

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Tomes! Enhancing Community and Embracing Diversity Through Book Arts

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IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHORS. FROM THE EXHIBITION "TOMES" (2018). THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

## Introduction: Paper is Power

Strip the inner bark of a fig tree, boil it until it is pliable, and sort the string-like fibers. Separate the lighter fibers from the darker, using a stone to soften and flatten the pulp. Lay them out carefully on a wooden board, connecting the pieces, and weaving in whatever unique designs you prefer, before drying them naturally in the sun and air. In the absence of bark, the leaves of agave, recycled paper, or cardboard can also be melted, stirred with other plant materials, then pounded into sheets, placed on lightly greased metal boards, and dried in the sun. This Mexican recipe for making paper (or *amatl*, its Nahuatl word) is both ancient and contemporary. For many peoples in Mexico, the act of making this paper is a bold expression of indigeneity, asserting the collective rights of community and connecting the present with the past through techniques passed from one generation to the next. It is also medicinal, according to the coordinator of Ya Mumpot Ei Pati (those who make curative amate paper), who cites amate papermaking as an ancient ritual that conjures natural forces to combat maladies (Gomez de Anda, 2010). Amate paper is thus a living organism intricately woven through the fabric of community and history. It is powerful: capable of crossing time and space and curing ills.

When the Spanish encountered paper among the Mexica in the 1500s, they perceived and feared this power. As Sandstrom and Sandstrom (2016) note, the native peoples of Mexico “used [paper] to make books concerning their religious beliefs, adorn statues of the deities and decorate temples, fashion priestly regalia, accompany the dead on their journey to the afterlife, dress sacrificial victims before putting them to death, make offerings to the deities in their pantheon, and divine the future” (paragraph 2). Painters of codices were known as *tlacuilos*, in the Nahuatl language, and it means both painter and scribe (Pohl, 2002, p. 18). Notably, Sandstrom and Sandstrom (2016) underscore that the *Codex Mendoza* records the annual receipt of 480,000 sheets of paper as tribute paid from Mexican peoples to Spanish authorities, who worked hard to confiscate, destroy, and replace amate paper with European variations, while pilfering native books or codices written by *tlacuilos*. After colonization, many codices were annotated in Spanish to aid the European reader and record “those who came to convert the indigenous peoples to Christianity” (Pohl, 2002, p. 20). Many of these codices are currently named after and housed in European repositories, depicting the “process of colonization and its effects on both colonizer and colonized” (Pohl, 2002, p. 20). It is thus important to recognize that communities throughout Mexico and the Southwestern U.S. have passed the knowledge of paper- and book-making down through the centuries—certainly before colonization—and they maintain its centrality within many communities today. Ya Mumpot Ei Pati note that curanderos from San Pablito in Puebla, Mexico, have maintained the ritual and its story in their spoken legends and in contemporary artisanship (Gomez de Anda, 2010).



## Bi-lingual/ Bi-cultural meanings

This article highlights important connections between the spoken word, handmade paper, cultural memory, and natural sustenance—in books and in artworks. The projects displayed in the exhibition slide back and forth between two worlds: books and artworks; pre-colonial and contemporary; English and Spanish, with a dusting of Mayan and Mexica languages. “Tomes (toh-Mez) + Tomes (tohmz) = Tomes” (“Tomes”) brings together two projects that highlight Mexican artists’ books as documents brought to life in communities through performance described herein. Following a description of the exhibit, the article makes a case for recognizing and accepting multiple meanings in the same construction, be it a word like “tomes,” or sculpted works of art presented and manipulated as books or printed portfolios. The English plural for scholarly books, *tomes*, is pronounced tohmz, and indicates weighty volumes of knowledge. In Spanish this combination of letters means something entirely different. As a conjugation, it is pronounced toh-Mez and means “you eat,” “you drink,” or “you take,” depending on the context. Written with no context, the signification is the same. Once spoken and heard, however, the word is remarkably different, depending on whether one is a Spanish- or English-language speaker (or both). The title of the exhibit plays with Spanish

and English for the distinct purpose of highlighting the prospective disconnect between at least two of the audiences our libraries and archives serve. Likewise, the themes referenced in the title—scholarly books and consuming food or drink—are equally significant because of their prevalence in the works displayed. One side of the exhibit displays contemporary codex-like tomes from an indigenous collective in southern Mexico, with a facsimile copy of the *Codex of Tlatelolco* (1994) as its backdrop. Indigenous paper- and dye-making practices connect structural, visual, and aural elements that invite tactile and olfactory experiences of indigenous papermaking. On the other side of the exhibit, five Mexican artists' books and portfolios, made to look like food or drink, are blended and served in a series of displays, inspired by diverse community interventions and descriptions of non-indigenous artists' books compiled at outreach events throughout 2017-2018. Care was taken to maintain continuity from one vitrine to the next.

Both sides of the exhibition invite interaction with multimodal, multisensory pieces that were created in and for communities. We struggled with the best way to create an exhibit that would honor this communal interactivity in a classroom space designed for a more passive and individual experience. Our intent in this article is to share how we integrated community as well as multisensory and phenomenological components by employing student and community engaged research in our design. We hope this article and the exhibit offer some insight into what happens when exhibits are reframed as educational experiences, sharing authority and expertise with audiences and community members. How can we, as educators, incorporate a multiplicity of voices into our exhibit designs, doing justice to the ways objects' meanings change depending on the cultural experiences of those viewing and interacting with them?

In a personal account and critique of traditional exhibition design, Kenneth Hudson (1991) writes, "although my mind was being adequately fed, my senses were not" (Hudson, 1991, p. 460). He continues, "Under normal conditions...in our daily life, we make use of all five [senses], but museums, like film and television, restrict us to only two, sight and to a lesser extent, sound. The result is...overintellectualized. We are given no chance to feel, to taste, and to smell" (Hudson, 1991, p. 461). In critiquing typical exhibition experiences, he says, "they are at best two-sense [experiences] and often only one-sense, whereas we all know that life is a five-sense affair" (Hudson, 1991, p. 461). Similarly, Elaine Heumann Gurian (1991) theorizes that, because we have internalized certain cultural preferences for some modes of learning over others, we have not fully exploited the sensory possibilities and opportunities for displaying cultural objects. She posits that "we have been taught that one mark of the civilized person is verbal ability" while "many of us also believe that in exhibitions focusing on aesthetics, the 'visually literate' person should know how to use visual cues provided by the objects without any additional assistance...and so we often do not write explanatory labels... and rarely use auditory, olfactory, or tactile techniques" (Heumann Gurian, 1991, p. 183). Multisensory exhibitions, in contrast, "offer many entry points," which "facilitate a range of learning experiences, without prejudice," offering choices and opportunities for visitors to utilize all the senses (Heumann Gurian, 1991, p. 184).

A multisensory experience may also be less Eurocentric and more aligned with indigenous ways of knowing. In other words, "the European tendency has been to split up the senses and parcel them out, one at a time, to the appropriate art form. One sense, one art form. We listen to music. We look at paintings. Dancers don't talk. Musicians don't dance. Sensory atrophy is coupled with close focus and



sustained attention....Absolute silence governs the etiquette of symphony halls and museums....In contrast with conventional exhibitions...which tend to reduce sensory complexity...indigenous modes of display...present an important alternative" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, pp. 416-417). The exhibit space in our archives and special collections, comprising 20 individual vitrines, was designed for close focus and sustained attention to individual items separated from one another.



In celebration of the codex, "Tomes" invites visitors to take in a multiplicity of sights, smells and textures. Events couple taste and sound as well as viewing. On display are works that challenge the silos and sensory atrophy that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) critiques so eloquently, and the confines of our exhibit space presents. As one community participant notes, these two angles on Mexican artists' books suggest to the non-expert that the artists' book genre reflects an inherently indigenous expression, brought to life through collective action. Through the power of paper, ink, and memory, indigenous expression here engages multiple senses, emotions, and ideas as audiences consume or "take in" the book, evoking empowerment through enactment. Their interactions with these unique pieces transcend a mere display or reading of a label and result in an emptying that takes words off the page, food out of the bowl, and drink from the bottle, in order to feed the community.

Instead of viewing rarified collections as dusty wares to be carefully preserved, how might we, as stewards of communal spaces and artworks, provide better access and outreach so that communities can interact with pieces that richly symbolize their homes, their traditions, their native languages, and their families? Many universities, museums, libraries, and archives write mission statements that speak to multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity, but words on the page mean little without context. How do we leverage these noble goals into performing better outreach and engagement with our communities and their collections, which are entrusted to us?

Through the yearlong process of developing content for "Tomes," we found that inviting community members to handle archival materials without gloves, oversight, pretext,

surveillance, or heavy guidance helped us learn alongside them, enabling us to gain insights that we incorporated into the exhibition. We curated objects, took them into the community, and asked the community what it saw, so we could turn a cold archival classroom into a communal table with wares and knowledge to share and "take in." The exhibit continues to evolve according to community feedback. We recognize how unusual an unfixed exhibit is within standardized archival exhibition and preservation

practices, but we believe our approach to collaboration is an effective tool for breaking down barriers to traditional authority and hierarchies.

As such, it helps to reframe our relationship with the audiences we serve and the collections we share with them. They are as expert as we are. Institutions are increasingly turning toward "collaborating with

partners and individuals in ways that do not privilege singular or dominant narratives," where "individuals...become producers of knowledge, where exhibitions are being planned through a constellation of perspectives, and the objects displayed are created as a product of dialogue and collaboration" (Pegno & Farrar, 2017, p. 169). By engaging active and potential audience members in conceptualizing exhibitions, these non-linear, complicated, ambiguous, open-ended experiences enhance our collective expertise (Villaneuve & Rowson Love, 2017, p. 47, p. 179). As museums, libraries, and affiliated organizations strive for financial and cultural sustainability, partnerships with diverse audiences who are "experts in their own interests...preferences..and values" can aid institutions in considering expertise along a continuum of shared authority (Koke & Ryan, 2017, p. 47). Of course, there is a range of comfort levels on this continuum, where institutions may choose to situate their relationships with patrons. "Tomes" finds itself "at the far end," in "the position where the institution gives up its role in [labeling] the experience and provides a platform for the community to speak" (Koke & Ryan, 2017, pp. 47-48). The risk we run, which has manifested, is that those who are accustomed to traditional descriptions felt alienated by the absence of traditional labeling. They didn't know what they were looking at and felt confused by the indigenous provocation displayed. This article describes how "Tomes" unfolded as culturally provocative outreach, using diverse collections and community experience to re-present the archives through a more public scope.

## Background: Demographics

The Southwestern U.S. is important to this project because, as our regional backdrop, the area defies absolute and categorical definitions. Should it be thought of as a quarter of the United States or as a cultural border zone? A north to the Mexicans or a west to Americans? (Meléndez, Young, Moore, & Pynes, 2018, p. 2). The region is not just a place on a map, but an idea, a concept, a human, cultural, ethno-cultural-geographic, spiritual, historic, political, and ecological border zone rich with features that have fueled



landscapes for generations. As part of what many call Aztlán, it is united with the rest of Latin and Central America through its written, oral, and familial histories. Our institution is a large public university in one of only five U.S. states where a majority (60.8%) identify as non-white. Reflective of this demographic, 59% of the university's students also identify as non-white; and of that percentage, over 42% identify as Hispanic or Latino/a, with nearly 10% identifying as indigenous (University of New Mexico Office of Institutional Analytics, 2018). Located in the majority-minority metropolitan area of more than 909,906 (United States Census Bureau Population Division 2016), more than 23% of the Albuquerque metropolitan region's population is bilingual; and of this percentage, 74% speak Spanish and English "very well" (The Neilson Company, n.d.). As Spanish-capable librarians at such an institution, it does not take us long to appreciate that Spanish-speaking communities are underserved by the special collections and archives, despite the notable institutional focus on materials from the region and in non-English languages; and on outreach efforts coordinated with multi-ethnic student services (Keating & Aguilar, 2009). A 2015 Pew Research Study, *Libraries at the Crossroads*, found that patrons who identify as minorities use libraries less than average, and then more often for services rather than collections (Pew Research Center, 2015). In a series of outreach experiments, we hoped to engage local communities around collections, heeding Durrani and Smallwood's (2008) call to respond to local contexts in innovative ways that "will enable libraries to... bridge the gap between the information rich and the information poor" (Durrani & Smallwood, 2008, p. 137).

## Projects Informing "Tomes (toh-Mez) + Tomes (tohmz) = Tomes"

The first project comes from two separate graduate-level research assignments: one was an independent study in which the student identified, described, and selected potential exhibit targets among Latin American artists' books, paying special attention to pieces that featured native languages and ways of knowing; the other research assignment, which became the basis for one half of "Tomes," examines how the printed works of Taller Leñateros

challenge colonial and Eurocentric ways of knowing, being, and seeing. Based in Chiapas, Mexico, the Taller Leñateros gives a decidedly indigenous answer to European-based knowledge and organization systems, bookmaking, and printed artworks. The English equivalent of the Spanish term *taller* is *workshop*, and in this case, it underscores the active and broad collaboration found within a community-based cooperative. The Taller Leñateros is a self-governing workshop comprised generally of Mayan women, yet the collective consists of a multiethnic collaboration of diverse peoples from diverse language groups and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Cinco Puntos, 2009; Taller Leñateros, 1999). It began without financial capital, relying solely on available spaces within the community, and emerged from the "collective ideas, and indigenous-peasant popular knowledge" of the group (Taller Leñateros, 1999).

The Taller's first book, *Conjuros y ebriedades: Cantos de mujeres mayas* (Past & Bañuelos, 1997), exhibited in "Tomes," was published in Tzotzil Maya and Spanish. It has been described as "the first book Mayan people have created, written, illustrated, printed, and bound—in paper of their own making—in nearly five hundred years" (Gies, 2010). The book offers the native Mayan language alongside Spanish, subverting the dominant hierarchy of English entirely. More importantly, the sculpted cardboard face that embodies the book cover implements ancient paper engineering, derived from recycled cardboard, plant pulp, and coffee. The face takes on color and texture from these living materials, transforming the piece into something more than a book. The cut out eyes turn the face of the book into a mask, incorporating the indigenous practice of "opening the eyes of the book," which, for Tzotzil-speaking peoples, indicates that the book sees-- but remains silent as long as it is closed (Gies, 2010). Like other performance

traditions, the book/mask only becomes animated once performed; in this case, once a reader opens it and speaks, or performs, the words to an audience.

Originally an oral language, Tzotzil challenges Eurocentric norms of the individual quietly reading a book, alone. *Conjuros y ebriedades* (Past & Bañuelos, 1997) is made for speaking aloud in community and not for reading in silence. In a poetic reversal such as this, a vignette might serve to bring more clarity to the situation. In describing a potlatch ceremony exhibition at the U'mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay, British Columbia, Canada, scholar Patrick Houlihan uses the terms "poetic impact" to describe the exhibition's design: "On the seating platforms surrounding three sides of the large, open dance area where the actual performance of the potlatch might occur, the masks, rattles, and other ritual paraphernalia of the potlatch are arrayed...By this placement the expected positions of object and visitor are reversed. The visitor is made to pass before the objects at rest in the places normally reserved for spectators. It is in this reverse placement that one experiences also the reversal and confusion of roles. That is, the object becomes the viewer, and the visitor becomes the object... And since many of the objects displayed are masks with eyes, noses, mouths, ears, etc, the confusion is real. Who's on exhibit?" (Houlihan, 1991, p. 206). Much like the masks and seating platforms, the vitrines line the exterior walls of the library's gallery. With some of the books on display having eyes that gaze and follow spectators, the books beg to be interacted with. They confuse the roles of observed and observer, as in Houlihan's example. Further confusing things, the gallery is also used as a classroom and meeting space, and is often filled with chairs and tables, aiding in the feeling of being watched from the display cases. For Houlihan, this moment of "poetic confusion" is essential to the exhibition of 'other' cultures because it forces non-indigenous viewers to confront the unexpected, beyond what is familiar; and in doing so, viewers are "shocked" out of presumed knowledge into new dialogic processes of learning with other communities and cultures (Lavine, 1991, pp. 155-156).

Line drawings and woodblock prints accompany *Conjuros y ebriedades* (Past & Bañuelos, 1997), as well as other books exhibited, such as the accordion-folded journal, *La Jícara* (Taller Leñateros, n.d.). Taller Leñateros promotes this publication as a "literary art journal.... printed in silk-



screen and bound as a pre-Hispanic codex" (Taller Leñateros, 1999). The journal focuses on contemporary literature, most often in the form of poetry, that is also meant to be performed—that is, spoken aloud. The significance of the *jícara*, *xicalli* in Nahuatl, and *rakure* in Huichol, is worth noting: this tiny gourd has been used in different parts of Mexico to serve liquids like chocolate, mezcal, and peyote; and is currently sold as a vessel for drinking tequila and mezcal. With its intricate line drawings that link delicate page to delicate page as it unfolds accordion style, the book captures motion in much the same way as the *jícara* pouring liquid from its container. This movement, metaphor, and symbolic significance is visually replicated by the engraving of a maiden, long hair flowing, pouring out liquid from a vessel on the cover of each issue of *La Jícara* (Taller Leñateros, n.d.).



The artists' books or journals of the Taller Leñateros are therefore much more than unique tomes for archival promotion or exhibits. They are the products of a culture, and the works of a community. In contrast to European-centered conceptions of individualism, the workshops produce knowledge that is socially intersubjective, with the first goal being to "document, exalt, and disseminate indigenous and popular cultural values: literature in indigenous languages, visual arts, and the painted codex" (Taller Leñateros, 1999). The Taller's works are always written in the native Tzotzil language, serving the Mayan community primarily, with Spanish or English as secondary translations, for the purposes of broader dissemination. As with other Native American groups, the preservation of their language and the act of writing, living, and disseminating their native

language is a way of saying, we are not extinct and we are not an artifact.<sup>2</sup> For the members of Taller Leñateros, the book is more than a tool for accessing information: It is a lived experience.

Taller Leñateros creates another embodied performance in *Bolom chon*, in what we might traditionally think of as a children's book. A jaguar leaps out as the child opens the pages of the book. An accompanying audio CD immerses the child in the sounds of the book, as Tzotzil children sing the song *Bolom chon* in their own language. The book transports the child into an oral story and performance, absorbing the reader and making the jungle and jaguar physically and experientially real. *Bolom chon* comes accompanied with a child's jaguar mask to wear while reading the book. The child reads while listening to the audio and wearing the mask, as they transform into the jaguar of the song. *Bolom chon* destabilizes perception and senses in a fully immersive, exciting, visual, oral, and performative media experience.

Another objective of the Taller Leñateros is to "recover ancient techniques that are disappearing, such as the

or served, food and drink because each of the artists' books incorporated, resembled, or recalled food and beverage. For example, one of the works selected for this project includes a bowl and a silver spoon as part of the "book." By using the spoon, the reader pulls magnetized life-like photographs of soups one-by-one out of the simple plastic bowl (Gurrola, 2013). Each turn of the soups unveils smaller images of soups within the bowl, into which the reader descends, literally and metaphorically consuming different soups. Each of the soups, including caldo (lime with chicken and rice) and posole, are well known to the audiences with whom we interacted. On the reverse side of each life-like image of soup are Spanish maxims, which can only be read once they have been taken out of the bowl by the spoon. The soup visually, metaphorically, and physically links the artist with the reader through the embodied act of ladling the soup - or flipping the magnetized photographs over and reading the maxims (Gurrola, 2013).

This process of ladling the soup forces the reader to use familiar tools, like a bowl and spoon, in novel and playful ways. Feeling the cool spoon and pulling back each



extraction of wild plant dyes and the recovery of indigenous languages" (Taller Leñateros, 1999). Pigments are made from native plants, paper is made by hand, and various types of glues are made from natural processes, designed to encourage and strengthen familial relationships as children and adults gather materials and preserve community recipes. This exhibition, like the communal bookmaking exhibited within its vitrines, encourages a linked community experience that lies both within and outside its gallery walls, promoting understandings of diverse cultures through dialogues on collaboration.

## Eat/Drink/Read: Sumptuous artists' books on display

The project occupying the second half of the exhibition is an innovative response to the call for multiculturalism, inclusion, and equity at an educational institution in one of the most multilingual and multicultural states in the U.S. We brought five rare Mexican artists' books out from the Special Collections to select programs and events that overlapped with the themes in the books. The five events were in public spaces where bilingual, diverse audiences could interact freely with the texts. Importantly, each event was near to,

photograph leads the reader to imagine the smell and taste of onions and lime, while simultaneously experiencing the warm soup swallowed and settling in a satisfied belly. When unique archival materials are shared with communities outside of the sanctity of spaces that adhere to archival restrictions, educators can learn from and with the communities they serve.

Instead of describing the pieces and instructing community members, we simply observed and recorded participants metaphorically consuming these unique materials. This project brings an oral history element forth from our local communities. For example, for some of us, posole brings us back to the first time someone served us posole as a child; and for others of us that is a newer experience, as an adult in the Southwestern U.S. The books' overlapping themes of Mexican food, drink, identity, and domestic intimacy centered around the communal table are understatedly powerful. Many of the participants we interacted with were very familiar with the recipes in the books, with mezcal and tequila, with tacos and tortillas, with caldo de pollo and posole. They had their own versions and variations of recipes, stories, traditions, and family memories. As a border state in the Southwestern U.S., many communities in New Mexico maintain multigenerational ties

through culinary traditions. The affective politics of food can be seen as one way to extend identity in the web of multilingual, transnational, social, political, and cultural networks (Arellano, 2013; Morton, 2014; Pilcher, 2012).

Like the *taller*, the selected artists' books challenge conventional definitions by incorporating sculptural elements, printmaking conventions, objects, scents, even tastes and smells into the conceptual structure of the book. They also document complexities in material culture, forcing readers to engage different senses and experiences. One 'book,' better described as a portfolio, named the *Karwinskii Effectus* (Herrera, 2012) after the intoxicative effects of the *Karwinskii* agave from Oaxaca, opens to sixteen original prints depicting different forms of inebriation and five carefully preserved and presented bottles of artisanal mezcal. The agave plant and indigenous patterns in these prints are reminiscent of characters found in Mesoamerican codices and contemporary popular culture, including *La Jícara* (Taller Leñateros, n.d.). The familiarity of these images and the beverage they accompany, not to mention the feeling of getting drunk, made this a highly accessible piece. Of the five we took into community settings, this item was the second-most consulted. For that reason, its images are predominant throughout the exhibit. It was also quite surprising to many in the community, who couldn't imagine alcohol in the archives, and were aghast at the sex and nudity depicted in some of the prints in the portfolio. Even so, some secondary teacher participants commented that the tie between alcohol and sex provided an excellent and accessible teaching opportunity on health literacy. Indeed, we were surprised to learn from a resident biologist that the animal depicted in many of the prints and on the labels of the mezcal was a bat that fed off the agave; additionally, we learned from a group of *mescaleros* visiting campus that the name *Karwinskii* is the species of agave.

Other reactions were delightfully unexpected: participants smelled the tea bags in *Hunab Hunab Ku: té de manzanilla sobre haikus* (De Jesús Villalpando González, 2010), for example, even though they have no smell but resemble tea.

A participant related tea to deeply personal memories, brought about through smell: "The tea is very powerful—the

smell makes me remember stories—memories." *Hunab Ku* (De Jesús Villalpando González, 2010) is a upcycled tea box with Mayan characters and lettering on the outside, which symbolize movement and energy in a spiraling design reminiscent of the yin-yang symbol. Words for harmony and balance symbolize equilibrium by their pairing with haikus and tea. Twenty-four individually wrapped tea bags are each printed with haikus.



Participants also smelled the mezcal bottles in *Karwinskii effectus* (Herrera, 2012), which surprisingly do have a smell. Many asked to taste the mezcal and, though most were half-joking, we often engaged in conversations about preservation. An interaction with a science resource-fair participant expressed interest in using *Karwinskii effectus* (Herrera, 2012) for research on organic farming and asked for a taste sample of the mezcal. After referring the participant to a local Albuquerque liquor store that stocks mezcal, we realized the opportunity to expand connections between creators and institutions such as ours who preserve and/or promote their products (in this case, both the artists and makers of mezcal, called *mescaleros*). An exciting output from this interaction was UNM Professors from the interdisciplinary cross-campus group "Food, Environment, and Resilience" convening these collections, including *Karwinskii effectus* (Herrera, 2012), with Oaxacan *Mescaleros*, local distributors, students, and community members.

Another book, made to look like blue corn tortillas in a tortilla warmer, employs Mexican papermaking recipes to create tortillas replete with family images, indicating the parallels between sustenance and the warmth of community around a table. The artist is Russian-Mexican, but her work emanates indigeneity in its incorporation of papermaking, visual imagery, ancestral memory, and the food that she chooses to symbolically represent. A group in our study passed around *Mis Tortillas* (Akhmadeeva, 2014) and read the back of each tortilla aloud, individually as well as in pairs. Participants helped one another with translations, all the while sharing recipes, ideas and memories, articulating their frustration with varied Spanish fluency. For example, a teacher participant related a story of inviting a *tortilleria* to class, explaining how the act of making tortillas together with this Spanish-speaking businessperson inspired a collection of shared recipes in high school classes, ultimately enhancing student engagement. We use this idea in our exhibit, asking participants to take a recipe and leave another.



The communal knowledge evident at these events underscored Alvarez's (2016) observations that learning occurs at the locus of taste, aesthetics, dialogue, and memory. Participants in the development of the exhibit shared stories and recipes through Spanish and English and gestures when words were insufficient. Performances ensued more than once as participants enacted stories in order to make relatable local and regional cultures and traditions. These interactions led us to envision the exhibit as a play between Spanish and English and the spaces in between.

One thing that was abundantly clear was that *Dies Solis* (1995) did not interest very many of our participants. The cloth-covered box opens to a fine-press book that can be propped open like a five-star-restaurant menu, alternating between prints and recipes. It is held together by a thread of red lettering reciting a tongue-in-cheek prayer for the last supper. We didn't even see this tiny red lettering until one of us, Suzanne, was making archival scans of the object for this article. While the recipes resonated with the local community, the high quality handmade cotton paper made them feel apprehensive about touching the book. Talk about the power of paper! It was the least performed artists' book of the grouping. In collaboration with the University Archivist and a fine arts student, we reenacted the red lettered subtext in the exhibit, extending it across the top of the vitrines in vinyl red lettering. We also highlighted the most accessible recipe, caldo de pollo, which tied it to our most accessible and performed artists' book: *¿Caldo?: sazonado con refranes populares* (Gurrola, 2013).

The range of descriptions used by participants opened a world of possibilities for how such objects could be described, as well as enormous questions of complexity. Adding these phenomenological components to the

traditional visual, written, and expressive literacies brings a richness and depth to a uniquely human experience. Certainly, the universality of some human experiences, such as the warmth of homemade soup, or the zest of lemon, needs no translation. Indeed, the reactions we observed from community members prompted us to imagine a fuller range of possibilities for instruction, exhibition, and outreach in library and educational services and programming.

Thus, some of the observations from the community forums worked their way into the exhibit which is the subject



of this article. The exhibit integrates and expands on some of these sensory components, inviting visitors to smell lavender, sage, and rosemary and to feel the tactile differences between twine, leather and fibrous papers derived of plant materials—all of which were used to make the early codices. Visitors can choose to leave haikus on tea bags that visually replicate the haikus on the teabags from the artists' book, *Hunab Ku* (De Jesús Villalpando González, 2010), or they can leave recipes in response to *Dies Solis*.

Through the process of bringing together these projects and communities, we identified several important lessons. First, words to describe may always be elusive, especially when dealing with objects outside of (or just outside of) one's own culture. Recognizing multiple ways of knowing, that is, multisensory pathways to knowledge, may provide one model for engagement. Second, what is familiar to some is always unfamiliar to others. Confronting this reality is essential for the promotion of diversity, but the process is messy and we must descend into the messiness if we are to succeed as educators. One cannot speak for someone else, nor represent someone else's reality. Therefore, creating buy-in with communities represented by an institution means allowing for other voices and expertise. Inadvertently, this also means being comfortable with your own ignorance and allowing others to inform your path to





learning. It means allowing for truly collaborative processes all along the way. “Tomes” works to center marginalized collections, produced by and for marginalized peoples. Installing exhibitions in spaces which are often historically dismissive of people of color breaks down patriarchal barriers, invites playfulness and creativity into uninventing and sterile spaces, and pushes the boundaries of what is possible in academic hierarchies. In order to shift the balance toward inclusion and empowerment, and avoid fetishizing communities like Euro-centered exhibitions have done to colonized peoples for generations (Karp & Lavine, 1991), care must be taken to create collaborative exhibitions that open up the frame of authority and level the field of expertise (Villeneuve & Rowson Love, 2017).

## Future Considerations & Conclusions

“How important is it to recognize the limits of one’s own understanding?” asks Allan Johnston, in his article in *Radical Pedagogy* (Johnston, paragraph 15). “At some point [during] reading..., and especially works from times, cultures, and perspectives different from one’s own... one [must] face sensibilities that are in many ways fundamentally different from one’s own” (Johnston, paragraph 5). Any organization which mounts an exhibition runs the risk of assuming they know what visitors want to see, or ought to see, and how they might choose to experience the works displayed (Koke & Ryan, 2017, p. 47). This exhibit is an attempt to subvert that tendency and extend the continuum of authority, offering visitors multiple modes for leaving their mark on the exhibit. Preliminary comments demonstrate how performative and tactile object-based inquiry leads to transformative learning. How do people interact with books that contain food, drink, and smells, with objects that recall recipes and make mouths water? How do communities interact with and describe materials whose intent is to push what comfortably translates between English and Spanish? How can we collaborate to provide better access to collections that represent their families, communities, or traditions? What sorts of differences are observed between the ways people handle and describe unique objects if they are not instructed first?

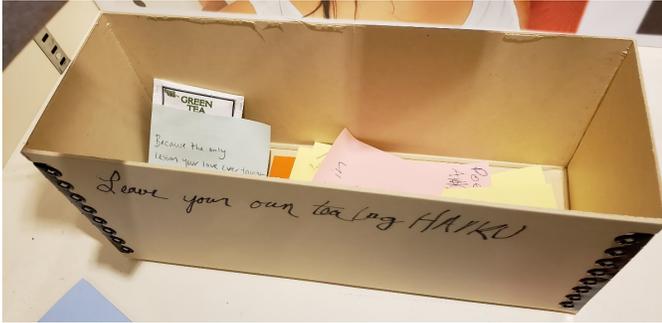
We are still exploring these questions. Indeed, “education is not only the content but also the *process* of

facilitating learning,” and “engagement suggests application, personal relevance, and usefulness of information” received (Blake, Smith, & Adame, 2017, p. 89, emphasis theirs). Through the experimental projects described here, we feel confident that the educational goals of facilitating learning did occur and are still occurring, even as we tweak the exhibit in response to current visitor feedback.

Working collaboratively with community members has its challenges. Engaging community members to reframe exhibits and programming as a cooperative process requires time, thoughtfulness, longer deadlines, and a certain comfort with messiness that comes with sharing ideas and products before they are finished. “While shifting the balance might make an institution more relevant to some, it can also disappoint traditional audiences who’ve come to... [expect] to learn from ‘experts’” (Koke & Ryan, 2017, p. 54). However, inclusive practices require empowering marginalized communities to come to the center and take a leading role in curation, education, and description—authoritative processes, which are typically internal rather than external. As we brainstorm the creation of a virtual



exhibit that will live alongside and complement the in-person exhibit, we again realize the excellent opportunities that emerge and re-emerge for educators, librarians, and archivists to critically engage the questions raised by these objects, the cultures that produced them, and what occurs when they are re-presented for others.



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