

**Unreadable Books:  
Early Colonial Mexican Documents in Circulation**

**by**

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## Prologue

This dissertation found its motivation in Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). McLuhan's book, which is frequently cited as a foundational text by scholars of book history, argues that electronic communications technologies are transforming societies in a manner similar to that of the printing press and the development of alphabetic writing. In doing so, it establishes an analogy between the spread of movable type in the early modern period, and the spread of electronic (or digital) media today.

Lisa Gitelman, writing several decades later, describes this analogy as “typological,” remarking that it has “become a commonplace of late to compare the ascendancy of digital networks and the World Wide Web with the rapid dissemination of letterpress printing in Renaissance Europe and the supposed emergence of print culture” (20). Indeed, the introductions to such diverse studies as Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1980), Adrian Johns' *The Nature of the Book* (1998), David McKitterick's *Old Books, New Technologies* (2013), and Gitelman's *Paper Knowledge* (2014) all locate the warrant for their work in the relationship between electronic culture and its precedents in print. Because it is so widespread among Anglophone authors, it is easy to see this print-digital analogy (as I will call it here, for brevity) as naturalistic. In preparing this dissertation prospectus, however, I began to think critically about the relationship between the early modern period and the contemporary moment. Why do we feel such urgency to understand how new technologies are impacting current systems of communications (and the publics, or cultures, that use them), and what is it about the early modern period, specifically, that makes it feel like the obvious antecedent to our

own moment? In European historiography, the association between the Gutenberg press and the major social transformations that we think of, collectively, as the transition to modernity makes the printing press exceptional among writing technologies, and Europe exceptional among global empires. This exceptionalism is well suited to North American ideas about the influence of new communications technologies in the electronic age.

This exceptionalism is also worthy of sustained critical attention. While scholars have worked to rethink the print-digital analogy by looking critically at the concept of “print culture” in early modern Europe (Gitelman, Johns) or expanding the history of textual reproduction (McKinnick), these studies have largely extended, rather than examining, the scope of the analogy. This is particularly apparent to anyone who reads this research with an eye to the histories of colonization and enslavement that are also, necessarily, part of the history of the printed book. The colonies dance at the margins of print history, much as they dance at the margins of the history of European modernity more generally. We know they exist, and we suspect that the history of the printed book in Mexico, or in the Philippines, or in New Zealand must be significantly different from the history of the printed book in Italy, France, or Spain. It is. But as Mary Louise Pratt has argued, the contaminating power of the colonies has a long reach. The history of the printing press in Europe is a colonial history (*Imperial Eyes*).

The contaminating presence of colonization in print history is brutally apparent in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Marshall McLuhan’s reach in cultural studies cannot be overstated: there is a research institute in his name; he makes a guest appearance in *Annie Hall*. What startles about *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is the degree to which it depends on an ideology rooted in colonial thought. McLuhan’s argument about the transformative power of both written language and the printing press is logically

dependent on the concept of “primitive man” as a figure located both prior to and beyond the borders of modern life. Primitive man, he tells us, echoing the thought of early conquistadors and missionaries in the Americas, is primitive because his capacity for thought has not been informed by the organizing logic of written text. Modern man, he continues, is modern only insofar as he is able to conform his thought to the organizing principle of electronic media: fail and he will discover, in McLuhan’s words, “the Africa within.”

Here is the urgency of this dissertation: to understand how a colonial ideology has insinuated itself, unchecked, into the dominant analogy through which we understand the history of the printing press and its relationship to the electronic age. To accomplish this goal, the dissertation begins in the colonies: in New Spain, a place that has become central to the counternarratives of European textual conquest thanks to the decolonial scholarship of Walter D. Mignolo and Elizabeth Hill Boone. In the historiography of New Spain, Nahua communication systems challenge colonial ideas about the relationship between writing and civilization, just as Nahua architecture, art, religion, and political structures challenge colonial ideas about European exceptionalism and Christian superiority. The early arrival of the printing press in Mesoamerica - the first press was established in Mexico City in 1539, less than twenty years after the conquest of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan and some seventy years after the printing of the Gutenberg Bible - allows us to consider print history in New Spain as concurrent with, and integral to, the colonization of the Americas. This history also makes Mexico an appropriate counterpoint to Germany in the narratives of textual modernity.

This dissertation proposes that we can gain critical understanding of the print-digital analogy by reorienting the analogy towards Mexico City, an argument that has implications for our understanding of both the history of communications

technologies, and the mechanisms of colonial rule. In one sense, the goal of this project is to accomplish a rethinking of the so-called “digital age” that acknowledges its colonial roots. The chapters that follow will serve as a reminder that colonial history is book history is digital history. The larger question that this dissertation seeks to address, however, has to do with the narratives that shape our engagement with both print history and the digital present. How have processes of reproduction, circulation, acquisition, and destruction informed the stories we tell about the history of modern textuality, and how do these stories, in turn, inform our understanding of the textual present? Looking primarily at the movement of historical documents from New Spain between the United States and Mexico (with some attention, also, to Spain, France, and England), this project considers how the desires awakened by historical documents interact with financial, political, and intellectual factors to shape public access to the historical record. It considers, in other words, how the stuff of colonial history becomes the stuff of book history and how that, in turn, becomes the stuff of legend.

## Introduction

“In history,” writes Michel Trouillot, “power begins at the source” (29). In the case of this dissertation, which focuses on the first century of Spanish presence in Mesoamerica, the sources are manifold: codices, letters, journals, statements, regulations, and printed books. Composed in a multitude of manners, according to a plethora of discursive, rhetorical, and linguistic rules, these written documents maintain authority over the work of historiography, from archaeological studies to works of popular fiction. In the history of colonial Mexico, the power of the source is the power of written language.

This dissertation is concerned with the ways that New Spain’s primary sources establish and maintain power as they move through time, following Trouillot’s schema of textual composition, archival assembly, retrieval, and retrospective significance (26). In this sense it is, following Trouillot, a dissertation about the making of history: about how, to parrot the language of José Rabasa, violence is effected through the production of knowledge and the articulation of the world - and the word (9). Yet this dissertation diverges from the work of Rabasa and Trouillot in its lack of attention to the content of the historical record. Instead, the focus of this dissertation is on the written works that have historically been, in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, *unread and unreadable* due to the barriers of language and of access (7). Its focus is, first, on the political, cultural, and capitalistic forces that have made these works inaccessible; and second, on the extratextual processes of reading, writing, and meaning making that occur through the circulation, acquisition, transcription, and translation of unreadable books.

Trouillot might categorize these processes as archival assembly and retrieval,

and indeed this dissertation begins with a history of collecting that extends the archival theories of Rodrigo Lazo, Ann Laura Stoler, Kirsten Weld and others. By examining the transnational collection of early colonial Mexico's documentary record, it seeks to accomplish what Stoler calls an ethnography of the archive. In doing so, it responds to Kirsten Weld's call for renewed attention to archival thinking. As Weld writes, "In order to think archivally, then, we must place archives - with their histories, their contingencies, their silences and gaps, and their politics - at the heart of our research questions rather than simply relegating them to footnotes and parentheses" (13). The first chapter of this dissertation responds to this call by examining how Mexico's documentary record has been collected and redistributed in Mexico and the United States, focusing on the cases of the Mexican bibliophiles Joaquín García Icazbalceta and Nicolás León, whose collections are now held by the Benson Latin American Collection (BLAC) and the John Carter Brown Library (JCBL), respectively. By examining the history of these collections and the changing shape of their organizational logic, this chapter will explore how the construction of these collections was shaped by the "transnational desires and anxieties" of nineteenth century North America, and how that logic has been preserved (or dissolved) within the collecting institutions (Brickhouse 33).

For all that the archival theories described above have embraced the transformative power of the archive, they tend to treat archival collecting from within the Derridean dichotomy of preservation and decay. Yet the processes of archival engagement are materially productive, resulting in an ephemeral shadow archive of transcribed and copied documents which are highly interpretive, but rarely preserved. This shadow archive is the subject of the second chapter, which focuses on transcription in the archive. As Arlette Farge writes in her slim introduction to archival research, "It may surprise the uninitiated to learn that the hours spent in



the library consulting documents are often hours spent recopying them word for word” (29). For Farge, though the transcriptions that result are ephemeral, it is through the action of transcribing that historians interpret archival materials. This chapter extends Farge’s rather narrow argument by considering more broadly how transcription has mediated historical engagement with the documentary record, and what kinds of interpretation might be preserved in this transcribing act, focusing on the cases of the Colegio de la Santa Cruz (Tlatelolco, MX, mid-1500s); William H. Prescott (Pepperell, MA and Mexico City, 1850s); and the Reading the First Books Project (UT Austin, today). It will consider how a colonial logic insinuates itself into both manual and digital transcription processes, and what kinds of meaning are made in this act of copying.

To counter the colonizing logic of both archival construction and reproduction, many have argued for the return of cultural heritage artifacts to their sites of origin, particularly in cases when these objects were acquired through processes of colonialism rather than capitalism. Though empowering in theory, in practice this process of return has brought to the fore questions about heritage, ownership, history, and authenticity. These questions are made even more complex when the process of ‘return’ is enacted through the circulation of reproductions. This chapter explores the possibilities and limitations of this kind of documentary return by considering three cases. First, it considers the ceremonial return of high-quality reproductions of the *Relaciones geográficas*, seventeenth-century census maps, to the communities that they describe. Second, it explores the so-called digital return of the books printed in the first century of Spanish colonization through the Primeros Libros collection. Third, it examines the recreation of colonial Franciscan libraries at the Biblioteca Franciscana. Through these cases, it will consider the political implications of reproduction as a rhetorical act.

The three chapters described above consider three forms of engagement with the historical record: collection, transcription, and return. The final chapter addresses these same concerns from a different angle, turning to fiction and poetry to consider how Mexico's documentary record exists in the historical imaginary. It turns to works of fiction like Carmen Boullosa's *Cielos de la Tierra*, a post-apocalyptic novel about early colonial Mexican manuscripts, and Gary Jennings's *Aztec*, a historical romance masquerading as an early colonial manuscript, to explore the positioning of these documents as signifying objects. It then turns to the Taller Martín Pescador, a small printing operation known for its careful reinvention of early colonial Mexican texts and avant garde poetry - including several chapbooks by Boullosa - to understand the material legacy of these historical objects in textual production today.

## **Part 1: Collection**

This chapter is concerned with transnational circulation of colonial Mexico's historical record, focusing specifically on the collection of printed books from the first century of Spanish colonial rule. Unlike the archival materials studied by Ann Laura Stoler and Kirsten Weld, the books studied in this chapter were produced in a context of textual reproduction enabled by the recent development of movable type. As such, the narrative of their circulation and collection follows a different logic than that through which we tend to understand the national or colonial archives. Unlike the fixed form of the colonial archives, these books have undergone broad and often divergent histories of circulation that span the Atlantic Ocean and cross the equator. They have been collected through nationalistic or colonial enterprises and preserved alongside manuscripts and archival materials, but this is not their only story. Indeed, the history of the circulation of these books is often told in the form of a lament that memorializes the failure of Mexico's national bureaucracy to preserve its own records, and assert its own "technologies of rule" (Weld 13). Within this broad story of textual circulation, this chapter will focus on two case studies: the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island; and the Benson Latin American Collection at UT Austin.

Today, the John Carter Brown Library's collection of printed books and manuscripts from New Spain ranks among the best in the world. As the library's website describes, it was first established by John Carter Brown in the early nineteenth century as a collection of books and engravings pertaining to the discovery and settlement of the New World. The processes and priorities that shaped this collection have been ably described in a recent dissertation by Lindsay Van Tine. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the focus of the library shifted towards

New Spain and the library rapidly became one of the premiere collections of colonial Mexican documents in the world. Today, the library holds more than 4,000 Mexican imprints from the colonial period, and has more sixteenth-century printed books than any other library in the world. By examining how the library developed its focus on Mexicana, I seek to understand what categories of historical and cultural value shaped the acquisitions process, and how these categories interacted with political events in both the United States and Latin America. This, in turn, will provide new insights into the way that libraries shape cultural knowledge.

The story of Mexicana collecting at the John Carter Brown Library begins with the acquisition of the private collection of Dr. Nicolás León, the eminent Mexican medical practitioner, natural scientist, anthropologist, and bibliophile. His collection of books went up for sale in the 1890s and was acquired in 1896 by the JCBL's first librarian, George Parker Winship, in collaboration with the Puebla-based missionary and book dealer Frank Borton. The letters that Winship received from both Borton and León are preserved among the Library Correspondence records at the JCBL. As a brief perusal of these letters, conducted in early November 2015, reveals, the story of this acquisition is one of avarice, personal tragedy, and mutual manipulation; but also one of transnational transit, delayed correspondence, silver, gold, and a passion for books. After the formal acquisition of the collection, which was made up primarily of Mexican imprints from the sixteenth century and unique editions of books, Winship reported ecstatically, "I fear that I am not wholly sober this evening despite the most complete abstinence" (Sept. 11, 1896). John Nicholas Brown answered, more staidly, "Henceforth my Father's library is easily the richest in the world in Mexicana, outside of Mexico" (Sept. 19, 1896).

The acquisition of León's collection launched a concerted effort to consoli-

date and expand the collection of colonial Mexicana at the JCBL, further affirming the library's position as a center for the study of colonial Mexico. This work and its legacy can be read in the continuing correspondence between León, Borton, and Winship (and later the library secretaries who succeeded him), which extends into the 1920s, tracing the shifting financial fortunes of these three men and their relationships with national and cultural institutions. At the same time, changes in the library's bibliographical priorities can be tracked through Winship's pursuit of other sources of rare books and manuscripts, including his (ultimately unsuccessful) effort to acquire the personal collection of the Chilean bibliographer José Toribio Medina. These stories, narrated through the letters collected in the JCBL's Library Correspondence files, allow us to isolate the forces that shaped the library's collection of early colonial Mexican documents, forces that in turn were structurally embedded into the collection.

The development of the Benson Latin American Collection, some forty years after the León acquisition, follows a similar trajectory: the library's specialization in colonial Mexican imprints and indigenous manuscripts comes from the acquisition of the García Icazbalceta collection (in 1937) and the Genaro García collection (in 1921). These two figures - the historian and the politician - were both book collectors, bibliophiles, and bibliographers, whose engagement with early colonial Mexican historical documents included both collection and reprinting. Their presence at the Benson makes that collection both a primary resource for scholars of Mexicana, and a very different kind of library from the JCBL. Collectively, the acquisition histories of these two libraries well shed light on how practices of collection and acquisition shape access to colonial Mexico's historical record.

## Part 2: Transcription

In a recent presentation at the MLA convention, Ryan Cordell called for closer attention to the mass-digitized documents that appear online. Like print editions, he argued, these digital “variora” are unique products of social and historical circumstance, and worthy of bibliographic analysis and critique. Each combines human and mechanized labor to produce a unique instantiation of what W. W. Greg describes as the “substantive” content of the text (“The Rationale of Copy-Text”). In his presentation, however, Cordell left unspoken the relationship between these historical and contemporary practices of transcription. By attributing the labor of automatic transcription to the computer scientists who develop Optical Character Recognition (OCR), he sidestepped the question of how the form of the transcription encapsulates the conditions of its production, and what this can tell us about the transmission of meaning through the transcription of text (“Q i-jtb the Raven”).

The question that motivates this chapter is: how does transcription mediate the transmission of Mexican colonial history? To answer this question, the chapter will examine three sites of textual transcription: the Colegio de la Santa Cruz at Tlatelolco, Mexico, in the sixteenth century; the offices of William H. Prescott in Pepperell, Massachusetts, in the nineteenth century; and the ongoing Reading the First Books digitization project based at the University of Texas at Austin. Collectively, these sites provide insight into the relationship between labor, cultural contact, and the (re)production of the documentary record of early colonial Mexico.

In the case of the Franciscan Colegio de la Santa Cruz, the question of transcription has to do with the rewriting of the historical record from spoken / painted Nahuatl to alphabetic manuscript writing to printed alphabetic writing. The Cole-

gio was the site of much of this work as the Franciscan friars and their indigenous informants and students sought to translate, transcribe, and transform indigenous knowledge, reframing it within the interrelated structures of Franciscan cosmology and Latin grammar. The New Philological approach to understanding this history, described by James Lockhart and represented in the work of Louise Burkhart and others, suggests that an analysis of the linguistics of early colonial Nahuatl can give insight into underlying patterns of cultural contact and transformation. The work of Walter Mignolo, Elizabeth Hill Boone, Barbara Mundy, and others extends this argument by exploring the interaction between indigenous systems of record-keeping and the alphabetic system introduced by the Spanish colonizers. Kelly McDonough's analysis of the printed *Artes* of Rincón, Olmos, and Molina, for example, shows how worldviews are inscribed in the representation of Nahuatl as an alphabetic language within the frameworks of Latin grammatology. My intervention in this conversation will be to look specifically at the structures imposed by the printing press on the representation of indigenous languages. This work will extend McDonough's argument by looking at the framing structures of orthography, line, page, and paratext, in the printing of Nahuatl grammars.

The Prescott case allows us to consider how transcription constituted a reframing of Mexico's early colonial documentary record in the context of transnational nineteenth-century historiography. William H. Prescott, arguably the first U.S. historian to gain an international reputation, is famous in part for his epic *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843). While there is a great deal of work to be done on the subject of Prescott's relationship with Mexico's documentary record (much of it ably studied by Anna Brickhouse and Lindsay Van Tine), in this chapter my focus will be on Prescott's relationship with the Mexican historian and bibliographer Joaquín García Icazbalceta. This interaction, which covered the pe-

riod of c.1847-1855, was initiated by Icazbalceta, who thought Prescott might be a more reliable source of historical documents than the politically complex archives in Spain. By contacting Prescott through his mentor Lucas Alamán, Icazbalceta unwittingly entered into a pre-existing network of documentary exchange through which Prescott had acquired many of his Mexican primary sources (including detailed descriptions of artifacts as well as transcribed documents). In return, Prescott helped to facilitate the transcription and shipment of several of his Mexican documents (themselves hand-transcribed copies of manuscript sources held in Spain) back to Mexico. Icazbalceta then used the Prescott transcriptions to print new editions of these foundational documents, including the histories of Oviedo and Motolinía. In examining this interaction, I will focus on the Prescott transcriptions and the Icazbalceta print editions (all held at the Benson Latin American Collection), looking specifically at how the multilingual and transnational conditions of this exchange shaped these ephemeral reproductions of Mexico's documentary record.

The final case study, which focuses on automatic transcription, considers how digitization can be seen as an additional stage in the long history of transcription described here. In considering the processes of optical character recognition used by the Reading the First Books project, I will apply the same kind of philological and social analysis used to analyze both the printed books from Tlatelolco and the Prescott transcriptions, treating the algorithm as a human-operated mechanism. At the same time, my purpose in conducting this analysis is to work against the facile association between early print and digital processes as well as the facile representation of processes of textual production as socially neutral, offering a colonial reading of automatic transcription.



### **Part 3: Return**

Like the previous two chapters, this chapter focuses on early colonial documents from Mexico and the processes of transcription, acquisition, and circulation that shape our access to those documents. Central to this chapter, however, which is set in the present day, are various strategies of postcolonial return related to the status of these documents as cultural heritage items. These strategies include so-called digital return, as in the case of *Primeros Libros* as well as bigger projects like Hathi Trust, EEBO, Google Books, etc. But they also include more material returns.

The growing popularity of digital return in recent years has provoked renewed interest in questions about artifact collection, ownership, organization, access, and use, particularly in the context of indigenous digital archiving (Bell, Christen, and Turin Christen Boserup). But these questions are not unique to the digital age. In the case of books and manuscripts, many have undergone a series of contextual shifts as they moved, for example, from convents to private libraries to publically owned archives and digital collections.

At the center of this chapter is the case of Puebla/Cholula, neighboring cities several hours south of Mexico City. Puebla is one of Mexico's oldest colonial cities, home to America's oldest public library (the Palafoxiana) and the second city in New Spain to establish a printing press (in the 1640s). Puebla is also home to the Universidad de las Americas. The city of Cholula predates Puebla considerably; at its heart is a pyramid that dates to the third century BCE, and a Nahua community settled there in the twelfth century. The city appears prominently in precolonial indigenous histories of Mesoamerica and continues to be home to a significant Nahua population.

The confluence of libraries, indigenous communities, and an academic in-

stitution make Cholula a valuable case study for addressing the question taken up by this chapter: How do new technologies mediate the return of cultural heritage to postcolonial communities? The Universidad de las Americas is one of the founding members of the Primeros Libros project and has a large program dedicated to the digitization of early colonial texts as cultural patrimony. A study of the projects at UDLA allows us to consider some of the assumptions and limitations that underlie the processes of “digital return,” as well as the promising future of digital libraries for the accessibility and discoverability of historical texts.

The Biblioteca Franciscana, meanwhile, located in a former Franciscan monastery in Cholula and funded by UDLA, proposes a very different kind of textual “return.” The library, which was established in 2000 (?), is dedicated to re-collecting the early colonial printed books that once belonged to the ecclesiastical libraries of colonial Mexico, attempting to recreate the intellectual culture of those historical sites by way of their book collections. This project returns the process of collection to the center of both cultural heritage and book history.

Finally, Kelly McDonough has been collaborating with the Benson to produce high quality print reproductions of the *Relaciones geográficas* and present them to the communities where the originals were produced. Kelly brought the first of these reproductions to Cholula this fall. The project of materially “returning” the *Relaciones geográficas* allows us to consider the stakes and engagements of indigenous communities in these processes of return and how they may work alongside or in conflict with projects oriented towards academia or the nation. Using anthropological methods - primarily interviews with key stakeholders in this project, including those from the community in Cholula - will allow me to bring other voices into this dissertation and explore its implications for the future of historical record-keeping, archiving, and reproduction.

## Part 4: Reproduction

The previous chapters, which were primarily historical, have been concerned with the means through which readers access the documentary record of early colonial Mexico, considering mechanisms of transcription and reproduction alongside processes of circulation and acquisition. This chapter takes a different approach to the question by considering how the texts of the early colonial period are made present in the modern imagination through fiction and poetry. It offers two methodological approaches to reading this imaginary.

The first method follows the model of traditional textual criticism by identifying and analyzing texts which take as their objects the documentary record of early colonial Mexico: books like the bestselling U.S. novel *Aztec* by Gary Jennings, or Carmen Boullosa's experimental work of science fiction *Cielos de la Tierra*. Jennings' *Aztec*, which has had widespread success in both the United States and Mexico, imagines itself as part of Mexico's documentary record: it is the transcribed text of an interview between Franciscan friars (under the surveillance of Juan de Zumárraga) and Mixtli, a Mexíca tlacuilo. Competing ideas about language, writing, and historical truth are embedded in the narrative; of equal interest for this project, however, is the way that Jennings' novel has been taken up as a source of historical truth, appearing in classrooms and the citations of academic texts (Chase, Chase, and Smith). In contrast, Boullosa's novel, which is more self-consciously interested in the implications of the historical record for the present and future, is a significant critique of the impulse to preserve and reproduce historical documents reflected throughout this dissertation. Together, these novels reflect two ways that Mexico's colonial historical record - and the academic discourse that surrounds it - is represented and critiqued within the fictional imaginary.

The second method offers a bibliographical approach to influence that considers not the textual legacy of these historical documents, but their material presence in contemporary textual production. As a case study, I turn to the Taller Martín Pescador, one of the most influential small letterpresses in Latin America. The Taller Martín Pescador (Kingfisher Workshop), operated by Juan Pascoe and located in Michoacán, Mexico, is one of the most influential small letterpress operations of Latin America. The press was founded in Mexico City in 1975, where it served as the center of a vibrant community of avant-garde poets, including Efraín Huerta, Carmen Boullosa, and Roberto Bolaño. As Pascoe explained in an interview, “The Taller Martín Pescador was in those years a meeting-place. Poets came, they proposed books, they helped me to make them. There would be a presentation, I would meet more writers the books were like a prolongation of the party” (Pablos 28). That community would later be memorialized as the Visceral Realists in Bolaño’s celebrated novel *Los detectives salvajes* (1998).

After relocating to Michoacán, however, Pascoe’s interests turned to historical print production. In honor of the 450th anniversary of the arrival of the printing press in the Americas, Pascoe began to produce a series of imprints dedicated to printing in early colonial Mexico. These volumes are a radical form of critical scholarly editing, bringing the mechanics of historical print production to bear on the production of the critical edition. An edition of the seventh volume of Bernardino de Sahagún’s canonical sixteenth-century study of indigenous Mexican religions, for example, was produced in an accordion form reminiscent of Mesoamerican codices: “It represented a typographical challenge,” Pascoe said, “to achieve a form that would reflect the content of the text” (28). Similarly, Pascoe’s bibliographical examination of the work of the sixteenth-century printer Cornelio Adrian César sought to replicate the unique printing practices of the original even as

it described the printer's corpus. In this case, the form allows access to a historical materiality that has faded over time. As Pascoe remarked, "The result is leaves that are closer to what [Adrian César] gave to his clients than the actual originals that we conserve" (33).

My study of the Taller Martín Pescador is concerned with the ways that the press embodies an intimate relationship between form and content, colonial and avant-garde. Through a close bibliographical study of the texts produced by the press, I seek to better understand the influence of early colonial aesthetics on the postmodern literature of the 1970s and 1980s. By asking "what aspects of colonial printing are revived in the Taller Martín Pescador chapbooks?" I seek to understand how the aesthetics of the avant-garde are informed by the legacy of Spanish colonization. Conversely, by asking, "what aspects of the Mexican avant-garde inform Pascoe's critical scholarly editions?" I consider how contemporary aesthetics shape our engagement with the colonial past. Together, these questions allow for a reading of the legacy of early modern print culture that takes us beyond the constraints of both the Europe-centered Gutenberg galaxy and the progressivism of the digital imaginary. The chapter will focus on Carmen Boullosa's *La salvaja* (1988), Roberto Bolaño's *Reinventar el amor* (1976), and the editions of Bernardino de Sahagún, Enrico Martínez, and Cornelio Adrian César.

This chapter offers an analysis of two forms of imaginative engagement with Mexico's documentary record: the symbolic repurposing of these texts within the novels of Jennings and Boullosa, on the one hand, and the material reproduction of early colonial aesthetics, on the other. The coming together of these two approaches to Mexico's colonial history is an uneasy confluence that has plagued this project from its first instantiation almost two years ago; it remains problematic in the conceptualization of this dissertation.

## Conclusion

This dissertation offers four distinct ways of considering the long history and continuing legacy of Mexico's early colonial legacy: circulation, transcription, return, and reuse. It brings a colonial perspective to questions that are central to the study of historiography, archival fashioning, and digital humanities:

- What is the indexical relationship between historiography and the historical record?
- What structures shape access to the historical record, and how do those structures impact our understanding of the past?
- What kinds of transformations occur as the documents that make up the historical record are moved, reorganized, and transcribed?
- What kind of imaginary informs our relationship with the documentary record, and how is that imaginary made present through material and literary culture?
- What are the continuances or ruptures that occur in our relationship with the past as the documentary record is digitized?

In moving forward, certain questions remain unaddressed:

- Structurally, this dissertation has been flexible if not downright fluid: there is room for reworking as we think about both the narrative of the dissertation and the cases which make up the body of the work.
- Theoretically, this dissertation draws on the postcolonial/decolonial work of scholars of historiography and archival theory, but its engagement with theo-

ries of silence, violence, affect, and trauma remains tenuous. What role will these theories have in informing the dissertation?

- Language and linguistics are at the center of this dissertation, yet my knowledge of the languages at stake (particularly Nahuatl) and their linguistic structures is incomplete. What is the humble and responsible way to approach these challenges?
- The scope of this dissertation is ambitious. How can we retain the spirit while ensuring timeliness?

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