

Transcription of the talk

**WILLIAM BLAKE'S
GOLGONOOZA: A
VISION OF LONDON
METAMORPHOSED**

given at the Arts and Humanities
Festival in King's College
18TH OCTOBER 2012

by Adriana Díaz-Enciso

This talk took place at the old Anatomy Theatre, that echoed the fourfold city of the Imagination through the four screens surrounding the audience.

It started with pre-recorded excerpts from Blake's poetry and a series of projected images as the audience walked in and took their edible token: the silhouette of Blake's 'Glad Day' printed in blood-red ink on a wafer of rice paper.

Most of the images projected during the talk were of course by Blake. Others were photographs I made and played with and yet others were emanations from Blake's art flowing into my photographs.

On trying to get the rights for reproduction of Blake's images for this online version of the talk, I discovered a vast expanded universe governed by disparate rules.

I am grateful to those institutions that granted rights for reproduction understanding the nature and aims of this online publication: namely, to share the talk as closely as possible to the original experience with those who were not there.

Other institutions had rules harder to comply with.

To include some of the original Blake images but not others would leave a mutilated version of my talk.

I had to make a decision for unity and coherence -- painful, outrageous: no Blake reproductions at all!

So I invite you to read the transcript of the talk accompanied by these sort of visual comments while you imagine how Blake's own images might have come in and the fourfold gates opened in the old Anatomy Theatre on that October night.

Let us start with the pre-recorded texts.

Click on the link below to listen.

(The link is the rectangle below)



When the recording is finished, you can read the actual transcript of the talk.



I behold London; a Human awful wonder of God!

He says: Return, Albion, return! I give myself for thee; My Streets are my, Ideas of Imagination.

Awake Albion, awake! and let us awake up together.
My Houses are Thoughts: my Inhabitants: Affections,



The children of my thoughts, walking within my blood-vessels, Shut from my nervous form which sleeps upon the verge of Beulah
In dreams of darkness, while my vegetating blood in veiny pipes, Rolls dreadful thro' the Furnaces of Los, and the Mills of Satan. For Albions sake, and for Jerusalem thy Emanation
I give myself, and these my brethren give themselves for Albion.



So spoke London, immortal Guardian! [...]

I write in South Molton Street, what I both see and hear In regions
of Humanity, in Londons opening streets.

I see thee awful Parent Land in light, behold I see! Verulam!
Canterbury! venerable parent of men, Generous immortal Guardian
golden clad! for Cities Are Men, fathers of multitudes, and Rivers &
Mountains Are also Men;

every thing is Human, mighty! sublime!

In every bosom a Universe expands, as wings

Let down at will around, and call'd the Universal Tent.



There is in Albion a Gate of Precious stones and gold
Seen only by Emanations, by vegetations viewless,
Bending across the road of Oxford Street; it from Hyde Park
To Tyburns deathful shades, admits the wandering souls
Of multitudes who die from Earth.
this Gate cannot be found
By Satans Watch-fiends tho' they search numbering every grain Of sand on
Earth every night, they never find this Gate.
It is the Gate of Los.



Withoutside is the Mill, intricate, dreadful
And fill'd with cruel tortures; but no mortal man can find the Mill Of Satan, in
his mortal pilgrimage of seventy years
For Human beauty knows it not: nor can Mercy find it!



I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination—Imagination, the real and Eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow. The Apostles knew of no other Gospel. What were all their spiritual gifts? What is the Divine Spirit? Is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain? What is the harvest of the Gospel and its labours? What is that talent which it is a curse to hide? What are the treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up for ourselves? Are they any other than mental studies and performances?



What are all the gifts of the Gospel? Are they not all mental gifts? Is God a Spirit who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth? And are not the gifts of the Spirit everything to Man? What is the Joy of Heaven but improvement in the things of the Spirit? What are the Pains of Hell but Ignorance, Bodily Lust, Idleness, and devastation of the things of the Spirit? Answer this to yourselves, and expel from among you those who pretend to despise the labours of Art and Science, which alone are the labours of the Gospel.



Can you think at all, and not pronounce heartily: that to labour in knowledge is to build up Jerusalem; and to despise knowledge is to despise Jerusalem and her Builders. [...]

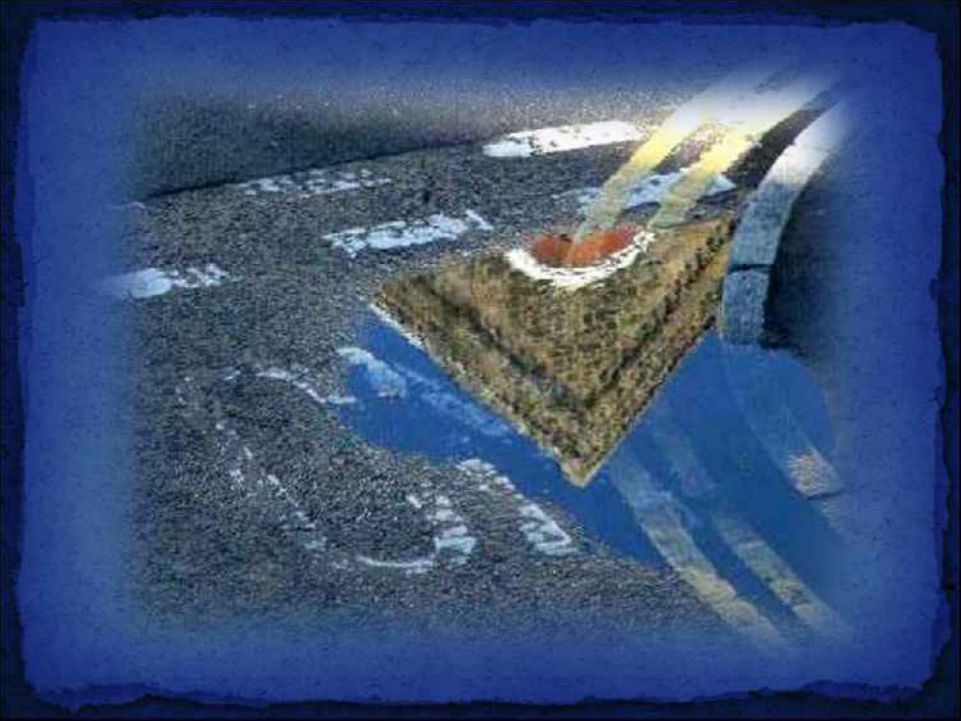
Let every Christian, as much as in him lies, engage himself openly and publicly, before all the World, in some mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem.



Trembling I sit day and night, my friends are astonish'd at me, Yet they forgive
my wanderings, I rest not from my great task! To open the Eternal Worlds, to
open the immortal Eyes Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought:
into Eternity for Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.



O Saviour pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love: Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!
Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly upon the rock of ages, While I write of the building of Golgonooza.



William Blake wrote the words you have just heard in London, in South Molton Street, a few steps from Oxford Street. He wrote what he both saw and heard:

London, *a Human awful wonder of God* : That place you have just come from before taking the lift up to this Anatomy Museum; where you are now, by the river Thames. From where we can now see and hear the vociferous worship of possessions, from where, in Blake's times, we would see the material and spiritual scars of poverty and, not too long before he lived there, the mobs rushing to Tyburn to watch an execution, near today's Marble Arch, Blake saw and heard the visions and the music of a sacred city, the streets of which were not brick and mortar, but *Ideas of Imagination* .



So what did you see on your way here? What did you hear? Think about it. How many gates did you have to cross? What gates *within you* did all those sensory images cross in order to reach you?

What Blake saw and heard from 17 South Molton Street, during the 17 years he lived there with his wife, Catherine, was Golgonooza, a sacred city built upon foundations of art. He saw and heard Jerusalem—not in the midst, but in the very marrow of Babylon. In Blake's foundational myth, Golgonooza, Jerusalem, are all facets in the stone of London.



'Return, Albion, Return! I give myself for thee!' This city that contains us, with an equal measure of blessings and oppression, actually *gave itself* for Albion. That is, for humanity. London echoing Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to actually give yourself for someone? For something?



William Blake understood reality from a different perspective than most of his contemporaries, or than most people at any given time. He inhabited both the material world we all do and the visionary world that we might inhabit too, if we were willing to use our senses properly and realize that those two worlds are one.



He was an artist. Not merely an engraver of plates, a painter of pictures, a writer of words. He knew that art meant transfiguration. The manifestation of the divine in man, therefore a means not of saving, but of *incarnating*, man's soul. In order to create art, we need our Vision, our Imagination, but also the material means to give it shape. The vision goes through the channels of our body in order to become manifest in the world: it goes through our brain, our eyes, our limbs, our hands, our vocal cords.

For Blake the sacredness inherent to artistic creation is no rhetoric. The Holy Ghost is an Intellectual Fountain. And to labour in knowledge is to build Jerusalem.

It was out of this conception that he wanted to create public art, and he had in his imagination a vivid vision of how his art would look like in public buildings.

But he was never commissioned to create public art. It would have been highly unlikely. As we know, many of his contemporaries considered him mad.



Blake lived in London most of his life, apart from the three years he spent in Felpham, by the sea. London is a living entity, literally *immortalized* in his work because in Blake everything we see, hear and experience is a manifestation of the eternal—including the eternal battles of attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate.

The city he lived in, with its suffering, its dirt, its injustice, its vice and degradation, was also that of his visions, crowded by artistic manifestations, including those that no one ever commissioned him to create—that he was ignored was England's loss, not his. He already lived in Golgonooza. *In fact* .



So what is Golgonooza? It is impossible to tel*precisely*. What is this oddly named city that we see appear in his Prophetic Poems, built 'upon the limits of Translucence'?

We learn it is the place that Los —the spirit of poetry, the personification in this world of creative

imagination, and a blacksmith—; and Enitharmon —his emanation, the manifestation of spiritual beauty, and a weaver—, built, and the place that they return to 'when satiated with grief. A place of compassion then, to start with.



It is spiritual fourfold London, a city which contains us, with four gates that open simultaneously to the indefinite void outside, to all the worlds that constitute humanity, and into each other. '[...] every part of the City is fourfold; & every inhabitant, fourfold.' And it is threefold within the brain, within the heart, within the loins. 'The Eyes are the South, the Nostrils are the East, the Tongue is the West, the Ear is the North'.

The city then not only contains us: it is replicated in the human body. Its gates are gates within each of us: the gates of the senses, of thoughts, of Imagination, of emotions, and of sex: the engendering of life.

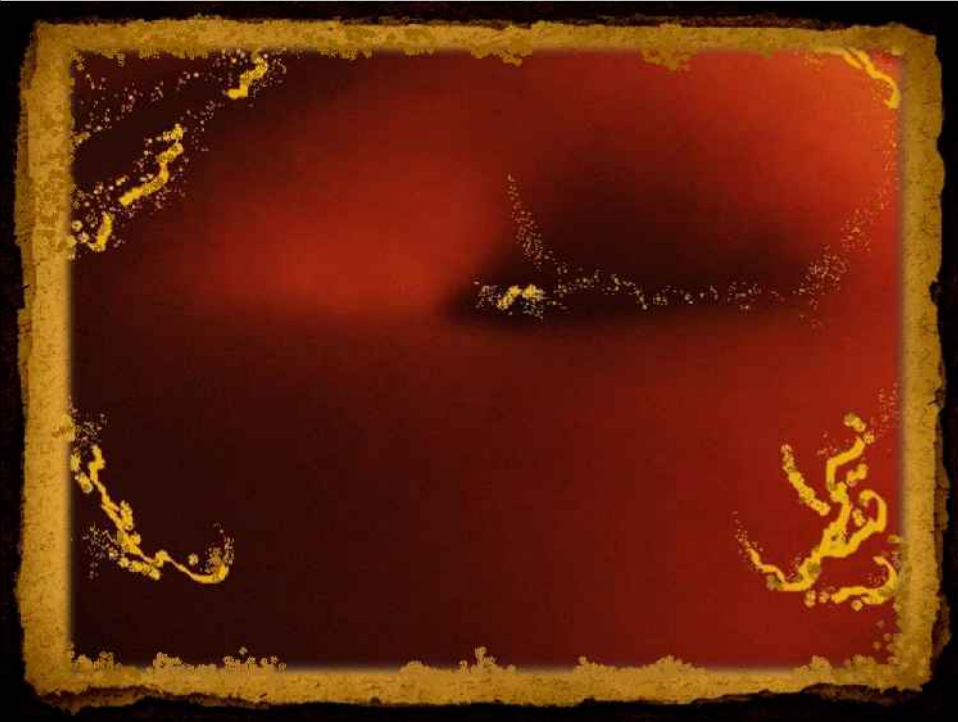
In the centre of Golgonooza are the forges of Los, where 'Ten thousand demons labour [...] Creating Continually the times & spaces of Mortal Life.' The transfiguration of matter that takes place in the furnaces mirrors the process of poetry, of creation.



It is a mirror too of our own matter; our animal essence. 'The Bellows are the Animal Lungs: the Hammers the Animal Heart: the Furnaces the Stomach for digestion.' In the centre of Golgonooza, that is the centre of creation itself, takes place the division of the sexes: 'The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom'. There also stands Luban: the female sex, leading to the golden Looms of Cathedron, which is the womb. A moat of fire surrounds all this, the Centre, *unapproachable for ever*, the mysterious core of life and creation.



Golgonooza is a complex entity, of which I can only offer a faint outline here. Some of its complexity lies in the fact that one moment we are in a city formed by the organs of the human body, and the next one we are in London-Golgonooza, sometimes even in very specific places. As usual with Blake, we must not be put off by perplexity at his apparent incoherence. There is nothing whimsical about it, and whereas much in his creative method was intuitive, intuition was something he took very seriously. There is truth in his seemingly disjointed realities.



Think about it: we inhabit a sacred city, with streets and buildings. London, Golgonooza, Jerusalem. We inhabit our body, with its own rivers, its own mountains and soft valleys. Aren't these only different facets, again, of one stone? A gem of reality: human experience. Because, in 'Los's and Enitharmon's Halls' [...] 'every human experience is contained.' Blake is reminding us that the city cannot be accessed if we have no body. That is, if we are not human.

There is an inside and an outside in human experience. 'Around Golgonooza lies a Land of pain and misery and despair and ever brooding melancholy.' 'Outside its gates the souls howl loud, waiting to be embodied.' Los hears them, and tirelessly 'labours the immortal lines upon the heavens': he traces the lines of beauty that will shape the centre of generation, both material and spiritual. And Enitharmon, his emanation, hears the howling souls as well, and tirelessly too, 'with sighs of love', [...] singing lulling cadences to drive away their despair', 'breathes forth upon the wind the spectrous dead', as she weaves their very shape.



Now the Spectres are embodied forms. 'Lovely in youth & beauty in the arms of Enitharmon.' So our created bodies are an act of love. Look at yourselves, feel the flesh you inhabit. Without this flesh we would be howling spectres lost in the land of death eternal that surrounds Golgonooza. By becoming incarnate we cease to be indefinite. We put an end to non-existence.



A city that brings forth the wonder of existence is built with no ordinary materials. 'The stones are pity, and the bricks, [...] affections: Enameld with love & kindness; the tiles engraven gold. Labour of merciful hands: the beams & rafters are forgiveness:

The mortar & cement [...], tears of honesty: [...] the floors, humility, the ceilings, devotion: the hearths, thanksgiving. [...]' So even though this holy city cannot exist without the physicality of our bodies, it cannot be conceived either, or experienced, without human feelings, and thoughts. No construction, however sublime, stands without the human breath.



In Blake's narrative, this sublime act of love—the creation of our humanity out of compassion for the formless, grieving state of our Spectres—, eventually brings about divine Incarnation. 'The Divine Countenance shone in Golgonooza, looking down the Daughters of Beulah saw with joy the bright Light and in it a Human Form and Knew he was the Saviour.'

This incarnation then is no mere taking on of human flesh in the fugitive and corruptible world of matter, but it is an act of the Imagination also (both human and divine).



When I became a trustee of the Blake Society in 2011, I conceived a farfetched idea: for us to make Blake's dream of creating public art come true. By so doing, we would be creating Golgonooza in the streets of London.

And how were we going to do that? In an excess of naiveté, I thought: we will illuminate London streets and buildings with Blake's images.



In my own imagination I had a vivid representation of what that London would look like. I knew from the very beginning that we would never be able to see that heavenly London in what we call real life: We would not be able to walk through its streets among his floating angels and immaculately naked figures. There would be no globules of blood hanging from the skies.

Pity would not descend on a white horse upon us any given day in the park to lift us in her caring arms. Los would not draw 'a line upon the walls of shining heaven', 'a permanent and lovely form inspired divinely human, Dividing into just proportions'. I knew I would never, ever see with these mortal eyes of mine what I was seeing with the eyes of my imagination, but I thought it was worth to investigate how far we could get. If we could bring forth at least a glimpse, however subtle, then passers-by would suddenly find themselves caught up in Golgonooza while still being in their every day city, and know, not with their reason, but with their body and their soul that they inhabited a space of holiness.

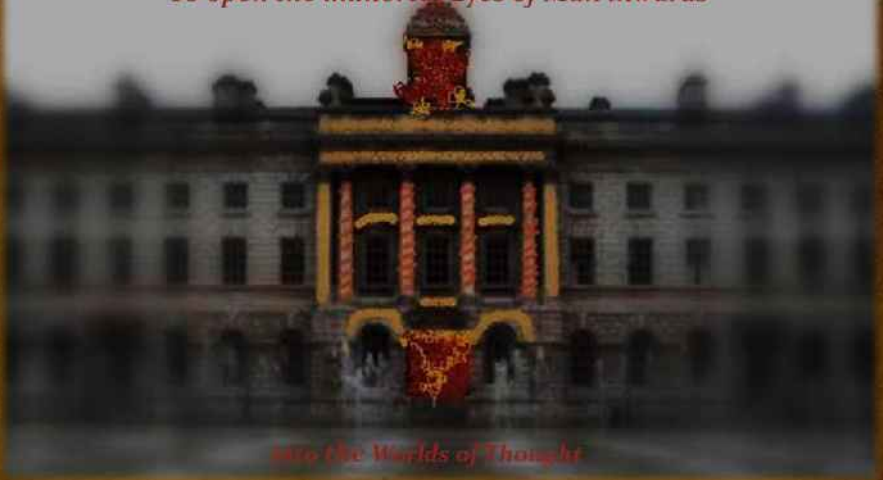


Then they'd blink, as if waking from a dream, and keep on walking, but something would have taken root in their heart, and it would grow. It might happen only in a few people. Maybe only in a single one. That would be enough, and worth the effort.

But *how* to do it?

For a year the project was dormant. When it reawoke, several people got very enthusiastic about the idea, among them Professor Clare Brant and director of Strandlines, thanks to whom we are gathered here this evening.

To open the immortal Eyes of Man inwards



into the Worlds of Thought

Carried by our vision, we thought we might be able to start our project, humbly, illuminating Somerset House's Fountain Court. Then enthusiasm started to collide against what we call normal reality. Do you know how much it actually costs to illuminate a building? How much it costs to transfigure Somerset House? Or even the smaller King's East Wing Courtyard? Or to illuminate anything at all?

The Blake Society works miracles with little resources. But there are limits. To realize this vision in any material way, we would have to concentrate most of our energies on raising money—enormous amounts of it—, and that somehow contradicted a project the source of which was *within* ; to pay so much for a fleeting glimpse of holiness. In fact, most of the illuminated buildings we see—because such fantasy is not a heavenly or unusual sight after all nowadays—are miracles of publicity, paid by commercial enterprises in order to make us awe and gape, then walk away, forgetting, with no seed of anything whatsoever sown in our heart, or mind, or loins.



That was only the beginning of our problems. The original project meant to include many art forms, not only the illumination of buildings. The aim was not to have some sort of arts festival. It was rather to use all these art forms as a vehicle for a true embodiment of our inner vision in the material world—as an offering to our fellow Londoners. Not a display. Not a showcase—an offering. A gift. A rather metaphysical business, as you can see, and very hard to convey to others. As more artists were invited, a frustrating truth started to become apparent to me: there was no shared vision of Golgonooza. It was probably not sharable. The energy dwindled, different proposals were stillborn. Spiritual four-fold London eternal was not really four-fold; it was hardly bi-dimensional. London is generous in arts festivals (we are in one at the moment); is in fact an arts festival itself, yet its inhabitants go on living a life of consumers, we consume even the art, then walk away again, forgetting. I wanted to escape that comfort zone, yet we could not agree on the most basic forms or means to give shape to our sacred city, so how could we possibly invite anybody else to walk in?



In the face of that, the illuminated buildings revealed themselves to be a matter of very little significance. We had no gates, and that was worse. Golgonooza may be well considered, after all, an utopia, and don't all utopias end up disastrously when we try to establish them in the so-called real world? I had ill-formulated an invitation to what was my intimate vision of a holy place, and all that came out of it were collapsing walls. You see, not even the invitation here, today, was right. This was to be the launch of a project that does not exist. Many other artists would have been invited, and even likely sponsors to see if we could lure them into coughing up some cash. But instead of attending the official launch of a Blake Society project, we are gathered expectantly to see if Golgonooza can be born today. Now. Indoors. And I didn't want that. I wanted our Golgonooza to be an unexpected gift to passers-by. Should I despair? Should I get up now and go, defeated? Or should I rather turn back to Blake and remember how Golgonooza is built, in 'immense labours & sorrows, ever building, ever falling'?



So let's go back there. It is not easy for Los to subdue the Spectres, those howling terrors, into taking on the human visage & the human form. They rebel and resist—because they are in pain. So the Sons of Los surround them with porches of iron & silver, 'creating form & beauty around the dark regions of sorrow, giving to airy nothing a name and a habitation Delightful: with bounds to the Infinite putting off the Indefinite Into most holy forms of Thought: (such is the power of inspiration). They labour incessant; with many tears & afflictions: Creating the beautiful House for the piteous sufferer.' So what is happening here? The disembodied souls, that are shapeless entities: stifling, paralyzing pain in the face of chaos, resist the form that will give them definition and freedom. The spirit of poetry and imagination has to force them into shape: once their pain is discernible, as much as the falsehood it comes from, it can be cast off, and the Spectres can then open up in beauty, like flowers, to reveal their true nature. It is a work of forceful compassion.



*But whatever is visible to the Generated Man
is a Creation of mercy & love*

The spirit must be ruthless in order to break through falsehood, and the pain it engenders. If the spirit doubts, true mercy will be lost, and with it courage, and with courage, freedom. So though Los builds Golgonooza in fear, he also builds it in rage & in fury, this 'Spiritual Fourfold London: continually building & continually decaying desolate'. *'I shall not cease from mental fight.'*

Could we say then that building Golgonooza is a balancing act on the tightrope of death and rebirth? (No safety nets here.) I think it is. To inhabit it we must be willing to enter the most fearful passages of darkness. And once there, we must walk through them—there is no way back. Only forward.



But, like Los, who carries the sun in his hand, we can light our way with the light of our spirit. This is the mythical descent to the underworld, to hell, that has really nothing fanciful about it. Building Golgonooza is about having the courage to enter the unknown, the indefinite, and the particularly shapeless and horrifying visages of human pain (no imaginary pain of others, but our own pain, the only gate that will lead us to true compassion) in order to conquer the realm of light. And there is some sacrifice involved in this journey, in embracing human suffering. There is nothing sanctimonious about it. All the opposite. Drawing on some of Blake's bestiary, there is in it more of the tyger, and the lark; the lion, and the lamb.

The head Sublime

The heart

Pathos

The genitals

Beauty

The hands & feet

Proportion



This is a festival about metamorphosis, transformation and conversions. So what does this tell us, in relation to our sacred city? We are gathered right now in an Anatomy Museum that, to start with, is no museum. Here, in the centre of this room, bodies were dissected until not that long ago. Human bodies that had gone through the greatest transformation of all were opened up to reveal their organs—their machinery, both in its decay and its mysterious perfection, the structure that sustains life—in the very centre of this room, just as in Golgonooza the organs of the body are contained in the centre. So we are in the city more than metaphorically.

*every moment lost
is a moment that cannot be redeemed*

*every moment lost
is a moment that cannot be redeemed*

*every moment lost
is a moment that cannot be redeemed*

*every moment lost
is a moment that cannot be redeemed*

*every moment lost
is a moment that cannot be redeemed*

Perhaps everything has conspired to bring us here and make us realize that in order to build Golgonooza, in order to inhabit it, we must be ready to face what we are, then be ready to change, to cast off our skin, our Spectre. Our selfhood. To be ready to face death, and its trail of fears and misery, so that we are able to live and truly inhabit this world.

Golgonooza is a city of the arts. To William Blake the Holy Ghost, Christ himself, are our mental gifts, our gifts of imagination. Art is a vehicle for our transfiguration. So we cannot expect to remain unchallenged, unchanged. Golgonooza cannot be about presenting to the world the nice pretty or clever things we do, for them to be admired, with our Selfhood (our name, our prestige, our CV) neatly attached to them, or about passively accepting what is presented to us and add it to the list of all the things we think we know. We must rather be ready to go beyond our limits, inwardly and outwardly, and to be metamorphosed in the process.



How did you come in here, today? What was London like? What did you see? What did you hear? What did you feel? Who were you? What other gazes met your eye? What joys and sorrows of others brushed past you? How did the light touch you? How did the sky look upon you?



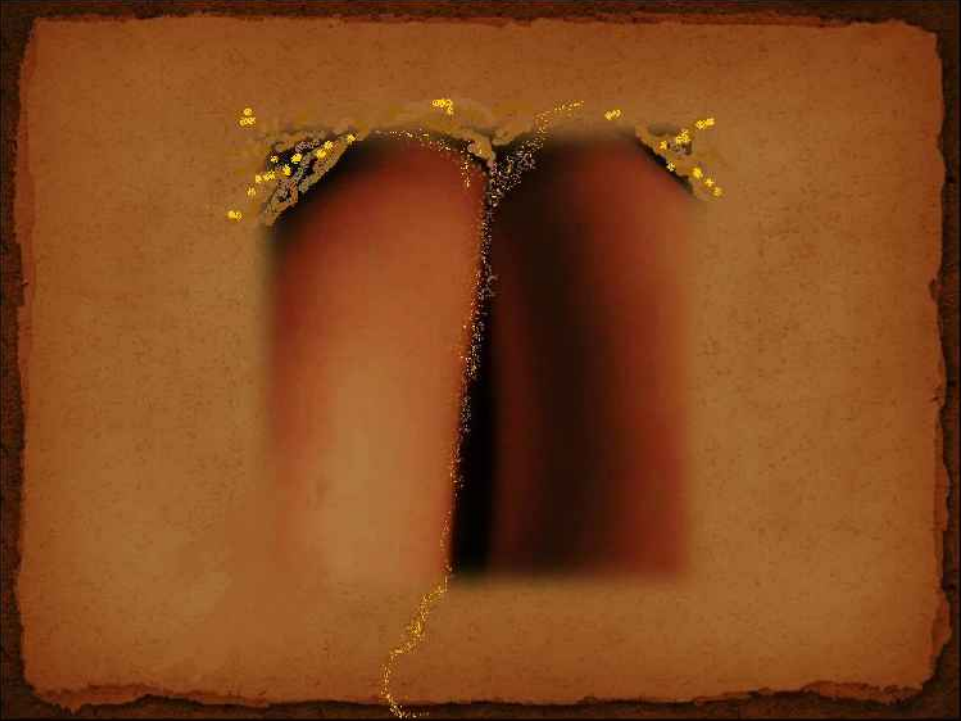
Going back to the Blake Society's Golgonooza project, when Somerset House, then the East Wing courtyard, started receding out of our reach, we still wanted to take over South Molton Street, where Blake wrote what he saw and heard, with the steadfast support of Catherine. We would take that narrow street of commerce and vanity, and the whole of it would be Cathedron, the centre of generation. We would embody Los, Enitharmon, the weavers giving their flesh-garments to the souls, and the souls themselves. And yet again it didn't work. Only, briefly, in our imaginations. Golgonooza indeed kept on eternally building and falling. My despair was perhaps unfair. But despair followed nevertheless. Briefly.

Let's go back to the idea of giving ourselves for something we believe to enfold some truth. Transformation. Sacrifice. We are not talking here of the sacrifice of Atonement, a concept Blake abhorred, as it carries along the ideas of sin, of punishment, and therefore sterile death. In Blake sacrifice is something quite different. It implies creation. The birth pains necessary for embodiment. To actually inhabit this sacred city, we must be willing to *exist* .



So little by little, much aided by the spur of Golgonooza's playfully appointed major (we had a major now, but no city), Tim Heath, otherwise known as the Blake Society's chairman, the thought crept through me that utopias fail when we try to implement them because they usually become an imposition upon others. Upon other people's vision. For this journey to work we would have no other choice but to attempt to project with unwavering faith the most personal vision of all, one that carried us beyond our known selves and forced us to understand how Golgonooza relates to a London that does not have to be materially the capital city of England at all, but a place of vision, and to our own body, our own self that gives itself for Albion—that means, for humanity.

Blake writes: 'Travellers from Eternity pass outward to Satan's seat, but travellers to Eternity, pass inward to Golgonooza.' 'Loud the Souls howl round the Porches of Golgonooza Crying, O God deliver us to the Heavens or to the Earths'. And aren't we all silently howling outside sacredness' gates, calling for deliverance, on the very verge of translucence... a translucence that we do not believe in?



What does it mean to become the Sons and Daughters of poetry? 'Every one a translucent Wonder: a Universe within Increasing inwards [...]: Starry & glorious: and they, every one in their bright loins have a beautiful golden gate which opens into the vegetative world: And every one a gate of rubies & all sorts of precious stones In their translucent hearts, which opens into the vegetative world: And every one a gate of iron dreadful and wonderful In their translucent heads, which opens into the vegetative world.' Our body open into eternity.



You certainly cannot invite other people to embody or experience that, let alone compel them. We inhabit Golgonooza when we learn to inhabit our own existence, and that is an individual experience, even if Golgonooza is a city.

I realized thus, little by little, that while I kept set upon my futile attempt at imposing my vision of Golgonooza onto others, I was living in it, at least during some untouchable, sacred moments of each day that, paraphrasing Blake, Satan could not find. With sacrifice and all.

Joys
impregnate



My Golgonooza has several levels. One is London, the city I have chosen to live in out of the pure phantasmagoria of words, this alien city of aliens, ruthless, of so much hardship and loneliness. My vision. The ghostly moon one morning high up in a pure September sky crossed by the white tracks of an airplane, while waiting for the Housing Benefits office to open; then a woman crying to the receptionist, me thinking, 'I know just how she feels; oh aren't we all frail.' Then an afterthought: 'And aren't we all blessed.'



Sorrrows

bring forth

Discovering that all this had a strange “last moment” quality, present in my alertness, in my even stranger sense of complete freedom out of what seemed to be wholesale loss. Later on that day a thought struck me: ‘To see Golgonooza one must be willing to die.’ And then I realized why this project had not been working. It couldn’t, until each one of us involved understood this most simple fact. So I withdrew, and saw, and heard.



My experience. What I came to follow here, what I left everything behind for. It is me.

It is my body. The borders are blurred, London goes through me and I go through it. The words are written running in my blood through my veins. They are written on my skin. In the organs that silent and unseen grow old and fight me ceaselessly at the time that they sustain me. On the flesh that grows old too, that has pleasure and hurts, that has been the vessel in which I have sailed throughout this whole life of mine. Every single globule of blood is Golgonooza. Everything I hear and see, everyday. I am the sacred city.



In Blake, the relationship of Religion, Life and Art is inextricably weaved. To him there is therefore no utilitarian goal in the artistic endeavour, nothing *extra* to be derived from it. It is an urgent and transcendent manifestation of our divine humanity. In everything that is truly urgent and transcendent there is some sort of violence involved. Blake knew this very well and his work turns constantly around opposition and the continual strife it entails. 'Without contraries is no progression.'



Talking about the moon watched over London, what would have been the experience of the very first men on Earth when watching the moon, before the concept of a 'satellite' even existed? If the theories of modern scientists are right, that mysterious companion that has been hanging on our sky for millions and millions of years came into existence out of great violence: the crash of a celestial body against our relatively new formed Earth. Then beauty was created. A celestial body of beauty.

Isn't it terribly Blakean? Is the moon the emanation of the Earth? Was it that kind of violence and separation? And would we be better off if the Earth then joined the moon again, in communion, instead of contemplating its beauty from afar in eternal longing and writing poetry and painting pictures about it?



It is a tricky question. The beauty and violence of art exist because we are human, and thus imperfect and divided. Art is necessary to bring us closer to our essence, but it is only a reaching out, it will never be reunion, and we know it.

And yet, Art is God Himself in the heart of man: a God that knows of longing and even despair—as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane, in that most solemn moment between the Last Supper (communion through his flesh and blood) and the Crucifixion. Faith itself, after all, is also a reaching out. Art is the most individual of endeavours and at the same time it is the casting off of our selfhood, so the aim is to look within, then to inhabit ourselves in nakedness, really, free from all chains. That is why Golgonooza is no arts festival, but the most intimate and at the same time the most rapturous and transgressing experience of ourselves: breaking through our own limits.

Imagination is not a state



It is the Human Existence itself

And yet here we are, in an Arts and Humanities Festival —don't think I can't appreciate the irony. I myself am a typical impoverished author hoping to have her latest books published and even eat a bit from them. Even William Blake was a commercial engraver also trying to feed himself, and he raged often when his genius was not recognized. We are only human and we cannot live in rapture 24 hours a day, every day. But we can still try to build and inhabit Golgonooza, constantly, if our lives are to have some meaning. Art in its most vital sense does that for us. And its fruits remain (at least in the modest scope of time that human history can encompass.) Our individual glories and tragedies matter only to us as individuals and to those near us, and disappear when we die. William Blake's anger, and hunger, don't matter much now beyond the anecdotic. But his work does, it has gathered us here today, and there is holiness in it.



Meister Eickhart, in his sermon 101, makes a pronouncement of utmost purity towards the union of the human and the divine. No images. Silence, stillness, are the way for God to work within us, for the Son to incarnate in us, for us to give birth to God. Blake's conviction that divinity dwells within us and we are therefore divine as well was not new. It is essential to all mystic traditions. For some of them, this stillness means also the rejection of the senses, of the body. To be not pure, but purity, and be no one, nothing, in order to be blessed, and become the blessing itself.



Other approaches, on the other hand, reach similar outcomes —namely, ecstasy—via what would seem to be the opposite path: an acute awareness of our body being here, of its perceptions, of what our senses say to us; for the body is indeed the vehicle of the soul in this plane of existence. Our thinking and our emotions resonate in it; there is no enmity between the flesh and the spirit.

I am no theologian, these are all very awkward musings, but they underlie nevertheless my own approach to Golgonooza. For I believe that William Blake reached intuitively an insight of the actual incarnation of divinity

that is *really* that —not by rejecting images (*any* sensory images) or the senses through which we receive them, but via an alert surrender to them, so that they stop being what we think them to be and become windows. Doors of perception. So that we can see, as Blake wrote in the *Everlasting Gospel*, ‘through’, not with the eye. And then find reality. Disturbing, uncontrollable reality.



So, even though I wish I knew in my soul of the purity of Meister Eckhart, as I seek my inner paths to ecstasy in this life (and art can certainly be a form of prayer), I am still very linked to the body. And to images. I am an author. I have chosen the path of the artist, which is in essence more mundane, as we don't tend to actually walk away from the world, but rather to immerse ourselves in it. I choose to explore the path to union as Blake did: through images (visual, verbal, sonorous), and instead of withdrawing into the mountain or the desert, the monastery, far from the maddening crowds... I came to London. Divinity is here. It's all around us.

MY HOUSES ARE THOUGHT

THE ONLY NOTION IS THE IMAGINATION
WHICH CAN NOT BE WIPED AWAY

MY FAITH IS SO HE SEES **AFFECT**

As a man is

IN REGIONS OF HUMANITY

WRITE IN SOUTH MOLTON STREET

WHAT I BOTH HEAR

WISDOM



IN REGIONS OF HUMANITY

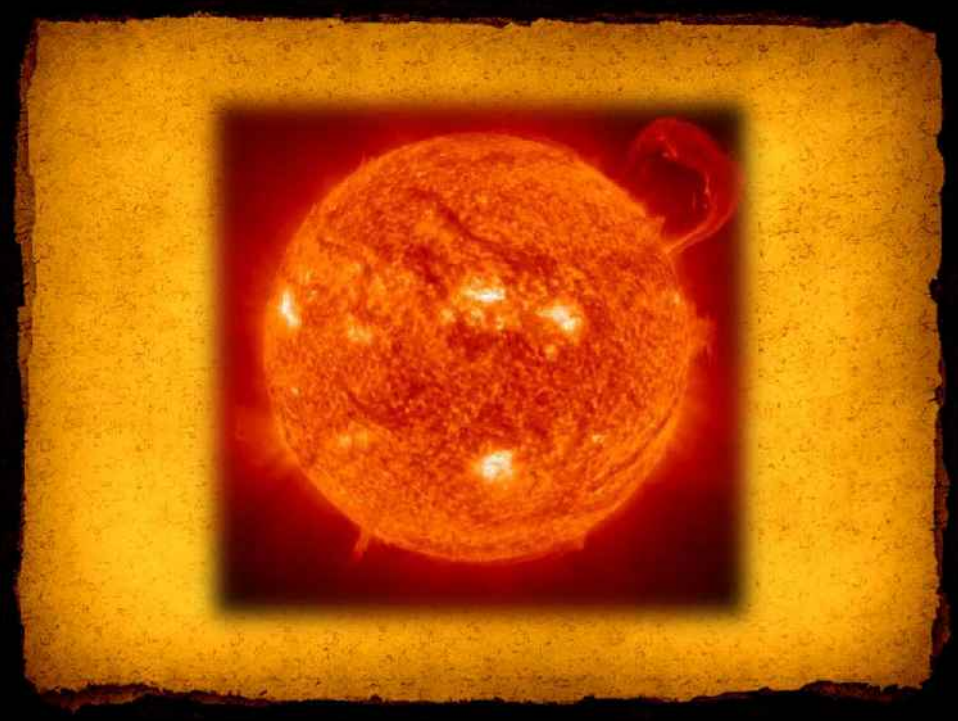
IN LONDON'S OPENING STREETS

We are going round, not in circles but a spiral. We've reached Cathedron again—the Cathedron we, the flawed first team of Golgonooza founders wanted to create in South Molton Street. The street itself, as we have seen, was now out of bounds. So then I thought of reducing Cathedron to the house in that street where Blake lived. A place where vision and freedom have been sought, incarnated, across time. I conceived a new, in my imagination beautiful idea of the building's gate being the Gate of Los, and the building Cathedron, both furnaces and looms, pouring beauty and some sort of blessing out of the windows onto the unwary souls wandering out there.

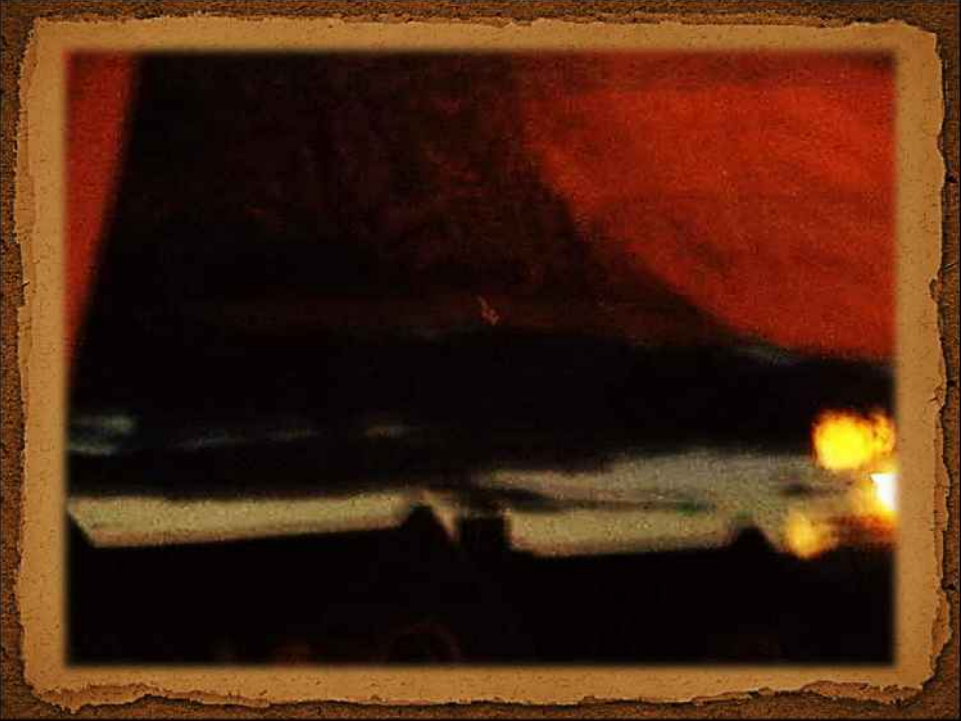


Only that by then I was truly alone in this. I was left in Golgonooza with my own body only. So I was challenged again.

‘Stop talking, and make Golgonooza manifest, on your own. Now.’ Now means *now*, all of us gathered here, today, and me... talking. And what should this manifestation of Golgonooza be then? Perhaps the oldest of all. To know yourself. Then to strip yourself of your Self. Then to be prepared to die.



And what does this mean? Well, exactly that. Blake's work and vision were about the eternal dialogue of contraries. That includes of course life and death. Annihilation and incarnation. The city is in perpetual construction and destruction. The dialogue in Blake is a kind of dance... To incarnate means to accept the sacrifice. To be the lamb, and to be in glory.




All sacrifices involve pain. Blake knew that, and not only because pain is inevitable. He sacrificed a lot for his art's sake. Not only because he believed in what he was doing, to 'follow his dreams' or any such self-complacent nonsense. He did so because he knew art to be essential to human life, to be one means of becoming real, of being truly human —and divine. There was nothing sterile in Blake's pain (in the sacrifice of creature comforts, material riches, or of acceptance and belonging in the herd, that, let's face it, is always reassuring even when we express disgust at it.) If he rejected the idea of Christ's death as atonement, it was in rejection of the emptiness of sterile pain enacted over and over again upon the same barren altars. But he knew pain to be a source of energy, of immense creative power if we are courageous when we enter its gates. So the sacrifice is not the goal, but the means, the path towards transfiguration.



And joy.

In that realization lies much of Blake's radical spirit. What offended so many of his contemporaries was the alert and courageous acceptance of pain, and the simultaneous naked, innocent, child-like surrender to delight. Seen this way, to *celebrate* a sacrifice really makes sense. In body and soul.



You become what you behold

So we must pay attention to what we privilege in the experience availed through our senses in order to touch eternity. We choose what we see, what we allow to take root, to have power over us. As Blake said, we become what we behold. *Wedo* . And on that choice lies the difference between sterile sacrifice and sacrifice leading to transfiguration.



So now I am here, inhabiting Golgonooza, having pondered on this for months, years! before today and now exposing before you, perhaps sceptical strangers, some of my most intimate lineaments. I tried to invite all Londoners to Golgonooza. I failed, over and over. I may have fallen into Urizen's trap, trying to impose my vision, to design and control. Yet I have not been discouraged. I know that on pondering on that human source of error, our neurotic fixation with reason, Blake created one of his best loved images –The Ancient of Days.



Blake talked about the mind forged manacles. There are chains all around us. In human life. In the streets of London. In my own body. But we have talked about a spiral and on one turn my body is London. My body is Golgonooza. For yes, I did come here today seeking freedom.



So what happened to that extravagant project of making Golgonooza visible in the streets of London, illuminating it all with heavenly Blakean images? Who knows. New facets of Golgonooza may still be born out from all this. We may even illuminate something... some piece of stone, some grain of sand. But today we are not gathered after all to launch such a project, and there are no potential sponsors among us, because we must start by the beginning: finding the foundation stone, and that is only to be found within us.



I deliver myself from the manacles of reason, of the material city out there—here. Here in London, I attempt to follow Los, who puts on his golden sandals to walk from mountain to mountain. I am the city, I am Golgonooza, I am the founding stone. And so are you. The vision is within you.



In the time of this festival devoted to transformation, in the pain-bearing space of this dissecting theatre transformed into a holy city—not far from where William Blake died on most humble dwellings on Fountain

Court, off the Strand—, you are now invited to be ready to die. *You become what you behold* . At the beginning of this talk you picked an image, your own sacred token. Now you can eat it, and make it yours.

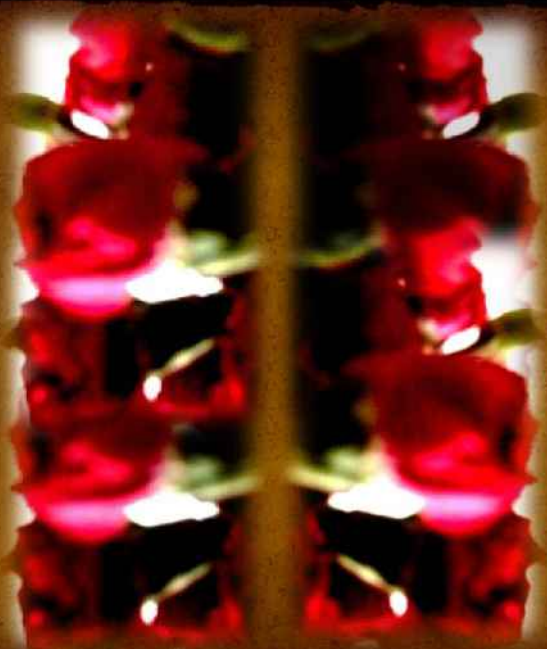
At this point the song "Dix",
by Mexican band Santa
Sabina, started playing in the
Anatomy Theatre while more
images were projected on the
screens and the assistants ate
their Blakean image: the
Naked Human Form Divine.

You can listen to the song by
clicking here while you watch
the last images.

(The link is the rectangle below)





















Additional Credits:

*William Blake's portrait by Thomas
Phillips, oil on canvas, 1807,
* National Portrait Gallery, London*

Photo of the Sun: ESA/NASA/SOHO