The Mediation of Death and the Temporality of the Scroll (Japan, c.1200)

KRISTOPHER W. KERSEY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

The image often has more memory and more future than the being who contemplates it.[1]

— Georges Didi-Huberman

From the earliest days of the discipline, art historians have argued that the scroll alone achieves the impossible: the continual pictorial depiction of temporal phenomena.[2] Given that the inability to depict time was commonly held to be the defining limitation of premodern visual art, the assertion is rather bold. The scroll's privileged relationship to the temporal is in many ways a straightforward function of its material parameters. Since the marked surface of a scroll often extends beyond the field of vision, the format allows for the production of a pictorial field that is either longitudinally or laterally unbounded. To behold such a picture requires a tactile, sequential, and definitively linear process of viewing. It is this material, physical continuity that invites the metaphorical extension. Material spans are made to index temporal ones. This is the weak claim, but there is a stronger one as well. For instance, the art historian Kurt Weitzmann, in his formative study on the topic, proclaimed the scroll to be nothing less than the premiere format for giving visual form to all manner of narratives (biography and history included).[3] Only the illustrated scroll, Weitzmann argued, could exceed the 'basic text' by capturing the 'transitory element' of discourse; and it did so, moreover, in a medium that was transportable to other locations and transposable to other media.[4] The primacy Weitzmann accorded the pictorial scroll is all the more striking when one considers the prevailing logocentrism of his disciplinary moment. In its most aggressive form, the claim would be that the medium of the scroll allows pictorial marks to mimic, exceed, and even expropriate the temporal dimension of written and spoken discourse.

Manuscript scrolls are not the antiquated topic they may seem to be. In fact, in its afterlife, the scroll format continues to structure present visual culture. While cinema (itself, until recently, a projection from a scrolled film) may have superseded both the codex and the scroll as the default reference metaphor for narrative,[5] one need look no further than digital, screen-bound media (such as Courtauld Books Online) to see that scrolling is, once again, the primary means of navigating the 'image-world' that is constitutive of late capitalism.[6] The physical scroll and the metaphor

of scrolling both imply a degree of continuity, yet as we will discover, it is possible to work against such continuity: to create disruptions, effect misreadings, and represent complex temporal structures that are much more analogous to lived experience than the simple timeline metaphor would suggest. Accordingly, this chapter will raise both a historical context (that of premodern Japan) and a specific object (a set of memorial handscrolls) in order to scrutinise the ways in which the temporal extensions of the medium might be used to mediate the cognitive dissonance and chronological disarray that death precipitates.[7]

The goal, however, is not to demonstrate an exotic historical

exception. For the study of the scroll in Japan is a topic with more global implications than it may at first seem. The reasons are several. Beyond the sheer volume of extant scrolls in Japan is the primacy of place accorded paintings and calligraphies in scroll format—both vertical and horizontal—in the Japanese art historical canon.[8] Japanese visual culture was, and to some extent remains, an image-world highly structured by the scroll. To make this clear, some historical context is in order. Whereas the codex is said to have eclipsed the rotulus in fifth-century Europe, in Japan, inscription, scroll, print, binding, and codex were not necessarily successive technologies. In fact, it was not until the seventh century that instrumental literacy (as opposed to alegible uses of writing) was adopted, meaning both paper—a first-century continental invention—and the scroll were present at the very dawn of domestic writing.[9]

The early advent of print further complicates matters, for throughout medieval and early-modern Japanese history, print and manuscript remained dual and not necessarily competing technologies of textual reproduction. One case in point is found among the earliest extant Japanese scrolls: the celebrated *One Million Pagodas of Dhāraṇī* (Hyakumantō darani 百万塔陀羅尼) , a series of one million fascicles printed with incantatory texts, each stored within an individual wooden pagoda (figs 7.1 and 7.2). They were created in 764–770 at the behest of the Japanese empress Shōtoku (718–770) and subsequently distributed, in groups of 100,000, to ten temples charged with the performance of Buddhist ceremonial for the purpose of defending the realm.[10] While these texts were not produced for reading, by the eleventh century print was used to produce texts for that purpose as well.[11] Even following the rise of commercial book publishing in the early seventeenth century, the manuscript scroll did not disappear. It retains currency to this day in certain East Asian religious and artistic contexts. Indeed, given the prospect (or spectre) of a post-print world, it may very well be that the manuscript scroll will outlive its purported successor.

Such larger context aside, the specific manuscripts that concern us here are among the most enigmatic artefacts in the Japanese art-historical canon: a set of palimpsestic scrolls commonly known as the *Eyeless Sūtras* (*Menashikyō* 目無経) (figs 7.3–7.6).[12] Once believed to have spanned some forty metres, only two thirds of the manuscript survives, parcelled into two-dozen fragments and housed in no fewer than seven collections.[13] They once comprised a four-volume transcription of an antiquated translation of several Buddhist scriptures: the *Sūtra of Golden Light* (*Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明経, in Sanskrit *Suvarṇa-prabhāsottama-sūtra*, T 663.18) and a one-volume, condensed version of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Rishukyō* 理趣経, in Sanskrit *Adhyardhaśatikā prajñāpāramitā*, T 243.8). Paleographic analysis has led scholars to surmise that the scrolls were produced as 'merit-transfer' *sūtras* (*tsuizenkyō* 追善経) for the repose of Emperor GoShirakawa (1127–1192). The practice is predicated upon the belief that by copying a *sūtra* one generates karmic merit that can then be transferred to the deceased. An increase in merit in

turn helps to enable a propitious rebirth, if not a full escape from the cycle of *saṃsāra* itself. Such manuscripts were often produced communally, and they represent a potent intersection of inscription and soteriology, wherein collective replication played a role in processing both memory and loss.[14] Strikingly, the *sūtras* of the Eyeless were transcribed over phantasmatic and monochromatic line drawings of chiefly domestic scenes of roughly contemporaneous affairs (similar in subject to 'genre painting' in Euro-American art history). Of the more than four hundred figures who appear beneath the *sūtra* texts, a mere nineteen have full physiognomic details, hence the 'eyeless' moniker.

Present understanding of the scrolls rests almost solely upon the interpretation of its two problematic colophons. The first, found at the end of the third fascicle of the *Golden*, states in Sino-Japanese *kanbun*: 'Copied on the first day of the fourth month of the third year of the Kenkyū era [1192]' (建久三年四月一日書寫之)', followed thereafter by an illegible mark believed to be the cipher of the transcriptionist. The second, found at the end of the *Perfection*, is much more detailed. The art historian Akiyama Terukazu interpreted the inscription as follows:

> The Tonsured Emperor GoShirakawa and Nun X's painting, when not yet completed [was interrupted by] the emperor's demise, whereupon the paper was used for copying this *sūtra*. The calligraphy [of the *sūtra* text] is by [former] Major Counselor Master Jōhen [and the] Sanskrit letters are by Master Jōken. In the eighth month of the fourth year of the Kenkyū era, this scroll was respectfully received from the abbot [Shōken] by Shinken.[15]

後白河法皇⊠禅尼之御絵未終功之処崩御仍以故紙写此経
熱筆大納言闍梨静遍梵字宰相闍梨成賢云云
建久四年八月　日
以此経奉受僧正御房了
深賢[16]

The inscription raises numerous questions, and the English translation necessitates smoothing over several ambiguities in the original.[17] First, the 'fourth year of the Kenkyū era' would be 1193, a full year after the inscription found on the *Golden* volume; the disparity calls into question the notion that these were originally produced as a set. The ambiguities of the *kanbun* grammar further support various readings: one is that the drawings themselves were in the possession of the emperor and the anonymous nun, while another reading is that the emperor and nun were the ones who drew the drawings. Physiognomic lack, in addition to the compositional disjointedness and monochromy, has led scholars to presume that the papers were *disjecta membra*, repurposed and assembled in haste upon the Emperor's death.[18] Accordingly, present scholarly consensus holds that pictures of the *Eyeless* are unfinished underdrawings made in preparation for a deluxe manuscript illuminating one of the novelistic tales, such as the *Tale of Genji*, for which this period in Japanese literary history is celebrated.

If the scrolls were indeed created for the repose of Emperor GoShirakawa, perhaps the most famous emperor in premodern Japanese history, then this contributes to the intrigue. GoShirakawa's death marks the end of Japan's halcyon, 'classical' Heian era (794–1192) and the beginning of four centuries of intermittent internecine war and almost seven centuries of military governments. Opinions on his reign vary. Some cast him as a profligate who cost the imperial family political control of the state, while others see him as a skilled strategist who levied soft power to manipulate the fractious military and aristocratic classes.[19] Be that as it may, the Emperor was a zealous patron of the arts and a legendary collector of illuminated handscrolls. Indeed, so intense was his fervour that one post-war art historian retro-diagnosed him as suffering from a pathological, scroll-induced mania.[20] Given this situation, the unorthodox design of the scrolls seems particularly curious. One might imagine that the ultimate manuscript made for perhaps the most handscroll-obsessed emperor would be not only complete, but also astoundingly lavish.

These enigmatic artefacts are rich documents of Heian pictorial culture, yet scholarship on the *Eyeless* has been blinkered by focus upon two issues: the identity of the anonymous nun and the identity of the narrative tale that the images are held to illustrate.[21] For the better part of a century, the primary goal has been to segment, splice, and shuffle the pages—a purportedly reparative enterprise—in order to 'return' the paintings to the order they would have been in had the illustrated narrative manuscript been completed. Rigour notwithstanding, such attempts are undeniably counterfactual, and result from the deep-seated methodological habit of explaining images by way of their textual sources.[22] It is symptomatic, it seems, of an enervated Panofskian iconology perpetually arrested at its secondary stage. And the reconfigured and doctored subject of analysis is a nonexistent, never-realised object that never would have had the opportunity to be seen or to participate in the recursions and replications that constitute visual culture. The *Eyeless* is an excellent example of the way in which an uncritical text-and-image approach can sometimes lead one astray.

Given the context of creation (if the colophons are to be believed) as well as the unbelievable sophistication of manuscript, it seems unlikely that GoShirakawa's memorial scroll was created simply by cobbling together, willy-nilly, recycled images from a bevy of unfinished works. By contrast, for the remainder of this essay, I would like to demonstrate the types of knowledge that might be

Fig. 7.5
Detail of the
Golden Light Sūtra,
one volume of
the *Eyeless Sūtras*,
(1192 C.E.). Ink,
gold paint, mica,
gold and silver leaf
on paper. Kyoto
National Museum.
Photo: © The
Author.
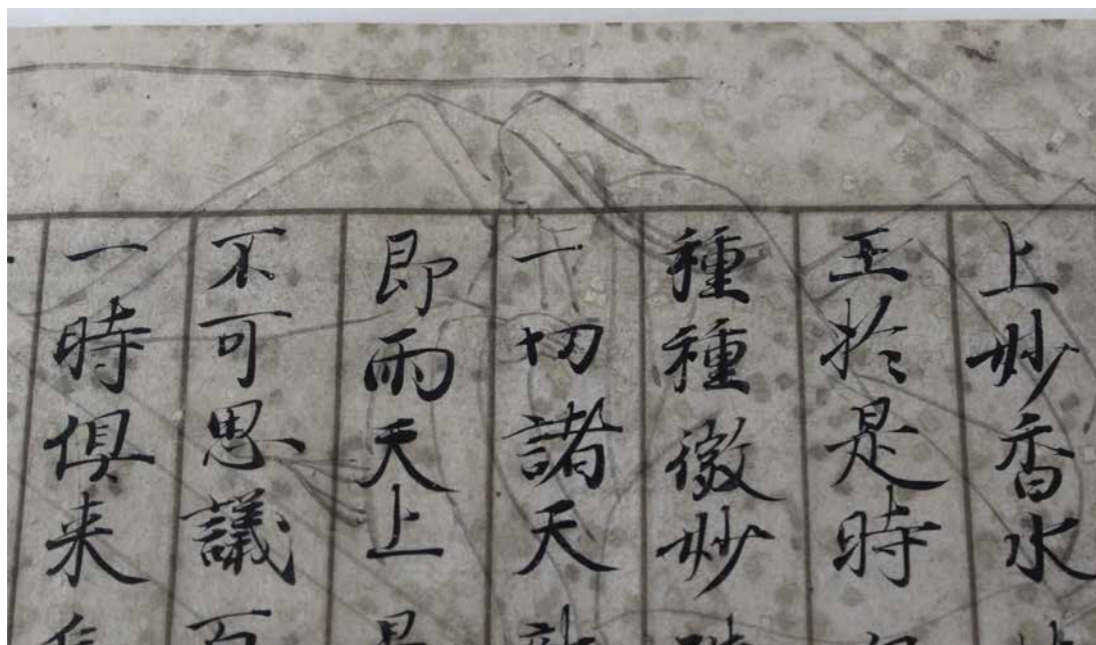
excavated by taking this artefact at face value. The first premise to dispel is the notion that these images are incomplete. One must bear in mind that the ritual identity of these objects as implements within mortuary ceremonial must take precedence over our modern understanding of these fascicles as 'illustrated manuscripts'. From a ritual point of view, they were undeniably complete since it was the *sūtra*-creation process that mattered. Accordingly, the *Eyeless* fascicles represent finished, important, and sophisticated illustrated *sūtras*, and not the sketchy remnants of an abortive illustrated manuscript. Their ritual identity, however, does not necessarily proscribe art historical scopophilia; it is neither ahistorical nor orientalist to scour the surface of these scrolls for moments of visual interest and hermeneutic insight. On the contrary, doing so restores 'historical dignity' to a marked surface long deemed unworthy of such close looking.[23]

Fig. 7.6
Detail of the
Golden Light Sūtra,
one volume of
the *Eyeless Sūtras*,
(1192 C.E.). Ink,
gold paint, mica,
gold and silver leaf
on paper. Kyoto
National Museum.
Photo: © The
Author.
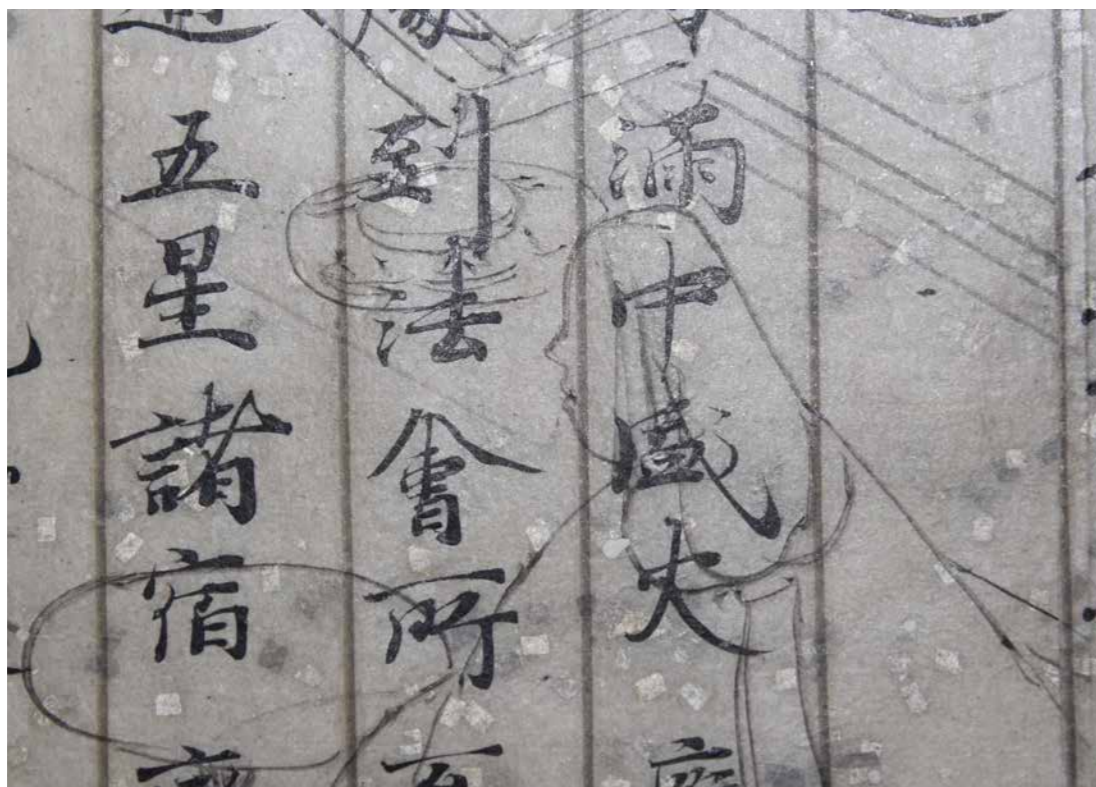
Let us begin with the medium itself, especially its claim to be continuous. Most simply, one can conceive of the scroll as a continuous band, a line expanded to sufficient breadth to support other representational lines. Yet at a material level, rarely are such bands continuous. Whether bound into a book or imbricated into a scroll, all paper-based texts are composed of discontinuous base units or sheets. Hence a paper scroll is, literally speaking, 'paginated', or at least segmented. This may seem like a quibble, but it directs attention to the fact that early paper in East Asia was likely seen as a substitute silk.[24] Unlike the paper scroll, continuity does inhere in a bolt of silk, and paper scrolls—as proxy textiles—inherited this aura of continuity. Indeed, the Buddhist scriptural canon, a corpus that played a catalytic role in the spread of the scroll and literacy to Japan, is comprised of *sūtras* (経, in Chinese *jing*, in Japanese *kyō*), a term whose etymology is traceable to the continuous threads of a textile.

Hence what distinguishes the format is not physical continuity so much as contiguity, a syntactic and metaphorical linearity. This aspect of the medium was most famously explored by Franz Wickhoff in his celebrated 1895 analysis of the *Vienna Genesis*, wherein he proposed a tripartite taxonomy of strategies for the depiction of a narrative text: complementary, isolating, and continuous.[25] The lattermost term designated narratives broken into 'a continuous series of related circumstances passing, smoothly and unbroken, one into another, just as during a river voyage the landscape of the banks seems to glide before our eyes'.[26] In critical response, Weitzmann proposed his well-known counter-formulation (admittedly based upon the earlier work of Carl Robert) of simultaneous, monoscenic, and cyclic.[27] While ideas of pictorial narrative have since progressed far beyond this trichotomy, its influence is still often felt.[28] According to Weitzmann, the cyclic involved a 'series of consecutive compositions' arranged in a manner with 'physical relation' suggestive of the continuity and causation meant to link them.[29] Scenes might be arranged in any manner, but scrolls necessitate tight sequencing along a single vector. Accordingly, as with what Meyer Schapiro called the hypo-semiotic valence of a canvas,[30] even a blank scroll presupposes what might be called a 'material-' or 'ground-span', a non-discursive and aniconic sense of continuity and sequence that structures any given arrangement of representational marks it might bear.[31] Since scrolls were both manuscript and pictorial supports, the directionality of the flow of writing determined the temporal valence. It was this bleed from text-space into picture-space that led Weitzmann to note that one *reads* scroll-bound images more than those in other media.[32] Similarly, while by no means universal, it was the right-before-left, top-before-bottom structure of premodern Japanese writing that provided the general semiotic substrate for the ground of Japanese scrolls.

The ground-span should not be conflated, however, with the chronology of the depicted narrative. This distinction was highlighted by the philosopher Nelson Goodman who, without reference to the century of scholarship that preceded him, put forth a somewhat reductive but nevertheless useful account of pictorial narrative based upon the observation that narratives are rarely told in the order in which the events themselves occurred.[33] In Goodman's terms, there is a difference between the chronology of the *telling* and the *told*.[34] A great deal of the pleasure of narrative stems from the rich tension between such disparate chronologies: the uptake, the timespan of the embodied telling or reading, the elastic temporal dynamics of the discourse, and the ultimate way in which one attempts to weave several chronological threads into a comprehensible whole. Not coincidentally, perhaps, Goodman's prime example for demonstrating this fact was Japanese: the Picture Hall of Horyūji Temple, in which five large eleventh-century paintings were used to architecturally construct the biography of Prince Shōtoku (575–622).[35] The events of the prince's life are distributed in three dimensions in a complex manner that is more faithful to cartography than chronology (fig. 7.7). Included too, as Goodman notes, are moments from the Prince's past lives. For according to Buddhist soteriology, all lives (Shōtoku's included) were understood as single links within long chains of karmically motivated rebirths, thus making the visuality of one's life even more polytopic and polychronic, since diverse scenes from diverse lives in diverse geographies
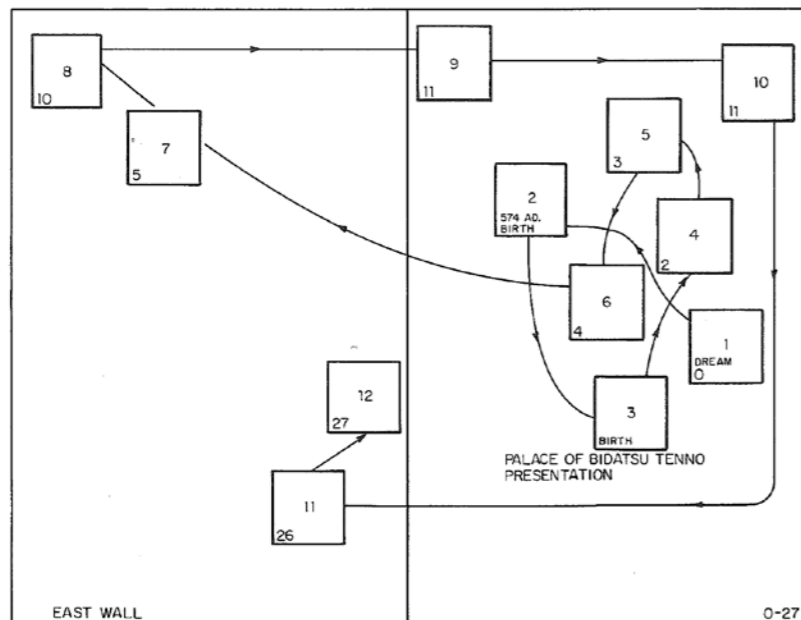
Figure 7. Plan of first screen of the series. The number in the lower left corner
of each square stands for the prince's age at the time of the incident depicted.
The number in the center of each square indicates the chronological position of
the incident relative to the others depicted on this same screen.

might feature in the telling of a single 'biography'. In other words, lives are not lived 'in order', and if the 'book of life' metaphor holds at all, it is a highly intertextual one.

In Shōtoku's pictorial biography, the sharp spatial departure from chronology led Goodman to call it 'twisted'. While a given *fabula* will often withstand severe chronological twisting; at a certain point, he tells us, it collapses. It then transforms into something quite different from narrative: a case study, a character study, or simply 'something else'.[36] Doubtless, the *Eyeless*' concatenated montage of pictorial scenes represents a prime example of a narrative twisted out of recognition, so much so that there is no longer a story to reconstruct. The purportedly narrative illustrations, once evacuated of their narrative, enter into this new ontological realm. The pictorial substrate hence represents a long, protracted stasis, twisted to such an extent that it now defies the defining feature of the medium.

Forensic evidence supports the claim that the pictures may never have been for an illustrated narrative at all, or at least that the compilers of the Eyeless were keen to transform these pictures from narrative illustrations into something quite different. Close looking reveals that the compilers attempted to mitigate pictorial discontinuity. According to the *fukinuki-yatai* (literally 'blown-off roof') perspectival system used in the *Eyeless*, we are granted access into architectural interiors through a dollhouse-like perspective that results in strong diagonal architectural lines. The compilers of the *Eyeless* aligned these orthogonals such that they reverse direction at the seams, thereby creating a wild architectural fantasy: a semi-continuous, zig-zagging interior space that exceeded the possibilities of the built environment (figs 7.8–7.10).[37] While alignment is one thing, it also appears that there is extensive in-painting. This can be ascertained from the presence of lines awkwardly laid in a much darker hue than the thin, carefully applied strokes that predominate (figs 7.11–7.13). First-hand observation reveals that some pictorial sheets were even flipped before additional lines were added on the 'back' to flesh out the pictures (figs 7.14–7.15). Some of this in-painting may even have occurred after or during the sūtra transcription. If this is indeed the case, then it seems undeniable that the pictorial stratum of the *Eyeless* is to be interpreted as-is: as the product of intentional construction, and not according to a reparative, salvage paradigm. 'Sketches' does not do justice to their complexity.

In light of the above, the *Eyeless* 'reads' like a montage of courtly scenes similar to those of the departed Emperor's world, but arranged in a manner that disrupts one's ability to read them as a narrative. There is, in a sense, no progression: repeated hypotaxis without paratactic development. We are confronted with an entire story arrested in a perpetual present, just as the deceased often seems suspended in the process of mourning as a collection of anachronistic memories, anecdotes, and images that seem in tension with the unforgiving perdurance of the deceased's absence.[38] Similarly, through a process of defragmentation, the various pictorial scenes of the *Eyeless*, each with its own internal chronology, have been assembled, doctored, and sutured into a continuum in a process not unlike the temporally unstructured activity of recalling the various scenes one remembers from the life of the deceased. In other words, the *Eyeless* represents not his life, perhaps, but its absence.

It was well established in GoShirakawa's time that a scroll could be used to depict biography. The clearest example of this is the genre of pictorial hagiography known as 'illustrated *vitae* of esteemed monks' (*kōsōden-e* 高僧伝絵), in which the lives and deeds of eminent monks were recounted, often with alternating passages of picture and calligraphy. Yet as the *Eyeless* is a historical memorial and not a literary or religious hagiography, its relationship to the Emperor is both more intimate and more oblique. It need not contain mimetic representations of GoShirakawa's life in order to represent him.[39] Instead of showing GoShirakawa situated within his world, the *Eyeless* represents the courtly world in which he lived, only now eerily estranged, populated by faceless, phastasmatic figures who seem like mannequins perpetually going through the motions of courtly life. Freed from any specific narrative they are rendered tokens of the narrative type. In other words, the pictures of the *Eyeless* present the world of the Emperor emptied of subjectivity, divorced from time, and brought into stasis. That the sequence of pictures is a scroll, moreover, is crucial. For if, according to Hans Belting, the European medieval imaginary was populated chiefly by 'an imaginary collection of single pictures', then one cannot help but wonder what role the pictorial scroll played in structuring the way in which GoShirakawa and his contemporaries constructed their own autobiographical imaginaries.[40] This merits pause, since it would mean that montage and moving sequential images were a part of the period understanding of pictorial narrative, features that Belting argues would remain dormant until the advent of cinema.[41]

The elegiac overtones of such an enterprise are difficult to deny. These pictures represent pictorial snippets of his visual imaginary, or at the very least they represent specimens of the types of pictures that would have been used to prime, calibrate, and develop the Emperor's own epistemic ability to make visual sense of his autobiography and his world. Heian courtiers frequently looked to the literary and especially the poetic canon for opportunities to draw
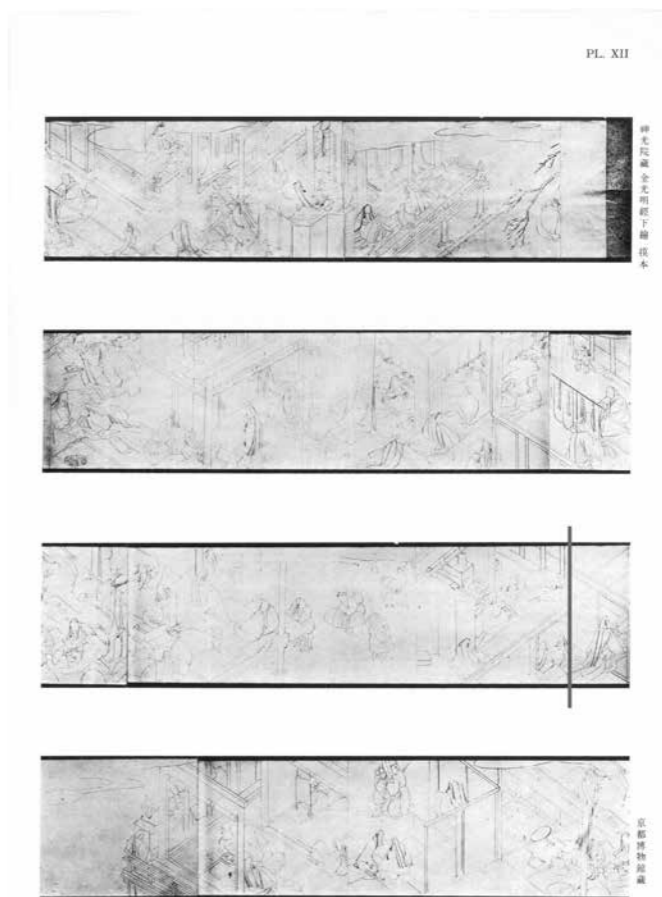

PL. XII

Fig. 7.9
The seam marked in fig. 7.8. Note the effort to align the architectural orthogonal at top and the woman's dress at bottom. Third volume of the *Golden Light Sūtra*, one volume of the *Eyeless Sūtras*, (1192 C.E.). Ink, gold paint, mica, gold and silver leaf on paper. Kyoto National Museum. Photo: © The Author.
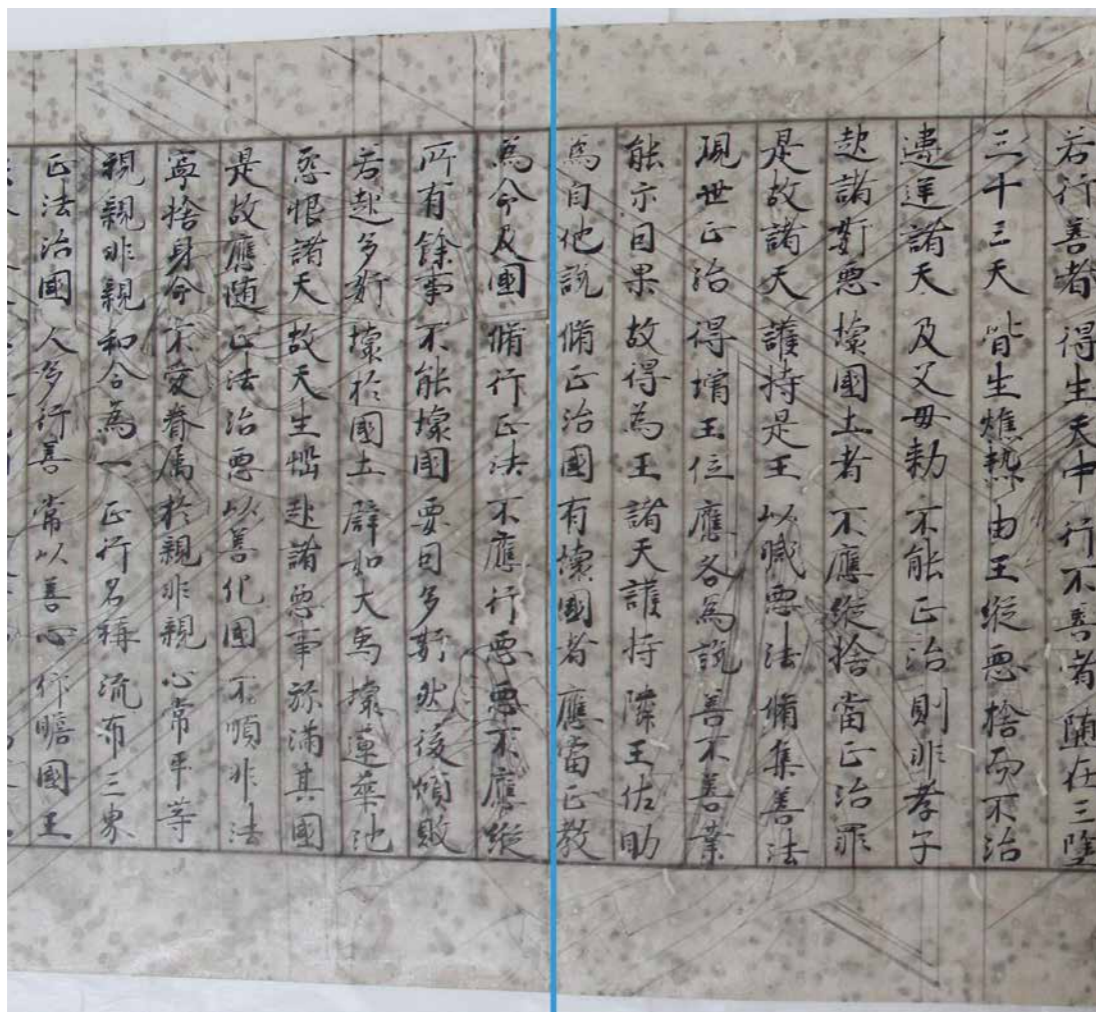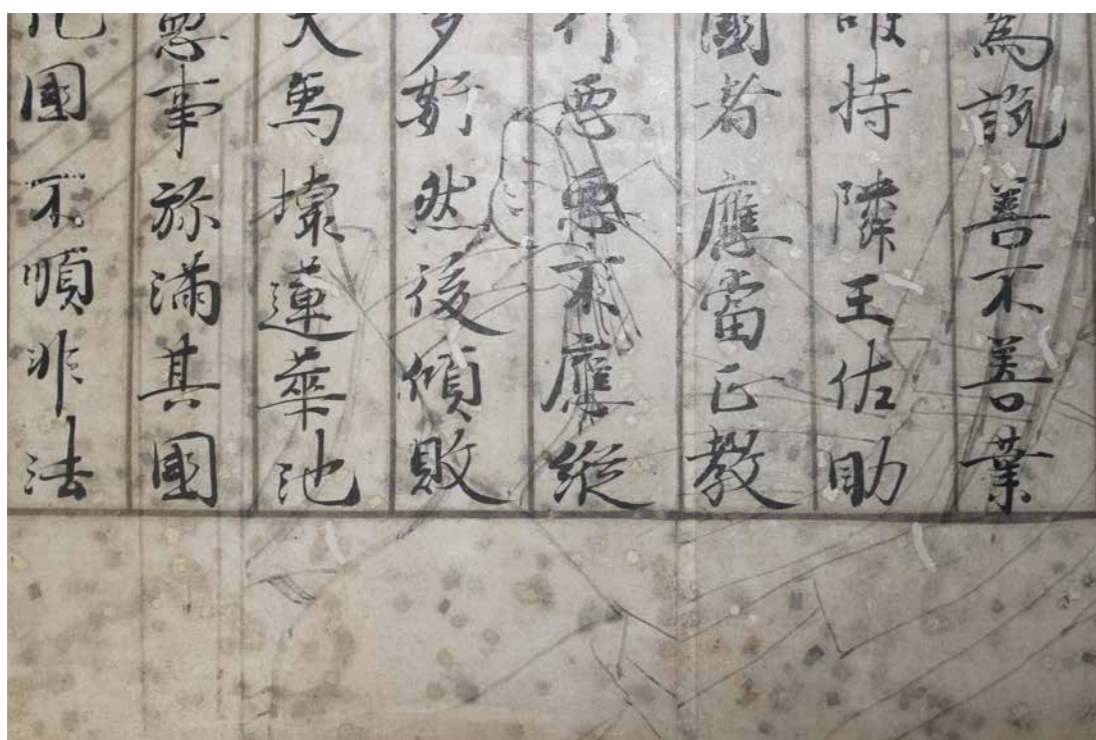

Fig. 7.10
Detail of seam in fig. 7.9. Third volume of the *Golden Light Sūtra*, one volume of the *Eyeless Sūtras*, (1192 C.E.). Ink, gold paint, mica, gold and silver leaf on paper. Kyoto National Museum. Photo: © The Author.

autobiographical analogies. Indeed, in this courtly milieu autobiographical analogy could be a politically freighted move, so much so that the scholar Joshua Mostow has argued that it qualifies as a form of cultural appropriation.[42] Pictures played a key role in these dynamics. Suffice it to say, those of the *Eyeless* are likely quite similar to the types of pictorial narratives in which the Emperor might have seen himself during his life.

On a material level, several contemporaneous practices and artefacts further support the notion that the pictorial expanse of the *Eyeless* was meant to represent the Emperor through aniconic or extra-iconic means. The most obvious analogue is a form of pictorial journalling known as *e-nikki* ('image-diary' 絵日記) described in period documents.[43] No exemplar survives, meaning one can only speculate whether or not the drawings within such diaries might have looked similar to the scenes of the *Eyeless*. As memorial *sūtras*, however, if the papers are indeed repurposed then the *Eyeless* begs comparison to a genre known as *hogukyō* (literally 'old-paper *sūtras*' 反故経), whereby various texts taken from various moments in the deceased's life (often letters, but sometimes poetry, mundane inscription, or even books owned by the deceased) were assembled and repurposed—either by washing, writing on the back of the pages, or fully repulping—to form handscrolls that could be used for the creation of a 'merit-transfer' *sūtra*.[44] Hence previous scholars' temptation to interpret the longer *Eyeless* colophon to say the pictures are autographic and thus reflect the very hand of the Emperor. Needless to say, such inscriptive traces were linked directly to specific biographical moments. To arrange them into a span is to place their individual chronologies in tension with the ground-span of the scroll. Moreover, given that epistolary texts were by definition the primary premodern means of circumventing discursive absence, their use in a memorial setting—a situation similarly defined by an absent presence—seems particularly befitting. As with such objects, the *Eyeless* brings multiple moments within a narrative together, 'twists' or disorders them beyond recognition, and arranges them into a band, making the disordered representatives of a lost life into a new ground for scriptural replication. Strictly speaking all memorial transcriptions might be thought of as attempts to form a presence from material absence, for according to the tripartite doctrinal understanding of the Buddha's corporeality, each recension of a *sūtra* does not merely represent Buddhist discourse but is a material instantiation of his bodily presence. Such artefacts thus transformed postmortem inscriptive detritus into the very material ground of sacred immanence.

The Eyeless was not the only object of its era to layer Buddhist *sūtra* text and pictures.
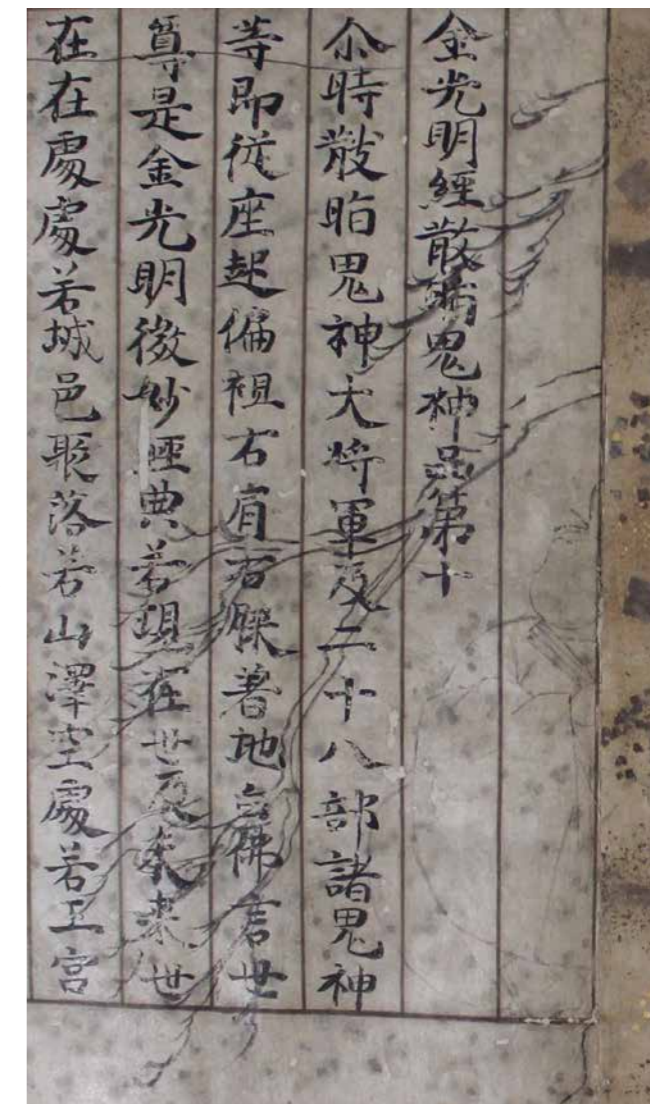

Fig. 7.11
Detail of possible in-painting. Opening of the third volume of the *Golden Light Sūtra*, one volume of the *Eyeless Sūtras*, (1192 C.E.). Ink, gold paint, mica, gold and silver leaf on paper. Kyoto National Museum. Photo: © The Author.

Fig. 7.12
Detail of fig. 7.11.
Opening of the
third volume of the
Golden Light Sūtra,
one volume of
the *Eyeless Sūtras*,
(1192 C.E.). Ink,
gold paint, mica,
gold and silver leaf
on paper. Kyoto
National Museum.
Photo: © The
Author.
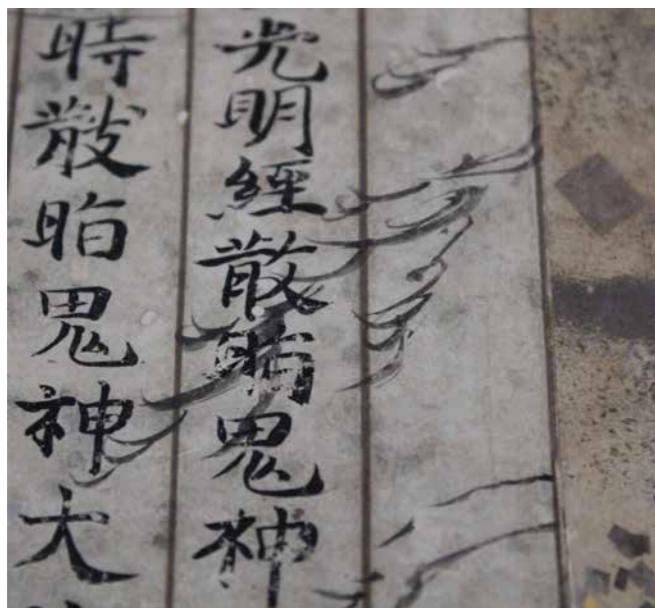
In notable contrast are two cele-brated manuscripts in codex for-mat: a late-twelfth-century trans-cription of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Myōhō renge kyō* 妙法蓮華経, T 262) and a mid-twelfth-century transcription of the *Sūtra of Visualising the Boddhisattva Fugen* (*Kan Fugen bosatsu gyōbō kyō* 観普賢菩薩行法経,T 227). In the former, the *Lotus Sūtra* is transcribed over polychromatic genre scenes not unlike the mono-chromatic line drawings of the *Eye-less* (fig. 7.16). By contrast, however, the latter manuscript uses its pagi-nation to insert dramatic interludes in the text, with two-page spreads of *sūtra*-over-pictures interrupted by mica-printed luxury papers inscribed with poems written in the Japanese *kana* script (fig. 7.17). These manuscripts make clear that perio-dic interjection, overlay, and visual 'noise' were considered desirable in luxury *sūtra* transcrip-tions.[45] Needless to say, the undisputed completeness of these codices further strengthens the case for considering the *Eyeless* complete.

The argument presented here rests upon a heterochronic undertaking of narrative and bio-graphy, one that highlights the ability for the pictorial to depart from the temporal progres-sion implied by the material page.[46] It also treats the present as 'specious', an illusion construc-ted from temporal retentions and protentions.[47] A recent turn in scholarship spearheaded by Georges Didi-Huberman argues that objects, too, embody and participate in similarly complex temporal extensions. Rather than being limited hermeneutically to their historical moment of 'euchronic consonance', an object's temporal stance is Janus-faced, including both the '*more-than-past* of memory' as well as all future interpretations the object will prefigure.[48] 'We thus

Fig. 7.13
Detail of possible
in-painting. Third
volume of the
Golden Light Sūtra,
one volume of
the *Eyeless Sūtras*,
(1192 C.E.). Ink,
gold paint, mica,
gold and silver leaf
on paper. Kyoto
National Museum.
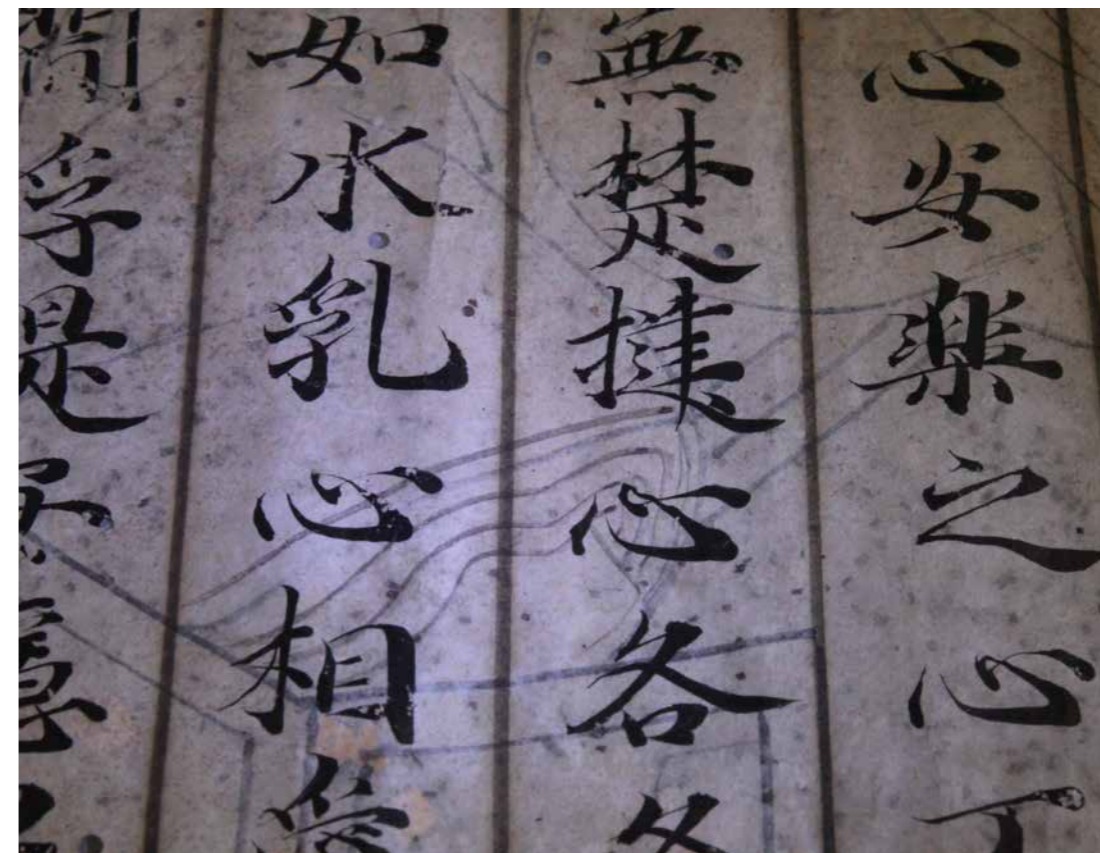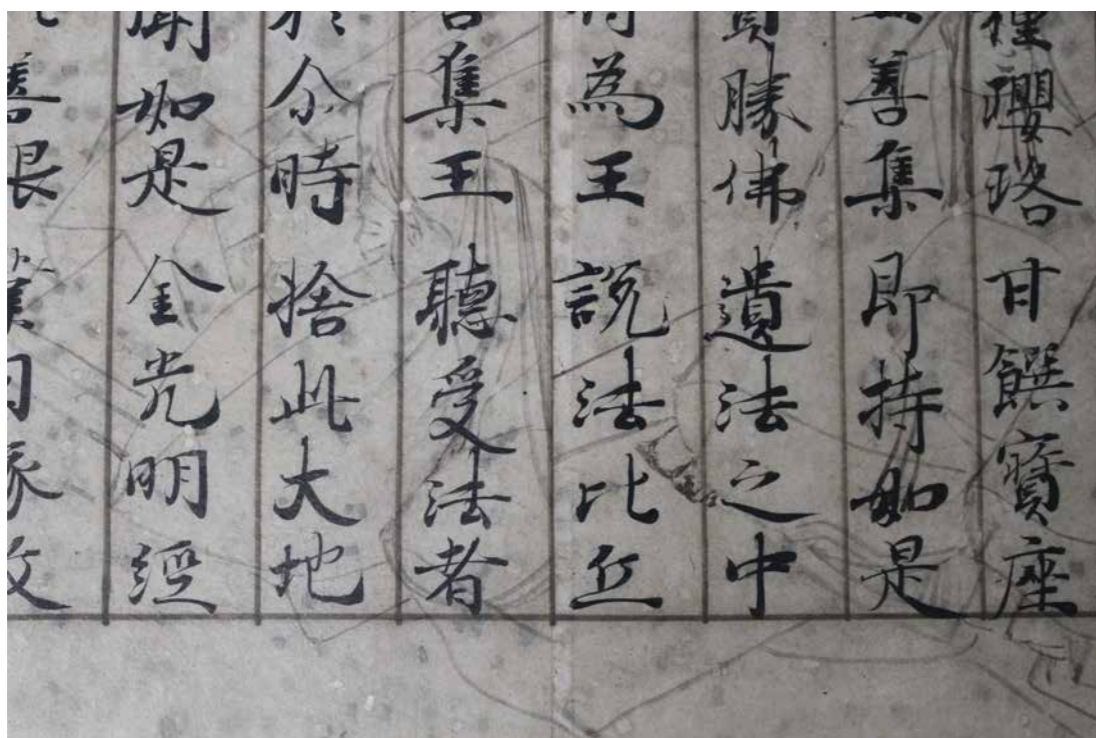Photo: © The
Author.

Fig. 7.14
Detail of possible
in-painting in the
Golden Light Sūtra,
photographed in
raking LED light.
Note the bluish
hue of the ink on
the back of the
page in contrast to
the gray hue of the
ink on the front.
Itsuō Art Museum,
Hankyū Cultural
Foundation. Photo:
© The Author.

find ourselves', writes Didi-Huberman, 'before the painted surface as an object of complex, im-pure temporality: an *extraordinary montage of heterogeneous times forming anachronisms*'.[49] His theory—and especially this final phrase—seems particularly well suited to the *Eyeless*. If anything, the scroll format complicates Didi-Huberman's anachronicity, since its ground-span contributes an additional chronological substrate to the image it hosts.

Accordingly, the most rigorous historical contextualisation of a marked surface will require departure from its strict historical context. In the case of the *Eyeless*, the horizontal splicing and stratigraphic layering of the inscription further com-plicates matters, such that any 'reading' of the manuscript must somehow ac-count for its multiplex temporality. To begin, note that there are several nar-ratives here at play: the mythical 'ori-ginal' tale of the pictures, the life of the Emperor, the process of transcription, and the modern gaze. As adumbrated earlier in this essay, through *allegore-sis* one can read the *Eyeless Sūtras* such that the world of the faceless pictures is seen to be evocative of the world of the Emperor. That is one type of anachro-nism. In addition, through analysing the lay of the calligraphy in relation to the pictures, one can reconstruct the transcribers' careful decisions about
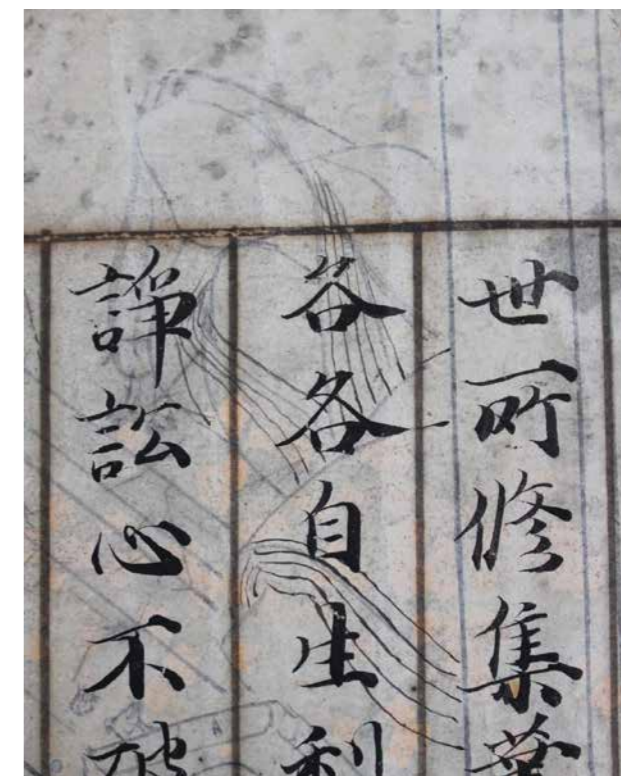

Fig. 7.15
Detail of possible
in-painting in the
Golden Light Sūtra.
Note the bluish
hue of the ink on
the back of the
page in contrast
to the gray hue of
ink on the front.
Itsuō Art Museum,
Hankyū Cultural
Foundation. Photo:
© The Author.

Fig. 7.16
Two-page spread from the *Lotus Sūtra Codex*, (late twelfth century C.E.). Ink and pigment on paper. Private Collection, Japan.

Fig. 7.17
Two-page spread from the *Visualizing the Boddhisattva Fugen Sūtra Codex*, (mid twelfth century C.E.). Ink and pigment on mica-printed paper, 18.7 x 22.8 cm. Gotoh Museum of Art, Tokyo.

Fig. 7.15
Detail of possible in-painting in the *Golden Light Sūtra*. Note the bluish hue of the ink on the back of the page in contrast to the gray hue of ink on the front. Itsuō Art Museum, Hankyū Cultural Foundation. Photo: © The Author.
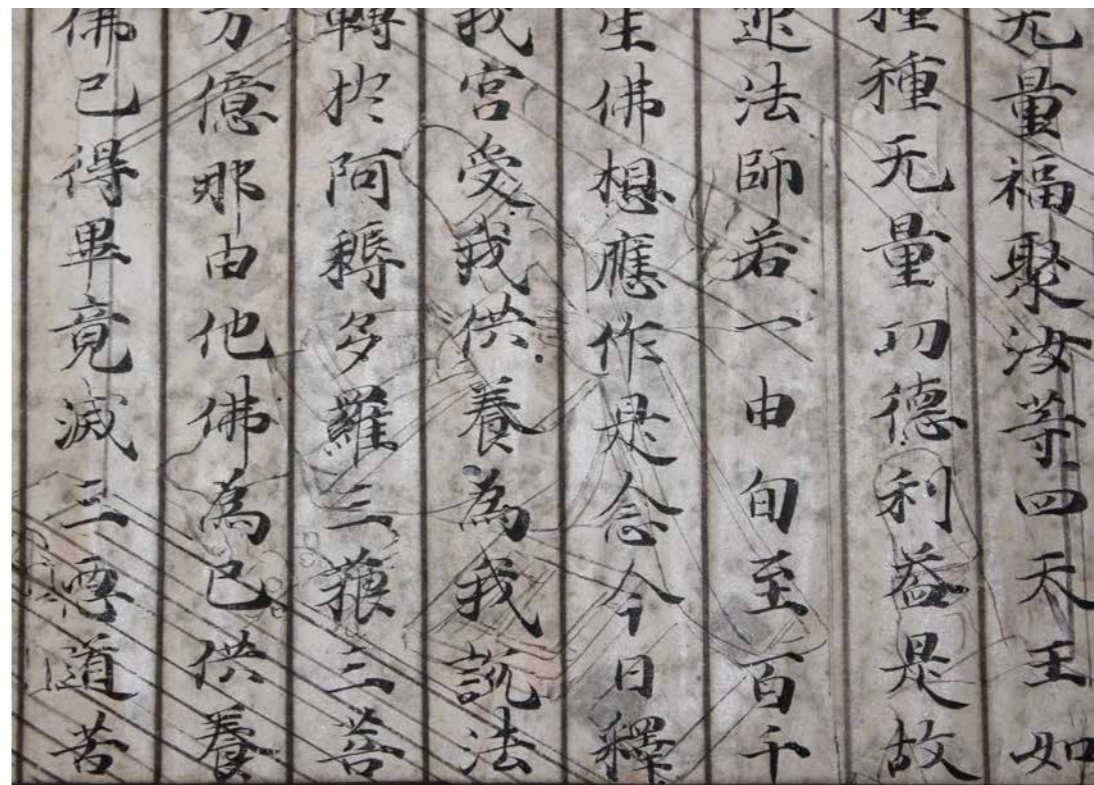
where and how to situate the text. Such traces of their intentionality constitute an idiosyncratic 'reading' of both the pictures and the inscribed texts. Indeed, as Reginald Jackson notes in his study of the *Genji Scrolls*, 'mourning operates as a catalyst for gestures resembling reading and as a mode of reading itself'.[50] Hence the second temporal layer. The third type of anachronism, however, is more complex. So far, we have focused solely on the planar dimension of chronology (left-right for the horizontal scrolls) since this is the index of the ground-span. Yet discontinuity and heterochrony also operate along the perpendicular axis (i.e., surface-depth) through the stratigraphy of the image.[51] In other words, to shift our focus to the *sūtra* text, one can break or decontextualise a given text sequence by making it participate in the pictorial stratum that subtends it. For instance, note the appearance in the *Eyeless* of a man, with a brush in hand, apparently at work transcribing a text (fig. 7.18). Just over his body the *sūtra* text reads—completely broken from syntactic context—'I/We made an offering' (我供養). Suddenly there seems to be correspondence between the intended text and the accidental pictures. Idiosyncratic and highly isolated, such 'stratigraphic reading' makes the artefact seem surprisingly self-referential. The textual may materially superscribe the pictorial, but the pictorial hermeneutically supervenes. Time and meaning bleed from one stratum to the other. I have addressed the full complexity of such stratigraphic reading in the *Eyeless* and other Japanese artefacts elsewhere.[52] Suffice it to say, however, when one considers the extent of heterochrony present in both the horizontal expanse and the stratigraphic depths of the *Eyeless*, its relationship to temporal continuity becomes complex indeed.

In closing, if the scroll is a medium defined by its relationship to continuity, and death the biographical moment defined by discontinuity, then the use of a scroll in a memorial context is significant. Hence the need to situate the Eyeless in the liminal context of mourning—its euchronic context, in Didi-Huberman's terms—wherein GoShirakawa's living presence ceased, to be replaced by the disordered images and traces inscribed in the material archive and in the memories of those who survived him. On the occasion of the death of perhaps the most pictorially literate person of his time, the decision was made to weave soteriologically freighted writing into a pictorial continuum made of concatenated, achronological, and ossified pictures

of the very type that had populated the deceased's visual imaginary. Regardless of the motivation, if for no other reason than the presence of in-painting, the prevailing understanding of these pictures as recycled sketches deserves scrutiny. At the very least one cannot deny that the Eyeless was a complete and efficacious ritual object, one seen in its time as befitting the scroll-obsessed Emperor. Whereas some read the colophon to suggest that the pictures evoke the Emperor's presence, either through his hand or possession, I propose that the opposite is equally possible: that the carefully orchestrated montage of phantasmatic, anonymous, and hollow scenes succeeds in representing his absence instead. The hypothesis here is that the compilers of the Eyeless worked against the celebrated temporality of the scroll medium in order to arrest narrative, and they did so as a means of mediating—in both senses of the word—the heterochrony of the absent presence one faces in a funerary context. Moreover, through the stratigraphy of the marked surface the inscribers managed to weave a complex web of temporal and allegorical relationships, hence denaturing the pictures and the texts. They thereby foreclosed neat linearity in the 'reading' of either stratum. In sum, the relationship of the scroll to time is far more complex than continuity implies.

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism', in Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (eds), *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History*, (trans.) Peter Mason (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 33.

2. Weitzmann credits the origins of this hypothesis to Otto Jahn's 1873 Griechische Bilderchroniken. Kurt Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration* (Princeton: University Press, 1970), p. 5.

3. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, pp. 5–6, 40.

4. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, p. 17.

5. This claim is implied but not asserted in Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, (trans.) Thomas Dunlop (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 28.

6. Lev Grossman, 'The Mechanic Muse: From Scroll to Screen', *The New York Times*, 2 September 2011, accessed 6 July 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/books/review/the-mechanic-muse-from-scroll-to-screen.html; T. J. Clark, 'Art History in an Age of Image-Machines', *EurAmerica* 38:1 (2008): p. 9.

7. For an extended exploration of the ways in which fictional deaths in the *Tale of Genji* were performed calligraphically in the *Tale of Genji Scrolls*, see Reginald Jackson, *Textures of Mourning: Calligraphy, Mortality, and The Tale of Genji Scrolls* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), as well as his earlier, 'Dying in Two Dimensions: Genji emaki and the Wages of Depth Perception', *Mechademia* 7 (2012): pp. 150–172.

8. 'Japan may very well preserve the largest collection of premodern manuscripts in the world'. Bryan D. Lowe, 'Buddhist Manuscript Cultures in Premodern Japan', *Religion Compass* 8:9 (2014): p. 296, n. 1.

9. David Barnett Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 1–3.

10. 'For a recent re-evaluation of the history of this project, see Peter Kornicki, "The Hyakumantō darani and the Origins of Printing in Eighth-century Japan", *International Journal of Asian Studies* 9:1 (2012), pp. 43–70.

11. The first textual record is of a copy of the Lotus Sūtra commissioned in the year 1009 by Fujiwara no Michinaga; the earliest extant printed manuscript for reading is the 1088 Jōyuishikiron housed at the temple Kōfukuji in Nara. Peter Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), pp. 115, 118–19.

12. Scholarship on the Eyeless began with Shirahata Yoshi, '*Menashikyō ni tsuite*', *Bijutsu kenkyū* 9 (1940): pp. 264–78. Following the war, Komatsu Shigemi authored a series of articles concerning the scrolls: '*Menashikyō shita-e no nazo*', *Sumi* 34 (1982): pp. 102–6; '*Menashikyō shita-e to Ariake no wakare monogatari*', *Sansai* 121 (1959): pp. 11–16; '*Menashikyō shita-e to Ariake no wakare monogatari* (Continued)', *Sansai* 122 (1960): pp. 16–23; '*Menashikyō to sono shūhen*', *Museum* 60 (1956): pp. 24–26. The most thorough recent analysis is Murakami Harumi, '"*Menashikyō*" shita-e no kentō to kōsatsu', in *Akiyama Terukazu hakushi koki kinen bijutsushi ronbunshū* (Kyoto: Benridō, 1991). The present article draws upon my own previous analysis of the scroll. The plural *sūtras* is preferred here since it

seems the notion of a single 'set' is misguided. See Kristopher W. Kersey, 'Stratigraphy and Story in the Eyeless Sūtra', in 'The Aesthetics of the Manuscript in Classical Japan' (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2014), pp. 34–70.

13. The whereabouts of the missing fragments are unknown. All extant fragments remain in Japanese collections: Kyoto National Museum, Tokyo National Museum, Daitōkyū Memorial Library, Itsuō Art Museum, Nezu Museum, a private collection, and a Kyoto gallery.

14. Komatsu was the first to notice the change in hands in the transcription, which suggests elevated persons began the transcriptions and then handed them off to copyists to complete. See Komatsu, '*Menashikyō shita-e to Ariake*', p. 13; Kersey, 'Stratigraphy and Story', pp. 47–52.

15. Akiyama Terukazu, 'Women Painters at the Heian Court', in Marsha Smith Weidner (ed.), *Flowering in the Shadows*, (trans.) Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), p. 167.

16. The colophon has appeared in print numerous times with a surprising degree of error and variation. This transcription is taken from Komatsu's last work on the *Eyeless* and it is the most faithful. See Komatsu, *Heian jidai yamatoe no tankyū: Hokekyō sasshi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), p. 544.

17. As I have argued elsewhere, there is significant reason to doubt the authority of the colophons, as well as the legitimacy of their various interpretations. Kersey, 'Stratigraphy and Story', pp. 40–45.

18. Weitzmann uses the term '*disiecta membra*' quite differently to describe heterogenous pictures, i.e., illustrations of other texts that are 'migrated' or 'transplanted' into a new narrative. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, pp. 143–53.

19. For the classic study in English of this period in Japanese history, see *Insei: Abdicated Sovereigns in the Politics of Late Heian Japan, 1086–1185* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975). Note the titles of two recent popularly marketed Japanese history books: *Retired Emperor GoShirakawa: The Emperor who Defeated the Warriors by the Power of Illustrated Handscrolls* and *Retired Emperor GoShirakawa: The Odd 'Silly Sovereign' who Ushered in the Middle Ages*. Kobayashi Taizō, *Goshirakawa Jōkō: "emakimono" no chikara de bushi ni kata mikado* (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 2012); Endō Motoo, *Goshirakawa Jōkō: chūsei wo maneita kimyō na "anshu"* (Tokyo: Yamanaka Shuppansha, 2011).

20. Komatsu Shigemi, *Nihon emaki taisei* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1977), p. 1:133. Cited in Yung-Hee Kim, *Songs to Make the Dust Dance: The Ryōjin Hishō of Twelfth-century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 29.

21. For a summation of the debate on her identity, see Akiyama, 'Women Painters', pp. 167–70; Willa Jane Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sūtra* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988), p. 60.

22. As his title reveals, Weitzmann's analysis is based upon an 'illustration' paradigm. The idea that a picture might not have a 'basic text' is anomalous and only briefly entertained. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, pp. 143–53, 151.

23. Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image', p. 34.

24. Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 169.

25. Franz Wickhoff, *Roman Art: Some of Its Principles and Their Application to Early Christian Art*, (trans. and ed.) Mrs. S. Arthur Strong (New York: Macmillan, 1900), pp. 1–21.

26. Wickhoff, *Roman Art*, p. 8.

27. Weitzman, *Roll and Codex*, pp. 12–36.

28. For an important intervention, see the appendix in Whitney M. Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992). For a discussion specifically in the context of Buddhism, see Vidja Dehejia, 'On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art', *The Art Bulletin* 72:3 (1990): pp. 374–92.

29. Weitzmann, in discussing friezes and sarcophagi, calls this simply 'physical relation'. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, p. 29 and 37.

30. Meyer Schapiro, 'On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art', *Semiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 6:1 (1972): p. 10.

31. Cf. the fluidity of other types of supports, such as wall paintings or screens, which might take seasonal quadrants or landscape as the basis for arrangement. Nelson Goodman, *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 116–19.

32. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, pp. 17–18.

33. Wickhoff seems to have been unfairly overshadowed by Weitzmann. The former was keenly aware of what he called the 'variance with experience' in continuous narration. Wickhoff, *Roman Art*, p. 14. Moreover, he curiously argues (p. 16) that the continuous mode came from 'Asiatic art'.

34. These terms roughly align with what scholars of narratology such as Mieke Bal, Gerard Genette, and Meir Sternberg would term the *story* or *sujet* (the 'articulation') versus the *fabula* (the 'chronological-causal sequence'). Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 8–9.

35. For a study of the Shōtoku paintings, see Kevin Gray Carr, *Plotting the Prince: Shōtoku Cults and the Mapping of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), esp. pp. 115–69.

36. Goodman, *Mind*, pp. 120–22.

37. As Jackson notes, 'Dying recontours temporal and spatial representation, compromising or enhancing legibility to alter perceptions' texture'. Jackson, *Textures of Mourning*, 93. See also his discussion of mid-Heian aristocratic customs of mourning, 54–56. Shirahata was the first to note this upon analysing her reproductions of the scroll without the text.

38. For a discussion of funerary rituals in various Buddhist contexts across Asia, see Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone (eds), *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

39. Indeed, even Weitzmann admitted that biographical 'cycles' could be assembled from images with heterogenous histories. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, pp. 27–28

40. Belting, *Anthropology*, p. 28.

41. Belting, *Anthropology*, p. 28.

42. Joshua S. Mostow, *Courtly Visions: The Ise Stories and the Politics of Cultural Appropriation* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 5–7.

43. Joshua S. Mostow, '"Picturing" in the Tale of Genji', *The Journal of the Association of Teacher of Japanese 33:1* (1999): p. 11.

44. Tanabe, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 58–60. Kornicki, *Book in Japan*, p. 88. For a recent analysis of a sūtra transcription on recycled letters, see Halle O'Neal, 'Inscribing Grief and Salvation: Embodiment and Medieval Reuse and Recycling in Buddhist Palimpsests', *Artibus Asiae* 79:1 (2019): pp. 5–28

45. I borrow the concept of 'noise' in Heian manuscript culture from Sano Midori.

46. In this regard, it seems revealing that Carl Robert used the term *Chroniken-Stil*. Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, p. 36.

47. While Edmund Husserl and William James are often credited with articulating the myth of a punctate present, recent research argues their precursors, especially Shadworth Hodgson (1832–1912), deserve more credit. See Holly K. Anderson and Rick Grush, 'A Brief History of Time-Consciousness: Historical Precursors to James and Husserl', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47:2 (2009): pp. 277–307.

48. Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image', pp. 40–42. Emphasis original.

49. Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image', p. 38. Emphasis original.

50. Jackson, *Textures of Mourning*, p. 277

51. 'Vertical' is typically contradicted with 'lateral' but the ground-span adds a new dimension, complicating the binary. For a discussion of this binary in relationship to allegory, see Gregory L. Ulmer, 'The Object of Post-Criticism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 95–99.

52. Kersey, 'Stratigraphy and Story', as well as in a forthcoming publication.