensive notes fields. She used this experience to write the artist's book section of Princeton's cataloging documentation page.⁸ These solutions, however, take us no further than what our existing "Reference notes" field provides. One of the advantages of running a private/public website is the agility of its software to facilitate change and rapid update. This agility allows us to work a little outside of the conventions and rules to which a public or academic library would need to adhere, underscoring Stover's (2005, 45) recommendation for a "separate database." Thurmann-Jajes's specific designators pointed the way. To begin, it was clear that our ubiquitous and blunt entry for the field "Category Type" that read "South African Artist's Book," no longer sufficed. What was needed was nuance and granularity (O'Dell 2014), especially given the fact that the database only documents and catalogues South African artists' books. In simply separating "Category" (South African Artist's book) from "Type," we could begin the move toward granularity. By conflating many of Thurmann-Jajes's "Category Forms," such as "artists' magazines and newspapers," "book objects," and "multiples," we were able to pull into the gravitational field of the artist's book many of Thurmann-Jajes's primary subforms. In our "Type" field, we now include objects such as "magazine" or "newspaper," "broadside," "book-object,"⁹ "book-shaped-object" (BSO), "book sculpture," "ob-

ject in book form,” “book installation,” “book multiple,” “photo book,” “typewriter work,” “artist’s postcards,” and related book-based ephemera. Thus, we have conflated the very categories Thurmman-Jajes has worked so hard to differentiate in order to provide greater nuance to subforms of South African artists’ books. Two more fields were created or renamed in item-centric mode: “Sub-type” and “Theme(s).”¹⁰ The “Theme(s)” field was specifically created to accommodate narrative statements reflecting something richer, more affectively in tune with the book-as-artwork, in our records. The value of doing this work lies in being able to more fully acknowledge both the diversity of forms and content that constitute the scope and breadth of the local field of artists’ books.

We provide “Basic,” “Guided,” “Advanced,” and “Browse Images” search options. As is clear from the inclusion of the latter, one of the more advantageous elements of contemporary online databases and catalogs is the presence of imagery. This evokes Ekdahl’s (1999, 247) and Chenero, Seigel, and Wilson’s (2000, 23) references to an “amplified” database, which is enhanced by the exhibition of examples. Stover’s (2005, 16) recommendation for the inclusion of imagery has seen more recent projects, such as the *Artists’ Books Thesaurus* (O’Dell 2015; Carter and O’Keefe 2018), place imagery at the center of online access. Our experience is that in the small, local book-arts community, a supportive and collegial atmosphere mutually supports both the project and the artists. South African book artists seem agreeable to having their work cataloged with digital images, and in this manner, made accessible to both national and international audiences. Georgia Harper’s (2019) “Quick Guides to Fair Use” asks two questions regarding the availability and presence of digital images in web-based projects: “1. Is the use you want to make of another’s work transformative—that is, does it add value to and repurpose the work for a new audience? 2. Is the amount of material you want to use appropriate to achieve your transformative purpose?” Harper (2019) states that “if the use of the resources is transformative and the amount used is appropriate for the transformative purpose, digitize them and make them available as needed, in accordance with the limitations.” In these terms, we define fair use as follows: without any commercial value, used for academic and research purposes, in low resolution (72ppi) not for printing, with limited on-screen enlargement capability, and with the reproduced elements being a small proportion of the totality of the work, thus having little effect on the market value of the original work. Our database strictly adheres to all of these principles. More critically, however, and to re-emphasize the point, images become miniexhibitions of the work, amplifying the catalog entry’s physical description, subject matter, theme(s), and content, while also providing some insight into the work’s objecthood, materiality, and affective qualities. Such rich, nuanced, granularity is described in Example One, below—William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx’s *Fire Walker* (2011)

Database of South African Artists' Books

SEARCH OPTIONS: [Basic](#) | [Guided](#) | [Browse](#) | [Advanced](#)

Full Details

Fire Walker:

William Kentridge, Gerhard Marx

Artwork date(s): 2011

William Kentridge - artist (and in title)

Gerhard Marx - artist (and in title)

Oliver Barstow - (edited and designed by)

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen - (edited with an introduction)

Description: The book is contained in a half-slipcase in red which is laid into a wooden box with a steel cut-out of the Fire Walker inset into the cover. The box also contains a print by Gerhard Marx titled Foot Map and another by William Kentridge titled Goldmann's South African Mining and Finance, each in a grey wrapper.

Medium: Relief and lithograph, collage, metal inlay in wood

Measurements: Box = 452 x 357mm

Inscription: Signed by the artists.

Edition: #27/40.

Category: South African Artist's Book in larger publication

Type: Codex & other media in box

Sub-type: Artists and multiple producers

Theme(s): Complex combination of texts and images in socio-economic commentary associated with inner-city Johannesburg and the meaning of public art in public spaces

Place publication: Johannesburg

Publisher: Fourthwall Books

ISBN: 978-0-9869850-1-0

Reference note:

The regular edition of the book is contained in the half-slipcase in red. The special edition contains the book, two prints both numbered 27/40 in a box also numbered 27/40. Of importance to the content of the project, Kentridge and Marx state about the women fire walkers:

"They evoke an industrial era - urban and rural mores colliding in the wildly textured and richly flavoured economic melting pot of the city. Like the disappearing mine dumps, the fire walker is a twentieth-century Johannesburg archetype that is fast fading from the picture as the city clutches at new markets and slicker incarnations for the new millennium - The archaic constancy of another time stands out awkwardly against the backdrop of Park Station's relentless radical transits. Gritty tracks run between discarded Kentucky Fried Chicken cartons and burned-out taxi tyres facilitating a daily pageant of arrivals and departures. Now we're getting warmer, closer to the inconstant spirit of the place. Amidst the bustle of street traders and commuter lines along Pim Street, the smell of roasting milies and peanuts at the corner of Pim and Sauer, adverts for 'Doctor Kidda, the Herbalist' the pungent smell of urine, waste and still water in dark corners and pavement potholes, the hordes of pedestrian traffic across Harrison and Bree, the comings and goings of taxis within and around the Metro Mall taxi precinct, I had never really noticed her before."

Ref: GB/13014

Articles

Now you see her, now you don't

Alexandra J. Dodd (essay by)

p13

Six Conversations

William Kentridge (interview with)

Stewart Barstow (interview with)

Oliver Barstow (interview by)

Lael Bethlehem (interview with)

Jurie van der Westhuizen (interview with)

John Munday (interview with)

Gerhard Marx (interview with)

p25

Constructing Fire Walker

John Hodgkiss (photo essay by)

p50

Urban Mythologies

Mpho Matsipa (essay by)

p61

Three Fire Walkers: A Photo Essay

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen (text by)

Ben Law-Viljoen (photo essay by)

p70

Walking with / Walking alongside / Walking against?

Zen Marie (essay by)

Jonathan Cane (essay by)

p79

Six Monuments: A Photo Essay

Oliver Barstow (text by)

Alastair McLachlan (photo essay by)

p89

Ma Firewalker and Mr Typewriter-Head: Maps, Marx and Kentridge

Mark Gevesser (essay by)

p103



Total images: 8

Figure 2. William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx. *Fire Walker*. 2011. 452 x 357mm (box).

Various printed media in wooden box with metal inlay. Edition: #27/40.

Photography: The author. Used with permission of the artists.

Reference: http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/view_collod.asp?pg=collod_item&collod_opt=item&ItemID=563>>

(see fig. 2), a publication that leverages the power of our bespoke software within a “separate database” in the form of an “amplified” record that is “enhanced by the exhibition of examples.”

EXAMPLE ONE

Fire Walker: William Kentridge, Gerhard Marx (2011)

William Kentridge – artist (and in title)

Gerhard Marx – artist (and in title)

Oliver Barstow – (edited and designed by)

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen – (edited with an introduction by)

This is the special edition of the book, described as being “contained in a half-slipcase in red which is laid into a wooden box with a steel cut-out of the Fire Walker inset into the cover. The box also contains a print by Gerard Marx titled *Foot Map* and another by William Kentridge titled *Goldmann’s South African Mining and Finance*, each in a gray wrapper.” The following data appears next:

Medium: Relief and lithograph, collage, metal inlay in wood

Measurements: Box = 452 x 357mm

Inscription: Signed by the artists

Edition: #27/40

Category: South African Artist’s Book in larger publication

Type: Codex & other media in box

Sub-type: Artists and multiple producers.

Theme(s): Complex combination of texts and images in socio-economic commentary associated with inner-city Johannesburg and the meaning of public art in public spaces

Place publication: Johannesburg

Publisher: Fourthwall Books

ISBN: 978-0-9869850-1-0

The publication is part of a larger project that includes a public sculpture in downtown Johannesburg and a set of essays on public art. Our web-page entry includes the titles, authors, and page numbers of eight associated “Articles” included in the publication (see fig. 2). In the book’s prospectus, the publishers (Fourthwall Books, n.d.) state: “Far more than being about a single artwork, this book participates in the myriad conversations and debates on the meaning of public art. The essays prise open critical questions about public space in Johannesburg.” This book’s content is devoted to an ordinary South African woman who arrives on the streets of Johannesburg carrying a burning brazier on her head, ready to cook her day’s ration of corn-on-the-cob that she sells to passers-by. Of these women, Kentridge and Marx (2011) state:

They evoke an industrial era—urban and rural modes colliding in the wildly textured and richly flavoured economic melting pot of the

city. Like the disappearing mine dumps, the fire walker is a twentieth-century Johannesburg archetype that is fast fading from the picture as the city clutches at new markets and slicker incarnations for the new millennium. . . . The archaic constancy of another time stands out awkwardly against the backdrop of Park Station's relentless radical transits. Gritty tracks run between discarded Kentucky Fried Chicken cartons and burned-out taxi tyres facilitating a daily pageant of arrivals and departures. Now we're getting warmer—closer to the inconstant spirit of the place. Amidst the bustle of street traders and commuter lines along Pim Street, the smell of roasting mielies [corn] and peanuts at the corner of Pim and Sauer, adverts for "Doctor Kidda, the Herbalist . . .," the pungent smell of urine, waste and still water in dark corners and pavement potholes, the hordes of pedestrian traffic across Harrison and Bree, the comings and goings of taxis within and around the Metro Mall taxi precinct, I had never really noticed her before.

This information, which might not have been included in the MARC 520 or 655 fields of any conventional library record, is acknowledged in a short narrative statement in our "Theme(s)" field: "*Complex combination of texts and images in socio-economic commentary associated with inner-city Johannesburg and the meaning of public art in public spaces.*" It is then captured in full in the "Reference note" field. Some of the eight images that accompany the bibliographic entry show sections of the above texts in contextual relation to the book, its housing as well as the producers' wider project reflected in the associated "Articles" section. Without these diverse signifiers on the web page, the essential quality of the "art project" slips its moorings, while the perfunctory entry for the "book" remains. These signifiers reflect the project's broad affective content, providing a compelling example of what Ekdahl (1999, 247) might describe as an "amplified" bibliographic record while also acknowledging something peculiarly South African.

SEARCHING FOR AND ACKNOWLEDGING AFFECT

Cifor (2016, 25) states: "Recently, there has been an increase in the collection, digitization and subsequent placement of archival records into privately owned, managed and for-profit subscription databases. I argue that the form of optimism held out by these databases to archives is often cruel." Cifor (25–26) continues: "These private databases offer archives the alluring promise of making available previously difficult to access records to a broader user base . . . [however] these digitized records are made accessible to a select set of privileged users only behind very expensive paywalls curtailing access, use and intellectual freedom." Berlant (2011, 48) states that "any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it." Thus, concludes Cifor (2016, 26), archivists suffer from a "techno-optimistic and affective attachment to the good life fantasy of access for all." It is exactly this "fan-

tasy of access,” in all its affective possibilities, that our bibliographic project confronts. As open access is a critical and nonnegotiable position for the project, there is no need for paywalls or subscriptions by users. Since 2006, the database has grown exponentially and, given where we find ourselves today,¹¹ our project now reflects the growing diversity of artist’s book production in South Africa. As efforts at affectiveness should emphasize alternate voices, it has been critical to capture and retain these diverse voices in the bibliographic records and ensure that our efforts at technical integration do not flatten the idiosyncrasies these alternate voices provide. This is achieved in a number of ways: first, by incorporating a “vents” function on the site for visitor participation and commentary on data already appearing on the site; second, by means of an online submission facility allowing for items and imagery to be uploaded by artists; last, by carefully capturing any oral, written, or published descriptors (often residing in a book’s colophon) that might exist. Embedded within these technical and digital enablers lies the potential to develop or acknowledge a set of affective relationships with any material appearing on the database.

Harris’s (2002, 84) description of the archival record as “a sliver of a sliver of a window into process” aptly describes the difficulty artists’ books have with visibility and thus the high stakes that are in play regarding their presence in South Africa’s artistic imagination. It would seem that the genre often sits upon the lowest rung of the artistic and bibliographic ladder. Complexities regarding their appropriate cataloging and description often deepen their opacity to search terms both in and outside the library. In the South African art world, the artist’s book occupies a marginalized and liminal space characterized, more often than not, by perplexed expressions and misidentification of the field as meaning “a book about an artist” or a monograph. Our information and image-rich web pages are designed to inform and educate a visiting public.¹² Thus, if the artist’s book is best served through the lens of affect theory and its acknowledgment, in Cifor’s (2016, 10) terms, as more than “legitimate objects of scholarly enquiry,” artists’ books might rise up the ladder of acceptability and visibility as “a new way of doing cultural criticism.”

Brian Massumi (2015, 3) states:

By “affect” I don’t mean “emotion” in the everyday sense. The way I use it comes primarily from [Baruch] Spinoza. He talks of the body in terms of its capacity for *affecting* or being *affected*. These are not two different capacities—they always go together. When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn.

Spinoza’s reference to affective bodies is instructive when considering the book/body relationship as interactive, tactile, and haptic. Johanna Drucker (1995, 161) describes how “familiarity of the basic conventions of the book tends to banalise them: the structures by which books present in-

Database of South African Artists' Books

SEARCH OPTIONS: [Basic](#) | [Guided](#) | [Browse](#) | [Advanced](#)

Full Details

Antibody

Artwork date(s): 1993

Belinda Blignaut**Liz Wigginton** - Typesetting by

Description: Hand-made metal covers with stitched suture. Contained in a Perspex hinged box. Spiral bound.

Medium: Photographic acetate positives, aluminium, Perspex and nylon

Measurements: 100mm

Inscription: Signed and dated by the artist

Edition: #16/30

Category: South African Artist's Book

Type: Codex in box

Sub-type: Artist as concept and item producer with one other (typesetter)

Theme(s): Self-conscious and reflexive forms delivering socio-familial commentary on violence

Place publication: Johannesburg, RSA

Publisher: The Artists' Press

Pages: unpagged

Reference note: Colophon: 'Published to coincide with Antibody - the exhibition held at the Everard Read Contemporary, Johannesburg July 1993. Typesetting by Liz Wigginton Johannesburg. Images contact: exposed from found objects onto daylight-working contact film.'

*rom 2006 catalogue entry:

'In this example, the small, square, spiral-bound book is communication on the front cover, not by means of a title motif on the dustjacket but through its cover's metaphoric materiality. The cover boards are pieces of thin aluminium cut and sutured from the bottom up. The constant material of the front cover of Antibody is foreboding. It with holes punctured on either side of the cut, whilst it hides deeper wounds, layer below layer, on the book's opening, the book presents the first of six transparent, layered, with images suggesting cutting and suturing. Be a rhyme concerning an Edwardian father named Udegoi provocative offspring on a Saturday night'. The word 'al' implying an end (to violence or incest?). A suture and n before the book ends with two black pages, the first wit repeating the word 'abort', and the second with the impleak simplicity of the texts and images bleeds between the depth of the wound whilst the book's temporal aspect period of time over which the damage occurs. Very few integrate the cover boards with the internal pages as it has done, through the signification of aluminium and tissue.'

Exhibition notes: Exhibited on the exhibition 'Antibody: Read Contemporary, Johannesburg, July 1993.

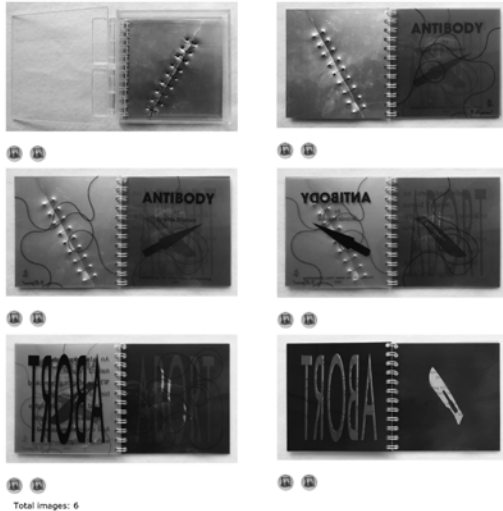
Item 167 in the exhibition 'Artists Books in the Ginsberg Johannesburg Art Gallery 25th August - 27th October 1

Item 3 on the exhibition 'Navigating the Bookscape: Art Digital Interface' which took place at the Aardklop Arts Potchefstroom, from 25th - 30th October 2006 and the University of Johannesburg, from 5th - 13th October 20

Samplings: South African Artists' Books. WAM, Wits University, Johannesburg from 26 March - 6 July 2019. In celebration of the launch of the Jack Ginsberg Centre for Book Art (JGCBA).

Ref: GB/00620

[Click here](#) to open this link.



Total images: 6

Figure 3. Belinda Blignaut. *Antibody*. 1993. 100mm (h).

Photographic acetate positives, aluminum and nylon. Edition: #16/30.

Photograph: The author, with permission of the artist.

Reference: http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/view_collod.asp?pg=collod_item&collod_opt=item&ItemID=650>>

formation, ideas, or diversions, become habitual so that they erase, rather than foreground, their identity. One can, in other words, forget about a book even in the course of reading it.” However, with specific regard to artists’ books, Drucker (2003) states that “the idea is to mark the shift from the conception of books as artifacts, or documents as vehicles for delivery of content, and instead demonstrate the living, dynamic nature of works as produced by interpretive acts.” Drucker’s affective, haptic, and relational allusions to the body are achieved in Example Two, Belinda Blignaut’s *Antibody* (1993) (see fig. 3), through exploiting the book’s self-conscious and reflexive elements as interpretive, and thus affective, acts of embodiment.

EXAMPLE TWO

Antibody (1993)
 Belinda Blignaut
 Liz Wigginton—Typesetting by

This small square book is described as follows: “Hand-made metal covers with stitched suture. Contained in a Perspex hinged box. Spiral bound.” The following data appears next:

Medium: Photographic acetate film. Photo positives, aluminium, Perspex and nylon
 Measurements: 100 x 100mm
 Inscription: Signed and dated by the artist
 Edition: #16/30
 Category: South African Artist’s Book
 Type: Codex in box
 Sub-type: Artist as concept and item producer with one other (typesetter)
 Theme(s): Self-conscious and reflexive forms delivering socio-familial commentary on violence
 Place publication: Johannesburg, RSA
 Publisher: The Artists’ Press
 Pages: unpagged

Our new “Theme(s)” field indexes the relationship between material and meaning: qualities that embody the notion of *bookness*. What I mean by this is that a book is “aware of itself” as a work of art by reflexively pointing toward its content through the agency of its own structural elements, materiality, and navigability. This is amply demonstrated in the six accompanying images, which show the book’s materiality from its front cover through different openings. Included at the bottom of the web page is a link to a digital version of *Antibody* that was included on a past (2006) exhibition by means of which, a visitor may page through the entire book. If the self-conscious interrogation of the material from which a book is made is often characteristic of artists’ books, then all other physical determinants are equally subject to such interrogation. The shape and physical

structure of books are obvious aspects that artists can manipulate in pursuit of meaning, but a true characteristic of the artist's book is the manner in which *bookness* is interrogated: how a structure is more than a mere container of information delivery. In this particular example, the affective qualities of structural and material self-consciousness and reflexivity have been brought into the "Theme(s)" field narrative as "*Self-conscious and reflexive forms delivering socio-familial commentary on violence*" and is accompanied by a fuller narrative that unpacks these themes in the "Reference note" field (see fig. 3). Notwithstanding the criticism by some librarians that the statement that now appears for this book's entry for Theme(s) might be too abstract for practical searching, we have responded to Thurmann-Jajes (2010), Shipe (1991), and Stover (2005) by incorporating both artist-supplied and curator-supplied narratives. These make our record for *Antibody* more nuanced, complex, and complete than before. The listing of simpler, single terms, such as "family" and "violence," can be included in the "Keywords" field to ensure easy return of this book in a search.

In her study of similar characteristics of self-consciousness and reflexivity in artists' books, Stover (2005, 35) states that her exemplar¹³

is fully dependent on the form of the book to emphasize its point. In traditional cataloging, there is no way to indicate to the user that the book is hyperconscious or self-reflexive. As this concept is often explored by book artists it is worth noting for the user. Without this inclusion, the work becomes just another codex filled with text.

Remembering that our database is now hosted by an art museum, a narrative, rather than only singular terms associated with LC Subject fields, not so much reinvents a bibliographic wheel, but expands the entry in answer to the fundamental question Shipe asked in 1991: "Should the description of a work in a library catalog be as complete as a museum description?" In this manner, our database entries allow for a more nuanced narrative than say Dublin Core Metadata Element 13: "Subject – The topic of the resource" might provide. Another important reason for doing the work of populating our existing database with affect-thick descriptions of local bookwork is to prevent the new institution from simply collapsing and conforming (Cifor 2016, 23) the data into current library conventions. As the literature clearly shows, these conventions have little space for adequate descriptions of visual or artistic phenomena in their data fields. Hence, the changes to our data fields that Thurmann-Jajes's *Manual for Artists' Publications* suggested have not only opened up a space for bibliographic consistency—they have specifically opened up a space for the provision of thick descriptions of affective content and relevant imagery. In his intriguingly titled book *Blurred Library*, Tate Shaw (2016, 159) cites Massumi's (2015, 3) description of affect in relation to the radical challenge of cataloging artists' books by "remov[ing] the catalog's ties to bib-

Database of South African Artists' Books

SEARCH OPTIONS: [Basic](#) | [Guided](#) | [Browse](#) | [Advanced](#)

Full Details

Xisiwana

Artwork date(s): 2017

Nkosinathi Ndlandla

Description: A unique book wholly made by the artist: paper, printed matter, hand-written texts and stab-bound covers
Medium: Lithography on handmade and found papers
Measurements: 245 x 355

Category: South African Artists Book

Type: Codex

Sub-type: Artist as sole producer

Theme(s): Homelessness and poverty. Self-reflexive relationship between material and content

Place publication: Boksburg, South Africa

Publisher: The artist

Reference note: The book is made out of various types of fibres: Sisal, Riverweed, Milkweed etc. and other exotic and indigenous plants taken from different places around our country. In the book the artist experiments with lithograph processes on hand-made and found papers and uses a stab binding technique.

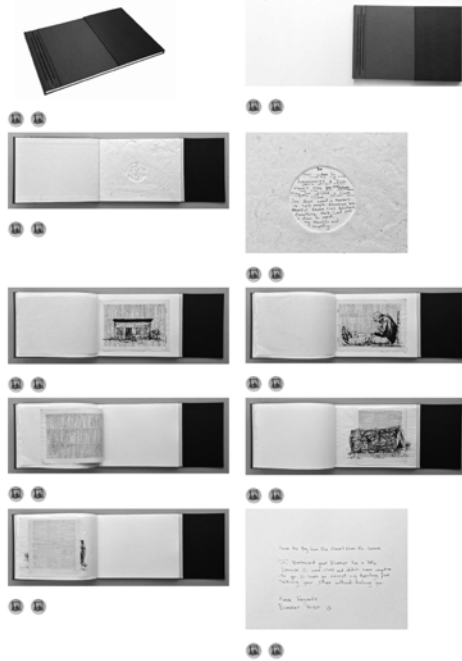
Artist's hand-written statement in the work:

"The title of my book is 'Xisiwana' which means Homeless. The book specifically explores the poverty that still exists in our society and which our government still seems to ignore, dragging their heels so as not to fix the problem. The figures and buildings depict some of the facts that are still a challenge in our country". As the experiences of homelessness, such as feelings of uselessness and having no value, is metaphorically contained in the materials from which the book is made: weeds and exotic (undesirable) plants, the book demonstrates a fine example of material/content self-reflexivity and self-consciousness.

Exhibition notes: Exhibited at: Booknesses: Contemporary South African Artist's Books. FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg.

Curated by David Paton and Eugene Hon. 24 March - 5 May 2017.

Ref: DP17/69



Total images: 10

Figure 4. Nkosinathi Ndlandla. *Xisiwana*. 2017. 245x 355mm.

Lithographic print and hand-written texts on various hand-made and found papers. Edition: #1/5.

Photography: The author. Used with permission of the artist.

Reference: http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/view_collod.asp?pg=collod_item&collod_opt=item&ItemID=938>>

liographic items and visually organiz[ing] a resource for primary visual research." This idea represents one far-reaching view of how artists' books might be appreciated in the archive beyond the limitations of its bibliographic description. I am particularly interested in Shaw's reference to Massumi's notion of reciprocal affect in the artist's book space. Example Three, Nkosinathi Ndlandla's *Xisiwana* (2017) (see fig. 4), demonstrates how such affect-rich descriptions are able to provide a reciprocal view of the idiosyncrasies of South African life. If our entries, including their imagery, shed light on socioeconomic life for many South Africans, then these entries are also able to describe, in a reciprocal way, how the book helps us, as readers, acknowledge the world beyond it.

EXAMPLE THREE

Xisiwana (2017)
Nkosinathi Ndlandla

The book is described as a “unique book wholly made by the artist: paper, printed matter, hand-written texts and stab-bound covers.” The following data appears next:

Medium: Lithography on handmade and found papers
Measurements: 245 x 355mm
Category: South African Artists Book
Type: Codex
Sub-type: Artist as sole producer
Theme(s): Homelessness and poverty. Self-reflexive relationship between material and content
Place publication: Boksburg, South Africa
Publisher: The artist

When Massumi (2015, 3) states that “when you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn,” this example describes the reciprocal affect that a thematic entry achieves by shedding light back on the socioeconomic life many South Africans experience. Self-consciousness and reflexivity abound in this work: elements most critical to the larger project that is the artist’s book. For a time in his youth, Ndlandla found himself homeless and living on the streets. This experience forged in him an empathy with the many homeless people who populate South Africa’s cities and whose abject living conditions and dire prospects present a major challenge to national, provincial, and local government structures in the country. Ndlandla describes how the title *Xisiwana*, meaning “homeless” in isiZulu, presses home the idea that much work still needs to be done for thousands of marginalized South Africans. The artist’s humiliating experiences on the city streets made him feel like waste, detritus, mere weeds. Thus, Ndlandla has made the book’s papers out of the fibres of weeds and invasive plants readily found in South Africa: Sisal, Milkweed, and Riverweed, literally embodying the idea of the superfluous, the undesirable, and the unwanted in the very materiality of the book. Upon these ironically beautiful sheets of paper, as well as found papers from discarded and out-of-date reference books, he has printed, in lithography, images of loss, hopelessness, and homelessness extracted from his own experiences. Handwritten texts introduce and end the book. Ndlandla is one of a handful of South African artists who takes control of the entire bookmaking process as he is trained and skilled in papermaking, printmaking, bookbinding and boxmaking. If our entry, including imagery, reciprocally sheds light on socioeconomic life for many South Africans, then we are also able to describe how the book helps us, as readers, acknowledge the world beyond it. If one of our project’s aims is to re-

introduce artists' books to a public that has little idea of their importance to its own identity formation, then a book's reciprocity with the world that inspired it is a powerful educative achievement indeed. In the end, one is left to contemplate the beautiful papers, printed surfaces, and craft binding as an eloquent metaphor for succeeding against the odds.

CONCLUSION

To repeat the foci of this paper, in order to do the critical affective work of making artists' books visible and accessible to a wider public, we conjoined Ginsberg's private and idiosyncratic collection with other South African sources. We then organized this data as an online resource. In order to do this, we took Anne Thurmman-Jajes's *Manual for Artists' Publications* (2010) as a point of departure for modifying the existing bibliographic fields of our bespoke software. The three examples I have discussed each exemplify a project aim: to show the refinements needed within the data fields in order to create an amplified record on our online database; to show how these refinements help open up a space for the recording of affective content in the bibliographic record by acknowledging a work's materially self-conscious and reflexive elements; and finally, to show how such affect-rich descriptions are able to provide a reciprocal view of the idiosyncrasies of South African life.

The database of South African artists' books, in its attempt to document the "output of a nation," reflects the steadily growing diversity of local artist's book production. What is obvious to us is that such an enterprise reveals the presence of gaps and fissures in the bibliographic record, which we have begun to close. We have had to be mindful of the value of such an enterprise in deeply affective terms. In the documentation of two of the three examples, for instance, where a prospectus, publisher's, or dealer's note does not exist, it was necessary to spend time with each book, consult its colophon (if present), and reach out to the artists for comprehensive statements that go beyond mere denotative and subject-related information. This is part of the larger task of making artists' books visible and accessible to a wider South African public. In order to do this work effectively, we must be in a position to deliver, in extremely concise information, thick statements on a book's affective content and/or artist's intent (where this is known) and its self-conscious and reflexive elements that amplify a work's *bookness*. Doing this labor increases the granularity of the data.¹⁴ This complex set of relationships deepens the concept of "what a book is about" beyond its obvious subject matter and asks the following questions: *How* have these characteristics revealed themselves? *How* are they implicated in the book's affective content? More challengingly, *How* does one adequately describe this in the record? This is crucial so as not to let the "art" slip away from the denotative, perfunctory information for the "book"—what O'Dell (2014, 270) describes as uncovering "aspects of *is-*

ness crucial to the discovery of art objects.” Artists’ books are never merely carriers of information in convenient form. Drucker (1995, 161) states that an artist’s book must demonstrate its intrinsic *bookness*, be conscious of and/or challenge its own book identity, be politically charged and/or socially critical, be artistically avant-garde, and represent the artist. If this is so, then it seems essential for all bibliographies to reflect any affective qualities that differentiate such objects from conventional books. As evidenced in the three examples above, we have carefully reconsidered four of our data fields. Our new “Theme(s)” field responds to Thurmann-Jajes’s (2010) “Genres” and to Myers and Myers’s (2014), Stover’s (2005), and others’ calls for an expanded field in which we are able to include narratives describing characteristics of artists’ books as reflexive, self-conscious, structural, and materially interpretive acts. These narratives help liberate and give evocative power to their affective content that was missing from the earlier bibliographic record.

The decision to assimilate the Ginsberg Collection into the University’s art museum and not lock it away in the library’s “special collections” is strategically important. In terms of our aim to make South African artists’ books more visible, its new home will facilitate the curation of a number of themed exhibitions each year in the Center’s exhibition spaces. It will also host the refined and expanded database of South African artists’ books, thus ensuring its continued availability to all, online. Eventually, we aim to have artists’ books returned from within a search for library-based information relating to books in general at the University. This greater visibility, however, prompts the completion of the daunting task of describing and classifying the remaining South African and the many thousands of international artists’ books held in the collection in equally affect-rich terms. Cifor (2016, 25) describes “acts of imagining and believing,” evoking Berlant’s tools for “scholars and archivists . . . to think, act and live differently by changing the dynamics in our thinking and relations to realize what is, what is stuck and what is possible.” Such insights provide the impetus to complete the critical work that can only be achieved by spending “countless hours with the books, turning their pages, learning their tricks, feeling their materials, examining their story lines” (Stover 2005, 46–47).

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NOTES

1. Organized by Alexander Campos, executive director and curator, The Center for Book Arts, New York, with Johanna Drucker (UCLA), Jae Jennifer Rossman (Yale), and Tony White (MICA), between October 11, 2014–December 20, 2014, Behind the Personal Library: Collectors Creating the Canon considered the influence of private collectors on the critical dialogue in the field of book arts. The symposium and exhibition also analyzed how the collectors came to collect books, what drove them to continue collecting, whether they consciously built and curated their collections, and how these factors influenced and informed artist bookmaking practices. The featured collections were as follows: Philip E. Aarons and Shelley Fox Aarons (NY), Mary Austin (CA), Duke Collier (MA), Jack Ginsberg (South Africa), Arthur Jaffe (FL), Monica Oppen (Australia), Barbara Pascal (CA), Robert Ruben (NY), Marvin and Ruth Sackner (FL), Julia Vermes (Switzerland), Francis H. William (MA/NY), Martha Wilson (NY), and the estate of Tony Zwicker (CT).
2. Apart from South African art and books on South African and international art, Ginsberg's collection consists of the following: first editions, rare books, fine press books and bindings; international artists' books; South African artists' books; books on artists' books; tracts, exhibition and sales catalogues and ephemera; and academic dissertations, theses, and journal articles on the book arts. Dennis's company, Logos Flow, developed bespoke software applications to meet the different cataloguing needs of Ginsberg's diverse collection.
3. A standard for creating catalogues of collections, such as library collections, including the consistent description of those materials and the formation and assignment of access points under which those descriptions are arranged.
4. Standards designed to be a carrier for bibliographic information about printed and manuscript textual materials, computer files, maps, music, continuing resources, visual materials, and mixed materials.
5. A type of thesaurus of subject headings, maintained by the United States Library of Congress, for use in bibliographic records. This, however, is only one of a number of lists. Encoded Archival Context-Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (EAC-CPF), College Art Association (CAA), and Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) codes are others. Courtenay McClelland (2017, 88) lists other sources as the Getty's *Art and Architecture Thesaurus*; the *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials*; the *Ligatus Language of Bindings Thesaurus*; and *Type Evidence*, an ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section controlled vocabulary. Carter and O'Keefe (2018, 173) state: "As other scholars have stated, a shared controlled vocabulary for artists' books is overdue."
6. A field for "Index Terms" with particular focus upon "Genre" or "Form." A genre term designates the style or technique of the intellectual content of textual materials or, for graphic materials, aspects such as vantage point, intended purpose, characteristics of the creator, publication status, or method of representation. See, also, McClelland (2017, 87).
7. Founded in 1976 in New York, NY, Printed Matter, Inc. is the world's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to the dissemination, understanding, and appreciation of artists' books and related publications.
8. Hamerman (email message to author, July 16, 2019) states that as far as providing a narrative description of the themes/content of the artist's book, one typically tries to provide an artist's/publisher's description in the MARC 500 field, quoted from the source where it is found. If one wanted to use a specific MARC field for themes/content (rather than a general notes field), it is suggested that the MARC 520 field be used, with a first indicator of 8. MARC 500 constitutes "Note Fields—General Information," with MARC 520 designated for "Summary, etc."
9. A term that Thurmann-Jajes includes in both her categories "edition object" and "multiples."
10. Our four categories are not unlike Carter and O'Keefe's (2018, 170–72) categories of Description, Subject, Style, Material, and Technique. We are mindful, however, that all their categories remain somewhat formal, if detailed, fields of denotative description.

11. Today we list a total of 496 producers on the database who have in any way been associated with a publication, a 545 percent increase since the first count in 2000 (Paton 2000) and a 344 percent increase since the first data listings when launched on the website in 2006. Note that the term "Producers," for example, in the case of an altered book, would include the name of the original author.
12. Between September 2013 (when statistical user data was first launched on the site) and June 2019, the number of unique global visitors to the website totalled 20,264 with an average number of unique monthly visitors totalling 2289. The majority of these visitors are American, British, and South African.
13. In this case, Stover's (2005, 33–35) exemplar, Jacki Apple's *Partitions* (1976), characterizes self-reflexivity in book arts through semitranslucent pages that obscure or reveal the text blocks.
14. Information on the website is often collected via personal engagement between collector, cataloger, and artist. Apart from three or four presses that print or publish artists' books, there are no dealers who specialize in or promote the genre in South Africa. Concomitantly, there is an absence of marketing material, prospectuses, and publisher-produced artists' statements. Given this vacuum, one of the aims of the project is to provide as much information about the books as possible. Visitors to the website might contribute insights to the relevant pages for each book via "wikis" or "vents," which are moderated for inclusion in the record. Artists can provide images and more information and suggest edits using the submissions upload feature on the site. O'Dell (2015, 246–47) discusses interactive visual databases into which social media platforms such as a Tumblr page can be incorporated.

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