

Bryce Wilner

Selected Typefaces, 2014–23

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Grotesque No. 3 Regular

Across the street from the JAARS offices sits the campus's most public-facing entity, the Museum of the Alphabet, a modest, densely-packed, one-story building dedicated to world alphabetical history as observed by SIL employees over eight decades. Its dozen-or-so rooms feature artifacts and books from Townsend's travels, but are mostly filled with homespun models, hand-painted dioramas, text panels, murals, and infographics portraying alphabetic writing from around the world. Upon entering the lobby, visitors are immediately flanked by a welded sheet metal sculpture of the Tower of Babel, and a human-sized, wooden "Alphabet Tree" illustrating some of the innumerable forks that writing systems have taken throughout human civilization. Branches labelled "Linear B" or "Mixtec Aztec" abruptly end not far above the ground, while others marked "Modern Roman," "Armenian," "Gujarati," or "Chinese," carry us high up the tree and into the present day. This forking tree motif—where certain writing systems simply die out in some kind of seemingly natural selection—recurs throughout the museum's galleries. Between the Tower of Babel and the Alphabet Tree, a large wall graphic assures visitors: "About 750 million are still waiting for... the Word."

The history charted by the museum will be familiar to anyone who's taken an introductory typography class. It begins with models of cuneiform tablets and Egyptian hieroglyphics, which slowly lead into alphabets by the North Semitic, the Phoenicians, the early- and classical-Greeks, the Etruscans, and then the Modern Roman characters we read in the west today, with significant attention paid to the technologies that made such writing and printing possible. The museum also features rooms dedicated to the development of Cyrillic, Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew, Thai, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Cherokee, and Indic

writing systems. Each room communicates a profound fascination with—a love for—languages of the world; a love troubled by SIL's insistence that the Christian God is the "supreme authority in all matters of belief and practice." The curators are careful to highlight consequential figures in the history of Bible production: Ulfilas, the Visigoth Bible translator who developed the Gothic alphabet; Alcuin of York, the English scholar who devised writing standards for Bible scribes; Mesrop Mashtots, who designed the Armenian alphabet to strengthen national identity through Bible translation; and Johannes Gutenberg, whose innovations produced the first printed Bible. SIL clearly sees itself as a spiritual successor to these figures. Future histories might list Townsend as a person of comparable typographic influence.

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Interlace Even and Interlace Odd

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

Interlace Vertical Even and Interlace Vertical Odd

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
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abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

Interlace

A man asks us in the park:
“In what two instances does life guarantee
you see your name in all caps, alone?”
He smiled and answered
“On your State ID
And then again on your tombstone”

Interlace Vertical

A man asks us in the park:
“In what two instances does life guarantee
you see your name in all caps, alone?”
He smiled and answered
“On your State ID
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A man asks us in the park:
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abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

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Dot Matrix

A
two instances
does not answer
the question
only one

Mosaic

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Mosaic Duotone 1 and Mosaic Duotone 2

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

In the early 1930s, Guatemala's economy was based on plantation agriculture; indigenous peasants worked on coffee or fruit fincas for little pay. The railroad infrastructure was owned by the United States, and the United Fruit Company controlled most fruit production. This extremely profitable, neocolonial order was maintained by Jorge Ubico's military dictatorship from 1931-44. While the literacy rate among the ladinos had reached 30%, the indigenous population . . .

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Standard Book

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

Standard Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

On November 18, 1993, the Barbadian poet, literary critic, and historian Kamau Brathwaite met with American poet and editor Nathaniel Mackey for a public discussion at Poet's House in New York City. The pair had been friends and colleagues for over a decade, Mackey having published Brathwaite in early issues of the 1982 poetry magazine *Hambone*. They settled in for a lengthy oral survey of Brathwaite's work, covering the effect his studies in Ghana and the UK had on his understanding of Caribbean identity, the Barbadian spoken tradition which he'd previously termed "nation language," his beloved *Arrivants* and *Ancestors* poetry trilogies, and his move to the United States in 1991 for a professorship in Comparative Literature at NYU. This talk with Mackey—Brathwaite's first public event in New York—occurred five years into a radical shift in his writing method, one that would redefine his relationship to his computer's word processor.

Six years after the Poet's House event, Brathwaite worked with We Press and the journal *XCP: Cross-Cultural Poetics* to publish a transcription of the discussion, expanding the hour-long conversation into a sprawling, heavily-annotated, visual history of his work—a now-essential key to following the poet's writing and influences.

The book, *conVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, has a large trim-size for a poetry volume, measuring 8.5 × 11 inches. Its soft cover and 320 pages allow it to flop open on one's desk, revealing text spreads that change significantly as one pages through it. The original substance of the conversation is typeset in Courier in squarish, fully-justified text blocks, which Brathwaite often interrupts with in-line, bracketed citations at a smaller point size. Longer annotations are signaled by narrowed, right-shifted columns, vertical lines running the length of the left side of the text block, double-stroked frames (sometimes multiple framed texts

on a single page), and sudden, significant changes in typeface and point size. The typefaces would have been available in 1990s Apple word processors and design software: Chancery, Times New Roman, Antique Olive, Avant Garde Gothic, Stop, Century Schoolbook, Latin, Arial, and New York, to name a few. Brathwaite bitmapped some of these types almost beyond recognition by printing them with his Apple StyleWriter printer, which necessitated the use of photo-offset printing to faithfully reproduce his typesetting for publication. These arrays of black pixels are in formal conversation with the pictographic glyphs from the dingbats typeface Cairo, as well as Brathwaite's own pixel drawings. His signature use of deliberate misspelling and double entendre occur throughout the conversation and annotations, which reference excerpts from his own poetry as well as the words of Caribbean luminaries such as Derek Walcott, Walter Rodney, Bob Marley, C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter.

The typographies in *conVERSations* are an exemplary specimen of what Brathwaite called his "Sycorax video style," a "new pathway" his poetry took after enduring three traumatic events in the previous decade. In 1986, he lost his wife Doris "Zea Mexican" Brathwaite to cancer. Two years later, Hurricane Gilbert triggered a mudslide that destroyed his home, library, and personal archive in Irish Town, Jamaica. And one stormy night in 1990, three men broke into his Kingston flat and bound, gagged, and robbed him. One of the men put a gun to Brathwaite's head. The weapon either malfunctioned or was not loaded, but he heard the click of the trigger, an event he later described as a kind of murder by "ghost bullet." Now regarding himself as someone who "was dead but had not died," he began to transcribe a series of dreams—intending to restore or reinvent his psyche—in this new video style. This writing would be collected under the . . .

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Uneducated in the field of linguistics, he was initially frustrated with his attempts to grasp the Kaqchikel language through an English lens. His first breakthrough came from studying the work of Edward Sapir, the University of Chicago linguist who theorized that a language's structure could not be learned without first trying to understand how a culture's perspective differed from one's own. Townsend abandoned his comparative linguistics for a "descriptive" approach, one acknowledging that each language has its own pattern independent of the Latin mold.[9] He came to recognize Kaqchikel as a complex language that could embed time, place, number of subjects, or even different kinds of actions into a single verb. After a year of study, he enlisted a Kaqchikel Mayan to help him translate the Gospel of Mark. According to Townsend's biographers, the mayor of Antigua initially protested when he learned of Townsend's activities: "We're trying to get rid of the Indian languages. We want everyone to speak Spanish!" Townsend was aware of the discrimination against Guatemala's indigenous people by Spanish-speaking ladinos, and believed that a New Testament in both Kaqchikel and Spanish would allow them to more easily assimilate into western custom by first encountering Christianity in their own language. "The key to Indian education is the mother tongue, the language of the soul," he wrote. "Help them learn to read their language and become proud of it and their heritage. Give them the Bible to set them free from vice and superstition.... Once they have dignity, spiritual freedom, and self-assurance, they can move into the Spanish-speaking world as equals with the ladinos." [10] With support from American mission agencies and a growing cadre of interested Christian linguists, Townsend spent the following decade completing the Kaqchikel translation of the entire New Testament. The manuscript was sent to the American Bible Society for printing in 1929, and the books reached Guatemala in 1931.

In the early 1930s, Guatemala's economy was based on plantation agriculture: indigenous peasants worked on coffee or fruit fincas for little pay. The railroad infrastructure was owned by the United States, and the United Fruit

Company controlled most fruit production. This extremely profitable, neocolonial order was maintained by Jorge Ubico's military dictatorship from 1931–44. While the literacy rate among the ladinos had reached 30%, the indigenous populations oscillated between 1 and 10%. Ubico, like Townsend, saw conversion to Christianity as an effective means to stave off communist organizing, and to more thoroughly integrate indigenous populations into a national economy increasingly oriented toward the North American market. When the Kaqchikel Bibles arrived, Townsend made sure the first one out of the box went not to the Kaqchikel people but into the hands of Ubico, who asked Townsend to do the same for the Kekchi Maya.[12] Townsend would later go on to fictionalize his experiences in Guatemala, with some anti-communist embellishments, in his novel *Tolo, The Volcano's Son*, which concludes with a Mayan Bible translation assistant foiling a Bolshevik-backed workers' revolution.[13] In Townsend's evangelical telling of the Christ narrative, material poverty is a symptom of a long-running spiritual debt rather than an economic necessity enforced by a ruling class.

Townsend's success in Guatemala attracted the attention of Mexican education reformer Moisés Sáenz, who invited the missionaries to continue their Good Work in Mexico. With blessings from the Dallas Theological Seminary, the "Old Fashion Revival Hour" broadcast, and Chicago's Moody Bible Institute, Townsend organized the Summer Training Camp for Prospective Bible Translators in 1934, which connected his linguistic collaborators with students from American Bible colleges, who would now be spending their summers doing translation work in Mexico and Guatemala. Describing the project to the Central American Mission in Dallas, Townsend wrote: "We will enter Mexico as linguists rather than as missionaries. The Indian languages must be learned and the New Testament translated into them. It matters not to us whether we be classified as missionaries or ditchdiggers if we be given a chance to labor toward that end." The participants christened their international project the Summer Institute of Linguistics. "...

Half 75

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Half 51

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Half 39

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Half 21

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Last month of the year.
February March. January
September March. Last
month of the year. April
May and June. Last month
of the year. September
January. Last month of
the year. March. Last
month of the year.

Last month of the year.
February March. January
September March. Last
month of the year. April
May and June. Last month
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January. Last month of
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February March. January
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month of the year. April
May and June. Last month
of the year. September
January. Last month of
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month of the year.

Goff Regular

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Goff Bold

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Goff Black

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
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Goff Light

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1234567890

March. Last month of
the year. April May
and June. Last month
of the year. January
September February.
Last month of the
year. March April May
and June. Last month
of the year.

March. Last month of
the year. April May
and June. Last month
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September February.
Last month of the
year. March April May
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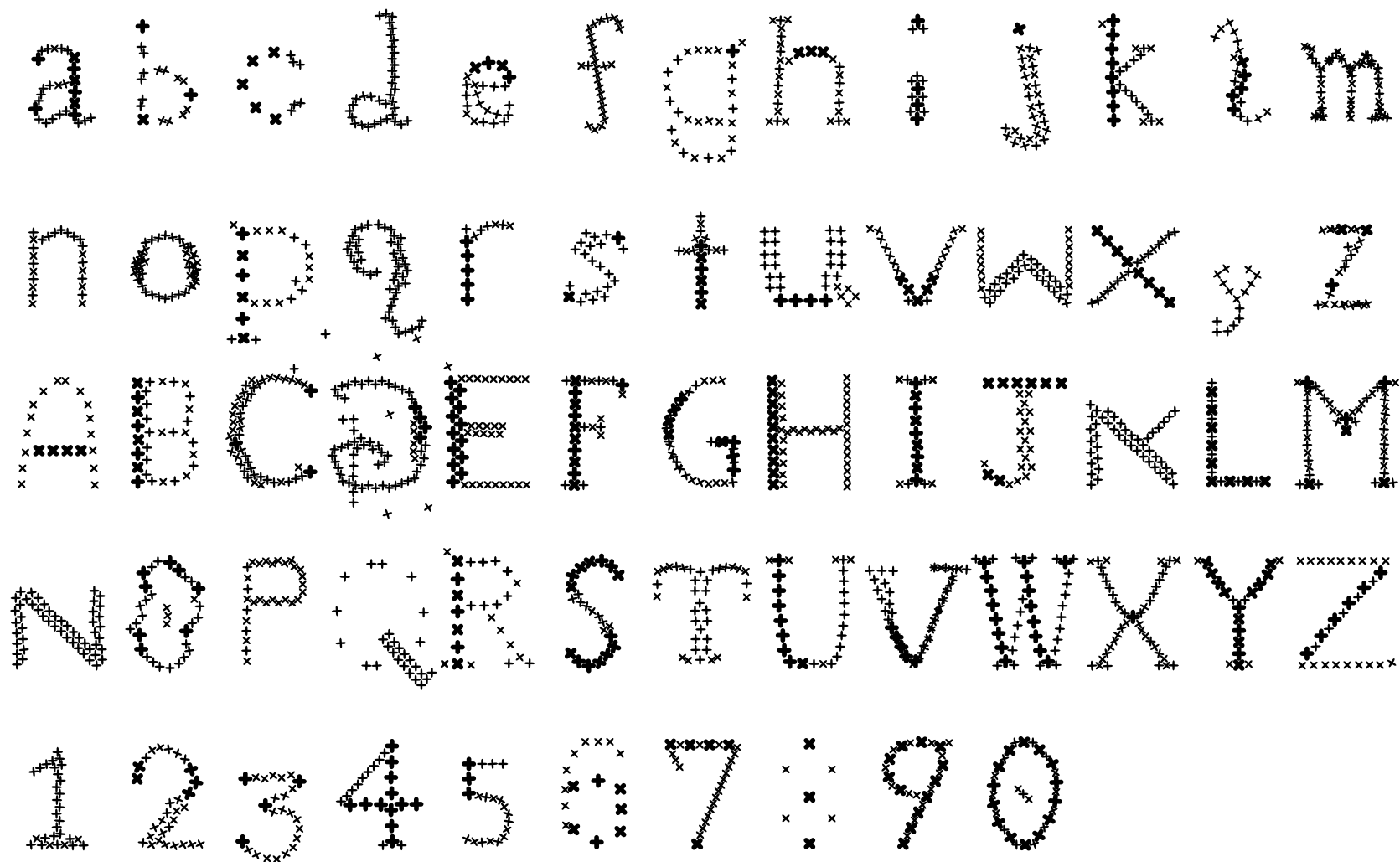
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In the early 1930s, Guatemala's economy was based on plantation agriculture: indigenous peasants worked on coffee or fruit fincas for little pay, the railroad infrastructure was owned by the United States, and the United Fruit Company controlled most fruit production. This extremely profitable, neocolonial order was maintained by Jorge Ubico's military dictatorship from 1931-44. While the literacy rate among the ladinos had reached 30%, the indigenous populations oscillated between 7 and 10%. Ubico, like Townsend, saw conversion to Christianity as an effective means to stave off communist organizing, and to more thoroughly integrate indigenous populations into a national economy increasingly oriented toward the North American market. When the Kaqchikel Bibles arrived, Townsend made sure the first one out of the box went not to the Kaqchikel people but into the hands of Ubico, who asked Townsend to do the same for the Kekchi Maya. Townsend would later go on to fictionalize his experiences in Guatemala, with some anti-communist embellishments, in his novel *To the Volcano's Son*, which concludes with a Mayan Bible translation assistant foiling a Bolshevik-backed workers' revolution. In Townsend's evangelical telling of the Christ narrative, material poverty is a symptom of a long-running spiritual debt rather than an economic necessity enforced by a ruling class.

Townsend's success in Guatemala attracted the attention of Mexican education reformer Moises Saenz, who invited the missionaries to continue their Good Work in Mexico. With blessings from the Dallas Theological Seminary, the "Old Fashion Revival Hour" broadcast, and Chicago's Moody Bible Institute, Townsend organized the Summer Training Camp for Prospective Bible Translators in 1934, which connected his linguistic collaborators with students from American Bible colleges, who would now be spending their summers doing translation work in Mexico and Guatemala. Describing the project to the Central American Mission in Dallas, Townsend wrote: "We will enter Mexico as linguists rather than as missionaries. The Indian languages must be learned and the New Testament translated into them. It matters not to us whether we be classified as missionaries or ditchdiggers if we be given a chance to labor toward that end." The participants christened their

IN THE EARLY 1930S, GUATEMALA'S ECONOMY WAS BASED ON PLANTATION AGRICULTURE: INDIGENOUS PEASANTS WORKED ON COFFEE OR FRUIT FINCHES FOR LITTLE PAY. THE RAILROAD INFRASTRUCTURE WAS OWNED BY THE UNITED STATES, AND THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY CONTROLLED MOST FRUIT PRODUCTION. THIS EXTREMELY PROFITABLE, NEOCOLONIAL ORDER WAS MAINTAINED BY JORGE UBICO'S MILITARY DICTATORSHIP FROM 1931-44. WHILE THE LITERACY RATE AMONG THE CHADINOS HAD REACHED 30%, THE INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS OSCILLATED BETWEEN 1 AND 10%. UBICO, LIKE TOWNSEND, SAW CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY AS AN EFFECTIVE MEANS TO STAVE OFF COMMUNIST ORGANIZINGS, AND TO MORE THOROUGHLY INTEGRATE INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS INTO A NATIONAL ECONOMY INCREASINGLY ORIENTED TOWARD THE NORTH AMERICAN MARKET. WHEN THE KACHIKEL BIBLES ARRIVED, TOWNSEND MADE SURE THE FIRST ONE OUT OF THE BOX WENT NOT TO THE KACHIKEL PEOPLE BUT INTO THE HANDS OF UBICO, WHO ASKED TOWNSEND TO DO THE SAME FOR THE KEKCHÉ MAYA. TOWNSEND WOULD LATER GO ON TO FORMALIZE HIS EXPERIENCES IN GUATEMALA, WITH SOME ANTI-COMMUNIST EMBELLISHMENTS, IN HIS NOVEL *TULO*, THE VOLCANO'S SON, WHICH INCLUDES WITH A MAYAN BIBLE TRANSLATION ASSISTANT FOOLING A BOLSHIEVICK-BACKED WORKERS' REVOLUTION. IN TOWNSEND'S EVANGELICAL TELLING OF THE CHRIST NARRATIVE, MATERIAL POVERTY IS A SYMPTOM OF A LONG-RUNNING SPIRITUAL DEBT RATHER THAN AN ECONOMIC NECESSITY ENFORCED BY A RULING CLASS.

TOWNSEND'S SUCCESS IN GUATEMALA ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF MEXICAN EDUCATION REFORMER MOSES SÁENZ, WHO INVITED THE MISSIONARIES TO CONTINUE THEIR GOOD WORK IN MEXICO. WITH BLESSINGS FROM THE DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, THE "OLD FASHION REVIVAL HOUR" BROADCAST, AND CHICAGO'S MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE, TOWNSEND ORGANIZED THE SUMMER TRAINING CAMP FOR PROSPECTIVE BIBLE TRANSLATORS IN 1934, WHICH CONNECTED HIS CONGREGATE COLLABORATORS WITH STUDENTS FROM AMERICAN BIBLE COLLEGES, WHO WOULD NOW BE SPENDING THEIR SUMMERS DOING TRANSLATION WORK IN MEXICO AND GUATEMALA. DESCRIBING THE PROJECT TO THE CENTRAL AMERICAN MISSION IN DALLAS, TOWNSEND WROTE: "WE WILL ENTER MEXICO AS CONGREGANTS RATHER THAN AS MISSIONARIES. THE INDIAN LANGUAGES MUST BE LEARNED AND THE NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATED INTO THEM. IT MATTERS NOT TO US WHETHER WE BE CLASSIFIED AS MISSIONARIES OR DITCHDIGGERS IF WE BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO LABOR TOWARD THAT END." THE PARTICIPANTS CHRISTENED THEIR



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Consider the twenty pages that the American-French filmmaker Michel Auder submitted to the project. He took a series of digital snapshots of three Maczetsis performances, and has arranged them here as if they were open image files moved around on a computer desktop. The ubiquitous Apple Preview image frame tells us where one fragment ends and another begins, with drop-shadows included to suggest the topographic depth we expect from a MacBook Pro. Opening one JPEG on top of another—we've all at some point tried out this crude method of personal computer photo-montage. It's something else to see such montage arrested in print. A female shoulder meets a male torso, a collapsed woman lies on top of herself, a person appears twice in the same room, a shin extends the wrong way out of a knee, a woman is bisected by the same person who stands just behind her. Some of the images' process inks have been swapped with fluorescents such that they glow, fuzz, and vibrate.

A few contributions later, the Dutch artist Joke Robaard presents some of her formidable collection of loose pages from fashion magazines, introduced by an excerpt from Roland Barthes's writing on the various ways that articles of clothing relate to one another. Rather than the large, full-color images we've come to expect in this book, Robaard's magazine pages are arranged in a grid on a plywood studio floor, photographed by someone standing on a table, and printed in grayscale. Over eight spreads, we see the photographer pan around the floor to capture each magazine page. We read this as a kind of animation.

CONSIDER THE TWENTY PAGES THAT THE AMERICAN-FRENCH FILMMAKER MICHEL AUDER SUBMITTED TO THE PROJECT. HE TOOK A SERIES OF DIGITAL SNAPSHOTS OF THREE MACHINETSIS PERFORMANCES, AND HAS ARRANGED THEM HERE AS IF THEY WERE OPEN IMAGE FILES MOVED AROUND ON A COMPUTER DESKTOP. THE Ubiquitous APPLE PREVIEW IMAGE FRAME TELLS US WHERE ONE FRAGMENT ENDS AND ANOTHER BEGINS, WITH DROP-SHADOWS INCLUDED TO SUGGEST THE TOPOGRAPHIC DEPTH WE EXPECT FROM A MACBOOK PRO. OPENING ONE JPEG ON TOP OF ANOTHER-WE'VE ALL AT SOME POINT TRIED OUT THIS CRUDE METHOD OF PERSONAL COMPUTER PHOTO-MONTAGE. IT'S SOMETHING ELSE TO SEE SUCH MONTAGE ARRESTED IN PRINT. A FEMALE SHOULDER MEETS A MALE TORSO, A COLLAPSED WOMAN LIES ON TOP OF HERSELF, A PERSON APPEARS TWICE IN THE SAME ROOM, A SHIN EXTENDS THE WRONG WAY OUT OF A KNEE, A WOMAN IS BISECTED BY THE SAME PERSON WHO STANDS JUST BEHIND HER. SOME OF THE IMAGES' PROCESS INKS HAVE BEEN SWAPPED WITH FLUORESCENTS SUCH THAT THEY GLOW, FUZZ, AND VIBRATE.

A FEW CONTRIBUTIONS LATER, THE DUTCH ARTIST JOCKE ROZAARD PRESENTS SOME OF HER FORMIDABLE COLLECTION OF LOOSE PAGES FROM FASHION MAGAZINES, INTRODUCED BY AN EXCERPT FROM ROLAND BARTHES'S WRITING ON THE VARIOUS WAYS THAT ARTICLES OF CLOTHING RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER. RATHER THAN THE LARGE, FULL-COLOR IMAGES WE'VE COME TO EXPECT IN THIS BOOK, ROZAARD'S MAGAZINE PAGES ARE ARRANGED IN A GRID ON A PLYWOOD STUDIO FLOOR, PHOTOGRAPHED BY SOMEONE STANDING ON A TABLE, AND PRINTED IN GRAYSCALE. OVER EIGHT SPREADS, WE SEE THE PHOTOGRAPHER PAN AROUND THE FLOOR TO CAPTURE EACH MAGAZINE PAGE. WE READ THIS AS A KIND OF ANIMATION.