

**INTERCONNECTEDNESS: AFFECT, MEDIA THEORY, AND THE SUBJECT
OF EMOTION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY NATURE POETRY
(WORDSWORTH, DICKINSON, AND KEATS)**

by

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Abstract

My focus in reading William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson is on the links among sensation, emotion, and subjectivity. I argue that nineteenth century nature poets challenged ideologically bounded agency, as constructed in political and religious discourses, in an experiential turn to affect that shifted the weight of attention from intellect to sensation. This modulation, from discursive to somatic attention, shifted the terms of political agency and the contexts for imagining individual freedom.

Recent affect and media theory, too, challenges bounded agency, at one and the same time critiquing both the notion of a core human essence circumscribed by discourse and the ‘disembodied’ implications of abstract postmodern models of subject-formation (the “culture doctrine”) reliant on a categorical division between discourse and sensation. In effect, although postmodern theory contested the tendency in western thought to circumscribe a privileged, discursive, disembodied human essence, existing in what Foucault called a ‘state of exception’ from naked life in its ‘state of exclusion,’ recent theory continues to grapple with postmodernisms perpetuation of that tendency.

Affect theory, in particular, potentiates a reexamination of the embodied poetics of figures such as Wordsworth and Dickinson. Yet, perhaps more importantly, nineteenth century nature poets may permit a revision of affect theory, in terms of phenomenological interconnectedness rather than informatics. Indeed, close reading of these poets may rekindle our interest in a turn to experience, rather than analysis: a relaxation of discourse little known in western thought (except in poetics), but more familiar to the east.

The aim of this paper is to take us all the way to an encounter at the heart of Wordsworth and Dickinson: an encounter with interconnectedness, as a visitational fullness of sensation akin to music. In brief, we will examine how nineteenth century nature poets prompt us to break the tacit taboo against relaxing the bounds of so-called paradise (bounded agency, or bios) to experience the mind not as constituted by discourse, but as participant in phenomenological interconnectedness (zoe). Instead of an abstract spirit, they prompt us to entertain a visitor little heard of in the west: *material attention*, the forbidden fruit of unqualified receptivity to sensation.

Though both nineteenth century nature poets and current media theorists share a common source thread, in the affective philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, they address opposite sides of the spectrum of the potential of affect. Where the nineteenth century nature poet sees an opportunity to “counteract” the “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” and “extend the domain of the sensible,”ⁱ the media theorist forewarns of an infiltration of information into biological life (‘bioinformatics’) by affective rather than discursive strategies, and of the “real subsumption”ⁱⁱ of biological subjects.

In both turns to affect, the bounded agent proves either more inter-relational or more serial than in received conceptions of the liberal enlightened humanist subject. For the Romantic nature poet, bounded agency proves permeable and inter-relational in the relaxation of the discursive center into sensation (communion/reunion). For the media

theorist, bounded agency proves serial (a product of “machinic assemblage”ⁱⁱⁱ) in the breakdown of categorical divisions between life and information (infiltration/rupture).

Pivotal to my argument is that in the Wordsworthian view, the turn to affect (exposure to the sensory impingements of natural phenomena and bodily emotion) has deconditioning effects, in stark contrast to current media theory, which notes affect’s creative potential but stresses its availability for biomediation and bioinformatics: Foucauldian “biopower.”

Reading key texts by Wordsworth, including *Preface to Lyrical Ballads (PLB)*, *Tintern Abbey*, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, *The Prelude*, and *The Excursion*, I consider the philosophical exploration of affect theory and political agency in Massumi, Sedgwick, Noonan, Braidotti, Agamben, Clough, Deleuze and Latour; the cognitive theories of Verela, Johnson, and Damasio; the radical science of Sheldrake and Bohm; and the commentary of literary critics, notably M.H. Abrams and John Beer, on Wordsworth’s sense of Being and consciousness.

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Preface

1.

My work on paradise is an attempt to unravel a mystery. That is: why did nineteenth century poets invest in so idealized a real estate as paradise while standing, as it were, knee-deep in the currents of climate change, globalization, and biopower?

Paradise, I suggest, was their way of addressing what Brian Massumi, in *Parables For the Virtual*, calls the “primacy of the affective,” or the “asignifying” aspect of autonomic attention that, addressing itself to an “incorporeal materialism” (Foucault), precedes construction in discourse, and can thus be understood as organic as opposed to mechanical. In brief, nineteenth century nature poets looked to a *sense of interconnectedness* available at all times to what Wordsworth called a “more than ordinary organic sensibility”¹: a sense of paradise that grounded epistemology in ontology; ethical agency, and indeed subjectivity, in a phenomenological sense of interrelationship; apprehended not in abstract ideas or in discursive processes but *in and through sensation*, or what I will call *material attention*, or *somatic attention*.

This is not to say that “posthuman” media theorists, inflected by French theory, are very optimistic about our potential for “affective escape,” or the possibility thus held open for subjectivity to be more than “produced” as a mere social effect. Nor is this to say that nineteenth century nature poets hoped to escape from the qualified and conventional into a pure domain of raw, prereflexive experience.

Still, the anxiety of the machine and the melancholia it provokes may have motivated poets to bring into sharp relief our affective responses to nature, and the alternatives these responses offer to thinking about subjectivity through technological metaphors. By contrast, media theorists tentatively embrace technological metaphors for their efficacy in breaking notions of biological boundedness.

Both groups, Romantic and postmodern, look to a subjectivity in excess of boundedness, the former through relaxation and reunion/communion/interfusion with a natural, material universe filled with a an active, visitational interconnectedness (the restoration of zoe or nature, as interrelationship, from its status of nonentity), the latter through rupture of the categoric divide between organic and inorganic, material “nature” and information (the infiltration of bios or discourse/information, as assemblage, into the once “pure” and “unmediated” domain of nature).

At root, both accounts emphasize the potential of affect to cross categorical bounds and classical divisions: matter and mind, unqualified sensation and qualified consciousness, nature and culture, discourse and naked life. While the former finds cause to celebrate an

¹ Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.

interrelationship that exceeds the *social* and moves through the material universe, the latter finds cause to criticize vestigial enlightenment notions of a bounded, privileged, *natural* human essence. Two different root metaphors are at work: the one interconnectedness, the other seriality.

In the course of this thesis, we will contrast these two turns to affect, not to disqualify one or the other, but to highlight the ongoing interaction between two forms of attention (somatic and discursive), and to investigate both as means of encountering the potential of affect. The primary difference between the affective turn in nature poetry and in media theory is that the former leads to an interconnectedness full of relationship and the latter leads to a non-unitary “machinic assemblage”^{iv} prone to conditioning.

2.

Paradise in nineteenth century poetry is related less to the aspect of subjectivity constituted in discourse and informatics, and more to its affective or somatic aspects. *This emphasis on mind in intimate connection (even communion) with matter draws into question tacit assumptions of discursive society about the bounded nature of agency.* To advocate feeling in an increasingly mechanized world, the Romantics had to trespass discourses (scientific, religious, political) that construct feeling and set its bounds.

The Miltonic sense of a “paradise lost” led the Romantics to a strange reversal: tasting the forbidden fruit (socially prohibited excess of feeling/melancholy) *to access paradise*, or the sense of interconnectedness. Tacit proscriptions discouraged examining the ontological anxiety springing from social identity; but the Romantic sought melancholy and discomfort, as the symptom of a constructed boundedness that might die into a luxuriant sense of relationship.

With the Romantics, there was a return to *sensory* attention in excess of discursive construction, described by Wordsworth as a project to “extend the domain of the sensible.”^v This willingness to feel, rather than to *know*, the detail and difference of the material world anticipated twentieth century reception of eastern thought (particularly notions of “valid cognition” and “emptiness of independent self-existence”) as well as movements toward process-over-structure in physics, philosophy, and psychology. Recent critical conversations in affect theory, critical humanism, and cognitive poetics return to notions of embodiment: the sensory, experiential, material, affective aspect of attention.

Romantic attention constitutes a voluntary, personal breaking of boundedness; not a paradise lost, but a sense of interconnectedness accessed in the relaxation of the discursive center (bios) *into* feeling and sensation (zoe). For Wordsworth and Dickinson, this blissful interconnectedness (described as a rich return to the five senses experienced as a visitational interconnectedness akin to music) is not a matter of belief, but of material

(experiential) attention. If a relational agency in excess of convention is experienced, it is because the subject constructed in discourse is temporarily quiescent: the discursive center (and its “linguistic survival”) relaxes into sensory attention.

Repeatedly in nineteenth century poetry, ontological anxiety is resolved in a calm receptivity to patterns of unlabeled phenomena. More is contested in this movement toward radical trust in sensation than Cartesian boundedness, with its categorical divide between mind and matter, or (in Foucault’s terms) between bios and zoe. Extended attention leads to a sense of extended responsibility – interconnectedness – with powerful ethical and political ramifications. Romantic subjectivity – and its concerns for paradise (or felt interconnectedness) – anticipated issues we grapple with today: climate change, biomediation, and what Latour had described as the collapse of a “modern Constitution” that instituted a Great Divide between culture and nature: the no longer tenable presumption of a modern impunity to represent “purification” while concealing “mediation.”^{vi}

Exploring the tension between media theory and nature poetry, and between conditioning and relationship, I focus on Wordsworth’s concern that, in our tacitly technologized cultural metaphors for thinking about our bodies and subjectivities, we least reverence and respect interconnectedness in its most apparent home: our own minds.

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If the labours of Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself.

William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

And never for each other shall we feel
As we may feel till we have sympathy
With nature in her forms inanimate
With objects such as have no power to hold
Articulate language. In all forms of things
There is a mind.

William Wordsworth

Better -- than Music! For I -- who heard it --
I was used -- to the Birds -- before --
This -- was different -- 'Twas Translation --
Of all tunes I knew -- and more --

Emily Dickinson

“Is the body as linked to a particular subject position anything more than a local embodiment of ideology? Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very ‘construction,’ but seems to prescript every possible signifying and counter-signifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of pre-determined terms? How can the grid itself change?” (Massumi, 2)

Introduction - Broken Bounds

Affect in excess of the bounded subject: tensions between interconnectedness and bioinformatics (the subject of emotion and the biomediated body) in nineteenth century nature poetry and twenty-first century media theory

“truth... carried alive into the heart by passion”

Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads

i. Paradise poetics and “bio-informatics” – two different turns to affect-in-excess-of-boundedness – two different enfleshed subjects

Contemporary criticism, over the past decade or two, has been attempting to redress the abstract, disembodied implications of postmodern theory. What is at issue, really, is whether subjectivity is entirely a cultural construct (‘the Subject’) or whether there is a non-culturally constructed ground of interrelationship accessible to relaxed attention. The goal of this thesis will be to look at the nineteenth century nature poetry (paradise poetics) of Wordsworth and Dickinson, in its turn to landscape, mood, and, above all, experience or sensation. In particular, the *interfused* Romantic subjectivity explored and professed in the poetry of William Wordsworth (famously critiqued by Keats for its *Egotistical Sublime*), may present a persuasive alternative to current micro-molecular or serial theorizations of subjectivity in the rupture of its boundedness.

Notwithstanding Keats’ critique, Wordsworth’s poetics (profoundly influenced by his early collaborations with Coleridge) constitute a major revision of Milton’s central metaphor of a paradise lost due to an attraction to the forbidden fruit, “Mother of

science!” (*Paradise Lost*, Book IX, 680). Whereas for the Romantics paradise, as a sense of interconnectedness that exceeded conventional bounds of identity, *was* the forbidden fruit, for Milton the forbidden fruit represented enlightenment hubris in its tendency to privilege intellectual and “discursive” (human) reason over emotional and “intuitive” (angelic) reason. By Wordsworth’s time, the terms were reversed. Tasting, touching, feeling - trusting in the senses, directly experienced - lay at the heart of the Romantic countercultural revolt; and in this sense the Romantics were no mere reactionaries against the enlightenment, but true proponents of the scientific spirit, ready to seek valid cognition rather than accept the proscriptions of authorities. They introduced the anti-hero, whose flaws, lapses, and darkneses (as in Keats’ *Hyperion* poems), led them to “feel the giant agony of the world” and rejoice in “sickness not ignoble” (*Fall of Hyperion*): a sense of profound melancholy (symptomatic of discursive agency divorced from feeling) which, tasted, felt, trusted, relaxed discursive identity into a sense of interconnectedness. Paradoxically, and ironically, then, these emotive poets of love and relationship were *revolutionary* and *heretical*; they found an emblem in Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods, and in whose mold Blake cast Satan in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, informing us that Jehovah was a tyrant, and that Milton “was a true poet and of the devil’s party without knowing it.”

Why did paradise involve *eating the forbidden fruit* for poets after Milton, beginning with Romantics like Wordsworth and Blake? To avoid convolutions, we may simply point to the fact that their *fruit* was not the same as Milton’s. Their forbidden fruit was not science and analytic reason but *sensation*, emotion, a trust in faculties that are ‘non-rational’ – somatic rather than discursive. Arguably, the Romantics were responding to

an industrialization that fostered a growing rift between calculation and sentiment, mechanism and feeling, the head and the heart. As expressed over half a century after the publication of Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* in the 1854 Dickens novel *Hard Times*:

It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions.

If there are two versions of the fruit, there are also two versions of paradise. Milton's fruit, as scientific knowledge, renders our nature unsuitable for paradise, and forces our exile beyond the garden's bounded walls. The Romantic fruit, as attention to sensation (an intoxication with the material universe), gives access to an interconnectedness that dissolves categoric divides. This is especially interesting if one looks at the Old Iranian roots of the word "Paradise"²: "walled (enclosure)", from *peri-* pairi- "around" + *-diz* "to create, make".³ From the roots of the word, it appears that *boundedness* makes – and is – paradise.

For Milton, science, and discursive reason, threatens a salutary boundedness in the garden of undissected relationship. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is defined by his skepticism,

² The word "paradise" ultimately derives from an Old Persian word that is currently pronounced as *pardis* (پَرْدِیس). It entered English from the French *paradis*, inherited from the Latin *paradisus*, from Greek *parádeisos* (παράδεισος), and ultimately from Avestan *pairi.daêza*. [1] The literal meaning of this Eastern Old Iranian language word is "walled (enclosure)", [1] from *peri-* pairi- "around" + *-diz* "to create, make". The word is not attested in other Old Iranian languages (these may however be hypothetically reconstructed, for example as Old Persian **paridayda*-)... <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradise>

³ <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradise>>

sophistry, and analytic bent. Indeed, the fullness of his character is achieved by the contradiction he embodies. He actively prefers hell to heaven: conscious as he repeatedly reveals himself to be that his rational being depends on an unconditional ground in which he refuses to trust, he asserts his free-standing autonomy in full knowledge of the fact that such separateness and independence means eternal torment. Yet, ironically then, Satan enforces upon himself a more invidious kind of boundedness: a sense of separateness from an underlying ground of relationship, as the owner of a privileged and circumscribed faculty of reason.

Indeed, Satan's rational boundedness – his refusal to trust in a deeper fabric of relationship, and his self-inflicted sense of isolation – is the very boundedness that Wordsworth and other nineteenth century nature poets sought to remedy. Satan's boundedness is not that of paradise, the garden where one might experience interconnectedness, but that of hell. Discrete identity. Rational consciousness that sees the world divided into component units. Technologized. Satan's army invents the first machines – war machines.

Yet, (the paradox thickens), to remedy seriality, the Romantics appealed to the Lucifer/Prometheus figure: poetic attention, in its turn to sensation, as the eating of a forbidden fruit of interconnectedness, the “sweet lore... which nature brings.”⁴ Ironically, the search for a remedy was, owing to an orthodoxy in place by the nineteenth century,⁵⁶ *heretical*, a trespass of the limits of bounded, rational agency.⁷ By contrast,

⁴ Wordsworth, *PLB*.

⁵ Though, Agamben argues (after Foucault) in *Homo Sacer*, this division between bios (discursive reason) and zoe (natural sweetness) began to be instituted in Roman law, and goes back to the early definition of citizenship (legal status as an entity) in a nation-state.

for Milton, Eve and Adam's obvious boundedness between heaven and hell, within the gates of Eden, was a salutary boundedness, founded on nature, feeling, and the trust in a deeper ground of interrelationship.

Here we may locate one of the most fruitful paradoxes in English poetry.^{8vii} The wall around the garden, the bios (discursive reason) that is supposed to contain zoe (natural sweetness)⁹ appears to have become, by Wordsworth's day, an end in itself, bounding only seriality (endorsed by Milton's Satan) - instead of protecting the domain of interrelationship from an analytic "intellect." As Wordsworth put it, "we murder to dissect."¹⁰ By Wordsworth's time, the purpose of poetry was not to repaint for us a paradise lost, but to lead us to break our boundedness, turning from codifying, discursive attention to a somatic, experiential attention that feels its interrelationship:¹¹

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;

⁶ And actively resisted in the "sentimental" literature of the period, with its fundamental contrast between the "cold head" and the "warm heart."

⁷ As John Beer points out in *Romantic Consciousness*, after the bloody turn of the French Revolution, Wordsworth and Coleridge began to take pains to tone down their "animism" and to distance themselves from ideas like mesmerism tainted by association with free-thinking Paris.

⁸ "Apotheosis and Transgression in Miltonic and Romantic verse: the clear religion of heaven and the medicine of hell," William Rubel, 2008.

⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

¹⁰ Wordsworth, *The Tables Turned*.

¹¹ In Appendix C, 10.1, I offer further examination of Milton's concern for a religious understanding grounded in the heart - rather than codified religion.

Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

(The Tables Turned, 21-32)

The question we must ask is whether analytic reason can, truly, so deconstruct the unitary experience of the subject, and its sense of interrelationship, as to lead to the postmodern condition: with its exploded boundedness, and its break with a so-called core, essential human nature - that is to say, its turn to seriality, assemblage, and construction. Has paradisiacal boundedness, in Milton's (felt) sense, been soundly discredited, and with it Adam and Eve's unproblematical sense of privileged existence, of originality and dearness to the universe? Or, in the relaxation of boundedness (in Wordsworth's *intellected* sense) into sensation, is there the potential for a relational return to the senses, in excess of discourse and in excess of construction?

Influenced by Baruch Spinoza, whose work is one of the source threads for current conversation in affect theory, Wordsworth writes of "one impulse" and of the "sweet" lore of nature, accessible not to intellect but to the "heart that watches and receives."^{viii} Hence, we may begin to imagine a debate between Wordsworth, in his turn to affect, and the turn to affect in recent media theory. For media theorists, though biomediation has broken the body's sense of boundedness as an organism, and opened it to a radical experience of affect (beyond the biological), it has also removed the categoric division between biology and information, exposing the body to a bioinformatics that is completely transparent to power (or political construction). In other words, media theorists, even as they take up affect as a medium of subjectivity that exceeds cultural (discursive) construction, view the rupture of boundedness very much in Miltonic terms:

it leads to a science and informatics that precludes any kind of non-serial fabric of interrelationship. By contrast, Wordsworth's turn to affect relaxes the boundedness of the discursive center, and encounters a passion (Latin root - "pathos" - suffering) active and moving in all materiality.

ii. Critical background – rethinking the body in Canada – Massumi and Noonan

Recent thinkers, like Canadian media theorist Brian Massumi, have looked to Deleuzian models of affect and virtuality to bring subjectivity back into a conversation dominated by the “culture doctrine” - an overdependence on notions of “mediation” which understands even the body and everyday materiality as discursive. The irony has been that profoundly influential critics like Foucault and Derrida, champions of a resistance to discursive domination, have been the chief exponents of the notion that subjectivity *cannot be found* apart from discursive construction.

Influential new works, like Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual* and Eve Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling*, begin by clearing the stage with introductions that advocate a turn to affect and challenge discursive models of subjectivity. Sedgwick critiques Foucault’s opposition of “the hegemonic” against “the subversive,” which brackets out “the middle ranges of agency that offer space for creativity and change” (Sedgwick 13). Likewise, Massumi critiques a social constructivism that “brackets the middle terms” – “movement/sensation” – and “their unmediated connection” (Massumi, 1).

In particular, the introduction to *Parables for the Virtual* offers a concise account of a critical trajectory that began by rejecting the phenomenology of the everyday (the non-abstract world of detail and difference) for notions of grand historical “rupture.” Phenomenology, he suggests, had been swept aside “for fears of falling into a ‘naïve realism’” that would “dissolve the specificity of the cultural domain in the plain, seemingly unproblematic, ‘presence’ of dumb matter” (1):

Culture occupied the gap between matter and systemic change, in the operation of mechanisms of “mediation.” These were ideological apparatuses that structured the dumb material interactions of things and rendered them legible according to a dominant signifying scheme into which human subjects in the making were “interpellated.”

(Massumi 1)

With the advent of more subtle notions of “mediation,” everyday materiality came back into the picture, but only in the “thoroughly mediated” terms of a “subject without subjectivism: a subject ‘constructed’ by external mechanisms. ‘The Subject’” (Massumi 2). Massumi goes on to explain how notions of “positionality” were developed to redress the erasure of “local cultural differences and the practices of resistance they may harbor” in “ideological accounts of subject formation” that overemphasized “systemic structuring”:

Mediation, although inseparable from power, restored a kind of movement to the everyday. If the everyday was no longer a place of rupture or revolt, as it had been in glimpses at certain privileged historical junctures, it might still be a site of modest acts of “resistance” or “subversion” keeping alive the possibility of systemic change. These were practices of “reading” or “decoding” counter to the dominant ideological scheme of things. The body was seen to be centrally involved in these everyday practices of resistance. But this thoroughly mediated body could only be a “discursive” body: one with its signifying gestures. Signifying gestures make sense. If properly “performed,” they may also unmake sense by scrambling significations already in place. Make and unmake sense as they might, *they don’t sense*.

(Massumi 2, italics mine)

First, the everyday (the phenomenal) with “the slughtness of ongoing qualitative change” was first overlooked as a “place where nothing ever happens,” in favour of the “grandness of periodic ‘rupture.’” Then, into the “gap” thus opened between “matter and

systemic change,” came pouring “mediation,” discourse, “dominant signifying schemes.”^{12ix} For Massumi, the problem is that mediation appears to reintroduce the body and the materiality of the everyday, but in fact “this thoroughly mediated body could only be a ‘discursive’ body”:

When positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second. After all is signified and sited, there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture....The very notion of movement as qualitative transformation is lacking.... Also lacking is the notion that if there is qualitative movement of the body, it as directly concerns *sensings as significations*.

Even though many of the approaches in question characterize themselves as materialisms, matter can only enter in indirectly: as mediated. Matter, movement, body, sensation. Multiple mediated miss.

(Massumi 3, italics mine)

My project is to take another look at William Wordsworth’s turn to everyday materiality as a phenomenological site of both radical empiricism and radical subjectivism: a site of paradise, or felt interconnectedness, rather than postmodern, bioinformatic assemblage and disunity.

In a sense, the project is to contrast seriality and interconnectedness (or relationality) as complementary poles in the potential theorization of subjectivity inflected by affect. I will examine how phenomenological nature influences ethical agency (human responsibility in a web of relations), rather than how culture constructs our human “nature.” Taking up Romantic subjectivity - a subject of emotion/feeling/sensation - with its phenomenological, Spinozan flavor, and its “organic sensibility,” we may compare it to recent turns to affect in media theory as inflected by

¹² See endnote 1 for a brief excerpt from Massumi’s introduction.

Deleuzian notions of “planar relations” (Sedgwick 8) and “machinic assemblage” (Clough 11).

Ultimately, the question is not whether nature and culture can be purified of each other. One may reasonably agree with Bruno Latour’s suggestion in *We Have Never Been Modern* that there are only natures-cultures. Ultimately, the question is whether Massumi, and media theorists, are pulled back too irresistibly toward the culture pole (conditioning, construction) to encounter the potential they identify in affect and matter. Arguably, media theorists point to affective escape and indeterminate subjectivity, but cannot avoid theorizing affect in terms of (and as already subsumed by) power. There may be value, then, in reexamining Romantic subjectivity, with its irresistible pull toward the nature pole (interrelationship). Nineteenth century nature poetry - with its phenomenological turn to mood, landscape, and sensation - emphasizes the relaxation of discursive attention into a somatic attention that comes closer than Massumi to the goal of rethinking the subject in excess of cultural apparatuses and signifying schemes: that is, the subject of emotion, the material subject’s capacity to *feel*.^x

Along with media theory by Brian Massumi, teacher in the Communications Department at the Universite de Montreal and author of *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), and Patricia Clough, Professor and Director of the Women's Studies Program, CUNY Graduate Center, and author of *The Affective Turn: theorizing the social* (2007), I will refer, frequently, to the work of Jeff Noonan, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Windsor and author of *Critical Humanism and the Politics of Difference* (2003); French actant-network theorist Bruno Latour; and Italian feminist Rosi Braidotti.

In particular, Noonan (who calls his work “materialist ethics” in the broader context of “critical humanism”) and Massumi (as a translator of French Philosophy with affinities for American Pragmatism in the broader context of affect theory) can be understood as contributors to a growing conversation about embodiment, or the need to bring the body (with all its detail, difference, and indeterminacy) back into theories of subjectivity. While Massumi addresses this question explicitly in terms of restoring nature (as movement, dynamism) to the conversation (via Spinoza, Bergson, and Deleuze), Noonan critiques the notion of a radical postmodern break with human nature, which promises to liberate difference by deconstructing universalist premises but that, in implying that all subjectivity is determined by external forces, undermines the notion of a self-determining subject and the coherence of the very concept of freedom. Effectively, both Massumi and Noonan question the culture doctrine, or the notion of a subject produced and positioned *merely* in discourse.^{xi}

iii. A map of the territory - the subject of emotion - the “atmosphere of sensation” versus the biomediated body - affect in Wordsworth and media theory

Several major disparities distinguish Wordsworth’s turn to affect and its “extended” sensibility from the kind of postbiological affect, in the “disassembly” of the human, posited by media theorists like Brian Massumi and Patricia Clough:

1. Wordsworth, in *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, decries the information age’s growing addiction to symbolic consciousness (the discursive habit), and the conditioning effect of informational overstimulation, calling for a return to the five senses, and the deep wonder to which they pertain, more immediately experienced in childhood (*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*).
2. Media theorists (like Clough) posit that biomediation disrupts the “body-as-organism,” opening the body to an awareness of its affectivity, in excess of Cartesian boundedness; but this excess is immediately theorized as digitalized, informational, and (alarmingly) available for the “real subsumption” of life into biopower.
3. Media theorists overlook *relationship*, which, arguably, cannot be constructed out of digital information, but is only possible when, as poets like Yeats and Wordsworth put it, “everything we see is full of blessings.” The Old English meaning of the word “bless” was “wound,”¹³ and in this deeper sense what the poets argue is that to touch is to be touched: changed, different than one was. Contact is intimate in the sense that it is, in Wordsworth’s words, a “great consummation” (*Home At Grasmere*); not only a marriage but a commingling, an “interfusion.”
4. Where media theorists emphasize the conditioning potential of affect, Wordsworth emphasized its *deconditioning* potential. Whereas symbolic or discursive consciousness might be informational, sensory attention requires the *cessation of the discursive habit*; a greater attentiveness to (or mindfulness of) feeling, and relationship; a receptive attention not only to the affect of matter but to one’s own stored bodily emotions. Patterns (both emotional and conceptual) are released, opened to change.
5. In Wordsworth’s poetics, landscape, mood, and melancholy are important because affective attention to landscape calls for a reduction of discursive engrossment. As the thinking subject calms and the feeling subject comes more to the fore, one becomes aware of one’s socially prohibited sense of melancholy and empathy or

¹³ Muldoon, 7.

interconnectedness. It is dangerous to the State if the bounded agent indulges in an extended attention that may lead to an extended sense of responsibility. Indeed, the powerful emotion of melancholy may be understood as a call to relationship, a resurgence of ontological anxiety on the part of a mind that cannot fool itself into forgetting that its bounded identity is both self-isolated and mortal. Melancholy, as in Keats' and Dickinson's poetics, calls for the death, cessation, or voluntary renunciation of every form of grasping at a self independent of relationship.

6. The result, in Wordsworth, as in Dickinson, is an intense and present experience of the *unfabricated*, an interconnectedness full of sensation, full of blessing (in the sense that subject and object are mutually interpenetrated or *wounded*); a direct experience of contact, touch, and relationship (that exceeds, in important ways, the Deleuzian sense of *machinic assemblage*), which they explicitly describe as a fullness of sensation *akin to music*.¹⁴ The conclusion of this thesis, and Appendix A, gives close consideration to the excess of sensation uncannily associated with music in these poets' works.

Let us note from the onset that Wordsworth does not mean to promote a new creed but to prompt toward *experience* (through a reorientation of root cultural metaphors, and through intense efforts to recapture and narrativize moments of somatically sensed interconnectedness).¹⁵ As this analysis proceeds, we may begin to see Wordsworth as something of an animist. Yet he stands in a peculiar relation to Christian theism (to which he arrives through "meditation"), and he explicitly rejects pantheism. His emphasis is on "our powers" to "see in Nature (w)hat is ours," to come back into "tune," and to be *moved*.¹⁶

Vitally, Wordsworth's sense of interfusion entails an encounter with - a voluntary turning of attention towards - powerful emotions, in particular melancholy, on which social prohibitions appear to be set. As James Averill puts it in *Wordsworth and the*

¹⁴ In eastern thought, the cessation of clinging to an essence is held to lead to a calming of mental elaborations and of grasping at substantial reality, so that the calm nature of mind (described in terms of luminosity, and sheer contact) may emerge.

¹⁵ "Spots of time."

¹⁶ Wordsworth, "The world is too much with us."

*Poetry of Human Suffering*¹⁷: “The poetry of ‘human passions, human characters, and human incidents’ is for Wordsworth inevitably the poetry of suffering. He does not avert his eyes from wretchedness; quite the contrary, he seems fascinated by it” (Averill 10). The “wreathed horn” sounded from out of the ocean, in a sonnet composed two hundred years ago, and very early in the nineteenth century, echoes still:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.--Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

The poet is forlorn, because “we have given our hearts away,” and because he too has become cut off from the protean, wreathed nature of interrelationship; the shared sympathy moving in the material universe; the capacity to be moved: to relax conventional identity into, and feel oneself part of, that movement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Averill, James, H. *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.

¹⁸ See Appendix A for an account of music, mood, and movement in Wordsworth and Dickinson.

Chapter One - Material revolution - “energy and pathos”- touch, the bond that cannot be broken

“We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.”
W. B. Yeats

“The affects pose a problematic correspondence across each of the divides: between the mind’s power to think and the body’s power to act, and between the power to act and the power to be affected.”
Michael Hardt¹⁹

In a peculiarly prescient passage of *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, which links right in with the turn to affect in media theory, William Wordsworth assures us that, even if “the Man of science” alters, at some moment in the future, the very nature of our sense-impressions, the poet will be right there “at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself.” This passage is worth examining at length as it is one of Wordsworth’s most explicit expressions of his theory of poetry, produced at a time when his dialogue with Coleridge was at its height, and when both poets has set their intention *to seek the ground of human nature and freedom directly in sensation and attention* rather than through appeal to metaphysical certainties transmitted through religion. As Wordsworth put it, much later, in *Home At Grasmere* (788-792):

...Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams--can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—

At this point in his career, evidence suggests that Wordsworth was forming convictions about human nature - arriving at a sense of its spirituality through its

¹⁹ Hardt, Michael. “Foreword: What Affects Are Good For,” *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Patricia Tincineto Clough, Ed., Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.

materiality. That is, from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. If these early investigations later supported his belief in a “Wisdom and Spirit of the universe” (*Prelude* 401), he was not, to begin with, satisfied by received doctrines of an externalized and monolithic divinity – a God, moreover, that had been “crossed out.” According to French actant-network theorist and sociologist of science Bruno Latour, God had been, since the seventeenth century, in the process of being “crossed out” (Latour 32) by a “modern Constitution” or tacit agreement to represent only “purification” (the upper half of the Constitution) but not the “mediation” (its lower half).²⁰

According to Latour, the “moderns” concealed mediation because it conveniently cut them loose from the “delicate web of relations between things and people” (39), instituting a “Great Divide” (39) between the human and the non-human; a divide that Latour argues is no longer tenable²¹ because of the “hybrid monsters” (like holes in the ozone) - with networks of causes and effects - that have reared their heads to remind us that what we do as a culture to “nature” or the “non-human” comes back to bite us. Interconnectedness sets an ethical limit on our actions, and forces us humbly to rethink the “freedoms” that come into view only in the denial of our relational bonds. Holding “all the critical angles” (38), the moderns never explicitly deny the existence of god, but

²⁰ Latour refers to the Hobbes-Boyle debate, in the 17th Century, over the air-pump, which disproved the philosopher’s notion of “ether” with a simple, “objective” scientific apparatus; a usurpation of the cultural by the natural. This “object” became, overnight, of more authority than the king. This did not prevent Franz Mesmer, in the eighteenth century, from asserting an ethereal medium residing in the bodies of animate beings.

²¹ Not only have we ceased to be “modern,” according to Latour, “we have never been modern.” What we have presented as purified we have always known also to be mediated, though we tacitly agreed to conceal that knowledge.

render that god both immanent and transcendent: “infinitely remote” and infinitely private (39), but never at work in the web of relations: crossed out.²² Celebrated lines from Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* bring home this severing of the web of relations:

Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind,
And grow with thought. Beside yon spring I stood,
And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
One sadness, they and I. ***For them a bond
Of brotherhood is broken: time has been
When, every day, the touch of human hand
Dislodged the natural sleep that binds them up
In mortal stillness; and they ministered
To human comfort.*** Stooping down to drink,
Upon the slimy foot-stone I espied
The useless fragment of a wooden bowl,
Green with the moss of years, and subject only
To the soft handling of the elements...
(*Excursion I*, 481-495, bold and italics mine)

Wordsworth’s turn was not, then, to abstract notions of god, but to experience, sensation, in-between-ness,²³ invisible “bonds” tangible to the “touch of human hand.” Later (in 3.3 and 7.1), we will look more closely at instances of the metaphor of the hand, which, arguably, express the poet’s longing to experience embodiment as an extraordinary *tenderness*, a relationality, a *touching* without borders or limits. Attending to the way the mind is “fitted” to the external world (*Home At Grasmere*) and vice versa, Wordsworth apprehends the vital links of interconnectedness, which Beer refers to as “*kairos*, the urge

²² In *Parables*, Massumi takes up this critique of immanence and transcendence as a strategy of erasure without accountability, but more in terms of a crossed-out *nature* than a crossed-out God.

²³ The Greek word “metoxia” means “inbetween-ness” and is the root of the word “metaphor” – further evidence, perhaps, that metaphor is grounded in sensation, or embodied patterns of experience.

toward an all-embracing moment of fulfilled experience.” Yet, if somatically-sensed interconnectedness led Wordsworth to “resulting experiences of calm... moments of cessation” or *aion*, these were, according to Beer, “simply bonuses” (Beer 42). Later in Wordsworth’s life, the odd sense of a vital calm, at first experienced by accident, may have superseded his interest in sensation: “His ‘spots of time’, in other words, recorded occasions of unusual *kairos*, followed immediately by a more visionary state with all the marks of the *aionic*” (42).²⁴ In reality, discursive cessation (the calming of mental elaborations) must accompany the sense of interconnectedness (somatic attention): the two must co-arise.

In writing the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads (PLB)*, Wordsworth was actively trying to understand the connections between human feeling and the world of sensation, often honing in on the luxuriousness of both pleasure and suffering, but also quieting down into an intimate attention to subtlest sensation.²⁵ With Coleridge, he set off with a conviction of “correspondences between the sensitive powers in humans and the finer influences in nature” (Beer 42) but, even as Coleridge felt the need to analyze his “optimism concerning the beneficence of the sensuous world” (52), Wordsworth wanted to go deeper into the processes and workings whereby a subjectivity becomes more responsive to the material universe:

²⁴ See, later, an excerpted dialogue between Antonio Damasio and the Dalai Lama on the “subtle state of mind” where “perception is reduced to very low levels” (Damasio) and “there is less influence of conditioning, so it is more pure” (Dalai Lama).

²⁵ Which, in Wordsworth’s larger view, may have had its source in a calm into which both all the senses and all that is sensed may revert, unconditional and unconditioned.

As with Coleridge, however, the first, pleasurable, sense of the 'one Life' that dominated the poems of 1797-8 was to be replaced by a more analytic approach, involving questioning rather than affirmation. The early plan of *The Prelude*, relating to the growth of a 'favoured being', changed, correspondingly, into a lengthier version, with further consideration of the process – the 'growths and revolutions' – that seemed essential to its progress. The workings to be traced within his consciousness became more complicated, signalled among other things by compound words beginning with 'under-'. (Beer 37)

If processes and workings become more important in later versions of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth was not necessarily seeking an objective processing machinery to explain the sense of "one Life," so much as exploring the ways in which attention to the fabric of interrelationship co-originate with the calming of discursive construction and deep trust in the passion of sensation. In other words, the fabric of interconnectedness was not to be fabricated, not to be known through analysis, but to be unconditionally yielded to, and experienced. Both the poet and the scientist are concerned with the interlinked processes of the phenomenal world, but shift their weight, as it were, to different foci of attention: somatic and discursive, relational and serial.

In the PLB, Wordsworth therefore considers the relationship of science and poetry, maintaining that "poetry is the first and last of all knowledge - it is immortal as the heart of man." We may pause for a moment to consider his grounds for this claim. First he considers the objection that the poet merely imitates the passions, and that poetry is not, in itself, invested with, and participant, in living truth:

But it may be said by those who do not object to the general spirit of these remarks, that, as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper that he should consider himself as in the situation of a translator, who does not scruple to substitute excellencies of another kind for those which are unattainable by him...

Yet, he emphatically rejects the notion of the poet as a “translator” of the passions, who cultivates “taste,” invoking Aristotle in support of his conviction that that “poetry is truth carried alive into the heart of passion”:

Further, it is the language of men who speak of what they do not understand; who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely about a *taste* for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontinac or Sherry. Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal.

Arguably, what Wordsworth suggests is that the poet understands subjectively (and internally) what the scientist seeks to discover objectively (and externally). In studying “particular parts of nature” as “objects,” the scientist develops a cold appreciation for the fine assemblage and connectedness of the material universe, but misses its active sympathy, its “breath and finer spirit.” These are two different kinds of knowledge then, and Wordsworth is not reticent about expressing which one of these he finds to be “a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance”:

He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. and thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies, converses with general nature, with affections akin to those, which, through labour and length of time, the Man of science has raised up in himself, by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies. The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us *as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and*

unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct *sympathy* connecting us with our fellow-beings.

(PLB, italics mine)

Where the scientist may analyze and slowly come to appreciate, with real affection, the passionate manner in which the works of nature interlink with one another, the scientist does not participate in that passion, and, to an extent, rejects the “presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion”:

The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, ‘that he looks before and after.’ He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love.

This prescient moment in the PLB, when Wordsworth appears to anticipate the tendency of science, and our human future, toward biomediation, is interesting, then, because it associates what is natural in human nature not with our habitual “sense-impressions,” but our capacity for interfusion, intercourse, relationship. It is not the digital impulses and impingements that matter so much as their interdependence and mutual origination: a presence of relationship, a song of sympathy and intimacy, which arises when bounded self-identity is relaxed.

By contrast, media theorists posit that biomediating technologies disrupt the “body-as-organism,” startling an organism that presumes it is closed into a sharp

awareness of its interactions with an excessive “affectivity of matter” (Clough 12). As Patricia Clough writes, “it is digitization that makes the experience of affectivity possible, makes it possible through a technical expansion.... examples and experiments... assemble technology and affect, that like new media, frame affect’s appearance, a production that makes affect felt in an unprecedented manner” (12).

In the PLB, Wordsworth, too, declared his project to be to “extend the domain of the sensible,” but he certainly did not see technical expansion as the key to this encounter with what Brian Massumi calls “uncontainable affect.” Like media theories of affect, Wordsworth’s poetics certainly challenge and extend notions of bodily sensation, its limits, and its potential to interact with the material universe through the affects. Yet, his emphasis is clearly on relationship, and *not* on *digitization*.²⁶

The objects of the Poet’s thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find **an atmosphere of sensation in which to move** his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as **the heart** of man.^{xii}
(PLB, bold and italics mine)

In *Natural Supernaturalism*, M.H. Abrams describes Wordsworth’s project as an attempt to link ‘energy and pathos.’ Rather than faith, Wordsworth’s concern was a “passionate intuition” that worked directly with feelings of pain, or bodily emotion: material bonds

²⁶ We may, indeed, invoke here (with T.S. Eliot) such extraordinarily contagious religious tracts as Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount” and Buddha’s “Fire Sermon” to consider the nature of passion. The former reminds us of what it may mean to suffer ourselves to live in materiality unconditionally (with love that totally loses itself in attention to what it is not). The latter describes how the five senses are burning, and everything that touches the five senses is burning. We may ask why Wordsworth calls the ‘heart of man’ immortal. If we substitute for this phrase the word ‘love’, its meaning seems less obscure. Love might be called immortal because, unconditional, it never exists for itself.

and ties of “pity and love,”²⁷ evoked in the root meaning of the word *pathos* (the suffering and passion shared by all life in matter). Emphasizing our status as “enjoying and suffering beings,” Wordsworth suggests that our “sense-impressions” and our “condition” are not the essential thing. With prescience, he looks to the technological future and its material revolutions. Sense-impressions may change, but “sensation,” passion, or feeling, which Wordsworth most intimately associates with “human nature,” will not change:

If the labours of Men of science should ever create any *material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive*, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, **carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself**. (PLB, bold and italics mine).

No mere passive impingement, sensation appears here as an active principle that feels and *senses* (i.e., sentience). Wordsworth’s notion of sensation, linked to nineteenth century notions of “sensibility,” is more organic and less informational than notions we have since inherited. At times in *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, this notion of sensation, centered in a subjectivity (however radical or interrelational) that *feels*, is overtly religious, verging, also, on a paganism that Wordsworth rejects, possibly because its anthropomorphism obscures the unconditioned, calm “Being” that succeeds his moments of *kairos*.

²⁷ Wordsworth, *Excursion*: “And faith become a passionate intuition...the Soul/Though bound to Earth by ties of pity and love...”

Chapter Two - *Wordsworth's atmosphere of sensation* – Preface to Lyrical Ballads

"If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood..."

2.1 An interconnectedness neither immanent nor transcendent: the poet's return from the abstract to the web of relations²⁸

"Such intercourse was his, and in this sort/Was his existence oftentimes 'possessed'"

A fusion of poetic license and early nineteenth century philosophical discourse, Wordsworth's use of words like "sensation," "feeling," and "impression" and "passion" calls for historical research and close attention to the intertextual generation of meanings in his canon. Notably, in "A Motion and a Spirit: romancing Spinoza," Marjorie Levinson²⁹ points to Spinoza's language of affect as a "submerged philosophical context" for Wordsworth's poetics.³⁰ This affinity with Spinoza, as evidenced in a phrase like "Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense," explicitly links Wordsworth to one of

²⁸Borrowing from Bruno Latour's famously titled his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, which argues that the tacit agreement to reveal "purification" and conceal "mediation" was in fact neither tenable nor strictly practiced, we might write, "We Have Never Lost Paradise." With Latour, we can suggest that the web of relations (and sense of interconnectedness), obscured by our western philosophical concern with abstractions (a penchant, Latour argues, extended to the "crossed out God" of western religion – ever immanent and transcendent but never present in the web of relations), has nevertheless remained an alternative, and arguably more influential, metaphor for theorizing subjectivity.

²⁹ "A Motion and a Spirit: romancing Spinoza," in *Studies in Romanticism*, December 22, 2007, Boston University.

³⁰ John Beer refers to Coleridge's feeling of being torn between Spinoza and the Church, and Sarker refers to Wordsworth's well-known affinity for David Hartley's theories of associational psychology.

the two main traditions in current affect theory: a thread emphasizing immanence, which passes from Spinoza, to Bergson, to Deleuze, to Massumi.³¹

Although the goal of this paper is not to offer an in-depth reading of Spinoza's influence on Wordsworth, it is important to note from the onset the great circularity of the proposition at hand. In reading for continuities between theorizations of affect in media theory and Wordsworth's poetics, we may be noting the presence of a shared philosophical context: Spinoza. And, in applying affect theory to William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson, we may mistakenly take the poet's "pure" expressions of moods and apprehensions as substantiation for the theories of affect with which they marvelously accord. In fact the poet's ground, too, may be located in a philosophical terminology that continues to inform our thinking about affect. Indeed, there seems to be a metaphysical circle here, a reification of concepts, a discursive circumscription of a essential, universal, core human nature, with which postmodern theory, according to Canadian philosopher and "materialist ethicist" Jeff Noonan, has radically broken.

Two things need to be said. First, that for Noonan this postmodern rupture appears still to keep us caught in circles of thought, when in practice, as history continues to prove, the human identity for which we stand up in self-determining freedom is always *both* - specific and universal. Identity occurs in relationship. Rather than essential, it may be described as relative and relational. Second, even if nineteenth century nature poets worked with philosophical contexts of their day, their aim was to speak to all human beings across the boundaries of culture and history – to step beyond the

³¹ The other main thread of affect theory might be identified with the work of neurologist, Antonio Damasio, and his "Somatic Markers Theory," and might be called "constructivist" in its emphasis on a self-contained feeling subject.

metaphysical circle (whether religious or philosophical) into experience. Indeed, it might be argued that the poets aim is to begin and end with experience.

In their turn to affect, media theorists follow postmodern thought in rejecting a core human nature, but attempt to push past the so-called culture doctrine to which postmodernism, in its rupture with human nature, turned.³² Objecting to the dividing lines between the human and the “non-human” still quietly maintained by “social constructivist” agendas at work in culture theory, Massumi suggests that affect is “autonomous” to the extent that it escapes identity in relationality. Materiality must be defined not as a concrete thing but as the “sum total of a thing’s interactions minus the thing”.³³

Implicit form may be thought of as the effective presence of the sum total of a thing’s interactions minus the thing. It is a thing’s relationality autonomized as a dimension of the real. The autonomization of relation is the condition under which ‘higher’ functions feed back.... *Affects are virtual synthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actual, existing, particular things that embody them.* The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. Its autonomy is its openness. *Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is.*

(Massumi, 35, italics mine)

³² While the problem with a naturally defined, core human essence is its easy mobilization by foundationalists and fundamentalists in the service of violent repressions of difference, the problem thus far with *a radical break with human nature* has been that the persuasive power of the “culture doctrine” – or the notion that subjectivity is always produced and positioned in a chain of signifiers – renders incoherent any notion of the “self-determination” (Noonan, 3) on which notions of freedom are based. Affect theorists, like Brian Massumi, make a concerted attempt to redress the erasure of the “excluded middle” that is “movement” (Massumi, 1): the sensation that always exceeds discourse and the micro-molecular materiality that escapes capture.

³³ This has strong resonances with Buddhist dialectics, particularly “The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination.”

Amid postmodern contestations for meaning, the *relationality* (what Massumi calls *movement*, “the middle term”) of the material being³⁴ is erased. Affect’s reemergence on the scene offers another avenue for understanding *felt* subjectivity, which *may* be constituted by social conditioning, but which also appears to participate in an interrelational “dynamism” of nature that, according to Massumi (following Spinoza), has been rendered “inert” by western philosophy’s tendency to position nature in terms of immanence and transcendence.³⁵ Arguably, affect has two dimensions, analogous to quantum superposition, in which a particle is understood to be in a wave-state until quantified: affect behaves both as a medium for social conditioning (culture), and as fabric of interrelationship (nature).^{xiii} Affect, because it speaks to and acknowledges sensation, offers a more detailed manner in which to understand the tension between conditioning and relationship.³⁶

³⁴ What Latour would call its “existence” (as a network, in a web of relations) rather than its “essence.”

³⁵ Here Massumi echoes Latour, whose work he does cite in *Parables*.

³⁶ Specificity, here, has less to do with identity and identification than with relationship, which happens only in the recognition of the indeterminacy and otherness in self-determination - a relationship to self that includes and requires a relationship to the world. Culture, then, is as much a discourse that shapes our material relations (including the way we experience embodiment), and vice versa (material, embodied habits that shape our discourses), as it is an ethical choice, or, that is to say, a relational choice, not merely reducible to identification with a given symbolic system, but with roots in difference, indeterminacy and interconnectedness that, to extend the metaphor, nourish (and are nourished by) a universal soil. Does the soil exist at all apart from the life processes that go on within it? Can we point to anything that is, innately, soil?

Looking closely, we find zoe, raw life, natural sweetness, process; an interconnectedness in excess of any independent aggregate; but, conventionally, as social beings, we find bios, the wall around the garden (ironically, the etymological

2.2 Massumi meets the Buddha

Where Wordsworth presents a *deconditioning* somatic attention that leads the mind to a sense of interfusion with a “vast elementary principle,” the media theorist focuses “on (affect`s) consequences for theories of the social... well-informed by recent rethinkings of power.”³⁷ This contrast does not imply an absolute conflict of world views so much as it emphasizes different ends of the affective spectrum. Yet, it may be that media theory stresses the conditioning pole of affect because of its reliance on machinic and informational metaphors.

If the Wordsworthian pole of affect seems to offer channels of access to a permeable subjectivity emergent from a sense of organic interconnectedness (a subject of emotion), it also relies on an austere work of mindfulness, or of sensation, undertaken by an individual acutely dissatisfied with bounded agency and willing to relax the discursive center. Wordsworth`s subject is not produced in discourse but sensed as interfusion: at

meaning of “paradise”). If we use the conventional definition of the universe (“rolled into one”), everything that physically exists, we create an excluded middle: the infinite interdependencies of those supposed physical objects. And, inasmuch as discourse has been insinuating itself into “life itself” as biopower, does it do so with the impunity assumed by what Latour calls the Culture/Nature divide of the modern Constitution; or does biotechnology have repercussions in interconnectedness that reaffirm the virtuality and pervasiveness of zoe? To call “the social” a sphere of constructed discourse is to miss the positive meaning-potential of the understanding of oneself **as social**, as existing in relationship, which is what zoe does. Responsibility toward one`s interrelational specificity does not contradict but, in fact, emerges and takes its dynamism from – finds its ethical force in – one`s responsibility to human freedom, a freedom that emerges from affect, sensation, feeling, relationship.

³⁷ Massumi, back cover of *The Affective Turn*.

the point when discourses do not satisfy, the weight of attention is shifted to soma-sense.³⁸

To enter more fully into the life of the organism³⁹ and into an active materiality – both biological life and life uncontained in biology – then, is to relax attention, release ownership, surrender the discursive center. What is released from boundedness (and thus heightened) is not merely one's response to what is sensed, but the faculty of sense, or sensing intelligence, touching but also being touched by a shared substance: unbounded life intelligence. Interconnectedness, as the life intelligence of an “active universe,” offers no separation between matter and attention. Both issue from a shared vitality.⁴⁰

By contrast, media theorists employ Deleuze's less “spiritual” model of life intelligence. For Deleuze, “matter and the nonorganic” are “dynamic” and “self-

³⁸ I will return to this later in regard to Verela's critique of western nihilism, which he suggests stops short of its full implications because western thought lacks an experiential tradition.

³⁹ What Gregory Bateson may have called “creaturely” identity.

⁴⁰ As Sunil Kumar Sarker writes, “In Bk II, Wordsworth presents us with his novel conception of the universe, that clearly shows his leaning toward vitalism and Spinozism. He does not conceive of the universe as a conglomeration of multiplicity of divers inanimate objects, but as a unified living thing, something like an immensely huge hylozoistic being, that is wholly pervaded by a ‘great Mind,’ and which is both the Creator and the created... But all of us are not aware of the presence of the ‘great Mind’ within ourselves, but only those of us who grow up in the lap of nature, and one, who becomes aware of the presence of the ‘great Mind’ in himself, receives a sort of power – a mysterious power – with which he can connect himself, and communicate, with the ‘active Universe’ (thus ceaselessly procreating, creating, changing, and destroying, and busy universe, i.e., the universe that is not passive, and is not being acted upon, but is effortfully and willingly moulding, shaping, things out). Wordsworth calls this power poetic or spiritual power. He says that nature nurses and purifies our animal sensibilities and feelings, and thereby prepares ourselves for the birth and blossoming of this poetic or spiritual power that we receive from our birth.” (Sarker, 492)

organizing,” but not necessarily unitary, just as time is no longer a narrative of “human subjectivity”(Clough, *AT*, 13): “the imaginary is part of a machinic assemblage, which may include the subject, but does not do so necessarily” (*AT*, 14). While thinking in terms of assemblage certainly breaks with bounded agency, just as Wordsworth’s turn to sensation does, the close association of consciousness with matter and assemblage renders it impersonal.

This move away from privileging homeostasis to thinking evolution in terms of information, complexity, and open systems under far-from equilibrium conditions of metastability undoes the opposition between the organism and the environment, as well as the opposition between the organic and the nonorganic. Rather than presuming matter or the nonorganic to be inert, such that form is imposed on it, matter is understood to be informational, that is, form arises out of matter’s capacity for self-organization out of complexity.

(Clough, *Affective Turn*, 12)

Here it is not clear what kind of “self” is at work in the Deleuzian notion of “matter’s capacity for *self*-organization.” Although ideas like autopoiesis and formative causation appear to be invoked, the Deleuzian account of self-organization is at variance with the organicist ideas of scientists like Francisco Verela and Rupert Sheldrake. In particular, Sheldrake has sparked contention by suggesting, in a Wordsworthian and Coleridgean manner, that formative causation, (which “postulates that organisms are subject to an influence from previous similar organisms” through “morphic resonance emanating from past events”) implies “non-local” mind, or mind not strictly localized to the brain and body.⁴¹ xiv

⁴¹ Indeed, as mentioned previously, Sheldrake advocates a scientific rethinking of the Greek notion of “Anima Mundi” or world-soul.

Such notions of mind are similar to Wordsworth's notions of material attention; the implication that, not limited to the physical brain, the mind is a field interfused, and intimate, with the material universe. Here again, though, we may remember that Sheldrake's argument attempts to be deductive, while Wordsworth's understanding of the mind is the expression of his experience, with no proof but our trust in the poet and in poetic attention into which his verse partially transports us. Ironically, just as science had largely persuaded us, until recently, that other earth-like planets were highly improbable, and that the basic materials for life were not to be found spread throughout the universe, advances in science since Wordsworth's day may have made us such hard skeptics as to make deductive proof seem more credible than poetic evocation. And needless to say, to many Sheldrake's views will seem more premodern than postmodern. At bottom here is the question of nature, and our biases towards this question: is nature relational or is it virtual?

Arguably, in the Deleuzian context of "self-organization," a better word than self would be "auto," as in automatic. Indeed, in media theory, which uses "information" as its root metaphor, the difference between human and automaton is dissolved.⁴² Yet, if we return to key phrases in Wordsworth's address to media in PLB, we discover the poet's confidence (in a passage that seems to prefigure Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) that, even if "Men of science should ever create any *material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive*" some species of

⁴² Though outside the scope of this paper, Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2003) argues vehemently in defense of neoliberalism against the ideas of "transhumanists." The question being, to whom is control more attractive: neoliberalism or transhumanism?

intelligence, the “divine spirit” of the poet, will move through those new sense-impressions:

If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the **transfiguration**, and will welcome **the Being thus produced**, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.

If, in the Deleuzian perspective, the body is seen as participating in a non-deterministic life intelligence (or “incorporeal materialism”^{xv}) to which the qualified processes of discursive and limitative reason do not have access, in the Wordsworthian perspective attention to bodily sensation leads to profound experiential confidence in a “divine spirit” or life intelligence (“the soul of all the worlds”) felt and encountered by one “possessed of more than ordinary organic sensibility” (PLB). A key difference between the two perspectives, then, is in the understanding of this life intelligence: either as possessing innate qualities of tenderness and touch, or merely as an *open system* productive in its indeterminacy.

If the media theorist’s indeterminacy suggests an informational resilience in the universe which human technology may open into, without ever posing a definitive threat to “life,” this confidence in indeterminacy appears to be predicated on the total breakdown of a separation between life and information. Yet, arguably, the former (life) is rooted in the metaphor of “organicity,” in which is implied the notion of an organism, a living system, something that grows out of an underlying fabric of interrelationship. The latter (information) is rooted in technological metaphors, the notion of a machine assembled from discrete units.

Curiously, though, the Ancient Greek roots of the word organism appear to refer to an “instrument” or “tool.”⁴³ If a tool, then a tool of what? The problem of defining what life *is* (mechanical or relational) seems embedded in language itself. *Wikipedia* offers the following definition: “The word ‘*organism*’ may broadly be defined as *an assembly of molecules that function as a more or less stable whole and has the properties of life*” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organism>). Here, we may speak of an “assembly” but can we avoid alluding, elliptically, to “the properties of life”?

Indeterminate as life may be, dissolving it into virtual assembly does not seem to resolve matters. When Deleuze speaks of indeterminate “microstates” that make up “metastability,” interrelationship dissolves into randomness. Yet, for Wordsworth, allowing the dissolution of the borders of personality identity, and even the boundaries of organism, leads to an extraordinary sense of interrelationship. Perhaps the difference in the media theorist’s and the poet’s outlook can be described as the difference between dystopia/utopia and paradise, or between what Massumi calls “the social” and what we might call phenomenological interrelationship.

Arguably, the poet’s account of metastability (or the appearance of stable existence) as emergent from an interrelatedness that exceeds description, complements and deepens the media theorist’s account of metastability’s assemblage from micro-indeterminacies. Relationship is the key word. The ‘postbiological’, taken as proof that the web of relations is not relational but serial, may rationalize an ultimate bid for control: power over life. A breaking of bonds. Yet, in their defense, media theorists, do not invent bioinformatics; they notice its symptoms. After all, control is no mere dream

⁴³ Greek *ὄργανισμός* - *organismos*, from Ancient Greek *ὄργανον* - *organon* "organ, instrument, tool" <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organism>>

of a dark future but a social reality. Rather than romanticize a free subjectivity acclimatized to a rarefied universe, they focus on critical awareness of how informatics operates. Media theory focuses on indetermination's susceptibility to determination: affect's appropriation into biopower.

Emphasizing the susceptibility of bodily sensation to informatics, media theorists take up affect theory in a complex manner that tests the limitations of, but also builds on, postmodern theory. The question is whether media theory can go much beyond postmodern notions of cultural construction in the persistence of the tacit agreement to omit notions of relationality. In its ongoing dialogue with postmodern thought, media theory appears to recapitulate what Noonan sees as a problematic break with embodied subjectivity, materialist ethics, and "human nature." The question is also whether, in opening itself to the postbiological, media theory can meaningfully suggest any ground for resistance to a technological police state.

Breaking with the boundedness of the organism, Patricia Clough offers a Deleuzian critique of Maturana and Varela's notion of "autopoiesis," which emphasizes equilibrium: "while relating to its environment, the organism seeks homeostasis and equilibrium... the environment's effect on the organism is, in part, selected by the organism" (AT, 11).

Deleuzian biophilosophy suggests that the organism must be rethought as *open to information*, where information is understood in terms of the event or chance occurrence arising out of the complexity of open systems under far-from-equilibrium conditions of metastability, that is, where microstates that make up the metastability are neither in a linear nor a deterministic relationship to it. As such the organism is better understood as a *machinic assemblage*, which, at this time, is approaching a "*techno-ontological*

threshold,” such that “the human is implicated in a postbiological evolution as part of its very definition.”
(*AT*, 12, italics mine)

This redefinition of the human as postbiological and technological by nature seems to come from the other side of Wordsworth’s universe, in which all information is an “atmosphere of sensation” through which tenderness moves. For Wordsworth, affects, as “the passions that build up the human soul” (*Prelude*, 1, 406), are steeped in relationship. In a word, what information theories lack is that which distinguishes so-called artificial intelligence from animate intelligence, an account of self-awareness, feeling; beyond the mechanism by which the heart beats, the “grandeur in the beatings of the heart.” Media theories of affect appear to dismiss relationship, preferring technological metaphors to organic metaphors, and favoring open informational systems to biological tissue and its sensitivities.

Wordsworth was critical of the exciting stimuli of the media, which he would have associated “with the mean and vulgar works of man.” In terms of the carefully framed and manufactured objects of the media, it may be appropriate to speak about a “contagion” or “transmission” of affect – a rethinking of biology in terms of non-living technological parts - implicated in the 21st Century’s most heinous human rights violations.^{xvi} Yet, the nature poet specifically concerns himself, not with technology, but with “high objects, with enduring things--With life and nature” - patterns of interconnectedness that lead to an ethical sense of extended responsibility.

For the media theorist, if affect offers the possibility of new connections, new ways of theorizing subjectivity in excess of discourse (slipping past social construction), it also opens new avenues for thinking about a set of *social relations* that transfers its

programs faster or more invisibly than discourse, through bodily soma, or that micro-molecular field of sensation referred to as machinic assemblage (*Affective Turn*, 4). Interestingly, what Wordsworth argues in the PLB is that the rise of populous urban centers cut the multitude off from nature, making humanity increasingly dependent on the “gross and violent excitement” of the “media.” This makes Wordsworth’s prescient, passing allusion to what we now call “biomediation” or “digitization” a crucial point of intersection, one that calls for a great deal of unpacking. Soma is not to be distrusted for Wordsworth because the finer one’s attention to sensation, the greater one’s growing sense of connectedness and responsibility. Attention to affect leads away from digitization and information into a sense of interrelationship, with deconditioning effects.

For Wordsworth, affect counteracts the blunting of the “discerning powers of the mind” precisely because, turning to ordinary objects of nature one does not find gross stimulations that have been, as in the media, deliberately manipulated and configured, such that the thing is isolated from the sum of its interactions (hence “violent and gross”). Arguably, this “debased thirst after outrageous stimulation” (PLB) is itself a symptom of human loneliness and ontological anxiety, all the more terrible because it promises but can never bestow what the subtle patterns of interrelationship alive in nature can: a genuine cure to loneliness.

By contrast, for media theorists, affect is a powerful medium for “biomedia,” “bioinformatics,” and “biopower” (Clough, 13), which, in “opening the body to its indeterminacy” (7) also makes way for a “reconditioning of biology” and “ongoing investment of capital and technoscientific discourses in the molecular level of the body as an informational body, the biomediated body” (13-14). The question is whether the

(pertinent and realistic) concerns about affect as a “break into biology” (22) and as a trump card for conditioning may be predicated on a persisting scientific uneasiness about the deconditioning potential of affect as implied in Wordsworth’s radically phenomenological, inspired moments:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, not in vain
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things--
With life and nature--purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
(*Prelude*, 1, lines 400-414, italics mine)

In his heart,
Where Fear sate thus, a cherished visitant,
Was wanting yet the pure delight of love
By sound diffused, or by the breathing air,
Or by the silent looks of happy things,
Or flowing from the universal face
Of earth and sky. But he had felt the power
Of Nature, and already was prepared,
By his intense conceptions, *to receive*
Deeply the lesson deep of love which he,
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive.

Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle: *sensation, soul, and form,*
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
*Of **visitation** from the living God,*

Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love!

A Herdsman on the lonely mountain tops,
Such *intercourse* was his, and in this sort
Was his existence oftentimes '*possessed*'...
(*Excursion*, lines 185-221, bold and italics mine)

Here, we may note Wordsworth's use of words like "intercourse," "possession," and "visitation" to describe what he experiences in the dissolution of discursive activity and gross perception – that is, in the unconditional surrender to sensation. With remarkable and explicit similarity, the lines "thought was not; in enjoyment it expired" parallels the notion of discursive "cessation," as a correlate of mindfulness, so prominent in eastern thought.

2.3 “The passions that build up our human soul” – affect in excess of informatics

“‘Let it suffice thee that thou know’st/Us happy, and without Love no happiness.’”
(*Paradise Lost*, Bk. VIII, 620-621)

Although pinning down what Wordsworth means in the PLB by words like “sensation” is a hermeneutics in itself, he implies that even if technology ever effects a change in our material conditions so radical as to alter the sense “impressions which we habitually receive,” the poet will follow, finding “an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings.” Wordsworth’s “atmosphere of sensation” is strikingly akin to Deleuze’s “virtual,” as picked up in Brian Massumi’s work on politics and media theory. Just as Deleuze looks at sensation as a “compound of percept and affect” (Deleuze, 163), with interesting parallels to Tomkins’ view on affect-object reciprocity (Frank, 10),⁴⁴ Wordsworth appears to indicate, by *sensation*, not the mere passive reception of sensory stimuli, but the active *sensing* of stimuli.

Deleuze’s use of the word “compound” suggests that it may be difficult, and possibly unproductive, to extricate percept and affect, matter and mind. Hence, even in the event of a “material revolution... in our condition,” Wordsworth is supremely confident that the poet (whom he tells us elsewhere in the PLB is one “possessed of a more than ordinary organic sensibility”) can find in those revolutionized sense-impressions an atmosphere for *that which senses* (i.e., for an intelligent, feeling sentience):

⁴⁴ *Some Affective Bases for Guilt: Tomkins, Freud, Object Relations*
ESC: English Studies in Canada - Volume 32, Issue 1, March 2006, pp. 11-25

The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, **if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us**, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences **shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings**.

(PLB, bold and italics mine)

Wordsworth's notion of "sensation" is steeped in nineteenth century notions of "sensibility." The trick here, both for the nature poet and the media theorist, is to attempt to theorize the virtuality of sensation in both of its aspects: one the excess of impressions available to the attentive body, and the other the active consciousness (sentience and sense). The question is whether this "virtuality" can, then, be distinguished from life intelligence. And, if not, what *is* the "life" in this "intelligence"?

Arguably, it is really *sensibility* that Wordsworth hopes to strengthen; and with it the vitality of our experience of the world, and of the feelings with which phenomenological experience may be infused, and, in a certain sense humanized.⁴⁵ The passions at work in the forms of nature ("meanwhile the forms/Of nature have a passion in themselves") are understood to "intermingle" with the works that are natural to man, as he writes in Book 13 of *The Prelude*,

...I felt that the array
Of act and circumstance, and visible form,
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
What passion makes them; that *meanwhile the forms*
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,

⁴⁵ This need not absolutely be construed to mean that the material universe is infused with human affect, or with an affective life intelligence, but that one's response to the material universe is human in the sense that one apprehends a fabric of meaningful interrelationship. One *cares*.

That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him...
(287-293, italics mine)

Yet this begs the question of *which* “works of man” are summoned by nature’s passions. Science? Art? As Wordsworth points out, one of the effects of modernization is to make the mind less sensitive to the *excitement* of ordinary, natural, unsensationalized objects. He is worried about a loss of sensibility, caused by the media, and “a degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation”:

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.... When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the *feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it...* (PLB, italics mine)

His notion of the poet’s work, “to extend the domain of sensibility,” is a project to provide us with a greater sense of feeling and connectedness, not dependent on “gross and violent” stimulation. Wordsworth lays special emphasis on what Adam Frank calls “the compositional aspect of affect in perception” (Frank, 20), which Silvan Tomkins identified as intensely uncomfortable to many:

“It is this somewhat fluid relationship between affects and their objects which offends human beings, scientists and everyman alike, and which is at the base of the rationalist’s suspiciousness and derogation of the feeling life of man. The logic of the heart would appear not to be strictly Boolean in form, but this is not to say that it has no structure.” (Tomkins, quoted in Frank, 20)

Part of sense, of sensation, and of sensibility, is the requirement that things *make sense*, not merely to our abstracting and code-using intellect, but to our relational,

emotional bodies, our feelings.⁴⁶ When Wordsworth writes, in his great ode, “My heart is at your festival/My head hath its coronal/The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all” (*Ode*, 40-42), affect is clearly in excess of serial information or digitization. The contact in that feeling goes beyond interface, to interfusion. Yet Wordsworth’s impression of an innate power that moves both in the mind and in sensory objects requires examination. When he speaks of “great and permanent objects” that act upon the mind, difficulties arise; surely ordinary natural objects cannot be called either great or permanent.

Context may be everything, here, because he has just suggested that he would succumb to melancholy if it were not for “a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible...” A tempting interpretation is that Wordsworth here refers to objects like the moon, sun, stars, and sea. Yet one might equally speculate that Wordsworth calls the impermanent processes of nature “great and permanent” because in them the material universe is, perennially, at work.⁴⁷

Importantly, we might remember what specifically Wordsworth is objecting to: a “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” - the pursuit of the ever-receding horizon (if we may recall Walter Benjamin’s “Angel of History”) of the new and mediated - the space junk and informatics that now literally clutter our biosphere. In simple terms, one

⁴⁶ See Appendix B 9.1 for a discussion of quantum physicist David Bohm’s notion of “soma-sense.”

⁴⁷ Interconnectedness, after all, when it is felt by living organisms sensitive to its extended responsibilities – its links of sympathy and relatedness – is both self-organizing and unselfish. It does not exploit but fosters life. In Lao Tzu’s words: it “never exists for itself, and so it can go on and on.”

can suggest that Wordsworth fears that his fellow human beings are losing their *soul* - if we can use that word here in the sense in which it is used in African-American Blues, in which context it suggests deep, rhythmic feeling. Soul can be understood as the capacity to listen, commune, feel, and, responsively, express what one feels.

Arguably, this soul, this relationality, is the “sensation” (feeling) that he insists the poet will “carry into the midst of the objects of the science itself.” In contrast to “the Subject” without a subjectivity, which worries Massumi in theories of mediation, the Romantic subject exists neither at (what Latour would call) the pole of mediation nor of purification, neither as existence nor as essence, but in between. Certainly it would be susceptible to, but not constituted by, “interpellation,” because its defining quality is its *betweenness*, its mutual origination, or interconnectedness.⁴⁸

In Wordsworth’s phrase - “degrading thirst for outrageous stimulation” - the “stimulation” is mechanical, and violent by necessity, because the faculty that receives stimulation, the “discriminating powers” is blunted to the extent that it, in Keats’ phrase, irritably reaches after facts, instead of realizing its own nature as relationship:

⁴⁸In the eastern sense, the subject neither exists nor does not exist; it simply does not exist *inherently*, or independent of interrelationship. We may locate it in neither of the two extremes: neither nihilism (denigration of existence) nor essentialism (reification of existence). This creates confusion, though, in relation to Wordsworth’s use of the word “inherent” (“a deep impression of certain *inherent* and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally *inherent* and indestructible”). A deeper look into Buddhist philosophy, however, does affirm an inherent nature – one that is calm, unconditioned, and characterized by unimpeded luminosity. Hence, it may not be the interdependently originated subjects and objects to which Wordsworth refers that are inherent, but his impression of an under-*quality* that he senses as indestructible because unconditional – the “foundations” of “mind” apprehended in “communion” (*Excursion*, 1, 132-133).

...and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible...

One of the problems with the media is that it uses forms of representation to construct symbolic sets of relationship, whereas the ordinary, natural objects to which Wordsworth would have us turn are accessed relatively nondiscursively or organically, exerting a gradual influence on our bodily memory, which, if a kind of conditioning, is a conditioning toward organic relationship and sympathy:

Yes, I remember when the changeful earth,
And twice five summers on my mind had stamped
The faces of the moving year, even then
I held **unconscious intercourse with beauty**
Old as creation, **drinking in a pure**
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters coloured by impending clouds.
and thus
By the impressive discipline of fear,
By pleasure and repeated happiness,
So frequently repeated, and by force
Of **obscure feelings representative**
Of things forgotten, these same scenes so bright,
So beautiful, so majestic in themselves,
Though yet the day was distant, did become
Habitually dear, and all their forms
And changeful colours by invisible links
Were fastened to the affections.

(*Prelude*, 1, 558-611, bolds mine)

In a passage from *The Excursion*, he explicitly refers to a “communion” of objects full of power, a quantum power which, ostensibly, he learns to discern in ordinary objects like daffodils:

So the foundations of his mind were laid.
In such communion, not from terror free,
While yet a child, and long before his time,
Had he perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed
So vividly great objects that they lay
Upon his mind *like substances*, whose presence
Perplexed the bodily sense. He had received
A precious gift...

(*Excursion*, 1, 132-140, italics mine)

Daffodils, to the extent that they appear in a poem, *are* culturally constructed, but they are also quite mild, quiescent excitants of discursive activity: they do not transmit active impingements of overtly coded information. Wordsworth insists that he takes nature as the subject of his poetry deliberately, and with the goal not merely of reviving the range of our sensitivity (or of making our domain of sensation wider), but with the goal of reviving the blunted “discriminating powers of the mind,” our sensibility:

The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants... It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour *to produce or enlarge this capability* is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day.

(PLB, italics mine)

Yet if both an “excursive” quality of the mind, and an “affectivity of matter” (Clough, 3) or, as Canadian nature poet Don McKay puts it, a “radical otherness” appears to take us beyond the verifiable and into the domain of belief, Wordsworth’s “organic sensibility” need not be construed as anything more than a sensitivity to patterns of unlabeled phenomena, a *somatic* or *material* attention intimately receptive to contact with patterns of material phenomena, the “atmosphere of sensation.”

Likewise, for Deleuze and Massumi, virtuality is not *intended* as a merely technological metaphor, digitized and purified of subjectivity; it is virtual precisely because it is negotiated somewhere in between percept and affect. Notably, for Massumi affect is primary; it comes first, and is “uncontainable.” Difficult as this territory may be, Wordsworth offers useful guidance in his marked emphasis on that which becomes “*manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.*” The palpable materiality with which we can make contact, and which we can experience, *matters* because through it we experience our *feeling* sentience: we enjoy and suffer.

Abrams speaks of Wordsworth’s project to unite “energy and pathos,” and if we accept, to a certain extent, the interchangeability of energy and matter, then we can revisit this statement in different terms: Wordsworth’s project was to unite matter and pathos, percept and affect. Even if our habitual sense-impressions are altered by material revolutions, he argues that the poet’s affect will move, unimpeded, in its atmosphere. The implication is that humans are beings who enjoy and suffer; sentient beings whose nature is to experience their intersection with matter. Indeed, Wordsworth implies that the mind manifests its rich capacity for feeling in response to detail and difference. Just as subjectivity cannot be meaningfully understood without reference to its materiality, neither can materiality, even the futuristic “sense-impressions” of biomediation, be understood apart from an “immortal heart” of the poet, a subject of emotion, that *feels*.

Instead of paradise lost, we find a rethinking of the bounds that circumscribe the core discursive consciousness, the rational human essence of western metaphysics, in its state of exemption from a phenomenological reality that has been relegated to a state of exclusion. The melancholy and political disillusionment of the Romantics is not

incidental, but pivotal, to this radical renunciation of the core promise of western thought; and it is only in this renunciation that nineteenth century nature poets, like Wordsworth and Dickinson, *experienced* the material universe as visitational and relational. In a “feeble endeavour... to counteract” the “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation,” Wordsworth holds forth the possibility of a *material attention*, relaxed into subtle interconnectedness, in which ontological questions are resolved.⁴⁹

Instead of paradise lost, the discursive addiction that alienates the mind from the material universe relaxes, an interesting fact if we consider the Old Iranian root of the word paradise – *parai* (around) *diz* (to make). According to media theorists, even at the micro-digital level, feeling is divided from that which is felt, and that which feels is constructed via that which is felt. More examination is necessary – in particular, a closer look at portions of Wordsworth’s unfinished *The Recluse* – before one may conclude that Wordsworth’s understanding stops at an “Egotistical Sublime,” in which individual affect takes an excursion, through “sympathetic imagination,” into the material medium. Or, conversely, that the passions of nature enact incursions into the sensing subject. Arguably, subject and object are constructions; poetic attention is always, explicitly, and “intermingling,” an “intercourse.”⁵⁰

Words like blessedness, holy, spirit, communion - and, especially, *love* - express what he ultimately finds important in the poet’s work. Arguably, he does not speak of the

⁴⁹ The division between mind and matter (instituted in Roman legal notions of *bios* and *zoe*) is seriously contested, yet without invoking mechanistic notions of matter; If mind can be *experienced* as matter, this does not mean that matter is the *cause* of mind (i.e., that mind is mechanistic and physicalist).

⁵⁰ In his longer works, and more directly in his poetry than in his intellectual work, Wordsworth clearly suggests an affectivity (spirit, power, influence) at work through nature, forcing us to ask, what, for Wordsworth, are the limits of the mind?

ideal and abstract love mandated and pronounced by religion, but a love that cares enough to look at things in detail, making contact, opening itself unconditionally to sensation. Is there in fact an egoistic center from which affect flows, or is there merely *affective flow* - natural sweetness, sensibility, tenderness - for which the interconnectedness of the material universe is a prime medium?

Chapter Three - The subject of emotion: touch and tenderness

Mind and body are seen as two levels recapitulating the same image/expression event in different but parallel ways, ascending by degrees from the concrete to the incorporeal, holding to the same absent center of a now spectral – and potentialized – encounter.... Affect is their point of emergence... virtual coexistence and interconnection... (Massumi, 32-33)

“Affect holds the key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology.” (Massumi, 42)

FROM Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.

Such benefit the humblest intellects
Partake of, each in their degree; 'tis mine
To speak, what I myself have known and felt;
Smooth task! for words find easy way, inspired
By gratitude, and confidence in truth.
(*Prelude*, Bk 13, 1-15)

3.1 Body and mind

The Fact that Earth is Heaven —
Whether Heaven is Heaven or not
If not an Affidavit
Of that specific Spot
Not only must confirm us
That it is not for us
But that it would affront us
To dwell in such a place —

Dickinson's pithy lines, if we could compass them, would beam us to the heart of the matter. Earth is interconnectedness. Such interconnectedness is heaven, a sense of interrelationship that resolves the infinite anxieties of the bounded subject. "Heaven" for its part, the heaven that circulates in our discourses, is an abstraction – a legal abstraction at that – a foolish "Affidavit" of a so-called localized, circumscribed "specific spot" – paradise as the wall around the garden: boundedness.

Yet, since we know that we are "affronted" by earth and its interconnectedness - preferring to its interrelational materiality a pure, free, abstract spirituality – this confirms that heaven is not for us: because earth *is* heaven. There is no substitute for, no freedom from (or other than), interrelationship. Just as we are affronted "to dwell in such a place" as Earth, we may infer that we would be affronted to live in heaven, should we ever recognize it for this very world.⁵¹

⁵¹ Interconnectedness, we might say, cares nothing for the personal (as fixed identity). It cares for, and is, relationality. It never exists for itself. Indeed, to the "person," it might seem like nothing short of sheer offense, the ultimate insult.

We may assume that interconnectedness is so utterly impersonal as to have no traffic with emotion. Moving as what Massumi calls “pure linkage,” it may exceed the self-referential body: an abstract, free spirit. But such a spirit – abstracted, cut loose from material interdependency, from detail and difference and the passion of being interrelated, interfused – was not the object of Wordsworth’s attention. If there was pleasure in Wordsworth’s sense of interfusion, it was the pleasure of unconditional acceptance of the whole experience of life, a project of looking “at the world in the spirit of love: further... a homage paid to the *native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure*, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves” (PLB, italics mine):

Among the qualities there enumerated as principally conducing to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree. The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel *without* immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. And with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with *our moral sentiments and animal sensations*, and with the causes which excite these... (PLB, italics mine)

Matter was not, for him, a mere trapping for an abstract, metaphysical presence (or pure being affirmed and reified in language). The bounded enlightenment subject – after all – was supposed to contain a human nature - a privileged being – which could therefore work its will on nature and non-citizens relegated to the legal status of inferior entity, or non-entity. If Wordsworth rejected such bounds, it was not out of grandiosity, but out of feeling, and caring: the near helpless exposure to the impingement of his own

feelings described, also, by Keats, in the *Fall of Hyperion*: “those to whom the miseries of the world/Are misery and will not let them rest... who feel the giant agony of the world...” It is in this sense, too, that Keats pictures the poet alone as coming into the “fane” of interconnectedness because, as Moneta tells the dreaming-but-truly-awake poet, he is unlike “All else who find a haven in the world/Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days.”

If, paradoxically, interconnectedness is the only remedy for this condition, it is also an agony. Moreover, it is a great risk, because it is a letting go of any haven, any property, anything that can be grasped:

So answer'd I, continuing, 'If it please,
'Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all
'Those melodies sung into the world's ear
'Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;
'A humanist, physician to all men.

Keats, *Fall of Hyperion*

If Wordsworth rejected the bounds of the enlightenment subject, it was not because he wanted to seek a new version of “transcendent” spirit, but because the enlightened spirit lacked relationality, a sense of relationship: felt interconnectedness. “Immanent” spirit, too, was not satisfactory: it must be flesh and blood, plainly present in “our moral sentiments and animal sensations.”

We find in Wordsworth’s poetics palpable links between overfull sensation, poignant emotion, and the feeling of something (“a presence”) that escapes even the finest receptivity. Indeed, the finer one’s receptive attention to interconnectedness, the more exquisite one’s emotion, as suggested in Massumi’s account of emotion as “the most intense (contracted) expression of... capture – and of the fact that something has always, and again, escaped” (Massumi, 35).

Further attention to the links between sensation and emotion – *feeling* - in the poetics of Wordsworth, Keats, and Dickinson may solidify the argument that emotion is, actually, a call to relationship (uneasiness), and that somatic attention allows suppressed bodily emotion to reemerge.⁵² In other words, when discursive consciousness relaxes, the five senses become more information-rich, more in “*touch*” with non-representational reality. Such relaxation occurs when the mind turns to the landscape, or what Wordsworth calls the “great and permanent objects” of nature; or, rather, it may not be the mind but the *body* (the whole affective system) that is turned toward the landscape.

A shift occurs from discursive attention, with its preoccupation with (and projection of a self through) past and future, to somatic attention, with its sensitivity to phenomenological interrelationship. Not only does sense-perception grow more vivid and vital, but, perhaps due to the concurrence of a greater sensitivity to feeling and a relaxation of conceptual thought, bodily emotions come back to the surface. The feeling subject, attending to the natural landscape, encounters (simultaneously) the landscape of his or her own emotional body. The encounter with emotion is both painful and pleasurable. This agonizing return to life of the body has been a perennial concern of poets. “April,” as Eliot wrote, alluding to Chaucer, “is the cruelest month.”^{xvii}

⁵² Motivated by an acute discomfort with a felt lack of relationship, they questioned the erasure in western metaphysics of an interconnectedness too dangerous to its structures of power. Arguably, in a queer manner, the nineteenth century nature poet exceeded prohibitions on sensation and emotion (the social construction of feeling): prohibitions that preserved power by limiting (setting bounds on) the potential for extended attention and extended responsibility. Control, or identity, is challenged by empathy, or relationship.

3.2 Kristeva's theory of melancholy and signification – chains of signifiers versus somatic interconnectedness

At the crux of all this is emotion, which may flow in two directions at once. On the one hand, the unconditional encounter with poignant emotion (melancholy) sets in stark relief the painful alienation of the bounded agent.⁵³ On the other hand, the return to feeling – when the senses are turned to nature, in its status not as nonentity but as locus of interrelationship – restores one to one's own landscape of bodily emotions; i.e., the whole neurological (or affective) system comes back to life, in orchestration. In brief, the issue of “affective capture” (in which “affective escape” is always implicated) may be understood in terms of how the relational universe and its “unqualified affect” (Massumi, 35) is always qualified by identity and its signifying chain.

Again, according to Massumi, emotion is “the most intense (contracted) expression of ... capture – and of the fact that something has always, again, escaped” (Massumi, 35). Emotion “captures” relationship – the paradox being, surely, that relationship cannot be captured. Massumi reminds us that emotion always has an owner; affect is captured and processed in a self-referential signifying chain. Emotion makes us painfully aware that identity never arrives at interrelationship; the serial synthetic signifying chain never attains the status of the organic bonds of interconnectedness.

Julia Kristeva's work on melancholia and depression, *Black Sun*, may provide us with a vital missing link for thinking about the social construction of feeling, *and its bans*, particularly the ban on what might be described as the loss of meaning and loss of a

⁵³ Arguably, the subject of emotion may come closer to valid cognition, relaxing discourse into fine attention.

productive will to act (with its implied lost sense of relationality): melancholia. Ironically, Kristeva suggests that melancholy is necessary for poesis. It is precisely because one sees through the chain of signifiers that structure social reality, and precisely because one senses a “primordial Thing” or “black sun” (an unsignifiable maternal object) at the ground of the psyche, that one is moved to link signifiers in a rhythmic upsurge of meaning. The concatenation of signifiers displaces the intensity of the non-presence of that place where all signifiers dissolve, transferring the energy of that appalling encounter, that abjection, into narrative links and chains that provide the pleasure of a sense of connectedness: *a narrativized sense of meaning*.

Yet, as Kristeva explains, the concatenation of signifiers falls apart when stark reality intrudes too forcefully, as in the poetry and literature after the Second World War. It also falls apart in cases of profound depression, as in the case of Modernist novelist and poet Djuna Barnes, who sealed herself away in a Manhattan apartment and wrote almost nothing during the second half of her life. At some point, then, a chain of signifiers meant to narrativize a world of pleasantly concatenated meanings, and to shield the psyche of “the premature being we all are” (Kristeva 42), collapses back into the non-presence of the unsignifiable. Melancholia becomes black depression. Fantasy fails to protect the always premature psyche from stark reality.

Certainly, we could read Wordsworth this way: as extolling an interconnectedness of which poesis (meaning-making, semiotic concatenation) is the epitome. We can explain his need to narrativize a sympathetic universe accessed with a “feeling of pleasure” (PLB) as a response to acute melancholia, the exposure of his mind to the instability of the chain of conventional signifiers and to the anti-presence of an original

non-differentiation that cannot be recuperated. We can read him as humanizing the passions, despite their indifference to any sort of unitary subject, and adding a “colouring” or over layer of pleasant, comforting unity:

In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment. (PLB)

We can speculate that the effort required by such a vast act of fabrication is why Wordsworth never finished his grand project, *The Recluse*. Like Coleridge, perhaps, he came to doubt the beneficence of the sensuous world. But to read Wordsworth this way, as asserting an interconnectedness through a chain of egotistically sublime signifiers, is to miss, completely, the strong probability that Wordsworth’s interconnectedness was not produced by chains of signifiers, *but was experienced in somatic attention*. In that sense, Wordsworth, as John Beer suggests, would have made the complete journey of the *via negativa*, allowing all discursive construction (or concatenation of signifiers) to relax into a dark materiality that has not been organized into codified, positive existence by the light of reason.⁵⁴ He would have voluntarily relaxed the manufacture of linguistic survival (discursive identity), radically trusting in sensation and in discursive cessation.

If we follow Kristeva’s line of thought, then the vain project of narrativizing meaning and pleasure is doomed to fail, sooner or later, in the encounter with stark realities. (How, after all, can poetry speak of the actual-but-unspeakable: like organ-harvesting perpetrated against marginalized citizens, or the actual conditions of the

⁵⁴ In *The End of Analysis*, James Hillman argues that western civilization has organized its masculine, militant, heroic, ‘bright’ logos against the ‘dark’ materiality of the feminine.

world's two or three billion abject poor? Narrative, because of the pleasure that accompanies the linking of signifiers, seems ill-suited to represent these facts). Yet Wordsworth's project began *after* he witnessed the bloodbath of the French Revolution. And, surely, he would *not* have wanted to narrativize freedom and meaning in the aftermath of those events. If anything, his naïve faith in the chain of signifiers would have been shattered, and he would have been seeking, instead, not an abstract, metaphysical spirit, in its potential for violence against embodied life, but an *experience* of material relationship realizable through sensitivity to life. In brief, Kristeva (with Freud) seems to emphasize the 'inorganic' basis of animal consciousness. Freud was deeply skeptical of the possibility of what Romain Rolland described (in a letter objecting to Freud's *Future of an Illusion*) as the "oceanic experience" – the somatic sense of interconnectedness (in excess of the physicalist view of matter) - as the source of religious feeling. If her theory fails, like much of western metaphysics, to take the phenomenological step past signification and into relationship, it does at least offer insight into what motivates the repressive nature of the social construction of feeling: *strong feelings threaten the stability of the social's chain of signifiers.*

As such, there may be social prohibitions set on powerful moods (like melancholy) which threaten both the bounded agent and State power. Wordsworth's turn to melancholy and to landscape was, in that light, a radical turn to relationship. Extended attention implies extended responsibility, challenging what Latour has called the "modern Constitution" with its contract that permits us to do violence to a web of relations the existence of which we render invisible to ourselves in discourse. This ethical call is not a new foundationalism, but the unconditional surrender to a lack of any foundation

independent from relationship. Somatic attention revives the squelched transmissions of the body, its organismic call to surrender discursively constructed identity to sensed interconnectedness. As Massumi argues (with Spinoza), rather vaguely, there is an “implied ethics of the project attached – without foundation, with desire only – to the multiplication of the powers of existence...” (33).

Interconnectedness *exceeds* self-interested emotion, self-cherishing aims. Yet, this does not mean that it is either transcendent or imminent, or that it is impersonal and non-relational. It is not so rarefied as to vanish from the material world, or what Wordsworth calls “the company of flesh and blood” (PLB). Speaking of flesh and blood, we can begin to probe a bit further into what neuropsychologists and cognitive linguists suggest about the relationship of language and soma. From Damasio’s “somatic markers” hypothesis, to Lakoff and Johnson’s notion of “image schemas,” there has been increasing interest in how cognitive processes may be rooted in somatic experience, and how language, which appears at times to reach into abstract realms, may be profoundly embodied.

3.3 Cognitive poetics – the embodied hand of the subject of emotion

Cognitive Linguists, like Lakoff, Johnson, Freeman, and Dancygier, offer another key angle for thinking embodiment. Their work suggests that texts may be adequately understood not to *construct* meaning, so much as to evoke the “richness of experiential frames already present as the background to reading” (Dancygier, in progress). These experiential frames do not exist so much in propositional language as in the neurological system. Bodily (*enfleshed*) networks woven in our neural pathways and somatic systems, necessary for the whole extraordinary orchestration of day-to-day embodiment, we might infer, are accessible for evocation through language, which acts as a prompt to such accesses.

An advantage of the cognitive approach is its amenability to a physicalist understanding of interconnectedness that is, nevertheless, not in contradiction with an organicist understanding of interconnectedness, such as we might find in Wordsworth and Coleridge. We may contrast physicalist and organicist notions of interconnectedness by describing the latter as a point of view that values the material (or phenomenal) but (unlike the physicalist) “senses” in that materiality a vital, organizing principle – what Wordsworth refers to as a “grand elementary principle.” In other words, there is plenty of room for affect in the cognitive poetic approach. Experience, sensation, dynamism, relationship, and interconnectedness come back into the foreground as the underlying fabric of subjectivity, rather than the “social constructivist” grid for the positioning of

“bodily” identifications (along a signifying chain) critiqued by Massumi in the introduction to *Parables*.

Interestingly, when parts of the body appear in texts they metonymically evoke subjectivity. A body part, like a hand,⁵⁵ evokes a whole network of associations, both at the level of motor functions and at the level of volition and intention. In a sense, the body part evoked in a text as an “anchor” (Dancygier)⁵⁶ escapes identification with the concretized body, and becomes, as Massumi puts it, “spectral” – moving through what Wordsworth, in PLB, calls “the atmosphere of sensation”:

Affects are virtual synthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actual existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. Its autonomy is its openness. Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is.

(Massumi, 35)

To contextualize the development of Wordsworth’s notion of the affects as a moral guide past self-reference and into compassion or relationship, it may be useful to consider John Beer’s account of Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s intellectual friendship. Though neither poet was Irish, if we recall the design of the Irish friendship ring, it pictures two (often golden) hands holding one heart (often a gemstone). Between the two hands, and in their care and tenderness, two embodied subjects share a “heart” of

⁵⁵ John Donne would be interesting in this respect.

⁵⁶ Narrative anchors capture more than the progressive accumulation of content and context, as described, for example, in Werth’s study of text worlds (1999) or Emmott’s discussion of ‘contextual frames’ (1997). They exploit the mechanisms of frame metonymy, frame evocation, mental space set-up or evocation, and cross-space projection. At the same time, they capture the complex interaction between specific expressions used, emergent connections across various parts of the text, and the reader’s processing of it. (Dancygier, in progress)

interrelationship: not a center, but an intersubjectivity, a flowing resonance. To look at these poets' friendship, I would like to invoke the metaphor of the hand, not only for the explanatory potential it may yield for this essay's ongoing contrasts (identity and relationship, intellect and feeling, grasping and receiving) but because it brings us straight to the core question of touch and sensation.⁵⁷

Poetry in English has been haunted by E.E. Cummings' hands smaller than rain; Dickinson's "narrow" and "vacant" hands; Keats' "warm" and "living hand" returning, for centuries, spectral from the grave; Wordsworth's "touch of human hand" echoed in the "soft *handling*, of the elements",⁵⁸ a hand, too, that in its palm holds Blake's eternity. A digitalized⁵⁹ hand is also figured on the cover of Massumi's *Parables For The Virtual*, indicating its suitability for theorizing affect and sensation; conjuring ties to Spinoza, and, thus, indirectly to Coleridge and Wordsworth. The hand that clasps in friendship also clasps in difference, and their friendship illustrates the tension, in the metaphor of the hand, between intellectual grasping and tender touch.

If Mark Johnson (whose ideas were admired by noted cognitive scientist Francisca Verela) was on the mark, and recurrent patterns of embodied experience find their analog in image schemata,⁶⁰ the hands may be a rich domain indeed:

⁵⁷ The point being that the poet seeks, as the encounter with the very heart of existence, a physically experienced sense of tenderness – interconnectedness felt at the level of one's whole being, radiating from the heart.

⁵⁸ Book One, *The Excursion*. Discussed later.

⁵⁹ The irony being that the word digit comes from the Latin *digitus*, finger or toe.

⁶⁰ Translating gestalts of force into cognitive patterns that mimic the physical vectors and constraint patterns of bodily experience, image schemata are analog cognitive patterns that govern symbolic representation.

In order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about, there must be a pattern and order to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. *A schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordering activities.* These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions. It is important to recognize the dynamic character of the image schemata.

(Johnson 29)

Massumi's understanding (after Deleuze) of the manner in which experience is patterned into coherence resonates with Johnson's: "The field is open in the sense that it has no interiority or exteriority: it is limited and infinite" (Massumi 35).

In our embodied experience, we use hands, to make contact, to grasp, to touch. In the womb and beyond (apart from their more aggressive and defensive functions) they are our first interface with the outside. Touch is a way of knowing; a means of attention. In poetry, hands appear quite naturally as image schemas in salient metaphors for attention. Hence, the use of the hand as a metonymic frame in poetry often has to do with the mental information that our hands give us, as in Cummings' "no one, not even the rain, has such small hands."⁶¹ Clearly, the rain has no "hands," but its raindrops are like thousands of hands touching us, making us aware that we are alive and in relationship: vulnerable to sensation. When the poet looks into his beloved's eyes, so rich are the

⁶¹ "The main point is that the internal structure of the image schema exists in a continuous, analog fashion within our understanding, which permits it to enter into transformations and other cognitive operations." (Johnson, 4)

sensations that it is like being touched by a multitude of infinitesimal hands.⁶² Affect and sensation are the information, the cognitive feedback, gathered by the hands of somasense.

When Dickinson writes, “For occupation – This/The spreading wide my narrow Hands/To gather paradise,” she capitalizes “Hands” to foreground their status as a frame evocation, within a poem that enacts a complex mapping between the domain of prose (as the domain of a woman’s conventional place in a man-made world) and the domain of poetry (as the domain of unfabricated “possibility”). One reason the final lines clinch the poem so admirably is that a woman’s conventional “Occupation” in an established New England household would have been to *keep herself occupied*, with various forms of handiwork. She might make things, weave patterns, but she could not do “masculine” work, politics. She might be social glue, but not a social change agent.

Should we forget that this poet also wrote, “They shut me up in Prose-/As when a little Girl/They put me in the Closet-/Because they like me ‘still’-”? Here, in “I dwell in Possibility,” Dickinson explicitly rejects conventional occupation, which keeps the hands busy and the subjectivity neatly closed and constructed in its social role. Choosing to trespass the bounds of that constructed relationship to self, she exceeds the gendering effects of conventional discourse; she exceeds discursive identity in accessing a sense of

⁶² “...anchors may also be images which form an entire network of concepts and jointly give meaning to an abstract and difficult text.... anchors... don’t simply ‘construct the story’, they construct its meaning through a network of blends and frame metonymies.” (Dancygier, in progress)

extended attention (“Much madness is divinest Sense – to a discerning Eye”) and extended responsibility: the radical, relational subjectivity of interconnectedness.⁶³

As Dancygier brings out, hands present a fascinating intersection between identity and subjectivity, conditioning and relationship, our ability to culturally construct things and our unconstructable emergence in the web-of-relations:

Being associated with the body but also with the human ability to manipulate, make new things, destroy things, etc, the 'hand' is easily seen as metonymic for a number of actions the person thus represented can undertake and perform. Moreover, all the actions associated with the hand also require a will and a subjectivity, thus in spite of not bearing any agency in itself, this body part can naturally stand for the subjectivity of a person.... (Dancygier, “Narrative Anchors,” in progress)

Dickinson’s “narrow Hands” invoke the narrow constraints of being in a gendered body, narrowly positioned as a woman. Simultaneously, they evoke the narrowness of reason (and discourse) which, with a pressure that conditions and that reinforces convention, rejects “divinest Sense” or perception in excess of constructed (man-made) language: sensory overflow. Queerly, the Hands invoke a radical subjectivity that exceeds discursive construction and receives somatic patterns of interrelationship (through extended attention):

I dwell in Possibility--

⁶³ Dickinson links the normative chain that enforces conventional identity explicitly to the discursive. “I dwell in Possibility” and “Much madness is divinest Sense” underscore the ways in which poetry exceeds convention (the “prose,” “closet,” or “pound” of “They shut me up in Prose” and the “narrow Hands” of “I Dwell”) allowing for a dislodged subjectivity, without “Captivity” or “occupation,” without identity: “And laugh – No more have I—” Dickinson refuses prose and chooses poetry because it liberates her from the “starkest Madness” of “much Sense.” Paradoxically the “closed in” (reclusive) poet, Dickinson, can exceed both inscription and the speech-depriving, imprisoning, gendering effects of structure.

A fairer House than Prose--
More numerous of Windows--
Superior--for Doors--

Of Chambers as the Cedars--
Impregnable of Eye--
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky--

Of Visitors--the fairest--
For Occupation--This--
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise--

Queerly, too, there is no love object, nothing to grasp, no one touching *her*. Notice, even, the openness of the dash that “ends” the poem. She opens her “narrow Hands” as a flower opens its petals to falling nectar, or as one in prayer does not plead but rather surrenders the pleading that maintains the separation of the drop from the ocean – “I asked no other thing/No other was denied/I offered Being for it/The mighty merchant smiled.” Her hands are narrow because they cannot construct the world in its relationship. They cannot pretend to control or manipulate. But they can open to what is beyond chains of signification. Not grasping at any object, the mind or “hands” receive a fullness of information or sensation.

Over and over in Wordsworth, as in Coleridge, too, we see a tension between an unconditional willingness to touch and be touched by the material universe, and a tendency to want to grasp the mystery of being. Paradoxically, ontological insecurity is resolved not in identity but relationship: the richest security may not be found in the closing of the hand that grasps at existence, but in the opening of the hand to receive the most information, the richest sense of interconnectedness: the oceanic experience.

3.4 Romantic attention and the problem of narration – the tension between unitary subjectivity and non-unitary consciousness in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats

“reverenced least/And least respected in the human Mind/Its most apparent home”

In *Romantic Consciousness*, John Beer describes how in 1797 an “intellectually troubled” Coleridge reached out and “made contact with the depressed Wordsworth... while looking for help in discovering ‘what our faculties are, and what they are capable of becoming’” (27). According to Beer, Coleridge (like Keats later) felt himself to “lack personal identity,” finding in Wordsworth a kind of “intelligent identity” and “powerful” character” (27). Coleridge’s notion of a *primary consciousness*, as the ground of the “secondary consciousness” of daily conscious action, helped the two poets to imagine ways in which the “primary, life consciousness” present in the mind also moved in the processes of nature, as a “natural element” (31-32).⁶⁴

After the French Revolution, Coleridge and Wordsworth were driven to ground ideas of human liberty in an understanding of “the nature of the true Being in each individual” because, “it was no use, they believed, for human beings to put their faith in

⁶⁴ Interestingly, according to Beer, Coleridge often measured his ideas against the tenability of “zoo-magnetism” or animal magnetism, the belief in a vital principle (described by Franz Mesmer in the late eighteenth century as a magnetic fluid or ethereal medium residing in the bodies of animate beings - and hence associated with “mesmerism”), that went in and out of fashion during his life. For Coleridge, the appeal of these ideas may have had to do with the urgent need to dislodge freedom from the political and constructed and to identify it more intimately with the natural and unconstructed. As Wordsworth wrote: “from link to link/It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds/This is the freedom of the universe/Unfolded still the more, more visible/The more we know” (*The Excursion*, Bk. Nine).

an abstract ideal” (Beer 24). Hence, when we refer to the “nature” of Being, in a sense we mean it literally; not Being as an abstraction, but, (even if in a radically empirical sense) material, natural, something unfabricated by discourse (i.e., the abstract), something that can be touched (even if without literal hands). This turn to zoe (natural sweetness) is interesting, also, in terms of Deleuze’s notion of “becoming animal” (as recounted in Rosi Braidotti’s “Met(r)amorphoses: becoming Woman/Animal/Insect”), with its critique of psychoanalysis’ deliberate misinterpretation of affective assemblage or flow as symbolic mediation organized by human/animal drives, when in fact no drive exists except for the molecular and “machinic assemblages” (Deleuze 73) themselves. Yet the dissonance is striking between Wordsworth’s organic ‘links’ and the machinic metaphor:

Whate’er exists hath properties that spread
 Beyond itself, communicating good
 A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
 Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
 No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
 It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.
 This is the freedom of the universe;
 Unfolded still the more, more visible,
 The more we know; and yet is revered least,
 And least respected in the human Mind,
 Its most apparent home.
 (*Excursion*, book 9)^{xviii}

Here, one may begin to inquire into the growing division between Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the most difficult question about affect. Does it belong to, in Coleridge’s terms, “personality” or “infinity” – “identity” or “consciousness”?

If we agree with Wordsworth that the calm, attentive mind realizes “properties that spread/Beyond itself” – and if we agree with Coleridge that Wordsworth gravitated more to the pole of identity than consciousness - then these spreading properties belong

to personality more than infinity. Experience of interfusion with the detail and difference of the material universe is *personal*, intimate; there is, even, a more robust sense of personal affect, or subjectivity. For Coleridge, however, initial confidence in the beneficence of the material universe gave way to notions of consciousness: impersonal, diffuse, abstract, indeterminate, infinite. Where Wordsworth might have trusted in those ‘spots of time’ in which he felt an affectivity that permeated the material universe, Coleridge might have cautiously averred that affect was a byproduct of the micro-molecular infinity of impingements.

In Wordsworth’s developing thought, the “Soul of all the worlds”⁶⁵ makes its “most apparent home” precisely in the “human Mind” where it is “reverenced least/And least respected.” If direct attention to the mind would lead it to access “properties that spread/Beyond itself,” prejudices of human reason have isolated the mind from sympathy with the material universe, neatly circumscribing rational consciousness in human form.⁶⁶

Splendidly, in these lines from *The Excursion*, then, raw, unqualified life (zoe) that circulates beyond the discursive center (the bounds of rational agency - bios) is also indicated to circulate in the human mind: an inversion of the state of exclusion/state of exception formula proposed by Foucault. If, according to Foucault, the Greeks placed natural sweetness within the bounds of a legally protected discursive agent, thus sanctioning its entity (the core nature we commonly think of as sensitive and “human”),

⁶⁵ Which, arguably, goes by other names, like excess, zoe, and Massumi’s “pure linkage.”

⁶⁶ Unlimited attention (as pointed out by Sedgwick and Frank, citing Tomkins, who in turns cites Freud), is socially prohibited from early childhood on.

they relegated the natural sweetness of the external material universe (outside the bounds of the human agent) to the status of *non-entity*.⁶⁷

In Wordsworth's verse, however, these equations are rearranged.

...from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.
This is the freedom of the universe;
Unfolded still the more, more visible,
The more we know; and yet is revered least,
And least respected in the human Mind,
Its most apparent home.

Why does he write that this interconnectedness – this “Spirit that knows no insulated spot” – is most apparent in “the human Mind”? If “Whate’er exists hath properties that spread/Beyond itself, communicating good/A simple blessing,” then, insofar as the “Mind” exists as a human attribute, it spreads beyond itself, and participates in interconnectedness. The human mind is thus the most apparent home of interconnectedness because 1. Everything that exists participates in interconnectedness, and 2. The human Mind exists, and 3. Of all things that exist, nothing is more apparent to us than our own minds.

The human mind *is* the “most apparent home” of an unbounded natural sweetness that pervades nature, “from link to link,” as the “freedom of the universe.” This is not to say that the human mind is *at the center* of the interconnected universe, and thus the privileged core of entity. Rather, in our very minds we may discover the active interrelationship or entity of the natural universe, and thus experience a sense of life beyond the bounds of conventional personhood. Why then is this interconnectedness

⁶⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

“reverenced least/And least respected” in the human mind? The implications are twofold. Our beliefs and prejudices, which *transpire in* our minds, actively disrespect the notion of nature-as-entity (i.e., we use our minds to privilege human reason); and we *refuse*, as if by some ban or taboo, to *look into* our minds.

Refusing to directly experience *mindfulness*, we associate mind with discursive reason. We resist what is perhaps a disconcerting idea that, far from being bound in institutional discourse, entity “knows no insulated spot” and “hath properties that spread/Beyond itself, communicating good/A simple blessing.” The birth of legal citizenship in early western civilization appears to coincide with a bold appropriation and its consequent maneuver. First natural sweetness (zoe) is located at the core of (and as the very thing protected by) discursive reason (bios). That is to say, circumscribed legal entity (bios) is instituted to protect citizens from violence, but the essence of the citizen (the paradise within) is understood to be natural interrelationship (zoe). This, however, is followed by a deft maneuver. We come to think of the core *nature* of the human *as* bios, or discursive reason. After all, the zoe *not bounded* within legal entity (citizenship) has now, by extension, been relegated to the status of non-entity. Zoe as sheer interconnectedness, the entity of nature, ceases to exist to our reason. The “state of exception” (human reason) views as inert the “state of exclusion” (nature). In doing so, reason denies the nature of its mind: it fails to reverence itself.

As we will see in Chapter 6 (“Access of mind”: “sensation, soul, and form”), Wordsworth actively works to communicate, and to prompt, that “still communion that transcends/The imperfect offices of prayer and praise.” That is to say, in place of discourses about human nature (religion, politics), he advocates the quieting of discourse

into receptive attention. The result is the opposite of modern man's lack of reverence and respect for the interrelational universe that is his home in its truest sense: "His mind was a thanksgiving to the power/That made him; it was blessedness and love!" (*Excursion*, Bk. 1). In the opening lines of the *Excursion*, Wordsworth goes so far as to suggest that when thought expires in the unconditional surrender to sensation (and discourse dissolves into silence) there is both "access of mind" and "visitation" from the living universe, such that "sensation, soul, and form/All melted into him; they swallowed up/His animal being..." (*Excursion*, Bk. 1). Here, remarkably, the bounds dividing human awareness from zoe are completely dissolved.

Initially, Wordsworth and Coleridge began by formulating unproblematic ideas of a direct correspondence between a "primary" consciousness and the vital processes of nature; ideas of an affective "'sentiment of being'" that "fuses with (the poet's) sense of the 'one Life,' now projected into the whole, various existence of nature" (Beer, 37). For Coleridge, however, doubts soon reared their many heads. This near-animist view of nature pinioned him between the two forces that had made him so troubled when he had first met Wordsworth. Coleridge suffered an enormous intellectual conflict between "natural religion," or the knowledge of nature exposed in the latest science, and the "revealed word of God" (26). Beer cites Coleridge's own later assessment of his state of contradiction: "For a very long time indeed I could not reconcile personality with infinity; and my head was with Spinoza, though my whole heart remained with Paul and John" (27).

As Beer explains, "Whenever the demands of these two forces pressed on him too closely Coleridge was plunged into a corrosive anxiety" (27). Even Coleridge's

admiration for a vital or creative organic ordering principle (i.e., an organicism) at work in both nature and mind soon gave way to a need for skeptical analysis “involving questioning rather than affirmation” (37). This had a corresponding effect on Wordsworth:

The early plan of *The Prelude*, relating to the growth of a ‘favoured being’, changed, correspondingly, into a lengthier version, with further consideration of the processes – the ‘growths and revolutions’ – that seemed essential to its progress. The workings to be traced within his own consciousness became more complicated, signaled among other things by compound words beginning with ‘under-’. (Beer 37)

Ostensibly, an abstract infinity is re-invoked, as an immanence, hidden below (and supporting) the detail and difference of sheer subjectivity. Notions of an “underpresence” may appear to present problems for the present argument about Romantic attention. Beer provides convincing evidence that Wordsworth associated this calm “underpresence” with the divine. Yet I hope to return to this question later, to suggest ways in which it does not contradict the present investigation into Wordsworth’s drive to reject abstract notions of being for something that might be tangibly, if subtly, experienced: an interconnectedness that never transcends detailed materiality.

Arguably, a felt interconnectedness was necessary as a material basis for ethical agency (humanist ethics), to wrest the notion of freedom back from mere political abstraction and into embodied life.⁶⁸ In a crucial passage of *Home At Grasmere* (which,

⁶⁸ Admittedly, though, where Dickinson wrote “This world is not conclusion/A species stands beyond” - indicating, through the senses, and past ratiocination, a field of non-ordinary experience, yet resisting the temptation to put it in positive terms available for recuperation into reified (and subtly Cartesian) metaphysics, Wordsworth’s confidence in the “calm” that Beer describes as *aion* does led him to use phrases like “Spirit of the universe” and “Soul of all the worlds.”

with *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* was meant to lend Wordsworth sufficient canvas on which to communicate his phenomenological understanding) he explains his sense that the responsibilities of his undertaking are even more daunting than Dante's or Milton's:

Urania, I shall need
Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
Descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven!
For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep--and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.

Wordsworth describes his project as no less than that of looking into the mind of man, which he identifies both with terror and with beauty. Moreover, he describes beauty as a living presence and a materiality crafted by the hands of "delicate Spirits": "Beauty – a living presence of the earth.../Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed/From earth's materials." The question is how the "Mind of Man" may be interwoven with a fabric of beauty at once material and earthly yet immaterial and uncontained. To Wordsworth, as for Keats in *Ode to Psyche*, none of the "faded hierarchies" are as alarming⁶⁹ to contemplate as psyche:

All strength--all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form--
Jehovah--with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones--
I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams--can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man--
My haunt, and the main region of my song
--Beauty--a living Presence of the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed

⁶⁹ In the sense of an "alarum."

From earth's materials--waits upon my steps;

Marvelously, the subtle tissue of the human mind is closely identified with the earth on which the poet steps, as if both were composed of sense-impressions, and mind and matter might be wedded in a "great consummation" by a sufficiently sensitive feeling subject:

Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
--I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation:

Freedom here is understood as freedom-in-the-bonds-of-relationship, inalienable from human nature, and accessible to the extent that one allows oneself to come in contact with one's interdependent status. For Wordsworth, the rational bounds set on participation in an intelligent universe (limits set on sensation by discourse) lock our "vacant" and "vain" minds in a death-like "sleep."

Arguably, part of what he implies when he writes that the "individual mind" and "external World" with "blended might" accomplish "the creation" is that the *creation is unfulfilled in us so long as we continue under the false conclusion that congress between mind and the natural universe is impossible*⁷⁰ and, thus, that crass materialism is a suitable goal for our desires. Rousing "the sensual" (by which he means the crass

⁷⁰ Arguably, for him this is a complete inversion of the actual state of affairs.

materialist, and also perhaps the physicalist) is altogether a more difficult task than imagining thrones of divinity or depths of hell, and is, for Wordsworth, the rapturous, but non-ornamental purpose of poetry:

--and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:--*and how exquisitely, too--*
Theme this but little heard of among men--
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:--this is our high argument.
(Grasmere, italics mine)

There is pain, though, in extended responsibility. The subject of emotion (who learns not to resist mutability) pays a price: one can no longer claim an exemption from caring.^{xix} Part of the reason for the conventional bounds we keep, the convenient limits we set, is that feeling is painful, if not agonizing, a theme Dickinson reflects on:

They say that 'time assuages,'--
Time never did assuage;
An actual suffering strengthens,
As sinews do, with age.

Time is a test of trouble,
But not a remedy.
If such it prove, it proves too
There was no malady.

For Dickinson, “actual suffering” strengthens the moral fiber, and is an inherent part of living. Experience proves that there is no cure for suffering because suffering is not a “malady.” Rather, it is part of our unconditional exposure to feeling and relationship,

what Keats calls “soul-making.” For Dickinson, there really is no bound or limit to our “bleeding,” though conventionally, and discursively, the mind seeks psychological security, imaging the “vital scarlet” can be measured in drops:

Bound -- a trouble --
And lives can bear it!
Limit -- how deep a bleeding go!
So -- many -- drops -- of vital scarlet --
Deal with the soul
As with Algebra!

Chapter Four - Affect in nature poetry versus affect in media theory

"Media transmissions are breaches of indetermination." (Massumi, 44)

"All that it is necessary to say, however, upon this subject, may be effected by affirming, what few persons will deny, that, of two descriptions, either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once." (Wordsworth, PLB)

4.1 The break with human nature

*"Frail is our Eden, if this be so;
And Eden were no Eden, thus exposed"
(PL, Bk. IX, 340-341)*

Thus far, we may not have made sufficient contrast between what Jeff Noonan calls the radical postmodern break with human nature and Romantic⁷¹ ideas of a ground of subjectivity in nature. We *have* indicated that the Romantics were actively engaged in a notion of poetic attention as an alternative to metaphysical discourses of science, philosophy, and religion. We have noted also that, in the twentieth century, postmodern thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze offered a resounding critique of western metaphysics, in particular the notion of a circumscribed presence (human nature) associated (as Stephen Goldsmith notes in *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation*) with a pure discourse located outside time and history.

From classical ideas of intellectual spirit (Plato) to modern theories of the unconscious (Freud), western metaphysics imputes a pure logos, a core rational/discursive human nature, exempted from and prior/post the world of relationship

⁷¹ (and, still, notably spiritual)

(lived political history). What such a metaphysics obscures is the possibility that meanings are always imputed by discourses, which, according to Derrida, attempt to pose as “natural” meanings. Discourses always impose a set of relations, seeking mastery over the world of living relationships. There is nothing pure, or ahistorical, about discourse; and nothing pure (nothing immune to, or exempted from, relationship) about human nature.

As Foucault warned, in his late work on biopolitics, the post-Enlightenment explosion of apparently life-fostering discourses thinly disguises a totalizing informatics that attempts to infiltrate and serialize every aspect of human interiority; these new strategies of social repression reflect institutional power’s turn to efficient mechanisms of “power over life” in place of the sovereign’s clumsy “right to death” (power to execute disloyal subjects).⁷² Wary of what Derrida calls the “appropriative madness”^{xx} of western metaphysics, postmodern theorists like Deleuze supplant profound psychological “depth” and “essence” with the “planar” freedom of affects or assemblages, and openness to the micro-molecular material universe (“becoming animal”); flows of potential and of sensation not yet concretized as information. If we take these three postmodern theories together – Derrida’s focus on “appropriative” language; Foucault’s focus on informatics as power over biological life; and Deleuze’s focus on sheer, virtual assemblage in excess of informatics – we may discern a growing postmodern concern with the critical analysis of how power mechanisms themselves mobilize techniques to structure not a core human

⁷² Foucault, Michel. “Right of Death and Power Over Life.” *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage, 1990.

nature but on the sense-experiences of subject, operating on those very flows of potential and sensation.

Media theorists have seized upon this idea of affect, and especially of biomediation in the digital age, because it offers an explanation of how new modes of social programming have been mobilized over the last fifty years or so by a serial police state that hides behind life-fostering programs, or what Foucault called *biopower*. Recent thinkers like Haraway and Massumi have stressed that, perhaps, the most effective means of countering this “informatics of domination” (Haraway) would be to hijack its strategies: give up thinking in terms of the organic, the natural, the human, and begin to think in terms of assemblage and disassemblage.

For Noonan, however, two problems arise when we make the radical break with human nature. First, it becomes very difficult to articulate coherent ideas of freedom and self-determination. This critique is borne out by the fact that, while affect and media theorists like Massumi and Clough set out to discuss the deterritorialized political implications of assemblage, their arguments consistently turn to biopower, or the infiltration of informatics into “life itself.” This is not to say that their arguments do not begin with clear departures from what has been called the “culture doctrine,” or the tendency in postmodern criticism to reduce the subject to a mere social effect positioned on a grid. Careful to point out that there is always something that *escapes* affective capture, Massumi associates this escape of affect (indetermination) with the poignancy of emotion that seems most intimate to subjectivity. Because affective capture always implies affective escape, an intensely attentive, feeling subject, like Wordsworth, might

perceive what Clough calls an expansion of “the body’s sense of its own affective indeterminacy” (Clough 10).

Briefly, both Massumi and Clough look at the “auto-poiesis of the body-as-organism,” or the notion of a bounded and privileged human body, in terms of “conscious perception” or “the narration of affect” from which “there nonetheless always is a ‘never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder’, ‘a virtual remainder’, an excess of affect” (7). Following Massumi, Clough defines consciousness as “subtractive” and “limitative... a derived function in a virtual field where any actualization becomes, at that same moment of actualization, the limit of that field, which otherwise has no pre-given empirical limit” (7). The notion here of a “radical empiricism” (as Massumi picks up the idea from William James), and of the tendency of consciousness to ‘produce’ its own qualified experience of reality, does certainly concord with Wordsworth’s understanding of the poet’s project to “extend the domain of the sensible” in moment in history when technological acceleration was, in Wordsworth’s eyes, conditioning the masses to a “degraded appetite” for what we might now understand as *captured* or manipulated affect, the “gross and violent” excitements produced by the media: “brainwashing” at the level of mimetic bodily affect.

In brief, the thrust of these arguments emerging from media theory is not on the *deconditioning* potential of affect but on the wholesale exposure to conditioning of an indeterminate subjectivity, especially in the media age.⁷³ Clough attempts to argue that increasing biomediation will make the body (as indetermination) all the more aware of

⁷³ Arguably, this indeterminate subjectivity would be attracted to the finite – ie., the reinforcements of feedback loops. The organism may find security in closure and determinacy.

the false closure of the “body-as-organism” and thus more responsive to “its own affective indeterminacy.” Yet, in the same breath, Clough turns to the “connection of affect and capital” (21), and the notion of affect as the “object of capitalist capture” (23) mobilized as biopower.

Rather, preindividual affective capacities have been made central to the passage from formal subsumption to the real subsumption of ‘life itself’ into capital, as the accumulation of capital has shifted to the domain of affect... seeking at a deeper level a reduction of energy resources, including the human body and ‘life itself’, to their informational substrate, such that equivalencies might be found to value one form of life against another, one vital capacity against another. With information providing the unit, capital accumulation in the domain of affect is an accumulation and investment in information as the dynamic immanent to matter... In this passage from formal to real subsumption, the tendencies of capitalism are moved by the techno-ontological postbiological threshold. (Clough, 21).

Clough links globalization (as the “break-up of the Fordist-Keynesian regime of capital accumulation” into “flexible accumulation”) with a “break into biology” (22) and locates in “the passing from formal subsumption to real subsumption... the political, economic, and cultural relevance of taking the affective turn” (19). Perhaps the most telling example of the tension at work between affect as conditioning and affect as extended relationship can be found in the last sentence of Clough’s essay, “The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies”:

While the political gain expected of the affect turn – its openness, emergence, and creativity – is already the object of capitalist capture, as capital shifts to accumulate in the domain of affect and deploys racism to produce an economy to realize its accumulation, it is important to remember the virtual at the threshold. Beyond it, always a chance for something else, unexpected, new. (Clough, 23)

Admittedly, media theorists hold open the creativity of affect. To do less would be extremely programmatic. But the overall thrust echoes a sense of helplessness in the face of an accelerated informatics, one that (for instance in Clough's thoughts about the liberatory potential of biomediation) appears insufficiently critical of the impunity of human intervention in the interdependence of biological systems. Yet, climate change, an unprecedented rate of species extinction, and a mounting array of alarming symptoms, indicate that biomediation continues a trajectory of control over life or nature that may lead to human extinction, too. If one shifts the emphasis from affect as conditioning (biopower) to affect as relationship, the work of "real subsumption" and of "capture" does not happen in a vacuum.⁷⁴

One could argue that Clough's formulation of the situation leaves freedom exiled as never before (beyond the virtual threshold) from political or social existence.⁷⁵ While Massumi and Clough point toward the excess of affect, they seem to bypass the role of attention as a means of accessing that which exceeds discursive capture. As Clough writes, "Affect and consciousness are in a virtual-actual *circuit*, which defines affect as potential and emergent" (7, italics mine). Consciousness, for Massumi, is actual, limitative and subtractive, but how then does one access the other end of the circuit:

⁷⁴Indeed, where Clough seems to take the survival of the human species as a given, and to take, perhaps, the turn to "real subsumption" as a mechanism that invidiously assures the production of such a future, albeit a future of micro-control, some may be led to doubt whether what she describes is life at all. We may look to another Deleuzian thinker. Among the otherwise salutary implications of her essay, "Met(r)amorphoses: becoming woman/animal/insect," Braidotti, a famous proponent of "philosophical nomadism," entertains the idea that we stop caring so much about our survival: if the material, affective universe of flows and assemblages does not need us, human, at its center, why cling?⁷⁴

⁷⁵ To call "the social" a sphere of constructed discourse is to miss the positive potential of understanding oneself **as social**, as existing in relationship.

virtual affect, as potential and emergence? Here, a notion of attention (or mindfulness), such as was present in nineteenth century nature poetry,⁷⁶ would be of inestimable value. As Wordsworth describes it, poetic attention is intimately connected to preverbal sensation or “first affections.” And poetic attention gently exceeds discursive consciousness because (even as Clough defines “information”) it is “contact.” Poetic attention *touches* rather than *grasps*, receives rather than *captures*.

Indeed, applying the ideas of cognitive poetics explicated in Mark Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind*, if there is an underlying image schema and metaphor (derived from repeated patterns of embodied experience) that can assist our critical thinking here, it may be precisely the metaphor so often invoked by poets for this purpose: the metaphor of the hand, with its rich image schematic evocation of the tension between touch, (contact, relationship, vulnerability) and what Keats called “irritable grasping” -(the need to seize its object, the intellectual quest for a “complete concept” that mirrors the scientific quest for an “ultimate atomistic particle”) - the claiming of identity motivated by ontological anxiety.

If Beer has referred to the heart as the medium by which the Romantics hoped to mediate between ‘consciousness’ and ‘identity’, clearly there is dissonance between the ways in which various thinkers use these terms. According to Beer, Coleridge was drawn toward “consciousness” as non-unitary infinity (which may remind us of Deleuze’s micro-molecular virtualities), and saw his friend Wordsworth as drawn to identity or personality, the powerful self-assurance in a unified subjectivity intimate with the universe. The former might be called objective and the latter radically subjective, with

the sentimental (the heart) mediating between them (i.e., softening hard objectivity). Yet, one must ask if Coleridge, in attributing an overly-robust sense of identity or dogged subjectivity to Wordsworth, undervalued his fellow poet's shared concern with *Being*. Beer begins his work on Romantic consciousness with the express aim of exploring the distinction in their thought "between consciousness and what for the purposes of convenience we shall refer to (with a capitalized letter) as Being" (Beer, 10). As Beer notes:

The complicating factor, which must be borne constantly in mind, is that while consciousness must always in some sense include Being – serving often, indeed, as a necessary filter for its expression – it is not clear how far Being will reciprocate. In order to convey what is involved, the attempt must often therefore involve resorting to impression and suggestion. The words of Wordsworth, that in order to paint such an effect he would 'need/Colours and words that are unknown to man...' reecho in such a context" (Beer, 10).

4.2 Via negativa – consciousness and being - Wordsworth, Damasio, and the Dalai Lama – a level of perception below normal consciousness, without overt splendor

From the point of view of affect theory, what is of special interest here is that Beer begins his exploration of Romantic consciousness by first invoking Antonio Damasio's celebrated "somatic markers" hypothesis. Beer historicizes Damasio in relation to the Romantics, whom he suggests spoke "in ultimate terms about being," always in the context of the "divine," because of political fears that made it imperative to "safeguard the boundaries of rational consciousness" in the face of "new intellectual developments... tarred with the brush of revolutionary thinking in France" (10) that included mesmerism. Here again, in Beer's contextualization of Damasio in a longer tradition of contestations of Cartesian boundedness, we find the distinction (made by Massumi, drawing on the Deleuze-Bergson-Spinoza thread of thinking about affect in terms of immanence), between consciousness and affect:

Yet once such new ideas had been voiced, they could not simply be hidden away again, and a conception which has come back many times, as in the thinking of Damasio, the idea that consciousness itself cannot be identified with the whole of what it is to be human, has remained insidiously present in human thinking ever since... (10).

Although Beer agrees with Damasio's critique of an "identification between reasoning and true Being" that gives primacy to reason as a faculty that exists *sui generis* without ongoing relationship with, if not emergence from, the biology of feelings, Beer suggests that Damasio risks falling into the corresponding error of "identifying Being with emotion" (10):

The position to be advanced here is that in both cases identification is inappropriate. Being should be thought of as distinguishable from both the levels of consciousness concerned, levels which are constantly fusing and intermingling with Being, yet which differ fundamentally in their own natures, the one being best described as primarily biochemical, the other as bioelectrical. (Beer, 10)⁷⁷

This critique of Damasio is incisive. The physicalist explanation of consciousness, Beer suggests, is something the Romantics would have been aware of, but would have resisted. Keats, he points out, began with a career in medicine and was well-informed of “the precise and subtle knowledge of human physiology that recent work had made available” (59), and would have been aware, for instance, of “a connection between the rushing of the blood to the cheeks in blushing and to the phallus in erection” (59):

In the Romantic usages of the key word of the time, ‘sensibility’, the expansiveness of literary fashion could thus come together with the medical exactness of the medical school, offering richness of resonance. The evidence of his writing in such contexts is that Keats’s attention was intensely absorbed when such links involved the inter-working of biochemical and nervous functions. On the other hand, simply to stop short at clinical analysis of such workings might make them seem in themselves *purely mechanical, leading to elimination of concepts such as the ‘Soul’ and to a materialism that might seem cold and even dead.*

(Beer, 59, italics mine)

⁷⁷ This gets us into murky territory. Beer goes on to discuss a study that attempts to argue, by linking the bioelectrical to thought, that machines can think. Support is drawn from the testimony of great mathematicians that most of their thinking is visual and nonverbal. Beer contends that a component of thought might also be biochemical (hence machines cannot think), proposing that consciousness is thus elusive and unseizable.

Here, at last, we approach (or circumambulate) one of the most interesting moments in Beer's thinking about Romantic consciousness, and one that has surprising connections to an exchange between the mindfulness tradition of the far east and contemporary neuropsychology, which takes place in a dialogue between the Dalai Lama of Tibet and Antonio Damasio in *Consciousness At The Crossroads: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Brain Science and Buddhism*, a record of the 1989 Mind and Life Conference.

In a chapter entitled "Keats and the Highgate Nightingales," Beer recounts Keats' brief walk with Coleridge in which the older poet discourses on a "skein of ideas" that "Wordsworth himself had encountered twenty years earlier, providing... an original stimulus to some of the most potent and attractive ideas of *The Excursion*... Keats was now receiving a deeper insight into processes behind passages which could in fact be regarded as compound product of the two poets' minds" (62). Marvelously, Beer makes an allusive return to an idea he discussed earlier in reference to key passages in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, the notion that Wordsworth's "'spots of time'... recorded occasions of *kairos*, followed immediately by a more visionary state with all the marks of the *aionic*" (42). The tension between *kairos* and *aion* is so interesting here that it is worth quoting Beer's explanation more fully:

When in a previous study I explored the underlying qualities further, I invoked the concepts of *kairos*, the urge toward an all-embracing moment of fulfilled experience and that of *aion*, the resting back on a timeless sense of eternity, to suggest that the extremes of a psyche such as Wordsworth's, arguing that in his youth the aspiration towards the first state was uppermost, the resulting experiences of calm being simply bonuses, occurring usually in the moment of cessation from such activity and not to be cultivated for their own sake.

(Beer, 42)

The relationship between *kairos*, which seeks a heightened experience of the correspondence that Coleridge, in his earlier and less skeptical years, made “between the sensitive powers in humans and the finer influences of nature” (42), and *aion*, which arises in the *cessation* of mental clinging, is interesting in view of the fact that both Beer and Keats point to Coleridge as, in Keats’ words, a man who “would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge” (56). In other words, Coleridge may have found it more difficult to release mental grasping at objective existence (discursive identity) into those finer influences.

If Coleridge felt himself to lack identity and to be pulled toward “consciousness” compared to a Wordsworth whom he felt had a strong “identity,” part of the inherited confusion in terms here may be Coleridge’s. Beer implies that the calm that was a mere “bonus” to Wordsworth in his youth became an aim of his later life, a shift that resolved some of the more interesting questionings of Being found in Wordsworth’s early poetry but provided him with a stable sense of ontological agency. In this context, consciousness, however diffuse and associative (and whether, with Beer, we associate it with bioelectrical thoughts, biochemical emotions, or interactions between the two) never fully relaxes identification and construction into the cessation that may in fact be the calm ground of what Coleridge perceived to be his friend’s too phlegmatic identity.

That is to say, the Wordsworth who achieved an unintended bonus of *kairos* after his early intense experiences of *aion*, may have in some ways been better able to rest his mind in sensation, or affect, releasing any lingering attachment to those sensations as

necessary sources of meaning (imputed existence). Those “finer influences in nature” led him to a calm past experience, past (and prior to) any process. Landscape became a prompt for him to relax the discursive center into a poetic receptivity to active (vital) interconnectedness. The calm and the receptivity, elusive, and in excess of identification, may have emerged into the foreground for him. Critically, this sense of calm rested on *cessation* (not only of discourse, but of the somatic as a self-releasing phenomenon), the very non-quality of negative capability that, ostensibly, Keats, too, may have worried that Wordsworth lacked. As Keats famously defined his concept:

...several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.

If, however, Wordsworth were merely falling back on a *belief*, a kind of basic trust in some hidden presence, in which he grounded his solid identity, we are left with little but an affirmation of the religious attitude, well enough in a priest, but not wholly satisfactory in a poet whose *Excursion* was greeted by Keats as “one of the three things to rejoice at in this Age” (54): a poet who effected a revolution in poetic language and form yet wrote many of the greatest traditional sonnets in the English language. Ironically, according to Beer, it may have been when Keats walked with Coleridge that he was “offered a more direct access to the esoteric element of Wordsworth” (63):

The notable lines that begin [*The Excursion's*] final book, for instance, concerning the ‘active principle’ subsisting ‘in all things’, which ‘circulates, the Soul of all the worlds’ was drafted at an early stage, when the collaboration was close. The lines, little altered from the first manuscript version, convey the sense of a power in the universe ‘removed/From sense and

observation' – *relying for its apprehension, evidently, on a level of perception below normal consciousness.*

(italics mine)

Until this point, I agree with Beer, and would contest only the following sentence, which, though supported by Beer's earlier observations of Wordsworth's resort to the notion of an "under-presence" (equated with the divine), may not give Wordsworth sufficient credit:

Wordsworth is using the sense of a hidden power, and of a secret means by which it can be grasped, to underwrite his doctrines – a device to be found more commonly in Coleridge's writings. (Beer 63)

This pronouncement seems unfair, if we consider that, far from underwriting his "doctrines," Wordsworth may have been attempting to express something profoundly experiential and recondite. The feeling subject who relaxes discursive addiction into subtle receptivity to sensation begins to sense not only interconnectedness but also a calm that is by no means a "hidden power" (abstraction) to be grasped by a "secret means" employed to "underwrite" Wordsworth's "doctrines" of the experience of interfusion. Rather, the means and the experience are available to every individual in the mere *cessation* of discursive attachment. Trust in sensation calms discursive identification so that the sense of interconnectedness (in which conventional bounded agency subsides) may arise. Let us consider an exchange between Damasio and the Dalai Lama:

ANTONIO DAMASIO: I have a question, for clarification. When you have the very subtle consciousness that one is supposed to have just before death, that really does not mean that you have heightened, greater awareness, but rather the contrary. *It means that in fact you are reducing perception to very low levels, right?*

DALAI LAMA: Yes.

ALLAN HOBSON: That is very important.

PATRICIA CHURCHLAND: I had assumed exactly the reverse.

ANTONIO DAMASIO: I also had the opposite idea.

DALAI LAMA: One of the purposes of tantric meditation is to prepare you to be able to utilize the death opportunity. The point is to transform that stage of mind into wisdom, because it is the most subtle state of mind. *There is less influence of conditioning*, so it is more pure.

ANTONIO DAMASIO: Mental exercise in preparation for death.

DALAI LAMA: Yes, it is very strong.
(Wallace 108, italics mine)

If Beer writes off Wordsworth's "underpresence" as a hidden hand, he picks back up the notion of Wordsworth's increasing confidence in *aion*, a mature, unconditional calm that did not depend on excitement so much as "a level of perception below normal consciousness."

When Keats heard Coleridge discoursing he was, by the same token, being offered a more direct access to the esoteric element in Wordsworth. The result was not the kind of excitement that had sometimes seized his mind as a young man. By now he had passed beyond such straightforward ecstasies – having been helped to do so, indeed, by Wordsworth's reflective poetry.
(Beer 63)

Beer has been careful to explain that, for Wordsworth, this "level of perception below normal consciousness" would not have involved a "splendor" but "something dim and vast in its own being" (41). "This," writes Beer, "is also true of the nature of imagination, which in Wordsworth's eyes, as in Coleridge's, was closely related to that of

Being. In some of the most important places where he uses the term he does so without suggesting an inherent splendor” (39). Wordsworth reports back home, with Heraclitus, and Dante, that “the way up and the way down are one and the same” (40), and that, though the imagination (identified with the nature of mind) is “essentially unseizable, unknowable, yet the disturbing loss of bearings is accompanied by an equally ineluctable sense of power” (40).

This highlights Wordsworth’s willingness to relax discursive consciousness into sensory attention, an entry into unconditional contact frightening because it ceases to construct meanings and relationships, in fact allowing their dissolution.⁷⁸ By letting go of high perception, by remaining with the low, the dim, Wordsworth may have been able to relax his anxieties about the ground of being, because, as Beer suggests very early on, what Damasio describes as a “background feeling” might better be understood as a state:⁷⁹

Damasio’s own error, if it may be so characterized, is to insist on describing as a feeling something that should be thought of rather as a state, since in this case it may exist, it would seem, without any emotion at all being present. Such a state, indeed, need never rise into consciousness for its existence to be believed in. Although not necessarily negative, it is better described in terms of what it is not than of what it is. (Beer 29)

⁷⁸The Via Negativa, the “negative way,” or the apophatic.

⁷⁹ Derrida’s own attraction to negative theology, and to a “messianicity shorn of everything” is something he joked about in *Monolingualism of the Other*, so it remains to be asked whether this homeless, unnameable being “better described in terms of what is not” is synonymous with the metaphysical presence supposedly circumscribed as natural meaning in the host of language, which Derrida critiqued.

Chapter Five - Romantic melancholy –

trespassing the bounds (social prohibitions on attention, reflection, and dissolution) - tasting the forbidden fruit – entering the fane of interconnectedness

5.1 “In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice”

If anything, Beer does not appear to take the significance of Romantic melancholy far enough, and does not adequately acknowledge how in Keats, for instance, it is melancholy, over and over again, that serves as the door to wisdom for the poet who identifies most intimately with the dreaming or woven nature of the reality. This is borne out, among many other examples, in key lines of *The Fall of Hyperion*, where, already pulled into a dream-vision (introduced by the medieval “methought”), the poet drinks from a “cool vessel of transparent juice” discovered on a “mound of moss” where “was spread a feast of summer fruits/Which, nearer seen, seem'd refuse of a meal/By angel tasted or our Mother Eve.” The reference to Eve explicitly connects the elixir to the forbidden fruit of the knowledge of life and death, a “full draught” that is something like the poison in *Ode to Melancholy*, with the power to induce oblivion or “lethe” but also to awaken one, in suffering, to the vibrancy of sensory existence: “the wakeful anguish of the soul.”

For Keats, the “soul” that tastes “the sadness” of melancholy’s “might” least resists and enters most the rich experience of life. So he instructs, “But when the melancholy fit shall fall/Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud/... Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose/Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave/Or on the wealth of globèd peonies/Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows/Emprison her soft hand, and let

her rave/And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.” In similar terms, Keats speaks of the elixir that brings him into Moneta’s temple in *The Fall of Hyperion*:

And, pledging all the mortals of the world,
And all the dead whose names are in our lips,
Drank. That full draught is parent of my theme.
No Asian poppy nor elixir fine
Of the soon fading jealous Caliphat,
No poison gender'd in close monkish cell
To thin the scarlet conclave of old men,
Could so have rapt unwilling life away.

That this poison is also a medicine becomes clear in the passage that soon follows:

'High Prophetess,' said I, 'purge off,
'Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.'

The poet asks, as Adam does of the archangel in *Paradise Lost*, for the obscurations that cloud his perception to be removed, though we know from the ending of the original *Hyperion* poem, the agony implied in the apotheosis:

'None can usurp this height,' return'd that shade,
'But those to whom the miseries of the world
'Are misery, and will not let them rest.
'All else who find a haven in the world,
'Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
'If by a chance into this fane they come,
'Rot on the pavement where thou rottedst half.'

And the poet learns that he has come into the fane of memory, the core of cognition, only by virtue of his complete acceptance of and wakefulness to sorrow, his lack of any “haven in the world.” But he is surprised to find that he is alone there, alone in that melancholy that feels the collective sorrow shunted aside by daily and narrow identifications with personal interests, alone in feeling the “giant agony of the world.” Melancholy is like the forbidden fruit, in fact, because social reality discourages one from

feeling it, and from feeling it fully. Silvan Tomkins, whose formulation of affect theory is explored by Adam Frank and Eve Sedgwick in *Shame and Her Sisters*, pointed out, following Freud, the social prohibition on “unlimited attention” internalized by children at a young age. Socialization teaches one to limit and bound both one’s attention and one’s emotional openness. In this light, Sedgwick calls affect “sublimely alien to any project of narrating the emergence of a core self” (*Touching Feeling*, 98). The work of a poet is, then, affective:

'Are there not thousands in the world,' said I,
Encourag'd by the sooth voice of the shade,
'Who love their fellows even to the death;
'Who feel the giant agony of the world;
'And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
'Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
'Other men here; but I am here alone.'

Moneta’s reply reflects Keats’ ambivalence about abandoning his medical path for poetry; she implies that those who truly love their fellows help them in practical ways.

'Those whom thou spak'st of are no vision'ries,'
Rejoin'd that voice; 'they are no dreamers weak;
'They seek no wonder but the human face,
'No music but a happy noted voice;
'They come not here, they have no thought to come;
'And thou art here, for thou art less than they:

Not only is the poet homeless, but, having transgressed the bounds of limited empathy and responsibility, the poet also suffers unlimited pain.

'What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
'To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
'A fever of thyself think of the Earth;
'What bliss even in hope is there for thee?
'What haven? every creature hath its home;

'Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
'Whether his labours be sublime or low
'The pain alone; the joy alone; distinct:
'Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
'Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve...

Ironically, this is why, in dream, he was allowed into the garden where he discovered the remains of the feast, and then into the temple, as compensation.

'Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shar'd,
'Such things as thou art are admitted oft
'Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
'And suffer'd in these temples: for that cause
'Thou standest safe beneath this statue's knees.'

Here, the poison of pathos, of suffering, is transmuted into the medicine of compassion, a “melody sung into the world’s ear,” echoing the opening lines of *Ode to Psyche*, “O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung/By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear/And pardon that thy secrets should be sung/Even into thine own soft-conchèd ear.” Keats appears to propose that the poet transmutes the melancholy that stands beyond bounded self-interest into a kind of music and healing medicine for a humanity that has closed its ear, and its senses, to the full communication of its being; a conch should hold the sound of the ocean, which, ironically the poet must sing into the world’s ear, reminding the individual psyche of its oceanic oneness, the sympathy of the part with the whole:

'That I am favour'd for unworthiness,
'By such propitious parley medicin'd
'In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice,
'Aye, and could weep for love of such award.'
So answer'd I, continuing, 'If it please,
'Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all
'Those melodies sung into the world's ear

'Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;
'A humanist, physician to all men.

Wordsworth, too, apparently had this willingness to suffer this “sickness not ignoble” which lends dignity to the soul, this “giant agony of the world” that makes his labour one of imagination, or of dreaming. This makes all the more sense if one considers the function of dreaming for the human psyche; apparently the wavelengths of dreaming sleep have a necessary restorative function. Dreaming is not just an escape into fantasy, but coordinated patterns of a brain maintaining integration. Its link with melancholy may have to do with its link with emotion in general; so much soma of the body is suppressed due to social prohibition and an incomplete capacity for affect and relationship in daily life. Indeed, the first thing to be unlocked by attention, if one has the courage to be mindful of oneself, not merely as conventional agent engaged in conventional activities but as being in need of relationship and wholeness, is a profound store of melancholy or suppressed affect.⁸⁰

As already indicated, Wordsworth's conception of Being had always differed from Coleridge's. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that he found the negative elements in Coleridge's ideas the more impressive, more consonant with his own experience, than the positive. The idea that in the midst of desolation one might for the first time, like the Ancient Mariner, glimpse the nature of true Being was by no means uncongenial to him; the difference was that he would be more likely to stress the actual conditions of the desolation, showing how they express the grandeur associated with Being, even if it does not normally reveal itself directly in equivalent splendour.

(Beer 39)

⁸⁰ In this sense, Derrida's critique still holds. It may be that one seeks true Being as an abstract and pure substitute for something much more difficult to admit one lacks, relationship.

Yet, it seems that it is easier in general for critical theorists, even those who are thinking embodiment, to bracket out the middle term, relationship, and the emotional call for relationship, focusing instead on conditioning and construction. A telling moment in Clough's essay breezes by the work of Eve Sedgwick, with its return to "the subject of emotion," glossing it almost as a mistaken optimism about the postmodern breakdown of dominant discourses, an optimism which failed to foresee its implications for an informatics that could therefore penetrate even more deeply into the "affective capacity of bodies" (22):

In cultural criticism and critical theory, there was an accompanying celebration of border cultures, hyphenated identities and queered subjectivities that yielded, however, in the later half of 1990s to the elaboration of melancholy, a focus on trauma, a worrying about memory that shifted remembering and forgetting to the body. In this context, the turn to affect, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995, 2003) proposed, could lead cultural criticism from the 'paranoid strong' theorizing of deconstructive approaches, while making it possible to reverse the effects of trauma. It would do so because affect, it was argued, is 'freer' than the drives as theorized in psychoanalysis, and therefore affect is more amenable to change.

In such accounts, the affective turn's privileging of movement, emergence, and potentiality in relationship to the body often returned to the subject, the subject of emotion, as a surplus of freedom... (Clough 19)

In recent decades, the great charge against Wordsworth has been his very tendency to dwell on the subject of emotion and to project a human sensibility out into the material universe, a charge associated with Keats' critique of his "Egotistical Sublime." While an answer to this charge must, for the moment, be deferred, one may note that, like Wordsworth, Sedgwick is more interested in investigating relationship and

less interested in the mechanics of conditioning. As Clough notes, part of Sedgwick's project was to depart from the critical tendency to hunt down "repression/control" having mastered one or two "discrediting questions."⁸¹ While Clough neatly relegates Sedgwick to an historical moment that has ostensibly passed, it may be that, as a media theorist, Clough has passed too quickly over the questions of melancholy, trauma, and bodily emotion that were of such great interest to nineteenth century poets.

⁸¹ Sedgwick, introduction.

5.2 “All that we behold is full of blessings”

From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought. 10

Such benefit the humblest intellects
Partake of, each in their degree; 'tis mine
To speak, what I myself have known and felt;
Smooth task! for words find easy way, inspired
By gratitude, and confidence in truth.
(*Prelude*, Bk 13, 1-15)

Landscape, mood, movement: Wordsworth makes affect the subject – and the subject of his poetry. As much as we might speak of a “subject of emotion,” we might speak of a mode of affect - a mode of processing the world of interrelationships (feeling) - which goes on “right there beside” the mode that apprehends atomistic units, discrete objects (thinking). The real subject matter of *Tintern Abbey*, for example, is not so much nature as it is the *feeling subject*. Though Wordsworth says he longs to be “nature’s priest,” what he seems to find most worthy of reverence is the “love and relationship” that moves through nature’s “atmosphere of sensation” – a subjectivity and an affectivity, a pathos and a passion, that escapes the local body.

All the same, Wordsworth does not simply abstract this “spirit” or posit it as categorically distinct from matter. Like Spinoza, he draws no strict body/mind division. On the contrary, if he senses an underlying fabric of relationship, he does so only by

grace of nature, with its patterns of sensation and interconnectedness. Turning, perhaps not radically, but with radical trust, *to his five senses* (i.e., to mindfulness), Wordsworth allows himself to feel, yields himself to sensation, surrenders (to whatever extent he was able) his discursive habits and internal monologues; it is sensation that resolves his ontological anxiety and reassures him of patterns of relationship deeper than both fear and control, deeper than identity; a sense of trust that his early collaborator in theories of organicism and vitalism, Coleridge, was increasingly unable to attain.⁸² Wordsworth is empirical, or what Massumi might call “super-empirical.” He begins with nature, matter, sensation, feeling; trusting it to prove excessive, to slip through identity, to move, interact, open into relationship. Spirit is never opposed to matter, but moves as the affectivity of matter.

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: -- feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love.

What is notable here is how the “little, nameless, unremembered acts” mirror the anonymity of the small, interactive, interrelational processes (the infinitesimal hands) of nature, perhaps best gestured toward in one of the world’s oldest and most companionable of texts, the *Tao Te Ching*:

Heaven will last,
Earth will endure.

⁸² See John Beer, “Coleridge, Wordsworth and Unknown Modes of Being” (21-53), in *Romantic Consciousness*.

How can they last so long
They don't exist for themselves
and so can go on and on.
(*Tao Te Ching*, 10)

Wordsworth repeatedly uses the word “blessed,” especially in connection with “mood.” For him, there is a “blessed mood” – literally a mood open to the wounds of things – open to the indeterminacy and contingency of all existence, in its interdependence – which sloughs off the “weight/Of all this unintelligible world”:

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence...
 ... I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:-
 ...Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,--
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things....
(*Tintern Abbey*, 23-49)

5.3 Cessation - the five senses and the material universe - “its own divine vitality”

In “that serene and blessed mood/In which the affections gently lead us on,” the world becomes less “unintelligible.” There is shared reading, shared touch, shared vitality: intelligence, interconnectedness, interfusion. By affections, Wordsworth does not simply mean imaginings or sentiments, but the intimate contact between the five senses and the material universe.⁸³ The mood is serene because discursive construction (all symbolic operations) must relax – with parallels, again, to eastern notions of “cessation.” The mood is blessed in the Old English sense of the word, “wounded,” mutually interpenetrated. The affections “gently lead us” to a moment when both “breath” and the “corporeal” and the “motion of our human blood” - these elements of air, earth, and water - are “almost suspended.”

Long before Whitman, here is a poet dissolving his elements into, mingling his mind with, the material universe, and radically extending the range of his affiliations or identifications. Although bodily sensation has led to this point, “we are laid asleep/In body, and become a living soul.” Attentiveness to the affectivity of matter has become so subtle, so detailed, that no body, no discrete elements can be found. Affect, in Massumi’s words, “escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction it is” (Massumi 35). When this “continuity of affective escape is put into words,” Massumi writes, there is the “perception of one’s own vitality” (36).

⁸³ Here are, certainly, some of the most interesting of Wordsworth’s lines.

Wordsworth, we may note, has peculiar notions about *vitality*, which may expand our appreciation of this word. The vital, the quick, the green, the living, that which moves *with meaning*, this is surely a key element not only in Wordsworth, but in Shakespeare, Marvell, Blake, and more recent poets like Dylan Thomas, Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, and Kathleen Jamie. Indeed, in a sonnet, Wordsworth gives direct advice to poets, counseling them to let their “Art be Nature,” or natural. It is not the imitable devices of the craft, but the “live current,” that leads to poetry:

A poet!--He hath put his heart to school,
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff
Which art hath lodged within his hand--must laugh
By precept only, and shed tears by rule.
Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff,
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool,
In fear that else, when Critics grave and cool
Have killed him, Scorn should write his epitaph.

He who merely follows rules he likens to a “groveller” who sips “his stagnant pool,” in contrast to the unself-conscious poet, who should “the live current quaff.” Here is where we get Wordsworth’s notion of vitality, a life intelligence that extends from the growth of trees to the writing of poems, from nature to art.⁸⁴ The sonnet, ironically, is a fairly restrictive form, just (perhaps) as the form of a daffodil is fairly restrictive. Yet, Wordsworth argues here that it is not the “formal mould” that creates the grandeur of either the flower or the sonnet, but the divine vitality that flows through it, an argument that Dylan Thomas seems to sympathize with strongly in “The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” Here, then, is a different sort of evidence for the source of

⁸⁴ Just as Shakespeare in *The Winter’s Tale*, celebrates a rite of Spring, and portrays nature as living art: “great creating Nature” (4.4.88) and “The art itself is Nature” (4.4.97).

Wordsworth's "Egotistical Sublime." It is not that Wordsworth is so grandiose as to project himself out into the material universe, but rather that he understands his ego to be rooted in an egoless ground of interconnectedness, and out of this vitality, is free, "free down to (the) root":

How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold;
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
But from its own divine vitality.

Hence, when Wordsworth speaks of being laid asleep in body and becoming a living soul, he is speaking about, to use the language of the Tao *Te Ching*, "returning to the root," or reverting to nonexistence, the vitality of interconnectedness in which matter participates, but which exceeds our ability to capture it in our concepts of matter. *This* is emphasized by *what the living soul apprehends*: sheer interconnectedness, "the life of things."

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

(*Tintern Abbey*, 45-49)

Spinoza's notion of "passion" and "impingement," picked up by media theorists like Massumi, is also present here. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth speaks of his "boyish days" when "The sounding cataract/Haunted me like a passion:/the tall rock/The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood/Their colours and their forms, were then to me/An appetite; a feeling and a love..." (78-82). After decades, and with mature experience, Wordsworth has "learned/To look on nature/...hearing oftentimes/The still,

sad music of humanity.” He has “felt a presence... deeply interfused... A motion and a spirit, that impels/All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/And rolls through all things.”

Coming back, sobered by a life’s apprenticeship in the human condition, Wordsworth finds his earliest affinities and affections were the ground of his mature understanding. Although his attention to human misery has led him to feel “something far more deeply interfused” which does not depend so much on material attention to the colors and forms of nature as on a deep inner attention to feeling, to compassion itself (rather than the passion of sensory impingement), he recognizes that it may have been his early affinity for nature that predisposed him to sense the subtler fabric of relationship, the music, that moves through the whole of life and its experience. So, he can tell us that “nature and the language of the sense” were the “anchor” of “my purest thoughts, the nurse/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/Of all my moral being.” And it is in this sense that he can continue to acknowledge his debt to nature:

....Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, -- both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
(*Tintern Abbey*, 102-111)

Nature appears to exert an invisible influence that protects the heart from selfishness and skepticism, or the utilitarian premise that society is best served by rational, calculating, self-interested members unmoved by mere sentiment or inferior

feeling. As he says, addressing his sister, who has become a witness with him in his return to Tintern Abbey, reaffirming Wordsworth's mature understanding of the importance of intersubjectivity:

for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings...

(Tintern Abbey, 125-134)

All we behold "is full of blessings" because everything is full of relationship, interchange; that is, without self-identity but not without a dynamic kind of unity. Indeed, Wordsworth's poetics communicate the passion of those "first-born affinities" (the sensations sweet/Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart," the "affections that gently lead us on") that move us to sensory apprehension of the interconnectedness of nature. Unschooled sensation leads to trust in the felt presence of a form more "deeply interfused" that "rolls through all things." The trust in a tender presence (the calm ground of both attention and phenomena) that moves equally in human sorrow and in organic interconnectedness allows him, in his later years, to love nature even more.

A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love -- oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love.

Chapter Six - "Access of mind": "sensation, soul, and form"

6.1 "His mind was a thanksgiving to the power/That made him"

Such was the Boy--but for the growing Youth
What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked--
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
Beneath him:--Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love. *Sound needed none,*
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love!

(*Excursion*, Book First, "The Wanderer," italics and bolds mine)⁸⁵

Here, early in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth voices one of his most direct and extraordinary meditations on the relationship of mind, nature, and "the living God" (perhaps best understood as the dynamic, vital "wisdom and spirit of the universe"⁸⁶ referred to in Book One⁸⁷ of *The Prelude*). The four elements, as qualities of embodied

⁸⁵http://www.everypoet.com/archive/poetry/William_Wordsworth/william_wordsworth_398.htm

⁸⁶ *Excursion*, Bk 1, "The Wanderer."

⁸⁷ described by Andrew North Whitehead as Wordsworth's best.

relationship - the wideness of space, the pervasive quality of light, the “solid frame of earth,” and the “ocean’s liquid mass” - are invoked, as the “Youth” *touches* the clouds and *reads* “unutterable love.” In confirmation of Beer’s argument that Wordsworth conceived of Being in the *aionic* sense, as a calm ground removed from gross stimulation, (in Zen terms, “basic wakefulness”) to be accessed in cessation, as immanence rather than an overt splendor, we are told, “sound needed none/ nor any voice of joy.” From the “naked top/Of some bold headland” the “growing Youth” experiences “what soul” or suchness⁸⁸ “was his,” in a crowning moment of inspiration, remarkable because its goal is not conquest or repute, but non-grasping and relaxation, (in Zen terms, “infinite spaciousness”), which thrills through the verse:

his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.

Notably, this relaxation into somatic attention, where the constructed lines of demarcation between identity and world dissolve, occurs for the youth on the mountain top; but, arguably, Wordsworth’s deeper project in the broader course of the unfinished *Recluse* was to bring that mountain silence, those “ecstasies of mind,” into the valley of daily life. The radical turn here, from the head to the heart, from discursive attention to somatic attention, has strong parallels in eastern mindfulness traditions, particularly Zen Buddhism, with its emphasis on “one taste” in which the mental categories of good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, sweet and bitter are resolved into a keen attention to

⁸⁸ The Buddhist term for reality nondually perceived.

sensation without opinion or labels. This concept is usefully explored by James H. Austin in *Zen-brain Reflections*,

In this third Tibetan usage, “One Taste” refers to the way our usual duality of experience finally dissolves... Thich Nhat Hanh... cited the way the Buddha described his own teaching as having only “one taste, the taste of liberation”... *Moksha* is the technical term in Sanskrit for this profound feeling of complete physical and psychic liberation... A further clarification arose in [Ken Wilber’s] statement, “One Taste is itself a peak experience, but it too will become, with further practice, a plateau experience, then a permanent adaptation”... the person experiences the basic tone of “One Taste” as a “relentless ordinariness, nothing special. It is *just this*, nothing more.”⁸⁹

Aside from the potentially pernicious implications of “permanent adaptation” (easily misunderstood to advocate a detached impunity Wordsworth never embraced), the metaphor of a peak experience that matures into a plateau experience is pertinent to Wordsworth’s poetics. Nonetheless, the specificities of Wordsworth’s description jar us out of the reified belief in a state to be attained (a great fault for Zen adepts) and ask us, simply, to feel, and to feel *fully*. As he expounds in Book 13 of *The Prelude*:

Also, about this time did I receive
Convictions still more strong than heretofore,
Not only that the inner frame is good,
And graciously composed, but that, no less,
Nature for all conditions wants not power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
Grandeur upon the very humblest face
Of human life. I felt that the array
Of act and circumstance, and visible form,
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
What passion makes them; *that meanwhile the forms
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,
That intermingles with those works of man*

⁸⁹ Austin, James H. *Zen-brain Reflections: Reviewing Recent Developments in Meditation and States of Consciousness*. MIT Press, 2006.

To which she summons him; although the works
 Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own;
 And that the Genius of the Poet hence
 May boldly take his way among mankind
Wherever Nature leads; that he hath stood
 By Nature's side among the men of old,
 And so shall stand for ever.

(279-299, italics mine)

And in Book Two:

Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,
 From Nature and her overflowing soul,
 I had received so much, that all my thoughts
 Were *steeped in feeling*; I was only then
 Contented, when with *bliss ineffable*
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
 O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
 Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides
 Beneath *the wave, yea, in the wave itself*,
 And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
 If high *the transport*, great the joy I felt,
 Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
 With every form of creature, as it looked
 Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
 Of adoration, with an eye of love.
 One song they sang, and it was audible,
 Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
 O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain
 Forgot her *functions*, and slept undisturbed.

(Prelude, Bk. 2, 396-418, bolds and italics mine)

These two passages speak of how “the forms/Of Nature have a passion in themselves/That intermingles with those works of man/To which she summons him” and of the “high transport” into the “bliss ineffable” of the “felt... sentiment of Being,” accessed when the “fleshly ear... Forgot her functions.” Thus, the opening of *The Excursion* tells us “his spirit drank/The spectacle,” emphasizing an absorption not driven

by a goal of liberation *from* embodiment, but a thirst for sensation; a thirst that cannot be described as attachment or clinging, but as unconditional encounter. The lines, “sensation, soul, and form/All melted into him; they swallowed up/His animal being” suggest the poet’s notion of graded links between sensation, soul, and form, indicating how sensation links us to a kind of patternless pattern. While neuroscientists today might object that sensation can be explained, exhaustively, in terms of neurons, Wordsworth’s “Youth” feels with his whole body, so unconditionally, that “his animal being” is “swallowed up.” Sensation is organized neither discursively nor neurologically and autonomically: “the worth/And dignity of individual man, No composition of the brain” (*Prelude*, Bk. 13, 80-83).

What Clough calls the boundedness of the “body-as-organism,” with its instincts and mechanisms (aimed at perpetuating the feedback loop of self within the body-membrane) relaxes into a “sensation, soul, and form” that exceed capture, and elude physicalist reduction, moving as interconnectedness, zoe, the natural sweetness of unfabricated life: “in them did he live/And by them did he live; they were his life.” In *Wordsworth and the Zen mind: the poetry of self-emptying*,⁹⁰ John G. Rudy offers an incisive summary of critical response to Wordsworth’s “excursive power” of the individual mind:

M.H. Abrams claims that the central vision of Wordsworth’s poetry is the power of the individual mind “*as in itself adequate, by consummating a holy marriage with the external universe, to create out of the world of all of us, in a quotidian and recurrent miracle, a new world which is the equivalent of paradise.*” Kenneth R. Johnston argues similarly that “Wordsworth’s great faith is in Nature, the extrinsic, what is ‘out there,’ and in the

⁹⁰ Rudy, John G. *Wordsworth and the Zen mind: the poetry of self-emptying*. Buffalo: Suny Press, 1996.

excursive power of Imagination to go out to meet it"... More recently, Barbara Schapiro, invoking principles of modern quantum physics, maintains that "imagination and Nature, or mind and the material world, are mutually reflecting realms for Wordsworth – the order of mind mirrors the order of Nature."

(Rudy, 10, italics mine)

As Beer points out, Coleridge, despite his admiration for Wordsworth, sometimes found him pugnacious and self-righteous.⁹¹ At the least, readers today may find Wordsworth's sense of unity and his romantic inspiration rather narrativized and implausible. In Wordsworth's idealizations of country folk, we catch hints of the idealization of the poet as the friend of the humble, with their lack of artifice. In his admiration for the low, we catch hints of self-congratulation on the part of man who wanted to find the high in every ordinary object of nature.⁹²

...nor did he believe,--he 'saw'.
What wonder if his being thus became
Sublime and comprehensive! Low desires,
Low thoughts had there no place; yet was his heart
Lowly; for he was meek in gratitude,
Oft as he called those *ecstasies to mind*,
And whence they flowed; and from them he acquired
Wisdom, which works through patience; thence he learned
In oft-recurring hours of sober thought
To look on Nature with a humble heart.
Self-questioned where it did not understand,
And with a superstitious eye of love.

(*Excursion*, Bk. 1, 232-243, italics mine)

91 If postmodern skepticism is of use here, it is in its critique of grand narratives, and its rejection of distinctions between high and low culture, a rejection Wordsworth was one of the first literary figures to move toward, as early as his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. Contemporary poets may be hypersensitive to the problem that the narrator of the poem, is not, as Dickinson insisted in her letters to Higginson, the poet. And they may be careful to present the enormous disjunction between personality and that which, exceeding the personal, is perhaps most personal.

92 Yet, it would seem hypocritical to reject the medicine offered simply because the doctor does not tell us about his spats with his wife or his ingrown toenails.

What Wordsworth wants to share, with real enthusiasm, is the “access of mind” that makes life worth living to a man who felt the weight of human suffering and was inclined to melancholy. As Satan asks of Gabriel in *Paradise Lost*:

“Lives there he who loves his pain?
Who would not, finding way, break loose from Hell,
Though thither doomed.” (PL, 4, 888-890)

Arguably, if we forget Wordsworth’s melancholy, and his deep social engagement, we cannot appreciate what he means by “communion.” Like Dickinson, who wrote (in “This World is not Conclusion”) “Much Gesture, from the Pulpit --/Strong Hallelujahs roll --/Narcotics cannot still the Tooth/That nibbles at the soul,” Wordsworth was not interested in dogmatic words and metaphysical assurances, but in that “access of mind” and “visitation” where “thought was not; in enjoyment it expired”; not in words that encouraged him away from socially prohibited melancholy, but in a complete entry into melancholy, uncertainty, indeterminacy: “nor did he believe,--he ‘saw.’”

Implied here is something of the violence of belief, and creeds. Indeed, Wordsworth’s mode, for all its visionary *power*, was trust, relaxation, and non-use of force. If he was a smasher of idols and breaker of codes, it was because these provide not security but real danger, not reason but appropriative madness, not sacred law but rule by force. If “only one of ten thousand” see how thought produces a secondhand relationship to life, he implies that it is not “bars thrown by Nature... animal appetites and daily wants” that pose the “obstructions,” but social conditioning, the bars thrown by discourse and said both to make us civilized and to protect our rights as bounded, rational animals:

With settling judgments now of what would last
And what would disappear; *prepared to find*

Presumption, folly, madness, in the men
Who thrust themselves upon the passive world
As Rulers of the world; to see in these,
 Even when the public welfare is their aim,
Plans without thought, or built on theories 70
 Vague and unsound; and having brought the books
Of modern statists to their proper test,
Life, human life, with all its sacred claims
 Of sex and age, and heaven-descended rights,
 Mortal, or those beyond the reach of death;
 And having thus discerned *how dire a thing*
Is worshipped in that idol proudly named
"The Wealth of Nations," 'where' alone that wealth
 Is lodged, and how increased; and having gained
 A more judicious knowledge of the worth 80
 And dignity of individual man,
No composition of the brain, but man
Of whom we read, the man whom we behold
 With our own eyes--I could not but inquire--
 Not with less interest than heretofore,
 But greater, though in spirit more subdued--
Why is this glorious creature to be found
One only in ten thousand? What one is,
Why may not millions be? What bars are thrown
By Nature in the way of such a hope? 90
 Our animal appetites and daily wants,
 Are these obstructions insurmountable?
 (*Prelude, 13, 64-92, bolds and italics mine*)

While this passage contains keen glimmers of a critique of biopower, the infiltration of informatics into “life” itself (“modern statists”; “Life, human life, with all its sacred claims”), to which this essay has returned more than once, what we note here now is the poet’s feeling that human beings fall short of their potential (those “other laurels” referred to at the end of his great ode), living without looking at this embodied world first-hand and questioning received knowledge. Dickinson, too, discards belief and intellectual abstraction for experience of subtle interdependence where, Wordsworth suggest, “littleness was not; the least of things/Seemed infinite” (*Excursion*):

It beckons, and it baffles --
Philosophy -- don't know --
And through a Riddle, at the last --
Sagacity, must go --

This, arguably, is what makes them nature poets: their dissatisfaction with second-hand knowledge, conventional perception, and the bans that reason sets on interconnectedness.

For both, interconnectedness is not a concept, but the only cure for the bounded agent's sense of inadequate relationship. Interconnectedness cannot be reduced to neurons, though certainly it might affect neurons; it cannot be mechanical, and cannot be experienced in the persistence of demarcating lines between mind and matter. Hence, Wordsworth calls it a "visitation from the living God," and, in Book 3 of *The Prelude*, writes, "felt/Incumbences more awful, visitings/Of the Upholder, of the tranquil soul/Which underneath all passion lives secure/A steadfast life" (2.114-18). Dickinson, too, speaks quite frequently in terms of visitation ("It beckons, and it baffles," "When it comes, the landscape listens"). The most radical of voluntary renunciations - the relaxation of thought, or discursive construction, with which our "linguistic survival" (Butler) is identified - lets "sagacity" go through the "Riddle" and sense the "species" that "stands beyond/Invisible as music, but positive as sound" (Dickinson, *This World is not Conclusion*).

Like Dickinson, "spreading wide [her] narrow hands to gather paradise," the young poet of *The Prelude* is extinguished in "enjoyment," and "Rapt into still communion" that renders prayer obsolete. Most profoundly what is suggested here is that love *is* love because it is an attention so unconditional, so feeling, that it forgets itself. As he writes in Book 13 of *The Prelude*, "How oft high service is performed within/When all the external man is rude in show" (227-228). Of all Wordsworth's lines,

one stands out, powerful and evocative, recounting the cessation of desire in bliss; non-grasping apprehension of the nature of the mind as unconditional gratitude that (to cite Dickinson again) is “in itself, of itself”: “His mind was a thanksgiving to the power/That made him.”⁹³

In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love!
(*Excursion*, Bk. 1, 15-23)

If we are careful to keep in the forefront of our minds the extraordinary emphasis Wordsworth places on communion rather than abstract cerebration - (and his aversion to positing new *isms* that further distanced the individual from natural *experience*) - it may be edifying to consider Indian critic Sunil Kumar Sarker's summation of the views articulated in *The Prelude*:

In Bk II, Wordsworth presents us with his novel conception of the universe, that clearly shows his leaning toward vitalism and Spinozism. *He does not conceive of the universe as a conglomeration of multiplicity of divers inanimate objects, but as*

⁹³ Ironically this line recalls Satan's self-conscious resistance to what he knows is natural, in *Paradise Lost*:

Lifted up so high,
I 'sdained subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burdensome, still paying, still to owe:
Forgetful what from him I still received;
And understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharged – what burden then?
(*PL*, Bk IV, 49-57)

a unified living thing, something like an immensely huge hylozoistic being, that is wholly pervaded by a 'great Mind,' and which is both the Creator and the created... But all of us are not aware of the presence of the 'great Mind' within ourselves, but only those of us who grow up in the lap of nature, and one, who becomes aware of the presence of the 'great Mind' in himself, receives a sort of power – a mysterious power – with which he can connect himself, and communicate, with the 'active Universe' (thus ceaselessly procreating, creating, changing, and destroying, and busy universe, i.e., the universe that is not passive, and is not being acted upon, but is effortfully and willingly moulding, shaping, things out). Wordsworth calls this power poetic or spiritual power. He says that nature nurses and purifies our animal sensibilities and feelings, and thereby prepares ourselves for the birth and blossoming of this poetic or spiritual power that we receive from our birth. (Sarker, 492, italics mine)^{94xxi}

Book 13 of *The Prelude* clarifies this point about poetic power as the byproduct of an experience that might be called visionary only if we are careful to avoid connotations of the merely hallucinatory and imaginative and respect his emphasis on vision as subtle or refined attention:

Dearest Friend!
 If thou partake the *animating faith*
 That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
 Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
 Have each his own peculiar faculty,
 Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive
 Objects unseen before, thou wilt not blame
 The humblest of this band who dares to hope
 That unto him hath also been vouchsafed
An insight that in some sort he possesses,
A privilege whereby a work of his,
Proceeding from a source of untaught things,
Creative and enduring, may become
A power like one of Nature's.
 (299-312, italics mine)

⁹⁴ Sarker, Sanil Kumar. *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2003.

6.2 Nomadism, Zen, homelessness

A final comparison of this critical passage in *The Prelude* to the thought of Italian critic and “philosophical nomadist”⁹⁵ Rosi Braidotti, who revisits the place of zoe in western thought (reading Foucault through Deleuze’s notion of “becoming animal”) may prove fruitful:

This scandal, this wonder, this *zoe*, that is to say an idea of Life that is more than *bios* and supremely indifferent to *logos*, this piece of the flesh called my ‘body’, this aching meat called my ‘self’ expresses the abject/divine potency of a Life which consciousness lives in fear of... Nomadic subjectivity is, by contrast, in love with *zoe*....What if consciousness were ultimately incapable of finding a remedy to its obscure disease, this life, this *zoe*, an impersonal force that moves through me without asking for my permission to do so?.... The becoming-animal undoes one of the major borders of the metaphysics of the self, scrambling the distinction between human and non-human. It opens up the borders to encounters of the third and even the Nth kind: the becoming-animal turns into the becoming/insect/molecular/imperceptible.^{xxii}

(Braidotti, 132-145 passim)

Here again, Deleuze’s notion of “becoming animal” is rather different from Wordsworth’s notion of “the animal” body that is “swallowed” when “sensation, soul, and form” melt into the young poet’s “spirit.” In “Met(r)amorphoses,” Braidotti recounts a fiction in which a woman who has had a miscarriage dissolves her grief by resolving her human feelings into an identification with the raw molecules of the universe, first of all by identification with a fly; she becomes “molecular, imperceptible.” Although this may recall Dickinson’s “I heard a fly buzz when I died,” it seems to be at variance with “sympathetic imagination,” which relaxes into a sense of shared sentience with the

⁹⁵ In keeping with the title of Book One of *The Excursion*: “The Wanderer.”

universe, or what British biochemist Rupert Sheldrake (an interlocutor of David Bohm)⁹⁶ has called “non-local mind.” For Wordsworth, soulful sensation is tide-like: both impingement that melts, and engulfment that swallows, the animal or instinctual body.

Nevertheless, though Deleuzian philosophers are cautious about affirming what elsewhere Wordsworth refers to in Book Two of *The Prelude* as the “sentiment of Being,” “bliss ineffable,” and “the wave itself,” they share an interest in the poetics of “self-emptying” and “one taste.”⁹⁷ Braidotti seeks a way to reintroduce the sacred: “a non-theistic redefinition of the sacred as life: zoe and bios reunited in becoming” (Braidotti, 144). One of the tasks is to trace the way zoe (or raw life) and bios or (discursive intelligence) might become reunited; or the sense in which their division, as suggested by Bruno Latour, never really happened. Let us note, then, two of Braidotti’s propositions. First, that “one of the central premises of Western thinking (is) that being and language are one.” Second, that “life as a raw force is in excess of the logocentric grid.”

One can relate the relaxation of discursive identity with the direct recognition of non-dual interrelationship (what Sarker suggests Wordsworth called the poetic power of the active universe). John Rudy cites Eihei Dogen, “a thirteenth-century Japanese priest and philosopher generally credited with founding the Soto school of Zen,” who “views the Buddhist understanding of universal identity as resulting from a process of self-forgetting and concurrently as a means by which the universe of myriad things realizes

⁹⁶ Sheldrake has advocated a scientific return to the Greek notion of *anima mundi*.

⁹⁷ Recently, I met with Professor Larissa Lai to discuss how one might theorize zoe in terms of affect. She brought to my attention the work of French-Caribbean philosopher Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, which I am excited to incorporate in further research.

itself through the individual: ‘To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things’ (Rudy, 13). This experience of selflessness (in the momentary cessation of discursive processes) is not an atomistic, or digital, dehumanization, but a quantum interfusion, an interconnectedness, full of relationship and sympathy:

...his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.

Far from rendering one immune to sorrow, self-forgetting attends to and “feels it all.” If the “Youth’s” moment of *kairos* matures, it does so because initial experiences of interfusion nourish a trust in feeling, keeping alive that willingness to feel that may shut down as one gains experience of the life-process and its shared suffering, what Keats calls “the giant agony of the world.” Wordsworth’s question, “Why is this glorious creature to be found/One only in ten thousand? What one is/Why may not millions be? What bars are thrown/By Nature in the way of such a hope?” is echoed later in Keats’ *The Fall of Hyperion*,

'Are there not thousands in the world,' said I,
Encourag'd by the sooth voice of the shade,
'Who love their fellows even to the death;
'Who feel the giant agony of the world;
'And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
'Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
'Other men here; but I am here alone.'

If there is an answer, it may be that bounded, rational agency appears to offer psychological security or control (power), while empathy or relationship, with its extended sense of responsibility, appears threatening to the discursive center (identity).

For nineteenth century nature poets, though, there was no security in identification with either the self or with larger core agencies (discourses), which set limits on interconnectedness. Ranking among “those to whom the miseries of the world/Are misery, and will not let them rest” - finding no “haven in the world/Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days” - they sing “melodies... into the world’s ear,” imploring us to hear the fullness of the music in all its “dark, inscrutable workmanship.” Wordsworth and Keats attended, unconditionally, to the soma-sense of the heart, where “consolation springs/From sources deeper far than deepest pain/For the meek Sufferer” (Excursion I: 936-939). Yet, Wordsworth implies that even as social beings we lack real sympathy for one another so long as we believe in the bounds that separate human entity, with its power to grasp the world in discourse, from the inter-touch of a mutual mind and mutual substance prior to qualification or condition:

And never for each other shall we feel
As we may fill till we have sympathy
With nature in her forms inanimate
With objects such as have no power to hold
Articulate language. In all forms of things
There is a mind.

(RC & P, pp. 120-123).

6.3 Mindfulness

“from link to link/It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds/This is the freedom of the universe/Unfolded still the more, more visible/The more we know; and yet is revered least/And least respected in the human Mind/Its most apparent home”

Listening has a profound importance for Wordsworth: listening to suffering, listening to impermanence, listening to the subtle sound of interdependence. I argue that landscape, mood, and melancholy are all profoundly linked to music in the paradise poetics of Wordsworth and Dickinson. Partly, music may be taken for a metaphor of dissolution, and as a metaphor for a sense of commingling, harmony, or communion with the material universe. But I will suggest we take their references to music as, more than metaphorical, a manifestation of an intensely wakeful but relaxed encounter with subtle consciousness: an act of perceptual excess and extended attention.^{xxiii}

Listening has little to do with effort, and even less to do with seeking states of preconceived experience. As in Wordsworth’s later sonnet, “Mutability,” melody has much to do with letting go of clinging to time’s productions:

FROM low to high doth **dissolution** climb,
And sink from high to low, along a scale
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
A musical but melancholy chime,
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,
Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.
Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,
That in the morning whiten'd hill and plain
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday, which royally did wear
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of Time.
(bold and italics mine)

Arguably, what is suggested is that a number of people whose minds are relaxed and not excessively biased or self-interested may actually live an existence calm enough for the music of the material universe to emerge, for them, from the background, heard and felt through the mutable appearance of life, a music “whose concord shall not fail,” as opposed to man-made “towers” and constructs marvelously imagined as melting at “some casual shout that broke the silent air/Or the unimaginable touch of Time.” In *The Prelude*, eerie associations with cosmic dust foreground its connections with a music sourced in “calm existence.” Wordsworth's reference to dust is eerily evocative of subatomic matter and its quantum interconnectedness, which, in one remarkable move, he associates with his own emotional, subjective development, indicating the extent of his notion of *interfusion*. He finds that all his pains and miseries have been a necessary part of the maturation and insight that brings him to deep calm.

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society. How strange, that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
(*Prelude*, Bk. 1, 340-350)

Again we may note his reference to music, sound, tone, and the mathematically ordered nature of the “one pervading spirit.” Here he implies that a certain amount of trust or faith is necessary before the mind can initiate itself into the oceanic experience of a

oneness beyond categorical division, a mindfulness, silence, stillness that is full of voice,
harmony:

*By one pervading spirit
Of tones and numbers all things are controlled,
As sages taught, where faith was found to merit
Initiation in that mystery old.
The heavens, whose aspect makes our minds as still
As they themselves appear to be,
Innumerable voices fill
With everlasting harmony;
The towering headlands, crowned with mist,
Their feet among the billows, know
That Ocean is a mighty harmonist;
Thy pinions, universal Air,
Ever waving to and fro,
Are delegates of harmony, and bear
Strains that support the Seasons in their round;
Stern Winter loves a dirge-like sound.*

(Stanza on the power of sound, II. 177-192, italics mine)

In Book Five of *The Prelude*, "visionary power" is linked to attention that senses motions of invisible winds and that moves as if clothed in poetic language: inspiration. He speaks of endless change, of substance "circumfused" with light, and of the "turnings intricate of verse," which reveals objects flashing with "glory not their own." The whole passing universe is a mere "step" or "link" to intercourse with the mind of God. He reminds us that even if a time comes when his "feet/No more shall stray where meditation leads," to the "flowing stream" and other "loved haunts," the "unimprisoned Mind" may yet have a means of entering into visionary power, because the mind partakes in the subtle interfusion of all substantialities, which are but links of intercourse, or interpenetration, with the "light divine":⁹⁸

⁹⁸What Buddhism calls "the unique, innate, original, clear light," "mother luminosity," or "ground luminosity."

Visionary power
Attends the motions of the viewless winds,
Embodied in the mystery of words:
 There, darkness makes abode, and all the host
 Of shadowy things work endless changes,--there,
 As in a mansion like their proper home,
 Even forms and substances are circumfused
 By that transparent veil with light divine,
 And, through the turnings intricate of verse,
 Present themselves as objects recognised,
 In flashes, and with glory not their own.
This universe shall pass away--a work
Glorious! because the shadow of thy might,
A step, or link, for intercourse with thee.
 Ah! if the time must come, in which my feet
 No more shall stray where meditation leads,
 By flowing stream, through wood, or craggy wild,
 Loved haunts like these; the unimprisoned Mind
 May yet have scope to range among her own,
 Her thoughts, her images, her high desires.
 (Prelude, Bk. 5, italics mine)

In Book Nine of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth turns his attention to the "scale of being." Most interestingly, he refers to an "'active' Principle" - "howe'er removed/From sense and observation, it subsists/In all things, in all natures" including rocks and "the invisible air":

"To every Form of being is assigned,"
 Thus calmly spake the venerable Sage,
"An 'active' Principle:--howe'er removed
From sense and observation, it subsists
In all things, in all natures; in the stars
 Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,
 In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
 That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
 The moving waters, and the invisible air.
 (Excursion, Bk. 9, italics mine)

As David Abram points out in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, the Greek scribes, in a sense divorced the sensual breath or *inspiration* from the spacious, boundless mind - binding sentience in the discursive - by setting spoken language down in alphabetic code:

By breaking this taboo, by transposing the invisible into the register of the visible, the Greek scribes effectively dissolved the primordial power of the air... The Platonic psyche was not at all a part of the sensuous word, but was rather of another, utterly non-sensuous dimension. The psyche, that is, was no longer an invisible yet intangible power continually participant, by virtue of the breath, with the enveloping atmosphere, but a thoroughly abstract phenomenon now enclosed with physical body as in a prison... (Abrams, 252)

One need only think of the orality of Wordsworth's poetry, its hymn of lyric praise meant for oral invocation, to appreciate its power to unlock the mind from a bounded sense of codification or circumscription. Wordsworth associates this understanding with a "venerable sage" - a figure as familiar to the west as to the east - who has direct experience of subtle reality. The sage speaks of an active principle that, however removed from gross sense, moves in all things: an active interconnectedness. It is in this sense, with reference to invisible links both mental and material, insubstantial yet not without substance,⁹⁹ that Wordsworth insists the world is full of blessings. Moreover, this subtle "atmosphere of sensation" (PLB) overfull with relationship is least "reverenced/And least respected" as the fabric of attention itself:

Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
Beyond itself, communicating good
A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; *from link to link*
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.
This is the freedom of the universe;
Unfolded still the more, more visible,
The more we know; and yet is reverenced least,
And least respected in the human Mind,
Its most apparent home.

(*Excursion*, Bk. 9, bold and italics mine)

⁹⁹ What Massumi, calls "incorporeal materialism" (after Foucault), "the real-but-abstract" (after Deleuze) and "radical empiricism" (after James).

Conclusion - Paradise and current critical theory

the sense of interconnectedness in Keats and Dickinson – Ode to Psyche, and Better -- than Music! For I -- who heard it --

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth - the two are one;
We brethren are," he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a-night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

Emily Dickinson

7.1 The patternless pattern

In exploring the relevance of Romantic subjectivity to current theorizations of embodiment, I have applied the work of two dynamic Canadian critical theorists, Jeffrey Noonan (Critical Humanism) and Brian Massumi (Affect Theory), to the paradise poetics of Wordsworth and Dickinson. Noonan, at his most simplified, interrogates the moral implications of the postmodern reduction of the subject to a mere "social effect." In, *Critical Humanism and the Politics of Difference*, he notes Derrida's reaction to the international outcry surrounding apartheid; at some point Derrida does have to assert an "undeconstructable" moral agency, one with universal implications, and in a sense "natural" to the subject. As we have noted, with ethics goes feeling, and with feeling

there arises a ground of subjectivity, a “subject of emotion,” that cannot be dismissed as merely discursive or constructed.¹⁰⁰

What we have grappled with, here in this essay, is the notion that there must be something unfabricated at the ground of subjectivity, and, perhaps more radically and more importantly, that this ground, if it is to be understood as feeling, might best be understood as interrelationship.¹⁰¹ Not only, then, is the affective prior to construction, but it is a groundless ground, without identity, “of itself for itself” as Dickinson puts it, but in fact *never identical with itself*. Again, we can look to Wordsworth’s notion of poetry, a notion to be reinforced by an examination of Dickinson’s “Better -- than Music! for I --”:

It is an acknowledgment of the beauty of the universe... a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love; further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the *grand elementary principle of pleasure*, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. (PLB, italics mine)

This “native and naked” thing, this “elementary principle,” is precisely where Wordsworth locates our ethical sense, a sense of sympathy, or shared substance (in Buddhist terms, *suchness*), shared suffering, that is (because it is relationship) always accompanied by pleasure, or a sense of meaning or purpose.

A more radical argument, advanced most effectively in Appendix A, relates to these poets’ rejection of conventional religion. As Latour explains, the modern god is a “crossed-out god,” both imminent and transcendent, and, so, never present in the web of

¹⁰⁰The notion that all feeling is constructed must strike us as abhorrent as Iago’s unmasking to Roderigo of the biology and violent instinct at the basis of love (*Othello*, 1.3.314-328): “Virtue? A fig! ‘Tis in ourselves that we are thus, our thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners...”

¹⁰¹ In *Poetics of Relation*, Edouard Glissant appears to make this point – a note for further research.

relations. One of the points that it has been the most difficult for me to approach is that paradox wherein naked attention, at its apparently most calm and silent is at one and the same time most deeply sensitive to the interconnectedness of unlabeled phenomena, and self-manifesting of its own nature: a dissolution in an excess akin to music.¹⁰² Here the conceptual divide between nature and attention, universe and creature, seems to dissolve.

As we have seen, Wordsworth implies an analogue between that which is indestructible and resilient in the mind and that which is indestructible and resilient in nature. It seems there is but one elementary principle, or one active interconnectedness of elements. It seems we can find neither the active principle of attention nor the active principle of the natural universe apart from, or anywhere else but in, the web of relations.^{xxiv} The direct experience of interconnectedness, then, has no substitute. The self cannot stand, inherent, immune, exempted, untransformed: *the serious investigator must let go of everything that postpones relationship.*¹⁰³

A final point that is grossly overlooked in arguments for discursive construction (or the culture doctrine) is that the direct experience of attention as selflessness, or

¹⁰² We may recall Beer's comment that Wordsworth grew to associate Being with *aion*, or timeless calm, rather than *kairos*, intense experience of the transitory. And we may also recall the exchange between Damasio and the Dalai Lama in which "subtle consciousness" is described as accessible through reduction of "perception to very low levels" where there is "less influence of conditioning."

¹⁰³ In a Buddhist parable, a doctor comes to a man pierced in a vital spot by an arrow. The doctor explains to the man, "If I spend all the time that it would require to answer your questions about how I am going to remove the arrow, you will be dead and gone long before I have done anything." Removing the arrow of a belief in a self, however, does not remove subjectivity: it gives rise to a sense of interconnectedness and a far more robust sense of agency. Yet it cannot do so intellectually, or through endless grasping at clear explanations. At some point, the conceptual must so trust in nonconceptuality as to unconditionally surrender its discursive property.

interconnectedness, has a *deconditioning* effect on the mind.¹⁰⁴ This is why Wordsworth calls it an active principle. Here Massumi's work is important because, at least partially, he mobilizes arguments for the Spinozan view of *naturing nature*, or a *radically inhuman subjectless subjectivity* (Massumi, 238). Like Dickinson, he asks us to think of nature not just as an "in itself" but as an "of itself" (238). For him, if we reduce the subject to an effect of discourse, we create an *excluded middle*, crossing out *movement*, and *intensity*; the body not as a thing positioned, which it becomes in discourse, but potential, both energy and matter, as uncontainable affect, a "relational quasi-causality" (239). Affect, he explains, "escapes confinement in any particular body" (35). Massumi looks back to Charles Peirce and William James, and the notion of *radical empiricism*, for terms that suggest how attention to affect exceeds conventional positioning and leads to a direct experience of both attention and the world attended to as anything but concrete. As Massumi puts it, in one chapter title, "Concrete is as concrete doesn't."

In brief, Noonan and Massumi turn to feeling or affect as another means of understanding subjectivity as something that exceeds fabrication and as something that implies more-than-ideological relationship. Nineteenth century paradise poetics, with its lyric subjectivity, does much the same. As postmoderns, we must grapple with this paradise poetics, which, despite our modern rejection of what we may misconstrue as mysticism, remains the most precious heritage of our western literary tradition.

104 Although it is debatable whether there is in fact anything to be deconditioned. That is to say, attention to interconnectedness might simply imply attention that is not satisfied with the conventional, received, discursive level of attention, and therefore trespasses the mere identity of things to encounter them in a more detailed, somatic, sensory manner. In that sense, if interconnectedness is attended to, conditioning is, by necessity, removed. One does not precede the other. Attention to interconnectedness and the sensing of interconnectedness co-arise, simultaneously.

Admittedly, we can throw away this precious artifact, turning to various other more tangible historical and political issues at work in cultural construction, but what we risk losing, most of all, is our cultural confidence in an interconnectedness directly accessible to experience; not to mention the extraordinarily affirmative proposition that anyone willing to allow one's senses to be fully participant in the world in its "suchness" can discover for oneself a non-ideological sense of responsibility that extends beyond constructed bounds and is, indeed, participant in the whole material universe.

Interestingly, one could argue that Wordsworth began a shift in our poetics, towards "ordinary language" and feeling, which Dickinson carried further, into the free, broken, elliptical verse that poets use today. By and large, there is a sort of "radical subjectivity" at work in poetry, to this day: a sense that subjectivity exceeds identity. The centered "I" of poetry dissolves, or resonates, into relationship: a "subject of emotion." Arguably, though, contemporary poetics has, largely, lost something, and there seems to be no great ode to restore it. Recently, affect theorists, in dialogue with "informatics" and "biomediation," have opened a window to, as Keats put it, "let the warm love in."

Instead of the fane of a pantheist world, when "holy" were "the air, the water, and the fire," Keats offers a fane within the neuron networks, "Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain." These branches, too, are the site of interconnection and, in an age of science that has analyzed the gods, the last place to look for the active creative principle, an interconnectedness "gardener Fancy.../Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same." We may note how *Ode to Psyche* (and many of the most enchanting passages of pastoral dream-vision in *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*) seems to echo an elegiac passage from *The Ruined Cottage* incorporated in Book One of *The Excursion*:

--The Poets, in their elegies and songs
 Lamenting the departed, call the groves,
 They call upon the hills and streams, to mourn,
 And senseless rocks; nor idly; for they speak,
 In these their invocations, *with a voice*
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion. Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind,
And grow with thought. Beside yon spring I stood,
 And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
 One sadness, they and I. For them a bond
 Of brotherhood is broken: time has been
 When, every day, the touch of human hand
 Dislodged the natural sleep that binds them up
 In mortal stillness; and they ministered
 To human comfort. Stooping down to drink,
 Upon the slimy foot-stone I espied
 The useless fragment of a wooden bowl,
 Green with the moss of years, and subject only
 To the soft handling of the elements:
 There let it lie--how foolish are such thoughts!
 (italics mine)

In this passage, Wordsworth recounts how the poets lament “the departed” by calling the natural landscape to mourn, too - recalling an animate sense of reality, infused with *sense*. The strong lament of human loss, the loss of ones with whom one feels strong empathic bonds, recalls another loss: the loss of the presence of the sacred, that may have seemed present in the natural world, until, as Latour explains in *We Have Never Been Modern*, so-called modern cultures invented a divide between “purification” and “mediation.”¹⁰⁵ By making such a divide an implicit cultural premise, the moderns

¹⁰⁵ In Latour’s thought, the spiritual field might be addressed in his notion of a “crossed-out God” literally made so ideal as to be absent from the web of relations. In contrast to the Native American notion of the “spirit-that-moves-through-all-things,” the modern God is alternately immanent and transcendent, but never present in the web of life. Positing two Great Divides, one in *space* (separating the work of purification from the work of mediation), and one in *time* (understood as a smooth “laminary flow” moving irreversibly away from an obliterated past), the

could imagine that nature was an inert object rather than a living network of relations from which humans were indivisible. Humans, so purified, could do what they liked to nature, so purified.¹⁰⁶ Nothing awesome was left in nature, nor was it a violation of anything sacrosanct for intellect to, as Wordsworth wrote, “murder to dissect.” God was located both outside nature (transcendent) and prior to nature (immanent): an abstracted, disembodied, de-materialized spirit, bracked out from the web of relations. Or, rather, it was the web of relations itself, for which God may have been a humanizing word - a spirit interfused with and indivisible from matter (such that matter could not simply be manipulated and misused, but must be treated with respect and tenderness) - that was bracketed out.¹⁰⁷

Nonetheless, Wordsworth tells us that poets, in their elegiac mood, “speak... with a voice/Obedient to the strong creative power/Of human passion,” implying that strong

moderns feel free of the network of relations, believing they “hold all the sources of power, all the critical possibilities... (displacing) them from case to case that they believe that can never be caught redhanded” (Latour, 39). Loosed from the “ridiculous constraints of the past which required them to take into account the delicate web of relations between things and people” (Latour, 39), the moderns created the most “spiritualized religion” and most disembodied God.

¹⁰⁶ The Romantics recount this change in human relationship to nature, but this is not to say that people of any time had a privileged relationship to the natural universe unavailable to us today.

¹⁰⁷ Those who think to win the world
By doing something about it,
I see them come to grief.
For the world is a sacred object.
Nothing is to be done to it.
To do anything to it is to damage it.
To seize it is to lose it.
Lao Tzu

passion moves us to a sense of participation in creation. Then, vitally, he suggests that there are “more tranquil” sympathies, of “kindred birth/That steal upon the meditative mind.” Marvelously, the passage moves toward what Mark Johnson in *The Body In The Mind*, might call an “image schemata”: a recurrent embodied pattern of experience that is translated into a prompt for cognition. Put differently, Johnson’s argument is that patterns of embodied experience are translated into patterns of symbolic representation.

In this essay, I have argued that the “hand” was the premier domain for representations of touch and sensation in nineteenth century nature poetry. And, here, in this key Wordsworthian moment, he writes, of the waters of “spring” with which he feels “one sadness”: “For them a bond/Of brotherhood is broken: time has been/When, every day, *the touch of human hand*/Dislodged the natural sleep that binds them up/In mortal stillness; and they ministered/To human comfort” (italics mine). Not only did the human hands maintain a lived relationship with the spring, through daily touch, but there is the insinuation that the spring *touched* those human subjectivities back, with less tangible hands that “ministered/To human comfort.”

We may recall, too, that the neglected “useless fragment of a wooden bowl” is now “subject only/To the soft *handling* of the elements” (italics mine). The richness of this evocation offers sensory evidence of interconnectedness rather than logical propositions. We see the bowl “Upon the slimy foot-stone.... Green with the moss of years” – returning, in other words, to whence this human artifact first came, for its wood (that became so useful as a “bowl”) is returning to wood again, and to those elements that now “handle” it softly. Subtly, and strangely, the human and the elemental are connected through touch, and through hands.

Thus, again, as in Dickinson, the “hand” is a prompt invoking rich experiential (embodied) cognitive correspondences – *relationality* - rather than mere propositional, symbolic information.¹⁰⁸ The hand here, and its touch, explicitly prompts for embodied experience of interconnectedness. The “meditative mind” in its “tranquil” sympathies is sensitive to rhythmic patterns of unlabeled phenomena. Gentler than the passions, these sympathies are *sensations*, tenderness, touch; fingers laid upon an underlying fabric of interrelationship, a “creative power.”¹⁰⁹ We are not speaking, then, of concrete touch, or of the hand that reifies its world. We are speaking of the tender hand that feels the interrelationship in things. We are not speaking of the man-made but the unfabricated, not of existence but of nonexistence.

Moreover, we can draw an interesting comparison between Wordsworth’s emphasis on “Sympathies... more tranquil” and Keats’ emphasis on “this wide quietness,” which he locates in the fane of the psyche itself. His image of the fane in *Ode to Psyche* is prescient and extraordinary because it sets the *unfabricated* at the core of cognition; it sets the patterns of interconnectedness that are the very principle of nature (and of the animistic/quantum universe) at the very roots of neural networks.

Let us not fail to note a better word for interconnectedness. Interconnectedness, fully realized, unconditionally surrendered to in the senses, in the enthrallment of the brain and the tenderness of the heart, in rapture and bliss - but also, quietly, in calm, clear

¹⁰⁸ Maybe the Romantic return to the medieval dream-vision was not accidental. Poetry here *is* like dreaming, because it discharges neural networks that, perhaps, may work to harmonize or integrate cognitive rhythms. As Keats wrote: “Sure not all the melodies poured into the world’s ear are useless/Sure the poet is a sage, a humanist, a physician to all men.”

¹⁰⁹ As Lao Tzu put it, “what works reliably is to know the raw silk, hold the uncut wood. Need little, want less. Forget the rules. Be untroubled.”

attention that adds no embellishment - might best be described as love. Love, in its extraordinary sensitivity, forgets itself, touching with attention a materiality that is a patternless pattern, never identical with itself: “With all the gardener Fancy e’er could feign/Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same.”

This may be why Psyche is paired with Eros, and why Keats, perhaps, appeals to the attentive power of the mind itself to realize the creative principle active in the material universe, translating that principle of interconnectedness into poetry¹¹⁰: “I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.”

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branchèd thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
Fledge the wild-ridgèd mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same;
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!

(Ode to Psyche, 50-67)

Without appealing to metaphysical ideas – as Keats reminds us, psyche is the “latest-born and loveliest vision far/Of all Olympus’ faded hierarchy” (24-25), the only divinity left to modernity, and one not located in a pantheistic universe, “too late for antique vows/Too,

¹¹⁰ To me, no poem better exemplifies this translation of sensed interconnectedness into the warp, woof, and web of poetry than Dickinson’s “Better – than Music! For I – who heard it...”

too late for the fond believing lyre/When holy were the haunted forest boughs/Holy the air, the water, and the fire,” but in the embodied mind (36-39) - we can begin to reconsider how extended attention (when the committed investigator dares to risk his or her “linguistic survival” and to relax man-made bounds¹¹¹) might lead, empirically, experientially, to excess, responsibility: interconnectedness.

¹¹¹ Blake’s “mind-forg’d manacles.”

7.2 “Eve’s great surrender”

Here, then, is the final stage in my argument that Wordsworth and Dickinson not only experienced interconnectedness, but experienced it with all their senses, especially as sound. Music. In effect, they listened to the universe, both hearing and feeling its meanings, not as a process of time, or a process of accumulative knowledge, but in a timeless apprehension, a "peace that passeth understanding," a useless wisdom to which nothing can be added or taken away. Let us remember Dickinson’s admonition concerning the social’s clinging to “sense”: *much sense the starkest madness*. Sadly, in Dickinson's day, like ours, there is something shameful in what we have termed “material attention” (or what Wordsworth described as the extension of the “domain of the sensible”), something that offends orthodoxy:

To simulate -- is stinging work--
To cover what we are
From Science -- and from Surgery --
Too Telescopic Eyes
To bear on us unshaded --
For their -- sake -- not for Ours --
'Twould start them --
We -- could tremble --
But since got a Bomb --
And held it in our Bosom --
Nay -- Hold it -- it is calm --

Therefore -- we do life's labour --
Though life's Reward -- be done --
With scrupulous exactness --
To hold our Senses -- on --

Dickinson's "Better -- than Music! For I -- who heard it --" brings home Wordsworth's notion that the music in well-crafted poetry takes its form and sense from an active music in the "life of things":

Better -- than Music! For I -- who heard it --
I was used -- to the Birds -- before --
This -- was different -- 'Twas Translation --
Of all tunes I knew -- and more --

Briefly, I will indicate, stanza by stanza, the form and content of the poem. First, we note that the poem's first word "Better" stands alone. Immediately, Dickinson has invoked that "better" reality, of which the material world is a manifestation. Its "betterness" is of itself, and is not a *comparative* or relative quality. One also notes the proximity of the designation of the lyric "I" to the presence of "Music!" - broken not by dashes but merely an exclamation point. Complex internal rhyme and rhythm, as well as sound devices (assonance, alliteration), mimetically reproduce both the tune of birds and the tune of the "Keyless Rhyme" of the universe. Dickinson's reference to "stanza" in the next lines is, like the "tuneful turning" in Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill," an explicit reminder that her verse, too, is a music, in form, inspired and guided by the subtle apprehension ("divine Sense") of the verses of universes, so immeasurable in its originality that it is never again itself, an explosion of bliss:

'Twasn't contained -- like other stanza --
No one could play it -- the second time --
But the Composer -- perfect Mozart --
Perish with him -- that Keyless Rhyme!

This "perfect Mozart" is the universe as living art; art without an artist; or as it is put in Vedic thought, the universe as a meditation without a meditator. The music

perishes instantly, as does the composer, the Keyless Rhyme. Here, Dickinson turns to childhood and the story of Eden. The word “better” is conspicuously repeated, “Bubbled a better - Melody -” - as if to reinforce the association of this word “better” with paradise, that which is supreme in itself. Children are told that brooks in Eden were more musical, of a higher order of harmony. The reference to Eve “Urging the feet - that would - not - fly-” may, marvelously, refer to the metrical feet of the verse. The odd break between “-- that would-” and “-not-” and “-fly-” suggests the hesitancy Eve must have felt, but also that it is most natural for *metrical* feet to fly.

Breaking the meter, losing the music, is a great anguish and surrender. In fact, as is often the case in Dickinson’s verse, lines that are apparently unassuming prompt us, who dare, to unpack riches of meaning. The children, told of the better music of the brooks in Eden, are said to “quaintly infer - Eve’s great surrender-” This line suggests not so much Eve’s great surrender to temptation in eating the forbidden fruit (though it may suggest just how great that surrender was), but her great surrender in urging her feet to *leave* Eden. This is reinforced in the follow stanza when Dickinson refers to “the Anguish” which grown children are able to dismiss as “Grandame’s story.”

So -- Children -- told how Brooks in Eden --
Bubbled a better -- Melody --
Quaintly infer -- Eve's great surrender --
Urging the feet -- that would -- not -- fly --

The “matured” and “wiser” children dismiss paradise as grandmother’s legend, yet, Dickinson, not without bemusing sparkles, adds the characteristic alliterative twist, “But - I was telling a tune - I heard -”

Children -- matured -- are wiser -- mostly --
Eden -- a legend -- dimly told --
Eve -- and the Anguish -- Grandame's story --

But -- I was telling a tune -- I heard --

Yes, the anguish is real, the process of putting the feet in motion: a motion away from the stillness of the uncomposed music. Dickinson *hears* the tune of paradise, that which is *better* than music, the *translation*, or perhaps the inimitable pattern, “Of all the tunes I knew - and more-“ If this patternless pattern, or Wordsworth’s “inscrutable workmanship” is better than music, this must be because its effects on one’s emotions, the intimacy of its affect, the way in which it nourishes and revives, *its touch* is more profound in its *tenderness*^{xxv}: “Better --- than Music! For I - who heard it -“

Moreover, this “Keyless” and uncontained rhyme is less conditioned than music. She was “used - to the Birds - before.” It is not limited to conditioned perception: “Twasn’t contained.” It “was different.” The word for this experience in Buddhism is *suchness*, direct mental contact, if not mingling with which, is said to bring bliss and pliancy. Arguably, implied in Dickinson’s words is that the path to suchness is the same as the path *from* suchness: great surrender, “the Anguish.” Identity cannot remain exempt, immune and inviolate in entering this difference. Here is more of a baptism, blessing, and transubstantiation than in formal, ritual, symbolic baptism:

Not such a strain -- the Church -- baptizes --
When the last Saint -- goes up the Aisles --
Not such a stanza splits the silence --
When the Redemption strikes her Bells --

Interesting from the point of view of Stephen Goldsmith’s work on Blake, *Unbuilding Jerusalem*, these lines too reject the western apocalyptic eschatology which promises a pure discourse at the end of historical time. Redemption, if there is any, is now, in silence, in the relaxation of the discursive center. To the baptism of belief, Dickinson contrasts a baptism beyond faith (with its ideological violence): a baptism of

the great surrender of self into relationship, or music. The final stanza of this poem (which stands in her work as one of the most simple yet intricate, rhapsodic yet quiet) is perhaps the most astonishing.

Let me not spill -- its smallest cadence --
Humming -- for promise -- when alone --
Humming -- until my faint Rehearsal --
Drop into tune -- around the Throne --

Arguably, her lifework of writing poetry is a devotion to this precious music she would not spill. Is it the music that is humming, or is she humming to keep in constant sympathy with its vibration? “Humming - for promise - when alone--” Is her act of composition, in solitude, inspired by the promise she apprehends in this music? Is her writing poetry an attempt to be in tune with this sense of interconnectedness, this vibration: a “faint Rehearsal”?

In the last line, with remarkable skill, she adds the finishing pearl to the weaving of meter, rhythm, and rhyme in simultaneity with the act of imagining her humming spirit *dropping into tune* around a polyphonous chorus of the hierarchies that sing the universe into creation. Of course, what is extraordinary is that she already feels herself to be a part of that harmony, knowing her poetry to be a keeping of its cadence. The musicality of her language, her care with each syllable, reflects the tune of that which is *better* than music, a paradise that she literally tells us she hears, and would echo: *But - I was telling a tune - I heard*. A further irony is that she achieves, through this sincere attitude of listening in humility to paradise, an inimitable style, much like that “perfect Mozart” – a patternless pattern that never “is” – perishing in its very embellishment: “No one could play it - the second time--”^{xxvi}

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Notes

ⁱ Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.

ⁱⁱ Clough, *The Affective Turn*, 19.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deleuze.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v PLB.

^{vi} One of the main strategies by which nineteenth century poets undid discursive boundedness was through *relaxation*. Landscape and mood, the re-turning of the body (the five senses) to sensation, acted as prompts for the relaxation of the discursive center: poetic attention *as* paradise. The subject of emotion sensed itself in relationality rather than demarcating itself as purified identity. Romantic attention exceeded social prohibitions on sensation, in unconditionally exposure to powerful feelings (emotions like melancholy) and to the impingements of nature.

Analogous to the failure, in Quantum Physics, to find an ultimate particle, the subject fails to find a foundation for, or essence of, agency other than interrelationship. Broken boundedness (sensation) leads to the web of relations. The “crossed out” middle term, relationship, is restored in sensation: not “mediated” by the signified but “active” as an interconnected, material universe. Nature, restored from its relegation to “immanence and transcendence” – its status as non-entity – is rendered visible to the subject as one’s own relationality.

^{vii} “Apotheosis and Transgression in Miltonic and Romantic Verse,” a paper I submitted for a directed reading (under the supervision of Professor Lee Johnson) on the influence of *Paradise Lost* on the Romantics, has proven vital background for this Master’s thesis: an interrogation of the idea of “paradise” and the reasons for its persistence in the information age. Even now, paradise persists as a mutable, resilient concept, and this is arguably because it has a nondeconstructable relationship to a human nature in excess of boundedness, to be experienced in and as interconnectedness. Although posthumanists embrace the “disassembly” of the “human” and reject “nature” as a foundationalist construct, theirs is a (dys)topia of the cyborg. Their break with boundedness is technological.

Rather than proclaim the end of humanism, we may do better to return to the radical humanism (the subject in excess of boundedness) of the British Romantics. Recent research in Cognitive Linguistics accords well with their notion that reason is grounded in imagination. The embodied philosophy proposed by Johnson and Lakoff in *Philosophy in the Flesh* suggests that aesthetic or bodily experience structures cognition and language. Image schemata, emerging from recurring patterns of experience that preserve the contours of perceptual experience, form the basis of symbolic expression:

Such schemata are image-like in that they are analogic neural activation patterns which preserve the topological contours of perceptual experience as a cohesive whole.

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Johnson_\(professor\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Johnson_(professor))]

I look to the British Romantic poets as a vital alternative to media theory which too readily replaces *interconnectedness* with assembly. As in our twenty-first century moment, the creeds that supported early nineteenth century values were rapidly dissolving due to unprecedented technological change. In poetic attention, a state of deep alertness and sensitivity, the Romantics bypassed creeds to offer a radical humanism. Their pastoral verse points through poetic attention to an intense sense of interconnectedness. Hence, the Romantic period, more commonly understood as spiritual, is not irreconcilable with science.

Like religious contemplatives, poets have celebrated what Wordsworth called the “serene and blessed mood”^{vii} that arises in seclusion, especially when the mind is deeply sensitive to nature. Arguably, valid cognition is a cognitive need, an organismic and relational need for a deep sense of interconnectedness.

The Romantic location of the holy arbor or “fane” within the human brain itself accomplished several things at once. It identified the mind as the temple where religious insight should be sought, and, at the same time re-imagined the “temple” as an “arbor,” or a site of serene communion formed not by human artifice but through natural processes of interconnection. Hence, they extolled interconnection as the living principle of sentience, and advocated eating this forbidden fruit to see “as god sees” through poetic attention to a natural world in sympathy with the mind.

^{viii} At the heart of this paradox about boundedness may lie a western (Judeo-Christian?) shyness about looking directly into the mystery of consciousness. Tempted by the serpent’s sophistry, Eve after all broke this taboo. She already lived in paradise, but longed to taste the “sciential fruit.” Yet, in the overthrow of religion by science during the Enlightenment, the skeptical, analytic, mechanistic approach became the norm. The nature of boundedness, in a sleight of hands, had flipped from bounded intuition to bounded reason. Paradoxically, then, Wordsworth called for a counter-stratagem: breaking bounded reason (the new taboo – an orthodoxy prohibiting inferior “feeling”) by relaxing it back into intuition. Dickinson, too, employed this counter-logic, reminding us that material existence (“Earth”), because it already is interconnectedness (“Heaven”), is proof not only that interconnectedness “is not for us” but that we would be “affronted” by interconnectedness:

The Fact that Earth is Heaven —
Whether Heaven is Heaven or not
If not an Affidavit
Of that specific Spot
Not only must confirm us
That it is not for us
But that it would affront us
To dwell in such a place —

^{ix}Massumi writes: “Mediation, although inseparable from power, restored a kind of movement to the everyday. If the everyday was no longer a place of rupture or revolt, as it had been in glimpses at certain privileged historical junctures, it might still be a site of modest acts of “resistance” or “subversion” keeping alive the possibility of systemic change. These were practices of “reading” or “decoding” counter to the dominant ideological scheme of things. The body was seen to be centrally involved in these everyday practices of resistance. But this thoroughly mediated body could only be a “discursive” body: one with its signifying gestures. Signifying gestures make sense. If properly “performed,” they may also unmake sense by scrambling significations already in place. Make and unmake sense as they might, they don’t sense. Sensation is utterly redundant to their description. Or worse, it is destructive to it, because it appeals to an unmediated experience. Unmediated experience signals a danger that, if anything can be, is worse than naïve realism: its polar opposite, naïve subjectivism. Earlier phenomenological investigations into the sensing body were largely left behind because they were difficult to reconcile with the new understandings of the structuring capacities of culture and their inseparability both from the exercise of power and the glimmers of counter-power incumbent in mediate living. It was all about a subject without subjectivism: a subject “constructed” by external mechanisms. ‘The Subject’” (Massumi, 2-3).

^x Arguably, alphabetic language is itself a technology, if not indeed the abstract, symbolic basis from which technological progress is possible at all. Since Milton first described, as an originary myth of the machine, the manufacture of diabolical war engines in *Paradise Lost*, it seems technology (and perhaps our “fallen” and always polluted discourse) has never had a place in paradise. If the machine (including language, or the technology of the symbolic) exists as an object for the use of an agent, still, it exists not *for* life but for operations performed *on* life. I would argue that the nineteenth century poet’s concern with paradise can be understood in terms of an effort to reaffirm affect, a project that continues to be urgently relevant in current art and criticism responding to what Donna Haraway has called “the informatics of domination.”

^{xi} There is a fascinating parallel here with the development of Buddhist thought in India in the 2nd Century, at Nalanda University, a thriving center of debate that housed over ten thousand scholars, and produced what are held, by Tibetan dialecticians, to be the most subtle and influential works in Buddhist philosophy. After Nagarjuna, author of *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*, firmly established the necessity of training monks and scholars in techniques of reductionist analysis, by which to arrive at a firm conviction of the logical necessity of emptiness, Asanga, 4th Century exponent of the yogacara school of Buddhist thought, author of, began to argue for an attention to interconnectedness that would cure the analytic adept (who had already been cured of essentialism) of a tendency toward nihilism. Arguably, both Nagarjuna and Asanga pointed, clearly, to emptiness as a site of interconnectedness and robust relationship, in close parallel to yesterday’s deconstructionists and today’s “embodied philosophers.” At any rate, this appears to be how Buddhist scholars understand the development of a tradition in Indo-Tibetan philosophy wherein the adept if first taught techniques of reductionist analysis and then introduced to experiential methods of receptivity and calm,

indeed sensory, attention. In my argument, then, I will focus especially on Massumi's work, which makes this turn to "radical empiricism" or "incorporeal materialism," a turn to profound receptivity to affect that played so vital a part in the paradise poetics of Wordsworth and Dickinson.

^{xii}The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, **if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings**. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the **transfiguration**, and will welcome **the Being thus produced**, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.—It is not, then, to be supposed that any one, who holds that sublime notion of Poetry which I have attempted to convey, will break in upon the sanctity and truth of his pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments, and endeavour to excite admiration of himself by arts, the necessity of which must manifestly depend upon the assumed meanness of his subject.

(PLB, bolds and italics mine)

^{xiii} Part of the apparent contradiction between subjectivity as culture-formation (conditioning) and subjectivity as web-of-relations (relationship) might be resolved if we dismissed the dividing lines between culture and nature, recognizing with Latour that there are only "natures-cultures" - cultural discourses are never natural but they are also never exempt from consequences in a web of an interconnectedness that exceeds human construction. According to Latour, we have never been modern because we merely concealed the work of mediation from our sight, while we made the work of purification hyper-visible. That is to say, we only pretended to have a cultural space exempted from natural consequences. Just like premoderns, and nonmoderns, we always knew, though we kept the secret from ourselves, that changes in culture also change nature – we simply gave ourselves an unprecedented but no longer tenable "freedom" to act otherwise. The Deleuzian move toward deterritorialization does not mean there is no territory. Rather, it means the territory has no independent existence apart from interrelationship.

^{xiv}The hypothesis of formative causation, which I first proposed in 1981 (SHELDRAKE, 1981) postulates that organisms are subject to an influence from previous similar organisms by a process called morphic resonance. Through morphic resonance, each member of a species draws upon, and in turn contributes to, a pooled or collective memory. Thus, for example, if animals learn a new skill in one place, similar animals raised under similar conditions should subsequently tend to learn the same thing more readily all over the world.

<http://www.sheldrake.org/papers/Morphic/formative.html>

The late David Bohm suggested that Sheldrake's hypothesis was in keeping with his own ideas on what he terms "implicate" and "explicate" order.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupert_Sheldrake

^{xv} Foucault, cited by Massumi.

^{xvi} I think of "organ harvesting" as practiced by China on Falun Gong practitioners and Tibetan political prisoners.

^{xvii} Here, with reference to Massumi (and Spinoza), we may be able to achieve a finer appreciation for the links between emotion, identity, and relationship. Part of the work of affect theory, as it responds to postmodern thought, is precisely to disassemble, in camaraderie with Wordsworth, the bounded enlightenment (or Cartesian) agent. A chief problem of this bounded agent is that (if we refer here Giorgio Agamben's resumption of Foucault's work on biopower) it describes a categoric divide between "bios" (discursive reason) and "zoe" (natural sweetness).

Roman law positioned zoe at the core of a citizen who, endowed with bios, was legally protected from violence. The natural sweetness outside the bounds of *legal entity*, citizenship, had more or less the status of a non-entity, and could be violated, or treated with violence. The western citizen, then, exists, with the State, in a state of exemption from nature, which is designated to a state of exclusion.

A rift is opened, thus, between nature and human nature, or the natural sweetness bound within the legal or conventional agent. Discourse is what generates *bios*, which discretely contains its own natural sweetness (*zoe*). Discourse is what makes (*diz*) the border around (*pairi*) the garden.^{xvii} The price of this rift, and boundedness, is a paradise that is always already lost, or as Derrida puts it in *Monolingualism of the Other*, "an essential alienation in language." The force of Wordsworth's poetics is to undo this violent rift between nature and human nature, so that an interconnectedness that seems always to escape identity can be experienced as a valid ground for freedom – not a freedom "from" the world, but a freedom from lack of relationship, a freedom-in-bonds-of-interconnection - a paradise the very fiber of which is relationship (and extended responsibility).

Exposing his body to the subtle interactions of the material universe in the apparently inert substance of the living landscape, the poet allowed conventional attention (as a discursively sustained center) to relax into a somatic attention – relaxing the dividing line (with its ^{implied} demarcation of entity from non-entity) between human nature and nature. Wordsworth's "Visionary power" describes attention's capacity to go past its conventionalized borders and enter into a deeper sympathy with the material universe, restoring what Massumi calls the "dynamism" of nature.

^{xviii} I cite these lines repeatedly, as they are crucial:

"from link to link

It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.

This is the freedom of the universe;
Unfolded still the more, more visible,
The more we know; and yet is revered least,
And least respected in the human Mind,
Its most apparent home.^{”xviii}
(*Excursion*, book 9)

xix “without an irritable reaching after fact & reason”

Relationship, not identity, is behind Wordsworth’s felt wholeness (or flux) of the subject. His “Egotistical Sublime” is, perhaps, egotistical only in that one cannot intellectually apprehend this wholeness, and, hence, no one can describe it or prescribe it to another; one has to realize, through direct recourse to oneself, interconnectedness *as* the ground of subjectivity. As British physicist David Bohm suggests:

...one has to view the world in terms of a universal flux of events and processes... instead of thinking of a particle, one is to think of a ‘world tube’... A more vivid image... is afforded by considering the wave forms as vortex structures in a flowing stream... There is no sharp division between them, nor are they to be regarded as separately or independently existent entities... The new form of insight can perhaps best be called Undivided Wholeness in Flowing Movement. (Bohm, 12-14).

Emphasis on Wordsworth’s strong “identity” may be somewhat misguided and misleading. What Wordsworth may have developed to a greater degree than Coleridge was a sense of relationship that freed him, to an extent, from what Keats, in his famous formulation of “negative capability,” referred to as “an irritable grasping after fact.” It is ironic that Keats, in part, developed his notion of negative capability to distinguish his project from Wordsworth’s “Egotistical Sublime,” and that, in his view of what it was to be a poet, he was perhaps closer to Coleridge: “As to the poetical Character... it is not itself – is has no self – it is every thing and nothing... What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the camelion Poet... not one word I utter... can ever be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature - how can it, when I have no nature?”^{xix}

Coleridge may have been misguided, in ways that Wordsworth was not, in his perception of a conflict between Christian doctrine (with its uncomplicated moral injunctions) and notions of what Brian Massumi calls “dynamism” in nature. According to Beer, this ongoing scruple – that is, his attraction to a clear, mandated code of ethics - motivated Coleridge’s skepticism about the radically subjective experiments in attention which inspired some of his most intriguing poetry. Although Beer calls attention to Wordsworth’s use of “compound words beginning with ‘under-’”, in response (it appears) to Coleridge’s analytic turn, and although Wordsworth clearly grew more

comfortable with religion in later life, it may be fruitful to consider whether Wordsworth actually needed notions of a hidden ground to arrive at his sense of moral interfusion.

At the root of the difference between Coleridge and Wordsworth may lie a difference in their respective abilities to trust in subjectivism, and the feelings of the poet. For Coleridge, it would seem, the imputed unity of subjective experience dissolved under analysis, while for Wordsworth if the poet added a “coloration” of feeling to the natural objects described, and if the formal elements of poetry “throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition” (PLB), these man-made additions merely facilitate an encounter with an intensity of feeling that, unfabricated, the mind tends to censor:

... though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose. (PLB)

Beer locates Keats as a younger poet who, with Coleridge, suspected that a cooler, more impersonal objectivity (as a kind of primary consciousness) underlay embodied, subjective feeling, but who, with Wordsworth, attempted to cling to the value of personal feelings. Beer argues that, “In Keats’s psyche was played out again the struggle between Coleridgean consciousness and Wordsworthian identity, which he endeavoured to resolve, as both poets had done before him, by drawing on the heart as a mediating resource” (77), and that Keats could not wholly resolve, except through death, the tension between primary consciousness and spacio-temporal material embodiment. But it may be necessary to reconsider the nature of the “identity” attributed to Wordsworth.

While for Keats, “primary consciousness” was “not a ‘self’” but “an ecstasy, an identification with the nightingale and the movement beyond, which transcends the limits of selfhood,” he sought a stable identity through the Wordsworthian solution of identifying with the heart, the promptings of which, Beer suggests, “led to the painful intensity of his love for Fanny Brawne... destined eventually to be all-consuming” (76-77). As Beer writes, “The problem came when... his philosophy of the heart led to the cultivation of a single love for an individual woman” (76). Here, again, we can find traces of Coleridge’s professed conflict between “personality” and “infinity,” for which we might also make the experiment of substituting Foucault’s terms, *zoe* and *bios*.

Apparently, then, Keats’ philosophy of the heart led him to reject a non-unitary “infinity”^{xix} for powerful feelings of a unitary subject (intense attachment to embodied human personality). Ironically, in regard to this Coleridgean duality of infinity and personality, one may argue, with Latour, that this “infinity,” both transcendent and imminent to the web of relations (the world of detail and difference), was a product of western philosophy’s tendency to “purify” or to abstract – (one could say, render discursive) – pure principles. The “infinity” of abstract religion and the “infinity” of objective science are similar in that both bypass web of relations (personality). This is

not to say that either science or religion *need* reject a notion of a materiality by nature interrelational, and therefore indivisible from ethics. Arguably, Wordsworth was *both*, religious and science-minded, yet maintained an unconditional trust in the material universe *as* relationship.

Coleridge's and Wordsworth's differences might, neatly, be described as the difference between two ways of thinking about affect: as Deleuzian "machinic assemblage" (the impersonal, non-unitary interactions of a micromolecular universe) and as Wordsworthian "interfusion." The one enacts what Noonan calls the postmodern break with human nature, the other grounds that nature in an interconnectedness without foundation.

Beer implies that, in the end, Keats expressed his affiliation with Coleridgean non-identity by requesting the stone-carved epitaph, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." There is a difference, however, between the ways in which interconnectedness manifests itself to grasping consciousness and to relaxed attention. Ironically, Wordsworth may have been more successful than Coleridge in relaxing that "irritable reaching after fact" that Keats associated with "negative capability."

^{xx} Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*.

^{xxi} Sarker also comments on Wordsworth's "Presences of Nature" in Book One of *The Prelude*: "Wordsworth calls this Spirit 'Presences of Nature,' and believes that the 'Presences of Nature' abide in the sky, over the hills, and in the woods and lonely places. The identities of these Presences are not affable even to Wordsworth himself, though, he assures us, he has very much realized the Presences. Nevertheless, Wordsworth says that anyone having rapport or understanding or *einfühlung* with nature will be able to realize the Presences. He calls the Spirit or spirits of nature simply Presences, perhaps because they are beyond the reach of all connoting or designating words" (Sarker, 483):

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry, when ye, through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impressed, upon all forms, the characters
Of danger or desire; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth,
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea?
Not uselessly employed,
Might I pursue this theme through every change
Of exercise and play, to which the year
Did summon us in his delightful round.
(*Prelude*, Book One)

^{xxii} Braidotti, 145.

^{xxiii} For Wordsworth and Dickinson, this blissful sense of interconnectedness (described as a rich return to the five senses, experienced as a fullness akin to music) is not a matter of belief, but of material attention. If a relational agency in excess of convention is experienced, it is because convention is temporarily quiescent: a relaxation of the discursive center (and of “linguistic survival”) in sensory attention. Romantic attention constitutes a voluntary, personal breaking of boundedness; not a paradise lost, but a sense of interconnectedness accessed, in psychological cessation, or the relaxation of the discursive center, in unconditional surrender to feeling.

Repeatedly in nineteenth century poetry, ontological anxiety is resolved in calm receptivity to patterns of unlabeled phenomena. More is contested in this movement toward radical trust in sensation than Cartesian boundedness, with its categorical divide between mind and matter, or (in Foucault’s terms) between bios and zoe. Analogous to the failure, in Quantum Physics, to find an ultimate particle, the Romantic subject fails to find a foundation for agency in discursiveness and codification, but finds it rather in sensation and interrelationship. Broken boundedness (sensation) leads to the web of relations. The “crossed out” middle term, relationship, is restored in sensation: not “mediated” by the signified, but “active” as an interconnected, material universe. Nature, restored from its relegation to “immanence and transcendence” – its status as non-entity – is rendered visible to the subject as one’s own relationality.

Extended attention to an excess of sensation, which baffles the borders of bounded agency, leads to a sense of extended responsibility – interconnectedness – with powerful ethical and political ramifications. Romantic subjectivity – and its concerns for paradise (or felt interconnectedness) – anticipated issues we grapple with today: climate change, biomediation, and what Latour had described as the collapse of a “modern Constitution” that instituted a Great Divide between culture and nature: the no longer tenable presumption of a modern impunity that claims the right to represent “purification” while concealing “mediation.”

One of the main strategies by which nineteenth century poets undid discursive boundedness was through relaxation. Landscape and mood, the re-turning of the body (the five senses) to sensation, acted as prompts for the relaxation of the discursive center: poetic attention as paradise. The subject of emotion sensed itself in relationality rather than demarcating itself as purified identity. Romantic attention exceeded social prohibitions on sensation, in unconditional exposure to powerful feelings (emotions like melancholy) and to the impingements of nature.

^{xxiv} An interesting explication of these ethical and philosophical issues, from the point of view of Buddhist dialectics, is offered in the Dalai Lama’s *How to See Yourself as You Really Are* (2006): “Emptiness is extremely important, because if you thoroughly understand it, you can be liberated from the cycle of destructive emotions.... a consciousness can be both valid and mistaken at the same time – valid with respect to the presence of the object and its existence but mistaken in that the object seems to have its own independent status. Chandrakirti posits that objects appear to exist from their own side due to a mistaken framework of ordinary perception. In fact, nothing is established from its own side. In this way, form *is* empty; it is not made empty by emptiness. What is it that is empty? The form itself. The table itself. The body itself. In the same way, all phenomena are empty of their own inherent existence. Emptiness is not something

made up by the mind; this is how things have been from the start. Appearance and emptiness are one entity, and cannot be differentiated into separate entities” (80-81).

^{xxv} When your hands leap
towards mine, love,
what do they bring me in flight?
Why did they stop
at my lips, so suddenly,
why do I know them,
as if once before,
I have touched them,
as if, before being,
they travelled...
(Pablo Neruda, “Your Hands”)