



Wenyon & Gamble *Biolography* From "Installation Age", Tmmp, 1992

## The Dream Book—Image and Bibliography

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Back when the written word meant cuneiform characters inscribed in clay, who would have predicted that the world would be as inundated as it is today with informative and creative work in book form? The transformation have been many: from ephemeral pictures to cuneiform writing, from ideographs to phonetic script, and from characters to signs. Today, moreover, the book itself is undergoing a major transformation as a vehicle for conveying information. Information is turning digital; what had been books on paper is shifting to a truly fragmented, disembodied existence.

What the book as vehicle brings us is, of course, not merely text data; it communicates a cornucopia of ideas and world views in pictures as well. The shape and design of the book are also the product of their age. In the case of the hand scroll, for instance, the book-as-vehicle included a time dimension, experienced as one scrolls through the manuscript from left to right. A book is not merely a record. It is an age bequeathed to us in the shape of a book.

Imagination and inspiration that exist only in someone's mind will disappear, never having taken shape. But if, thanks to inventors, that imagination can be given concrete form, can be made visible, then another person — ourselves for instance — can learn of it. Concepts can be read from descriptions intended as information; illustrations enable us to imagine the objects they refer to. Religious symbolism, practical wisdom, warrior tales, or narrative fiction: they are all in books. In the history of the sense of sight, then, what role has the book played?

The many books that have come down to us give a truly rich and varied record of visual experiments and devices. Books are where people enthralled by the visual report their achievements. A. KIRCHER and G. DELLA PORTA proudly describe optical phenomena in illustrated books; viewing how they illustrate their dubious devices brings with it a profound emotional involvement. From compilations of cute shadow pictures we can read a partiality for light and shadow. *The Illustrated London News* special issue on the Great Exhibition in London and *La*

*Nature* give a sense of an endless fondness for spectacles. The rare books on display in this exhibit are evidence of an appetite for the visual. "Dream books" to searchers and pioneers, they have an impact on the viewer, not least because of the superb plastic qualities of the books themselves.

In looking at panorama books for children, which resemble peep shows, or J.C. LAVATER's book on physiognomy (*Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*), one senses the wonder of pure sight. Today, morphing on the computer can bring us what were once visual hallucinations in the minds of LAVATER or GRANVILLE. Consider "the transformation from frog to Apollo," found in an illustrated book: morphing indeed.

When we think about works of art in book form, one in particular comes to mind — *Biolography*, a holographic installation that we displayed in our Installation Age exhibition, back when the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography was in its old building. This work by WENYON & GAMBLE is a holograph in which books appear to be lined up on a blank wall, an empty space. The names on the spines are all of books having to do with light, such as Newton's *Optics*. The artists knew that these books would function as "a distant icon of memory."\* Their work, in full awareness that the books will be memories, mementos, and finally vanishing objects from the past, presents them with detachment. That brings to mind the oft-quoted phrase, "the museum is the city's memory device." The book, once serving as a metaphor in paintings, is now a symbol of delusion. Then what is the meaning of our memory device? Its function is simply to be a site for the work of dispassionately collecting and recording the infinite accumulation of experiments in vision.

\*Nakagawa Motoko, *Hon no bijutsushi: Seisho kara multimedia made (History of the art of the book: From the Bible to multimedia)*. Kosakusha, 1995, pp.185-188.