An examination of one book, and the elements and ideas that went into it

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AN EXAMINATION OF ONE BOOK,
AND THE ELEMENTS AND IDEAS THAT WENT INTO IT

by

Sara Ann Langworthy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts degree in Book Arts
in the Graduate College of
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Thesis Supervisor: Professor Timothy Barrett
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER’S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of
Sara Ann Langworthy

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Book Arts at the August 2013 graduation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*New Patterns in Old Style* is an artist book, handprinted and handbound in an edition of 24. While the sequence of pages and printing is consistent from book to book, there is a degree of hand work and hand painting which provides for slight variations between copies. The text and images are drawn from three sources: the definition of the word cleave, tatting instructions, and images of decayed leaves. Though the book is in keeping with certain formal elements of previous works, such as a restrained color palette, use of handmade papers, and a combining of hand painting with printed image and type, *New Patterns in Old Style* is a departure from my earlier print and book work. In this essay I will explore the three sources that inspired the piece, describe how the book came to be, and provide, in the Appendix, a pictorial walk through the pages.

In my work I call attention to beauty in unremarkable places: grey of wet concrete seen through worn out holes in a leaf on the sidewalk, light reflected on a wall in mid afternoon. My approach to image-based letterpress printing shares strategies common to collage practice, as well as strategic letterpress design and production. When constructing a printed image across a series of pages, I have at the start an idea of the page layout and design. The initial concept gives me a starting place and then an image is constructed layer by layer at the press, rather than entirely planned out in advance of printing. In this approach spontaneity exists alongside a pre-composed page and careful presswork. I take a real delight in achieving extremely tight registration, or other letterpress effects requiring the sort of skill and mastery that are the results of years of presswork. I work back and forth between written words and pictorial elements; images are inspired by words, and sentences grow from images.

The artist book structure/format provides an inherent two-sidedness. For every page, each front is also a back. The only way to view the entire piece is to relinquish a part of it. With print, I am most interested in edges; where two color blocks overlap or nearly touch, the places where the ink so saturates the paper that you become aware of both the
printed sides of the page, as well as the paper acting as a mediating substrate between the pages. In any artist book incorporating both text and image, a relationship exists between these two elements. Some images are purely illustrative of the text, while a text block may serve merely as words to keep the reader moving forward through image-rich pages. In previous large-scale book projects I approached the pieces from both sides of the relationship. In *Morpho Terrestre* (2006), I began with seven poems by Emily Wilson. All choices for *Morpho Terrestre* were made to elucidate and honor those poems, with the images serving as companion illustrations to the poems. Though the prints are able to stand on their own, all formal and conceptual cues may be traced back to Wilson’s seven poems. In *Solid Phases* (2008-2012) I attempted to engage in a call and response dance with an author. The initial plan was to create a series of images, leaving room in the page order and layout for the addition of words, and to give these serial images to an author to respond to the images with words. After two failed pairings with willing authors, and as the project deadline came nearer, I moved on from the idea of collaboration and provided my own verbal content. The primary source for the images in *Solid Phases* is the book *Ice Physics* by Peter V. Hobbs. I selectively highlighted passages of the chapter “The Solid Phases of the Water Substance” (the chapter which provided a title for the piece) and printed these fragments where I had hoped an outside author would provide words. The resulting sentences and fragments construct a narrative which leads the viewer through the images. The piece started as a series of printed abstract shapes, with the added words selected to highlight and emphasize elements suggested in the images.

In *New Patterns in Old Style* I kept both these modes of working at hand, embarking on an approach which would synthesize the two methods. Through a series of small sketches and exercises, the text and images in the new piece were built concurrently. In some areas of the book the text was fully resolved and helped to direct the images, in others it was the images that helped to complete unresolved text. *New Patterns in Old Style* was first imagined as three smaller, unrelated books. When I began, the three smaller art-
ist book projects explored what I thought were unrelated elements: leaf shapes, tatting instructions, and the word *cleave*. In exploring the three elements, what I found compelling about each was shared among them and essentially the same: a state of being two things at once, an exploration of binary pairings, and the tensions present when two opposing states inhabit the same space. The resulting book is an examination of linked opposites, and the tensions present when these elements exist in proximity to one another.
CHAPTER II

THE THREE ELEMENTS

Cleave

The word *cleave* is a homograph, one word form with two distinct meanings, each with a different etymology. More specifically, the word is an autoantonym, or Janus word, a homograph that is also an antonym. Cleave meaning “separate” is from the Old English *clēofan*, while cleave “adhere” is from Old English *clifian*. Samples from a variety of dictionary definitions of *cleave* are: to adhere firmly and closely, or loyally and unwaveringly; to be faithful; to adhere, cling, or stick fast to; divide by, or as if by a cutting blow; to make or accomplish by or as if by cutting; to split or divide by or as if by a cutting blow, especially along a natural line of division, as the grain of wood. There are numerous autoantonyms in addition to *cleave*; what I find compelling about this particular example is the violence and passion present in both sides of the definition of *cleave*. The words “unwaveringly” and “loyal” are frequently used in definitions of the “adhere” aspect of *cleave*, while the “separate” aspect often implies a severe violence.

Tatting Instructions

In 2010 I started collecting lace and tatting samples in junk stores and flea markets. Many of the samples were pinned to the newspaper clippings of their written instructions. I was first drawn to the tatting itself, entranced by the small knots and thread which implied astral jellyfish or flying flowers. My initial attempts to depict the tatting were the unsuccessful but necessary steps required to get to what I wanted to say. I started by printing the lace itself, hoping a print of the lace would get to the aspect I was so taken with yet unable to articulate. But the printed lace just looked like printed lace, it was too much itself, almost more so than the tatting sample had been. I put the compelling but distracting lace and tatting samples away, and started reading through the collected instructions and clippings that accompanied the samples. For the most part, the instructions are written in a coded language similar to knitting or other sewing instructions (“join to same p where r was last joined 5; Ch 1, turn, sc in first sc, 2”), with both nouns and verbs
turned to abbreviations only the trained can decipher. Within these codes were fragments of language discernible to the uninitiated, instructing the maker to repeat, cut, tie, start back at the beginning. As I spent time reading the tatting instructions, I began to make a connection between the needlework words: tie and cut, repeat, join, and leave, and many of the words used to define the word *cleave*: adhere, split, cling to, divide.

**Leaves**

The third component to *New Patterns in Old Style* is an entirely image-based visual element. The images in the book are built from multi layered prints of decayed leaves. Like the tatting samples, I collected decayed leaves for years. As with the tatting and lace, I again attempted all manner of literal printed depictions of the leaves, achieving the same somewhat bland and disappointing results from the early trials. I was not interested in illustrating a leaf, but at first the only way to print what I liked about the leaf was to print it. What was of interest to me was not the leaf itself, but the holes worn in the leaf surface, and the glimpses of surface these holes provided. I scanned the leaves at a very high resolution, and increased the size of the scan as high as I could go while still keeping clear details. I then cropped the leaf scans into rectangles and squares, providing enough abstraction to make the holes the focus rather than the perimeter of the leaf edge. The cropped leaves read to me as aerial views of landmasses rather than leaf objects. These images are flattened in a way that my earlier explorations of printed plant matter are not. In previous plant-based work, I was laying tangles of plants on a scanner bed. The scans show the liveliness of placing an object of volume on a scanner. With these new leaf scans, the leaves are flattened by weather and time, and then pressed flat during storage. The resulting leaf prints have a flatness referencing the flattened, disembodied tatting illustrations. Each newspaper clipping tatting instruction had at its top a sample shot of white lace on a black field, laid out like a dissection specimen. The flattened leaf scans have that same quality of a detailed 3-D object rendered in two dimensions.
CHAPTER III
PROCESS

Materials

During my gathering of cut-out and scrapbooked sewing instructions I found a needlework newspaper column called “The Workbasket,” devoted to weekly tatting and lace making instructions. The advertisements on the edges and backs of the clippings suggest the papers date from the 1950s, but no indication of publisher or date was left with the scraps. The notion of a workbasket, a bin of useful scraps kept by a maker who wasted nothing, remembering the past while keeping future use in mind, was a guiding principle for how I made material choices for the book, as well as an early working title. A formal constraint of the project was to use only papers already on hand in my collections, to reuse photopolymer plates from previous projects when appropriate, and to revisit any half-started prints and book ideas sharing themes of duality and opposing forces.

In 2004, I started a series of prints of two water towers standing side by side. A number of these prints became finished single pieces. One set, an edition printed on full-size sheets of commercially produced Kitakata, was always part of some yet unrealized larger project. I nicknamed these prints Cleave and would return to them every year or so to see if I knew yet how to resolve them. For New Patterns in Old Style, these sheets were cut in half, and used as the outer folios for the two signatures of the book. The sheets are heavily printed with a combined layering of printed wood type and hand painted sumi ink. No other pages in the book have as heavy or thick inking, but the reverse sides of the sheets gave me a surface and coloration to attempt to match with the printing of the first page facing these sheets. The number of these sheets of paper and half-started printed determined the edition size of the book.

The rest of the papers came from a variety of sources. Most of the handmade western-style papers are sheets of text-weight flax and hemp or cotton-blend papers from the University of Iowa Center for the Book Oakdale Papermaking Facility, acquired as part of a work-trade opportunity while I was a student worker in 1999. Though I once kept good
records of all the fiber varieties and names of the sheets, five studio moves in ten years left me with a stack of paper labeled only “UICB text wt., unsized” and an assortment of identification cards piled at the bottom of the paper drawer. From my experience with these papers I was able to distinguish the slightly greyer tones of a 100% flax sheet versus the more creamy smoothness of a hemp sheet during printing. For the book though, this group of “UICB text wt.” paper was treated as a single batch, so one book may have a flax/cotton page where another has a hemp. A second batch of paper resulted from a trade with papermaker Lynn Amlie around the same time, I do not recall the fibers used. Amlie’s paper, being of the same batch and fiber, was more consistent sheet to sheet than my mishmash of University of Iowa papers. I used her paper in the first section of the book (the first appearance is page five), where the consistent white of the paper works against the very light grey inked areas and painted pages nearby. There is one folio of Amlie’s paper in each book. The Japanese sheets are Kozo Kaiga, purchased in quantity when Aikos Art Materials went out of business in 2007, and commercially produced Kitakata purchased in anticipation of the Cleave series of prints. The one sheet of sumi ink painted paper is an offcut from a custom-made sheet of translucent flax paper made by Bridget O’Malley of Cave Paper, for the book Solid Phases.

The Text

When I began assembling materials, I was not really sure what the book would be about. I knew I had an interest in the three elements, and that I wanted to print the leaf crops. With the compelling positive and negative spaces of the leaf scans, I had a clear idea as to how to express the binary qualities I wanted to investigate. I was less sure of how to incorporate printed language however. What finally led me to the words as they exist in the book started with borrowing from a John Cage game of random/chance wordplay. I took a stack of index cards and wrote one word, either from cleave or tatting instructions on each card, and used the stack to generate sentences and phrases. In the first step, I made a vertical column seven cards tall of one card each. These were the first words of seven sentences. For a true random/chance exercise, the player would allow
for chance to dictate all sentence formations. At first I adhered strictly to the rules, setting a second vertical column to the right of the first, creating the first and second words of seven sentences, placing the cards in the order they were pulled, and on again to the third and fourth words of the sentence, et cetera. After a time, and following too numerous unusable word groupings, I took a more active and controlling role in the game and determined placement of words based on my own preferences for sentence and phrase construction. On average, one to two usable sentences or phrases were generated every three or four cycles. These I wrote on a large sheet of paper I kept pinned to the studio wall. These sentences and phrases were then assembled in the order present in the printed book. All printed words are built from language present in the definition of *cleave* and the phrasing of tatting instructions. Writing each word on an index card, then pulling the cards out one by one, helped crystallize for me what direction the book should take. I noted how often I would come across certain words such as “repeat,” “tie and cut,” “join,” and “leave;” these words appear in the book with a related frequency. In paying close attention to what I was noticing (following the instructions of Ann Hamilton to “pay attention to what you pay attention to”), I was better able to catch the direction of the project and work towards and with it, rather than trying to fit the unformed book into my expectation of what it should be.

From the sentence-generating exercises, I knew the words that would begin the book, and I had a sense of how the text would conclude. Having decided that the overprinted watertower prints would bookend the two signatures helped provide a color palette and place to start in terms of image design. The images were built organically, designed entirely on the press; for each blank sheet I had a first step press run and color planned but nothing else. The mottled sumi ink blotches of the back of the first Kitakata prints gave me the start of the grey palette used on pages four and thirteen. My goal was to match the back side of the printed grey to the sumi ink painted grey present on page two.

There is a degree of back-and-forth between the images and text, with the evolving images helping to direct unresolved areas of text. Image elements are registered both
within the boundaries of the page as well as across pages and through the book, as many of the translucent papers allow for viewing through a page to the one beneath. The rectangles and square shapes of the cropped leaf images mimic the narrow columns of tatting instruction newspaper clippings, and their printed arrangement on the page implies the collected and assembled scrapbooking of tatting samples. I made over forty photopolymer plates from the leaf files, not sure which ones I would need during printing. I printed about three-quarters of the plates.

The title is borrowed from a needlework and knitting manual archived in the The Antique Pattern Library, an online library of lace and tatting manuals (http://www.antiquepatternlibrary.org/). *New Patterns in Old Style, Parts One and Two*, written by Emilie Bach, Directress of the Royal School of Embroidery in Vienna, was published in 1890. This borrowed title perfectly describes my process and journey of resolving loose ends and half-started explorations, as well as serving as a direct reference to needlework manuals and tatting instructions which provided a large portion of the text. I gave up my idea of *The Workbasket* as a title, with the idea that the notion of a “workbasket” was a guiding principle for the start of the project, but the title *New Patterns in Old Style* better described the end product itself.

The book is divided into two sections, echoing the binary aspects of the word cleave. Each section is wrapped with a sheet of the overprinted, ink washed Kitakata paper. The color in the first section is primarily grey, beginning with the sumi ink painted paper and keeping with a light- to dark-grey palette. The transition to color in the second section is hinted at with the introduction of layered pink and yellow on pages twelve and thirteen. In the second section, the narrative become less linear and color takes a larger role. As the grey gives way to color, the pink/yellow/orange begins to saturate the printed sheet. Color eventually takes over everything, including the printed words and type. The analogous colors of each section emphasize differences between closely related but separate elements. With the greys especially, the differences between the tones are much clearer when the various ink colors are printed in close proximity to one another. As the book
comes to an end the color begins to recede, grey creeps back in. With the final spread, 
the sheet is primarily white, with both color elements and grey forms carrying equal
weight on the page. It is up to the viewer to decide if this represents a return to complete
greydom, or a resolution where both color elements are able to continue on in balanced
proximity to one another.

The Type

The types used are digitally set Dante and Bulmer, printed from photopolymer plates. The generated texts constructed from tatting instructions and cleave definitions are printed using Dante, and the transcribed tatting instructions are printed using Bulmer. My initial plan was to hand-set and print all the type using Center for the Book supplies. In general, I much prefer printing from metal types rather than photopolymer types, and the hand-setting step of the process worked well with my desire to keep sewing instructions and systems of reuse present throughout the piece. The logistics and timing of working with metal type outside of my own studio proved somewhat complicated however, and I decided to try out the photopolymer/digital type option instead. When I made mock-ups using digital Dante, I found the metrics of the digital Dante types disappointing. The type lacked the weight and spacing of its metal forebear, which required making some adjustments to the letter spacing and point size. The digital letterforms themselves are fairly close to the metal types, and I only made adjustments to the white space between individual letter pairs and words. To determine the necessary point size and white spaces of the digital type, I first hand-set the text for the book in 15-point Dante, the type size I wanted for the book, and printed one sheet. I digitally composed the Dante in InDesign, making adjustments to best match the digital version to the metal. Between the digital and metal types, a 15-point metal Dante is the same size as its 16-point digital counterpart. This was interesting to me but not surprising, as point size is often not the same within a typeface as it is translated from an inked and printed piece of metal to vector graphics. Due to the limited number of words used in the book, I was able to closely match the spacing of all the letter pairs and word groupings to their printed-from-metal counterparts. I would not
recommend this process for a text with more than a handful of words, or words in sentences or strung together in any length. My few longer sentences (“you have been before to this side of favor”) required much more attention and time than the single words found later in the book. With the transcribed tatting instructions, I wanted only to reference the extreme narrow column and justified type of the newspaper clippings, not try and recreate the qualities of a metal type with photopolymer plates. This was a much simpler process than matching the digital to the metal Dante, and more a matter of selecting a point size that worked well with the column width. I matched the width of my columns to those of the newspaper clippings containing tatting instructions.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

*New Patterns in Old Style* debuted at the Codex Book Fair in February 2013. Spend-
ing four days describing this brand-new book I had yet to distance myself from or gain
any perspective on was a new experience. Repeating the reasons, describing choices,
explaining subtleties of design choices of a book literally hot-off-the-press (but in my
case, sticky-off-the-press) cemented this project in a way that I have not experienced with
earlier works. Generally after completing a large-scale project I can barely stand to look
at it, let alone discuss it at length. All I can see are the things I would do differently or the
places that gave me trouble. With *New Patterns in Old Style* the work pace was accelerat-
ed, and as it was finished so close to the public premier, I never went through the standard
(to me) phase of feeling disenchanted and disengaged from the work.

With this project I avoided the luxury/trap of spending four weeks agonizing over
relatively inconsequential design choices. I had spent months and years mulling over
the three elements in the book, but as separate and unrelated components. The book as a
whole was designed and worked during the five months prior to the Codex Book Fair. I
had a particularly good studio day during the first weeks of work on *New Patterns in Old
Style*, and decided then to apply to Codex and focus all energies on completing the new
book in time to showcase at the book fair. Though I am not at all advocating for hurried
or thoughtless work methods, I did benefit immensely from having such an intensely tight
timeline. There are small areas I would perhaps do differently were I to make this book a
second time, but more common are portions I know I would have over-worked and over-
worried had I allowed myself the room to fuss and fret.

In critiques, a standard question posed is whether the information being communi-
cated orally by the artist is necessary to a desired conclusion on the part of the viewer.
As I walked a collector through *New Patterns in Old Style* at Codex2013, she made the
comment that though the book was compelling without the background information about
tatting instructions and “cleave” definitions I provided, she would not have inferred much
of what I was describing without an explanation. With *New Patterns in Old Style* I have reasons for every placement and color choice, but those justifications are not at all essential to the reading of the piece. The larger theme is one of polarity and juxtaposing opposites, suggesting binary relationships present in everyday things. There is something to be gained from knowing the background information, but it is not crucial to a basic understanding of what drove the book. More simply put, this piece is the whole sum while the three elements are the lesser but essential parts.

*New Patterns in Old Style* represents a departure in my work method and process, while keeping with my desire to call attention to beauty in unremarkable places. It follows my ongoing desire to take full advantage of the artist book format, making pieces which require the viewer to read through the pages to understand the whole, making a work that by necessity must be read in book form rather than as individual sheets easily mounted in frames across a wall. By choosing to work in the artist book format, I sacrifice a degree of ease of display. What is gained is a fully integrated piece that must be read as a book, a form that allows the viewer to consider both the front and back sides of a sheet simultaneously.
APPENDIX

NEW PATTERNS IN OLD STYLE

Figure A1. New Patterns in Old Style, book upright and open

Figure A2. Pages 2 and 3, verso: back of “cleave” print on kitakata
Figure A3. Pages 4 and 5, “You have been before to this side of favor”

Figure A4. Pages 6 and 7, “firmly”
Figure A5. Pages 8 and 9, “unwaveringly”

Figure A6. Pages 10 and 11, “split by a cutting blow”
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Figure A10. Pages 18 and 19 “Repeat from beginning / complete as before”
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Figure A13. Pages 24 and 25, translation of tatting code

Figure A14. Pages 26 and 27, listing of words from cleave and tatting instructions
Figure A15. Pages 28 and 29, “join by looking / by leaving separated”

Figure A16. Pages 30 and 31, “join and shuttle / stick and tear / tie and cut threads”
Figure A17. Pages 32 and 33, “cleave”

Figure A18. Pages 34 and 35, printed tatting instructions
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