

## CINE-INSTALLATION *METABOOK.1:* *THE BOOK OF LUNA*

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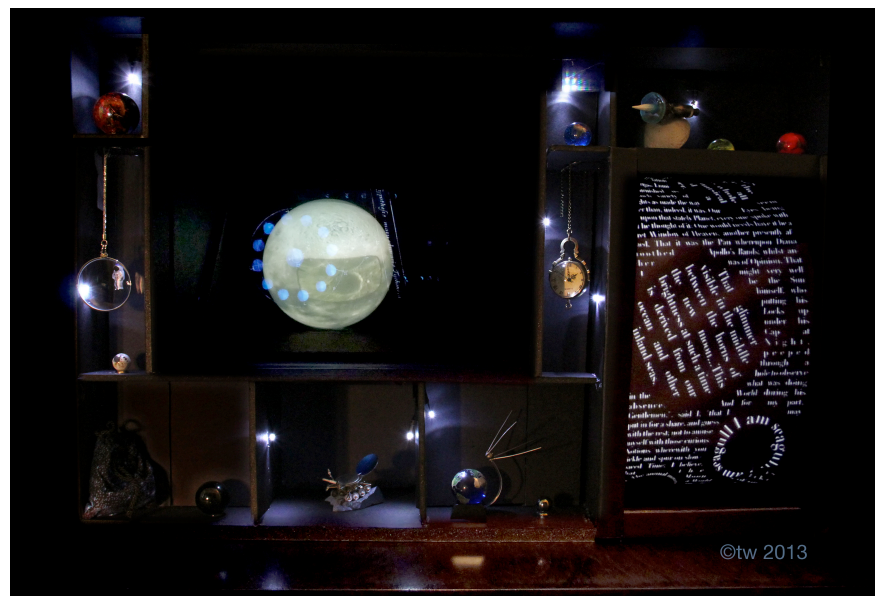
### Abstract

The *MetaBook* is a transmedia concept that bridges the analog and the digital by introducing a cinematic and interactive dimension to the physical object of the book. *MetaBook.1: The Book of Luna* is the first realization of this concept. Across a series of embedded media technologies, this artwork explores texts written and inspired by some of history's great philosophers and scientists by navigating a map of the Moon's craters that have been named after them. The reader is free to navigate between these craters on page and screen, or just fly through them in a constant orbit.

**Keywords:** expanded cinema, electronic literature, immersion, hybrid media, interactive, video installation, structural montage, dynamic montage.

### The Poetics of Space

In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard traces a profound homology between our perception of space, our way of being-at-space, and poetic thought: "...the great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams. The house, the bedroom, the garret in which we were alone, furnished the framework for an interminable dream, one that poetry alone, through the creation of a poetic work, could succeed in achieving completely" [1]. Spaces are psychological resonating chambers, exterior sanctuaries for our interior states, in much the same way that poetry is a sensate linguistic structure for expressing daydreams. To apprehend space as poetic text entails following the a-logic of the daydream – accompanying the peregrinations of a mobile mind as it pulls in many signifying threads, pictures and words. The project at hand, *MetaBook.1: The Book of Luna* by Clea T. Waite and Lauren Fenton (2013), is an expanded cinema installation, an electronic cabinet of curiosities crossed with an illuminated manuscript, that formally examines how structural and dynamic montage can be employed in counterpoint to create experimental narratives and immersive experiences. Interpreting these techniques as spatial metaphors, our work specifically explores how the topographical architecture that a film occupies can be used as an exter-



**Fig. 1.** *MetaBook.1: The Book of Luna*, multimedia object (prototype), © Clea T. Waite & Lauren Fenton, 2013. Photo © Clea T. Waite

nal signifier of the film's internal logic.

*The Book of Luna* narrates a poetic essay about the Moon's place in the historical imagination that unfolds across a series of projections and nested spaces. In the spirit of Bachelard's daydreams, *The Book of Luna* treats the Moon both as a poetic concept and as a concrete, navigable place, effectively presenting a topological metaphor that superimposes a fictional with an actual, selenographic space. The result is an immersive experience that combines the dynamic, recombinant possibilities of the digital database with the familiar intuitiveness of the book and the perceptual engagement of cinema.

*MetaBook.1: The Book of Luna* investigates this poetics of space by creating an individual polymedia experience with responsive content. In the encyclopedic catalogue that accompanied the Getty Museum's 2001 exhibition of techno-artistic artifacts, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, Barbara Stafford evokes an entire lineage of 'gadget-furniture', objects for the home such as perspective boxes and toy theatres that functioned as 'socio-poetic kits'; simple machines that unfolded platforms for the imagination within their imbricate space. Stafford states: "... objects, too, are not eternally fixed within their utilitarian or commodity function but, like the dynamic consciousness itself, are seen to be metamorphic and performative"[2].

Building upon the interactive, exploratory possibilities of these Baroque domestic objects, *The Book of Luna* is a single participant object combining the experiential qualities of text, sculpture, interactive devices, and cinema within the enclosed architecture of a tabletop cabinet. The piece takes the form of a wooden cabinet measuring 24.5 x 9.5 x 24.5 inches with multiple compartments. Contained within these compartments are miniature projections on both a curved screen and a glass globe, a Pepper's Ghost illusory mirror effect, interactive electro-mechanical devices such as joysticks and tuning knobs to allow user control of the projected material, and a collection of evocative objects (Fig. 1). Within one compartment of the cabinet, a three-dimensional model of the Moon is layered with the stunning film recordings, made from orbit by the Apollo and Kaguya/Selene missions, of the Moon's surface, archival space-flight footage, and animated fantasy characters from the stories being told to form a three-dimensional, dynamic collage. The orbital footage, drawing attention to the lunar surface textures and irregularities whose revolutionary discovery was made possible by the telescope, is manipulated to simulate the primitive optics of Galileo's original telescope from 1609 (Fig. 2). The lunar imagery is composited in real time and projected onto a translucent glass globe using a fish-eye lens and image mapping techniques like those currently em-

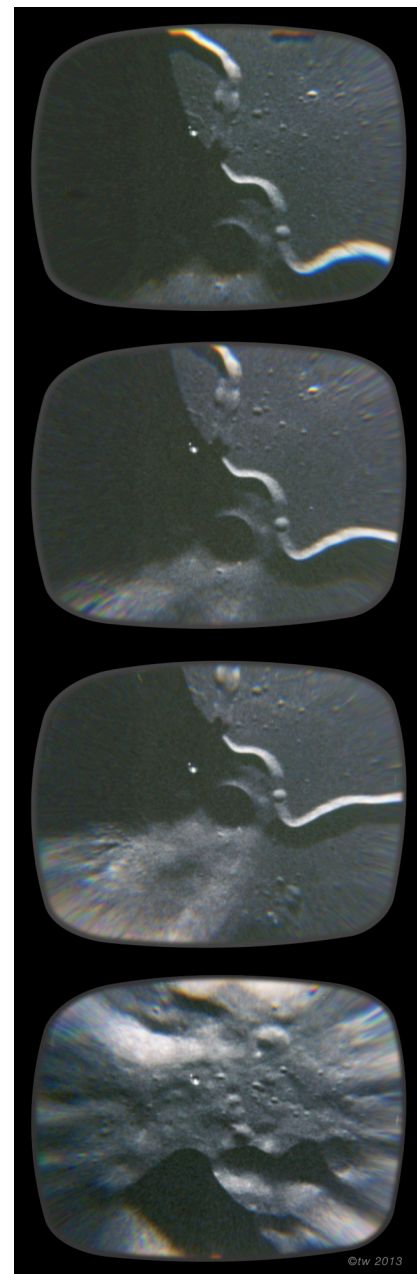
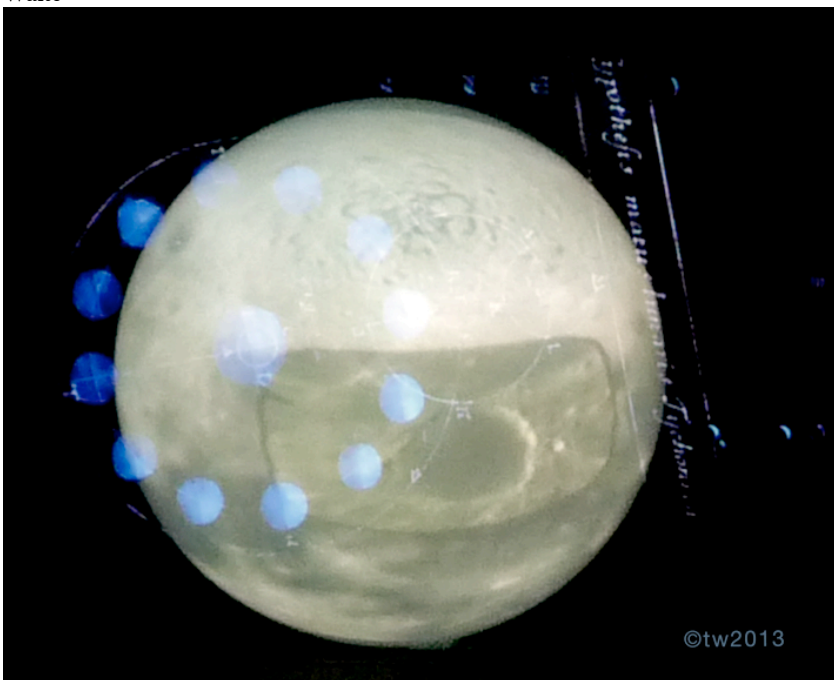
ployed in state-of-the-art, digital full-dome planetaria. The resulting 3D model of the Moon that is projected creates a luminous, interactive orb. This orb floats collocated with the characters from the archival space flight footage and fantasy that augment the narrative of the craters. These characters and other figures float in space using the Pepper's Ghost technique, creating a hologram-like effect, giving the impression that the animated images are moving through and around the globe within the compartment, generally making it impossible to distinguish between background and foreground, projected material and solid objects (Fig 3).

The composition of the work reflects the Moon's own history as a palimpsest of humanity's philosophical and literary imagination. The nature of love, madness, the unknown, and our capacity for the sublime are amongst the intellectual passions that have crystallized around this mysterious object. There are as many perspectives of the Moon—poems, fantasies, myths, and scientific data—from the beginnings of culture to the Space Age and the memories of the Cold-War generation—as there are craters on its surface. Recipient of prayers, myths, and dreams since the beginning of human consciousness, it inspires love poems and lunacy, influences werewolves and the tides.

*For what is the moon, that it haunts us,  
this impudent companion immigrated  
from the system's less fortunate margins,  
the realm of dust collected in orbs?[3]*

John Updike incisively dubs our planet's singular satellite an impudent companion; "no star but in the zodiac of stars, a stranger there too" [3]. Queries into the Moon's nature, its place in the cosmos and in our lives have reflected and diverted the trajectory of Western art and science. *The Book of Luna* remixes selenological aphorisms, musings, and observations from some of the philosophers, poets and scientists after whom the Moon's craters were named: Ariosto, Aristotle, Aristarchus of Samos, Copernicus, Cyrano de Bergerac, Leonardo da Vinci, Gagarin, Galileo, Hippocrates, Kepler, Lucian of Samosata, Plutarch, Plato, Ptolemy, Pythagoras, Tereschkova, Tycho, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. *The Book of Luna* allows the reader to visit these craters and experience the quotations either by interactively navigating through the map of the Moon that is projected onto the globe, or by scrolling through the associated texts that are projected in another compartment of the box. The text is a non-linear, cut-up poem combining quotations from the lunar philosophers with original writings. The interactive text allows the reader to select and combine quotations. Once a crater is selected from the text scroll or the Moon map, more cinematic material is

**Fig. 3. *MetaBook.1: The Book of Luna*, detail of Moon map projection onto a glass globe and Pepper's Ghost illusion, © Clea T. Waite & Lauren Fenton, 2013. Photo © Clea T. Waite**



**Fig. 2. Archival Apollo Mission orbital footage digitally processed to evoke Galileo's telescope view, from *MetaBook.1: The Book of Luna*. © Clea T. Waite & Lauren Fenton 2013. Photo: © Clea T. Waite**

unlocked. When selected, portions of the text transform and fly across the book to take the reader to the corresponding crater on the globe. In a *MetaBook*, the viewer chooses which pages (here, map or text) to engage with, and how.

Miniature video monitors and lunar memorabilia housed in smaller compartments of the cabinet complete the experience of *The Book of Luna*, adding to the layers of storytelling that play out within the electronic assemblage. The back-and-forth between the text, the globe, the 'ghosts', and the digital and material memorabilia enact

the larger metaphor of the lunar orbit, both as a literary device and as a distinctive model for interface design. The aim of this design is to allow the user to effortlessly explore content, to ‘float’ through a narrative and through different media, launching her on a reading journey that draws her ever more deeply into an imaginative space. The somatic traversal of a topographical space is transposed and compressed into an intimate, personal topology of navigation within the *MetaBook*. The written word becomes a voice, another actor, in the film’s unfolding.

### The Wunderkammer and the Baroque

Through its exploratory poetics and personal architecture, *The Book of Luna* draws a contemporary connection between the 17<sup>th</sup> century cabinet of curiosities, the *Wunderkammer*, and Gilles Deleuze’s analysis of the Baroque as the folding of imaginary space. Cabinets of curiosities were ornate pieces of furniture devoted to the juxtaposition of curios and artifacts, which created in the cabinet owner’s mind a structural chain of sensuous and symbolic associations (Fig. 4). These cabinets were used by the wealthy as systems for organizing facts and artifacts, and are the precursors to the travel documentary and the natural history museum. The cabinet of curiosities as a whole evoked a vast imaginary space whose extensive proportions were collapsed into the comparatively diminutive physical space of the piece of furniture itself. A historical connection between cabinets of curiosity and the book can also be found in the form of the *xylotheque*, a collection of books made of wood and other elements of various kinds of trees, exemplified by the encyclopedic creations of Carl Schildbach (1730-1817) and displayed by artist Mark Dion in his contribution to *Documenta 13* in Kassel, Germany, *Xylotheque* (2012) (Fig. 5). Similarly, the *MetaBook* re-invents expanded cinema according to a neo-baroque logic of serial miniaturization that unlocks proportionally vast sensorial and imaginary realms, conjuring an experience in which “matter...offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular

passages” [4]. The more our perception unfolds the object before us, laying out its inexhaustible wealth of detail for our consumption, the more we ‘fold’ ourselves into it, until the object seems to balloon, to grow beyond us into a world in which we are then immersed, and which becomes our stage. In *The Book of Luna*, this Baroque exercise of the perceptual imagination results in designing the work’s topological form as an extension of the film’s internal narrative. The subject of the piece, the Moon, fuses its topographical signifiers – the sphere and the craters – with the architectural structure of the cinema-installation, the freely navigable globe. Motivating movement and focus through interface design becomes an element of composition and meaning in which the attention of the viewer composes the linear flow of information. It demonstrates how somatic immersion and active navigation impact upon the compositional flow of a piece. This form of experimental cinematic montage harkens back to the artwork of Joseph Cornell, whose compositions hinge on the manner in which the meanings of the objects ricochet off each other, creating an immersive and powerfully evocative web of material signifiers. Through his boxes Cornell conjured closed, self-sufficient worlds of thought and feeling. In *The Book of Luna*, we pay homage to Cornell’s penchant for evocative dime store knick-knacks and toys.

The cinematic composition of the *MetaBook* relies upon the concept of structural montage, one which transposes the linear-sequential progression of the narrative, one scene after the next, into a multivalent, non-linear presentation of the ‘scenes’ using spatial distribution. This system of elements relates back to Eisenstein’s concepts of juxtaposition and collision of cells in montage: “The montage method is obvious: the play of juxtaposed detail-shots, which in themselves are immutable and even unrelated, but from which is created the desired image of the whole” [5]. Within the *MetaBook*, physical space and form are used to supplement sequentiality in the construction of a cohesive, poetic narrative.

The use of multiple projections in an architectural cinematic space recalls the rich history of theatrical lighting effects from the Baroque era onward, known as magic lantern shows or phantasmagorias. The most spectacular of these stage illusions is perhaps the Pepper’s Ghost, invented by John Pepper and Henry Dircks in 1863. The effect creates the impression of a hovering, translucent figure, popularized today by theme park attractions such as Disneyland’s Haunted Mansion. For *The Book of Luna*, we created our own miniature Pepper’s Ghost effect through a reflective projection mechanism hidden inside the cabinet, resulting in hologram-like, translucent animations of historical figures, lunar illustrations, and dia-



Fig. 4. Trompe l'oeil painting of a cabinet of curiosities by Domenico Remps (1690s, Museo dell’ Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence) [7]

grams. By confounding the viewer's sense of foreground and background and making them interchangeable, Pepper's Ghost participates in a powerful form of spatial montage that extends the narrative into ambiguous spaces where flights of the imagination become possible. Our use of the Pepper's Ghost effect was also inspired by medieval illuminated manuscripts' practice of weaving graphic illustration into the body of a text. Like illuminations, our translucent animations continuously emerge from, and melt back into, the audio and textual narrative, intersecting with the lunar projection on the globe.

Finally, why have we chosen the metaphor of the book? As the common book progressively moves into the virtual, it leaves the functionality of the physical book in a minor role of impracticality – and hence perfectly suited to the role of art. As an ancient interface, the book reconnects with the non-linearity of contemporary digital media. Lev Manovitch memorably describes the book as a “perfect random-access medium” [6], a versatile platform equally suited to exploring databases and becoming absorbed in narratives. Skipping across imaginary spaces and moments in time is as simple as flipping through its pages. In *The Book of Luna*, the turn of a page becomes an edit in the film or the beginning of a new line in the poem, revealing a new cell in the montage. In a *MetaBook*, the multi-channel space of an immersive architecture is transformed into an intimate installation within the book's pages. The medial space of immersion is re-internalized, just as literature has always immersed the mind of the reader. *The MetaBook* is a film to be read as well as viewed, activated as well as experienced.

## Conclusion

Our artistic research addresses topics at the intersection of art and science via physical, cinematic works examining immersion, structural montage, and dynamic montage, and the effect of these formal elements on meaning, creative process and reception. How decisive is form on the quality of content? What new metaphors arise from new technologies, from crossbreeding disciplines and media to create new forms and meanings? *The MetaBook.1: Book of Luna* reinvents expanded cinema according to a neo-baroque logic of serial miniaturization, while extending the concept of cin-



**Fig. 5. The Schildbach Xylotheque of the Ottoneum in Kassel, Germany, a collection created by Carl Schildbach from 1771 to 1799. Each 'book' is made of the wood of the tree that is documented within it, with wax three-dimensional replicas of significant elements of the tree. Since 2012 the Xylotheque has been shown inside the display designed by Mark Dion for DOCUMENTA (13) [8].**

ematic montage beyond Eisenstein's juxtaposition of cells, to the juxtaposition of evocative materialities. This recombinant assemblage of tangible surfaces which also correspond to narrative units points us back to the origin of media and the book, a platform we metaphorically allude to in our title. As a polymedia book, the *MetaBook* articulates how immersive spaces and an active form of spectatorship can orchestrate the piece's composition. By mapping its selenographical subject, the Moon, to the architectural structure of a cinema-installation, *The Book of Luna* addresses the challenge of creating an external form which functions as an extension of the work's internal logic; in the context of expanded cinema, this means unpacking or unfolding the narrative in a spatial dimension. As a hybrid, neo-baroque artifact that brings together illusion and science, aesthetics and apparatus, *The Book of Luna* investigates the possibility of experimenting with technologies as epistemological mechanisms which can, within an artistic framework, open up new avenues of perceptual and affective experience.

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