

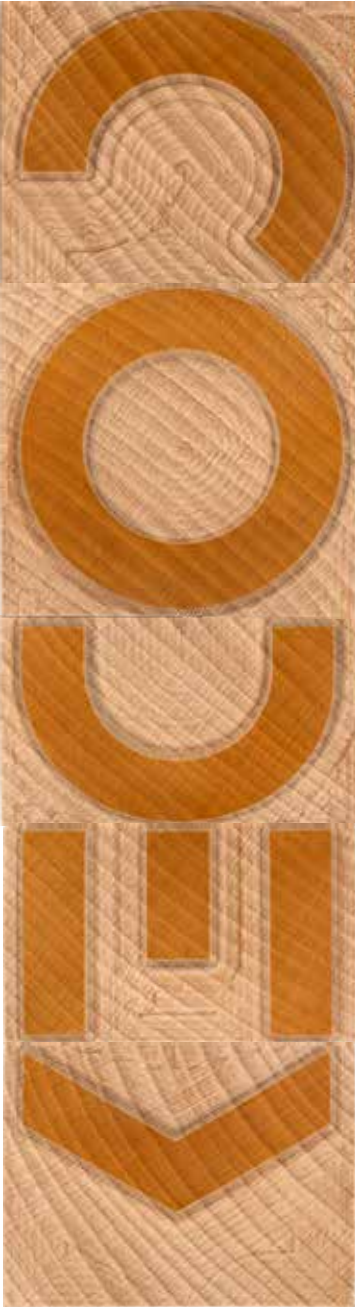
VOLUME 4

THE CODEX PAPERS

THE BOOK AS A WORK OF ART
AN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

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Editor's Note

ARTIST BOOKS AND TRANSLATION

When Inge Bruggeman, executive director of the CODEX Foundation, invited me to guest edit this issue of *The CODEX Papers*, I spent much of the eighth CODEX Book Fair thinking about possible themes. I was looking for a topic broad enough to encompass a wide range of approaches to and philosophies of artist books, but specific enough to be a memorable contribution to the series. One idea that I kept coming back to was the notion of translation as a metaphor. In a surprising and pleasant confluence of ideas, I learned from Inge that she had been thinking along similar lines and was planning for the theme of the next CODEX Symposium to be “translation.” And so we happily present this volume as a bridge between the work exhibited at the eighth CODEX Book Fair in 2022 and the upcoming ninth CODEX Book Fair in 2024.

In the realm of literature and languages, translation represents an approximation of the meaning of the original in a form comprehensible to speakers of a second language. The fitness of that approximation depends on many factors, not least the grammar and lexicon of both languages and the skill of the translator. For most purposes, we treat the two texts as if they are semantically interchangeable, but of course this is not quite correct. Three of the essays in this volume address the complexities of translations between languages either directly or obliquely (Mellis, Yankelevich, and Bringhurst), providing a useful reminder that using the trope of translation to discuss other kinds of transformations or conversions is imprecise at best. And yet, the imprecision of the metaphor and the inexactitude of literary translation need not stop us from exploring the notion of translation as a tool to understand various devices and strategies in the artist book form.

The articles in this volume approach the notion of translation from many directions, including translation as metaphor for alteration, transformation of an idea into an embodied form, interpretation of an experience into another mode, and, of course, translation between languages. The medium of artist books lends itself to ideas of translation on virtually every level, so it is a rich area of inquiry.

In this issue, Daniel Mellis writes about his recent publication *Tango with Cows: Translation, Facsimile, and Commentary*, which translates the poetry of Vasily Kamensky (in collaboration with poet Eugene Ostashevsky); this project is made much more complex by Mellis' fidelity to the spirit of the original's 1914 Russian Futurist typography, itself a project of considerable “translation.” Patricia Lagarde presents an essay based on her 2022 CODEX Symposium lecture, presented here in both English and the original Spanish, in which she shares a multitude of conceptions of the moon, both literary and artistic, from her *Moon Archive*. John DeMerritt discusses the publishing program of DeMerritt | Pauwels Editions, an imprint that focuses on using the handmade book object to bring an idea into object form, in what DeMerritt calls the Idea/Object Approach. Tatjana Bergelt's epistolary discussion with noted Nabokov scholar Stephen

Blackwell gives us new and thought-provoking ways to understand Bergelt's book *Pas de Deux*, an artist book that explores Vladimir Nabokov's passion for butterflies. Matvei Yankelvich considers *Curb* by Aaron Cohick and ways in which the physical properties of the book enhance the effects of the powerful poetry by Divya Victor. Robert Bringhurst, long-time friend of the CODEX Foundation, has contributed his moving and wide-ranging 2022 CODEX Symposium keynote address, in which he examines relationships between languages and scripts, and what both contribute to literature, and, more broadly, to civilization. Amanda Marchand guides us through a visit to Datz, the South Korean publisher, residency, and museum, with a photo essay about this impressive enterprise. And, lastly, we have three thoughtful and insightful reviews of books: Laurie Whitehill on *elude* by Jule Claudia Mahn of *Verwandte Objekte*; Molly Schwartzburg on *Dead Life* by Clifton Meador of *Studio of Exhaustion*; and Stephanie Stillo on *Hellmap Atlas* by Didier Mutel and Peter Koch, of *Atelier Didier Mutel and Peter Koch Printers*, respectively.

As readers of this series will know, *The CODEX Papers* is a journal of invited and submitted essays from artists, publishers, curators, dealers, and collectors discussing some of the extraordinary work that is exhibited at, related to, or discussed at the CODEX Book Fair and Symposium every two years. The series was begun as part of a larger publication program by the CODEX Foundation that aims to document the work at the Fair and Symposium and broaden its reach. Of the publications in the broader project, *The CODEX Papers* brings together multiple essays around a loose topic to create a conversation on themes of the editor's choosing. The previous three volumes were beautifully conceived and assembled by Gerald Cloud of Gerald W. Cloud Rare Books and explored a range of thoughtful and evocative topics. For the fourth volume, I am very happy to have been invited to be the guest editor.

—Sarah Hulsey

Related Objects: Jule Claudia Mahn's *elude*

Laurie K. Whitehill

Jule Claudia Mahn. 2021. *elude*. Leipzig, Germany: Verwandte Objekte. Archival pigment print on Metapaper Greenwhite. Embossed with foil as well as printed letterpress using photopolymer plates and linocuts on Hollytex nonwoven. Two facing, interlacing book blocks with open sewing. Housed in a paper-covered case. 32.6 x 21.5 cm with 64 pages of varying sizes. Text in English. Edition of 16.



Jule Claudia Mahn's artist book series *Verwandte Objekte*, or related objects, names a broad theme evident in the body of her work. With an interest in collecting the stories of people and places, she explores these multi-layered interrelationships, focusing on embedded memories and histories. She likens these histories to a village where roads lead into and out from the center. Over time, people come and go, leaving marks of their passing. Mahn provides inventive ways to read, reorder, or reframe these marks of passing in her books. In so doing, the reader becomes an integral part of these *related objects* of people and place.



In Ms. Mahn's book *elude*, veiled fragments of the singular life of a woman named Mona are encountered. The passage of time and the natural effects of aging have begun to fade or dissolve memories for her. Once-familiar faces, as well as streets and landmarks in her village, are now baffling and confusing. Her remembered stories are no longer neatly linear, past and present now a confusing jumble. The artist brings the reader physically, mentally, and visually through an assortment of disorienting memories alongside Mona.

On the cover of the book, foil-stamped words are crossed out, the book title obscured like a deleted thought. Disorientation is immediately encountered in opening the book; multiple and complex layers of enclosure each operate differently. Behind interior French door panels are two opposing letterpress-printed, pamphlet-sewn text blocks with the spines on the outside edges, left and right. The two halves of the text block are positioned so that there is a gap of about one eighth of an inch between each facing fore-edge. The phrase "She knows She knows," is printed on either side of the first pair of pages, followed by "She knew She knew" on the next pair of facing pages, introducing the theme of the narrative. Mona's story then unfolds as each pair of double facing pages is opened sequentially.

The text, printed in large blue type, is aligned carefully at the center gap so that sentences can be read moving from one half to the other if each half is opened simultaneously. However, some words are cut mid-gap so that following the sentences requires concentrated effort. Even if read with an exact alignment of pages, the story is not linear and is difficult to follow. The typeface, "Spitzkant," deliberately incorporates idiosyncratic ligatures in which some letters are fused together or detached. Randomly



interjected thoughts, names, and flashes of memories persist. For Mona and the reader, the past and present are a random patchwork of thoughts that escape definition.

As the book title implies, themes of loss and disorientation run through the narrative. Mona has strong fragments of memories of specific incidents, or possibly nightmares—a storm on a beach, a woman heedless of danger, a dog drowning, a stranger in uniform, Mona being sent to her room alone, a brother who leaves. Present moments of tinnitus ringing in her ears occasionally override these rambling thoughts. Pictures on the wall bring pieces of her life briefly alive and then they are gone. Memories of her parents, friends, and husband collide with the confusion of where she is now. Are they still here? Where are they? Is she dreaming or awake? Does she want to remember or is the past something she unconsciously wants to forget?

Disorientation becomes even more prominent as the textual narrative ends and is succeeded by a visual journey. Linocut prints of disembodied, abstracted urban landmarks and vague patterns float on opposing signatures of translucent paper. Though hinting at bridges, ladders, bodies of water, fences, and gardens, they fail to reveal complete objects. There is a randomness to the order of these pages, with endless potential juxtapositions adding physically to the experience of “confusing vastness” and “deceptive appearance.” This neighborhood not only eludes Mona’s recognition but creates for the reader the alarming effect of walking in dense fog.

When the reader comes to the end of the book, a personal dilemma occurs: how to close the book and return to the beginning. There are no page numbers; the varied widths of the image pages hold no clues. The reader is faced with the challenge of



finding a way back out of this maze. If the book is read again, will it unfold in a different sequence and will the story be different each time? Will it be clearer next time or more confusing? Will the gaps in Mona's story forever be obscured? The book does not behave like a normal book, and the reader feels much of the same anxiety and confusion as Mona does.

Writers of fiction have tried to convey the experience of dementia, memory loss, and Alzheimer's disease. The task is difficult because observers can only see the outward effects of loss. What goes on in such minds is a mystery. One writer, Lisa Genova, has provided what seems to be quite a realistic glimpse into the mind of a woman with early onset Alzheimer's in *Still Alice* (New York: Pocket Books, 2009). Confusion, memory gaps, fear, and disbelief reveal Alice gradually losing herself. Novelists bring worlds to life through description and dialogue, using lengthy texts to immerse the reader in the minds of both the protagonists and others in their realm of experience.

Book artists do not engage in telling a novel-length story. Brevity of word and image, creatively integrated with sequence, structure, and material, effectively create a fully engaged experience for the reader. Though the artist may provide only a fragment of a story, it is often a gripping deep dive into a moment of time or place. Rather like poetry, artists' books reduce storytelling to its essence, but with the added tools of visual and tactile inputs.

Confusion and elusive mental clarity is a theme that can also be found in Scott McCarney's artist book *Memory Loss* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1988). In this double-sided accordion fold book, McCarney gives a glimpse of the confined life of

his adult brother in a nursing facility. The reader is not told how his brother's impairments came about, but the experience of loss is clearly conveyed.

Clues of impairment are visually revealed with a puzzling assortment of floating images and words on either side of the accordion. One side lists the medical terminology relating to deficits of speech and cognitive processing. The other side is a more personal collection of scattered photos and crudely written notes. The narrow accordion structure is bound by a short string running through the pages and cover boards at either end, imitating a folded window shade. This string intentionally prevents the accordion from being fully opened flat or straightened. McCarney's book is less about a narrative and more about experience.

Similarly, in *elude*, only fragments of Mona's life are conveyed. The reader is caught in disjointed moments of time and space. Though questions about her past and future remain, further lengthy narrative or dialogue is unnecessary to complete the reader's experience. "Related objects" of memory in Mona's life, the theme drawn from the name of Mahn's imprint, *Verwandte Objekte*, succinctly disclose her present state. For Mona, connections between people and places have become elusive—they've flown away, left town, or escaped from her cohesive memory.

In Ms. Mahn's beautifully crafted and elegant artist book, the content, formal precision, and execution of the binding imply an orderly, expected narrative. But within that precise matrix is a journey into a place of confusion. All the varied considerations available to book artists—textual, visual, material, structural, and sequential—are masterfully combined in *elude*, leading the reader beyond the position of objective observer. The artist has evoked a parallel subjective experience for the reader, one in which untangling Mona's narrative becomes irrelevant, direction is unclear, and feelings of physical disorientation and anxiety linger.

Laurie K. Whitehill—retired Special Collections Librarian and Curator of Artists' Books at the Fleet Library, Rhode Island School of Design. For twenty-five years she developed the library's artist book collection, provided classes and individual consultations, taught bookmaking workshops, and contributed to the field of book arts scholarship. In 2012, she produced her own handmade artist book in an edition of 25 copies which now reside in library collections around the country.