The ghost artist

Tracing spectral embodiment as a figure of aesthetic resistance, in an unknown woman’s eighteenth century paintings, and works by Hilma af Klint and Louise Bourgeois

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PART ONE: SHADOWS AND LIGHT
A BOOK OF SECRETS

The anonymous manuscript is a hand-painted book of watercolours, not a printed book, and is in the collection of Glasgow University library. It is known only by its archival designation, MS Ferguson 115, and dated by the library as being painted between 1699 and 1799. It is unsigned and is an almost entirely unstudied artefact of high invisibility. It is part of the Ferguson Collection of Books and Manuscripts, 7500 volumes collected by John Ferguson (1838–1916), bibliographer and Professor of Chemistry at the university from 1874 to 1915. Ferguson’s professional interests led him to collect all he could on the early roots of his subject, and the collection is focussed on alchemy, early chemistry, witchcraft, Cabbalism, Rosicrucianism, Free Masonry, and Romany literature. It includes 317 manuscripts, nearly entirely alchemical in nature. Ferguson’s book collection was purchased by the university from his estate in 1921.

The manuscript’s fifty-two hand painted watercolours are held within blank boards 196 x 153 mm in size and covered in worn, fawn coloured leather. The end papers have, sadly, been torn out. On the inside front cover is a bookplate of the Victorian collector Edward Hailstone (1818–90). This is the only link to the book’s history before it came to John Ferguson, but there is no record of when the book entered Ferguson’s collection. However, Hailstone’s book collection was split when he died, going either to the collection of York Minster, or the sale rooms of Sotheby’s in London (4 – 14 February 1891, and at Walton Hall, Yorkshire 2 – 7 Feb 1891). By this time, Ferguson was a professor and spending a lot of time buying books. It is possible that he purchased MS Ferguson 115 at one of these auctions. I found the Sotheby’s auction catalogues in the British Library, but a day spent reading every listed item of sale led to nothing. The book may have been sold as a parcel listed simply as ‘miscellaneous chap-books’ but there is no further information.
My first encounter with MS 115 had been with four black and white reproductions, and, despite their dismal quality, a frisson of uncanny recognition had stolen up my neck. Delicate paintings of the cut ends of fire logs revealed bark and outer age rings, but heart wood that transformed into clouds, figures, and strange animals. These magical worlds bridged into my own, and in the absence of any further online resources, I decided to visit the archive.

The paraphernalia of a reading room are the everyday of academic life, but the winged foam supports, clustered on tables and slung with the beaded silk stockings of page holders, had an animistic presence to my artist eyes. As I silently sucked them in, and adjusted to the voiceless rustling of the room, I was also trying hard not to be disappointed. The manuscript is—modest. The size of a biggish paperback, and 200-year old used. The plain leather cover is worn and rubbed, as if it had been carried around a lot in a bag. It most closely resembles an old sketch book, which is what it probably is. Resting on its winged support, it gushed ‘mistake.’ There were too many angels and badly drawn kings and queens, bad drawing generally in fact, and so much brown. Why had I ever thought this might be interesting? And yet. Pages 13, 14, page 27, page 31. The artist’s unspoken voice drew me past my prejudices. Clearly, I had been hoping for a bit more razzamatazz, but this book was bare, the performance of classical skill was not part of whatever this was. Going backwards and forwards through these pages was to look into a private world of gentle monsters and village folk, cut disquietingly with death, violence, and emptiness, and wrapped in repetition. Gabriel was certainly there, and a man in a mitre hat, but the ouroboros was out for a swim, and easily overpowered them.

As the reading room darkened and I wandered off, I realised my day had been like a trip in the Tardis of my Dr Who childhood, going back in time with the brush marks of this deeply personal vision, by-passing the (missing) historical data of who, when, where, what for, the butterfly pins that hold objects in historical narratives, and landing instead on an unknown terrain. The sometimes-dense layering of paint revealed changing decisions and a lengthy working time. I doubted the paintings were pre-planned, every page looked more like an attempt or a question, one about pain, mortality, family, reproduction, and unknowable strangeness. The bare lack of professional flourish betrayed sincere striving to work something out. As recognition of these artistic processes came and went, the work’s unknowability brought up self-doubt along with the hairs on my arms. Anthony Vidler (1941–) points out in Buried Alive, 19 that when Freud writes on the uncanny, he suggests that fear of being buried alive by mistake can induce some of its strongest expressions. There was something about this object’s burial.
in the archive that touched on Vidler’s further observation that uncovering what has been long buried is essentially the work of psychoanalysis. Did I touch my fear of death when I handled this book? Or did I touch my fear of artistic death in reaching out to an artistic hand that seemed to be rising out of an unmarked grave?

I revisit psychological and artistic death in the second half of this writing, but to make that possible, the first half compiles my research on this uncanny object. This began with Adam McLean (1948–), a Scottish specialist on hermetic literature, whose short book on MS Ferguson 175 suggests that

It is facile to describe such a strange manuscript by the overused word ‘unique,’ but there is truly nothing similar to this work to be found among the many thousands of alchemical manuscripts that survive in libraries and specialist collections.

In a meeting with McLean, he made the point that, although alchemical languages tend to be esoteric and uniquely developed, there are commonly used symbols that reveal at least an historic web of sources and influences. Individual texts also reveal structure and sequence, as they are a record of process. Despite many years of familiarity with MS 715, he had been unable to either create this historical web, or find structuring sequences, and so wondered if it is alchemical at all, and whether it might more usefully be considered as an isolated historical maverick. This was a full stop before I got started, but I saw his point. Known alchemical texts reveal clear symbolic repetitions and sequences, and while many of them were spectacularly beautiful, their seriality nevertheless suggests an encoding meant to be read as such, perhaps as records of events happening in the hermetic vessel or furnace, but not the doubting, suggestively autobiographic ‘hand-writing’ of the manuscript, which displays a commitment in the brush work that is fundamentally lodged in a testing, curiosity driven visual mode, for its own sake, and not as a record of ‘elsewhere.’

Even when she is drawing such an alchemical standard as the ourobors, it is performing, its curves are decided afresh on each page, sometimes alive and twisting, sometimes dead and passive. These are decisions based on the need for certain aesthetic, not symbolic, readings.

So, these paintings can almost be contextualized as the deliquescenst remains of an emblem series that has lost its context (Elkins), or as seeming to be alchemical, but failing to meet the criteria of an unmarked grave? In this tradition (McLean) could these partial adoptions be made possible by the lack of actual biographic data, that I was moved by this recognisable imagination of practice, made possible by the lack of actual biographic data, that Ferguson was a chemistry historian and in 1906 he published _The Bibliotheca Chemica_ Volume 1, p. xvi. Ferguson follows this definition of his interest with a list of historians before him, who have recorded this debate, up to Gimelin’s Geschichte der 1798, the first differentiated history of the subject. The trans-mutation of base metal into gold, and so discovering the Quantesse or Philosophical Stone, which, as material evidence of the underlying structure of nature, would contain the power to ‘perfect’ anything it touched, is generally thought to have been the underlying drive of alchemical experiments. This process is described in C66-70. This is the Alchemies, as ‘Science, teaching how to turn base into noble, and of metals into another […] by a proper medicine [...]’. Alchemy therefore is a science teaching how to make and compound a certain medicine, which is called Elixir, which when it is cast upon metals or imperfect bodies, doth fully protect them.”

found in Lyndy Abraham, _A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery_, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 4

the library archive describes it as. A space would then remain open for these depicted transmutations to hold the more autobiographic voice I thought I saw there. Could this fifty-two-image sequence record a personal journey or inner dilemma? Elkins would go on to publish _What Heaven Looks like_, Comments on a Strange Wordless Book, a meditative, page-by-page commentary on MS 115, which also notes the divergence from classical alchemical texts, but, lacking any other clear historical ties, he finds these paintings to be strangely ‘mute,’ a site of possible projection, but ultimately unknowable. Elkins also thought the artist might have been a woman though, and he imagines her at work.

A woman sits down to her secret work. She lives alone—her husband has died, and her children have grown and moved away. The church lingers in her thoughts, but she is no longer sure what its stories mean. It is the very end of the Renaissance, and the old certainties are gone. Even the myths and legends seem wrong as they drift in and out of her solitary thoughts. She goes out the back of her house and walks up a slope to a woodpile. She selects a cut log, and carries it back to her room. She stands it on the floor next to her chair, and she leans over to look at the cut surface. She studies the drops of dew and the damp soft bark. She moves her fingers in gentle circles, following the fine brown rings in the wood. Cracks score the surface like spokes of a wheel. She tests them with her fingernail.

I was moved by this recognisable imagination of practice, made possible by the lack of actual biographic data, that important factor in the manuscript’s historic isolation. I also saw a woman’s world view haunting painfully intimate paintings created by someone who may have been dealing with her training or audience, with its needs for norms of recognition.

Ferguson was a chemistry historian and in 1906 he published _The Bibliotheca Chemica_ (1906), where he defines three periods of chemical literature: the pre-1600 alchemical period with its belief in transmutation, the intro-chemical period from 1600–1800 defined by the archival study of the older information; and the post 1800 modern period of scientific chemistry. He discusses the connections between these stranded forms of old and new knowledge, and goes on to point out that

It is an illustration of the persistence of an idea that all through the eighteenth century […] when entirely new theories were advanced, the controversy as to the reality of transmutation—as a fact and as a theory—was still sustained.
He points to a certain wilfulness in relation to this idea, a need for magical transformation that was not being met by scientific advancement alone, and could no longer be fully accounted for by church teaching. This resonated with my own willful interest, and a developing idea that the book’s occluded imagery might lie closer to contemporary ideas of the unconscious than to the early languages of chemistry. McLean understands the journey towards these twentieth century ideas to be a core work of alchemy however, when he states that the tradition is for him fundamentally spiritual, a means for exploring our inner space [...] a practical method for investigating the substance of our being, by mediating upon chemical processes. The alchemists worked with their retorts, heating, calcining, subliming, distilling substances, watching all the while the transformations within their experiments. They used events in their experiments as seed images for meditations, forming visual mantras from chemical changes. The alchemists reflected and mirrored these outward events into their interior world. They saw the processes in their flasks as an interaction and linking of the spiritual and the material. The spirit rose up, separating from the substance at the bottom of their flasks and descended again to spiritualise the material into an essence or tincture. As the alchemists reworked their flasks and descended again to spiritualise the material processes in their flasks as an interaction and linking of outward events into their interior world. They saw the changes. The alchemists reflected and mirrored these events in their flasks as a kind of microcosm of macrocosmic Nature.

There are no images of the hermetic vessel itself in the manuscript, but the stand-in vessel of a log end also functions as a microcosm of the larger tree, and the larger tree is a standard alchemical, and Christian, metaphor of the cycle of life, the ordering of being, and process itself. If this book was from the eighteenth century as the library suggested, then with Ferguson’s noting of the persistence of the ideas surrounding transmutation, it is possible to read in the log, the claiming and partial quotation of the aesthetic traditions of alchemical emblems, but for some new sort of alchemical transformation. To understand the matter in the flask as a parallel of embodied life, as McLean suggests the alchemists did, to also see this in the stand-in of the log, and to work with this in hands-on, open-ended experiments, can also be understood as the work of painting itself, where one never knows quite how things are going to turn out in the negotiation of ideas with sludge. My interest in the work of the unconscious is explored in detail in What Painting Is, Routledge, London, 2000

Though the craftsmanship of an ape of nature from the prototype of the whole of chaotic nature itself in as many portrayals (totidem ecyps adumbrae?) and for ever conserved in memory of the King. Books of Secrets were early attempts at a scientific literature, and they originated in Medieval compendiums of data about the world, a ‘secret’ being both a recipe (or receipt) and directions for an experiment or method, usually accompanied by a supporting text of success. The reflections of practical knowledge, domestic ‘how to’ or DIY books, often written in vernacular language by surgeons, metal workers, empirics in every field who sought to share knowledge gained through trial and error methods. They often focused on medicines, technical know-how in relation to agricultural and building machinery, metallurgy, botany, dyeing, making perfume and cosmetics, astronomy, as well as astrology, magic, and alchemy. In naming this genre, Ferguson brought together all the early literature he could find relevant to the history of chemistry. His collection is now defined as alchemical, but these books cover a much wider field of knowledge, as chemistry,
Alchemy, and other sciences were entwined fields of enquiry well into the eighteenth century. This broader genre slightly redefines the way MS 115 might be approached, as Ferguson’s goal was to cast a wide net, and he was interested even in books he saw no particular value in. In the sixth lecture, he throws in that “there is always some old book coming forward which I did not know before” and that though he finds many of these books unintelligible they are also “seductive and suggestive.”

As collections of populist knowledge and folk custom, Books of Secrets were understood to contain ‘natural knowledge’ or that which is ‘known’ about nature (the world). Before the scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment allowed greater comprehension into how things worked, many manual/technical/artistic operations that specialists engaged in seemed wondrous, ‘magical,’ or like a secret revealed. That we no longer necessarily see a DIY manual as a revelation says something about how our world view has been transformed. Books of Secrets formed a vast field of popular early European literature, and one of the most famous is the *Magia Naturalis*, by Giambattista della Porta, from 1558. Although written in Latin for a learned readership, it ran to 20 editions re-printed over more than one hundred years. Among much useful and practical information, the book contains, magnificently, the recipe for siring a rainbow coloured horse.

On the inside front cover of this centenary edition of *Magia Naturalis*, the image of chaos at the heart of the cosmos bears formal similarity to the structure of the manuscript, but the zodiac symbols, sun, moon and wind form an accessible agreed symbolism.

Another important and wide-spread publication was *The Natural History of the Two Worlds*, by Robert Fludd (1574–1637). These volumes are alternatively called early encyclopaedias and alchemical key works. As a Book of Secrets, they reveal the simultaneous value placed on spiritual understanding and
The coloured horse is an example of practical chemistry, arguing into deriving alchemy. Alchemists' preparations were often linked to changes in colour, so an essay on dyeing fabric could be a practical recipe, an essay on the use of gold in creating red glass a technical instruction, but the way to create a multi-coloured horse comprehensible today only as a metaphorical rendition dressed in the form of a recipe. The emphasis on visual transformation however accounts for the space given over to dyers and metal work in many Books of Secrets. Eamon gives a compelling account in Science and the Secrets of Nature of how the historical work of Western European alchemy is misunderstood as merely a search for transmutation of metals, and that understanding that was a religious goal. To project upon matter the mystical drama of the passion, death and the resurrection of the god of the mystery cult is almost impossible. In effect “compressed the lived experience of generations of empirics into simple, time tested rules” partly as they continued to supply a need for practical information by a newly emerging professional class. In Distilling Knowledge, Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific revolution, Bruce Moran (1950–) frames the usefulness of alchemy to early modern science as one in which “process can count as an object, in which making is learning, and in which the messiness of conflict leads to discernment.” The searching brush in the manuscript reveals these processes centre stage, with figures left half formed, and some areas thickly over-painted with new decisions.

Both Moran and Tara Nummedal (1970–) stress that alchemy was a recognised trade in early modern Europe. Alchemists are often presumed to have lived at society’s margins, as con-men or dreamers, but, in Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire, Nummedal shows that both men and women were employed by patrons, built laboratories, and ordered supplies, as tradespeople, with all the everyday contingencies of any other job. Success depended on skill and ingenuity, and was one of the few trades open to women. While some alchemists were philosophers, others created practical technologies that addressed the economic needs of early modern states. Newton in England worked on metallurgical assays experiments while working for the Royal Mint, and many German alchemists worked alongside engineers in the mining industry, which occupied a central place in these state’s economies. Moran points out that even when their procedures and projects lacked success, the involvement with alchemical and chemical processes by numerous figures across the social spectrum had implications for further knowledge because, unless utterly accidental, to do and to know how to do were, and still are, connected. In an age before copyright, alchemists were often keen to encourage their information, and the esoteric qualities of the work are what have come down to us today. Alchemy was also overtly used, however, as a cloak for messages of a quite different register, and Nummedal cites both Rudolph II of the Holy Roman Empire, and Landgrave Moritz of Hessen Kassel as rulers who embraced alchemy to reinforce other political agendas.

For these princes, alchemy and the study of nature’s secrets could be many things: an expression of religious tolerance in the face of the tensions of reformation Europe; a type of symbolic political propaganda that equated control of the natural world with control of the human world, or a familiar language in which to couch more novel proposals, such as capitalist ventures. So, the alchemical tradition was in many ways a practical one, and open to both men and women from across class divides. This also means that women, even if they were not alchemists, might well have had access to the literature. This was a democratic tradition of knowledge sharing, and it involved the coalescing of word and image in meaning creation. It was also a meditative tradition, as a material expression of life’s unspeakable mysteries, those of internal experience. The anonymous manuscript reveals knowledge of this rich semiotic heritage, but re-worked, or perverted, for the artist’s own ends, or to use Nummedal’s phrase, using a ‘familiar language in which to couch more novel proposals.’

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The Paper

Glasgow University Library dates the manuscript to 1699–1799, but that looked like a guessestimate, and before I could go any further, I needed to look under the paintings, to the paper and the structure of the book. The hand sewn binding reveals 54 folios, brought together in groups of four (eight pages) except for the first two, which are single sheets. There is one extra folio, that with image 21 painted on it. Its conjugal leaf was cut, and this page inserted as a replacement. 46 This suggests that the order of the images was important, and that the book was bound together before the paintings were made, and not the other way around.

Holding each page up to the light reveals both horizontal and vertical watermark lines as well as emblematic watermarks. Prior to around 1800, all paper was handmade by dipping a wooden framed screen, called a mold, into a watery pulp of cellulose fibres, lifting it out and draining off the water, leaving a matted layer that when dry, became paper. The screen itself was made up of fine horizontal wires 'laid' over thicker vertical wires, called chains. Wire designs (watermarks) were sewn onto this grid. The watery paper pulp would be thinner where it went over the wires, but its surface tension also meant that it would gather just to the side of the heavier chain lines, creating slightly thicker paper there. When held up to the light, this is visible as chain line 'shadows' on each side of the lighter watermark line. This sort of paper is known as 'antique laid.' Every page of MS Ferguson 715 reveals these shadows, and so the paper is likely to have been made before 1800.

In addition to chain line shadows, many pages also reveal parts of designed watermarks. These are all partially sewn into thebinding, but there are four distinct marks. Edward Heawood (1863–1949), in Watermarks, mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries 44 reminds us that books from before 1800 often reveal a variety of watermarks, as paper merchants collected their supplies from scattered sources, and sold paper according to size and quality, not by mark. These mixed marks were then also compatible with a pre-1800 date.

The first paper I tried to identify was one with a clear name marked on it, that of the famous Dutch papermakers D&C Blauw. In the late seventeenth century, several important papermaking companies developed in Holland, making first grey and blue, then finer quality, white, paper. Blauw, from Zaandijk, north west of Amsterdam, would become one of the most important. The firm D&C Blauw started life in 1621 as De Oude Blauw, a paper mill for blue packaging paper in the structure of the book. The hand sewn binding reveals 54 folios, brought together in groups of four (eight pages) except for the first two, which are single sheets. There is one extra folio, that with image 21 painted on it. Its conjugal leaf was cut, and this page inserted as a replacement. 46 This suggests that the order of the images was important, and that the book was bound together before the paintings were made, and not the other way around.

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Patras in the manuscript are, in addition, only ever partly seen, as they are sewn into the binding.

Tracing such a mark, the most common in the book, therefore seemed to be an impossible task. This must also have been a problem for papemakers seeking to distinguish their product however, and reading Voorn further, I found out that between about 1775–1800, control of the Dutch paper making industry began to be consolidated into a small number of companies, and the huge diversity of watermarks seen in the first part of the century became more uniform. Commonly used marks such as Liberty and Pro Patria begin to be seen with a countermark, usually a letter. D&C Blauw began to insert a single B under their main mark. 52 Blowing up my photographic documentation of a D&C Blauw Pro Patria page on screen, I began to detect just such a B within the watercolour paint of pages 6, 19, and 51, placed directly below the gate in the palisade. This identifies many of the Pro Patria pages. In other pages, it is the top half of the mark that is visible, and overlaying these, the head is quite identical, suggesting the Pro Patria papers are all one batch. Also finding the B identifies most of the paper in the book as being made by D&C Blauw, in Wormerveer, after about 1775. The paper date I now had was 1775–1800.

The consolidation period of 1775 to 1800 was a quarter century approximation by Voorn however, and so I dug deeper into the company’s history. In 1768, D&C Blauw created a new trademark of a coat of arms with a double cross on a shield and the letter B below, while continuing to use the post horn and Pro Patria to designate writing papers.

At the same time, “In 1768, at public auction, he [Dirk Blauw] bought the Zaandijk white paper mill De Herderin, for 15,700 florins, which was added to his enterprise.” 54 This large mill greatly extended their production of quality white paper, and it was the same year they designed their new ‘company logo’ watermark with the double cross and B. It seems quite likely that this expansion and branding exercise was also the moment the B was added to existing marks they wished to continue. Adjusting to this more detailed information, the D&C Blauw Pro Patria paper in the manuscript now seemed most likely to have come from a single ream, made in Zaandijk between 1768 and 1800. This time span is supported by a sheet of paper positively identified as D&C Blauw, and held in the collection of the U.S. Library of Congress. It is a letter written by Thomas Jefferson on February 19, 1783, in Washington D.C. 55 The chain line markings, post horn and fleur-de-lis are all very close to those of page 35.

Not all of the palisade watermarks have the post-1768 B however. It is missing from the introductory page, suggesting it was made pre-1768. Thinking about Heawood’s comment that paper sellers would make up a batch from various sources however, it seems

The images inserted here in the printed thesis are not available in the digital thesis.
most likely that the manuscript’s paper is mostly from a single ream of post-1768 D&C Blauw Pro Patria writing paper from a mill in Zaandijk, with a small number of older sheets, from D&C Blauw, C&J Honig, and a single unidentified Lion Rampant sheet making up the numbers.

So, the book was sewn together after 1768, but the not after date remained vague. The paper historian WA Churchill traced the use of Pro Patria in Dutch mills to between 1683 and 1799, but I was not able to find evidence for this, and Churchill does not supply any, so I looked at the more general history of papermaking technique at this time. Throughout the late 1700’s, the use of wove papers, first introduced in England in 1757, was spreading throughout Europe. In wove paper, a screen of fine woven mesh was stretched evenly across the wooden frame and required no supporting chain lines. Watermark emblems were still sewn onto the wove surface, but paper made this way shows no lattice, and is easily identified. The MS papers are all laid paper, made using the more old-fashioned process. In 1807, a machine for the manufacture of wove paper was invented by James Cobb in England, and Voorn records that in that same year, the Zaanse paper mills all changed over to the making of wove paper for all but their most specialist papers.

1807 is then the end date for regular antique laid writing paper in the Zaanse mills. Heawood’s watermark history adds another important detail when he writes that: “From 1794 onward, the practice of watermarking the date of making became general.” A big mill like Blauw would not be behind on such a development, and as none of our papers has any hint of a date, they are likely to have been before 1794. That places paper production between 1768 and 1794.

Heawood, p 28, chart showing proven time lapses between the making and use of dated papers in the late 1700’s.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.
The Dutch were Protestant in their beliefs, but Catholic in their choice of trading partners. A regular bound writing notebook would have been inexpensive and available to anyone from the middle or upper classes of any town in Europe or its colonies. Dating the paper had defined when this notebook was most likely to have been bound, (1768–1777), but it had telescoped my thinking on geography. To locate the work further, I turned to the paintings themselves.

After the Latin dedication page, the book contains only paintings, each on the right-hand, or recto side of the paper. These are between 110 and 130 mm in diameter and repeat a circle shape that floats centrally on an otherwise blank page. They are based on the cross-sections of trees, nature's clock-face, but within each one we also see a magical world of clouds, figures, and animals. If there is a narrative structure, it is opaque. The imagery has roots in an emblematic and alchemical European tradition, but this section considers a quite different development of the image that was also happening in the eighteenth century.

Looking at the layers of paint in a slanting light, it is possible to see a painting process that begins with an outer circle, often set out with a pencil line. These outer growth rings of the tree are then drawn as they come in from the bark or 'outer skin' of the log. As these inscriptions of the tree's ageing process progress towards the heart-wood, they begin to transform into imagined worlds. These modulate between pages related to contemporary Christian imagery, quietly violent scenes, and strange, almost abstract surfaces. Other pages can only be described as surreal. Studying these begins to raise a question about the relationship of the two parts. If the log is understood as a 'one-liner' framing device that is otherwise unconnected to these interior worlds, a quality of looking out, which had
I realized that the artist had pondered her material with a great deal of attention. The artist's record of rings of growth cut through with the crack lines of age and drying, residues of mould, fungus patterns, and rotted holes relate directly to what happens to individual pieces of wood. Each of these paintings had begun life in observations of the material world. Slow contemplation and study had ‘effloresced’ the heart wood images out of the observed. There is a release of conceptual control inherent to this method of ‘looking out to look in,’ and this was my artistic connection with the paintings.

The artist develops metaphors of transformation that begin with the transformations of the wood itself: the cracks, stains, and holes that mark time. It is the process of looking and recording, as well as the data found there, that leads to the imagined imagery, much of which is also concerned with the cycles of life, but which is entangled in the depiction of found material. This entanglement is the discipline of the method, but having observed these two separate methods (recording and imagining), I now found it hard to focus on their entanglement.

My eyes switched between the logic of the imagined scene, or that of the log, as if I was looking either into an old mirror, or...
Systema naturæ per regna tria naturæ, secundum classes, ordines, genera, species, cum characteribus, differentiis, synonymis, locis or translated: “System of nature through the three kingdoms of nature, according to classes, orders, genera and species, with characters, differences, synonyms, places.” Across several updated editions from 1735 on, the Systema naturæ became the basis of contemporary zoological definition. Linnaeus was Swedish, but studied and published his book in the free Netherlands, with the financial assistance of a Dutch and a Scottish scholar. Linnaeus’s continual movement from one country to another, working with scholars wherever he could find intellectual support, and travelling constantly on field trips, personifies the international mobility of the Enlightenment.

Linnaeus began publishing Systema Naturae, in 1735, marking a new age of botanical records created from painted observation. Linnaeus would not have recognised this artist as a pupil. There is a botanical record here, but if this was a study notebook, then for the study of what? This language is neither that of the alchemical flask nor the budding botanist. Each work begins with bark and ring data, but as the brush strokes inward, taking on elements of sap mould, cracks, and deep holes where soft heart wood has rotted, there is a switch, a step change to a different world.

Clouds

The clouds/mouldy sap that most often mark this step change reveal botanical roots, but they are also a more generic framing device found across emblematic and alchemical literature, where similar clouds, bounding a circular motif, are used to symbolically separate earth from heaven, or material experience from internal awareness, such as belief in the spiritual realm. In A Theory of Clouds, Hubert Damisch (1928–2017) argues that, from the Renaissance on, painters used clouds as a counterpoint to the rigours of linear perspective, allowing the creation of other types of pictorial space outside of the perspectival grid. The defined and definable space of the grid then enters a relationship with the nebulous, and Damisch points to this as the space of alterity, perhaps the celestial realm, or that which, more broadly, remains undefined by the dominant codes defining visualisation. The constant presence of the ouroboros, entwined with these framing clouds/sap, reveals an artist familiar with this tradition of the cloud as boundary marker, as well as with the stock imagery of the Christian version of the spiritual realm, with its angels and cherubs. The bishop’s mitre in the strange scenes of page 7 further confirm this book was painted within a (questioning) Christian context. Other pages however are hard to relate to any image structure from that time.

It is this movement between codes that led both McLean and Elkins to conclude that the notebook cannot have been painted as an alchemical script, despite the obvious semiotic markers of clouds, snakes, heaven and earth. The cloud sign bounding a nebulous inner world defines only a problematized use of these formulas, and the notebook seems to float between this and the different inward-looking gaze of the Romantic subject that was coming into being in certain parts of Germany at this time, further supporting the idea that the alchemical tradition was being used as an ‘empty vessel,’ of quotation for other purposes.
Perhaps it allowed the artist to search for ways to depict her own world view, a subjective experience she did not yet know how to depict, and did not see recorded in the work of others around her. The container of the circle, the botanical study used as auto-suggestion, the overlaying of image formulas specific to the depiction of the nebulous, could be understood as a serial process that allowed this undefined language to come forth. Artistic research theorist Estelle Barrett (d. o. b. unknown) writes about the way artistic practice can have a specific role in this sort of exploration when she states that the aesthetic image is ‘performative’; it emerges through sensory processes and gives rise to multiplicity, ambiguity, and indeterminacy. Out of this, meanings that fall beyond the codes of a given sign system (visual or verbal) may be accessed.

To get closer to this indeterminacy, it is necessary to map out what other sorts of imagery might have been available to someone painting in a little notebook, somewhere in Europe or its colonies, in the years shortly after 1768. She is familiar with religious, alchemical, and emblematic semiotics, and has embedded them within the new codes of botanical study. None of this pointed particularly to the discipline of fine art however, and so I did not begin looking there, but where the artist had begun, with wood itself.

Looking at Wood

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had seen a huge expansion in the marketplaces for European goods, and shipping routes led to and from the Far East, Africa, and America. This growing ‘embarrassment of riches’ also created conflict between the European nations who controlled these routes, as monarchs and princes jostled for control of a new world or its colonies, in the years shortly after 1768. She is familiar with religious, alchemical, and emblematic semiotics, and has embedded them within the new codes of botanical study. None of this pointed particularly to the discipline of fine art however, and so I did not begin looking there, but where the artist had begun, with wood itself.

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68
Barbara Maria Stafford, Body Criticism, imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, p. 38

69

70
Samuel Pepys Diary, 21 January 1665: pepys.org, see link 10 for full address. Archived 14.01.2017

71
Thomas Sharp, The Virtuoso (1676)
Hooke’s majestic *Micrographia* emphasised on every page that it was a record of microscopic investigation, and not a work of the imagination. He repeats a form of the word on every title plate, and, also, as Janice Neri observes in *Between Observation and Image*, “Hooke often enclosed the objects he presented within a round frame, thus offering viewers an evocation of the experience of looking through the lens of a microscope.” *Micrographia* was published in 1665, however the lost plates were re-discovered in 1745, and re-printed that year as *Micrographia Restaurata*, so sharing his work, again to great European acclaim, with a new audience almost a hundred years later, and much closer to the time the notebook may have been painted.

Throughout the 1700’s, scholars increasingly published their work in their own languages, or in French, the language of international conversation across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was an ideological gesture, an Enlightenment interest in sharing over secluding knowledge within Latin, which was only understood by a privileged, formally educated, minority. In the same period, steadily increasing literacy was creating a mass market for books, periodicals, and leaflets on contemporary thought and invention. Women would also have had access to household ‘books of secrets,’ and to other printed alchemical literature, because, as previously mentioned, alchemists were often women.

The *Micrographia* and *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* reveal the way lens technology also allowed for new conceptual lenses with which to understand invisibilities as also a part of the material world. The *Micrographia* reveals a developing mind-set based on serial imagery, laid out to reveal underlying structures, which could then be understood as a set of abstractions. This had also been a goal of alchemists, but their attempts to find an underlying structure of the world (the secrets of the philosopher’s stone) were on the one hand, tightly bound up with an idea of the divine, and on the other, governed by secrecy in a world ruled by church censorship and control.

The Enlightenment’s political principle of sharing over secluding also led to the sharing of knowledge and discovery across class and gender divides, and was a direct assault on ecclesiastic censorship. This was a way of ‘seeing’ that would eventually lead to revolution and the end of the pre-Modern world. The *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* was Bernard de Fontenelle’s (1657–1757) opening up of the invisibly vast, and another Baroque best seller which could then be understood as a set of abstractions. This had also been a goal of alchemists, but their attempts to find an underlying structure of the world (the secrets of the philosopher’s stone) were on the one hand, tightly bound up with an idea of the divine, and on the other, governed by secrecy in a world ruled by church censorship and control.

The work of natural philosophers began to reveal information on the actual nature of matter, replacing faith with measuring and viewing instruments, which exceeded the natural boundaries of human sight and began to record the invisible world as materially present. The Enlightenment’s political principle of sharing over secluding also led to the sharing of knowledge and discovery across class and gender divides, and was a direct assault on ecclesiastic censorship. This was a way of ‘seeing’ that would eventually lead to revolution and the end of the pre-Modern world. The Latin inscription of the notebook, written sometime after 1768, in combination with the form of both a botanical notebook and an alchemical treatise, marks our author as an educated person looking back to a lost world and the gaze of ‘natural magic’ that Ferguson noted was so hard to give up, as it continued to feed a need not met by this newly mechanizing world.

**Class**

The developing middle class and the peasantry would have handled logs every day of their lives. They were the basic fuel that went onto the fire and heated every meal. They would have been touched and smelt and brought from the outside world into the home, every day. The attention given to logs with every page of the notebook may have had its resonance.
The timeless quality of the log has only disappeared in the West since WWII. My mother remembers going to the river with her grandfather in the 1930's and 40's to collect the driftwood that was her grandparents only source of fuel for heating, hot water, and cooking. This is not the progressive twentieth century that is written of in history books, but it would nevertheless been the experience of many people across Europe.

in this everyday act of attending to a fire or a meal, a painterly re-visiting of a domestic ritual, with a haptic resonance I struggle to bring into my contemporary experience. I weakly imagine the joy of indoor plumbing but the fire would have been a hundred times more fundamental. Logs were the key that allowed a cycle of building, nourishment and warmth, intellectual growth through books, and trade and travel in boats and carts. The living and dying of the family are also reproduced in the cycle of growing a tree and chopping it down to give it new life in the fire. Logs are rarely seen in the paintings we now look at in museums, and yet they would have been ubiquitous, if individually temporary, household objects. To choose this as a fundamental subject matter says something about the artist. The questioning, strange images seem to rule out the painterly hand of a clergyman, and the aristocracy would have had a distant relationship with logs that other people sawed for them, moved into their homes, put on their fires, and used to cook their food. The notebook artist knew them intimately.

If she was not a member of the nobility, she would also have had limited access to the fine art that we now associate with the cultural life of this period. Our contemporary notions of art as being made for its own sake were an idea only coming into being during the late eighteenth century, along with the idea of the public museum. Fine art objects were still the playthings of the rich and powerful, and tied to other social functions than aesthetic pleasure alone (such as power, display, and the spreading of doctrine). The artist whose canvas was a notebook made from cheap writing paper may have had only a glancing acquaintance with contemporary oil or fresco painting, and been more familiar with a visual vocabulary gleaned from prints, magazines, and books. So wood was not a neutral choice of subject matter. To reveal such haptic knowledge of it is extremely unlikely to have been done to impress a rich client, and it is certainly not botanical research. Wood however, was fundamental to both people's domestic lives, and to industry, and this was also what Peter Watson (1943-), in The German Genius, calls 'the age of paper,' when massive increases in the number of printed books and magazines allowed the sharing of all other information. For the many women who learned of the world from new informational magazines, wood was directly connected, not only to the daily rituals of the home, but to the liberations of knowledge.

The importance of timber at this time led to the creation of wood libraries, or collections of 'wooden books.' These Xylotheques began to appear in the late seventeenth century, but some of the most complete were created in Sweden, the German states, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the later 1700's, the same time as the notebook was painted. In some,
such as the Schildbach Xylotheque in Kassel, slices of example woods are cut into book shapes, but others contain whole cross sections of trees, preserved circular slices very reminiscent of the notebook’s log ends. Collecting wood, and recording information about it, were new tasks of this time. Finding pictures in it was an idea that had a history. Up until the mid 1700’s, natural figurations, such as images of faces or animals in wood of stone, were often thought of as omens and portents, or the work of nature as a sentient being, as an aspect of God. It was already widely accepted in 1768 that tree rings indicated age, but when early geologists put forward the idea that the images inside stones, which we know today as fossils, were the remains of animals and plants from thousands of years ago, they presented an idea that would fundamentally alter our understanding of time. It is hard to imagine today how upsetting to a religious world view such an understanding must have been, and it led to new ways of understanding the passage of time as a visual trace being constantly recorded in the materials of the world. This was poetically registered by Henri Bergson (1859–1941) in the early twentieth century, when he wrote that “Wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed.” Bergson was thinking of the human body in terms of a durational archive, a place where time is inscribed, but the wider idea of life being understood in terms of duration, rather than presence, was a fundamental shift in understanding. Its roots are in these ideas of natural history, which re-wrote the world as no longer simply being eternally ‘present.’ Seeing meaningful images in wood was part of the old worldview, but painting them as a ‘log-book,’ a record of time passing, a record whose imagery is also a reflection on that time passing, was part of the new. This merger embodies an argument that ranged across Europe during these years, and encompassed the nature of time, physical matter, and the place of invisible experience. As a log-book, the notebook presents a stand-in for Bergson’s durational body, mediated out of daily connection with a fundamental material of life. Its pages trace hard to formulate, but sensed, questions about this changing way of seeing. The first few pages of the manuscript may even directly explore this question, as received imagery of the creation on pages two and three gives way, by page seven, to what seems to be a debate on piety, as figures in the distance peer over a ledge into the eternal fires of Hell.

If the notebook is a form of diary, it may or may not be an artistic practice, but the drawings and paintings of scientists were definitely not. Our contemporary distinctions between art and science were still being established in the late 1700’s, but these early scientists were developing sign systems for readability and re-use, which were governed by different aesthetic criteria to either the notebook (though it partly echoes these formulas) or to fine art practices that were valued in this time. The
The sun clouded over as Jess opened her mouth to answer. Her sun had reached out with the very last of her mind, and as she clung onto the old hands, Jess's chest caved, and her mother tumbled away.

The strangeness of the notebook is its movement between a quasi-scientific way of looking at rotting wood, a quasi-alchemical depiction of nebulous ideas, and the quasi-fine art depiction of social scenes. None are completed to a professional standard, and all are entangled together. The difference between this and a contemporaneous recording of scientific discovery within established fine art practice can be seen by looking at two works by British artist Joseph Wright of Derby. The most obvious difference is in terms of technical skill, and I look at this later, but here I point to the way science was recorded in fine art, by looking at the way Wright concisely records the cultural movement of the times, in two almost contemporaneous works.

Phosphorous manufacture was a major discovery of the early modern age. Combustible properties were used in bomb manufacture.

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In Two Boys Blowing a Bladder by Candlelight, Wright paints children wondering at the natural world, in the spirit of modern experiment. In counterpart, The Alchymist is depicted on his knees, awe struck at his accidental discovery of phosphorus from distilled urine, and in prayer, as in a religious painting. 

This was perfected by Renaissance painter Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) with such works as the Oculus from the Camera degli Sposi, Andrea Mantegna, 1465–1474. Fresco, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy.

The Alchymist, in search of the Philosopher's Stone, Discovers Phosphorus, and prays for the successful Conclusion of his Operation, as was the custom of the Ancient Chemical Alchemists. 1771. reworked 1795. Derby Museum and Art Gallery.

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The way the logs present two worlds, one within another, is depicted on his kiss. The way they present two worlds, one within another, is an alchemical depiction of nebulous ideas, and the quasi-fine art depiction of social scenes. None are completed to a professional standard, and all are entangled together. The difference between this and a contemporaneous recording of scientific discovery within established fine art practice can be seen by looking at two works by British artist Joseph Wright of Derby. The most obvious difference is in terms of technical skill, and I look at this later, but here I point to the way science was recorded in fine art, by looking at the way Wright concisely records the cultural movement of the times, in two almost contemporaneous works.

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and the turbaned figures that appear are not gods. A syncretic tendency can be read into these pages more in the way optics also appear, as a question addressed towards image formation itself. The blurring of image functions does not reveal an underlying syncretic clarity however, rather a pensive questioning of something else, held within botany, alchemy, fine art, and religious doctrine.

**Indeterminacy**

The entanglement of these different image systems throws up some truly strange pages that seem to stand outside of their time. Their sustained ambiguity suggests ‘pensive images’ as explored by Jacques Rancière (1940‐). Rancière’s starting point is a person who is pensive, someone who is “full of thoughts but this does not mean that she is thinking them. In pensiveness the act of thinking seems to be encroached upon by a certain passivity.” Thinking but not thinking might be thought of as a sort of circling motion, reminiscent of a plane’s holding pattern, or, the repeated repainting of similar images. Could the holding and repeating of the manuscript be usefully thought of as ‘pensive’? Rancière continues that a pensive image, as opposed to a pensive person, contains

unthought thought, a thought that cannot be attributed to the intention of the person who produces it and which influences the person who views it without her linking it to a determinate object. Pensiveness thus refers to a condition that is indeterminately between the active and the passive.

This might be indeterminacy between a representation’s mimetic and aesthetic functions, but more than that “to speak of the pensive image is to signal the existence of a zone of [...] indeterminacy between thought and non‐thought, activity and passivity, but also between art and non‐art.” There is a resistance to analysis in the notebook that speaks to this second idea of indeterminacy, which Rancière further defines as “a set of distances between several image functions present on the same surface.” He discusses this in relation to the bumpy reception of both photography and video into the realm of fine art in the twentieth century. This debate revealed an indeterminacy of reception in relation to these new mediums, which allowed certain works to entwine different registers of meaning creation. The indeterminate registers he focusses on are: indeterminacy of intention on the part of the artist—when we cannot know why a work was made; indeterminacy of time—when a work that we know to be of the past seems contemporary in some way; and indeterminacy of modes of representation—when various image functions seem to be present within each other. A pensive work might be found in this tangle of indeterminacies, and it will reveal a lack of clear readability. Our ignorance, according to Rancière, is not the
measure of the pensive image, it is a structural aspect of certain imagery.

Clarity and order were the clarion calls of the Enlightenment, not pensiveness and ambiguity. A Classical principle of unity was reflected in the requirement in unity in art works, a desire that led French academician Roger de Piles to demand, in his highly influential Principles of Painting of 1708, that correct pictorial composition control the viewer’s gaze according to the strict requirements of the artist’s intention, and allow him no “freedom to wander aimlessly.” Such clarity of composition was still the academic rulebook of Europe in the 1780’s.

David Robey analyses the inherent difficulties of this didactic call for clarity, and points to what Umberto Eco (1932–2016) noted as a crisis in this classical order.

Eco defined the ‘open work’ as an early twentieth century function of Modernity, and related it to the contravention of established expressive forms, which in turn led to a high degree of ambiguity in fine art, music, and the notebook conceptualists. Eco’s interest was the idea that conventional forms of expression, the forms he understands pre-twentieth century Western art to have utilized, can convey only conventional meanings, and conventional meanings are part of a conventional view of the world. The Modern open work is therefore, for Eco, a contestation of a conventional world view.

There is a question of how open a work can be however, before it loses its right to be called a ‘work,’ and becomes simply, say, a mess of innards. For Eco, evidence of artistic intentionality is key, and he evokes this as the oscillation of a “pendular position.”

Eco proposes that the open work, through its formal properties, reflects a modern experience of the world, and is an epistemological metaphor that touches on twentieth century science and mathematics, but is also, importantly, analogous to the senselessness and feeling of discontinuity that modern life generates. The open work seeks a new way of seeing, feeling, understanding, and accepting a universe in which traditional relationships have been shattered and new possibilities of relationship are being laboriously sketched out.

Although Eco defines the open work as belonging to modernity, it is barely mentioned in the It is coming up again because of the book. She was pressing on circles and blood, and her thoughts spiraled down them into places she couldn’t see. She didn’t want to think about it anymore, and stood up, knocking her chair. She was writing at home, and wandered to the loo for a break. The one in the new place was a square closet, small enough that, while she sat, she could rest her forehead on the little sink built into the corner. This had become a habit over the warm summer months, as the cold ceramic comforted her. Tonight she was chilling her cheek, and her eyes inevitably rotated to the drain, but it was clean and looked like a Silver. The shiny metal reflected the pinkness of her face, and low evening light illuminated the pipe below the rose.

It came like a whip crack and lashed through her. The slime was fresh. The bodies of the others had been drained of water and oil, and piped, and when she spat out her toothpastes, there was truth between her and then. Visceral contact with ghosts she fought every day could not be, and so she pushed them out rather than shatter completely.

She flushed, and walked back to her computer. A man’s voice told her not to be so upkeep. She thought about his; and the others. He had always made clear that she was just another incompetent repair, a temporary stand-in for so others he had mysteriously mislaid.

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Eco defined the ‘open work’ as an early twentieth century function of Modernity, and related it to the contravention of established expressive forms, which in turn led to a high degree of ambiguity in fine art, music, and the notebook conceptualists. Eco’s interest was the idea that conventional forms of expression, the forms he understands pre-twentieth century Western art to have utilized, can convey only conventional meanings, and conventional meanings are part of a conventional view of the world. The Modern open work is therefore, for Eco, a contestation of a conventional world view.

There is a question of how open a work can be however, before it loses its right to be called a ‘work,’ and becomes simply, say, a mess of innards. For Eco, evidence of artistic intentionality is key, and he evokes this as the oscillation of a “pendular position.”

Eco proposes that the open work, through its formal properties, reflects a modern experience of the world, and is an epistemological metaphor that touches on twentieth century science and mathematics, but is also, importantly, analogous to the senselessness and feeling of discontinuity that modern life generates. The open work seeks a new way of seeing, feeling, understanding, and accepting a universe in which traditional relationships have been shattered and new possibilities of relationship are being laboriously sketched out.

Although Eco defines the open work as belonging to modernity, it is barely mentioned in the It is coming up again because of the book. She was pressing on circles and blood, and her thoughts spiraled down them into places she couldn’t see. She didn’t want to think about it anymore, and stood up, knocking her chair. She was writing at home, and wandered to the loo for a break. The one in the new place was a square closet, small enough that, while she sat, she could rest her forehead on the little sink built into the corner. This had become a habit over the warm summer months, as the cold ceramic comforted her. Tonight she was chilling her cheek, and her eyes inevitably rotated to the drain, but it was clean and looked like a Silver. The shiny metal reflected the pinkness of her face, and low evening light illuminated the pipe below the rose.

It came like a whip crack and lashed through her. The slime was fresh. The bodies of the others had been drained of water and oil, and piped, and when she spat out her toothpastes, there was truth between her and then. Visceral contact with ghosts she fought every day could not be, and so she pushed them out rather than shatter completely.

She flushed, and walked back to her computer. A man’s voice told her not to be so upkeep. She thought about his; and the others. He had always made clear that she was just another incompetent repair, a temporary stand-in for so others he had mysteriously mislaid.

Itself, in the new world, for example, funded much of the scientific research that led to Enlightenment developments and the leisure time of a whole class to pursue these interests. It is a fundamental concept in the cultural production of the century while being one of the most influential ideas supporting i.

Enlightenment developments and the leisure time of a whole class to pursue these interests. It is a fundamental concept in the cultural production of the century while being one of the most influential ideas supporting it.
**2001: A Space Odyssey**, directed and produced by Stanley Kubrick, U.S., 1968. The extended final passage, the film’s hero Bowman, has regressed in time and is transformed into a foetus in an orb of light, floating through the cosmos. Ambiguous imagery and plot lines are a famous feature of the film, in which an unknowable obelisk-like object seems to connect the distant past with the far future.

Space give way to a yellow line just left, at the centre of the scene; a bare, almost form into which I am able to project the giant foetus of *2001 A Space Odyssey*. I am ‘reading-in’ from my now, but this is Eco’s ‘pendular dialectics.’ There should be some reading of this part of the image, but in its inherent ambiguity, it is left open to me to finalise what that is, or could be. This partial interchangeability between artist and viewer can be understood to introduce a democratic ideal to the experience of a work, a point Gamboni makes when he states that potential images correspond to the democratic ideal in the political order and address themselves (in Mallarmé’s words) ‘to the newcomers of tomorrow, of which each one will consent to be an unknown unit in the mighty numbers of a universal suffrage.’

Mallarmé’s revolutionary aspirations did not totally play out in the twentieth century, and Gamboni goes on to acknowledge that the space between this ambition for the work of culture, and its realization, defines the limits of that democratic project.

The conditions of a free exchange between equals that it [democracy] formally guarantees is made void by the distribution of wealth and power. But the project itself proposes […] a ‘sharing of authority’ in relation to contemporary art. In the way it activates, reveals and makes us conscious of the processes of perception and cognition, it offers the opportunity to put freedom of interpretation into practice and to experience the construction of an unknown reality.

If the screen of images that make up our cultural worlds are open to interpretation, rather than being the univocal dictates of a few on ‘how things are,’ then more people have the possibility to see themselves reflected in, and therefore as part of, that culture. This is the basic principle of cultural inclusion, but the open work, or interpretable image, is also an epistemological model of a world in flux, a world in which things could be another way, so a future oriented mode of seeing. This places responsibility as also with the viewer, making them an active participant in the creation of meaning in that future world, rather than a passive consumer of ‘how things are.’

The artist’s contemplation of her logs as a form of visual study that might lead to a ‘wild and free inner space’ has offered up this interpretation of her work in terms of pensive and ambiguous imagery. Discovering the detailed study of individual log patterns has revealed the merger of an older world view represented by alchemical emblems, with the new one of botanical study, while also nodding to another older understanding, of fossilized ‘pictures in nature.’ This syncretic merger has left us with doubtful, pensive images, a ‘holding pattern’ of world views being tested out in fifty-two floating
worlds, which, through their overlapping formal languages, deliquesce simple scenes into an ambiguous flux that thwarts semiotic logic. Testing and searching brushwork has produced serial openness, and this political dimension of the notebook means it sits both in and out of its time, and can be understood to function as a record of the artwork as a site for the possibility of change.

In choosing to consider the notebook as an art work, and exploring it through these twentieth century ideas, I am imposing my twenty-first century criteria. However, with no lived knowledge of the 1770's, my intellectual and sensuous present is where I do my looking from. This is the point cultural theorist Mieke Bal (1946–) makes in *Quoting Caravaggio*, when she explores how historical objects, while created within the gaze of their times, exist for us in the gaze of our time. We cannot do other than impose our contemporary vision onto our objects of study. Bal coins the term ‘re-visioning’ for this process, and makes an additional point in relation to genealogies, that art is always engaged with what came before it, both in its making, and the interpretation of it.

That engagement is an active reworking. It specifies how and what our eye sees. Hence the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead. 103

There is no historically objective viewpoint, there is only our limited and subjective ‘now’ from which to view anything, and in this way, past and present illuminate each other. Historical art works exist now within an art historical framework that did not exist in their own time of making. Our imagination of these artists is therefore entirely ours, and in Bal’s words, an artist such as Caravaggio “could have had no knowledge of, or agency upon, what we see him to be now; an irreversible new old master.” 104 The influence of Caravaggio’s paintings can be traced in the art history that came after him, and is still being made, but the situation of the notebook is different. It is not known to have influenced anything until now. Its historical trace is itself, the fact that it was kept. The non-academic brushwork means it is unlikely to have been considered an artistic object in its time, and yet it has been silently preserved, as a voice wrapped in silence. The lost voice of Anon. The university library defines its pages as revealing ‘the emergence of form out of chaos.’ With *The Ghost Artist* I am re-visioning it as an archival survivor linked to an unwritten past. I see this new old work as that of a non-professionally trained, and yet knowledgeable, artist from a sufficiently humble position in life to have an intimate relationship with the logs for her fire. An artist cloaking a personally confusing enquiry in an out-of-date alchemical semiotics, but using the ideas of transformation inherent to

She’d been reading about Enlightenment ideas of the idealized image. It was also a sort of repair, a smudging of troublesome particularities in search of a perfect form. She wondered if she might change her name. She wondered what life in the third person would be like. And then she wondered how much time she had already spent there.
this to ask barely formed questions about her time and life, and the possibility of having a voice.

The alchemical cloak she used is possibly the work’s historical life-belt, but these aesthetics are being read differently by me than they would have been in its time of making. By naming it as an art work, and, in future chapters, laying out where I see a woman’s voice, and placing this in a genealogy of women’s artistic practice, I seek to give new cultural value to this outsider voice. History has voids, voices unvalued by its writers. The notebook is one of these voids, and in re-visioning it as an approach to visual self-definition, to portrayal, I hope, in feminist critic Elizabeth Grosz’s (1952–) words, to demonstrate

the contingency and transformability of what is given [... as] there needs to be not only the production of alternatives to patriarchal [...] knowledges but more urgently [...] a freedom to [...] transform existing concepts by exploring their limits of toleration, so that we may invent new ways of addressing and opening up the real, new types of subjectivity, and new relations between subjects and objects.  

Women have historically walked a difficult path between subjecthood and objecthood, and their voices have historically been either undervalued or erased. I believe the unnamed ghost that haunts these painted pages is one of these women. I found her notebook while looking for a way to come to terms with my own experience of time passing. I could find precious few vibrant images of older women, and ended up exploring an historic vat of witches and crones that eventually led to emblem studies. But Elizabeth Grosz asks what it is worth to seek recognition as a valued subject, in a culture that prefers to refuse this, and she proposes that the feminist project might more usefully focus on

making something, inventing something, which will enable us to recognise ourselves, or more interestingly, to eschew recognition altogether. I am not what others see in me, but what I do, what I make.  

This emphasis on materiality as an expression of life, over epistemological argument, resonated with my own empirical methodology, called painting one’s way out of a corner. Did the notebook artist also try to do this? Do these paintings reveal the will to self-definition, hermetically hidden within other possible readings, the work of an artist unsure if this was either possible or permissible? The possibility haunts these pages. As I build a context for these paintings however, it is notable that the artist herself did not. Her world floats within pages otherwise left quite blank.
I first saw it on a cloudless day of early July. We had started at dawn, crossed Cairngorm about nine o’clock, and made our way by the Saddle to the lower end of the loch. Then we idled up the side, facing the gaunt corrie, and at last, when the noonday sun penetrated directly into the water, we stripped and bathed. The clear water was at our knees, then at our thighs. How clear it was only this walking into it could reveal. To look through it was to discover its own properties. What we saw under water had a sharper clarity than what we saw through air. We waded on into the brightness, and the width of the water increased, as it always does when one is on or in it, so that the loch no longer seemed narrow, but the far side was a long way off. Then I looked down; and at my feet there opened a gulf of brightness so profound that the mind stopped. We were standing on the edge of a shelf that ran some yards into the loch before plunging down to the pit that is the true bottom. And through that inordinate clearness we saw to the depth of the pit. So limpid was it that every stone was clear.

I motioned to my companion, who was a step behind, and she came, and glanced as I had down the submerged precipice. Then we looked into each other’s eyes, and again into the pit. I waded slowly back into shallower water. There was nothing that seemed worth saying. My spirit was a naked as my body. It was one of the most defenceless moments of my life.
Strange baubles of life float on the otherwise blank pages of a modest pre-bound writing notebook, made from Dutch paper produced between 1768 and 1777—an object of indeterminate semiotic layers more secretive than Ferguson might have imagined. Pensive, repeating attempts at world-making blur the univocal ideology of its times, with imagery that at first glance registers an already old alchemical world view, but which, on closer looking, reverberates with Modernist ideas that reflect the uncertainties of pre-revolutionary Europe and the great upheavals about to come. It does this despite the notable absence of any of the technologies that helped bring about those changes. The only contemporary details are of some clothes, and in this chapter, I look at these.

Most of the figures are loosely sketched, but there is one couple who stand out in sharp pen. This is the most nervously wrought page in the whole book, the artist seemingly determined to get things ‘right.’

**Page 32: A Couple in Fashionable Attire.** Free of the soft looping brushwork that characterizes most pages, this couple are scratched into the paper with hard, taught pen lines. There is no swirling together of the log and its people here—their central position fails to involve any of the visual involutions of other pages. It’s just about the clothes, and rendering them appears to have been a laborious process. The extreme aesthetic detachment even made me wonder if this drawing was a later addition. Another visit to the library with a magnifying glass failed to reveal touching up however, or an under-painted image coming through on the back of the page. It seems the artist was just approaching this image with a different frame of mind to the others. Formal dress and an emphasis on appearance, how one looks to the world, seem to make her nervous.
Changes in Enlightenment fashions across Europe were dictated by the courts of France and England, and, just like scientific innovation, this news was dispersed through periodicals and news sheets, and by travelling tailors. Upper class and court dress were particularly disciplined, and, according to Aileen Ribiera (1944–) in *Dress in Eighteenth Century Europe*, “Clothes played the most vital role in defining man and his part in society, to an extent which we cannot contemplate today.” This is a literal statement related to sumptuary law, which I address later. This French men’s outfit from 1715 shows the dominant silhouette at the end of the Baroque, a coat with a wide skirt pleated into the waist, loose sleeves, and wide cuffs. Coats like this were designed to be buttoned at the waist, to reveal a large silk neck tie and to flair out below. This is not what image 32 depicts.

Ribiera writes that by “the 1760’s the side flare of the coat had virtually disappeared and [...] men (were) increasingly reluctant to fasten the buttons of their coats.” In this French men’s suit from 1780 the silhouette has completely changed. This suit defines daywear for the middle and upper ranks across Europe (and with a slight delay, North America). and the coat now ties across the breast and curves away to each side. The waistcoat, which would have been the same length as the coat in 1700, is now on the hips and cut almost straight across. According to the V&A, this movement up the leg happened during the 1770’s, reaching the top of the thigh (in high fashion circles) by the late 1770’s. This is the ensemble of page 32 and the rising waistcoat quite specifically dates the painting to 1778–1780 at the earliest. This is supported by the small cuffs and modest collar that went along with the thigh level waistcoat.
My not-before date for the manufacture of the paper was 1768, but dating this outfit places the painting of the notebook to ten years later, to not before 1778.

The man’s hat was difficult to make out, but it is just possible to see a tricorn hat. It is a bit out of proportion, but it is possible to see the waving brim line. Going back to Ribiera, the three-cornered style [...] was the form of the formal hat through the eighteenth century [...] Those wearing uncocked hats were either travelling in bad weather, or were members of the lower classes. 114

So, this is a well-dressed middle- or upper-class European man, who is also clean shaven. An Enlightenment interest in immaculate and smooth surfaces made the beard unfashionable throughout this century. This satirical sketch from 1767, for example, Englishman at Paris, shows a middle-class man in a tricorn hat with working class men from several walks of life, all wearing headwear appropriate to their functions. 115 None have a beard. The presence of beards throughout the notebook is an anomaly.

Englishman at Paris 1767.
Lettered with title and

Moving to the woman’s outfit, I hoped to find an even more sharply honed fashion eye. The dress shows the dilated hips of all formal dresses throughout the century, but the panniers are not huge. Flattened hoops, or panniers, appeared in the French court in the 1720’s and in court dress their width became ludicrous, with dresses up to four metres wide recorded mid-century. This seems to be a more modest middle-class version of the style, but still reveals a tightly corseted waist, a triangular ‘stomacher,’ a parted robe revealing an underskirt, and elbow length sleeves finished with lace. These details are datable to between 1750 and the 1780’s, a Robe à la Française. 116 Dresses like this had a long shelf life. The fabric required to make them would have cost much more than any of the commissioned paintings I previously mentioned, difficult from the point of view of the late Enlightenment, but I could still not find a toehold on the beard problem. Kings and Queens are standard alchemical figures, often understood to depict qualities of the sun and moon, but the king on the right of this image seemed to be a depiction of Goethe’s aristocrats, and they may well have been copied from a periodical, which would account for the hard, flat drawing compared to that of other figures in the book. The anonymous manuscript was probably painted sometime after 1778, and it now appeared to be a sort of fugue from the last days of the ancien regime and a feudal system whose brutal end was about to usher in a new system of the world.

Page 37: The Two Kings. This page shows two bearded men wearing crowns. The combination of beard and crown is, as previously mentioned, difficult from the point of view of the late Enlightenment, but I could still not find a toehold on the beard problem. Kings and Queens are standard alchemical figures, often understood to depict qualities of the sun and moon, but the king on the right of this image seemed to be wearing quite a specific style of jacket, and I wondered if there might be a worldlier connection. The jacket closes straight at the bottom, and has a waist sash. Looking for similar styles in portraiture of the time, I found it in several paintings of Frederick the Great, such as this one by Anna Dorothea Theresbusch (1721–1782) from 1772.

The changes that the revolution brought shuddered through all of Europe, and were clearly reflected in dress. The memoirist Nathaniel Wraxall, writing in London in 1815, remembered London in 1776 as a period “which is now so distant, and the manners, as well as the inhabitants of the Metropolis have undergone since that time so total a change, that they no longer preserve any similarity.” 117 For the English Wraxall, the pivotal moment was 1793, the year the French monarchy were executed and Jacobinism brought in its wake women who cut their hair short and, he continues, wore “drapery more suited to the climate of Greece or of Italy than the temperature of an island situated in the fifty-first degree of latitude.” This was political change directly resonating in dress codes and its effects were felt in even the remotest parts of Europe. So, by 1793 or so, the dress on page 32 would have been a rare sight, and certainly no longer aspired to. Indeed, the revolutionary sentiment that drove this change was already being expressed through clothing much earlier. In Goethe’s The Sorrows of the Young Werther, published in Leipzig in 1774, the hero is deliberately described in plain dress of the English fashion, in contrast to aristocrats wearing what Goethe calls their ‘gothic dress’ which “made a still greater contrast to our modern coats.” 118 The artist has gone to some pains to depict these socially telling details, but they are not part of the world she is conjuring. The fluidity and brevity with which she executes the dress of peasants and workers reveal this to be a depiction of Goethe’s aristocrats, and they may well have been copied from a periodical, which would account for the hard, flat drawing compared to that of other figures in the book. The anonymous manuscript was probably painted sometime after 1778, and it now appeared to be a sort of fugue from the last days of the ancien regime and a feudal system whose brutal end was about to usher in a new system of the world.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.
This style of overcoat is a *Waffenrock*, a Germanic military overcoat, and was worn by Frederick the Great in almost all his portraits. This was a man who spent his reign building his army and his territories, and was famously disinterested in fashionable clothing. 119 I wondered if this style of coat was also worn by leaders of other mid European states, but it was not. Their portraits tended more to either civic pomp, or to slightly militarized versions of men’s day wear. I could find no other state leader of this time portrayed in a *Waffenrock*. This is the coat of a Prussian general, and with the addition of the crown, it seems very likely that it depicts Frederick the Great.

Frederick II was King of Prussia from 1740–1786. He supported the Enlightenment throughout his life, hosting artists and thinkers in his men-only palace of Sans Soucci, in Potsdam. Biographer Tim Blanning (1942–) reveals this radicality when he quotes a letter sent to Voltaire in 1738: “I think it better to keep a profound silence on the Christian fables, which are canonized by their antiquity and the credulity of absurd and insipid people.” 120 Frederick was raised a Pietist Protestant 121 and did not declare his atheism publicly, but this upbringer contributed to a sense of public duty, and his powerfully progressive views led to the first universal primary education provision, and previously unheard of tolerance for any and all religious beliefs. He was, however, also an aggressive and expansionist leader, with a dedication to his army that led one of his ministers to remark that “Prussia was not a country with an army, but an army with a country.” 122 If this is Frederick, and on the dedication page we can read that the whole book is dedicated to ‘the memory of the King’ then the notebook was painted after 1786, when Frederick died, and it was painted by someone who saw him as their king, so a Prussian subject. This moves the finalisation of the book, the writing of the dedication page at least, to after 1786. By this time the ‘gothic dress’ of page 32 was old fashioned, and it completely disappeared in most European countries after the beginning of the Terror in France in 1793.

### Page 46: Rape or Rescue

This page is one of the most brutal in the book. A soldier is depicted standing over a woman who is prone on the ground and in a state of undress. The man’s left

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119 Ribiera records that when Frederick the Great died in 1786 his wardrobe consisted of only fur-lined cloaks, old uniforms, and 13 shirts. See Ribiera, op. cit., p. 59.


121 Watson, op. cit., pp. 45–47.

In the 1780’s there were three squadrons. For information on the history of the Corps, see: kuerassierregimenter.de, see link 19 for full address.

Foot is between her legs, and his sword is drawn, though directed away. It is impossible to establish if this is a rape or a rescue, and the painting is tiny, but the detailed brush work is specific. The artist did it this way, and not another. The soldier’s uniform is painted as being light in colour, with a darker covering breast plate, which stops at the waist — so is a cuirass. The hat, which at first glance looks like a bear skin, is in fact drawn as two parts, with a semi-circular front and a plume coming out of the top centre of this. Looking through army uniforms of the period, I found that this ensemble most closely aligned with that of an officer of the Gardes du Corps of the Prussian army, the elite regiment established by Frederick the Great as his personal bodyguard when he came to power in 1740. Designed to be a model to other regiments, numbers were kept small, and soldiers taken almost entirely from the Prussian nobility.

Their uniform consisted of white leggings and jacket with a metal cuirass. An officer’s hat was a black tricorn but flattened on front to look semi-circular. It would have had a white or black plume extending from top middle. The depiction of a uniformed soldier of Frederick’s personal guard made it even more likely that the crowned figure wearing a German military overcoat on page 37 was indeed Frederick.

Page 17: The Lion. When I was looking at portraits of Frederick the Great, I came across one in which he is shown with a Lion. This post 1778 painting was apparently of the Lion of Bavaria. When I then started sifting through ‘Lion of Bavaria’ imagery, to find out more about this lion, I realised that the padded crown in the painting would not have been its most common depiction at the time. An oil painting is a single object, and unless chosen as the source for populist engravings, would have been known only to a small coterie of the privileged. Looking online, it also seemed that the Bavarian lion was an idea, and its specific representation could vary considerably. One image that would be fairly consistent however, and be repeated throughout Bavaria, would be the coat of arms of the state. In the official coat of arms from 1777–1799 the lion is repeated five times, three times with exactly the same design of crown as image 17—a profile of three points, widening from the tips, then reversing sharply in to join the base of the crown. So image 17 did not necessarily depict the alchemical lion I had supposed, it was becoming equally likely that this was actually the Lion of Bavaria.

The image inserted in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

Fredrick the Great with the Lion of Bavaria. Painting, after 1778, anonymous, on presentation, 1764, v. Johann Heinrich Ch. Franke (1738–1792). Oil on linen, 126x96 cm. Jetzendorf, owner of v. Freiberg, akg-images.de, see link 21 for the full address. Archived 15.08.2018

Frederick with a lion is held by the Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte (House of Bavarian History), and the archival notes suggest this painting was not commissioned by Frederick himself, but is a re-working of an earlier portrait of the King in order to place him beside the Bavarian Lion, who is seen to offer him documents which read: “Documents of the Land owners, Inheritors, and of the succession of Bavaria.”}

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.
In 1778, Elector Maximilian Joseph of Bavaria died without heirs, ending 30 years of relative peace. A European squabble ensued over who should legitimately inherit the right to rule Bavaria. Emperor Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire wanted it to further his interests in the West, and the next in line to Bavarian power, Charles IV Theodore, was willing to align himself with Joseph in a complex deal over territory. Frederick the Great was not prepared to allow this Austrian expansion to the west, and a war ensued. This ‘War of the Bavarian Succession’ of 1778–1779 is what is being referred to in the oil painting. It lasted less than a year and ended in victory for Frederick in 1779. This painting seems to have been created during the unrest, and to record a plea from some of the people of Bavaria for Frederick’s assistance in defending their realm.

A diplomatic peace was agreed in 1779, when Catherine the Great of Russia threatened to support Frederick’s invading army with an extra 50,000 troops. The short conflict was known historically as the plums and potatoes war, a diplomatic war fought between non-engaging armies, whose main tactic was to cut off each other’s food supplies during a year of encampments. This passive action nevertheless killed thousands of troops, and civilian support, as starvation and dysentery raged through the camps. The war-without-battles was not, however, fought on Bavarian soil. The armies camped out in Northern Bohemia, now the Czech Republic, east of the Elbe. Patriotic Bavarians won their conflict without having to endure its being fought out on their own lands, and Frederick’s actions led to him being called a saviour by many patriots. The website of the Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte also records that “according to a statement from the Austrian ambassador, there was almost no house in Munich, where the portrait of the King of Prussia, engraved in copper, had not been hung up.” This is an important detail because it means that an image of Frederick as a Soldier King, an image like that on page 37, would have been seen over and over again, all across Bavaria. Could the notebook have been painted there, or by a Bavarian supporter of Frederick the Great. The Lion of Bavaria is depicted eating a snake-like enemy. As Frederick ‘saved’ Bavaria from the rule of the Holy Roman Empire only seven years before his death, the notebook could well be painted by a Bavarian patriot in the years around and shortly after 1786.
Historian Vernon Stauffer (1875–1925) blamed this squarely on religious shoulders, seeing a land where sacerdotalism reigned supreme. Religious houses flourished in abundance; the number of priests and nuns was incredibly large [...] superstitious practices made the popular religion little better than gross fetishism. So-called 'miraculous' images were commonly paraded through the streets; innumerable statues and sacred relics were exposed to the gaze of crowds of the faithful; the patronage of the saints was assiduously solicited. Among the educated there was a widespread conviction that the piety of the people was ignorant and that their trustful attitude made them the prey of many imposters.

This was not a centre of progress and innovation then. Die Aufklärung was underway in neighbouring states, and Frederick’s educational reforms, along with the increase in printed literature, were leading to the formation of a standardized German language. The most progressive literature of the Enlightenment was either banned or difficult to find in Catholic Bavaria however, and a tradition of miraculous or pareidolic images, often observed in stones, vegetables, perhaps wood, was widespread. The methods of the notebook had precedent.

The Jesuit order had been dissolved due to corruption in 1773, but continued to extend influence, especially within education. Faced with a political impasse, Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830), a professor of Canon Law at the University of Ingolstadt, created a short-lived secret society, which, between 1776 and 1785, studied and disseminated banned Enlightenment texts. His society of the Illuminati “was a short lived movement of republican free thought [whose] aim was to replace Christianity with a religion of reason.” The Illuminati have gone on to haunt conspiracy theories and block buster fiction ever since, but they were originally a small group of free thinkers who, for nine short years, worked throughout the southern German states to counter the secret influence of the Catholic church in the ordering of public life. Bavaria was the battleground for an intellectual war that marked the furthest reaches of the age of reason.

Images of light shining through darkness litter the manuscript, but pages 20 and 21 are particularly claustrophobic views from under water, or from the bottom of a well, with bubbles of air carefully painted as rising from the depths. Is this the return of a pareidolic image as one of suffocation and drowning, far from the light? Historian Richard van Dülmen (1937–2004) traces the work of the Illuminati, whose aim was to influence a fundamental rethinking of social order and the abuse of power and “to put an end to the machinations of the purveyors of injustice.”

“Weishaupt wrote that ‘Of all Illumination which human reason
138 Voltaire lived as Frederick the Great's guest at his palace of Sans Soucci, near Berlin, for years. Frederick was one of Europe's strongest supporters of Enlightenment thought and its dissemination through education. He is not thought to have been a member of the Illuminati, but is known to have been a Mason.

139 They also published anonymous political pamphlets and used their professional roles to influence political and academic life. The society was not quite progressive enough to include women, but their successful dissemination of Enlightenment ideals through the higher echelons of Bavarian society filtered into Ladies salons. The war of succession also led to increased liberalization, but under the weak leadership of Charles Theodor, church repression returned. The educated classes looked to the illuminati and their influence spread rapidly, attracting the attention of Goethe and other intellectuals working in Switzerland and other German states. This rapid expansion led to more open expressions of anti-monarchical thought, and in 1785, all secret societies were banned in Bavaria and brutally put down. The existence of the Illuminati had become semi-public knowledge and its members, including Weishaupt (aka Spartacus), were forced to flee. 139 The same year, Charles Theodor again tried to make a deal with the Holy Roman Empire, and to trade Bavaria for leadership of another territory he found more favourable. He was once again stopped by Frederick, this time diplomatically. His disdain for his people was clear however, and when Bavaria was finally over-run by French revolutionaries in 1792, its troops found a society and institutions closer to those of the middle ages than the Enlightenment. 140 It is within this turmoil that I think the notebook artist was working, taking ideas from a street use of images, merging them with scientific approaches, engaging in a form of private self-education perhaps encouraged by secret reading of Illuminati texts. The likely depiction of Frederick the Great, soldiers from his Corps, the Lion of Bavaria, of drowning in mud but seeing light, all point to this work as a visual log-book of someone struggling to articulate a voice whose right to exist was being fought out in the streets around her. Seen in this light, the notebook becomes a visual record of a dawning idea of the modern subject. The revolutionary work of the Illuminati was a moment of possibility that was, in the end, not taken up by Bavarians, but by the French. The Bavarian battle of ideas was won by the Catholic church and state, but when the French Jesuit Abbé Barruel published his Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism in 1797, 141 he blamed the Illuminati and societies like it for planning and executing the French Revolution. It was with Barruel that the conspiracy theories so loved by contemporary fiction began.

140 britannica.com, see link 24 for full address. Archived 28.10.2017.

141 Abbé Barruel, Memoirs, illustrating the History of Jacobinism, trans. Robert Clifford, Hudson & Goodwin for C. Dears, New York, 1799. Archived 28.10.2017. The actual work of the Bavarian Illuminati has not yet been clearly historicised. Some of their names are known, but the extent of their network and what they achieved remains secret.

can give, none is comparable to the discovery of what we are,” 137 a desire for self-understanding freed from church doctrine, and coming out of political texts that were freely available in other parts of the Prussian Empire, but banned in Bavaria, including those of Locke and Voltaire. 138 They also published anonymous political pamphlets and used their professional roles to influence political and academic life. The society was not quite progressive enough to include women, but their successful dissemination of Enlightenment ideals through the higher echelons of Bavarian society filtered into Ladies salons. The war of succession also led to increased liberalization, but under the weak leadership of Charles Theodor, church repression returned. The educated classes looked to the illuminati and their influence spread rapidly, attracting the attention of Goethe and other intellectuals working in Switzerland and other German states. This rapid expansion led to more open expressions of anti-monarchical thought, and in 1785, all secret societies were banned in Bavaria and brutally put down. The existence of the Illuminati had become semi-public knowledge and its members, including Weishaupt (aka Spartacus), were forced to flee. 139 The same year, Charles Theodor again tried to make a deal with the Holy Roman Empire, and to trade Bavaria for leadership of another territory he found more favourable. He was once again stopped by Frederick, this time diplomatically. His disdain for his people was clear however, and when Bavaria was finally over-run by French revolutionaries in 1792, its troops found a society and institutions closer to those of the middle ages than the Enlightenment. 140 It is within this turmoil that I think the notebook artist was working, taking ideas from a street use of images, merging them with scientific approaches, engaging in a form of private self-education perhaps encouraged by secret reading of Illuminati texts. The likely depiction of Frederick the Great, soldiers from his Corps, the Lion of Bavaria, of drowning in mud but seeing light, all point to this work as a visual log-book of someone struggling to articulate a voice whose right to exist was being fought out in the streets around her. Seen in this light, the notebook becomes a visual record of a dawning idea of the modern subject. The revolutionary work of the Illuminati was a moment of possibility that was, in the end, not taken up by Bavarians, but by the French. The Bavarian battle of ideas was won by the Catholic church and state, but when the French Jesuit Abbé Barruel published his Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism in 1797, 141 he blamed the Illuminati and societies like it for planning and executing the French Revolution. It was with Barruel that the conspiracy theories so loved by contemporary fiction began.

In the years before the revolution, many forces vied for control over how the world might be seen, and the role of God within that vision. Pansophism incorporated scientific discoveries into new images of God; Syncretism looked for the underlying
The secretive work of the Illuminati re-enacted Rosicrucianism, which announced itself as a mysterious brotherhood through the publication of two manifestoes in Kassel in 1615–1616. These also spread a revolutionary vision of universal education and reformation and are thought to have been the work of Lutherans. Both Descartes and Leibniz tried to track down the brotherhood but they remained invisible, indeed the ‘Invisibles’ became their nickname, setting an historic tone for godliness as resistance. See Urszula Szulakowska, Alchemy in Contemporary Art, Ashgate publishing, 2011, p. 16.


The battle for control of the narrative, and therefore of power and resources, between the intellectual forces of democracy and the Catholic church had been going on in southern Germany for a hundred and fifty years before the manuscript was painted. In a pre-Darwinian, pre-Freudian world, the lack of any other narrative that allowed an interpretation of powerful feelings, the invisible electricity of lived experience, created a void that religion rushed to fill, and images with social resonance in their time, such as those of electricity, were used for this. Alchemical imagery, which was not necessarily tied to religious belief, had a role to play in maintaining distance between this acknowledgement of inner forces, and the doctrines of the church. Returning to McLean’s understanding of the work of alchemists, they “used events in their experiments as seed images for meditations, forming visual mantras from chemical changes. The alchemists reflected and mirrored these outward events into their interior world.”

The difficulties inherent to this indeterminate ground meant that the Enlightenment period saw a growing dualism between the logic of abstract thought and the necessarily ambiguous nature of images, expressed by Barbara Stafford as congruent words versus fantastic, incongruent images [...] baldly characterized, the schism obtains between lying ‘paint’ and ‘unvarnished’ logic. The latter must manage the former by negation or control. This persisting struggle between legible methodology and illegible empirica remains inscribed in the current fate of the immeasurable, and thus only probable, fine arts.

The potential for ethical betrayal still haunts our enjoyment of the visual arts, but as Ferguson pointed out in his Bibliotheca Chemica, “It is an illustration of the persistence of an idea that all through the eighteenth century [...] when entirely new theories were advanced, the controversy as to the reality of transmutation — as a fact and as a theory — was still sustained.” It was sustained because it touched a need. Transmutation, as the action of changing, or the state of being changed into another form, lay at the heart of both alchemy and Christianity, but transformation was also the goal of revolutionary thought. Our dry chemist pinpointed this transforming as an underlying human desire, one we can summon today by thinking of 3 am studies of our bedroom ceilings, and the stabbing work of the question ‘Is this it?’ Is there a point in life when we accept the world’s definition of who and what we are, or do we maintain a belief in transmutation against all odds, in the possibility for yet another inner change, and yet another experience of the new?
While battles for hearts and minds raged in Bavaria, a little mirror drifted through gentler moments of Enlightenment culture. It was both a new technology, and a nostalgia machine, as it reflected the present in an image more reminiscent of a century before. This marvel of forwards and backwards was the Claude Glass, created to transform any landscape into a vision approaching the academic ideals of Baroque artist Claude Lorraine. The Glass was a smoke-blackened convex mirror, most commonly round or oval, and about the size of a hand. They were popular, inexpensive, and sold in opticians, stationers, art suppliers, and at tourist destinations. People kept them in their pockets or handbags.

Did the notebook artist have a Claude Glass? Artists used them as compositional tools, and in most European countries, tourists could stop at proscribed ‘viewing stations,’ buy a Glass if they did not already have one, and, turning their backs to the view, savour a transformed, framed image of the scene behind them, in an earlier enactment of the selfie-taker today. This pre-photographic tool for framing, distorting, and tinting a view, the same way every time, created a generic image that was in keeping with contemporary ideals of the picturesque. A key theorist of this movement, William Gilpin (1724–1804), describes watching a Claude Glass attached to his carriage.

A succession of highly coloured pictures is continually gliding before the eye [...] like visions [...] or the brilliant landscapes of a dream [...] if the transient glance of a good composition happens to unite them, we should give any price to fix, and appropriate the scene. 149

Frame after frame of nature’s complexities, tamed, but constantly renewing. It is reality but it isn’t. In a world that had not yet seen a photograph, never mind a digital screen, this popular toy must have been a strange phantasmatic delight. The dominance of

Concrete steps went up from the back door into the garden. They were the kind you still saw on housing estates, gritty, mass-produced blocks now weary with age and neglect, but still rough enough to grate any errant knee. Except this wasn’t a garden; the black metal hand rail was askew and where flowers might have been there were only boulders and mud. Something had been demolished, and now there were people scrabbling at the rocks nearest the steps, prizing them away to reveal a dark hole where earth should have been. Jess could see there was a body. Waxed legs were being pulled out, filmy with dirt. The girl was clearly dead and yet they lifted her carefully, protecting her from the concrete; feet, legs, buckling, then the body, a school skirt, shoes. The head lolled back and she couldn’t see, but it looked as if she had been there a long time. They laid her down on a patch of ground and fitted her back onto her umbilical cord.

golden-brown colours in the anonymous manuscript, the seriality, the framing, all suggest familiarity with this contemporary aesthetic, and pages 28 and 40 are painted as lens or mirror-based views. If the darkness of the Glass hovers over these pages, then so do its inherent problems of definition, and the distorted, and therefore corrupted, image that it creates.

In *The Female Thermometer*, Terry Castle (1953–) makes the point that the mirror began to be a regular household item in the late middle ages, and its everyday use may have influenced the development of European middle-class individualism more than any political development or philosophy. As intimate domestic life wrapped itself around a new technology, this created a growing awareness of one’s ‘self’ as also being an object in the world. The structural suggestion of a dark mirror or a lens in the notebook, in contrast to the Gainsborough sketch, brings out this growing ‘self’ awareness as a possible subject. The Claude Glass was a dark mirror in more than its smokiness. You could hold it up in front of your face and see a distorted self. It is the possibilities of this, as a move away from the appropriate and the clear, that the notebook may be interrogating.

In a discipline orientated eighteenth century, the appropriate and the clear image came under the authority of the art academy, whose expansion, in place of the studio system and court support, also related to a developing mercantile bourgeoisie. As with fashion, Paris and London dominated, and their academy’s teachings on image ideals disciplined what it was possible to imagine, make, and have accepted for exhibition. In a letter to a potential client, Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) reveals the dominance of this idealist tradition. He had been asked to paint a view of the client’s estate, and replied that with regard to real views from nature in this country, he has never seen any place that affords a subject equal to the poorest imitations of Gaspar or Claude [...] if his Lordship wishes to have anything tolerable of the name of G[ainsborough], the subject altogether, as well as the figures etc. must be of his own brain.

Landscape painting as a record of what is actually there was not yet an idea, they were constructed settings for other concepts or actions. The first painting of the notebook is a constructed landscape, and is used only once—to set the scene. On the page before, the dedication page, she seems to contradict this idea however, by defining herself as an ‘ape of nature’ (*Per artem Naturae Simiam*). This was a common contemporary description of an artist and is traceable to a Renaissance idea of truthful depiction that had by the seventeenth century degenerated into a notion of unimaginative imitation. It was this meaning that Charles Le Brun intended in his widely distributed 1688
lecture, 154 when he called artists of the 'lower genres' of portraiture, still life, and animal painting 'apes of nature' or mere copyists. It was a hierarchy that stuck, so was the notebook artist being ironic? A mere copyist of what exactly?

Le Brun may have come up with his ape metaphor because these animals were only beginning to be understood, and Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and Jefferson would all go on to employ them in representations of human behaviour. Thinking with animal metaphors offered up a new sort of mythology, and Elizabeth Liebman (1950–) writes that

With the accumulation of scientific knowledge of the strange anthropomorphic animals came fantastic stories and images [...] of mixed-race monkey men, stolen women [...] children raised by monkeys. These stories combined the passions of awe, desire, and fear, in effect supporting a kind of mythology in an increasingly demystified world." 155

There are no apes after the dedication page but fabulous worlds full of strange animals are the imaginative underworld of Enlightenment rational thought. Naming herself an 'ape of nature' may not have been a throw-away gesture. It seems more likely that, tipping her hat to the appropriate and the ideal, this artist has then walked off in completely the other direction.

Seeing Ghosts

Eighteenth century interest in the visible world was literally and metaphorically 'reflected' in the popular technology that was the Claude Glass, and its visualisations of a fabulous landscape world that was there, but not there. Terry Castle goes was the Claude Glass, and its visualisations of a fabulous landscape world that was there, but not there. Terry Castle goes further.

There are no apes after the dedication page but fabulous worlds full of strange animals are the imaginative underworld of Enlightenment rational thought. Naming herself an 'ape of nature' may not have been a throw-away gesture. It seems more likely that, tipping her hat to the appropriate and the ideal, this artist has then walked off in completely the other direction.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.

When she showed up at work later, her assistant asked if she was okay. She realized she must still look blown, but the question begged an answer about split miz or broken bones, not about how she had misunderstood love and obedience so completely that she felt broken on a wheel of her own making and that now it might be too late. She spiralled outwards far enough to tell a story of public transport, and then reversed into work.
glass, but always accounts for its material body. The artist hovers pendulum-like between the realisation of an interior world seeking to escape its own self-consciousness, and the persistence of bodily presence. One occludes the other, comes back, goes away, in a ghostly narrative of the sensual present, the spectral past, and perhaps the imagined future.
Hovering in the present, looking back to the past; perhaps Walter Benjamin’s angel of history is a part of all of us, eyes staring, wings spread in horror at the wreckage of what has gone before. And yet, still ‘our passions carry us,’ into imagining futures, and imagining the things we cannot see when we look.

Endless looking for an interior beneath the surface of the bodies and images with which we are forever ensnared is the catastrophe of living (in)skin. Skinned alive, our bodies are sentenced to find a form that might hold our love, a form that might hold our deaths. The promise of that constantly-deferred final sentence, exuberant sky writing, why’s own writing, is what keeps us performing repeated acts of looking, repeated acts of loving. They must be repeated because they cannot be sustained. The radical formlessness and apparent endlessness of our vision, of our sexuality, of our dying, makes it impossible to still these things and declare them ‘still lives’.

Peggy Phelan (1959–) was writing about a Caravaggio painting of Doubting Thomas searching the bloodless wound of a transformed Christ. She interprets Christ’s bloodless interiority as an expression of the vessel we all still seek, one that mirrors our own inner formlessness, our sensation of being alive; a vessel with which we might touch the unbounded feelings of interior experience, and which might still exist within art practice. Fifty-two paintings raised from the decaying ends of fire logs may have been an artist taking this measure, moving instinctively away from a religious cultural imaginary, and, just like Doubting Thomas, needing to test a material present for its capacity to hold her own moving towards and away from dying. Finding pictures in nature like this was a familiar practice, and there are received images of angels and kings in the notebook, but the artist goes further, pressing into

Sandy grey fur covered the cow’s tongue neatly folded in the butcher’s window below her apartment. Dark pink swelled through the grey and for a second, she imagined being licked by such a tongue, then staggered back in revulsion at herself, and it. Her arm sprung up to shield her eyes with the back of her hand.

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160 Phelan, 1997, op. cit, p. 42

161 Michelangelo Caravaggio 1571–1610, The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, 1601–1602, oil on canvas, collection Sanssoucci, Potsdam, purchased by Frederick the Great.
the material body of the log with fingers and eyes, and finding forms that do not come from any repertoire, so must have come from her life. The containing epidermis of bark, with fleshy inner layers of growth and ageing becomes entangled with these inner emblems, in a relationship modulated by the ouroboros and the cloud, that classic marker between mimetic representation and some other way of seeing. The artist may have battled to paint this personal vision, as culturally received images of matters interior, angels and burning bushes, keep coming back, but where she moves away, we see a woman looking, and her individual record of the ‘catastrophe of living (in) skin.’

The theorization of men’s looking, as a gendered cultural event, was named by cinema theorist Laura Mulvey (1941–) in 1975. Mulvey used the term ‘the male gaze’ to theorise the voyeuristic fetishism of a cinematic world view generated by recording the entwined gaze of male characters, writers, cinematographers and directors, all taking pleasure in the attention they uniformly accorded women, as objects of their looking. This collected ‘gaze’ denied women the possibility of returning their look, and so unable to enter the economy of gazing as fully human subjects. Although not universal, Mulvey pointed out its cultural domination in film, which helped reveal its wider aspect within a Western history of fine art—the commissioning and creation of paintings, sculptures, and museums also being historically controlled by the visual preferences of a white male heterosexual economy of self-alienation. Although not universal, Mulvey pointed out its cultural domination in film, which helped reveal its wider aspect within a Western history of fine art—the commissioning and creation of paintings, sculptures, and museums also being historically controlled by the visual preferences of a white male heterosexual world view, in a mirror of the wider economy. A discourse on the possibilities of a female gaze grew out of this, also mostly in relation to cinema, with film makers Catherine Breillat (1948–) and Zoe Dirse (1960–) among others, making important intersectional contributions and attempt to positively address what a female gaze might see. Mulvey’s principal point, of exploring how the reception and internalisation of judgement of women looking does have a history. Anna Dorothea Lisiewska-Loufbourow, ibid. We are all familiar with this superficial, judging self. Loufbourow’s suggestion is that we all, having absorbed this way of looking in relation to women’s skins, perpetuate it when we encounter women’s artistic and cultural production. This critical, rather than Sontag’s cosmetic, summing up, is located in ‘the male glance,’ which we all employ.

The male glance is the opposite of the male gaze. Rather than linger lovingly on the parts it wants most to penetrate, it looks, assumes, and walks on. It is, above all else, quick. Under its influence we rejoice in our distant diagnostic speed […] This is the male glance’s sub-rosa work, and it feeds an inchoate, almost erotic hunger to know without attending—to omnisciently not-attend, to reject without taking the trouble of analytic labor because our intuition is so searingly accurate it doesn’t require it […] we point and classify. We are all familiar with this superficial, judging self. Loufbourow’s essay is an analysis of recent critique of contemporary women’s writing, but the male glance also functions unconsciously as a way of dismissing anonymous cultural objects that do not conform to dominant aesthetic value systems.

In researching the anonymous notebook, I lost count of the people whose glancing eyes suffered only a few pages or feigned interest unless I prepared the frame with my ghost story. While this theorization is recent and ongoing, the painting of women looking does have a history. Anna Dorothea Lisiewska-Therbusch, the Prussian portrait painter of Frederick the Great, was working only a little earlier in the eighteenth century to the notebook artist. She painted several self-portraits, often associated with Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain Bois’ instructions for Use, Centre Pompidou, 1996. Growing out of George Bataille’s 1929 ideas of Involuntary, published in the Surrealist journal Documents, 1929–1930, this exhibition focussed on material formlessness as an aesthetic tool of twentieth century artists rebelling against art world definitions of value. The revolutionary concepts Krauss and Bois seek to define within this, and its tight Oedipal bond with art world economics, is not however, a direction this research moves towards.
Page 9: A woman’s head in the mouth of a bear. There is a woman looking on page nine, the first time someone looks directly out at us from the book. It is from the jaws of a bear. If this was a scene of violent death, we might expect more agitation, but this woman is acceptant of her lot. As women don’t often look straight out at the viewer in late eighteenth century art, this is in itself a forceful indication of authorship, but what to make of the bear? In my general research on Bavarian history, I looked at some of the art that was taken from the country during the Thirty Years War, and came across a similar bear, also with a head in its mouth. In this manuscript page from 1424, a demon of desire seizes upon human bodily weakness, grabbing men (and only men) in its jaws and claws. The depiction of the lower left head is strikingly similar to page nine. The demon can be found in a famous manuscript on human vice and virtue that left Bavaria in 1623, but the influence of such images permeated church teaching long after. If our page nine is a demon of desire, the woman has given herself up to being eaten alive by it.

Close study of the paint layers on page nine reveal the locked heads at the centre were one of the last details to have been painted, perhaps a coming to the point. As a self-portrait, it is a bold statement of interest. Previous pages record heaven and the making of the world, leading up to page seven, the strange religious debate page. Page eight introduces a tie between a woman and a man, and then there is this page, which takes a religious semiotics and transforms its power dynamics by placing a woman openly engaging with desire. She is not ‘lost,’ but her body, the log body, is become a swirling, tumbling mass that streams from the hands and feet of a small running figure directly above her head. This sensual abstract brushwork fills almost all of the log-body, except for the bottom right, where there is an indistinct couple, arms out towards each other. Lines of hatching suggest the artist was undecided about how close she should paint them. The outer bark is completely sealed in a golden ring.

Page 12: The Ghost and the Toad. On page twelve light shining from the heart of the log shoots out through the enclosing bark like sun through leaves. It is three pages since the declaration of desire and two figures float in golden light. Neither are clearly gendered, and one is only just coalescing as a shimmering atmosphere of smiling dots. A memory, a wish? Rising behind the darker figure is the snake that on other pages is the ouroboros, alchemical eternity. Here it seems more biological, painted as growing out of the body of the log, and folding around the figure; time become more urgently real perhaps. All three are looking down at a toad lying belly up on the ground between them. The toad also has an alchemical register. Animal symbols were often used to represent stages of material change.
in the flask, and a black toad was an expression of wet matter in transformation. It is never alchemically drawn as belly up and vulnerable like this however, as an actor in a mimetic, rather than a symbolic, narrative. The naturalism of this playful, canine expression of subjugation is a performative, aesthetic, use of the symbol for transforming wetness. This does have a history in painting. It is a commonly used symbol of women’s sexuality, or, from a judgemental perspective, debauchery. Bosch presents it as such in his Garden of Earthly Delights, on the right panel, latched onto a woman’s breast. It is also often seen in moralising nature studies. The cultural persistence of such a sexual reading can be seen in Austrian painter Maria Lassnig’s (1919–2014) self-portrait, where the artist depicts herself engaging with her own ageing sexuality through communion with a frog.

The notebook toad presents female sexuality as relaxed and tummy revealing, and in perfect balance between the dark painted snake on the left, and the smiling evanescence on the right. The lightness of touch works around Lassnig’s more literal statement, and is far away from the pornographic aides painted by a contemporary like, say, Boucher. This is female sexuality from the inside, not out.

Pages 30 & 44: At the Theatre. These two pages repeat the same view of a theatrical performance. The first one, page 30, is dark with burnt umber reworkings that ended up with a sort of proscenium cave entrance, framing a lit ‘stage’ with three figures. We share the view of this with a painted audience of three women. Once again, there are men with swords and clubs. The one on the right is wearing a winged cap, a winged right shoe, and carrying a caduceus, so is a portrayal of Hermes, messenger of the gods. Hermes was also the god of trade, thieves, travellers, of boundaries and transitions, both literal and figurative, and the guiding deity of alchemists—the closed circulation of liquids in a pelican jar would be ‘hermetically’ sealed, or bounded. In the middle a well-built man is about to strike down with his club. This could be Zeus, king of the gods, who always carried his thunderbolt in his right hand. The remaining figure is down on the ground, oppressed by the stage backdrop, which he is pushing against. A stage backdrop is the world for its actors, which would make this the Titan Atlas, struggling to hold up the world. Atlas carried the weight of the heavens on his shoulders as a punishment bestowed on him by Zeus, in retribution for leading the Titans into battle against the gods. This Atlas looks more like a pudgy young boy though, and he appears to have an erection. Lewd humour was part of the eighteenth-century satirical world, but this is its first appearance in the notebook. A stage would be an appropriate place for that however, and our classical heroes, the Lords of the Universe, are depicted as infants play-acting at war, kingship, and diplomacy, and getting an erection while doing so.

The image inserted here in the printed thesis is not available in the digital thesis.
The cultural magazine Die Horen was famous for its support of and inclusion of women writers. Der Teutsche Merkur, began in 1772 in Weimar, was a huge success across all German states. Its editor, Wieland, believed in the value of the theatre as a political public forum, and their coverage of this led to almost constant opposition from the church. This painting therefore not only reveals a feminine gaze, but also suggests a politicised one, asserting itself in opposition to the dominance of the church in Bavaria. See Watson, op. cit., p. 78.

Watching the performance are three naked grown women, sitting at the mouth of a cave. While many of the figures in the notebook are sexually ambiguous, there is no doubt here. Are they laughing at the spectacle our heroes perform? In the German speaking world of the 1780’s, Weimar Classicism was busy synthesising the rational ideas of the Enlightenment with new Romantic interests of feeling and the body, and not only within an elite. These ideas were widely disseminated in cultural magazines such as Die Horen and Der Teutsche Merkur. There is a position to be read here, and it is one of the clearest hints that we are sharing in the world view of a woman. When I looked at this page in reproduction, the lower legs of the women appeared to be goat-like, and suggesting witches, but when I went back to the library with my magnifying glass, these spindly lower legs, most visible in the middle figure, were revealed to be flat shadows meant to indicate light coming from the stage, also the reason for the silhouette.

Thirteen pages later we are back at the same theatre. The women still sit at the entrance to the cave, but the world of the stage has deliquesced into a scintillation of sherbet blues, pink and lemon. Small dots fill the air with a pointillist hum. Perhaps it is evening. The three heroes are still there, but they are small, indistinct, and no longer pudgy children. Their attributes have become bow and arrow, sword, and wings. Are they now in heaven? The women have not changed, and continue to watch from the mouth of their cave.

The brush marks of deprivation
Over and above these specific pages indicating that we are sharing in a women’s-eye view of the world, there is a more general reading of cultural deprivation that also suggests a woman’s voice. Everything points to an artist working in Bavaria sometime between 1778 and 1792, when it was invaded by French revolutionary troops. There is no hint of the changes to everyday dress that the revolution brought, and the troops portrayed are Prussian, not French. Bavaria’s remoteness from Enlightenment modernity also accounts for the artist’s tense relationship with fashionable dress, but perhaps more importantly, the anomalous presence of beards on many of the male figures. No-one of noble eighteenth century European birth is recorded with a beard, including Frederick the Great. However, if the notebook was painted somewhere quite remote, in a village rather than a city, perhaps beards were still part of everyday experience. Women rarely travelled, and medieval sumptuary laws, the legal enforcement of dress codes, remained in place in Bavaria until the middle of the century, and in neighbouring Switzerland until the mid 1800s. These laws were designed, in Ribiera’s words, “to keep the lower classes, and particularly women, in their subservient place; the clothing worn was therefore kept far behind current fashion.” As were ideas.
about appropriate facial hair. The laws visually defined, and therefore affected, all strata of society, in ways we can understand more easily today by thinking with Mulvey's male gaze. Sumptuary laws were no longer enforced by the 1780s, but their cultural shadow, the social approbation they encouraged, would have lingered much longer in a country dominated by conservative ideals.

Most of the pages with clothes are in the second half of the notebook, as images of solitude give way to the depiction of discursive groups. And most of these groups wear sketchy non-specific dress. Ribiera notes that at any given time [in the C18th] one would find society built up of layers, consisting of the most recent fashions imported from France or England, middle class versions with local adaptations demanded by custom and law, and the virtually static traditional dress in the more remote areas, where custom varied from village to village, so tightly bracketed were the small communities.

Peasant families would have mostly spun and stitched their own clothes, designed to fulfil functional needs. Our artist, when she gets around to depicting a social world, was most comfortable among the ‘common people.’ The one clear depiction of the upper classes came out nervy and hard. The use of Latin on the opening page makes it unlikely she was herself a peasant, but domestic isolation and external control were facts of almost all women’s lives at this time, and she may have lived remotely, and educated herself, like most women of the time, with magazines and books. For middle and upper class women in cities, salons were also an increasingly important social forum, as they brought the possibility of intellectual debate, and a small number of those women also found it possible to flourish in the public realm. If not upper class, these women usually had some rare and specific talent, such as writer, artist, or alchemist. There is no evidence that our artist was one of those, or had access to a salon. There is nothing of urban domesticity in these pages. The artist had a sparkling mind and an awareness of alchemical literature, but then, Books of Secrets had been a household’s other bible for over a hundred years.

Side-stepping to that other Prussian woman artist, Anna Dorothea Lisiewska-Therbusch, whose talent was recognised in the commission to paint Frederick the Great, it is possible to trace how the gaze functioned with regard to women at this time. Lisiewska-Therbusch was trained at home by her artist father, and continued her self-development while running an inn in Berlin with her husband. By the time she was forty, her three children had become adults, and she left her family to begin a professional career as a portrait painter, moving round the courts of Stuttgart and Mannheim, Paris, Brussels, and the Netherlands. Over and above her commissioned work, she painted several self-portraits, many with her monocle in place. In the painting of 1777, it is slightly off the centre of her eye, suggesting its primary use was not looking out at us, but as a working tool, for reading or painting. There are spectacles and pince-nez in paintings since their invention in the medieval period, and we see them in contemporaneous self-portraits by Chardin, but it was most unusual for a woman not only to be depicted using a contemporary technology, but to be defined (literally) ‘through’ a tool for the accumulation of knowledge. By painting herself in this way the artist emphasized her own agency, and she looks through technology at the viewer, who is temporarily held within a rare depiction of a magnified female look. Choosing such a frank portrayal was a courageous act, also as her age was against her professionally, which she already knew from an experience with the French Academy ten years before. In 1767, she had dared to send in a mythological painting, at a time when women artists were bound by social convention to portraiture and other genre forms. Jupiter Transforms himself in Pan to Surprise the Sleeping Antiope was rejected as obscene by an academic commission that, ironically, included François Boucher, who had himself successfully exhibited Odalisque in 1749. The charge, however, was not necessarily focussed on the painting itself. A rival Prussian painter in Paris, Daniel Chodowiecki (1726–1801), wrote of the incident that it was especially when she had the notion to arouse voluptuous ideas that she was insufferable, particularly when I reflected that this was an old woman who wished to arouse these ideas in order to earn money.

Denis Diderot (1713–1784), with whom Lisiewska-Therbusch had a complex personal relationship, remarked about this event that “it was not talent that she lacked in order to create a big sensation in this country […] it was youth, it was beauty, it was modesty, it was coquetry.” The jibe about modesty may relate to looking straight out, magnified, but there was also criticism of her overtly realistic painting of her peasant models, in an age of blurring idealism. Chodowiecki’s judgmental male gaze got no further than the artist’s face however. Therbusch was highly regarded, as Diderot makes clear, and had already painted Frederick the Great by this time, but such was the prejudice aroused by her rejected painting, that she could no longer get work in Paris, and had to leave these ambitions behind her, and move to another country.

Control over the images a society makes, is also control over who is permitted reproduction as a visible member of that society, a point Judith Butler (1956–) makes.
There is no reproduction of the social world that is not at the same time a reproduction of those norms that govern the intelligibility of the body in space and time. By ‘intelligibility’ I include ‘readability in social space and time’ and so an implicit relation to others (and to possibilities of marginalization, abjection, and exclusion) that is conditioned and mediated by social norms. 178

It was as a ‘body in time and space’ that Diderot thought Therbusch failed, not as an artist. She got as far as she did because she trained herself in the visual ‘intelligibility’ that defined picture making in her time, but the image that was her own body could not be accepted by this same culture. If she was not young and potentially sexually available, a coquette, she had no right to ‘represent’ sexuality. To go further and bring bodies visually coded with poverty (her peasant models) into the academy, was altogether too much. Stepping back to the notebook, it becomes easier to see that the tentative explorations of sensuality it explores, and its grounding in peasant life, must have crossed right over the borders of what was socially permissible, and these beautiful paintings may have been made with an audience of one, or perhaps two, in mind.

Wonderful as its pages often are, the artist who painted them did not possess the professional skills of a Lisiewska-Therbusch. Page fifty-two reveals only an embattled grasp of human anatomy. These are paintings created by someone with no training, only a ten-year-old writing notepad to paint in, and what was probably a limited supply of watercolours, as there is notably sparse use of more expensive reds and blues. This is the ‘reproduction of the social world’ of a woman whose aesthetic vision has been deprived of learnable norms. The public museum did not exist before the French Revolution, and while academy exhibitions were theoretically public, they existed only in large cities, and only if you were deemed sufficiently middle or upper class. For those without access to exhibitions or education, images were to be found in church, and in print: a widely distributed etching of Frederick the Great; popular Books of Secrets that people kept in their homes; printed illustrations in scientific and literary periodicals, fashion magazines, possibly a few other books. The paintings that we now understand as art history were viewed, in their time, by a tiny elite. The iconography that the notebook artist drew from comes from the other, domestic world of popular edition and household print, it is not the privileged visual language of fine art that Lisiewska-Therbusch managed to access because of her father. The ‘view from the mouth of the cave’ that I am unfolding may have been unintelligible to these academic eyes. This may also be what has saved the notebook for us today, that it was never considered more than a strange oddity in an alchemical
Both McLean and Moran reveal that while we now see the alchemical project as esoteric, it was in its time a search for order, sequence, and illustration. By the 1790s it represented a nostalgic and disappearing world-view, and its images were already being gathered and preserved in alchemical encyclopedias, so that they could be impacted from an analytic distance. This is not what the manuscript is performing.

I believe the artist who painted this book was doing it to make her life more liveable. She did not know how to make grand paintings, and evidence of this lack, in the face of creative need, can be understood as a form of deprivation—the withholding, by those who can, of what they consider to be their private rights to knowledge and skill. We can see it in every careful brush mark, as she tries her hardest to model the forms she needs to see. These brush marks of deprivation reveal a vision wavering uncertainly in a shadowy, unauthorised visual world. The artist’s lack of access has also been her freedom however, and it has left us today with an alternative ‘symbolic iconography’ of her time, one that resists engagement with the gender norms of the public arena that destroyed Lisiewska-Therbusch’s Parisian career.

In A Room of One’s Own, written in 1929, Virginia Woolf records being locked out of an Oxbridge Library because she was not a man, “I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and then I thought how it is worse perhaps, to be locked in.” It was Woolf’s intersectional privilege in other areas that allowed her to get even this close, but importantly, she points to the freedoms that may exist outside of the dominant view. It is this shadowy wilderness that the notebook artist worked. She was clearly using logs as the black mirrors of Capote’s ‘threshold to secret vision’—the ‘Damischean’ cloud ring found in moulding sap, the area of transition between mimetic representation and some other way of seeing. The child is on the threshold of the visible. Perhaps this is an image of pregnancy, a there-but-not-there child pressing on the womb for a form that might hold our love, a form that might hold our deaths. The relationship of physical bodies have with both the social and material world around us will, in the thinking of Anzieu, directly affect the development of our psychological self. The two are inseparable. Being locked out will be formative of everything that is locked in.

A Sensed Life
Between pages 30 and 44, it is possible to trace how the notebook reveals this search for form. Between the two theatre pages where women are painted watching men acting out, there is an amazing sequence of pages where the log, as a ‘form that might hold our love,’ comes into focus.

Page 31: The Wrapped Child. In one of its most beautiful pages, a swaddled child is painted as straddling the thick brown outer layers of the log and the ‘Damischean’ cloud ring found in moulding sap, the area of transition between mimetic representation and some other way of seeing. The child is on the threshold of the visible. Perhaps this is an image of pregnancy, a there-but-not-there child pressing on the representational field. The burnt umber holding body of the log cradles the child’s head as it also falls around it and into the interior, flowing across the log’s interiority in light, frothing waves. This liquid field, perhaps an expression of the sensation of amniotic fluid, in turn cradles another head, a more fantastic, pensive bear, the central core of this stand-in. We are twenty-two pages (weeks?) on from page 9 and the ‘bear of desire.’

Could this be a mother’s image of pregnancy?

Page 32 is the tense fashion drawing. The freely flowing images of the page before could not be more different to its scratchy angularity.
Page 33: The Painting and the Herm. Three pages after his theatre appearance, Hermes returns as a herm, an ancient Greek boundary marker made up of a bearded man’s head on a pillar that would traditionally have an erect phallus carved on, or in, it. The stand-in body of a herm boundary marker could also reference the conceptually liminal, the edges of the known and accepted. Below the herm two turbaned men discuss an unrolled portrait, announcing this more broadly as a subject of discussion. Turbans mark these men as non-dominant voices within a Bavarian social context, but, as we will see in the following pages, the artist reveals only positive identifications with turbaned men, and the herm seems to mark the conceptually liminal, and not the exoticisms of a foreign land. A line draws down to it like a noose from the enclosing body of the log. This is drawn as darkly circling forces, marked, uniquely, by white breasts that spill out and claim this body as female. Do the woman and child inside this sensuously female body seek to destroy, play with, or embrace the phallic fence post that marks the limits of possible discussion of the portrait? This is the place where experiments happen and rules fail, and more than anywhere else in the notebook, this painting suggests the artist to be knowingly experimenting with the approaches to self-portrayal that I am putting forward.

This page is also perhaps the most Rococo of the notebook, and reminiscent of Watteau’s Fêtes Galante. These mysterious paintings often also play with social structures, the boundaries of sexual permissiveness being played out around a (female) herm in his early work Return to the Love Isle of Cythera (1717), for example.

On page 34 the encircling log-body performs sensation and movement as it twists round a central splintering blue reminiscent of both a map and our internal nerve trees.

On page 35 a naked woman sits with her legs apart, but this is not the sexually provocative pose of a Boucher painting. She simply has no clothes on, but between her legs she dangles a winged infant with an arrow. This is Cupid, and she is holding his hand. There is no snake and there are no clouds. The outer body is thick, calm and completely enclosing. This is how it is.

On page 36, a tree grows where the drying cracks of the log meet. The tree holds a man and radiates light that reflects red on the surrounding cloud ring. This seems to be the religious miracle of God revealed in the burning bush, the moment when Moses learns of his task to rescue his people from bondage. Thinking with the logic of the log-body, this could be the depiction of an inner miracle of revelation, an inner burning light that does not burn.
Page 37 is the painting of the two kings, one of whom may be Frederick the Great. There are traces of the ouroboros under the heavily painted outer rings, but in the end the artist removed this performer from the scene.

Page 38: A Man in Ottoman Dress. The borders of the Ottoman Empire in the 1780’s were much further west and north than those of Turkey today. The empire included present day Greece, Serbia, Bosnia, Romania, and Bulgaria, and shared a border with the great powers of the Holy Roman Empire and Russia. It was by the 1780’s in military decline, but still an important foe, with an active diplomatic corps in every court in Europe. Although a closed country for much of its history, Ottoman troops served on various sides during the Seven Years’ war, which violently re-drew the map of Europe and its colonies between 1756–1763. They were therefore a limited, but visible, part of European society at various social strata.

They were also part of the European imagination. The Ottoman empire was slowly opening up to travellers during this time, and this open-but-closed quality made the empire’s styles and habits fascinatingly exotic all over Europe. They were recorded in popular prints and fashion magazines, and a ‘Sultane’ was a popular, informal, at-home gown based on a caftan. Dressing à la Turque was to be seen at public masquerades in larger cities, and was a popular theme of both commissioned portraits and travel sketches. This exoticizing fashion does not account for page 38 however. There are none of the discontinuities that ‘dressing up’ always somehow reveals, and this is more likely to be simply a portrait of a man, either remembered or imagined. His heavy cloak can be seen in portraits of Ottoman diplomats, and was traditionally tied at the neck with two large metal circles linked by a chain, one of which can be seen here. Ottoman head coverings were specific to rank and function, but this fez with a cloth wrapper, as with all the others in the notebook, is not identifiable. This lack of detail, compared to the drawing of Western headwear, suggests a lack of precise cultural knowledge. The artist was not a Turk.

The white circle of the clasp is repeated as snowfall in night-time and the man’s clean-shaven face suggests a formal role, perhaps a diplomat or translator. Whoever he was, or was imagined to be, this night image is the most intimate of the book, and the only one painted entirely in black and white. The smiling man looks up towards the two heads of a pulsing curvaceous ouroboros, eternity here surging up each side of the log, and instead of eating its tail, locking tongues with itself. Throughout the notebook, the emblem of the ouroboros exchanges places with cloud markers, alternatively suggesting the movement from either countable time (the rings of the log, the days of a life) to the eternal time of the memory, or the

And then James died. It was August of the next year, and the news came as she touched down at Logan. A text from one of the four people who had known.
movement from definable space to the formless space of internal experience. On page thirty-eight the sensing body propping up the inner portrait is kissing and sensual. Did she have a night visitor from the East? It is an enchanting idea. The border was relatively close.

The images inserted here in the printed thesis are not available in the digital thesis.

Page 39. On the very next page, violence returns in what could be an allegory of rape. In a secluded area, perhaps a wood, seven men in Western hats push a pole up the ass of a seated animal, a cow or a mule, both stand-in words commonly used to degrade women. The sensuous delights of the previous page have completely collapsed. The ouroboros has no flick in its curves now, it lies immobile and deathly pale at the bottom of the page.

Page 40. The social order returns. Queen and King sit on a cloud radiating what you would expect to be light, but it is actually the darkness that is painted. This could be a version of a common alchemical image, the moon and sun in Heaven, or the combining of female and male energies in a totality. No longer encircled by boundary markers of either clouds or an ouroboros, these figures are held within a clear white circle, marked to suggest the reflective surface of a curved lens. The dark mirror here reflects the social order, and the previously sensuous body has become a flat brown ring. Is this a picture of lens adjustment, and the return of the socially disciplined body? Are these last two pages an attempt to come to terms with an enforced ‘negotiation with forms of power,’ to quote Butler again? Is this imagery made by a woman using painting to try to make her life condition ‘more liveable’? It is a picture of the received order reversed to radiate darkness not light, a suggestion that this life was one that was less liveable “if not fully un-liveable.”

And the figure from page 38 is back. Far away in the blue yonder, but reaching out to help a figure prostrate on the ground. The enclosing body once more vibrates with life, and the dead rings of the previous page become quivering elver-like gestures excitedly circling the sky. These flickering lines take the place of the single ouroboros of time. Where they rise out of the delicate lemony bark body they are lightly placed but they thrum with more insistence as they move inwards, and completely lose their order in the final inner framing of the exchange at the heart of the blue. Are we looking at a memory? A wish?

The log body that quivered with life only one page before has become a thick crust of cracked earth. Shadows under the heart shaped hole in the middle suggest a cutting out, an inner absence from where we view talking with three men: a bearded, slightly hunched man who may be wearing a turban, it is not clear; a younger man with a lyre, another in a working man’s cap. The painting of the angel has caused the artist some trouble, with repeated overworking and what appears to be an extra arm falling away from its back. The holding body is clear but the absent heart reveals a social world that is not.

This portrait page is out of synch with all the others. The holding body is barely rendered at all, entirely displaced by what looks like an observed study of a man in Western dress. The figure of Frederick the Great was also a sort of portrait, but really a symbol created by coat and crown. This sketch seems to have been almost stamped onto the imaginative heart of this log, whose encompassing body has been rapidly, carelessly, marked in and almost disappears at its outer, worldly, edge. There is no entwining of the mind and the flesh here, only the efficient depiction of one whose image epitomizes the ‘symbolic iconography’ of the times.

This intense series is bookended by the second visit to the theatre, where the three women watching from the mouth of the cave look out at their classical heroes, still on stage, still with weapons of war, possibly in heaven.

Women twice look on at men dressed as gods, but depicted as children; a woman gives herself up to the beast of passion, looking calmly at the viewer while she does so; a sensual portrait of an Ottoman is immediately followed by Western men violently attacking a domestic animal; an outdated, but subtly reversed, depiction of an alchemical totality, a distant return of a joyous image, and then an imposed Western male gaze. A log body revealing breasts and a baby; entwining itself with the symbolically liminal and linking this to a discussion of portraiture, or excitedly framing the turbaned man. A log-body that entangles with imagined worlds to perform sensuous, curling...
engagement, or to lie in pallor and slackness, or to almost disappear entirely.

There are more passages like this in the notebook, but in looking closely at these pages I have been conjuring this log-book as a record of a woman's internal battle with the erasure of disciplining social structures. This is the real battle that these pages depict, in all their violence and joy. In creating this marginal history out of an anonymous object, I am presenting the notebook as a previously unnoticed record of a life that is only one example of all the women's lives that have been excluded or erased, simply not noticed, in the writing of our histories.

The intensities of this battle can also be understood by thinking with the coming and going of an object in Sigmund Freud's *fort-da* game. In *fort-da*, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) speculates that the infant game of 'now you see it, no you don't,' is a way of allowing a child to come to terms with the terrifying idea of an absent mother, and an important staging post towards an independent self. Transposed to my reading of the notebook, we may be seeing an artist testing out conflicting visions of the world, those she desires to be, and those that are imposed upon her, drawn as a narrative of repeated returns. This struggle of coming and going haunts what at first glance appears to be formulaic religious and alchemic imagery with a fugitive voice. If this is understood as a completely conscious encoding, then this could be simply a more occluded alchemical text, but I believe this process was only partially conscious. Neither alchemical nor rationalist, the flickering voice straining to picture itself is more suggestive of the questions that would go on to occupy the Romantic world view, the *natuurphilosophie* of Goethe and Schelling, before being taken up by twentieth century psychoanalysis. There it might be understood as a partial expression of the subject, whose eternal ambiguity is a primary psychoanalytic tenet, as the subject resides in the unconscious. This partial expression has been found by a woman daring to see herself in the partial black mirrors of her fire logs. The inner world revealed by this process is one marked by isolation and deprivation, a reading compounded by the formal lack of context for this stand-in body. These worlds float on blank white pages. They are informed by a religious upbringing, folk practices, and illustrations in printed books and magazines, but they find no context. To live in such a near vacuum, unable to see yourself as part of representable world, would not have been unusual for a woman at this time, but finding a way to record such deprivation was most unusual. In contemporary terms, this is the work of an 'outsider artist,' but for a society that excluded almost all women from cultural participation, it is more interesting to consider Avery Gordon's observation that

Walking through Boston station on her way to the next place, she saw a red news banner flash across the screen on the wall. It was telling the world the lawyer was dead. She panicked and turned. It was American sport. She read it wrong. But she had been married to the lawyer, and now she felt the shocking resolution of holding on to a life as it seeped through her hands.

On the train to New York, and walking long pavements, it all unravelled. If James was dead, the others would also die, falling out of her mind like playing card princes.
To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows. These pages are fragile and experimental, unsure of their negotiation with this shadowy world. Forms are left half done, others fall back into received religious and alchemical symbolism, the given languages of interiority at the time. And yet a ghostly ‘dialectics of visibility and invisibility’ surfaces nevertheless, an identity only now being negotiated into visibility with a twenty-first century vision.

Pain ripped through her body like acid on fire. She was on her hands and knees and spots of red on the sheet below her face said her nose was bleeding from her screams. Five minutes before, her Day high had said that she could make it to the loo unaided. Such chemical deceit had left her sprawled forwards over slip-resist floor tiles. Her ripped palms now stained her grip as someone else’s visitor ran for help, and orderlies somehow got her back on the metal bed. She was an animal in an invisible trap and screamed in vertical red stripes. On a distant shore, a needle nipped her arm as more blood stopped her throat. Coughing it out, she felt her back snap in two, and pee warmed her leg. When she came round there was wind and lights. A woman smiled and asked her to count. There would be a knife.