Revelatory Words and Images: William Blake and the Artist's Book

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Revelatory Words and Images:  
William Blake and the Artist’s Book

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Part I

Chapter 1: William Blake: the illuminated book as a unified vision

*Text as Image, Book as Art*

The works of the Romantic poet, printer, and visionary William Blake invite explorations about the relationship between word and image. Blake’s illustrations in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, revelatory unto themselves, often subtly undercut or complicate the meanings of his writings, offering a complex view of the songs as both literary creations and artistic objects. Through close interpretations of the engraved plates, this paper examines the conflicting appearances of the illustrations in relation to the text. Significantly, I contend that the material elements in the images, such as colors and forms, symbolize larger metaphysical ideas; for example, the evolving copies depict the rises and falls of humanity. Merging literature and visual art, the illuminated books elucidate the interplay between format and content, revealing the fascinating experiment between word and image.

In creating his own works, Blake envisioned the illustrated book as an ideal form bringing together into unity text and image, with the power to join the author and the reading public. The illustrated book, with its “ideal union of word and design,” required the reader’s active engagement and perception.¹ At the same time, Blake recognized that eighteenth-century book production “failed to realize the potential of its form,” as “divisions existed between author, illustrator, engraver, printer, and publisher.” Instead, he brought together the roles of artist and printer, in essence “transferring the stages of

artistic production into one creative act.”² In imagining the book’s potential to create dynamic interactions between text and reader, and in uniting the roles of artist, printer, and publisher as embodied by one person, Blake radically reimagined the book as a material process. As Kay Parkhurst Easson writes, this singular vision of illuminated printing aimed “to create anew both the illustrated book and its reader, to bring into relief the infinite form of the book hidden by fragmentations of its art.”³ Yet beyond its potential to unify disparate elements, the book emerges as a vehicle for communicating ideas, perhaps taking on an agency of its own.

Blake’s innovative method of printmaking – called relief etching – awakened new possibilities for artistic production. Trained in the craft of engraving, Blake self-published his works. His visionary form translates into a physical structure, with distinct qualities – as Blake used unconventional techniques while adhering to traditional printmaking methods, the illuminated books at once suggest earlier medieval manuscripts, and gesture forward into interactive media and virtual space. In this way, Blake and today’s independent book artists can be seen on a continuum: as Blake employed retrospective methods to create sophisticated illustrations, artists’ books similarly gesture a return to handmade crafts and traditional bookmaking. Blake’s vision of the “artist’s book” forms a connection between the conventional book form and the art object – anticipating later aesthetic movements in this unified process of artistic creation – such as contemporary artist’s books that invite multiple non-linear, fragmentary readings of the text.⁴

³ Easson, p. 35.
⁴ Ruth Rogers, Rare Beauty: Contemporary Visions in Book Arts, (Joseloff Gallery, Hartford Art School, University of Hartford, 2012), p. 3.
In a constant interplay between word and images, the illuminated books comprise both literary and visual elements that coincide with, coalesce into, and oftentimes contradict each other. The addition of a visual dimension stimulates the reader’s engagement, in a “transmutation of his vision from reasoned analysis to imaginative participation.”\(^5\) However, the reader’s interactions with the book are not merely ‘imaginative,’ but active, as the experience of reading integrates tactile and kinesthetic elements. Blake reconceived the reader’s role as viewer, integrating the reader as part of the creative process, stimulating interactions between the reader/viewer’s sensory perceptions and the literary and visual qualities within the text. Within this ideal, the visionary and metaphysical elements project themselves unto three-dimensional, physical space.

*Images in the Illustrations*

Invoking a pastoral world, Blake presents a vision of unity preexisting the dichotomies of experience – in which the human and the divine coexist. Even so, a rich tapestry of symbolism informs the moral universe – human and animal forms, sprawling vegetation, natural landscapes, and diffuse colors and patterns appear on the plates. Several recurrent images or motifs run through the illustrations and are interspersed throughout the poems: the piper, for example, who invokes the muse in the introduction to the songs, or the twisting vines, symbolizing the complications of experience existing within a state of innocence. At the core of the biblical imagery is the child, a central

\(^5\) Easson, p. 37.
figure representing innocence, and the lamb and the shepherd, in their union symbolizing Christ.

A look through the plates reveals the array of images, natural and abstract, that appear across the pages. Blake modified illustrations for the same piece throughout multiple copies; with changes in tint and hue, the images themselves undergo transformations, as, for example, in two copies of “The Little Girl Lost” – in one pencil, in another, rich pastel watercolors create the appearance of a sunset. As Easson writes, the variable copies run in counterpoint to the static pictures seen in contemporary mechanical representations. Various patterns and motifs occur in some instances, but not others, suggesting natural, organic growth as opposed to mechanical reproduction; the images embody living forms that extend or interrupt geometric exactitude.6 Beyond signifying an organic evolution, however, the illustrations create rich, multidimensional layers of meaning: the images express the contrary states of being, the mutating forms reflecting the ambiguities and tensions within experience. An individual reader can view only one unique copy, making this evolution less apparent, yet multiple readers across various special collections might derive different experiences while viewing contrasting copies. On the Blake Archive online, one can trace the changes across the copies of a single plate, from their initial conception into organically evolving forms.7

The unique visual symbolism complements the written imagery. More than merely serving as illustrations for the text, the engraved plates enrich the argument and expand upon the ideas, exposing the ambiguities and complexities hidden within the

6 Ibid.
7 See Coda.
language. The images work closely with the text, in a mutually complementary relationship, adding another layer of meaning that begs for interpretation.

“Introduction” to Songs of Experience

Figure 2. Copy C, 1789, 1794, Library of Congress

Images of the fallen world intersperse both the text and the accompanying image; in this interplay between the visual/verbal elements, each carries a greater symbolic meaning. The physical elements invite viewing and looking, both as poetic phrases and as visual art. An array of interrelated natural elements comprises the poem: the “evening
“dew” upon which the “lapsed Soul” weeps, the “starry floor,” and the “watry shore” contain heightened visual imagery. Illuminating these descriptions, the engraved plate shows an expansive cosmos, a black night sky punctured by stars. The scene conveys the sense of the eternal present as seen by the Bard in the past, present, and future; in its cosmic vision, the illustration reaches beyond spatial and temporal dimensions into a higher realm as imagined by the poem. The text, describing the fall, appears on a cloud; surrounding this is the emptiness of the night sky. Appearing in the foreground, the “lapsed Soul,” is depicted as a woman, in the traditionally gendered illustrations of the earth as female. Additionally, the word “soul,” signifying the human spirit, is gendered female in several languages – in Latin as “anima,” in Spanish as “alma.” The figure has a nude form; her face, in partial view, seems at the delicate cusp of turning back toward the viewer, as though about to answer, as the earth answers in the next poem. In these ways, the figure parallels the earth’s movements, yet embodies these notions – the curvature of the body, with its distinctly human form, reconceives the text’s abstractions – natural, inanimate elements comprise the lines, while the figure emphasizes the human aspect. Though the text is suggestive of the human consciousness that enacts the fall, the illustration provides a literal manifestation of the poem’s central subject: humanity, with its continual rises and falls, its movements from sin into redemption.
The subtly evolving copies of this plate weave their own narratives through various colors. The images reflect the contrary states of innocence and experience. Different copies convey varying tones of lightness and darkness and contrasting blue, yellow, gray, and purple watercolors; each version casts a distinct essence upon the lyric and our interpretation. In the copy shown above, the light beige color in the background has been muted into a darker orange-brown. Whereas before the earth became illuminated by the rosy flesh and light blue environs as though a muse from the clouds of
“Innocence,” in this image she becomes obscured by the mingled purple and blue hues. In the movement from clarity to obscurity, the earth has descended from its elevated, heavenly realm into vague, indeterminate territories; our view has been obfuscated as this presence is concealed and shrouded from our gaze. As the earth’s character is eclipsed, this version renders a darker portrayal of humanity’s fall into sin. This earth seems to be a “lapsed soul…weeping in the evening dew;” night has “worn” humanity in this image. The figure appears tainted or perhaps corrupted by experience, embroiled within the confines of human consciousness and degenerated from its previously elevated state in the former illustration. In the former, the earth still inhabits the “starry floor” and “watery shore;” in the latter the speaker pleads more vehemently, “O Earth, O Earth return!” Yet in this depicted obscurity, the extent of the earth’s “fall” remains veiled and ambiguous. Later copies reveal a halo around the earth’s head, as well as a brightened cosmos. This revision by an older Blake might signify a return to the notion of a more innocent earth; in this way the cyclical rises and falls emerge as natural and organic, as integral as the changing of the seasons.

Textual interpretations

Within the Songs of Experience, several lyrics explore the theme of prophecy, anticipating Blake’s later prophetic works, including Milton and Jerusalem. While presenting humanity’s fall into experience, these poems invite the notion of a future redemptive time beyond the fall – into what some critics have called “a higher

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innocence,” an elevated spiritual realm. In addition, the illustrations accompanying these poems offer an especially interesting and complicated relationship to the text, both the visual and verbal elements contributing to the larger symbolic meaning – such as the state of human consciousness, and the evolving figure of the Bard. In the following close readings, I look through different angles at three distinct, yet interrelated pieces within Blake’s creative output – first, the “Introduction” and “Earth’s Answer,” then two corresponding lyrics exploring the progression from innocence into experience in “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found,” and finally, a glimpse of experience as an encompassing whole in “The Voice of an Ancient Bard.” Each lyric reveals a particular lens into the moral and spiritual imagination of the Songs, moments wrested from a continuous tapestry that shine light upon the whole.

In the “Introduction” to Songs of Experience, Blake introduces the Bard, a prophet-like figure who “Present, Past, & Future sees” – existing in an “eternal present” uninhibited by “linear time.” A voice of prophecy, the speaker conjures an expansive vision as depicted in the illustration, in which the dark night sky suggests the emptiness of the cosmos. The Bard holds great perceptive powers, endowed with senses of sight and hearing. In Blake’s version of the Biblical story, however, he subtly revises the text, reconstructing the narrative of creation and the fall into sin. For example, while in Genesis God walks through the garden, here the “Word” walks “among the ancient trees.” The “Word” suggests the significance of language in the original creation; perhaps the poet is the creator rather than God. The poet conveys the divine “word” to readers in

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10 Robert N. Essick, Songs of Innocence and of Experience (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 2008), p. 91.
the form of a book. In whole, the piece illustrates a narrative of the fall into sin, in a
cyclical progression from the fall into redemption, inviting a new age of spiritual
enlightenment.

In the second stanza, the speaker summons the earth to redeem the fallen physical
world and elevate human consciousness to a higher spiritual state. Human beings, having
lost “control” of the “starry pole” upon the fall, have reverted to the material domain;
significantly, however, the earth’s cyclical movement allows for an eventual progression
upward. The syntactic inversion illustrates this cycle – as the speaker bids “fallen fallen
light renew!” renewal reverses the fallen spirit. The physical variation in line lengths
suggests this narrative of the fall as well – as Robert N. Essick writes, the “contraction
and expansion of line lengths mirror the pattern of Blake’s myth of creation, fall, and
redemption: the contraction of the infinite into the finite, followed at the end of time by a
return to the infinite.”

11 Intriguingly, however, looking across the various copies of the
plates, the physical layout of the lines remains constant, while the images evolve as the
colors lighten and darken. Some light tints offer a more innocent view of the human
domain, while dark gray and brown hues expose the earth’s corruption. In these
successive rises and falls, the earth undergoes cycles of retreating and advancing, the
mutating hues of the illustrations mirroring the spiritual transformations.

In the third stanza, as “Night” passes into the “morn,” with time comes a new age;
the Earth “rises from the slumberous mass,” from its material domain into a spiritual
realm. The speaker entreats the earth to “turn away no more,” for humanity to renounce
its spiritual transgressions. The “turn away” refers in a literal sense to the diurnal cycle,

11 Essick, p. 92.
in which “the earth literally turns on its axis away from the sun, and turns back again at dawn.” Additionally, in a dialogue between format and content, the designs augment the meaning. The evolving images in the copies mirror the earth’s revolutions, in its cyclical movement from darkness to light, from the fall to redemption. These movements invite the possibility of regeneration and transformation. Why does the earth turn away, the speaker asks, if the “starry floor” and “wat’ry shore” are there “till the break of day?” In this movement, the earth renews its vitality, conjuring its redemptive powers once more.

“Earth’s Answer”

\[12\] Ibid.
The illustrations accompanying “Introduction” and “Earth’s Answer” amplify the opposition between accentuating the two poems’ contrary natures – the terrestrial and the cosmic. The two images juxtapose earth and sky – the expansive night sky depicted in the “Introduction,” and the leaves and tendrils spinning through “Earth’s Answer.” In a particularly interesting interplay, the vines in “Earth’s Answer” seem to be twisted in the shape of the cloud in the “Introduction,” and if superimposed upon the design to the former poem, the foliage could run along the border between cloud and sky. Whereas the border in “Introduction” separates the white cloud from the black cosmos, in “Earth’s
“Answer” is the sky is blue, the tendrils green. The visual dichotomy between the two poems becomes even more apparent when viewing the illustrations: the tendrils wrap around the border in the same shape as the border of the cloud in “Innocence.” In a stark opposition of earthly and cosmic dimensions, the living tendrils exist in the space inhabited by the night sky in the former illustration. The illustrations display in a literal and metaphysical sense this duality and contrast, revealing the conflicting nature and irreconcilable states of being within experience.

Text

While Blake presents a cosmic perspective in the “Introduction,” describing a fallen universe, in “Earth’s Answer” he explores the terrestrial domain as an embodiment of the human spirit. With its alternating expanding and contracting lines, this poem mirrors the form of “Introduction,” serving as its symmetrical counterpart. Upon hearing the Bard’s call, Earth rises up from “the darkness dread & drear.” Personified as a woman – “her locks cover’d with grey despair,” Earth relates her lamentations through the stanzas, bespeaking despair and suffering.

In this poem, Earth speaks in parallel to “Introduction,” yet opposes its claims: whereas in the “Introduction,” the Bard presents the “starry floor” and “wat’ry shore” as positive, elevating influences, Earth reverses this notion, lamenting that she has been “Prison’d on watry shore,” where “Starry Jealousy” keeps her within a “den/Cold and hoar.” While God had been “weeping in the evening dew” over the “lapsed Soul,” here Earth weeps as one who is subjected to oppression. Earth further invokes the language in the “Introduction,” but distorts its meaning – instead of hearing “the Holy Word that
walked among the ancient trees,” she hears the “father of the ancient men” – a wrathful God. Contrary to the Bard’s call to “renew” the “fallen fallen light,” Earth’s “light” has “fled,” and she remains within the “dark corners of consciousness.”

In the third stanza, Earth’s lamentations become intensified with cutting specificity – she describes God as the “Selfish father of men,” with his “Cruel jealous selfish fear,” each word spilling from the last. The selfish father has “chain’d in night” the “delight” of the “virgins of youth and morning.” In Blake’s view, sexuality becomes tainted when bound by conventional morality; the speaker spurns those who cast desire as a shameful sin, repressed by secrecy in the night. In the fourth stanza, Earth turns to the phenomenon of nature, asking, “Does spring hide its joy?” and “Does the sower/Sow by night?” As “spring” does not “hide its joy,” nor the “plowman in darkness plow,” so, the speaker entreats, human beings likewise ought to act freely without shame. The language evokes fertility, the “buds and blossoms” of spring and the reaping of the plowman’s harvest as natural states of being, cyclical in movement. In the same way, desire, as a natural condition, should not be bound by artificial constraints – or undergo regeneration and rebirth only within the confines of night.

As the fifth stanza begins, Earth’s pleadings become ever more intensified, exposing her state of despair and bondage. Realizing the extent of her suffering, she sounds a cry for liberation: “Break this heavy chain/That does freeze my bones around.” The physical chains bind her from spiritual enlightenment, causing acute pain that reaches the bones. In a surprisingly modern critique, the poem extends from an initially distanced cosmic vision to illustrate the greater human condition of enslavement to rule and convention. With heightened emotions, she pronounces direct exclamations in tones
of anguish: “Selfish! Vain:/Eternal bane!” Earth’s subordinated condition reflects the
tendency during that time to associate women’s desire with sin; repression keeps “free
Love” in “bondage,” unable to be released from this grasp and ascend to liberation.

Within its larger progression, the poem moves from abstract references at the
beginning of the poem – images of darkness and light – to more personal lamentations of
subjection to an oppressive force. This gradual movement produces a heightened
emotional effect – as each stanza develops, the speaker progresses from detachment to
involvement, pulling away from the Bard’s abstractions. Viewed in relation to one
another, the two poems exist within a dynamic contrast: while the “Introduction” is
cosmic in scope, “Earth’s Answer” exposes the psychological undercurrents of the human
condition, as Earth refuses to heed the prophetic call for redemption. Presenting the
earthly fall into experience and subsequent regeneration, the two lyrics illustrate repeated
cycles of birth and death, growth and backward movement.
“The Little Girl Lost”

In the first engraved plate accompanying “The Little Girl Lost,” a young woman seems to be caught in the grasp of a lover and desirous of liberty. Is she attempting to flee, and if so, why? Interpreting this tension in the context of Blake’s prophetic vision for the poem might suggest her unhappiness in this state and her struggles to transcend to spiritual realms, achieving redemption. Significantly, her hand is pointing upward: in this view, she reaches beyond the physical, emerging at a higher spiritual state of being.

The poem’s truncated, simple lines provide a sharp contrast to the fluid hues and merging colors of the illustration, whose flowing watercolors delicately qualify the
printed text. Contrary to the statement that “the summer’s prime/Never fades away,” on
the painting we see varying hues, an array of vibrant colors that fuse into each other.
Light pastel colors, pinks and yellows, provide a translucent background to the scene, the
layers of color evoking a sunset. Several contradictions become apparent: though the
poem tells us that she has seen “Seven Summers,” the illustration reveals her true age;
Lyca exists in a state of maturity, or reaching maturity, on the delicate cusp of
womanhood. The illustration, with the rounded figures suggesting adult forms, subverts
the notion that its protagonist remains sheltered by simplicity and naiveté. Instead, the
curvature of the bodies, especially the woman’s, suggests their mature age. While the
male seems relatively stable, the female figure is suspended in a moment of struggle, as a
statue portrays movement within stillness. With its distinctly human forms, the
illustration further animates and complicates the poem’s seeming simplicity and
measured rhythms, providing a glimpse of tangled experience.
In this version, the radiant watercolors have been muted into a darker blue-gray hue. While Lyca inhabits a land “where the summer’s prime / Never fades away,” the skies are now overcast, foreseeing the darkness impending. This bleak vision suggests the chaotic, primordial “desert wild” falling into nighttime before it brightens into a “garden mild” upon the coming day. As the evening fades into dusk, the image is obscured, as Lyca is on the verge of becoming tainted and corrupted. Across the various copies, the images express the contrary states of being, ranging from delicate, subtle scenes to rich,
contoured landscapes. The mutating forms reflect the ambiguities and tensions within experience, exposing Lyca’s gradual transformation into adulthood.

“The Little Girl Found”

Moreover, the illustrations do not solely complicate the individual lyrics, but interact with corresponding poems and illustrations; the related symbols and figures form a larger development or narrative arc. Tracing this development, the several plates relating to Lyca serve as dynamic reflections and mirrorings of one another: As Norma A. Greco explains, the characterization of Lyca serves as a contrast to the figure of Ona.
in the related poem “A Little Girl Lost.”\footnote{Greco, p. 147.} Ona, who is burdened by the weight of experience, suffers from repression by her father and is unable to achieve physical and spiritual freedom. In the illustration to “A Little Girl Lost,” we see a darkened, decaying tree; the branches convey signs of death, as do the ominous birds flying overhead. Lyca, on the other hand, achieves a higher level of being, pointing her hand upward even while restrained by the male figure’s grasp. The first plate also serves as a counterpoint to an earlier depiction of Eve, on the title page of the *Songs*, as she is cast out of Eden; Lyca reverses Eve’s path leading the way back to the garden. In this reading, Blake presents Lyca’s path toward redemption from original sin.

The repetition and enlargement among the various plates open up to greater issues; larger thematic patterns and narratives emerge, and the images reveal complications hidden within the text. In Lyca’s progression from innocence unto experience, she undergoes a spiritual death followed by a rebirth – completing the “initiation into womanhood” that parallels the earth’s movement toward redemption. Ona provides a contrast to Lyca, as she remains bound to the “blighted world of experience” – serving as a symbolic opposite through which Lyca may emerge.\footnote{Ibid.}

**Text**

The corresponding lyrics “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” continue the theme of prophecy – exploring the realm of dreams and the psyche. In this way, the poems anticipate Blake’s later prophetic poetry. The first poem opens on a grand vision, broad in scope: “In futurity/I prophetic see” – the speaker, the Bard, establishes
and invites us to consider his own visionary powers. Upon redemption, the earth “from sleep…Shall arise and seek/For her maker meek,” progressing from a state of passivity to one of action. As the earth moves from sleep to wakefulness, as it “shall arise and seek,” Lyca follows a similar pattern in her movement from the unconscious to the conscious state. In the mirroring between the two, Lyca emerges as the figure by which the earth can achieve redemption.

The imagery of the opening lines invites a view into a natural environment, which exhibits questionable qualities suggesting potential corruption even within the world of innocence. The “desert wild,” a chaotic, primordial space at once of nothingness and perhaps of experience, takes on an agency of its own in giving life and energy to events, but in time becomes a “garden mild,” suggesting a return to the Garden of Eden through redemption, and perhaps evoking the “balmy airs” of the Eden in Milton’s Paradise Lost. (“Wild,” it may be noted, occurs again a few lines later, in apparent innocence – she hears the “wild bird’s song.”) The descriptions suggest an expansive physical landscape – as the speaker describes, Lyca had “wandered long” – in these wanderings, there is the potential to stray from a straight path and venture into unknown territories and possibilities, suggesting that she remains yet vulnerable and malleable, not quite fully formed.

The following stanzas, presented as quotations in Lyca’s voice, invite a subtle play between “weep” and “sleep” – at first, she calls for sleep, asking, “Do father, mother weep,/Where can Lyca sleep?” In the next stanza, the relationship between the preceding two lines is complicated: “How can Lyca sleep/If father, mother weep?” In the move from one to another, the states become conditional upon each other – Lyca cannot sleep if
father, mother weep, nor can she have a place to do so. In the following stanza, the statements take another turn:

If her heart does ake
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep,
Lyca shall not weep.

Here, in an interesting reciprocal relationship, the mother’s heartache wakes Lyca, and in another reversal of causation, Lyca’s tears are determined by whether her mother sleeps. This interchange presents an interesting juxtaposition between two psychological states: weeping may be viewed as guilt arising from excessive pleasure. To sleep poses dangers: of passivity and unconsciousness, of not knowing and not doing; Lyca’s inaction makes her vulnerable to being corrupted and violated.

In nighttime, the moon arises rather than the earth, a counterbalance that tips the scale from day unto night, inviting a figurative darkness, the possibility of transformation. She conjures the moon, whose light is also “bright” and illuminating. Viewing her asleep, the “beasts of prey,” leopards, tygers, and lions, emerge from “caverns deep,” surrounding her. The beasts create a lively scene in their play, the lion becoming the central figure viewing her as object. As he licks her bosom, “upon her neck/From his eyes of flame/Ruby tears there came.” The phrase is syntactically complicated, the lion’s ruby tears dropping from his “eyes of flame” upon her neck, or perhaps a second interpretation, in which the ruby tears emerge from within her eyes. “Ruby” suggests blood or poison, the corrupting venom or fluid entering her body, or perhaps the acid dripping from the printer’s engraving tools. While the liquid signifies Lyca’s transformation, the lion appearing in the illustration is “painted,” possibly also with acid. The lioness, in turn, partakes in the act, unloosening her dress. Another
sentence inversion occurs in the last line, as “naked they convey’d/To caves the sleeping maid,” and again, the nakedness signifies Lyca’s exposed and corruptible state, while the placement of the word “naked” might also refer to the lions themselves.

“The Little Girl Found,” by contrast, begins where the former ended, “where sleeping Lyca lay” – exposed to the dangers on the heath. Traversing the land as they “trac’d the desart ways,” Lyca’s parents wander through the paths in search of their daughter. Viewing Lyca as an object, the parents “see their child” in “dream.” Lyca becomes an image, an imagined or perceived ideal existing only within the mind – “Pale thro’ pathless ways/The fancied image strays.” The descriptions suggest sensory perceptions of viewing and looking – they encounter the lion, and “look upon his eyes/Fill’d with deep surprise.” The lion is no longer a dangerous presence but a “spirit.”

As the parents “behold” the lion, noticing his mane of gold and the crown upon his head, they become relieved of their worry, and follow him into the cave. Here, the imagery further conjures sight and seeing – the young girl turns from a “fancied image” into a “vision.” The contrast between an “image” and a “vision” relates to the material book: whereas an image is a symbolic representation, a vision merges various elements to create an art form. When the parents encounter their “sleeping child,” Lyca becomes a true vision and not simply an image perceived by the imagination. Only upon truly seeing their child safe among the animals are the parents comforted from fear and uncertainty; “seeing” then becomes an essential part of experience – granting true knowledge and reconciliation.
“The Voice of the Ancient Bard”

Figure 8. Copy C, 1789, 1794, The Library of Congress

The design for “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” ties together figures encountered through the rest of the poems – the “ancient” Bard stands in the foreground, strumming a harp; a number of figures stand in the background. The figures seem to give the speaker little attention – in particular, we recognize the lovers from “The Little Girl Lost,” embracing and giving no heed to the Bard. In another corner, three friends stand, much like the trio in “The Ecchoing Green,” or the three friends in the plate accompanying
“Night.” Cast as recurrent images and gathered together, these several “players” within the creative tapestry seem to inhabit virtual space, dissociated from any particular environment and allowed to intermingle at will. As Zachary Leader writes, the Bard himself is akin to Old John in “The Ecchoing Green.” We realize that he is one of those who “wish to lead others, when they should be led” – not one to be revered, but who is himself mired in the “tangled roots,” who “stumble all night over the bones of the dead.” The Bard, having been transformed from the piper of Innocence, now aging, has also “fallen” – he comes to realize his place “as a guide in need of guidance, a mental traveller whose prophetic certainty and optimism has been so undermined that ‘care’ threatens to be his only knowledge.”

Text

Like the “Lyca” poems, “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” presents a cyclical progression from innocence unto experience, describing a fall into experience yet anticipating a prophetic vision beyond the fall. This redemptive time comes in the “opening morn” as a “truth new born,” a movement into a higher state of being. Tracing the literary and visual parallels among several poems offer a view into Blake’s moral and spiritual imagination. In particular, the texts and images of “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” provide a panoramic glimpse of the visions encountered within experience. Like the opening to “The Little Girl Lost,” “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” opens on a vision of prophecy – the Bard calls forth the “Youth of Delight” to see “the opening morn.” In this moment, contained within the present – the “Image of Truth new-born” – the Bard

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16 Leader, Ibid.
and perhaps the poet himself becomes aware of the centrality of the visual – as Truth itself emanates from an Image. In these lines, Blake seems to write consciously of the visual elements that occur on the page. Folly’s “endless maze” recalls the visual images along through the various plates of the Songs – the “tangled roots” and vines running across the frames and borders. These references, beyond their symbolic connotations, may suggest the physical book, the art object the viewer perceives while in the midst of reading the text. The material book combines disparate elements – intersecting motifs, characters, as well as images and texts – into an organic whole, a “unified vision.” As “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” is the last lyric within Experience – and it had originally been part of Innocence – considering the poem’s position sheds light unto its role in reflecting upon the Songs as a whole. Conjuring visual images within the text, Blake acts as a writer simultaneously inhabiting and thinking of his role as an artist.

Taken together, spreading across texts and images, the figures and motifs weave into a thematic tapestry – the various youths and the evolving Bard serving as characters who interact within the world of experience. In particular, the Bard manifests a central role in tying together the strands of different lyrics – opening with a prophetic voice that calls for redemption, yet aging and eventually undermined by the “youths of delight” and the Earth herself, whose despairs and sorrows keep in balance the contrary states of being – the cosmic and psychological dimensions of existence.

More broadly, the texts and images interact among various plates, the progression through experience opening up into larger meanings and issues within Blake’s moral imagination, such as the movement toward a future redemptive time even beyond the fall

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17 Leader, p. 191.
into experience. The lyrics offer a cyclical movement from darkness to light, from the fall to redemption – in an evolving duality between contrary states. In their expansion toward an elevated spiritual state, a ‘higher’ innocence beyond experience, the Songs invite the possibility of regeneration and transformation, opening up into a prophetic future.
Reimagining space

Beginning with Blake’s vision of the interactions between author and reader, artists’ books have evolved in a variety of forms through innovations in media and printing techniques. From the codex and the scroll, to present-day technologies including digital media and the web, Blake’s influence continues to this day. Betty Bright traces the development of the genre from its early stages in the Arts and Crafts movement beginning with the deluxe book, ‘sculptural bookwork,’ and eventually, Duchamp’s box(es). Bright’s history focuses on the 1960 to 1980 era. In her last chapter, she ponders “the next chapter” of the book form. In a similar spirit, this paper examines the artist’s book through its most recent manifestations from the 1990’s to the present day, and reflects upon the future of the book form in virtual space.

As Ruth Rogers writes, contemporary artists’ books “are a synthesis of form and content – a bridge between the traditional book and contemporary art.” Often diverging from standard narrative form, these pieces, for example, might offer a fragmented narrative or unique format to convey metaphysical ideas. Materials forming the pieces range from traditional letterpress binding to “unconventional formats such as double spine, accordion, carousel, or modified scroll.” Through textures, structure, images, and text, these creations inspire stimulating interactions between the senses.

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18 Ruth Rogers, Rare Beauty: Contemporary Visions in Book Arts, p. 2. Rogers’ catalog has greatly informed this introduction.
20 Rogers, p. 3.
“Is it book or art?” Rogers and several other historians and curators have explored whether artists’ books might be seen as private works encased within special collections, or perhaps belong in the space of an exhibition. In particular, discussions over whether artists’ books belong within private special collections or public museums invite investigations about the idea of a single reader as opposed to multiple readers, whose shared experiences constitute the emergence of an audience or a public. Whereas a single scholar views Blake’s plates or artists’ books within special collections, and derives a particular experience in these private spaces for study and research, multiple readers glean different interpretations across various places. Blake navigated the notion of the “private,” in selling works to patrons, as well as conceived the idea of a “public,” in placing several paintings on display at exhibitions. Contemporary book artists operate within independent presses, and their pieces have been or are currently on exhibition through college and university programs. Likewise, copies of works continue to be sold to individual “patrons,” or to a library’s special collections.

Bright terms this phenomenon of reading artists’ books “performance art,” in which the reader performs the book. Yet the audience does not simply take in the works passively; instead, artists’ books integrate the reader’s active participation in the experience and engage the senses of sight, sound, and touch. As the reader “manipulates” the structures, the objects unfold gradually, in turning a page, sliding a frame, or uncovering a box to reveal the contents within. A flat, folded piece of paper expands into a three-dimensional, sculptural structure. The interactions between artist, reader, and book emerge as an ongoing, evolving process that transcends the initial act of creation as

21 Rogers, Ibid.
22 Bright, p. 204.
multiple readers synthesize their experiences of works. Shared experiences within a museum space invite communication, interaction, audience participation and engagement, as viewers shed new light upon the meanings through interpretation.

**Introduction to the book artists**

The following chapters examine works by three noted contemporary book artists. Barbara Tetenbaum has created pieces that respond to literature, music and other visual arts. Julie Chen has crafted works that often reflect upon personal identity and memory through conceptualizing geography and space. Finally, Ken Campbell has constructed books with a contemporary vision that resonates with Blake’s prophetic works.

In selecting these three book artists in particular, I wanted to juxtapose different visions of the contemporary book form. Several works convey meaning through intricately designed material structures, while others display an ongoing experimentation with text and image. Though the styles are, at times, strikingly divergent, at other times, the creations merge together – for example, I included “Ode to a Grand Staircase (For Four Hands),” created jointly by Barbara Tetenbaum and Julie Chen, as a bridge between the discussions of the two artists.

Through images or text, these artists’ books explore the realm of memory, or the transformative spaces of the mind, often through a fragmentation of narrative. The pages, scrolls, and plates invite us to reconceive the interactions between verbal and visual elements. As we come upon a work, we may become surprised, even unsettled, as words and images are disconnected from each other and from the spine of a book. In a play upon form and content, a piece disrupts our sense of coherence, animates our perceptions.
of color and light. We can view these works as vessels containing ideas, inviting entry into new worlds, whether it be the future redemptive time in Blake’s prophetic art or the vast spaces of the mind as imagined by Ken Campbell. These worlds lead us to reimagine space, narrative, and the ways in which books can take shape as art.
Chapter 2

Barbara Tetenbaum: the book as inspired by poetry, music, and visual art

Introduction

Barbara Tetenbaum’s works invite explorations into the ways in which book arts can forge crucial connections with poetry, music, and other visual arts. Having created artist’s books under Triangular Press since 1979, she currently serves as Associate Professor of Book Arts at the Oregon College of Arts and Craft. One of today’s most celebrated book artists, she has received fellowships and awards such as the Fulbright Lectureship for teaching book arts in the Czech Republic, and her work has been featured in several exhibitions, including a gallery installation on Willa Cather’s My Antonia at Reed College in 2010. The works explore the lively interplay between vibrant images and imaginative forms manifested in traditional letterpress and mixed media. Her elegant, delicately crafted pieces are imbued with subtle, playful references to the arts, music, and nature. As we trace evolving themes in her works through time, we observe that several pieces have been inspired by other artworks. While “The Sermon on the Practice of Loving-Kindness” serves as a medium to reflect upon Buddhist literature and spirituality, “Collage Book” plays upon and critiques modes of reading modernist art. As a finale, “Ode to a Grand Staircase” imagines the possibilities of translating sound into sculpture, communicating music through the visual art of sculptural space. The varied pieces strive to engage the stimulating interactions between poetry, music, and the arts on an experiential and even visceral level.

“The sermon on the practice of loving-kindness”

Figure 1. Barbara Tetenbaum, The Sermon on the Practice of Loving-Kindness, 1995.

This work opens as an array of bookmarks, loosely connected by a piece of string. Designed to “emulate the near-extinct Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscript,” the object offers a sense of freedom from the bounds and boundaries of a book. As in a “floating book,” words and images are disentangled from one another, spreading apart. Earthy tones on Kitaka paper resemble the hues on a tree; the pages scatter like leaves blowing in the wind. Yet upon further glances, a narrative reveals itself.

24 Colophon.
One page says,

If you’d grasp the path to peace
With skill in doing what one ought
Then strong, direct and upright be,
Soft-spoken, mild, without conceit

The phrases might be seen as simple adages, yet are attributed to the Buddha, and capture the essences and meanings of Buddhist spirituality. Calling for meditation and loving kindness, the messages entreat the reader to “let all beings…born or to be born…experience happiness.” One begins upon the “path to peace” in a state of humility and conscience. In its simplicity, the work conceptualizes space through the harmonies within nature: a hard, gritty letterpress material, a cord running through the edges as though a nimble branch of a tree.

Tetenbaum was invited to create an artist’s book response as part of an exhibition on palm leaf books at Whitman College in 1995. As she writes, “I was struck by the direct simplicity of the sentiment expressed in the text: "Don't deceive another one, nor despise anyone at all; because of anger or ill-will, don't wish another pain." My choice of "illustrations" was made to reflect both western and eastern cultures who have learned a gentle, moral approach to life through the words of the Buddha. I wonder if/hope that this simple message can permeate the wall of hate-filled rhetoric we are currently confronted with in the US.”

Its careful intimacy exposes the delicate quality of the book, its fragile uncertainties. Within a harmonious merging of eastern and western practices, the piece also carries a social message – to speak quietly for peace and reconciliation in the present moment.

_Collage Book_

*Figure 2. Barbara Tetenbaum, Collage Book #3, 1987.*

In _Collage Book_, disassembled images and words conjure unstable, shifting meanings. The short, sudden phrases within this book made of collages are strikingly ironic and self-referential: one page states bluntly: “Don’t tell me how to look at this.” A spread of circles of varying size and shape scatter across, measurements and encapsulating circles occupy the center and peripheries. The statement calls into direct question the paradigms of looking dictated by conventional bookbinding arrangements of text, image, and space. Blake envisioned ways of viewing and experiencing, in the active interplay between word and illustration – one should glance back and forth to derive
meaning. But here, the curt message is placed in stark contrast with an informative caption on the accompanying page: “In ordering brass circles it is necessary to specify style number of rule face wanted and outside diameter of circle.” Mathematical accuracy, calculated precision – the bounds of reason leave little room for how we might perceive circles in our transcendent, post-rational state-of-being. Instead, our perceptions might be surreal or imaginary, like the interspersed images produced through the pages. The meta-reference raises the question, how do we derive meaning from fragmentary images – or from emptiness?

Figure 3. Barbara Tetenbaum, Collage Book #4, 1987.

Another page states simply: “A floating object.” As objects move away from their associations and undergo displacement, the creations transform concrete objects into abstract concepts. Abstract curves, a spiral, and a leaf-like semblance compose the drawing; on the other side is a print of a man’s profile. As in Joseph Cornell’s boxes, within this assembled collage, physical objects have the power to convey metaphysical ideas. The juxtaposition of man, abstract patterns, and typewritten text raises interesting
questions – can a person be a “floating object,” like a leaf or a spiral? The collage books can serve as visual poems: in a play between form and content; texture, color, and light unfold and reveal themselves through time and space. As the catalog entry reads, this assemblage was created from “found images including Victorian woodcut illustrations, old manuals, trade catalogues and advertisements.”\(^{26}\) The seemingly random assortment of collected objects serves a greater purpose, however: the “jumbled imagery references history, literature, science and religion, the ancient and the modern.” In a conglomeration of disparate elements, the *Collage Book* explores and illuminates the hidden territories and expanses of human experience. Yet it is a history we have not seen until we open up the book, which translates meanings through the intersections and interactions of distinct ideas, revealing new insights along the way.

\(^{26}\) Colophon.
“Ode to a Grand Staircase (For Four Hands)”

In this visually orchestral work created jointly by Julie Chen and Barbara Tetenbaum, a grand staircase opens up as the pages expand outward into a three-dimensional book. Inspired by the work of composer Erik Satie, Chen and Tetenbaum composed a visual structure in response. A majestic array of colors, shapes, and patterns dazzles the senses as the motifs change upon each new page. The Getty Museum’s exhibition describes, “As the viewer turns each leaf of the book, the French-door structure creates new windows that reveal portions of other leaves in an ever-changing vision.” In ever-evolving illustrations, harmonic patterns, bright colors, and multiple layers reveal themselves. According to the description, the book was “constructed in a modified tunnel book structure where the individual panels have been cut up the middle

causing the tunnel to "collapse" when the pages are extended, echoing the shape of a staircase.”

Like Blake’s Songs, this Ode seems expansive when viewed online, but the actual object is surprisingly small in size. Satie composed Enfantines for the piano meant to fit a child’s small hand, and the closed box containing the book also resembles a child’s toy. Yet as the note on the container describes, “Jean Cocteau once said that the smallest piece by Satie was like a keyhole: it seems small until you put your eye up to it.” Upon opening the folded pages, we can catch glimpses of the other layers through a hole, like seeing lower stories from a staircase. The “keyhole” itself changes shape with each page. A multitude of colors, symbols, patterns, shapes, and words compete for our attention – the eye and the hand shift up and down, back and forth, to catch each. Its multiplicity of competing voices and images scatter, coalesce with each other, and expand into new and unexpected forms.

A literary dimension emerges in juxtaposition with the visual elements; the texts act as a subversive and complicating force. The composer, acting as though a tour guide, inserts comments across each spread: “it is a large staircase, very large.” The phrases are witty, yet clearly overstated and meta-referential. The voice continues, “it has more than a thousand steps, all of ivory / it is very beautiful.” Like a children’s fantasy book, this work invites us to enter a fragmentary, yet strangely majestic world.

nobody dares use it / for fear of damaging it
the king himself / has never used it
to leave his room / he jumps from the window
also, he often says: I love this staircase so much / I am going to have it stuffed
is the king not right?

28 Colophon.
Despite this light humor, there is something jarring about these inserted phrases. The voice – even its very presence – seems to undermine the grandeur and dazzling visual display. In the midst of ever-evolving spectacles, it is as though the text constantly takes us out of our experience, creating distance even while poking fun at the object. Even so, another voice emerges and simultaneously competes for attention: “fold carefully,” “do not inflate,” in the style of an instruction manual that tells the reader the proper way to construct a pop-up structure. Other speakers instruct us to play the piece “with delicate intimacy,” “seriously,” and then adds, “but without tears.” These pieces of text are “derived from the musical directives and silent librettos which accompanied his scores.” These moments disrupt our sensations, unsettling and destabilizing our position as viewers of an art object. Are we contemplating a piece within a museum’s display case – which implies interpretation and analysis – or are we simply the audience for a postmodern mind game?

Yet as a response to another work of art, the object does offer layers of meaning beneath that which the literal statements might suggest. The Ode may be viewed as an instrument – a musical as well as literary vessel – that communicates Satie’s musical score through the visual art of sculptural space.29 Satie, a twentieth-century avant-garde composer, employed minimalist techniques – he saw himself less as a musician than as a scientist, one who measures sounds – a “phonometrician.” His compositions are at once impressionistic – evoking paintings by Monet and music by Debussy and Faure – and

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abstract – gesturing toward later modernist movements in the twentieth century. In resisting definition through evoking synesthesia, while also embodying abstraction with its careful, precise measurements, this creation plays upon the tensions within Satie’s musical score.

Listening to “March to a Grand Staircase” reveals the ways that Chen and Tetenbaum translated sound into sculpture, in a transmutation of visual and auditory perceptions. Satie drew more inspiration “from painters than from composers,” and this music conjures a picture within our minds. The notes alter our conceptions of measured rhythms. Playful jumps, gaps, and breaks puncture the melody; the jumps sound like the clicking of heels up the steps in a staircase. Our ascension becomes ornamented with surprising rhythms – on each page or musical measure we encounter circles, squiggly lines, zigzags – moments that play upon our expectations, take us out of the music and remind us that we are, in fact, listening to a constructed piece, subject to the composer’s whimsical digressions and flights of fancy.

More broadly, the “Ode” invites explorations into the complicated relationships between vision, sound, and space. In a mingling among various artistic forms, the work gestures toward the connections and interactions that integrate diverse media, including visual processes such as painting, sculpture, and architecture, as the creation unfolds with design, pattern, and shape into a three-dimensional structure. In inviting an ongoing, active process of creation and interpretation, the piece also blends the auditory and kinesthetic elements in dance and music, which find expression through sound and

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30 Tetenbaum also composed “Gymnopaedia” after Satie’s Gymnopedies. “Gymnopedies #1” has been put to words as “From My First Moment,” sung by Charlotte Church, with lyrics by Sam Barberia and arrangement by Jesse Cook.
movement. Experiencing this piece begs the questions, in what ways does one medium affect or influence another, and how are different phenomena interrelated?

In particular, music and dance can both be expressed as a mode of writing. As Tetenbaum writes, “Exploring and using the ‘sister arts’ – those that use some kind of written system to enable the re/creation of a sound (music notation), dance step (choreographer’s scores), or the multisensory experience conjured through writing – has allowed me to find alternative systems of writing and organization of information, in order to challenge the expectations of traditional book reading.”31 Within this intersection among the various arts, the viewer can ‘read’ the artist’s book in a similar way as a musician creates sound, or a dancer embodies choreography. Creating a “multisensory experience,” the “Ode” simultaneously channels these artistic processes.

Engaging music as a source for creative inspiration, Chen and Tetenbaum collaborated in transmuting sound into sculpture. As this artistic transmutation signals a change in genre, a “March” becomes an “Ode.” A “march” suggests a regular, measured procession with rhythmic motion; an ode is “a lyric poem, typically one in the form of an address to a particular subject, written in varied or irregular meter.”32 Conjuring music, an ode addresses or elevates a subject. The comparison sheds light on this interpretation of Satie, as the “March” is rhythmic and measured, while the “Ode” exalts the grandiose nature of the staircase through the varied complexity of shapes, layers, and dimensions. In particular, the artist’s book transforms the single voice of the piano in the “March” into multiple voices on a continuum, as artistic response stimulated the addition of new

31 I was able to contact Tetenbaum regarding her work, and she generously offered thoughts about her creative process.
elements such as multifaceted colors and patterns, along with the “silent librettos.” This augmentation can be seen in other responses to Satie’s works. In writing the words to “From my first moment” after “Gymnopædies No. 1,” Sam Barberia translated the music into poetry, and imbued the sounds with meanings: “From my first moment you gave me wings / Let me fly and believed in my dreams.” Jesse Cook’s arrangement integrates guitar, voice, and orchestral accompaniment in a multiplicity of harmonious voices that enriches and expands upon Satie’s original composition. One might still wish to hold on to Satie’s simplicity, yet works of art invite multiple readers’ interpretations and participation in active response. As the voices multiply, amplify, and escalate, the responses open up into the infinite realms of artistic expression and creation.

Like Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” this Ode opens up in spatial and temporal dimensions. As each stanza – or leaf – unfolds, the reader/viewer perceives another angle of light shed upon the urn, or discerns a glimpse heretofore unseen in the staircase. Portraying a sense of movement within stillness, this silent object yet has musical/aural qualities – as though it could be a song or a poem, hence the title. Its shape resembles an accordion, contracting and expanding to produce sound. The curvature also conjures the shells or panels used to create acoustics within a concert hall; the shells, though silent, transmit and reflect vibrations and synergies in music. One might wonder whether this could be an artistic object for a gallery installation, or meant to be “read” as a non-traditional book. The leaves contain minimal text lifted from the librettos, leaving room for interpretation. With minimal text, the object communicates meaning through colors, patterns, shape, and structure. In this augmented reality mixed with fantasy, a book conjures simultaneous experiences and fuses elements within the senses.
Reflections on collaboration

Collaboration in creating artists’ books can help stimulate a creative synthesis. Reflecting on working jointly with Julie Chen, Tetenbaum writes that she is “interested in seeing what common or new languages can come from this kind of alchemy or experiment.”33 This experiment can take the form of imagining oneself as the other. The two book artists work differently, and have gained insight from their mutual efforts: while Chen works “methodically,” Tetenbaum is more spontaneous. Tetenbaum writes, “I find collaboration to be a great fuel for my work. Not only do I have the opportunity to work with people I admire who have different skill sets and ideas, but I usually spend much of the collaboration imagining what the other person would do and in a way allow this to open up new ways for me to make my work.” Through forging these connections, the artists have constructed an artistic vision that continues to resonate with readers and audiences.

33 Tetenbaum graciously offered these thoughts via email.
Chapter 3

Julie Chen: the book as a vehicle for geography and identity

Introduction

Flying Fish Press, an independent press established by book artist Julie Chen, seeks to publish artists’ books that integrate “meticulous attention to craft, intricate structural design, and inspired artistic vision.” Chen’s own works seamlessly combine these elements to impart meanings through intricately crafted material structures. An avid book arts educator, she is currently an associate professor in the book arts program at Mills College, and also teaches workshops on creating artists’ books. Several of her works explore the intersections of geography and spatial perceptions; ‘reading’ and experiencing these spaces emerges a process of discovery for the viewer. As Chen writes in her artist statement, “The idea of giving order to personal experience through the use of mapping, charting, and numbering is an important underlying theme that runs through much of my work.” Often, she locates her pieces within a specific social or geopolitical context – as in The Veil, in which she imagines the unfolded tapestries as the Middle East. Creating a world in miniature, these small enclosures can be contained, yet expand into multiple dimensions, perceptions, and meanings when gradually opened. While “Leavings” depicts the fragmented pieces discarded by time and memory, “River of Stars” ponders questions about consciousness through the physical form of the river. “The Veil” exposes the visible and invisible aspects of communicating between cultures. Chen’s works explore the ways in which texture, structure, and shape create meaning, but

35 Ibid.
delve into greater issues, such as identity and the process of constructing one’s experience in a narrative form. These books expose the complexities and ambiguities within our present moment, unraveling memories and losses weaving through time and space.

*Leavings*

![Figure 5. Julie Chen, “Leavings,” 1997.](image)

When closed, *Leavings* takes the form of a small box, tied together with string. As one opens the box and unfolds the pages in layers, the binding reveals itself in zigzagged, hinged sleeves. On the left side of each spread, we read a short phrase – “Silent reminders,” “of the passage of time.” The right side of each spread says: “fragments,” “discards,” “scraps.” Pockets beneath the words contain a bookmark that offers actual
glimpses of these words – stem-like figures represent “discards,” while small buttons symbolize “scraps.” We can pull out and examine the fragments contained the bookmarks, though they offer mere glimpses of places once visited. These are not even the found, everyday objects from Cornell’s boxes, but have become degenerated into “scraps,” “shards,” and “residue,” broken remnants left over from the past. Left and right sides interact with each other: the left a phrase that makes up part of an ongoing expression, the right only fragmented actualizations of these notions. Words unfold simultaneously across each spread:

Silent reminders / fragments
Of the passage of time / discards
Forgotten souvenirs / scraps
Of wasted days / shards
A private collection / remnants
Of loss / residue

On the reverse side of the pages, another narrative emerges:

Scars
Suggestions
Traces
Vestiges
Tokens

The corresponding pages display pictorial representations of might be seen as pieces left over from geography: an acorn, a shell-like fossil, a piece of vertebrae. These compose remnants from our anthropological past, memories half-realized, misshapen, or lost.

Yet, as Chen writes, mapping and charting give order and a sense of stability to these works – each pocket is numbered, given order; grids on the graph paper demonstrate the importance of precise measurements in understanding geography. The descriptions for each fragment signify classification and orderliness, as though labels for specimens within a natural history collection. The narrative resembles a traveler’s journal or diary
entry, unfolding chronologically through each day’s progression; at the same time, the structure begs for what we might glean from another’s personal experience.


The structure plays upon our mode of ‘reading,’ inviting multiple, non-linear ways to experience the text. One could read the sleeves forward and backward in order to see the entire phrase, or venture inside and outside through peering in each pocket. Two narratives unfold simultaneously on the front and back sides, so that one might discover one story before the other, or else flip back and forth to catch both. In this way, the book might first appear to have a straightforward, logical order, but reveal several sequences with the reader’s manipulations in time.

The viewer may slow the pace of unfolding the page, and take time to examine the contents of each pocket, pondering these remnants as collected souvenirs. In the breaks and pauses between the pages, in our thinking and wondering, the real action occurs. This book examines the possibilities and limitations of translating one’s memories into a narrative form – memories leave “scars,” “suggestions,” “vestiges” of something greater; they are at once only fragments and scraps and subtly suggestive of
possibilities beyond. A “collage of found images, objects and printed matter,” this conglomeration carries weightlessness and insignificance as disposed, unwanted fragments. The artifacts are scant, conveying minimal meanings – and yet in these “leavings,” leave room for us to imagine what is left unsaid, the empty spaces opening up for us to fill.

*River of Stars*

Enclosed within a tiny box, only about two inches in width and height, a structure lies compressed. The bottom of the box states simply that the book was “letterpress printed on handmade paper with book structure masterminded by Ed Hutchins.” Made from navy blue and white construction paper, this piece evokes a children’s pop-up book on the mysteries of nighttime, though the texts are imbued with more complicated meanings. As in child’s play, we can expand and contract the river with our hands. With intricate craft and design, Hutchins designed the book as a double accordion structure, which book artists Peter and Donna Thomas term a “nested accordion,” reflecting the

*Figure 7. Julie Chen, “River of Stars,” 1994.*
interlocking quality of the two accordions. When expanded to full view, a river runs through the “spine” in zigzag, while two streams of lyrical phrases flow, crafting poetry in its course. One lyric says:

I dreamed about the sea spilling gently through my window
flowing through all the rooms in the house

bathing the walls with liquid light and rinsing out my tired eyes
with the blueness of night-dark water and starry sky

until I could not tell the difference between water and air
darkness and light, waking and dreaming

and I could find rest in fluidity
floating and breathing in a river of stars.

The “flowing,” “bathing,” “waking and dreaming,” conjure the expansion and contraction of a boat upon water guided by the waves, or perhaps the rhythms of breathing as one is lulled to sleep whilst dreaming about the sea. A suspended tension emerges between “water and air / darkness and light, waking and dreaming.” In this ambiguous existence, the speaker floats in limbo, caught between opposing states and intermingled elements.

In a conversation between format and content, the structure magnifies the meaning. As the river wanders ‘suspended’ between the borders, the empty spaces open like windows for the stream to pass through. Seen through its physical structure, the river seems as though it is “floating” in a detachment from spatial constraints. In this narrative, the speaker could “find rest in fluidity,” comforted by the harmony within these rhythms. But the river of stars suggests not only the stability offered by the cosmos. A hidden sub-text emerges in the spaces between the lines of the first poem, etched in silver:

So many stars / like white-hot stones

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36 Peter and Donna Thomas, Web site for books made by Peter and Donna Thomas, http://www2.cruzio.com/~peteranddonna/. Peter and Donna Thomas designed a miniature book entitled Song of Creation, which explores the “nested” element of the double accordion structure.
Searing an indelible wall / through my dreams
Will I find reflections of the night sky / dancing on the water
When I / wake?

Here, loss of consciousness arrests our sense of balance and stability as stars, “like white-hot stones / sear an indelible wall / through my dreams.” The speaker questions whether she will “find reflections of the night sky…when I wake?” In the abrupt movement from sleeping to waking, the river’s harmonious flow is disrupted. The hidden counter-narrative subverts the former’s lyrical melodies; its disorienting anxiety simultaneously competes for our attention. This voice suggests the uncomfortable ambiguities of consciousness – as in Keats’ Ode to a Nightingale, in the last moments when the speaker asks, “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? Fled is that music – / Do I wake or sleep?”

This second lyric appears on the white borders of the stream, inviting an intriguing dialogue between format and content: the intersecting narratives of harmony and disharmony mirror the physical manifestation of the river and its border. As before, the design augments the meaning – the border structure “holds” the meandering stream in place, offering the river a stable, harmonious flow even while detached from it amid the empty spaces that separate the accordions. On the other hand, the river itself exposes the incoherence and tensions associated with real experience, which “sear” “like white-hot stones” through the unconscious mind.

“River of Stars” evokes fate, destiny, and prophecy in ways that recall Blake’s cosmos in the “Introduction” to Experience, in which the engraved plate shows a black night sky punctured by stars. The “river of stars” envisioned in this book connotes the Milky Way, conjuring an expansive cosmos. Whereas in Blake, the illustrations accentuate the stark divisions between the terrestrial and cosmic dimensions, “River of
Stars” reflects upon the uncertainties and ambiguities between opposing states – water and air, darkness and light, waking and dreaming. In our present moment, the separations between contrary states of being are fluid and ambiguous; stability and instability become interrelated, given meaning through opposition. Here, the coherence and harmony of the river are thrown into disorder by anxiety. Even so, the conflicts in Blake are not resolved, but suspended in a continuous tension. Conjuring movement within stillness, the expansion and contraction of the river suggest an ongoing dialogue between the metaphysical and material.

*The Veil*

*Figure 8. Julie Chen, “The Veil,” 2002.*
Upon first glance, an Islamic-style screen covers our view, obscuring our perception of the piece. As we unravel each layer, the folds of the tapestry reveal themselves as partial hemispheres in the globe. Resembling a Mercator map when fully expanded, The Veil reveals a startling vision of our world. Delicately shaped patterns evolve with each page. As Rogers writes, “Every frame has a blue globe of the world within, but it is obstructed by a screen or veil, which becomes harder to see through with each successive opening.” Its richly textured shape and structure evoke the Middle East; the Islamic veil serves as protection and yet as exposure. With one culture fusing imperceptibly into another, the sculpture subtly depicts an East merging with the West, the ambiguities and confusions within an increasingly interrelated world.

Figure 9, Julie Chen, “The Veil,” 2002.

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37 Rogers’ description of “The Veil” on p. 6-7 of the catalog has greatly informed this piece.
38 Rogers, p. 6.
“In a carousel book format… the book has magnets imbedded in the covers which allow it to be displayed in a circular, sculptural format.”

The “veil” itself begins as a navy blue linked chain that sparsely covers the globe; then the patterns become denser, partially anticipating or gesturing toward the following page. Eventually, the unformed spots of lighter blue coalesce into the shape of an American star. Additionally, the borders are decorated with the designs on a dollar bill. Across the pages, the piece evolves into an eastern architectural screen imbued with western elements. While the blue star and red edges are American, the designs that compose these colors and shapes are Middle Eastern. This rendering suggests a mutual dependence and interconnection.

Each page manifests a distinct meaning, mirroring the reader’s own experience looking at the veil, and imparts evolving messages that develop through the pages.

“An obstructed view of the world”
“The unheard story / the unseen face”
“A conscious decision / to shield our eyes”
“Hiding behind words, protecting our fears”
“Wearing a veil / of untold sorrow”

On the first page, the text simply tells us what we see: an obstructed view of the world. The lost chances are isolated and impersonal at first – an “unheard story,” an “unseen face.” With the successive pages, however, the messages place the blame on us, the readers encountering the book; the conflicts arise from a “conscious decision to shield our eyes,” to defensively hide and protect ourselves from the “other.” In the final statement, we wear the veil in physical closeness; the last word, “sorrow,” lingers in our minds long after we have closed the book. Yet deeper layers in the work lie beneath the opening in the surface display, which heightens the meanings embedded in the structure.

The deepest layer of text is the preamble from the United Nations Charter; significantly, we can discern only parts of words and dissociated letters; our view becomes obstructed by conflicting viewpoints. Reflecting the text, the obscured charter depicts our conscious act of “hiding behind words,” displaying the human rights declaration as a symbol of goodwill while retreating from real compassion. A multiplicity of layers impedes our “vision,” serving to complicate and confuse understanding.

Silently exploring crucial questions, this piece serves as a private, intimate encounter, its fragile uncertainty seeking contemplation before action. The piece ponders the tensions between visibility and invisibility, the hidden and unseen elements of navigating disparate geographies. Though the spatial perceptions of geography are imagined and unreal, the political undertones are muted with delicacy. As the dimensions descend into obscurity, vision becomes ever significant; the ability to see through clearly becomes vital to communication and transparency, as closing in impedes and obstructs understanding. Chen gently reminds us of our dependence on sight to render intelligible the complicated and confusing realities of experience, particularly interactions across borders.

The book silently asks the questions – what remains private? What has become exposed, vulnerable to corruption or perhaps devastating change? The folded layers of the sculpture evoke a female organ, perhaps a womb, or the delicate space of gestation; as uncovering the veil exposes a woman’s body, sexual violation becomes an intensely personal encounter. Merging political and personal dimensions, the piece might also reflect upon the violence against women in the Middle East, the societal limitations placed on gender and female identity. As the “veil” is a piece of material gendered as
female and yet without a voice, the work could “speak” silently for the greater empowerment of women.

The note accompanying the piece wonders, “Are we inside it looking out, or outside peering in?” As the viewer passes through the veil, metaphorically and physically, does it offer us entry into its depths, or merely a passing glance? We might wonder whether the book lets us into a complete and coherent vision of the narrative, or portrays an ultimately limited and obstructed view. Exploring inside and outside, the distance between the self and the other, the piece reveals the unsettling idea that damages could become a vague and distant memory reimagined only within the realm of the book.

In a “strangely disquieting way,” The Veil exposes the visible and invisible aspects of communicating between cultures. In its journey of discovery, the piece uncovers truths hidden beneath the surface. Yet significantly, the book remains silent, unable to give voice to its tensions. As harmonies are disrupted by conflict, the book suggests erasure, and the troubling loss of identity.

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Chapter 4

Ken Campbell: the book as a vision for the present moment

Introduction

Ken Campbell’s works expose the fragmentation and degeneration within our contemporary world. His sweeping visions evoke the vast expanses and territories of the mind, seeking light through an uncompromising darkness. As he writes in *The Maker’s Hand*, a catalog on his works, “These books break the rules of what makes a book and how a book is made. But those rules are always in this maker's mind and hand, and the form of the book is both referred to and revered.”\(^{41}\) One can draw parallels with Blake in the concept of the “maker” who crafts using both “mind” and “hand,” translating the metaphysical into the material.

In a unified vision that finds its origins in Blake, Campbell takes on the roles of author, designer, and printer. Trained as a printmaker, he has taught graphic design in London’s art schools, and has housed the complete collection of his works in Germany, Yale, and the Library of Congress.\(^{42}\) Campbell actively integrates printmaking into his larger artistic vision; the materials, and techniques include polychrome letterpress as well as wood and zinc plates. He derives significance from the “form” of the book; the book serves as a container that brings into unity disparate elements. The abstract meanings are closely intertwined with the physical form of the books, joining with printing technology

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and book production to produce a synthetic vision. Often, the material realm exists in the book form, as in “Night Feet on Earth,” in which we see visible signs of production through the images drilled with zinc blocks.

In these works, meanings are developed through the foundations each book builds upon, exploring “elemental themes” and difficult confrontations. Campbell’s conceptions of craft reflect Blakean notions. As he writes, “I feel that all my books are really one work-in-progress, each book a chapter; and in the first can be seen the essence of all that follows.” As Blake’s characters interact in virtual space, and reappear in a gradually unfolding narrative that extends from the worlds of innocence and experience through the prophetic books, Campbell traces an evolving narrative through his invented mythology.

Campbell’s mythmaking employs a symbolism that depicts our disintegrated, mechanized times: a comet, stars made from iron, the maker’s own head replicated in computerized images. The themes explored within the books are drawn from religion, architecture, and mythology, and often engage spirituality and death. Yet again as in Blake, these notions become imbued with Campbell’s own version of spirituality that radically alters our conceptions about viewing and perspective. As Marcia Reed writes, in the continual ordering and re-ordering of images through space, we are compelled to reconsider our relationship with the book, “tilting the head” to read a slanted phrase or graphic, and encountering an object in an unfamiliar context. In many cases, the narratives offer uncanny re-inventions of history.

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44 Campbell, Ibid.
45 Reed, Ibid.
While “Night Feet on Earth” constructs a future dystopia splintered by mechanization, “Pantheon” provides a panoramic view into the spaces of the mind, as the psyche engages in a continuous cycle of creation, evolution, and destruction. As Campbell writes, bookmaking serves as a “vehicle for the pursuit of a constantly unfolding poetic. Printing is the vehicle but not its own end, nor beauty the only pursuit.”46 These works offer a fleeting glimpse of the deeper undercurrents that lie just beneath the surface of mundane existence. While the repetitive motifs might suggest madness, the books expose fundamental questions about existence. His visions suggest fate, destiny, and the yearning to connect and understand.

*Night Feet on Earth*

![Figure 10. Ken Campbell, “Night Feet on Earth,” 1986.](image)

This dark and foreboding vision weaves together uncanny juxtapositions – comets, a horse, and a “divine child descending.” Yet this is not the child in the clouds of

46 Campbell, Ibid.
Innocence, but a being disoriented by the mechanized world that Campbell depicts. Upon its “fall” unto earth, the child muse takes the form of a horse, which serves as a symbol for both the comet and the divine child. Despite its cosmic vision, the book’s origins are surprisingly earthbound. Campbell drew inspiration for the story from a Christmas party he attended, when he opened a party cracker shaped like a horse, and made an unexpected association with the recent arrival of Halley’s Comet. He imagined the book as a “rather pagan Christmas carol,” and constructed stars and horses drilled with zinc blocks.47

This book exposes the fragmented, visceral energy and urgency of our present moment. Yellow and white stars dot across a dark blue sky in a mechanical fashion, yet the images produce an unsettling feeling with a dizzying quality. The words fill up the alternatively white and dark spaces, set in a bold, urgent typeface pressed into the page. On the first spread, a comet that resembles a disembodied, hand-like shape reaches out from a corner. We see only a leg and tail of this skeleton at first; with each successive page, the comet is revealed as a horse-like creature. Within dystopia’s future language, disjointed texts and images have an unnerving quality. The horse-like figure changes orientation, retreats, disappears, and re-emerges in a different form, and eventually divides in two. The horses’ joints, reduced to disembodied parts, are anchored by holes drilled with zinc. These patterns jut into the page, and the words and images resist coherence and understanding.

47 http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/nightfeet.html
The text is non-linear and fragmented; slight revisions, circular and reductive, induce anxiety and instability. The gaps, fissures, and junctures anticipate in their state of imbalance and incompleteness and expose in their physicality an interrupted language.

NIGHT
FEET ON
EARTH
PLY

COME O
COMET
YOU ARE DRAWN

ON EARTH
PLYWOOD
CURVE IN
TO

DRAWN A
SCIMITAR
OF SEMEN
SPILT
In this negative future, phrases become disintegrated, and even words are broken down into indiscernible parts. “Ply” could connote the folded layers or dimensions within the book, yet in the stanza, the word bears no apparent relationship to “Night feet on earth.” In its essence, “ply” seems to signify the mechanical productions that construct the elements within this world: as a verb it could mean to use or apply, which suggests the printer drilling the images into the plate. “Come o / Comet / You are drawn,” the speaker entreats, embodying a god-like maker who brings the comet into existence through the act of drawing. This creator draws “on earth,” using plywood and a scimitar – a sword or blade, evoking the violence of creation. The voice continues, breaking down into unintelligible murmurs:

    INTO FOR
    REST OF
    OUR DEEP
    SO

    SPILT ON
    NIGHTBED
    VELVET
    COME

The latter stanza exposes the bodily corruption and violation that occurs in nighttime. Do “night feet on earth” cause the fluids to be “spilt on nightbed velvet?” Are the phrases related, or broken images that only hold meaning through our perceptions in the moment?

    The divine child flies down in the “fuselage” of an airplane, while traveling
    “Down spy / Glass” as he descends from the cosmic to the infinitesimal scale of a
    spyglass. In its obscure and dismembered fashion, the poem progresses toward a
    revelation:
HORIZON
AND
HEAVEN

IS HE
THE ONE
STAR OF
NIGHT

BY THE YEAR 1014
ALL STARS WILL BE
STARS OF IRON

As the lines reel toward the climax, the revelation appears across a central spread that occupies both pages. “Horizon and Heaven” encompass the domains inhabited by this contemporary mythology. “Is he the one star of night,” the voice cries, as this being descends from the heavens, a prophet drilled in mechanical plywood. The voice stems eerily from a mass-induced fear of thingness. The anxiety over an increasingly
industrialized world accelerates as the seer makes the prediction, “By the year 1014 all stars will be stars of iron.” The divine child produced with iron, falling from the sky as a comet, becomes rendered on the page as a horse. In this “fall” unto a corrupted earth, the star becomes fractured, the very words in its message disintegrated. With the intersections of text and image, the disconnected elements strikingly collide into a single vision.

Despite the fragmented future, the narrative structure nevertheless bespeaks symmetry. The book is divided into halves, separated by the revelation that occupies the central spread. In the beginning through the central spread, the first half of the poem appears on the dark left side of the page, while the second half appears on the white right side. Afterward the refrain repeats itself, though the left side is dark and the right side light. In a gesture toward virtual dimensions, Campbell anticipates the first word of the following page at the end of a page. This effect serves to offer “rhythm and to echo the tradition of cueing the eye for what is to come overleaf.”

In an unforeseen finality, this vision remains grounded where the cosmic touches the terrestrial, where the heavens meet the earth. “And did those feet in ancient time” emerges from distant memory as the future collides with humankind. As Campbell writes, “The horse's tail has been distorted to give a fiery tail of a comet. This book is where the hooves touch the ground.”

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48 [http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/nightfeet.html](http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/nightfeet.html)
49 The title “Night Feet on Earth” reminded me of the opening to “Jerusalem” from Blake’s *Milton*.
50 Ibid.
With its monumental dimensions and expansive scope, “Pantheon” delves into the hidden territories and expanses of the mind. As a sweeping vision, the work echoes *Jerusalem*, yet reaches toward a synthesis of material and spiritual realms, reimagining mythology as both individual and universal. The cover is white, suggesting the blank slate or “tabula rasa,” yet open up into many expanding forms. Upon first glance through the pages, viewing the book’s multiple dimensions reveals glossy, translucent surfaces that conceal hidden depths; one can peer through the openings even while inside the opaque interiors, conjuring an effect at once demonic and yet ethereal. One can even smell the chemicals used in making each layer, evoking the processes of making the book. This material metamorphosis suggests a spiritual transformation through the book’s

51 Ruth Rogers inspired me with this thought.
physical elements – the distorted graphics, segmented texts, and gritty textures transfigure the metaphysical into the material.

Figure 14. Ken Campbell, “Pantheon,” 2000.

“Pantheon” explores the conception of the “self,” constructing the self through changing states of consciousness; while the passages immerse the reader within an altered consciousness or dream-like state, the deliberate manipulations convey the maker’s heightened awareness of his craft. Significantly, Campbell inserts his own image into the book, as though he “embedded himself in the book… [The images] serve as anchors but they are also instruments of passion and torture.”52 As Mark Dimunation writes, “the dome and oculus of the Pantheon (‘a nigh perfect building’) is juxtaposed with an image of his own head…the shaft of light that pierces the dome is likened to the illuminating light of thought and recognition.”53 A black grid or tiled pattern covers the images, partially obscuring sight or “oculus,” the vision conjured by the Pantheon. In a swift

53 Dimunation, Ibid.
movement, the self embodies and becomes one with the book, “the press and the poet interact to shine bright with this unique vision.”

“Pantheon” reveals an interesting simultaneity: multiple modes of reading unfold in temporal and spatial dimensions – the enlargement and diminishment in perspective, changes in images and colors, and multiple phrases and poems create layers of complexity. The motifs and associations are dispersed and fragmented, spread across the pages as though wrested from distant memory, isolated thoughts that float away from a linear narrative. This dream-like consciousness nevertheless speaks in patterns.

With its abstract designs, the book resembles an assemblage, a conglomeration of elements imagined and real. Symbols materialize as windows, walls, and doors inviting “entry and exit.” Forms and expressions develop amid the book; text and images shift in an organic evolution, evoking spontaneous thought processes through the incessant

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54 Dimunation, Ibid.
55 Reed, Ibid.
ordering and re-ordering of ideas in the mind. The constant revisions signify a reversal or counterpoint, as phrases introduced are then repeated in reverse, or graphics are rotated, disintegrated, or recreated.

Figure 16. Ken Campbell, “Pantheon,” 2000.

We see the poet’s skull in changing positions – facing forward looking at the reader, sometimes in profile, then separated into two selves whose heads touch in a mirror image. The larger trajectory or narrative arc manifests the process of reinventing the self through duplication and photographic manipulations; the computerized graphics serve as an insistent reminder that we looking within virtual space. Objects and images are constantly reproduced in a montage; as elements are combined and reimagined, the book reveals the artist’s mind at work through the creative process.

In its progression through time and space, “Pantheon” exposes the creation, evolution, and degeneration of the self. One page invokes “Aham,” the supreme self or consciousness in Sanskrit. The word, defined as “I here; I being such,” suggests the
fundamental assertion “I am.”

“Maha,” the word in reverse, connotes greatness and appears toward the end of the book. This idea of “aham” expands through the following phrases. The designs on the first page are repeated on a later page, in which words are superimposed upon the illustration. The words reference both the man and the dome as “the last house,” a final resting ground. Another page revisits the theme of physical and spiritual death: “The body is a tomb.” Yet the statement appears strangely on the page; the words

THE
IS A

are superimposed upon

BODY
TOMB

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57 Ibid.
The self embodies a tomb; perhaps the dome or another imagined space. Arising from the depths of original creation, this expression seems to articulate a fundamental truth. The spatial arrangement captures a sense of symmetry, the letters alternating between three and four. “The” and “is a” are shown in blue, while “body” and “tomb” are in green. The letters in “Soma sema” literally embody and surround the phrase. On the next page, this is reversed: “The body is a tomb” encapsulates “soma sema.”

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Figure 18. Ken Campbell, “Pantheon,” 2000.*

A sepulcher can contain the body in whole, as the physical book can carry the image. Here, as with Campbell’s other works, printmaking serves a meta-referential purpose. Material elements in the book’s production create a greater symbolic meaning; as Campbell writes, “The calf binding suggests a scalp, within which the book sometimes takes a notional stroll.”58 “Somea sema” is a line from the Greek mythology of Orpheus,

58 [http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/pantheon.html](http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/pantheon.html)
in which spirituality takes precedence over the body.\textsuperscript{59} Orpheus repeats this line to celebrate the immortality of the soul and divine power. The phrase translates as “the body is a tomb,” yet its origins carry deeper implications as a symbol that signals the soul buried within the body “as in a prison or a tomb.”\textsuperscript{60} This symbolic tomb becomes embodied in the Pantheon and in the poet himself; the body inhabits darkness while the spirit carries an illuminating light that shines from within, emanating from the opening of the dome.

A broader conception of space beyond the individual’s tomb emerges from the following pages:

TA-NETJER

STAND ON THE EAST BANK,
GOD’S LAND, YOUR TEMPLES
TO THE RISING SUN

Here, space has been given a specific geopolitical context, the fraught, contested territories of the East Bank. “Ta netjer” refers to the “land of god” or the Land of Punt in ancient Egypt.\textsuperscript{61} The phrases fuse ancient history and religion as the poem entreats the reader to “stand on the East Bank, / God’s land, your temples / to the rising sun.” Intriguingly, the “temples” could mean the physical spaces of worship, as well as the individual, who points the forehead toward “the rising sun” – toward the light that shines into the dome. The opposite statement appears a few pages later:

MARUST’HALI

THE WEST BANK IS FOR
THE SETTING SUN, FOR

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Macdonell, Ibid.
TOMBS, FOR GRAVES,
YOU ARE IN THE DESERT,
LAND OF DEATH

These lines describe Jordan’s former control over the West Bank, the disputed territory that continues to be a site of conflict and violence today. “Marsut’hali” is a region in India that in Sanskrit connotes “the land of the dead.”

Whereas in the former statement on the East Bank the eye looks upward to “the rising run,” here the gaze is downcast toward “the setting sun.” In this vision, the West Bank symbolizes death in the form of the “tombs” and “graves” in the desert. In the battles over the holy land of Jerusalem, the ties between east and west have been severed; humans have been annihilated. Another phrase pages away explores the enclosures of the west:

THERE IS NO CITADEL THAT
A SOVIET CANNOT STORM

With political implications, the Pantheon has evolved into a modern citadel, a place of war signifying the destruction of the self as well as the other. In the physical embodiment of abstract concepts, the tomb, an enclosure that contains a single person, extends into a societal space as civilians experience the terrors of war. This movement from the singular to the multiple reflects the creation of the universe, which begins as unified, then separates into dualities:

ONE BECOMES TWO
TWO BECOMES THREE
THREE BECOMES FOUR

Toward the end of the book, the lines are presented in reverse; as Campbell writes, “Four becomes three, and thereafter becomes the dualities of left and right, day and night, two

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62 Macdonell, Ibid.
63 Mallarme’s “Un Coup de Des” explores the dualities that emerge from the spontaneous moment of creation, in the “throw of a die.”
banks of a dark river and a single corpse that, during conception, never gained resolution along its material mid-line. The head floats as a vanishing ark on the amniotic flood. You are invited to both sink and swim. From the spontaneous creation of the self emanates a movement into dichotomies – the conflicts within the self, between the self and the other, in the increasing complexities and multiplicities of experience depicted in the book.

Figure 19. Ken Campbell, “Pantheon,” 2000.

The interactions between text and image unfold simultaneously: on one spread, we see conflicting words; on another, colliding profiles of the man. Images serve as symbolic texts that gradually develop meaning through the pages. Paragraphs of stories appear; then the different phrases and pieces intertwine. One piece says, “You hold a long, bandaged spar. You use it to push and so arduously unravel the dressings to unveil the man, naked and pale… You have mounted a replica of his dark and handsome head.”

The poet speaks to the reader; we take on the agency, embedding ourselves in the work as

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64 [http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/pantheon.html](http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/pantheon.html)
we pierce our way through and “mount a replica” of the head. Our work is as “arduous” as the poet’s; the act of creation is our own. The fragmented narratives create intersecting patterns and forms that are illegible and impenetrable, like the dim, protruding spaces of the mind. Thoughts become unfathomable as the patterns darken, like the mind closing in, losing consciousness. The interiors of the Pantheon retreat like a chasm down the steps into the earth; meanwhile, the bard wanders in darkness, seeking light.

Resurfacing from the veiled interiors and recesses of the mind, the fragmented phrases achieve a singular vision:

Who’s that writing
John the Revelator

The voice is uncertain, perhaps hopeful, in making this allusion to the biblical revelation; like the bard in Blake’s Songs or the speaker in Milton’s “Il Penseroso,” this speaker inhabits an ambiguous identity, reaching toward spiritual light yet diverging from traditional Christianity through its reinventions of spirituality. Perhaps a more direct assertion comes in the word “Oculus” a few pages later – the term suggests vision, in the light that illuminates the mind from within and offers insight to the poet. “Oculus” also reminds us of our own act of viewing, peering through the surfaces to discern the many complicated layers that arise from the shadowy depths. At times, our vision is obscured, yet resurfaces with time. Near the end of the book, we encounter a final illumination:

A round hole in the roof of the building allows the sun
In its declination to pass an ellipse of light through an arc
Around the inside of the dome. This arc illumines, and is
Changed by local detail: the coffering and architraves
From which the gods have fled, or otherwise gone away.

This description, which finds its way into Campbell’s artistic statement on the book, offers a sense of understanding that wrests a moment of clarity from the
complicated multiplicity of narratives that weave through the book. “Oculus” appears before the statement, signifying vision; “skull” appears afterward, evoking the interior spaces of the mind. A single “ellipse of light” passes through the opening of the dome; the opening offers a momentary glimpse of knowledge. The coffering, the black grid squares that cover the images in the book from sight, takes the shape of an arc. Each piece of this arc composes a distinct part of the narrative, exposes a new meaning with each page. The dome allows the poet to reimagine worlds in a space “from which the gods have fled, or otherwise gone away.”

The visions conjured within this book – and the complications and confusions thereof – reflect our own act of viewing. As we encounter the volume, the material elements stimulate our spontaneous thought processes, the moments of revelation mirroring the shaft of light that pierces through and illuminates the dome. The penultimate page reads, “May you finally be inscribed.” In this finality, we as readers are “inscribed” into the book as an integral element. This illumination fuses the internal and external aspects of viewing – the vision itself, as well as our perceptions of the work. The experience of reading emerges as a way of seeking toward meaning in the self within, in the world without.
Conclusion

In transfiguring the metaphysical into the material, the contemporary visions of Tetenbaum, Chen, and Campbell alter our paradigms of viewing and experiencing the book. As words and images shift away from a linear sequence, the dispersed motifs conjure unstable, shifting meanings. While Tetenbaum and Chen experiment with material structures to explore the ways in which books can take shape as art, Campbell exposes the fragmentation and re-combination of texts and images within a seemingly contained volume. Taken together, the pieces convey the increasing complexities and multiplicities of experience that can be explored through the realm of a book.

In various ways, the pieces resist a sequential mode of ‘reading,’ inviting multiple, non-linear ways to experience the works. Often, we do not encounter a ‘page’ in the traditional sense. Several structures by Tetenbaum and Chen are assembled with layers or leaves, as in “The Veil,” or with the folds in an accordion that expand and contract, as in “River of Stars.” Even though the leaves or folds could be numbered and given order, our eyes might move in various ways, catching glimpses of images and words as we register what we see. In “Ode to a Grand Staircase,” the patterns and texts are scattered about in a dismembered fashion; in “Leavings,” we might encounter the folds in reverse, as the motifs unfold on either side. The pieces reveal multiple spatial dimensions, opening up into a three-dimensional visual sculpture.

Whether through the unfolding layers in an accordion or the pages in a volume, each work depicts a complicated, multi-dimensional visual texture. In contrast with the three-dimensional structures in Tetenbaum and Chen’s works, in Campbell the recurring motifs create multiple overlays of words and images superimposed upon a two-
dimensional surface. Yet despite its two dimensions, “Pantheon’s” shape is curved rather than flat; the Japanese-style calf binding produces this effect, which suggests the rounded arc of the dome. Campbell builds on a montage of gradually assembled images, which creates an effect of simultaneity as images and words are embedded within the pages. This phenomenon appears in the “Ode to a Grand Staircase” and “The Veil,” in which we can see glimpses of the various layers through the “keyhole” in the leaves. Similarly, we can peer through the opening of the dome in “Pantheon” to discern the shapes and forms within.

Moreover, one can trace the constantly evolving images and symbols within each book. In the various pieces, the forms and expressions morph with each successive leaf or page. In “The Veil,” the patterns become denser, gradually obscuring our view. In “Pantheon,” on the other hand, the darkening patterns evoke the mind as it closes in. Campbell’s works in particular are self-referential; as he inserts his own image into the frame, the iterations across the pages represent the changing states of consciousness. Conveying a vision of a fragmented future, Campbell grapples with questions of identity, employing mutating representations to depict the construction and eventual destruction of the self.

In the larger progression through the works, we see a movement from unity into fragmentation. While the pieces by Tetenbaum and Chen can be seen as more harmonious, inviting connections among various media, Campbell’s works display brokenness both in the language and the interactions between text and image. We can see this broader evolution in the changing encounters between East and West depicted by

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66 http://brokenrules.co.uk/pantheon
each artist. While “Sermon on the practice of loving-kindness” conceptualizes space through the harmonies within nature, channeling Buddhist spirituality to offer a message of peace and reconciliation, “The Veil” exposes the anxieties and confusions within an increasingly interrelated world. In “Pantheon,” however, fraught, contested battlegrounds divide the East and West Banks; there is no gesture toward the interdependence and connection expressed by the other works. The links between the self and the other have become segmented and disintegrated, the lightness descending into an uncompromising darkness. Despite Blake’s vision of the illuminated book bringing disparate elements into unity, these pieces reveal the tensions and contradictions in that notion. Instead, contemporary artists’ books expose the increasingly complicated realities of our present moment.
Coda: Afterthoughts & Imaginings

Art in virtual space

In *The Book as Instrument*, Anna Arnar projects the “the afterlife of the book.” In the study, she explores modernist renderings of art objects, such as Duchamp’s boxes, in relation to the evolving form of the book. One such “afterlife” of Blake’s illuminated books appears in the online Blake Archive. We can explore this virtual experience as a “floating archive,” in which words and images become disentangled from the confines of linear time, away from their original sequence in the *Songs*.

In perceiving actual objects in a library’s special collections or archives, one can see textures, color, light, and shadow; the kinesthetic experience engages the senses of sight and sound that are integral to the experience of the artwork. Within virtual space, by contrast, the dimensions are necessarily flattened into a single surface. Inhabiting user interfaces and interactive media, we lose the tactile, tangible qualities of “real experience.” Objects are dissociated from their original connections – an image floating in limbo amidst empty space, a page detached from its physical binding. Yet in this displacement, one can discover new associations, and surprising interrelationships emerge. As in a museum display that features an assortment of objects in isolation from their contexts in time and space frees the mind to reimagine these very notions, so viewing art online allows us to rearrange elements and create novel connections. On the web, we open up new “windows” that display creative visions.

In the Blake Archive, one can view different copies of a plate side by side, or examine all copies at once on a single page, charting in a panoramic glimpse the evolving

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colors and forms among the various copies. Viewing the pieces in this way reveals a larger progression or narrative arc; the sweeping vision resembles the experience of unfolding the layers within “The Veil” or “Ode,” as motifs evolve with each successive page. This simultaneity creates a world in miniature within even a single plate; the slight mutations compose visual and abstract landscapes as light tints darken into shades, exposing depths of hidden meanings that are not apparent when viewing a single copy.

Campbell’s works in particular signal a movement toward virtual space. In “Night Feet on Earth,” words at the bottom of the page anticipate what is to come next, while in “Pantheon,” we can see shadows and parts of words and images before the motifs are fully explored later in the book. The computer-generated graphics simulate natural, organic evolutions, as in the different copies of Blake’s plates. Yet the images also reveal the artificiality of the manipulations: they are illusions that exist apart from physical reality. Within the works, the interactions between text and image are continually reproduced, reflecting the process of multiplying the self through duplication. This gradual metamorphosis, the impulse to question one’s identity, resembles the fluctuations of objects and images within virtual space. In this simulated environment, we can order and reorder elements, re-inhabiting an entirely intangible domain.

The online version of The Maker’s Hand produces a similar effect as the Blake Archive, presenting twenty books by Campbell on a single page. The catalog, which traces the evolutions in the artist’s work across the past twenty-five years, can be seen as a meta-referential homage to the “form” of the book in uniting text and image. In a sweeping vision, the images on the screen suggest the format of the individual works: on one side is a description, on the other, the book’s image. In this way, the catalog itself
becomes an artist’s book in its own right. The recurring reddish-orange hues, as well as the indecipherable motifs, evoke the hellish plates in Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” which serve as meta-references to the printmaker’s materials and tools. The Maker’s Hand echoes this self-reference to printmaking; Campbell writes that the catalog offers “insight into the physical and mental processes deployed during each title's gestation.”

Blake’s plates stimulate a variety of creative responses in both virtual and “real” space. Blake 2.0 explores the connections his works have inspired in various media innovations including art therapy, graphic design, music, etc. Perhaps, as the book suggests, his pieces animate a continuing afterlife in the digital age because the composite art merges and sparks new interactions between poetry and visual illustration; printmaking and vision. Simultaneous experiences can reveal connections in surprising ways. One activity can stimulate sensory perceptions of another – in the course of writing or thinking about this thesis, I have heard “Jerusalem,” set to music by Hubert Parry, playing in my head. And I can imagine a similar experience by Tetenbaum and Chen, as they constructed “Ode to a Grand Staircase” after Satie’s “silent librettos” and original composition.

We might view the creative process as child’s play, awakening the imagination with its hopes and fears. As artists’ books stimulate creative responses, inviting the interactions among the senses, we as readers can rediscover the possibilities in the

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68 http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/themaker.html#
70 Blake 2.0 has spawned a network of websites after its name; the sites include a blog, a “William Blake Channel,” and a “Digital Reading Project.” http://blake2.org/myblake/
continuing interplay between images and words. In this movement from experience into a higher innocence, we can revisit the piper in the fields who writes songs that “every child may joy to hear.”
List of Illustrations

Part I. William Blake

1 – William Blake, “Title Page for Songs of Innocence,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

2 – “Introduction,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

3 – “Introduction,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
Copy F, 1789, 1794, Yale Center for British Art, http://blakearchive.org/

4 – “Earth’s Answer,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

5 – “The Little Girl Lost,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

6 – “The Little Girl Lost,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
Copy L, 1795, Yale Center for British Art, http://blakearchive.org/

7 – “The Little Girl Found,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

8 – “The Voice of the Ancient Bard,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

Part II. Contemporary Artists’ Books

1 – Barbara Tetenbaum, “Sermon on the practice of loving-kindness”
1995, letterpress, mixed media, Portland, OR: Triangular Press
http://loveandorterror.arizona.edu

2, 3 – Barbara Tetenbaum, “Collage Book #3”
1987, 11 cm x width 6.5 cm, Portland, OR: Triangular Press

4 – Julie Chen & Barbara Tetenbaum, “Ode to a Grand Staircase”
2001, letterpress, 19x97 cm., folded to 19x17 cm, Berkeley, CA: Flying Fish Press;
Portland, OR: Triangular Press
http://www.flyingfishpress.com/portfolio/earlierwork.html

5 – Julie Chen, “Leavings”
1997, letterpress with polymer plates, 24 p.: col. ill. 17 cm, Berkeley, CA: Flying Fish Press
6 – Julie Chen, “Leavings”
http://oregondigital.org

7 – Julie Chen & Ed Hutchins, “River of Stars”
1994, letterpress printed on handmade paper, 2-7/8” x 2-7/8,” Berkeley, CA: Flying Fish Press
infoguides.gmu.edu

8, 9 – Julie Chen, “The Veil”
2002, letterpress with lasercut details, 4.25” x10.5,” Berkeley, CA: Flying Fish Press
http://www.flyingfishpress.com/booksinprint/theveil.html

10 – Ken Campbell, “Night Feet on Earth”
1986, letterpress from zinc blocks, 254 x 279 mm; 40 p, London: K. Campbell
http://www.brokenrules.co.uk/nightfeet.html#

11, 12 – Ken Campbell, “Night Feet on Earth”
Courtesy of Wellesley College Special Collections.

13, 14 – Ken Campbell, “Pantheon”
2000, polychrome letterpress, 387 x 381 mm, 132 p., London: K. Campbell
http://royalacademy.org.uk

15-18 – Ken Campbell, “Pantheon”
Courtesy of Wellesley College Special Collections

19 – Ken Campbell, “Pantheon”
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http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/artist_book/

“Triangular Press.” Vamp & Tramp, Booksellers, LLC.

http://www.vampandtramp.com/finepress/t/triangular.html

Wellesley College Special Collections, copies of artists’ books by Barbara Tetenbaum, Julie Chen, and Ken Campbell.