he has sold publicly. I buy every revision. Its doorstop bulk makes it daunting, but I dip into it and adapt sections of it for my own Masters and PhD bibliography courses. It isn’t really a syllabus but rather a set of bibliographies of bibliographies. Navigating your way around the dozens of headings, sub-headings, sections and divisions is far from easy. Sometimes they are arranged alphabetically, sometimes chronologically, sometimes in groups within those listings. So it’s all a little random and not at all as systematic and well organised as you might expect. The four pages of subject index at the end help although, always a mystery, the index is shorter than the outline of contents at the beginning. Nevertheless for an overview of bibliographies on the history of bibliography, bibliographical reference works, printing, publishing history, descriptive bibliography, paper, ink, typography, illustration, binding, and analytical bibliography, this is as good a place to start as any. There will be far more and yet far less than you need on any particular topic: more, because there is a lot of old, even outdated material here; less, because the more you know about a subject the less adequate someone else’s bibliography of it is. But given that it is not, as Tanselle admits, a formal publication, its idiosyncrasies may be forgiven.


This is a how-to manual by one of the leading book designers in Great Britain. Normally concerned with construction, Johnson here gives advice on reconstruction and repair. Interesting though some of the processes are, I wouldn’t dream of attempting them.

The book begins with a very general overview of why we like books and how they have been constructed. Johnson proceeds to half a page of notes for the professional bookbinder, and the warning that first editions should not in any case be rebound. But if you get that far and do decide to rebind, the damage he describes is horribly depressing: dog eared leaves, tears, worm holes, missing leaves, marks, stains, fungal spores, loose plates, unusual numbering or section arrangement and, innocently slipped into that list, amateur repairs. There is a single page on how to do a collation before you begin the
work. Then you'll need a nipping press, sewing frame, board chopper, laying press, plans chest, light box, cutting mat, photographer's large tray in glass or enamel, secured cupboard for chemicals, finishing press, boxes of hand letters, pallets, mitred fillets, gold pad, knife and plough, as well as "the usual hand tools." You'll of course have all kinds of papers to hand and a good collection of cloth, boards, tapes, cord, thread, adhesives, gold leaf, foils and dyes, but if not there are pages of suppliers' addresses at the back. You'll need chemicals, though he doesn't say exactly which ones.

It is difficult to know who this book is aimed at. Far too superficial for a professional and too ludicrous for an amateur, it is interesting as a guide to what bookbinding is about. It nicely demonstrates the construction of a book. There are nearly a hundred illustrations, Johnson's own very clear, useful drawings, illustrating processes and techniques. The vocabulary of bookbinding is quite well explained along the way, perhaps the book's best feature. But to imagine going to work on a book based on the suggestions and methods offered here is absurd.

Don't try this at home.

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