

PETER RUTLEDGE KOCH

EMBODIED LANGUAGE

THE BOOK AS CRAFT AND CONCEPT

🧙‍♂️ ESSAYS ON ART AND MAGIC



THE CODEx FOUNDATION 🧙‍♂️ BERKELEY 2026

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EMBODIED LANGUAGE

THE BOOK AS CRAFT AND CONCEPT

“The distinguishing characteristic of a book we call “magical” is the presence of an aura that excites the imagination and imparts a sense of mystery. I am not referring here to a grimoire or books about magic, but rather to books that exhibit a palpable radiance emanating from the work itself, books *made of* magic — magical books.”

EMBODIED LANGUAGE: *The Book as Craft and Concept* is a collection of four essays that distill fifty+ years of thinking and practice in the arts of printing, poetry, and collage. The essays trace the history and formation of a unique field – the auratic *Gesamtkunstwerk* or “total book” – invoking ancient concepts of Craft that have evolved for thousands of years, transmitted through Neoplatonic thought, to become the book as metaphysical instrument (*via* Mallarmé) in the modern world.

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard has warned us in *The Poetics of Reverie* that “hands dream” and in extraordinary circumstances, the active principle of the artist and the poet is to employ the creative imagination in the struggle to constitute itself. These four pieces were written to “essay a thought” describing the emergence of a metaphysical paradigm, and illuminate the book as a work of art and magic.

Inviting the Book as an artform into open discourse, Koch supplies a context for the work he most admires. Evoking the philosophical foundations of his mentors, William Everson, Adrian Wilson, Sandra Kirshenbaum, and Jack Stauffacher, Koch proceeds to describe the works of his contemporaries, Carolee Campbell, Clemens-Tobias Lange, Russell Maret, and Veronica Schaeppers, that illustrate his thesis of the “Third Stream Book,” a concept that borrows heavily from an essay by Kirshenbaum describing the “printer’s book” as the form that offers the most authentic expression of the book as a total work of art.

The final essay introduces a fresh thought experiment: *The Poetry Musaeum* — as a locus for exploring the materiality of language.

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