

The Efficiency Toolkit: A Subversive Manual

Andrea Kohashi

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Article abstract

As libraries increasingly turn to automated systems to make materials more available, they inadvertently create less accessible collections. The Efficiency Toolkit is an artists' book exploring the implications of automation and efficiency innovations in human work. Using this bookwork as a point of provocation, the difference between the accessibility and availability of library materials is highlighted and the desire for innovation and efficiency in the workplace is questioned.

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The Efficiency Toolkit: A Subversive Manual

Andrea Kohashi

Virginia Commonwealth University

ABSTRACT

As libraries increasingly turn to automated systems to make materials more available, they inadvertently create less accessible collections. The Efficiency Toolkit is a collection of five artists' books and book objects exploring the implications of automation and efficiency innovations in human work. Using this bookwork as a point of provocation, the difference between the accessibility and availability of library materials is highlighted and the desire for innovation and efficiency in the workplace is questioned.

Keywords: book art · efficiency

RÉSUMÉ

Comme les bibliothèques se tournent de plus en plus vers des systèmes automatisés pour augmenter la disponibilité des documents, elles créent par inadvertance des collections moins accessibles. The Efficiency Toolkit est une collection de cinq livres d'artistes et d'objets qui explorent les implications des innovations en matière d'automatisation et d'efficacité du travail humain. En utilisant ce livre comme un point de provocation, la différence entre l'accessibilité et la disponibilité des documents de la bibliothèque est mise en évidence et le désir d'innovation et d'efficacité sur le lieu de travail est remis en question.

Mots-clés : art du livre · efficacité

Artist's Statement

As a book artist, I rely on “outmoded” technologies from letterpress printing to hand book-binding, with the keen awareness that these modes of production were once the progenitors of change in the name of efficiency and innovation—letterpress printing superseding the handwritten and bound codices replacing cumbersome scrolls. The methods and tools of production, the text, the paratext, and image, all play a role in the meaning-making of my work. I operate within a value system which often eschews contemporary conceptions of innovation and efficiency, sacrificing larger



edition sizes or faster production schedules because those choices have implications in the viewer's understanding of the piece as a whole. In addition to my identity as a book artist, I am a librarian in Special Collections and Archives, where I work with materials that inherently resist efficient description and organization. In the institutionalized effort to prove increased productivity and efficiency, access to more items is often valued over greater access to one item, but the reality is it's a zero-sum game. Providing meaningful access to rare and unique items frequently requires laborious processing or original cataloguing and, much like producing artists' books, these inefficient methods are integral to the access and understanding of these collection materials.

Comprising five artists' books and book objects housed in a handmade box, *The Efficiency Toolkit* explores the human desire to be more productive. Presented outwardly as a pedagogical tool, the work adapts texts, images, and concepts from Lillian and Frank Gilbreth and Ralph Barnes, pioneers and researchers from the early to mid-twentieth century in the field of motion economy studies and work methods. Upon further examination, the piece, rather than being instructive, is a provocation to investigate the absurd and potentially detrimental and dehumanizing aspects of striving for efficiency.

Videos

YouTube videos where I demonstrate *The Efficiency Toolkit* and each of its five artists' books and book objects:

[Full playlist](#)

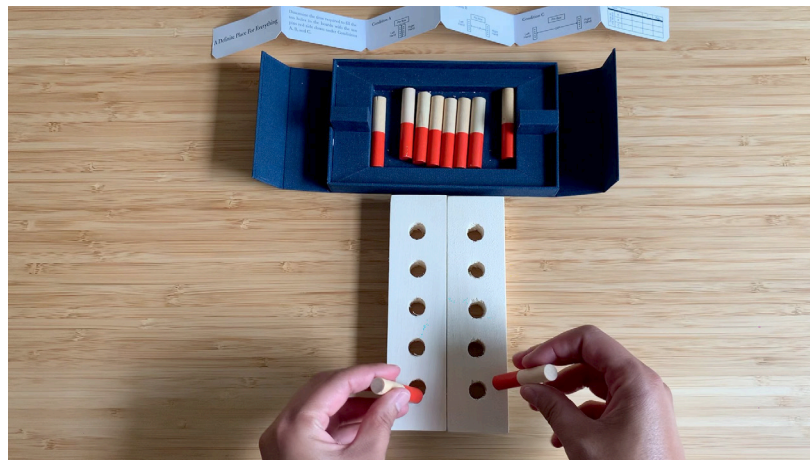
[Efficiency Toolkit \(Full piece in housing\)](#)



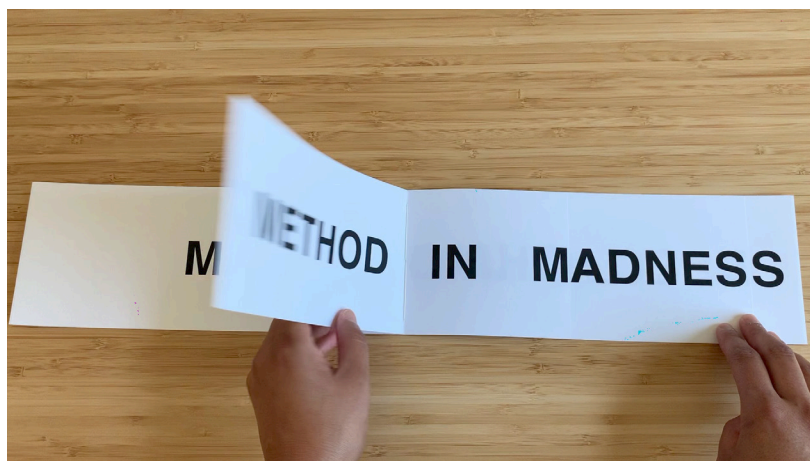
Work Methods Manual



A Definite Place for Everything



*(asterisk book)



A Study of Simultaneous Symmetrical Hand Motions



Flashcards



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Andrea Kohashi is a book artist and librarian residing in Richmond, Virginia. She is the Teaching and Learning Librarian at Virginia Commonwealth University's Special Collections and Archives. Her areas of interest include Book Arts creation, research, and scholarship as well as engagement with primary source materials. Kohashi holds an M.A. in Library and Information Science and an M.F.A. in Book Arts from the University of Iowa. She received a B.A. with a major in architecture from Washington University in St. Louis.