R E V I E W

Roger Lüdeke. *Zur Schreibkunst von William Blake: Ästhetische Souveränität und politische Imagination*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013. 296 pp., 15 color plates. €41.90, paperback; €31.99, e-book.

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1   IN contrast to William Blake's popular twentieth-century reception, which was dominated by his fans' fascination with his visionary art and lyrical poetry, a substantial proportion of his recent academic audience has carved a poet-persona whose religious diction is closely linked to his opinions about the American and French Revolutions, as well as the 1790s, the decade of political repression in Britain. The main achievements of these academic interpretations, based on archival work and derived from historical contextualization, Lüdeke finds to be summarized in Jackie DiSalvo's introduction to *Blake, Politics, and History* (1998). In his own nearly fifty-page introduction Lüdeke frequently returns to Jon Mee's chapter in that collection. What starts off as a narrowly focused assessment of Blake studies and historicism soon expands into a complex discussion of the "defining tension between the religious and the political" ("konstitutive Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Religiösem und Politischem") (9). Taking his starting points from Eric J. Hobsbawm and Jürgen Habermas, as well as Mee and Saree Makdisi, Lüdeke summarizes the outcomes of the research on the public sphere and its self-declared prophets, enthusiasts, antinomians, millenarians, and dissenters. Critics, he asserts, now perceive religion as a mode of compensation, affecting, in turn, the interiorization and aestheticization of art (12-13). Lüdeke wants to reconsider certain investigative leads and to reexamine the relationship between the political and the religious by focusing on radical and protestant discursive practices and textual strategies (14).

2   His critique of the critical studies that position Blake as a member of the "public in opposition" ("Gegenöffentlichkeit") (10) identifies two weaknesses: one, that there has been too much emphasis on external criticism of the political, as a result of which the "internal political" ("innerweltlich Politische") (15) got pushed to one side. Quotations from Blake's early prophetic books have been uncoupled from their discursive contexts; once they have been used to illustrate political opinion, they are reduced to their "mimetic functions" (18). Two, that there is not enough work on Blake's discourse, not enough on the dialogues and stylistic or formal affinities to eighteenth-century philosophical or political foundation narratives, such as Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) and *Age of Reason* (1794). There need to be more "further-reaching functional explanations of Blake's stylis-

tic and thematic borrowings" ("weitergehenden funktionalen Erklärungen für Blakes stilistische und inhaltliche Anleihen") (17) to appreciate fully what Lüdeke calls the "aesthetic difference" ("*ästhetischer Differenz*") (18) or "claim of aesthetic sovereignty" (26) of Blake's works. In short, his approach, which targets the "interior of politics and religion" (18), aims to investigate that area of the realm of political engagement marked out by the blurry boundaries between law and arbitrariness as well as law and violence, a region in which a "discourse of the human" (19) is possible. It is called the "Indifferenzzone" ("in-between zone"), a term that denotes and comprises the willingness of individuals to prioritize organizational matters over personal needs, and is borrowed from Niklas Luhmann, the German sociologist whose social systems theory Lüdeke wants to bring to Blake studies.[1] Lüdeke also aligns Blake's prophetic poetry with political discourse and revisits Angela Esterhammer's work on performative language (24), but only to point out that Esterhammer's analysis, though useful, did not go far enough. With systems theory the attention is on social communication in which individuals partake, and the abstract, recursive structural rules according to which this communication is organized independently of individual participation. His intention is to ask important questions about general social relationships rather than psychological relationships or those between individuals.

3   In the second part of his introduction Lüdeke addresses the paradigmatic shifts in Blake studies: the attention paid to editions and versions of the early prophetic books as well as their practical-technical dimensions (27). Here his goal is to theorize the relationship between relief printing and handwriting, and the interrelationship between media-technology and Blake's thinking. Moving on from socio-economic arguments, he engages with Louis Hjelmslev's theory of language to describe the levels of structures conditioning expression and content in Blake (28). He then summarizes the experimental activities of, and disagreements between, Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi on the one hand and Michael Phillips and Martin Butlin on the other hand, ultimately siding with the former. Lüdeke's interest in the materiality of text and its relation to semiotic statements is eventually framed by poststructuralist approaches to language. He refers to Carr ("Illuminated Printing: Toward a Logic of Difference," 1986), Mann ("*The Book of Urizen* and the Horizon of the Book," 1986), and

Pierce (*The Wond'rous Art*, 2003) to argue that Blake's prophetic poetry makes visible what political discourse tries to hide. For Lüdeke's book, this means that both levels (the structures conditioning expression and content) are to be analyzed outside their historical contexts and as part of the dynamics between signs and media-process (35) as well as the early prophetic books' potential for performativity and Foucault's analysis of repetition, which is characteristic of political foundation narratives (37ff.). He ultimately intends to investigate the contemporary discourse on writing and the physicality of the very act of writing (42). Lüdeke then returns to "the discourse of the human" (43) while explaining that any bodily activity related to writing falls into the "Indifferenzzone." Writing is a form of performance mediated by a trained and culturally refined body. He concludes by explaining why Giorgio Agamben's concept of *nuda vita* ("bare life") is relevant to his reading of *The Book of Urizen*, which, he says, interweaves mystification and political legitimization with aesthetic perception and the experience of the transience of life. The meaning of all (texts and images), he states, is balanced inside the "in-between zone" of biology and culture.

4   In the first chapter Lüdeke introduces the concepts "religious politics" and "political religion" from Hans Maier's *Totalitarismus und politische Religionen* (2003). He positions these concepts, after first embedding them into a historical overview of their changing meanings, starting with Ancient Greece and the Bible, to define the original unity of the religious, the political, and other private and social factors that drive the processes authorizing and justifying political sovereignty (52). Moving between Hobbes, Paine, and Burke, he discusses paradigmatic shifts: how since the seventeenth century the transcendent God has been replaced by the state and how state power sustains itself through "internal authority" ("innerweltliche Legitimation") (53). The scope of power remains the same, but as the religious is being secularized, its rules and beliefs are transferred onto the political. Luhmann's social systems theory is helpful here, because latency, one of its key terms, captures that which exists and actively contributes to the social systems humans live by. Invisible shaping forces, which can be noticed but cannot be communicated due to their transcendent status, remain nameless and are inside the "Indifferenzzone." The question Luhmann raises is, how the divine or, more generally, abstract power is experienced by those whose lives are affected by it (57). It is this question that Lüdeke discusses against the backdrop of the late eighteenth-century debate about human, civil, and natural rights, the rise of the individual and wish for self-determination, and the belief in humanity's capacity and striving for happiness. His discussion is supported by Foucault's metaphysics of finitude, which, of course, deals with tendencies for latency in political thinking as

1. Lüdeke is not the first. Discussing sex and the discursive junctions between Blake, Fuseli, Hrdlicka, and eighteenth-century culture, Peter Gorsen draws attention to the relevance of Luhmann's *Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität* (1982) in his introduction to the catalogue *Alfred Hrdlicka: "Blake and Füssli": 47 Zeichnungen* (Frankfurt: Timm Gierig, 1983) 9.

well ("*Metaphysik der Endlichkeit*") (63). The "discourse of the human," Lüdeke stresses, is the "Indifferenzzone" (66), and it interferes with the symbolic order (71), which is rather delicate. Political writers such as Hobbes, Burke, and Paine not only fight against literal application of prophetic discourse (75), but they take advantage of system-based proclivity when they write about their preferred forms of government and political representation (71-72). Lüdeke explains further that in narratives pertaining to revealed religion, political founding acts are normally shown to prophets (that is, witnesses), and that Burke attacked Richard Price's famous sermon *On the Love of Our Country* (1789) on the grounds that it mixed the religious with the political. Paine later confronted Burke's claim for universal, timeless rights and argued instead for the natural rights of each generation.

5   Lüdeke brings the discussion back to Blake once he starts comparing prophetic discourse with prophetic writing; the latter is understood to be a repeatable and material "reflection" of a singular, divine verbal utterance: "At that very moment, when it appears in its material form, the divine message enters the political and social arena of different interests, ranges of applications, and strategies" ("In dem Moment, in dem sie in ihrer Materialität auftaucht, tritt die göttliche Wahrheit in ein politisches und gesellschaftliches Feld unterschiedlicher Interessenslagen, Anwendungsbereiche und Strategien") (83). He then contextualizes Blake's thinking with the writings of Robert Lowth, Edward Young, Thomas Howes, and Richard Watson (85ff.) and analyzes relief printing and Blake's use of the prophetic mode in the meeting between the narrator and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel in "A Memorable Fancy" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (87). Lüdeke agrees with the historicist and broadly familiar critical position that Blake's response to his contemporaries' investigations of "religious politics" revolved around questions of social consolidation, but points out that Blake's response is also and perhaps more importantly aesthetic (87) and satirical (93).

6   The first chapter concludes with a summary and survey of Blake's concept of Imagination and relevant writings on the imagination by Kant, Böhme, Plato, and Augustinus. Lüdeke outlines how Blake uses the imagination, in Luhmann's sense, to provide an experience of "true existence" as a whole and beyond all divisions (102). Concluding with a close reading of the title page of *All Religions are One*, he writes about the optical effect created by the framing lines. To Lüdeke this image, which provokes the illusion of a change in form created through a "picture puzzle" ("*vexierperspektivischen* Verfahren") (104), embodies a moment of aesthetic sovereignty; it is also the visual equivalent of the "Indifferenzzone." At this point, he revisits an argument from the 1930s that proposed to read and represent Blake's

"logically constructed world system" as picture puzzles.[2] Originally, this approach was linked to questions about Blake's state of mind, but in Lüdeke it is not.

7   In the second chapter, which like the other chapters is divided into several subchapters, Lüdeke turns to Blake's *The Book of Thel*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America*, *Europe*, and *The Book of Urizen*, and, therefore, to a more literature-oriented analysis. He argues that Blake's early prophetic books follow two narrative models. On the one hand, these models interlock, like the political foundation narratives that Blake's texts are responding to, but, on the other hand, each exaggerates certain paradoxes and thereby reveals what is hidden. Lüdeke now applies Yuri Lotman's semantic plot analysis ("Sujetmodell"), which deals with "events" and focuses on space rather than time as the major structuring component of action. He uses it to account for "narrative movements," which invert beginnings and endings in Blake's early prophetic books (110-15, 119). By Lotman's definition each "sujet" consists of two connected but separate themes. Lüdeke's example is Thel's response to the life-death dichotomy and her wavering between spiritual and material existences. As protagonist she tentatively crosses the boundary between the two, but then decides to withdraw. This means, in Lotman's terms, that because the symbolic and cultural order of *Thel* stays in place unchallenged, we are dealing with a "restitution sujet" ("Restitutionssujet") (111). Similarly, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* introduces the theme of the political division between America and England, but whereas topographical boundaries are only suspended in *Visions*, the defining structure of America and "Albion" in *America* and *Europe* is separation (114). What marks the difference between the two narrative models is that Blake inverts elements of the narrative so that we end up with a "restitution sujet" or, put simply, an unresolved situation. One of Lüdeke's examples is Bromion's rape and marriage offer (of Oothoon) to Theotormon, which leads to a precarious "threshold situation" or "zone of transition" ("Schwellensituation," "Übergangszone"). If read against the context of slavery, Bromion's proposal can be construed as an attempt to overcome national and political separation (113).

8   Moving on to *America*, Lüdeke enlists Elena Esposito, who studied under Eco in Bologna and did her PhD with Luhmann in Bielefeld in the late 1980s (116). Esposito's book on social memory and forgetfulness, *Soziales Vergessen: Formen und Medien des Gedächtnisses der Gesellschaft* (2002), helps Lüdeke think about the "doubling of reality" of Blake's early prophecies: the changeover between the

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2. Irene Seligo, "Der Prophet in seinem Vaterlande: William Blake," *Zwischen Traum und Tat: Englische Profile* (Frankfurt: Societäts-Verlag, 1938) 232-74 (see 271).

realm of the gods and the world of history inhabited by man as well as the resulting interpenetration of semantic and syntactic "surface and depth" in *America* in particular. His example is the cultural memory of Atlantis, which Blake exploits to evoke the idea of a forgotten but shared origin as well as an actual but invisible (geographical) connection. Brought into line with systems theory, this unity defines the nature of the political conflict between America and England (117-23). Lüdeke's point is to highlight the strategies that "detemporalize and dehistoricize" *America* (118). Just as in *The Book of Thel* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake does not allow for the "narrative movement" or, indeed, the represented political conflict to reach a conclusion (120). Interestingly, Lüdeke, who says he has established the "conditions for reception" (134), never questions readers' ability to navigate safely between the semantically and syntactically constructed meanings of the narrated.

9 Blake's early prophetic books have similar themes, but *Europe*'s treatment of them is special, since it "increasingly reflects on the difference between the agency of the sign and the constitution of reality" ("zunehmende Reflexion auf die Differenz zwischen Zeichenhandlung und Wirklichkeitskonstitution") (128). As a result, the narrative movement in *Europe* is a lot more chronological, though no less complex, than that of *America*. Its structure suggests the simultaneity of several beginnings and endings. This section of the book is bolstered with a general discussion of divine origins, magic, and prophecy (Ernst Cassirer, Gerhard von Rad)—that is, with how other narratives parallel and "dissolve" the main narrative movement. Such narratives, in Esposito's words, destabilize the boundaries between past, present, and future (127ff.)[3] and turn the transition from "before" and "after" into a "line of division without duration" ("Scheidewand ohne Zeitdauer") (129, quoting Esposito). Blake, Lüdeke says, achieves this effect in *Europe* when he quickly moves between events and styles associated with either the French Revolution or archaic Celtic traditions. Blake thus "doubles" a story about the divine origin of civilization with that of a social, political, and historical rupture caused by a revolution, propelled by its salvation narratives (131). When explaining how, in Esposito's sense, past and future collapse into the present once the reader's imagination has been mobilized, Lüdeke falls back onto the term "horizon" (136). In contrast to Burke and Paine, he concludes, Blake "sharpens" the difference between immanence and transcendence because he uses the divine as an external perspective; although it is no longer accessible, it in effect doubles the narrated political events and becomes,

in Luhmann's sense, an underlying but invisible reference point (136-37).

10 The final subchapters of the second chapter are on *The Book of Urizen*. Here Lüdeke turns to Leslie Tannenbaum's *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies* (1982), but not to Mee or Makdisi; instead, he builds his interpretation on Bernadette Malinowski's *"Das Heilige sei mein Wort": Paradigmen prophetischer Dichtung von Klopstock bis Whitman* (2002). Malinowski, who responds to Mee's *Dangerous Enthusiasm* (1992) as well as Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), discusses (human) imagination in relation to (divine) inspiration while investigating the prophetic-pragmatic potential of language in Klopstock, Hölderlin, Novalis, Shelley, Blake, Wordsworth, and Whitman. The bottom line for Lüdeke is that David Worrall's reading of religion in *The Book of Urizen* "does not go far enough" (138), nor does Tristanne Connolly's discussion of pity or compassion (149): for Lüdeke Urizen is the first legislator. Of Urizen's abstract creation, he notes, "The interworldliness created by Urizen's splitting off is to be understood as an expression of that 'Indifferenzzone' that begins to exist with the institution of political and legal systems" ("Die durch Urizens Abspaltung erzeugte Zwischenweltlichkeit ist als Ausprägung jener Indifferenzzone zu verstehen, die mit der Institution politisch-rechtlicher Systeme entsteht") (142). Moving on to the issues of mortality, pity, and compassion, he quotes Agamben and corrects Connolly's medical interpretations. The last subchapter touches on Los's relationship with Urizen and Blake; it ends with a close reading of the title page. Lüdeke focuses on Urizen's writing tools and the writing in *Urizen* in order to talk of ambiguous text-image relationships, printing techniques (158), and changes in print media. He theorizes Blake's artistic decisions in relation to the interrelated material conditions for their technical recording (159-60).

11 The third chapter is on outline and handwriting; it summarizes the technical aspects of relief printing, including Makdisi's Marxist reading of illuminated book production (162), and condenses Essick's and Viscomi's research on Blake's engraving and printing methods—Phillips gets a brief mention on p. 165—as well as Morris Eaves's and Detlef Dörrbecker's readings of Blake's aesthetics. Dörrbecker's analysis of Blake's production process falls victim, I think, to the ambition to include all these perspectives. Writing about Blake's Notebook, Lüdeke quotes Dörrbecker, who argued in *Konvention und Innovation* (1992) that Blake used his Notebook like a "quarry" ("Steinbruch") and there is evidence that he continually and for many years returned to his notes. Lüdeke's comment is revealing: "This implies the availability of prestructured forms—that is, forms organized according to certain principles of classification, which as it were are available for a differentiating

3. Elena Esposito, *Soziales Vergessen: Formen und Medien des Gedächtnisses der Gesellschaft*, trans. from the Italian by Alessandra Corti (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002) 31.

processing due to their being coded and repeatable at any time" ("Dies impliziert die Verfügbarkeit von prästrukturierten, nach bestimmten Ordnungsprinzipien gewonnenen Gestaltungsformen, die quasi kodiert und jederzeit wiederholbar für differenzierende Verarbeitung zur Verfügung stehen") (179). The comment seems an attempt to shift the "quarry" metaphor and make it mean "system." For his argument about the visibly determined and imagined codifications of marks and lines, Lüdeke draws inspiration from Viscomi's work on handwriting (163). Handwriting survives, if preserved through relief printing; it infuses printed text with the sketchiness normally associated with the physical act of writing (165). The existing debate about Blake's practices and their effects is expanded once Lüdeke starts to consider Gerhart von Graevenitz's *Das Ornament des Blicks* (1994) and Ernst Rebel's *Druckgrafik: Geschichte—Fachbegriffe* (2003). Graevenitz's discussion of the "*Typographeum*" (168), an ideal comprising all aspects of text and image cooperation, helps to explain how the layout of a page discloses as well as alludes to information due to underlying formatting and printing conventions. This is important because Lüdeke's discussion moves from technical to theoretical matters and to contemporary debates about perception and epistemology. His argument, for example, touches on Locke's explanations of the visual nature of concrete ideas (166); it moves to Reynolds's rejection of ornament, deemed by him artisanal rather than artistic (169-70), as well as Hogarth's interest in the tension between the pictoral and the lineal, as discussed by Ronald Paulson (171-72). What holds these topics together is a "model of transparency" (167), which, Lüdeke says, determines that a sign is more than its material referent on the printed page. As examples he mentions George Cumberland's writing on perfect drawing (168) and William Gilpin's on perfect etching (176). He explains that whereas a line creates an object, a perfect line embodies and projects the represented figure out of its drawn boundary. Outline, to put this differently, becomes invisible because it is no longer noticed, and Blake's own writing on outline echoes this idea (173). Finally bringing the research and strands of argument together, Lüdeke proposes:

> Compared with the classicist-informed ideal of the transparency of the pictoral and the verbal medium, Blake's *relief printing* seems to emphasize the material, bodily, and non-sign aspects of writing and drawing—that is, those "opaque" characteristics, which within the printed ideal of transparency are programmatically excluded in favor of a standardized codification. (Gegenüber dem klassizistisch geprägten Transparenzideal des piktoralen und verbalen Mediums scheint Blakes *Relief Printing* also die materiellen, körperlichen und nicht-zeichenhaften Aspekte des Schreibens und Zeichnens zu betonen, jene "opaken" Merkmale von Schrift und Bild also, die im Rahmen des druckschriftlichen Transparenzideals zugunsten standar-

disierter Kodifizierung programmatisch ausgegrenzt werden.) (173)

Lüdeke agrees with the Marxist position that relief printing subverted the going modes of reproduction (179); it enabled Blake to make a printed page look like a handwritten page. This in-betweenness, brought about by a specially invented medium, he explains, created the "condition" of all of Blake's "*Poetry of Vision*," as well as the potential of the "religiously informed imagination of the unobserved" ("religiös geprägten Imagination des Unbeobachtbaren") (179).

12 The following two subchapters contain close readings of the "Introduction" of *Songs of Experience* and plates from *America* and *Europe*. Lüdeke opens with that famous passage from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* about "printing in the infernal method" (E 39) and elucidates Blake's "poetological approach to printmaking" (182): Blake's aim is to activate the reader's imagination so that he or she observes what cannot normally be observed. By this Lüdeke means performative speech acts and the creation of two opposite worlds, which he quickly associates with the figure of the Bard. He clarifies how Blake—through this figure—juxtaposes and eventually synthesizes divine with prophetic speech (185). He notices, for example, that the "O"s of "O Earth O Earth" (E 18) look different on the printed page, even though they share the same meaning; he mentions Nelson Hilton's description of the many downward-moving "l"s in the second stanza of the poem (187) and concludes that Blake's writing on copperplates overproduces meaning (189).

13 The next section is on *America* and *Europe*. It quotes Dörrbecker ("Schriftbilder und Bildzeichen: William Blakes Experimente," 2005) to support ideas about vertical structuring of texts and images on plates (189ff.), but strangely does not refer to Dörrbecker's *The Continental Prophecies* (1995). From *America*, Lüdeke chooses the combination of "The King of England" and the image of a winged dragon (plate 4) to talk about "semantic indefiniteness" (191), and afterwards he compares the figures of the Angel of Albion and Orc on plates 8 and 10 to discuss "syntactic coherence" (192).[4] The conclusion is that all of these combinations "realize a divinatory attitude of reception"

4. Lüdeke explains in a footnote (190n184) that he is working with copy A in the Morgan Library in New York and that, when quoting, he is following the numbering used in the *Blake Archive*. His labeling, however, is imprecise; he gets the plates mixed up. The images at the back of the book do not match the references on pp. 192-93. Lüdeke, for example, quotes from plate 9, and the *Blake Archive* identifies the figure on plate 8 as probably Urizen. I am following the Erdman edition.

(194). Probably because he is interested in the discursive dynamic of the religious and the political, Lüdeke does not move much beyond his examples or beyond *America*. Accordingly, he stresses that it would be wrong to speculate about whether Blake sympathized with the American Revolution, suggesting that Blake chose to withhold his opinion for a reason. Instead, he says, Blake "suspends" his comments by transporting political claims for liberty into the realm of "the mythic-divine mode of the religious political" (196).

14 In the section on *Europe*, Lüdeke teases out the differences between *America* and *Europe*. He explains how Blake has moved on and how the main purpose of text-image combinations is no longer to create an "overall context for a hidden level of meaning" but to "evidence their fundamental difference" (196-97). In *Europe*, text and image work together to create an awareness of the "limits of human, symbolic conversation," characteristic of mankind's fallen condition (197). This time Lüdeke focuses on *Europe* plate 10, with the crowned serpent in the lefthand margin, to draw connections between the effect of the enjambments, the curled body of the snake, and the downward movements they impose on the reader/viewer (198-99). Writing of reader expectation, he determines:

> The world-intrinsic final horizon of human finitude within the positive boundaries of and opportunities for language and symbolic representation will be so fully radicalized that the imagistic-linguistic sign context will give priority to the physiological conditions of perception, and make noticeable the limits of human experience of reality via the act of aesthetic reception (in the sense of the observed unobservedness of observation). (Der weltimmanente Letzthorizont menschlicher Endlichkeit innerhalb der positiven Grenzen und Möglichkeitsbedingungen von Sprache und symbolischer Repräsentation wird hier dadurch radikalisiert, daß der bild-sprachliche Zeichenzusammenhang die physiologischen Bedingungen der Wahrnehmung in den Vordergrund spielt und die Grenzen der menschlichen Wirklichkeitserfahrung über den Akt der ästhetischen Rezeption [im Sinne einer beobachtbaren Unbeobachtbarkeit von Beobachtung] spürbar macht.) (201)

Lüdeke also relates this phenomenon to the political; he maintains that Blake differs from Burke and Paine in that he "confronts the assertive claims of a metaphysics of finitude with the radically unavailable transcendent final horizon" (202). The reading subject, in other words, can never be sure that whatever he or she has gained during an aesthetic experience is valid.

15 The last four subchapters are on Urizen and *The Book of Urizen*. These are—maybe because of the long buildup—the most interesting sections of the book. Returning to the argument about ornament, Lüdeke turns to the "pictoral overmoulding of writing" ("piktorale Überformung von Schriftlichem") (204) and the ways in which the boundaries between letter and image blur in *Urizen*. He identifies this phenomenon in several plates, including the "Preludium" (206-07) and the one where Los, between two eternals, is leaning forward, pointing downward and drawing Urizen's "death-image" (207-08). On account of the "in-betweenness" created by this image and the lines of poetry it illustrates, Blake achieves a "*doublesightedness*" (209): is Los writing or drawing? Has he just started or is he about to finish? From the "death-image" of Urizen Lüdeke returns to the question of the political, because Urizen can be interpreted as representing the new status of the human as well as Agamben's *nuda vita* (210). *Urizen*, by comparison, stands for a specific physical practice (writing embodied in relief printing), which, Lüdeke reminds us, is typical of the functioning of the political (212-13).

16 What follows is a short history of books on learning how to write (213-25). The section starts with guidebooks from the seventeenth century and ends with contemporary theory on writing (Derrida). Again, Lüdeke focuses on the function of the ornament in writing and its increasing importance in the perception and creation of individuality (217). He returns to his discussion about the role of the imagination—in imagining the invisible—when he describes John Jenkins's writing system in terms of an "Indifferenzzone" (220).[5] During training all individuals' handwriting is mediated through the body and is, at the same time, set against an ideal, which it only ever aspires to but never meets (222). Next, Lüdeke returns to Urizen and the title page of *Urizen* to discuss "the turning-into-images of writing contexts" as well as the relationship between "the law and mortality" (226). He engages with the existing critical writing on Blake and the body (John Barrell, Makdisi, Connolly), but rejects most of the research on anatomical issues; he then goes on to discuss the representation of corporality in *Urizen* and Urizen, and finally identifies more cases of "*doublesightedness*" (232, 234).

17 Where does all this leave us? Lüdeke concludes:

> The scene of writing, represented by Urizen, acquires its specific aesthetic sovereignty on the level of its typographically marked materiality. This is where its specific power is embedded in an in-between zone equivalent to that of the political. It is a virtual area existing between statement and utterance, which the politically discursive sys-

5. Lüdeke discusses English handwriting and John Jenkins, *The Art of Writing, Reduced to a Plain and Easy System on a Plan Entirely New* (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1791), an American publication.

tems owe their assertive claim to. … Urizen's law, therefore, marks in its overdetermined indefiniteness the inner connection between the *performative* dimension of Blake's prophecies and the specific structuring rules of their replication. (Ihre spezifisch ästhetische Souveränität erhält die durch Urizen repräsentierte Schreibszene damit auf der Ebene ihrer druckgraphisch markierten Materialität, denn hier ist ihre spezifische Macht in einer dem Politischen äquivalenten Indifferenzzone verankert, jenem virtuellen Bereich zwischen Aussage und Äußerung, der sich auch der Geltungsanspruch der politischen Diskurssysteme verdankt. … In ihrer überdeterminierten Unbestimmtheit markiert Urizens Gesetzesschrift so den inneren Zusammenhang zwischen der *performativen* Dimension von Blakes Prophezeiungen und den spezifischen Strukturregeln ihrer Replikation.) (242)

Different rules of communication attend the transition from the oral tradition to letterpress printing. This means that any kind of communication technology that exists independently of any speakers or actual speaking contexts is interrelated with the beliefs and virtues of a developing, industrialized society. Blake's invention of relief printing, in other words, is as much part of Blake's works as are the text-image relationships of his illuminated books.

18 While offering many thought-provoking suggestions about the theoretical implications of Blake's choices and attempts to control and manipulate his media, Lüdeke mentions but makes nothing of the fact that Blake shared his labor with his wife, Catherine. He thus misses an opportunity to show that writing as well as printmaking ought to be associated with male and female agency. For example, the blurring of gender, another important social boundary, can be noticed in the generously ornamented designs of Blake's early prophetic books. In addition, in the books Lüdeke discusses there are characters who opt for oral transmission, against writing. Oothoon breaks into song in order to air her pain and disappointment, but also to give expression to her hope for a better future. Another example of female agency can be found in *America*, where a tumultuous narrative (text) is offset by a peaceful scene (image) placed in the middle of the plate. The design shows an old woman lecturing a youth who is leaning on a pile of closed books (plate 14). The description of the American War of Independence is interrupted by a voice we cannot hear. The listener in the scene, however, has abandoned his books and appears to be completely absorbed. What are we missing? Nothing is fixed or can be fixed in Blake's early prophetic books. The reader can never be sure if what he or she is imagining is valid.

19 Lüdeke's theory-driven book suggests some new ways theory can be applied to Blake's methods of production and to understanding the physical acts of writing of both Blake

and Urizen. The book, based on Lüdeke's habilitation submitted at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich in 2006, is thoroughly researched and extensively referenced; one footnote is almost a page long. Because Lüdeke prefers to quote in the original language and also trace concepts sideways through different disciplines while invoking the writing of several theorists at once, reading *Zur Schreibkunst von William Blake* can be a little taxing (exacerbating the problem, the German translations of the quotations are inconveniently located toward the end of the book, after the fifteen color plates). Nevertheless, this book is a rare success in reading Blake against continental European theory, and it illuminates Blake's significance for modern thought.